

Pedagogy of Experience in Teacher Education for Learner and Teacher Autonomy

**Pedagogía de la experiencia en la formación del profesorado
para la autonomía del estudiante y el docente**

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Language teacher education programmes can promote autonomy-oriented change when they are based on a transformative rationale regarding learner and teacher development. This involves adopting an experience-based approach whereby dominant ideas and practices are problematized and opportunities are provided for teachers to learn about, experience, and inquire into autonomy-oriented language teaching practices. A proposal based on the analysis and construction of cases in post-graduate teacher education is presented, in which teachers analyse and design autonomy-oriented action research experiences and produce narratives of inquiry. Six teacher narratives are analysed, showing that experience-based teacher education may enhance teachers' agency to challenge mainstream practices and explore learner-centred teaching, thus developing professional autonomy in seeking to promote learner autonomy.

Key words: Autonomy, cases, experience, language teacher education, narratives.

Los programas de formación de profesores de idiomas pueden promover un cambio orientado a la autonomía cuando se basan en una lógica transformadora con respecto al desarrollo del alumno y del profesor. Esto implica adoptar un enfoque basado en la experiencia en el que se problematizan las ideas y prácticas dominantes y se brindan oportunidades para que los maestros aprendan, experimenten e indaguen sobre las prácticas de enseñanza de idiomas orientadas a la autonomía. Se presenta una propuesta basada en el análisis y la construcción de casos en la formación docente de posgrado, en la que los docentes analizan y diseñan experiencias de investigación de acción orientadas a la autonomía y producen narrativas de investigación. Se analizan seis narrativas de docentes, lo que demuestra que la formación docente basada en la experiencia puede mejorar la agencia docente para desafiar las prácticas generales y explorar la enseñanza centrada en el alumno, desarrollando así una autonomía profesional en la búsqueda de promover la autonomía del alumno.

Palabras clave: autonomía, casos, experiencia, formación de profesores de idiomas, narrativas.

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Experience and Autonomy in Teacher Education

Although the importance of experience for professional learning has long been acknowledged (see Dewey, 1963; Schön, 1987; Smyth, 1987; Zeichner, 1983), many teacher education (TE) practices are still influenced by a long-standing tradition where a theory-to-practice rationale prevails, that is, teachers are seen as recipients of theoretical knowledge and expected to apply it to practice. However, as Carr (2006) points out, the legitimacy of theory to determine practice must be questioned since educational theory is a form of social practice that is historically embedded and transitional, and there are no epistemological foundations that guarantee the truth of theoretical knowledge. Moreover, even though theories should inspire and support change, they can hardly translate directly into practice given the complex nature of teaching contexts and professional decision making processes.

Surpassing a theory-to-practice rationale in TE entails acknowledging the centrality of teachers' experience in professional learning and promoting a constructivist epistemology whereby teachers become critical inquirers and agents of change (Giroux, 2014; Kincheloe, 2003). Kincheloe (2003) points out that “deskilling of teachers and dumbing-down of the curriculum take place when teachers are seen as receivers not producers of knowledge” (p. 19), and teacher empowerment can only result from a view of teachers “as researchers and knowledge workers who reflect on their profession needs and current understandings” (p. 18). This requires, first of all, realising that experience is the core of professional development as it shapes and is shaped by the teacher's inner self:

Experience is what one gains from operating in the real world, in practice (in our case the real world of teaching in schools), and encompasses both the environment (e.g., the classroom) and one's own inner reality while relating to this environment. This inner reality is multi-layered, as it encompasses, for example, good or wrong ways of doing things (know-how), beliefs about practice, as

well as a sense of professional identity developed through internal encounters with the T that goes through the experiences. (Lunenburg & Korthagen, 2009, p. 228)

In accounting for teachers' experience, TE programmes can develop practices that build on teachers' concerns and agendas, enhance their awareness of what goes wrong in educational practices and why, and foster their willingness and ability to explore alternative practices based on humanistic and democratic values. What I propose here is a *pedagogy of experience* in TE (Vieira, 2010), which may be described as an approach that locates the nucleus of teacher development in the terrain of professional action through pedagogical inquiry, with the purpose of enhancing teachers' willingness and ability to challenge reproduction-oriented teaching and explore pedagogies that may contribute to an education for democracy. What Schostak (2000) pointed out almost two decades ago regarding the need to reshape education in this direction still rings true in many school settings today:

Millions of children leave school all over the world each day no better able to engage in democratic action and make changes in their communities to meet their needs than when they entered. Rather than a curriculum that constructs subjectivities around failure, around “knowing one's place”, around complacent disregard of the misfortunes and experiences of others, around an apathetic acceptance that “things can't change”, around a meritocracy that disowns its underclass, the chance always exists for education to construct curricula for challenge, for change, for the development of people and not the engineering of employees. (p. 50)

From this perspective, teacher and learner autonomy become central purposes of TE programmes. Research on autonomy in language education has often tended to underrate issues of teacher autonomy, which has reinforced a de-politicized view of pedagogy for autonomy (see Benson, 1997, 2006). However, an understanding of autonomy as a collective interest and a democratic ideal implies that in the expression “pedagogy for autonomy”,

autonomy refers to the learner *and* the teacher, and it can be defined as “the competence to develop as a self-determined, socially responsible and critically aware participant in (and beyond) educational environments, within a vision of education as (inter)personal empowerment and social transformation” (Jiménez Raya, Lamb, & Vieira, 2017, p. 1).

In a recent exploratory review of published research on 20 initiatives developed mainly in Europe for pre-service and in-service language TE for autonomy, Manzano Vázquez (2018) concludes that critical reflection and inquiry are key elements for promoting teacher autonomy, understood not only as an integral aspect of teacher development, but also as a means to promote learner autonomy. However, three different interpretations of teacher autonomy emerge from his study: (1) professional freedom or control over professional activity; (2) the capacity for taking control over learning how to teach and professional development; and (3) teacher and learner autonomy as interconnected phenomena developing simultaneously within co-constructed, democratic pedagogies. Even though these views can be seen as complementary, only eight of the 20 initiatives were categorized under the third interpretation, which is the main view adopted here. Understanding teacher and learner autonomy as interconnected phenomena means that professional autonomy grows from teachers’ efforts to face constraints and find ways to meet learners’ needs and interests in the service of more democratic education. Therefore, TE programmes need “to envisage pedagogy for autonomy as a cultural and political project where resistance, critique and subversion become crucial components of teachers’ professional competence” (Jiménez Raya et al., 2017, p. 68). Professional learning and educational change can thus be seen as journeys between reality and ideals:

Pedagogical hope and professional autonomy go hand in hand in our struggle for a better education: education that is empowering for teachers and learners and ultimately contributes to the transformation of society at large. If this sounds like a utopia, then it sounds

right. Only *ideals* can push *reality* forwards, and not being able to fully accomplish them is just one more reason to keep on trying. From this perspective, dealing with complexity and uncertainty is integral to “re[ide]alistic” professional lifelong learning and “re[ide]alistic” pedagogies. (Jiménez Raya et al., 2017, p. 78)

In this paper I propose an experience-based TE approach that draws on the assumptions presented so far and involves the use of cases—case analysis and case construction. Studies regarding the use of cases in language TE have suggested that it fosters reflective teacher development, helps surpass the bridge between theory and practice, and enhances innovation (Jiménez Raya, 2011, 2017; Jiménez Raya & Vieira, 2015; Sachs & Ho, 2011). Shulman (2004a) argues that analysing narratives of teaching helps teachers connect the narratives to personal/other experiences, that is, to other cases, and also to “categories of experience, to theoretical classifications through which they organise and make sense of their world” (p. 474). Therefore, case analysis requires the use of multiple frames of reference, both experiential and theoretical, so as to explore possible answers to the question “what is this a case of?” (p. 474). Case-based TE practices may also integrate case construction through teacher-led pedagogical inquiry and teacher-authored narratives. Research on narrative writing as a teacher development strategy has accounted for its transformative value as regards teachers’ identity, professional knowledge, and predisposition for change (see Attard, 2012; Dutra & Mello, 2008; Golombek & Johnson, 2004, 2017; Huber, Li, Murphy, Nelson, & Young, 2014; Johnson & Golombek, 2002; Moreira, 2015). Teacher-authored narratives foster the intersection between experiential and “expert” knowledge, and account for teachers’ cognitive and emotional dissonance as their struggle to reconceptualize understanding and reshape practices (Golombek & Johnson, 2004, p. 324). As a form of self-study and self-inquiry, narratives “can enable teachers to (re)interpret their experiences as teachers and to build local knowledge situated in

their classrooms and contexts, and with their students and communities” (Golombek & Johnson, 2017, p. 16).

The approach described below was developed in a post-graduate course and integrates case analysis and case construction for promoting learner and teacher autonomy. Its value will be discussed later on the basis of six autonomy-oriented experiences conducted and narrated by English teachers.

Pedagogy of Experience in Action: A Case-Based Approach

When I first started to explore a pedagogy of experience in post-graduate TE, I had already been a teacher educator for a long time and one of my biggest concerns had always been to make the courses I teach relevant for professional learning. Although I tried to link course contents to teachers’ experience as much as possible, I still felt the need for a more radical change, namely by making experience the *core* of TE practices through the analysis and construction of cases.

Over the years I have evaluated, refined, and consolidated this approach, mostly within a post-graduate course on Language Education and Pedagogical Supervision (15 weeks, 45 teaching hours) that I teach in the first semester of a two-year master degree programme for in-service language teachers at my institution. The course aims at promoting autonomy-oriented pedagogical inquiry in schools, involving teachers in experience-based learning through case analysis and case construction. Theoretical input focuses on language education, pedagogy for autonomy, pedagogical supervision, and classroom-based inquiry, but not as a body of knowledge to be applied to practice. Recommended readings and theoretical discussions are always related to case analysis, either to support it or as an extension of it, and also to case construction as teachers select readings on their topics of inquiry, that is, on what they want to learn about. Therefore, a theory-to-practice rationale is rejected in favour of a praxis-oriented epistemology where the role of public theories is to support personal

understandings, the theorisation of practice, and a more informed approach to self-directed inquiry. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the theoretical rationale of the course itself determines its content and directs the teachers’ attention to particular views of teaching, learning, and professional development.

Case Analysis

In our course, teachers are invited to analyse at least two narratives of autonomy-oriented classroom experiences carried out by language teachers from previous editions of the programme, produced within case construction as described below.¹ The first stage of analysis is rather unstructured, focusing on what teachers find most relevant in the experience they read about and how it resonates with their own teaching. The second stage is based on theoretical input related to pedagogy for autonomy, involving re-interpretations of the narrative or parts of it. One or more inputs can be provided and used sequentially for each narrative, depending on the time available (e.g., full texts, excerpts of texts, and reflective tools). In seeking to relate a particular theoretical framework with the narrative at hand, teachers discuss their own understandings of the framework and its connection with practice, and opportunities for clarifying and expanding theoretical concepts arise. Figure 1 illustrates a task for case analysis. Teachers are asked to analyse the narrative of an experience where a group of English teachers tried to make homework activities more learner-centred.² In focusing on learner and teacher roles, teachers should answer the question: *to what extent can you say that the narrative illustrates a case of pedagogy for autonomy?* These tasks are complemented by recommended readings that may be done before or after task completion.

1 Narratives published in English on the promotion of autonomy can also be found in language teaching journals and in books like those edited by Kalaja, Menezes, and Barcelos (2008), and Barfield and Alvarado (2013).

2 This narrative is one of the six cases I will consider in my analysis of the potential value of this approach.

Figure 1. Example of Task for Case Analysis

Pedagogy for autonomy: Learner and teacher roles			
<i>Read the teachers' narrative. To what extent can you say that it illustrates a case of pedagogy for autonomy? In order to answer this question, analyse the learners' and teachers' roles in the teachers' experience, using the framework below.</i>			
Learner Roles	√	Teacher Roles	√
<i>Reflecting about language</i> (linguistic, pragmatic, and cultural aspects)		<i>Analysing contexts of practice</i> (identifying problems, designing alternatives)	
<i>Reflecting about language learning</i> (e.g., attitudes, beliefs, strategies...)		<i>Centring teaching on learning</i> (promoting reflection, experimentation, regulation, and negotiation)	
<i>Experimenting with learning strategies</i> (in and outside class)		<i>Articulating personal and social dimensions of learning</i> (attending to individual and collective interests, needs, ideas, and experiences)	
<i>Regulating learning</i> (planning, monitoring, evaluating learning)		<i>Inquiring into teaching and learning</i> (collecting and analysing evidence to understand and reshape practice)	
<i>Negotiating meanings and decisions</i> (interacting, collaborating, taking initiatives, making choices and decisions)		<i>Sharing ideas and practices with peers</i> (promoting the collaborative construction of knowledge in the professional community)	

During case analysis, creating a conversational, non-judgemental atmosphere is of the utmost importance so that teachers feel free to present and confront points of view. My main role as teacher educator is to facilitate collaborative reflection. Rather than seeking consensus, I try to promote divergent thinking and the confrontation of perspectives.

Narratives used for case analysis illustrate autonomy-oriented inquiry and prepare teachers for case construction, whereby they become authors of their own autonomy stories. This means that those narratives must be inspiring examples of how teachers might engage in classroom inquiry to enhance and evaluate learner-centred teaching.

Case Construction

Case construction is the major component of the course and takes place after at least one narrative has been analysed. It combines the development of small-scale action research projects in schools with the production of narratives of classroom-based inquiry, where teachers document and interpret their efforts to enact pedagogical change. Action research plans are ideally designed in small groups to enhance collaborative reflection, and even though all teachers in the group are free to carry out the plan, adapting it to their own teaching contexts, only one of the experiences is considered for in-depth analysis and narrative writing. This means that each group decides who the

“experimenter teacher” is, and his/her experience is accompanied by the other group members through lesson observation whenever possible and in group meetings. The group is responsible for designing, analysing, and narrating their case, which prevents bias through the negotiation of perspectives.

Teachers start by reflecting on pedagogical problems they would like to surpass so as to identify a topic of inquiry. A planning grid is provided where they register decisions regarding the issue they want to tackle and why, the context and objectives of the intervention, the classroom procedures and materials, and the data collection strategies to evaluate the experience (e.g., learner questionnaires and self-evaluation checklists, learning and teaching journals, lesson observation, analysis of learner performance). I accompany the planning stage and help teachers design teaching and data collection materials. Each experience is then conducted in three to four language lessons. Finally, they write a narrative to describe and interpret the experience. In order to support narrative writing, some guiding questions are provided:

- Does the narrative have an appealing title?
- Is it divided into sections that make its presentation clear?
- Does it present the topic, the objectives, and the context of the experience?
- Are the innovative features of the experience pointed out?
- Is the relation between the experience and learner autonomy clear?
- Are the stages of the experience described?
- Are the materials used presented?
- Are the data collected presented?
- Is the experience interpreted in light of data and theoretical input?
- Are learner and teacher gains pointed out?
- Are future practices suggested on the basis of evaluation?

Teachers are encouraged to develop a “language of experience” (Larrosa Bondía, 2010), a hybrid language that combines creativity with rigour, personal insights and interpretations with a critical standpoint based on data collection and theoretical input. As Golombek and Johnson (2017) suggest, narrative writing should help teachers “externalize” their understandings and feelings regarding their experience, but also “verbalize” academic concepts that they use “to re-examine, rename, and reorient their everyday experiences” (p. 18). Therefore, writing becomes a form of *talking from the self* rather than *about the self* (Contreras & Pérez de Lara, 2010), which prevents excessive subjectivity and makes narratives potentially useful for other teachers to build on. Writing should enhance critical thinking through the integration of experience, theory, and practical wisdom (Lunenberg & Korthagen, 2009).

During the process of writing, I choose not to give feedback on the teachers’ provisional texts. I explain that writing should be experienced as a (self)discovery process of inquiry (Van Manen, 1990), that they need to struggle with so as to make sense of practice and find an appropriate language as authors of autonomy stories. Therefore, I provide feedback only on the final version of the narratives, which are used for course assessment. Narrative assessment is based on four general criteria discussed at the beginning of the course: *ability to innovate* by reshaping previous teaching practices and using strategies to promote learner autonomy; *articulating theory and practice* by using theoretical knowledge to justify choices and analyse the experience; *articulating teaching and research* by using data collection strategies and analysing the experience on the basis of data and theoretical input; and *formal correction* at the level of language, textual organization, and bibliographic references. I provide constructive feedback on the teachers’ narratives, and I ask groups to revise them as an optional task so that I can use them with other teachers for case analysis. Over the years, I have gathered a bank of cases, and in 2014 I edited a book with six narratives (Vieira,

2014). I will draw upon them in the following section so as to illustrate how autonomy-oriented pedagogical inquiry is developed by teachers.³

Teachers' Narratives of Autonomy-Oriented Inquiry

The potential value of the approach proposed above can be understood by looking at teachers' narratives. As Johnson and Golombek (2002) point out, "teachers' stories of inquiry are not only *about* professional development; they *are* professional development. Narrative inquiry becomes a means through which teachers actualize their ways of knowing and growing that nourish and sustain their professional development throughout their careers" (p. 6).

The six narratives were written by 21 experienced English teachers, all female, who worked in groups to design small-scale action research projects carried out by one teacher in each group, in one of her classes, in three to four lessons. The projects were developed in Portuguese regular state schools, in classes with 11 to 27 students from grades 9 (five cases) and 10 (one case). Table 1 summarises the didactic topics, perceived problems, purposes, and strategies of inquiry. All the projects account for the adoption of learner-centred teaching as a central feature of pedagogy for autonomy, emerging from concerns with learning and reshaping teaching so as to enhance learning. The teachers designed tasks and materials that fostered both language and learning competences. Questionnaires and self/peer assessment checklists were built to raise students' awareness of and participation in the teaching-learning process, and allowed teachers to collect invaluable data to interpret, readjust, and evaluate their approach.

Although class time used in these projects is short, pedagogical tasks and roles are significantly reshaped. For example, the teachers who explored homework

(Brandão, Monteiro, & Costa, 2014) realised "the need to question its goals and nature, and fight back feelings of dissatisfaction from students and teachers" (p. 52). They were concerned that their homework assignments were mostly aimed at reinforcing language learned in class and students were not motivated to do them. In a questionnaire to students, they found that many associated homework with the ideas of obligation, routine, and boredom. In order to change this situation, they decided to make homework more learner-centred by enhancing learner creativity and self-direction. The teacher who implemented the project had been teaching her students how to write a summary, and the students were invited to imagine a story for a book or a film, write a summary of the story, and produce the front and back covers of the book or the movie CD-ROM, where they had to include the summary, metadata, and an illustration. They were also involved in self/peer-assessment of this task on the basis of criteria regarding the adequacy of the summary and the verbal and visual information provided. This approach led to a new understanding of homework as an activity that can be engaging and promote both language and learning competences.

Moving towards learner-centred pedagogies entailed the enactment of principles of pedagogy for autonomy. This is illustrated here in the case of improving oral presentations in class (S. Ferreira, Ribeiro, & Pereira, 2014). The teachers felt that students often failed to prepare and present their assignments properly, and they decided to reinforce teacher support and independent work. In their narrative, they present a table comparing previous routines to the new approach. Pedagogical changes indicated in italics in the right-hand column of Table 2 (adapted from S. Ferreira et al., 2014, p. 116) show how previous practices were reshaped through integrating the principles of autonomy support, responsibility and choice, self-regulation, and assessment for learning. According to Jiménez Raya et al. (2017), "autonomy support" entails helping learners develop their ability to learn and make informed choices, which in this case

³ The narratives were originally published in the teachers' mother tongue and all excerpts were translated here into English.

consisted of indicating learning resources they might consult, clarifying criteria for assessing oral performance, and supporting them during the preparation for oral presentations; promoting “responsibility and choice” means allowing students to make decisions regarding what and how they learn, in this case by letting them choose a topic and thus enhance peer negotiation through cooperative learning; fostering “self-regulation” implies creating opportunities for students to plan, monitor, and evaluate learning, which was accomplished by giving

them some freedom regarding topics and how they were to be approached, and by promoting self/peer-assessment of oral performance based on the criteria set, through direct observation and listening to audiotapes of oral presentations; as regards “assessment for learning”, that is, formative assessment that contributes to enhancing learning, assessment procedures involved the students’ reflection on what oral presentations require and how they could assess and improve their own performance according to the criteria used.

Table 1. Teacher Inquiry: Topics, Problems, Purposes, and Strategies

Topics	Perceived problems	Purposes of inquiry	Main strategies
<i>Homework</i>	Poor learner engagement in homework assignments	Making homework more self-directed and creative	Learner questionnaire about homework; Innovative homework tasks; Analysis of learner performance in homework tasks; Self/peer-assessment of homework tasks; Learner questionnaire to evaluate the project.
<i>Reading comprehension</i>	Poor learner engagement and effectiveness in reading assignments	Understanding reading difficulties and changing reading strategies	Learner questionnaire about reading; Innovative reading tasks; Analysis of learner performance in reading tasks; Self-assessment of reading tasks; Learner questionnaire to evaluate the project.
<i>Oral interaction</i>	Learner difficulties in coping with oral interaction	Enhancing the preparation of interaction and the use of communication strategies	Negotiation of role-play situation; Role-play task prepared by learners; Self-assessment of performance and strategies (pre/post-task); Teacher observation of learner performance; Learner questionnaire to evaluate the project.
<i>Oral presentations</i>	Learner difficulties in coping with oral presentations of research-based work	Enhancing the preparation of oral presentations and learner involvement in assessing oral performance	Learner questionnaire about oral presentations; Raising awareness of preparation strategies and assessment criteria; Collaborative preparation of oral presentations; Self-assessment of oral performance; Comparison of learner and teacher assessments; Learner questionnaire to evaluate the project.
<i>Oral reading</i>	Low learner confidence and engagement in oral reading	Enhancing expressive reading and learner self-confidence in oral reading	Raising awareness of quality criteria in oral reading; Collaborative preparation of oral reading task (a play); Oral reading and self-assessment of reading performance (pre/post-task); Dialogue about the project.
<i>Cooperative learning</i>	Lack of teachers’ confidence and experience in promoting group work	Promoting cooperative learning	Learner questionnaire about collaborative work; Cooperative learning tasks; Learner self-assessment of cooperative learning tasks; Teachers’ collaborative journal along the project.

Table 2. Reshaping Pedagogical Practice: Oral Presentations

Previous teacher's routine	New approach
T indicates a topic for the whole class, proposes an outline for oral presentations, highlights useful language items (with ss' collaboration), and presents criteria to assess oral presentations.	<i>T indicates three topics for ss to choose one</i> , proposes an outline for oral presentations, highlights useful language items (with ss' collaboration), <i>indicates websites for research</i> , and presents criteria to assess oral presentations <i>and simplified descriptors to clarify each criterion</i> .
ss prepare individual presentations outside class by researching topics, writing texts, and training outside class.	<i>ss prepare collaborative presentations (in pairs)</i> by researching topics, writing texts, and training outside <i>and inside class, with direct T support</i> .
ss present their work individually and T assesses presentations.	<i>ss present their work in pairs and presentations are tape-recorded</i> ; T assesses presentations <i>and pairs self-assess presentations, using a common assessment tool with criteria discussed before</i> ; <i>ss listen to audiotaped performances and self-assess again</i> ; <i>T and ss compare assessments</i> .

Note. T = Teacher, ss = Students. Adapted from S. Ferreira et al. (2014), p. 116.

A central aspect of learner-centred pedagogies is learners' engagement in reflections on learning for developing metacognitive knowledge about themselves as learners (person knowledge), about the nature of specific learning tasks (task knowledge), and about learning strategies (strategy knowledge). Although metacognitive knowledge may be acquired consciously or unconsciously, bringing it to consciousness and talking about it will enhance its development and support autonomy (Wenden, 1999). This is well expressed by the teachers who explored oral interaction in class (Costa & Barreiro, 2014) when they write that learning to talk for communicative purposes is important, yet not enough: "*Talking to learn* is also necessary, because it is necessary to talk about what one learns and how one learns, to talk to learn to negotiate and make decisions" (p. 90). These teachers devised a role play activity to be performed in pairs—"an appointment with the doctor". The students had to prepare for the interaction and self-assess their communicative ability before and after the role play as regards language functions they needed to fulfil (e.g., ask/tell about a health problem). They were

also taught a number of communication strategies they might use in case of communication breakdowns (e.g., rephrasing, asking for clarification), and they reflected on the strategies used during the role play. Therefore, they not only developed interaction skills but also skills to reflect and talk about interaction itself.

As illustrated by the previous cases, learning how to learn through metacognitive awareness-raising was always connected with the enhancement of language competences. Another example is the narrative on oral reading (Teixeira, Neves, Serdoura, & Monteiro, 2014), which shows how learning about and assessing oral reading was successfully linked to developing oral reading skills. The teachers devised a plan that started with the oral reading of a short play with no previous preparation, intentionally reproducing a mainstream classroom procedure that often results in poor, meaningless readings. Students were then led to brainstorm the difficulties they felt and why, which was the basis for agreeing on what oral reading entails (performance criteria) and how it can be improved (learning strategies). They were subsequently asked to prepare for the

oral reading of the same play in groups, and they could tape-record their readings for analysing and solving problems. After enacting the play before the class, they self-assessed their performance in a questionnaire where they compared the first and final oral readings, that is, reading without and with preparation. Table 3 (Teixeira et al., 2014, p. 142) presents data from students' self-assessment and their perceptions of progress regarding the performance criteria discussed before: intonation and expressive reading, rhythm and punctuation, pronunciation, fluency, and comprehension. For each of these aspects, the questionnaire indicated the problems that were initially brainstormed with the teacher's support, which shows how self-assessment instruments can be built from students' ideas, potentially enhancing their understanding of and involvement in metacognitive development processes.

Table 3. Students' Self-Assessment: Oral Reading (*n* = 11)

PROBLEMS	Initial reading			Final reading		
	√	?	X	√	?	X
Intonation and expressive reading						
I was not expressive	3	8	0	0	1	10
I read in a very low voice	2	7	2	1	0	10
Rhythm and punctuation						
I did not follow the punctuation	4	3	4	0	3	8
Pronunciation						
I did not say the words well	5	6	0	1	2	8
I felt difficulties in pronouncing the words	5	6	0	0	5	6
Fluency						
I did not read continuously	3	4	4	0	4	7
I hesitated with or at some words	5	4	2	0	8	3
Comprehension						
I did not understand the meaning of words	4	7	0	0	1	10
I had no reading instructions	7	3	1	0	1	10

Note. √ = I felt this problem a lot, ? = I felt this problem a little, x = I did not feel this problem at all.

Table 4 presents a summary of metacognitive knowledge developed across the six experiences through various kinds of strategies: initial and final questionnaires, pre/post-task self-assessment checklists, and conversations and input about learning. Initial questionnaires were aimed at getting to know the students' opinions and experiences regarding language learning and the project topics, which was the starting point for raising learning awareness and for devising tasks that were appropriate for the class; self-assessment checklists allowed the students to monitor their performance in specific language tasks and evaluate their educational value, which raised their awareness of progress and difficulties, and also of task rationales; classroom conversations, namely when clarifying task demands and purposes, or when discussing results from questionnaires and checklists, were an opportunity to negotiate understandings on how students might better improve learning.

Table 4. Developing Students' Metacognitive Knowledge

<i>Person</i> knowledge: knowledge about...	<i>Task</i> knowledge: knowledge about...	<i>Strategy</i> knowledge: knowledge about...
previous/current learning experiences and approaches.	nature of and requirements for specific learning tasks.	meta/cognitive, affective, and communicative strategies for specific learning areas or tasks.
competence/performance (strengths and weaknesses) in specific learning areas or tasks.	value of teaching and learning approaches.	strategies to improve learning.
factors that constrain/favour learning.		

In developing their projects, teachers created new learning environments where students could expand their voice, take some control over their learning, and influence the course of teaching. In the case on reading comprehension (P. Ferreira, Precioso, Vilela, Barros, & Azevedo, 2014), the teachers write about how school cultures are often built “towards silencing the students’ voice”, and how students “appear to be moulded to act according to that condition as their *self* is conditioned so as to not seeing beyond what they usually do” (p. 88). Their experience involved making students more active readers by engaging them in exploring and reflecting on reading strategies. Their intention is well expressed in their narrative title, which is also a summary of their answer to the question “What is this a case of?": *Breaking Routines – Reading with Seeing Eyes? Seeing with Reading Eyes!* Helping students “see with reading eyes” involved: promoting awareness of reading strategies, creating conditions for meaningful reading, and fostering collaborative reflection on reading processes in class. In order to accomplish this, they devised two reading comprehension tasks with similar texts and a set of similar reading questions to be answered in writing, but in one of the tasks both the questions and the students’ replies were written in their mother tongue, which was a completely unfamiliar approach. The students were asked to reflect on their performance in both tasks, namely on whether the use of the mother tongue had helped them to better understand and reply to the questions, rather than copying chunks from the text as they often did when they did not understand the questions well or when they had problems in writing. The teachers and the students realised that this experiment allowed them to disclose reading problems and strategies, opening up new paths for exploring and assessing reading comprehension skills. The teachers felt that in seeking “to navigate towards the democratisation of the construction of knowledge, searching for a pedagogy for autonomy, the students’ voices broke the silence” (P. Ferreira et al., 2014, p. 83).

The metaphor of the journey is often found in teachers’ narratives to express the exploratory nature of their experiences. This metaphor is extensively used in the case on cooperative learning (Vasconcelos, Costa, & Gonçalves, 2014), described by the teachers as “a journey through seas never navigated before” (p. 145). These teachers had given up using group work in their teaching mostly due to negative experiences related to students’ inefficiency and their own inability to monitor students’ work. They saw this as a limitation of their practice and decided to learn about cooperative learning. They devised cooperative tasks that promoted the students’ interdependence, social skills, and self-assessment of group work. Moreover, they also decided to engage in collaborative journal writing among themselves, which was also a new experience for them. When referring to the motto “swim or sink together” used by Johnson and Johnson (1994) regarding cooperative learning, they state that “together in the boat of knowledge, teachers and students can surpass the *small shipwrecks*” (p. 165), thus stressing the educational value of co-constructed pedagogies where teacher and learner autonomy develop in tandem.

In their narratives, teachers refer to the limited scope and impact of their innovations given the short duration of the experiences, but they also acknowledge significant changes in how pedagogical encounters were designed and carried out, with positive implications for students and for themselves as professionals. As Benson (1996) points out, steps towards learner autonomy necessarily reshape roles and power relations in the classroom:

Because steps towards autonomy invariably problematize roles and power-relations, autonomization is necessarily a transformation of the learner as a social individual. In other words, autonomy not only transforms individuals, it also transforms the social situations and structures in which they are participants. (p. 34)

In their journeys across the interspace between reality and ideals, teachers developed their professional autonomy by challenging established routines and carrying out practices that were more in tune with

democratic values and with their own aspirations as educators. As expressed by the group that explored reading comprehension, inquiry played “a crucial role for understanding the oppressive forces that mould our mind, which, from a critical constructivist perspective, is essential to make informed decisions about who we want to be” (P. Ferreira et al., 2014, p. 82).

Concluding Remarks

This paper presents a form of self-study whereby I analyse and disseminate my experience as a teacher educator, hopefully producing knowledge and insights that may be built upon by other teacher educators (see Loughran, 2002; Lunenberg & Hamilton, 2008; Zeichner, 2007). I have argued for a pedagogy of experience that creates opportunities for teachers to analyse and experience autonomy-oriented pedagogical inquiry, and even though my proposal refers to a particular TE setting, it will hopefully resonate with other initiatives within in-service TE where concerns with learner and teacher autonomy arise.

One of the strengths of the approach is the combination of case analysis and case construction, but it is the latter that promotes more significant changes. The fact that I extracted ideas from six narratives limited the possibility of illustrating how *each* experience accounts for the promotion of autonomy, and this is a shortcoming of the analysis. Nevertheless, it shows how teacher and learner autonomy can be explored as interconnected phenomena developing simultaneously within co-constructed, more democratic pedagogies. Teachers developed their willingness to challenge ingrained practices, their ability to centre teaching on learning, and their belief in professional agency. As pointed out by Jiménez Raya et al. (2017), case construction “benefits teacher empowerment because it emerges directly from teachers’ concerns and aspirations, requires them to undertake a critical analysis of teaching, engages them in explorations of autonomy, and promotes reflective experiential writing” (p. 118).

Based on my experience, I would strongly recommend teacher educators to experiment with and inquire into experience-based approaches that combine case analysis and case construction. Apart from the benefits pointed out before, case construction generates a bank of teacher narratives that can be subsequently used for case analysis, which is greatly appreciated by teachers as they can easily relate to the situations described by their colleagues. Case construction is, however, a time-consuming task that needs to be adapted to TE circumstances as regards the type and frequency of support, the complexity and duration of classroom experiences, the length of final narratives, and the quality of expected outcomes. It is also quite demanding as it involves the articulation between teaching and research, theory and practice, experience and writing, which means that case analysis and on-going support from the teacher educator are of paramount importance. As stressed by Golombek and Johnson (2017), “For teachers’ narrative inquiry to be professional development, that is for teachers to transform their thinking and doing of teaching through narrative inquiry, systematic and intentional mediation by teacher educators needs to be acknowledged and made explicit” (p. 17).

Over the years, I have observed a number of difficulties in case construction, particularly in the design of autonomy-oriented action research projects and in narrative writing, especially because these are new learning experiences for most teachers. This led me to introduce improvements to the approach, namely by making its rationale and purposes more explicit, enhancing dialogue and collaboration in class, providing written guidelines, and offering constructive feedback. It has certainly been a learning experience for me as well, with implications on the teachers’ learning processes and outcomes. Nevertheless, variations on the quality of projects and narratives also result from differences regarding teachers’ previous background training and experience. Collaboration among teachers may attenuate

these differences, but we need to accept that professional learning is always dependent on factors that cannot be acted upon, and what really matters is that *all* teachers gain from the experience. I have never encountered situations where teachers were disengaged or ended up frustrated with their learning, which has greatly motivated me to go on exploring this approach.

Regarding the use of narratives as a vehicle for teacher inquiry, Golombek and Johnson (2017) stress that *how* teachers engage in narrative activity will shape *what* they learn (p. 18). In this case, the way teachers engage in narrative writing and what they can learn from it is directly influenced by the development of action research projects aimed at enhancing both learner and teacher autonomy. These projects are at the heart of case construction and determine the direction of innovation and professional growth. However, it is important to note that the ultimate goal of inquiry is not to turn teachers into researchers, but rather to empower them as language educators by fostering their belief in the value of experience for professional development, and increasing their ability to carry out and evaluate innovations that are locally relevant and personally meaningful.

We need further accounts on the use of experience-based, autonomy-oriented practices in language TE contexts. Local cases, like the one presented here, cannot aspire to produce generalizable knowledge. However, they can inspire other teacher educators and contribute to a more collective understanding of how TE for autonomy might be developed. In order to inquire into the value of a pedagogy of experience, teacher-educators-as-researchers may resort to a number of strategies, like teacher feedback questionnaires, narrative analysis, observation of autonomy-oriented practices developed in schools, and follow-up interviews or case studies to ascertain post-course impact of training. Supporting the dissemination of teacher-authored narratives is also important, as they represent an invaluable legacy for other teachers and can be used in TE settings. As

Shulman (2004b) suggests, cases “may well become, for teacher education, the lingua franca of teacher learning communities” (p. 544).

Despite all its benefits, a pedagogy of experience may find resistance in TE cultures where teaching practice and teacher agency are undervalued. At my institution, especially in post-graduate programmes, I can find traces of a theory-to-practice rationale based on a taken-for-granted supremacy of academic knowledge as the only legitimate source for teacher development, along with a generalized view of post-graduate TE as an introduction to academic research traditions. In our role as teacher educators we often need, like the teachers we work with, to challenge mainstream practices and become critical inquirers and agents of change. Like teachers, we need to become authors of autonomy stories.

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