

**“CONTEXTUALIZATION”  
IN  
DEVELOPMENT:  
A MICROGENETIC STUDY  
OF  
AN ENGLISH  
AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE  
TEACHER**

**“CONTEXTUALIZAÇÃO” EM DESENVOLVIMENTO: UM ESTUDO MICROGENÉTICO DE  
UMA PROFESSORA DE INGLÊS COMO LÍNGUA ESTRANGEIRA**

**"CONTEXTO" EN EL DESARROLLO: UN ESTUDIO MICROGENÉTICO DE UNA PROFESORA DE  
INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA**

**Paola Gabriella Biehl\***

**Adriana de Carvalho Kuerten Dellagnelo\*\***

Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

**ABSTRACT:** In the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher education, attention must be given to novice teachers, so that they can establish a dialectical relation between theory and practice aiming at praxis. Following one of the tenets of Vygotsky's

---

\* Has a Master's degree in Linguistic Studies from Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC). PhD student in Linguistic Studies at Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC). Works in the area of teacher education. | Mestre em Estudos Linguísticos pela Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC); Doutoranda em Estudos Linguísticos pela UFSC. Atua na área de educação de professores. E-mail: [paolabiehl@yahoo.com.br](mailto:paolabiehl@yahoo.com.br).

\*\* Professor of the Foreign Languages and Literatures Department and the Graduate Program of Linguistics and Literary Studies (PPGI) at Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC). Her research focus is on teacher education, mainly from a sociocultural perspective. | Atua nos programas de graduação em Letras e pós-graduação em Estudos Linguísticos e Literários (PPGI) da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC). Sua área de interesse é a formação de professores de línguas, predominantemente sob fundamentação sociocultural/histórico-cultural. E-mail: [adrianak@cce.ufsc.br](mailto:adrianak@cce.ufsc.br).

(1988) sociocultural theory, this study aimed to trace a novice teacher's developmental path, as she was mediated by a more experienced *other*. The guiding question that permeated this study was the extent to which the mediating sessions between teacher educator and novice teacher created an impact in the teacher's development of the "contextualization" concept. Qualitative research methods were used to analyze data, which were collected through class observation and mediating sessions, both videotaped.<sup>1</sup> The findings suggest the importance of the teacher educators' intentional and goal-oriented mediation for the participant teacher.

KEYWORDS: Teacher education. Concept development. Mediation.

RESUMO: No campo de formação de professores de Inglês como língua estrangeira, atenção especial deve ser dada a professores iniciantes, para que eles consigam estabelecer uma relação dialética entre teoria e prática com vistas à práxis. A partir de um dos princípios da Teoria Histórico-Cultural de Vygotsky (1988), este estudo objetivou traçar o desenvolvimento de uma professora iniciante, enquanto mediada por *outro* mais experiente. A questão norteadora da pesquisa foi entender como as sessões de mediação impactaram o desenvolvimento da professora quanto ao conceito de 'contextualização'. Métodos de pesquisa qualitativa foram utilizados para analisar os dados, que foram coletados por meio de observação de aulas e sessões de mediação, ambas filmadas. Os resultados evidenciam a importância da mediação intencional e direcionada do formador no desenvolvimento da professora participante.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Formação de professores. Formação de conceito. Mediação.

RESUMEN: En el campo de la formación del profesorado de inglés como lengua extranjera, debe ser dada atención a los profesores principiantes, para que logren establecer una relación dialéctica entre la teoría y práctica objetivando la praxis. Siguiendo uno de los principios fundamentales de la teoría histórico-cultural de Vygotsky (1988), este estudio tuvo como objetivo trazar el desarrollo de una profesora principiante, mientras mediada por otro más experimentado. La pregunta central del estudio fue cómo las sesiones de mediación entre los dos impactaron la formación del concepto "contextualización" de la profesora. Métodos de investigación cualitativa fueron utilizados para analizar los datos recogidos mediante la observación de clases y sesiones de mediación, ambos filmados. Los resultados apoyan la importancia de la mediación intencional y orientada del formador en el desarrollo de la profesora, participante.

PALABRAS CLAVE: La formación del profesorado. Formación de conceptos. Mediación.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Novice teachers generally step into the classroom with some theoretical knowledge that lacks its empirical counterpart. Bridging the theory learned along their academic years into practice is a process that takes time, requires pedagogical awareness and agency, as well as calls for situated participation in teaching and learning activities. As Johnson (2009) asserts, "[...] learning to teach is conceptualized as a long-term, complex, developmental process that is the result of participation in the social practices and contexts associated with learning and teaching" (p. 10).

Accordingly, it is well established that it usually takes quite some time until an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) novice teacher is able to comfortably manage classroom practices and to understand the effects of teaching decisions and choices on students' development (JOHNSON, 2009). Although pedagogical awareness normally develops with practice, the time on the way to informed decisions can be reduced if teachers are provided with opportunities of engagement with more capable peers who will both foster and enhance their reflection and, thus, their professional competence.

<sup>1</sup> Since this is a research that involved human subjects, an approval from the Ethics Review Board (CEPSH-UFSC) was submitted and granted under number 953.102

In this vein, this study examines how a novice teacher builds knowledge and develops the concept of contextualization while teaching a communicative- based EFL course with the mediation of a teacher educator.

The theory that underlies this work is Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1962, 1980, 1998, 2002 [1978]), according to which it is through engaging in mediated activity that concepts develop and may be internalized. This mediation, either object-regulated or other-regulated, serves as a scaffold to self-regulation, i.e., this mediation aims at moving individuals from an inter-psychological level of thinking to an intra-psychological one towards the learning of new concepts. Aligned with the aforementioned understanding, the path to developing concepts is not linear, but twisting (SMAGORINSKY; COOK; JOHNSON, 2003), and develops over time and through social participation of individuals within the activities related to their object of knowledge.

## 2 SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY AND CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

Vygotsky (2002 [1978]) claimed that human beings have a mediated mind, rooted in and dependent on cultural and historical contexts, and formed according to the social interactions they engage in along their existence. In this sense, knowledge is socially mediated, and mediation is seen as a sociocultural construct that links the man to the world.

As previously mentioned, the way in which individuals internalize concepts, according to Vygotsky, is a dynamic, twisting process. This means that the path to develop concepts is not even or linear, but rather winding, as one can move back and forward in the process. Concept development, in his theory, happens in two ways: spontaneously (everyday), that is, empirically, situationally and practically (SWAIN; KINNEAR, 2010), and thus in an intuitive manner; and scientifically (abstractly), forming systematic relationships and definitions, and hence in a conscious form.

Spontaneous concepts come from an individual's participation in social and cultural activities, and as such,

They are empirically based and require lengthy periods of practical experience to develop. They are, however, at the heart of our lived experience as human beings and are, for the most part, more than adequate for carrying out our daily activities (LANTOLF, 2002, p. 39).

Spontaneous concepts are, thus, developed along the experiences of individuals, and often carry unsystematic, and at times mistaken, meanings. These concepts are situated and do not usually apply to occasions divergent to the ones from which they originated.

On the other hand, scientific concepts are, although based on human experience, generalizations over a certain aspect, which are freed from physical constraints and can be understood at an intellectual level of abstraction, enabling individuals to apply them to situations divergent to the ones they originated from. They "[...] represent the generalizations of the experience of humankind that is fixed in science, understood in the broadest sense of the term to include both natural and social science as well as the humanities" (KARPOV, 2003, p. 66). Scientific concepts evolve through instruction in a systematic manner, being applicable in diverse contexts.

According to Smagorisky, Cook and Johnson (2003), "[...] while spontaneous concepts may be developed without formal instruction, scientific concepts require interplay with spontaneous concepts; hence the problematic nature of the theory/practice dichotomy" (p. 1). Therefore, concept development is rooted in social practice, requiring both spontaneous and scientific knowledge in order to be sound. Without scientific concepts, knowledge is restricted and unsystematic; without spontaneous concepts, there is the risk of incurring "empty verbalism" (VYGOTSKY, 1988, p. 170).

For Vygotsky (1986), “[...] the development of [the child’s] spontaneous concepts proceeds upward, and the development of [his] scientific concepts downward [...]” (p. 193). Based on his elaboration on the distinction of the opposite path that each of these types of concepts makes towards development, the psychologist makes it clear that a real concept emerges when a scientific concept descends to the concrete level of everyday life, and when a spontaneous concept rises to the level of abstractions and generalizations. Along this twisting path, learners may acquire what Vygotsky calls complexes and pseudo-concepts, neither of them properly consistent with the concept.

Bringing this notion to teacher education, one can say that it is within situated practice that the scientific concepts learned by teachers in academia, or in teacher pre-service programs, are developed, for it is there that scientific concepts confront their spontaneous counterpart, thus originating the necessary encounter between the concrete and the abstract. The way in which teachers develop concepts may depend on the quality of knowledge generated academically and the way they resonate in teacher’s empirical knowledge, as well as on how much sense they make of what they perceive. The constant development of concepts should follow teachers along their careers, as it is not a formula to be learned; instead, it is a process of engagement in understanding.

### 3 THE STUDY

This study aimed at tracing the developmental process of a novice teacher participating in a 60-hour-in-service program called Teacher Education Program- TEP, as she was mediated by a more experienced other, and provided with opportunities to develop the concepts presented to her in the pre-service program of a Language Institute (LI). It constitutes a 4-month long study consisted of observing and videotaping 8 classes taught by the selected novice teacher, every fortnight, and having feedback sessions about the classes, which were also videotaped for later analysis. The feedback sessions were called mediating sessions, and were held within the first subsequent 24 hours to the classes.

The novice teacher, Nicole, had lived in the USA for over 5 years, and had had 3 years’ experience as a private tutor prior to the study, for which she did not receive any kind of pedagogical training or course. The 60-hour pre-service offered by the LI was her first pedagogical instruction; therefore, all the concepts presented then were new to her. This study took place right after she had finished the pre-service. The teacher educator, the main researcher of this study, had 25 years’ experience with teaching English before this study, 20 of those as a teacher in the LI. In the previous 10 years she was also an academic coordinator and a teacher educator there. However, she was not the novice teacher’s coordinator, neither did she work at the LI unit where the study took place.

The participating LI adopts a communicative language teaching approach, and sees learning in alignment with social theories with emphasis on interaction. Besides, learning is considered a process that involves the active participation of learners in fulfilling tasks. The construct of tasks adopted by the LI (expressed in the pre-service material) follows Nunan’s (1991) definition, according to which:

[...] a task is any activity or action which is carried out as the result of processing or understanding language (i.e., as a response). For example, drawing a map while listening to a tape, listening to an instruction and performing a command, may be referred to as tasks (NUNAN, 1991, p. 280).

The 60-hour pre-service training involves both theoretical modules and practical ones (with microteachings). Teachers are supposed to prepare classes following a class plan model called Task Analysis Framework (TAF). The components of the TAF are: goal of task, input data, grouping, instructions, procedures (subdivided into preparation, performing and accountability), link to the next task and related homework.

In this article, we will look specifically at the concept “Contextualization”, which was a part of *Preparation*, in *Procedures*. The table below exemplifies the goals of each part of *Procedures*:

## Procedures

Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contextualize (set the mood);</li> <li>• Model (help build up students (Ss) confidence, make instructions less explained and more practical, make Ss perceive task goal);</li> <li>• Incorporate information brought up by Ss.</li> </ul>
Performing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ss carry out the task at their own pace;</li> <li>• Teacher's role is of an observer;</li> <li>• Pay attention to early finishers.</li> </ul>
Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help Ss perceive what they have learned;</li> <li>• Check learning results.</li> </ul>

**Figure 1:** Summary of the objectives of the three phases of Procedures.

The analysis of classes and feedback sessions followed a qualitative paradigm “by directly reflecting upon and trying to interpret data” (ALLWRIGHT; BAILEY, 1991, p. 65). It is also considered a microgenetic study, defined as a “very short longitudinal study” (LANTOLF; THORNE, 2006, p. 52), and characterized by the use of direct observation of change that occurs in a person as they learn and develop cognitively, taking into consideration one specific aspect within a specific time span, “making explicit the moment-to-moment revolutionary shifts that lead to development of independent mental functioning” (JOHNSON; DELLAGNELO, 2013 p. 415).

The analysis consisted of 4 steps: i) watching the classes and the mediating sessions, and making a chart of the topics that emerged in the mediating sessions; ii) comparing the topics among the mediating sessions, and analyzing both the practice (what the teacher did) and the discourse (what the teacher said), both during classes and in the mediating sessions; iii) selecting the TAF component that presented a higher rate of change during the study; iv) transcribing the excerpts of the mediating sessions in which this topic emerged and analyzing them, referring to the theoretical foundations of the study. The codes adopted in the transcriptions are provided in Figure 2.

#### Transcription Conventions

T	Teacher
TE	Teacher Educator
S	Student
Ss	Students
[ ]	Encloses non-verbal and/or paralinguistic information (e.g. [laugh]);
Aham	Expression used to show agreement
Hummm	Expression used showing hesitation/pause
(...)	Short hesitation/pause
(!)	Expression of counter-expectation (e.g. surprise, amazement, etc.);
<i>Italics</i>	Text in English with a grammar mistake/ use of bad words/ in Portuguese/ showing emphasis.

**Figure 2:** transcription conventions used when transcribing the classes and interactions presented in this study

## 4 FINDINGS

*Contextualization* is related to *Preparation*, in *Procedures*, and has to do with creating a context that enables the emergence of the topic to be studied/ discussed, so as to lead students to get in the mood for what will be dealt with in a specific task. According to the LI pre-service material, this is the moment when teacher and students get involved in the task. Therefore, it is not enough to explain what to do in the task (instructions), there is the need to create an atmosphere by relating it to reality and providing a link among the various tasks.

It is expected that teachers contextualize every task; however, the way to do it varies not only according to the objectives of the task, but also to the teacher's personality, or, as Parsons and Shils (1951) argue, *need-dispositions*, defined as "individual tendencies to orient and act with respect to objects in certain manners and to expect certain consequences of these actions" (p. 14). In the pre-service offered by the Language Institute (LI), teachers are presented with an array of ways of contextualizing tasks (theoretical concepts), as well as are provided with a chance to apply them in the microteachings.

It was both in the beginning of the class and in listening tasks (happening either at the beginning or in the middle of the class) that we found the most significant instances of problems in contextualization. For that matter, we will call the ones happening in the beginning of the class *class contextualization*, and the ones related to listening activities *listening contextualization*. This analysis follows a chronological order.

The extract that follows is from the first mediating session (MS1), in which aspects from the first class were discussed. This passage displays the teacher's lack of understanding with regards to the concept of *Contextualization* and its misuse in the first class.

### Excerpt 1: (Mediating Session 1 (MS1))

TE: [TE shows the part of the class in which the T starts the class by asking Ss if they remembered the video they watched last class, and although Ss said they did, she tries to show the video again, but there was a technical problem and she could not] Ok, ..., what part of the class was this?

T: The **opening**?

TE: The opening ... remember the three phases of an oral task, in the pre-service, there were three phases, right, the Preparation, Performing and Accountability... Yes, remember that? So what part of the class is this?

T: ... Preparation?

TE: The preparation, aham... do you remember what you should do before engaging in the activity itself?

T: ... set the mood?

TE: Set the mood, exactly, or, in other words, contextualize. Do you think that was done?

T: Actually, I thought I was setting the mood with the video, but I guess I wasn't... yeah, no.

TE: Ok, why not? Why saying "let's watch the video" is not the contextualization?

T: Because they had even already watched it, ...

TE: When did they watch the video?

T: Last class.

TE: [Nods in agreement] So there were two days (in between classes), so maybe they remembered, maybe not... So how do you think you could have "warmed up" the class? Because it's the same as saying "let's open the book", and you remember in the TEP, the pre-service, that teachers shouldn't just arrive in class and say "open the book", so you should have a contextualization before engaging in the activity, right?

T: Could I just say... I couldn't do that, right? Humm, what I wanted to do was actually start asking "do you remember the video from last class?", but then I was so afraid that they wouldn't remember, that I showed the video before, you know what I mean, the part I did after this was actually my first plan... and then I thought it's like you always... underestimate your students, I feel like I do that, because they remembered everything...

TE: Aham, they remembered. So, just by saying "do you remember the video we watched last class" and eliciting, as you did in the rest of the class, "what was it about?", which was the activity you did after the video, right, actually you didn't have to watch the video again, yeah, because they remembered.

T: Yeah, that was my idea, but I was afraid...

TE: I see... I think you should go with your guts, so that would be contextualizing... And what do you think is the importance of warming up? Because it's in the TAF for a reason... why do you think contextualizing is important?

T: Well... to warm the brain up! [laughs], and not just throw information, it's so hard, you know... when you get the whole information and you break into pieces, I would do it for a listening activity, well, for everything.

TE: So, you think it's important, to warm up...

T: Yes, that was my goal... So you think that maybe not watching the video and just making them remember...

TE: Yes, I don't think you would need to watch it, because you couldn't and they remembered everything.

T: Yeah, I was so afraid, but they... because last class I had to switch classes with somebody else to watch it, I didn't have my tablet or anything, and I didn't get their feedback when they left, because we had to switch classes...

TE: Hummm, there was no accountability.

T: No, and I was... I didn't know if they got it, that's why I was so...

TE: But even so you assigned some questions, guiding questions...

T: Yeah... but I wanted to watch the video after the questions, to see if they get it, like "ok, now let's see if you got it"

TE: Aham, because there was a lack of accountability last class... but actually with the questions they got everything, right?

In MS1, Nicole showed lack of understanding of the concept *contextualization*, in practice and discourse, which might indicate that there was a need to put theory and practice together. The scientific concepts presented at TEP had not yet conflated with the spontaneous concepts needed to internalize this concept, even after the microteaching phase of TEP. This can be observed by the fact that even having filled in the TAF Nicole did not remember the name of the TAF component. She mistook *Contextualization* with *Opening* - which is a session of the book. Nicole used her own terms to explain the goal of contextualization (to "warm the brain up"), which might indicate that the goal of the concept was clear, although she failed to perform it. Her fear that students would not remember the video shown in the previous class prevented her from following what she had planned, which would then be a class contextualization (asking questions before the video was shown again).

Nicole also displayed lack of knowledge of the term *Accountability*, which is another component of TAF, referring to it as *feedback*. This appears to show that what she lacks is, in fact, the discourse of the LI and, according to Vygotsky, naming (knowledge of words) is an invaluable technical aid for thinking: "Real concepts are impossible without words, and thinking in concepts does not exist beyond verbal thinking. That is why the central moment in concept formation, and its generative cause, is a specific use of words as functional "tools" (VYGOTSKY, 1962, p. 107).

The next excerpt, from class 2, shows an instance of *listening contextualization*, which can be held in the beginning of the class, demanding class contextualization, or in the middle of the class, requiring a pre-listening contextualization.

One of the strategies that can be used to prepare students for a listening task is to explore the pictures on the book (besides other pre-listening activities, like predicting and anticipating the topic, reading the options of the listening task, clearing up unknown vocabulary, etc.). In the beginning of this study, Nicole's classes lacked pre-listening activities. As we can see in the following passage, Nicole went straight to the listening without preparing students for it.

#### Excerpt 2- MS 2

[TE showing an Excerpt of class 2 on TV] T: Ok, are you ready to listen? First, listen, just listen, and think, ok?

TE: So, what part of the class, or what part of the second task is this?

T: (...) I don't know!

TE: The preparation for the second task...

T: Ah ok... but actually, I didn't like what I did... I don't think they should be so... *soltos*... loose for the first listening, I don't know...

TE: That's what I was going to comment...

T: Really?

TE: Yeah, because the instructions were "listen and think"... so, think of what?

T: Yes!

TE: What do you think you should've done for the first listening?

T: I think I should've stuck to the book, the instructions, it says first they listen and just check the vocabulary, then listen one more time for this part, see if they get it right, and then listen to it one more time to get the second, I think. I realized it while they were listening, like what's the point.

TE: OK, that's good! Yeah, you realized it before I even said something, they always have to have a point in listening, in reading; so "listen and think" is not actually a point, think about what?... So, "listen and think about what they're saying", "listen and see if they mention what we talked about before", you could have asked, without following the book, but it should be more directed, a little more directed.

In the second class, Nicole did something that did not work out the way she wanted, and she realized it before MS 2, which showed that, even though that was her first class after the first MS, the concepts started ringing a bell. She realized that and attributed this to her way of giving instructions, which was a pseudo concept of contextualization, as it seemed that it was the same thing to her.

Nicole's availability and openness to change made it possible to comment on that contextualization aspect in MS 2, and despite the mediation being very instructional, it was also reassuring in the sense that what Nicole thought was not adequate in her class met with what I<sup>2</sup> was going to comment on, although we had different ways of seeing the same thing: I thought she lacked contextualization, and she thought she had problems with instructions; yet, we were already sharing a certain level of intersubjectivity.

In class 4, Nicole already presented an instance of the concept being formed, when she showed a significant development in class contextualization.

### Excerpt 3: MS 4

TE: What part of the class was it?

T: **Contextualization**

TE: Aham, and what did you do in order to contextualize, how was this process?

T: I linked it to last class, and then I wanted them to pick the word technology, so I could bring up this to today.

TE: Did they do that?

T: Yeah they did, I knew they would bring up technology, because that's what they do, they don't know how to play ...

TE: Aham, playing without computers, right? So you got... actually, you were talking about pollution, right? Then I thought, oh, ok, let's see how she handles that... and it was really well, I think it was really smooth... do you feel that?

T: Yeah!

TE: Do you feel the difference between what you used to do in the first class... and now?

T: Oh Yeah! The first class was horrible!

TE: No, it was not horrible, but do you feel the necessity of doing that or you're just doing because the method says you should?

T: [Pause] No, I think it's better.

TE: In what ways?

T: I think that it's because they don't feel like: "Ok, today we're going to talk about this", and then it's like "ok, let me get prepared". They just go with the flow and it just flows. So, I think it's better, **you got me!**

As portrayed, in this class Nicole elicited the previous topic and linked it to the topic of the class. Even though they were completely different topics (the previous topic was pollution and the topic of the current class was technology), she managed to draw a smooth link between them and contextualize the class. In MS 4, Nicole used the name *contextualization* and, when enquired, could explain why she did it, and the advantages of doing it. We can notice, both in her practice and in her language use, that she was becoming

<sup>2</sup> The pronouns "I", "me", "my" refer to one of the text authors, the one primarily involved in collecting data.



more sensitive to the concept. Her final remark, “you got me”, hints at the idea that first she did not perceive or believe in the importance or the necessity of contextualizing the class. It was along the four classes and MSs that she acknowledged it.

The material also provides input for contextualization, which is the introductory session of the unit. In this session, there are usually textual aids (vocabulary) and visual aids (pictures, charts, graphs, etc.), both playing a significant role. In class 4, Nicole started the class by bringing realia concerning the topic “Crazes”, and after students manipulated and talked about the objects from the 90’s, the teacher asked students to open the books, asking them what they knew about it, reading the written examples from the book, however, not referring to the pictures.

MS 4 shows an attempt to lead Nicole to perceive the importance and purpose of pictures on the material, as it follows in Excerpt 4b.

**Excerpt 4: MS4b**

TE: Ok, then you told them to open the books [TE shows the class Excerpt described above]. So, after you’ve established what crazes meant, you asked them to open their books [TE gets the Student’s book and opens it on the pages of the class]. The first thing you see when you open the book is what?, when you open the book, imagine you’re a student...

T: I think I see that [pointing at pictures].

TE: So, you see pictures, right? You don’t see words...

**T: Oh! OK! Sorry!**

TE: It’s ok.

**T: Maybe... that’s what they see... oh, I think I should’ve asked them... about the pictures. Yeah... I should [looking at book].**

TE: Why would you do that? Why would you ask them about the pictures first, before they read?

T: [Pause] I think I would do that to, like, explore more “crazes”... but I don’t know if this is so important, since we had such a long preparation... maybe this could be a preparation if I hadn’t done...

TE: OK, it could be... The first thing he said... [TE shows S saying “Power Rangers” in the video] was *Power Rangers*... see, there’s a picture of *Power Rangers* here, so the first thing they noticed was the picture... the first thing you notice when you open these pages are the pictures, right? Why do you think the pictures are important? Because they’re here for a reason...

T: To... to visualize, to visual aid the whole unit... the whole, I mean, goal, that is crazes.

TE: You mean the topic?

T: Aham... you know, **I didn’t even notice the pictures**...

TE: Aham, let’s see if the teacher’s book says something...

T: I’m sure it does... I really do.

TE: [TE opens the teacher’s book and reads from it] “Before Ss are in the activity make sure they understand the meaning of crazes”, which you did, “you may give some examples or use the pictures on the page”, so one thing would be to use the pictures on the page, the pictures are mentioned, they have a purpose, otherwise it would be just black and white, which is cheaper... besides, they have the words here... “Home alone”, for example [TE shows the picture of the film *Home Alone* on the page], and the picture is there... so the pictures are here for a reason...

T: Yeah, especially because one of them said he didn’t know what *Home Alone* was... I could’ve just shown the picture... **I didn’t realize it was there**...

TE: Yeah, sometimes we’re so worried about what the words say, and we forget that we have all this to support us, to help us...

As shown, the teacher did not even notice there were pictures on the pages she was working with, which might indicate that class preparation focused primarily on what was written on the book, not on the visual aids. Maybe this aspect had not been emphasized in the pre-service, or maybe Nicole did not consider them important, after all, it was not in her conceptual framework of contextualization.

Yet, as seen in the sentences highlighted in bold, at the prompt of what one sees in the book as they open it, she immediately realized that she had lacked using the pictures to contextualize the topic, which, again, appears to signal that this issue was already being formed in her conceptual framework.

Yet, still in class 4, there is another example of lack of contextualization. The task subsequent to the previous one was a listening task, in which there were a lot of pictures to be explored on the book, and which were important for the understanding of the listening, as students would use them to match with what they would listen; however, Nicole did not point them out to students, she limited to asking them to read the instructions for the task. In MS 4c, this was discussed.

**Excerpt 5: MS 4c**

TE: Ok, then you're going to start the exercise. Between the instructions and the CD, there's something missing... it has to do with something we talked before [T is silent]. Take a look at the page... [T looks at the book pages dealt with in class].

T: Humm... they should talk about the pictures before?

TE: Why do you think it would be interesting to do that?

T: To **contextualize**, and to *kinda* know what they're looking for... does it say that in the Teacher's book?

TE: Let's see... [TE shows the Teacher's book file]... "before playing the CD, make sure Ss understand the illustrations.

T: Humm, ok... yes, I'll do that!

TE: Because the illustrations were really tricky... so in what way would it help, to work with the illustrations?

T: Yeah, I could've asked them "what do you think this person is talking about", you know...

TE: And why do you think this would help?

T: It would help so they would know what they're trying to get from the... audio.

TE: Aham, you see... so again, there are illustrations for a reason. So, whenever you open a book "oh, they're here, why", go to the Teacher's book, see what they say, or not, sometimes the teacher's book doesn't say anything, but it's your judgment, right? If you think it's important, if you listen to something and it's tricky.

T: That would be good, especially because these ones are not so easy, right.

Still in class 4, Nicole made use of the strategy talked about previously (listening with a purpose), but forgot to explore the pictures on the page, which were crucial to the understanding of the exercise. This forgetfulness is not meaningless; on the contrary, it illustrates that the role of visual aids to the contextualization of the activity is not yet appropriated and internalized by Nicole. It was only during the MS, after having gone through another conversation regarding the importance of this kind of contextualization, that she reflected and understood the reason to make use of the resources provided by the material (visual aspects of the material).

As Nicole would be on her own after this study, the strategy used was to refer her to the teacher's book, because that is the mediating artifact that will always be available to her, and consulting it when preparing classes is a potentially powerful resource. The objective in doing this was to have her look at the teacher's manual as an expert other, which she could always resort to, in this path to self-regulation (from other to object to self-regulation).

In her following class, Nicole explored the pictures, but still not in an optimum way. The topic of the class was city life. She started eliciting from students the previous class' topic (crazes) and linking it to transportation - what were the crazes of transportation in the past and nowadays. Then she referred students to the book, which depicted scenes from city life (on one page images of a downtown area, on the other, images of suburbs). She did explore the pictures of transportation then, which lead to a discussion on that, but not on city life itself. Therefore, although she had students participating and understanding the vocabulary related to transportation, her behavior is more a display of the development of a pseudo concept than of a concept properly said. This issue was addressed in Excerpt 6.

**Excerpt 6: MS 5**

TE: [after showing the previous Excerpt of class 5] So, what part of the class was this?

T: It waaaas contextualization... a long one!

TE: [laughs] Yeah, no, but it's ok, it has always been... what is the topic of the last unit?

T: Crazes?

TE: Crazes [nodding], so you started talking about this topic, yeah, and then you linked to the topic of this unit.

T: Aham.

TE: What is the topic of this unit?

T: You know what, I forgot!

TE: By watching, what do you think it is?

T: It was transportation, right?

TE: I thought it would be, but it's city life.

T: Ok.

TE: Ok... so from watching the beginning, we assume that the topic of the whole unit is transportation... but it's a little bit "bigger" than that...

T: Ok...and then I didn't talk about the differences between the two cities in the picture, did I?

TE: Aham, no... So, you focused on transportation because that was your link. But what did you forget to do?

T: I forgot to talk about the picture, I think... the differences, not only transportation... but, hummm, (why did I do that?) I think I did that because of the... the listening...

TE: Ok, but the listening is about places...

T: Yeah... I don't know...

TE: But you linked, it was a great link, very smooth... do you feel that?

T: No, I feel that.

TE: That the links are really smooth? It's going naturally. But then, you got to the page and... maybe because there are so many interruptions, that maybe, I don't know what happened, sometimes you can lose concentration, whatever.

T: Yeah, I think this class, specifically, I was not concentrated at all.

TE: Oh, why was that?

T: Because of my car, and my exams, and... I made an experience and prepared this class... I prepared this class last Friday.

TE: Oh, my, so there was almost a week before class.

T: Aham, and then I didn't have time to read...

TE: Aham, to go over it.

T: So, I think I'm not gonna do that anymore.

TE: Aham, good, so this is experience, right. Once I had to do this and it was terrible, because all your line of thought is lost.

T: That's what I thought yesterday, I kept looking at the TAF...

TE: But you didn't remember why you wrote that on the TAF anymore, right?

T: Yeah, specially the "me either, me neither" part... it was right there on my face and I didn't do it...

TE: But it's really good that now you are realizing things before our session... before you didn't have a clue about it.

T: Yeah!

TE: Now you're like "Oh, I should've done that...". This is the process the teacher engages when using this... reasoning, to, to reflect upon their classes, to think about what could have happened if I had done differently... that's really good... and you are engaging by yourself, I'm just here helping you, but you engaged in this before I told you so...

T: Yeah! Well, during class, I was like "oh... this is not good".

TE: So, there are so many elements here that you could've explored, yeah [TE shows the pages of the book], that have to do with the topic, city life, and not only with transportation, which is one of them.

T: Yeah... I didn't talk about... I remember, I thought about it at the time, that this side was the suburbs, and this side was a big city, but I didn't say... I think I was expecting them to say anything, but they didn't, and I forgot.

TE: Exactly... this is the suburbs and this is like, downtown [showing the pages on the book]. In our last meeting, we talked about exploring the pictures, you did it... kind of [laughs]. But it's a process, too, right. So, maybe try to explore more, extract things and have them talk about the picture itself, because there are a lot of things...

Language Institute gives you two pages of pictures for you to do that, ok?

T: Aham.

TE: But it's so nice that you realized that...

What we see in this excerpt is that, at this point, Nicole even understood that it is important to explore pictures for the flow of the lesson and its contextualization, but she does not yet realize that this discussion has to be related to the objective of the lesson. In other words, it is not yet clear for her that the use of pictures and any kind of contextualization is goal-oriented, intentional, thus necessarily having to address the objective of the lesson (as previously mentioned, it was city life, so the pages of the book showed a city, the suburban area and downtown, with buildings, houses, streets, people, and also means of transportation).

Therefore, this class depicted that exploring visual aids was taken into account, but the concept was still in the process of formation, as she could have explored more, leading to the topic of the class.

In MS 5, Nicole used the word *contextualization* to define that part of the class, which shows that she was using the concept in discourse. However, by failing to explore all the graphic elements of the page so as to pave the way into the topic of the lesson, she demonstrated that the concept was still only at the level of discourse, not yet at the level of performance. This is expected; at first, these concepts are just names a person gives to certain strategies without owning them. It is just in the situated activity, and with the help of a more expert other, that they start building bridges that allow them to connect the scientific concepts (the definitions) to the spontaneous concepts (the practice) (Johnson, 2009).

Additionally, Nicole brought up her uneasiness of not remembering what she had prepared/written on the TAFs, because she had prepared them a week before, which shows that she was, at this point, other-regulated by the TAF mainly. While she could not self-regulate at that point, her acknowledgement that she was beginning to take in-flight decisions and reflecting on the action in class prior to the MSs indicates that she was engaging in a gradual process that allowed her to conceptually reason upon her teaching.

In Class 7, Nicole's practice was in alignment with what had been discussed with TE, and she showed understanding of the concept of contextualization, this time with a Listening Preparation, both in practice and discourse. She started the class by reminding students of the previous class's topic (internet safety tips), eliciting from them examples, and linked to the current task, which was a listening task about internet safety tips, by asking them what they thought they would listen to (a general question about the topic of the class). In the MS, the improvement Nicole had in preparing students for a listening task was brought up for discussion, as shown in Excerpt 7.

#### **Excerpt 7: MS 7**

TE: So, here, you were talking about something, you were contextualizing, and then you linked it to the listening, yeah? And this is something that you did that you didn't do before, do you realize that?

T: Yeah...

TE: Before, you said "ok, let's listen".

T: Ah, ok!

TE: Now you said "what do you think is gonna happen?", and then you elicited from them, and then they listened with a goal, yeah, this is something that was different. This is pre-listening, one pre-listening activity that is predicting, ok, the name of this is predicting.

T: Aham, ok... But still it's not too short?

TE: No... we'll continue talking about this.

[TE shows the following portion of the class on screen].

By pointing out what Nicole did in this class, saying that was different from what she had been doing until then, the aim was to show to the teacher her own improvement in terms of providing goals for listening activities and predicting the topic of the listening passage. The strategy to show her the aspects discussed in previous MSs in her practice constituted a means to bridge the scientific concepts previously provided explicitly to the spontaneous concepts gathered from Nicole's practice. The fact that she had doubts about its efficacy (by saying "it's not too short?") is maybe an indication of what Wertsch (1985, p. 132) calls *performance preceding competence*. This concept, although already present in her practice, cannot yet be seen as a tool for thinking.

Nicole was able to apply the concept of contextualization in different contexts, both in listening activities, and in book activities, which indicated that the concept of contextualization was strong enough to allow a generalization.

A sign of the acquisition of a scientific concept is the fact that one can generalize it and then apply it in any context, as opposed to being limited to individual situations without understanding how a theoretical framework is able to be implemented, as those who rely solely on everyday concepts.

We can notice Nicole's development in listening contextualization still in Class 7, where she checks with students the answers from the task mentioned above - a general question about their understanding of the topic of the listening -, and links to the task itself, telling students to open their books and describe the pictures they see on the page. The following comment was focused on the development Nicole portrayed in this class regarding pre-listening activities.

**Excerpt 8: MS 7b**

TE: So, you see you had almost two minutes just talking before opening the book, so you re-explored their first impression of the listening, and then you opened the book... and you explored the pictures! And this didn't happen before, you just went straight to the book and...

T: And what's nice about it was that I didn't have my TAF with me, that's why in the end I felt good about this class, because some things came, like, more naturally, I didn't have to "ok, what am I gonna do"...

TE: Aham, you didn't resort to... "oh I don't have my paper", so you followed your instinct,<sup>3</sup> followed everything we have been talking about...

T: Yeah, it was nice.

What was most interesting about this interaction was Nicole's verbalization about "feeling good" because she knew what to do even not having the TAF with her, that it became more natural. This clearly shows that the concept of pre-listening contextualization and preparation finally resonated to Nicole, and that she was doing it agentively, not being other-regulated by the TAFs, but as self-regulated, which might indicate that the scientific concept approached in the pre-service and reaffirmed in the MSs met the spontaneous concepts she practiced in 6 attended classes, becoming internalized in her practice.

Nicole showed a sign of pedagogical maturation and development, having engaged in a self-analysis process during and after classes, even before this was brought up for discussion. Summing up, it was a moment of self-regulation that turned her experience into what we could call a *conceptual pedagogy*.

In this same mediation session, there was one more interaction about the topic *listening contextualization*.

**Excerpt 9: MS 7c**

TE: So, this is something that you didn't use to do either, yeah, when you had a listening. You asked them to open the books... [TE gets student's book and opens it on the corresponding page].

T: And explore, yeah.

<sup>3</sup> By instinct I meant that she acted according to a concept that was already internalized, she did not have to think about the concept to apply in her practice, which might indicate Nicole is thinking in concepts.

TE: Pictures. Yeah, as you said, there was one little picture, but it was related to the topic, right. But at least you did that. Why did you do that?

T: I don't know, actually, it wasn't planned...

TE: Oh, really?

T: No, when I saw it I was like: "Oh, ok, gonna work with that", but I hadn't planned to do that because... I wanted them actually to just explore the questions, because I really felt like this [pointing at picture] was so small, and that's why I decided to, to make them guess what the listening was about, but then I just did it! [laughs].

TE: Aham, and do you think it worked? Do you think it served the purpose of... of... trying to anticipate, and trying to make it easier for them to understand?

T: Yeah, yeah.

[TE continued showing class 7, when she asked Ss to read the options of the questions to be answered before playing the CD]. So, what did you do in this class that you didn't do in the previous listenings (from the classes that I attended)?

T: I... explored the... questions.

TE: Aham, and why did you decide to do that? Read the options, yeah...

T: Hummm, so they know what they are listening for? I just think I'm having too much teacher-student talking time... maybe they could've done that by themselves... not alone, in groups maybe... I don't know...

TE: Which part? Reading?

T: Yeah, I don't know, I feel like it's always me the center...

TE: Hummm, it depends on the task, and the goal of the task. In this, if you remember the TEP, in the preparation the teacher plays a more central role, because it's when the teacher is supposed to say what students should do, and how they should do, right... and then in the *Sharing*, the *Performing*, it's their turn to do the work.

T: Ok, yeah, so it was ok.

TE: Ok? Yeah, they read... maybe if you had read all the questions, maybe...

T: Ah, ok, that would be bad.

TE: No, not bad, but...

T: No, I talk so much!

TE: It would be more teacher-centered... I don't think it's... I don't think that's an issue, Teaching Talking Time (TTT), because you're always motivating them to give their opinion, ok, and if you talk about a teacher that really has a high TTT, the teacher does all the talking all the time...

T: Ok, like a lecture.

TE: Aham, and doesn't give opportunities for Ss to talk, yeah. So when you are doing the accountability, you always ask them to give more examples of their lives, for example, yeah. I don't think you should be worried about that.

T: Aham, ok.

TE: It's just that I realized in this class that you did things in the listening that you didn't do before.

T: Yeah! Ok, because the only meeting (that's why they are so important) I went to at LI was about the pre-listening... and then we got together in groups and planned the pre-listenings together, and... I had these ideas... with a partner... because she's been teaching there for ten years, then I realized "Oh, I need to change this". So...

TE: Aham... we have been talking about this! A lot of times.

T: [laughing] Yeah, but you know when you need something that just makes you... [T snaps her fingers].

TE: Click.

T: And then... yeah, that's why.

TE: Aham, yeah, nothing like hands-on...

T: Yeah.

T: Ok.

In this part of the MS, when acknowledged and inquired about having been able to contextualize the task, Nicole states that the completion of the concept of contextualization was due to a meeting and workshop she had attended with other fellow teachers, focused on preparing pre-listening tasks. This appears to indicate that, even though we had spent nearly three months talking about

this issue, the point in time of the whole experience when she acknowledged the comprehension of the idea behind contextualization was after engaging in a more practical learning moment, hinting at the need and the importance of hands-on meetings.

It is clear, however, that this project of individual mentoring was what actually pushed Nicole to understand and be able to make use of the concept in a proper way when planning a class with a colleague. Summing up, along the six classes and MSs, Nicole circulated among three stages: one in which the contextualization concept was absent from her discourse and from her practice, another in which she used the term, however not applying it to her practice, and yet a third one in which she both used the term and employed it in practice. Even though we believe that Nicole ended up developing the contextualization concept, we are aware that the process of development is twisting, and that she may eventually take steps back. Hopefully, however, she now has the resources to continue her path in her development as a serious and committed professional.

## 5 FINAL REMARKS

This study aimed at tracking the development of the concept *contextualization* by a novice teacher teaching her first few classes in a language institute.

As foreseen by SCT, learning to teach is a prolonged, dynamic, and situated activity (JOHNSON, 2009). Accordingly, Nicole's development happened in a rather progressive, yet twisting way, coming from not knowing the concept at all, to knowing its name and starting to understand it, to building a pseudo concept, and then, finally, a concept.

She started by not remembering the term *contextualization*, and using her own term, "*opening*", to express that same particular meaning; but learning its name seemed to be an earlier and easier movement for her. Yet, it was an important step into development, because once concepts are verbalized and, thus, open for discussion and mediation, they will be more easily and more accurately assimilated, and then internalized. As Vygotsky (1980) points out, naming is paramount in concept formation: we ought to know what to call something in order to recognize it.

At first, though, she displayed the so called "empty verbalism" or "mindless learning of words". The term was still at an abstract level in her conceptual framework; she had been introduced to it in the pre-service, she recognized the word, but she did not associate the name to what it really referred to, as the use of "*opening*" clearly shows. With the mediating sessions, the name started making sense to her, that is, she could see in practice what she had been introduced to in discourse, during pre-service.

In this vein, the mediating sessions were essential for her to acquire the scientific concept and relate it to the spontaneous one, which was her own practice. According to Vygotsky (2002) "[...] the transformation of an interpersonal process into an intrapersonal one is the result of a long series of developmental events" (p. 75).

Overall, Nicole's movements were not linear; she showed that, like any path in concept development, hers was also twisting: she made movements back and forth, presenting pseudo concepts (SMAGORINSKY; COOK; JOHNSON, 2003) intertwined with the concept. Her practice showed that the concept which she had already presented as being assimilated returned to the state of her prior practice, thus exemplifying that she was still in the process of internalization of the contextualization concept.

However, the fact that she was able to generalize the concept, as she does when applying it to a different context, indicates that she is not circumscribed by spontaneous concepts anymore. She can now work out the reasons for conducting a certain practice, and the implications of her attitudes as a teacher in a broader scope. As the study ended before Nicole presented consistency in using the concept adopted, it is likely that she will continue this movement between mastering and not mastering the concept. Our hope, in this sense, is that she is now able to engage in private speech and self-mediation or, in case she is not yet ready for this much, that she resorts to the teachers' guidelines for continuous external mediation until she feels she can regulate herself (LANTOLF, 2007).

In this context, an important implication this study appears to bring to sight is that one of the challenges for teacher education is to create an atmosphere where there is a bonding trust between student teacher and teacher educator, so that the interactions that take place in this context are valued and seen as leading to development.

## REFERENCES

ALLWRIGHT, Dick; BAILEY, Kathleen M. **Focus on the language classroom: an introduction to classroom research for language teachers**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

CERUTTI-RIZZATTI, Mary Elizabeth; KURTEN DELLAGNELO, Adriana. Implicações e problematizações do conceito de Intersubjetividade: um enfoque na formação do profissional de línguas. **Revista Brasileira de Linguística Aplicada**, Belo Horizonte, v. 16, n. 1, p. 107-132, 2016.

JOHNSON, Karen E. **Second language teacher education: a sociocultural perspective**. New York: Routledge, 2009.

JOHNSON, Karen E.; KUERTEN DELLAGNELO, Adriana. How "Sign meaning develops": strategic mediation in learning to teach. **Language Teaching Research**, v. 17, n. 4, p. 409-432, 2013.

KARPOV, Yuriy V. Vygotsky's doctrine of scientific concepts. In KOZULIN, Alex. **Vygotsky's educational theory in cultural context**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 65-82, 2003.

LANTOLF, James P.; THORNE, Steven L. **Sociocultural theory and the genesis of L2 development**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

LANTOLF, James P.; THORNE, Steven L.; POEHNER, Matthew E. Sociocultural theory and second language development. In: VAN PATTEN, Bill; WILLIAMS, Jessica. **Theories in second language acquisition: an introduction**. New York: Routledge, 2015. p. 207-226

LORTIE, Dan Clement; CLEMENT, Dan. **Schoolteacher: a sociological study**. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975.

NUNAN, David. Communicative tasks and the language curriculum. **TESOL quarterly**, v. 25, n. 2, p. 279-295, 1991. Retrieved from <<http://teflclub.com/home/CommunicativeTasksAndTheLanguageCurriculum.pdf>>.

PARSONS, Talcott et al. Values, motives, and systems of action. **Toward a general theory of action**, v. 33, p. 247-275, 1951.

SMAGORINSKY, Peter; COOK, Leslie Susan; JOHNSON, Tara Star. The twisting path of concept development in learning to teach. **Teachers College Record**, v. 105, n. 8, p. 1399-1436, 2003.



SWAIN, Merrill; KINNEAR, Penny; STEINMAN, Linda. **Sociocultural theory in second language education: an introduction through narratives**. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2015.

VYGOTSKY, Lev Semenovich; HANFMANN, Eugenia; VAKAR, Gertruda. **Thought and language**. Cambridge, Massachussets: MIT Press, 1962.

VYGOTSKY, Lev Semenovich. **Mind in society: the development of higher psychological processes**. Cambridge, Massachussets: Harvard University Press, 1980.

VYGOTSKY, Lev Semenovich; RIEBER, Robert W. **The collected works of LS Vygotsky: Volume 1: Problems of general psychology, including the volume Thinking and Speech**. Springer Science & Business Media, 1988.

VYGOTSKY, Lev Semënovič. **A formação social da mente: o desenvolvimento dos processos psicológicos superiores** Trad. José Cipolla Neto, Luis Silveira Menna Barreto e Solange Castro. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2002 [1978].

WERTSCH, James V. **Vygotsky and the social formation of mind**. Cambridge, Massachussets: Harvard University Press, 1988.

**Recebido em 1º/11/2016. Aceito em 30/11/2016.**