

# GLOSAS DIDÁCTICAS

REVISTA ELECTRÓNICA INTERNACIONAL  
ISSN 1576-7809

## ARTÍCULOS

### Self-observation: a teacher development approach

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#### 1. "To be or not to be? That is the question!"

In Portuguese we make the distinction between the verbs *estar* and *ser*. A native speaker of Portuguese can easily make the distinction in meaning of *estou professor* and *sou professor*. In Portuguese, we say *professor* for both teachers and professors. *Estou professor* suggests an idea of a temporary state, whereas *sou professor* involves a whole sense of being. In English this distinction is not clearly made. When someone asks me: 'What do you do?' My answer is: 'I am a teacher' which can either mean a temporary activity or a career option.

I'd like to start my series of reflections asking the reader of the present article the following questions:

1. **Are** you a teacher? (Is you **are** a synonym for the Portuguese *estou* or *sou*?)
2. Does it make any difference to the students once you step into the classroom?
3. What does being a teacher really involve?

The reader might not agree with me but I believe that whether I have embraced teaching as a career or not, it makes no difference to my students. Once I step into a classroom I am a teacher and that involves my whole sense of being: body, mind, sense of self, and emotions. "Pupils feel the personal emotional structure of the teacher long before they feel the impact of the intellectual content offered by that teacher" (Pine & Boy *apud* Williams & Burden, 1997:62). So it is expected that I am both emotionally and academically prepared to work with my students and help them through their learning process. As a teacher I am not allowed to give neither my students nor myself, the excuse of not developing and upgrading due to being only temporarily teaching.

In May 1999, I carried a research in the city of Fortaleza-CE, Northeast Brazil, to know a bit more about the profile of teachers in private English language schools. Fortaleza, a city which reached the year 2000 with a population of over 2 million people, has had a strong tradition in ELT for more than 30 years: there are over 400 active English teachers in private language schools and more than 50 registered institutes. In order to carry the research, I visited ten well-known courses and asked 150 teachers to answer a small questionnaire. The analysis of the first question of the questionnaire, revealed that **53%** of the teachers interviewed had only been teaching

between 0 and 5 years, **30%** between 6 and 10 years, **16%** between 11 and 20 years, only **1%** had been teaching for more than 20 years. My discovery led me to ask: **why do the English teachers of Fortaleza stay so little in the field of ELT?** Might this happen in other places in Brazil?

The questionnaire led me to understand that most teachers teach for a couple of years and then move on to a different career; they are university students of other fields such as Medicine, Law, Engineering, Business Administration, Psychology and others, who take short Teacher Training Courses (T.T.Cs.) - which vary from 2 weeks to 1 year – and are hired as English teachers. They all have finished an advanced English course with good fluency in both speaking and writing and most of them have had an experience abroad. To these teachers, teaching English becomes a pleasant way of earning good money while they are in university: they can do it part-time and arrange a schedule of work, which will not interfere with their academic lives. After finishing university, most quit teaching. Some continue but do not perceive themselves as real teachers. Others fall in love with teaching and decide to take a degree in TEFL. And of course, there are also the *born English teachers*, but they are minority. The problem is that the Language Graduation Courses of our universities do not attend the demand of the amount of English teachers needed in the private language courses as well as in the regular private and public school sectors of education. Very few get to finish university with a degree in ELT and, unfortunately, the horrendous beliefs that *anyone can teach English* and that *being a teacher is a career for someone who has failed on being something else* are still very strong and lead people to ask... **“why study in order to teach English when it can be done as an informal/temporary activity?”**.

But, does the fact that one is fluent in English and has had an experience abroad make them teachers? Do short T.T.Cs. enable fluent speakers of English to deal with the subtle and demanding situations faced in a classroom? What can be done to improve the present situation of ELT in Fortaleza? I believe a possible key-answer to this problem has to do with the promotion of TEACHER DEVELOPMENT programs, which support teachers and their teaching whether they are temporary or career teachers. The T.T.Cs, in the way they are planned in most language schools, are not effective enough to make teachers reflect on the implications of teaching and being a teacher in a developing country like Brazil. School owners, supervisors, co-ordinators and teacher trainers will obtain better teaching quality in their schools if they promote developmental activities and programs for all the teachers all year around and not only for beginner teachers during the schools' holiday break. The ELT community of Fortaleza must perceive that it is not effective, nor acceptable to enter the new millennium with the *recipe-kind of training* that most T.T.Cs offer.

One of my favourite definitions of Teacher Development is the one given by Adrian Underhill (*apud* Head & Taylor, 1997:vii):

Development means **change** and **growth**. Teacher development is the process of becoming ‘the best kind of teacher that I can personally be’. It means becoming a student of learning, your own as well as that of others. It represents a widening of the focus of teaching to include not only the subject matter and the teaching methods, but also the people who are working with the subjects and using the methods. It means taking a step back to see the larger picture of what goes on in

learning. It also means attending to small details, which can in turn change the bigger picture. Teacher development is a continuous process of transforming human potential into human performance, **a process that is never finished.**

Teacher development programs must, therefore, promote fertile time for reflection on what teaching (and being a teacher) actually is. Teachers should be led to think about their philosophy and principles of living and teaching despite the amount of years they intend to teach. According to Richards & Nunan (1990:xii)

The teacher education program and the teacher educator are seen to be sources of knowledge, experience, and resources for student teachers to use in exploring and developing their own approach to teaching. Such a program needs to be firmly grounded in both theory and practice, informed on the one hand by an understanding of what we know about the nature of classroom second language teaching and learning, and on the other by a scrutiny of classroom data, either in the form of direct or indirect teaching experiences.

Career teaching should be motivated and given the respect it deserves. School owners, supervisors, co-ordinators and teacher trainers should lead teachers to reflect on questions such as the ones proposed by Leo Bartlett's article *Teacher Development Through Reflective Teaching* (apud Richards & Nunan, 1990)

1. What caused me to want to become a language teacher?
2. Do these reasons still exist for me now?
3. What does it mean to be a teacher, a language teacher?
4. Is the teacher I am the person I am?
5. Where did the ideas I embody in my teaching come from historically?
6. How did I come to appropriate these ideas?
7. Do I believe in them?
8. Whose interests do these ideas serve?
9. Am I satisfied with the teacher I am?
10. Are my students satisfied with the teacher I am?
11. Am I being the best teacher I can be?

The political idea of teaching and of what teaching involves cannot be forgotten in a teacher development program. Teaching is a **political act** (Brown, 1994:441). Teaching English as a foreign language is a much stronger political act than we can imagine. Through teaching a foreign language, especially English, a teacher can either, **enslave** or **free** our own language and culture. By reinforcing the ideas of "importing the superior culture" of first-world-English-speaking countries a teacher can enslave our own culture and language. It is very common to find English teachers, in their classrooms, despising our own culture and people when promoting positive stereotypes of North American and European societies. **Until when will we accept this kind of brain washing going on inside our classrooms?** Learning English as a foreign language should be reinforced as a means of empowerment. Through reading, speaking, listening, and writing in the English language, our students can have access to the best literature in the world in all fields of sciences and arts - literature that would probably take too long to be translated into Portuguese or maybe never be translated. The domain

of the English language enables our students to communicate with the rest of the world in both a real or virtual way. It also enables them to study to become the best professionals they can be and the more qualified our students become, bigger are the chances of development (=change and growth) for our nation. Teaching is not only just passing on contents; teaching is *“All manner of behaviour in which individuals and groups act upon each other. The essential characteristic is reciprocity in actions and responses in an infinite variety of relationships: verbal and non-verbal, conscious and unconscious, enduring and casual. Interaction is seen as a continually emerging process, as communication in its inclusive sense”* (Simpson & Galbo *apud* Bartlett, op cit:204).

As **teachers** we form opinions and influence learners. In our classrooms we can either work on promoting changes or continue reproducing the oppressive competitive system our world is based upon. We **are** teachers and *“the term teacher can be redefined as someone who engages learners, who seeks to engage each person wholly – mind, sense of self, range of interests and interactions with other people in learning”* (Duckworth *apud* Bartlett, 1990:204). Therefore, whether I am teaching temporarily or for a lifetime, it is my duty and challenge to devote effort to **developing the teacher I am...**

## **2. Developing the teacher I am...**

It was reading Carl Rogers' writings that helped me deepen my thoughts about **developing the teacher I am...** Definitely Rogers was a man who has helped change the history of teaching. Reading his books have helped me become a better person and as a consequence a better teacher. Carl Rogers was born January 8, 1902 in Oak Park, Illinois. He was a psychologist and a teacher. As a psychologist he became well known because he founded what is today called *client-centred psychotherapy*. Rogers saw psychotherapy different from other psychologists of his time; he believed that the process of therapy had to be centred on the client's reflections on his/her own experiences and feelings. He pioneered in the development of scientific methods for studying psychotherapeutic outcomes and processes. In 1942 Rogers became the first therapist to record and transcribe therapy sessions verbatim, a practice now quite common. He published his ideas and clinical results in several books, and the one I like most is *On Becoming a Person*, which made him a well-known figure in American psychology. Rogers' client-centred therapy is among the most influential and widely employed techniques in modern U.S. clinical psychology. Rogers also largely influenced the world of education. He taught at the University of Chicago and at the University of Wisconsin, at Madison. As a teacher he believed that the focus of the educational process should not be the teacher, but the student. He proposed a shift of focus in education from teaching to learning. He also believed that the teacher should not be the dominant figure in the classroom, but a facilitator of the learning process. According to Rogers, (*apud* Head & Taylor, 1997:55), *“The primary task of the teacher is to permit the student to learn, to feed his or her curiosity. (...) The teacher's task is delicate, demanding, and a truly exalted calling. In true teaching there is no place for the authoritarian, nor the person who is on an ‘ego trip’.”* According to Rogers a good facilitator should have the attitudes of *genuineness, acceptance, and empathic understanding* in order to promote a good learning environment.

With *genuineness*, Rogers suggests that teachers should be themselves and not play roles in front of their learners: “*when the facilitator is a real person, being what she is, entering into a relationship with the learner without presenting a front or façade, she is much more likely to be effective...*” (*ibid*) *Acceptance* is the sense of recognising each student as a human being of worth: *It is a caring for the learner, but a non-possessive caring. It is an acceptance of this other individual as a separate person, having worth in her own right. It is a basic trust – a belief that this other person is somehow fundamentally trustworthy...* (*ibid*:56) *Empathic understanding* means ‘understanding the student’s reactions from the inside’: “This attitude of standing in the other’s shoes, of viewing the world through the student’s eyes, is almost unheard of in the classroom... But it has a tremendously releasing effect when it occurs.” (*ibid*).

Rogers is considered one of the fathers of the Humanistic Approach to teaching, which believes that

Teaching is an expression of values and attitudes, not just information or knowledge. Humanistic teaching is not just learner-centred, but person-centred. (Wiliams & Burden, 1997: 63)

Humanistic education starts with the idea that students are different, and it strives to help students become more like themselves and less like each other. (Hamachek, *apud* Wiliams & Burden, *ibid*: 36)

The Communicative way of teaching English as a Foreign Language is based on Humanistic principles. Rogers is more present in our classes than we can imagine!!! The ideas of student-centred classes/activities come from Rogers. His Humanistic ideas led us to understand that

Pupils feel the personal emotional structure of the teacher long before they feel the impact of the intellectual content offered by that teacher. (Pine & Boy *apud* Wiliams & Burden, *ibid*:62)

And because the personal emotional structure of the teacher has such an important impact on the learning process, it is necessary that teachers reflect on their actions and experiences as human beings and as professionals. Reflection on personal experience is a *must* for anyone who wishes to become *the best they can be!* Rogers’ words about reflecting on one’s own experience are very strong. Listen to what he says:

Experience is, for me, the highest authority. The touchstone of validity is my own experience. No other person's ideas, and none of my own ideas, are as authoritative as my experience. It is to experience that I must return again and again, to discover a closer approximation to truth as it is in the process of becoming in me. Neither the Bible nor the prophets neither Freud nor research --neither the revelations of God nor man -- can take precedence over my own direct experience. My experience is not authoritative because it is infallible. It is the basis of authority because it can always be checked in new primary ways. In this way its frequent error or fallibility is always open to correction. (Rogers,1962:22)

It is from Rogers that we have inherited the ideas of leading teachers to reflecting on their own actions as Meek (*apud* Brown,1994:437) says that

The main thing wrong with the world of education is that there's this group of people who do it - the teachers - and then there's another group who think they know about it - the researchers. The group who think they know about teaching try to find out more about it in order to tell the teachers about teaching - and that is total reversal. Teachers are the ones who do it and, therefore, are the ones who know about it. It's worth getting teachers to build on what they know, to build on what questions they have, because that's what matters - what teachers know and what questions they have. And so anybody who wants to be a helpful researcher should value what the teachers know and help them develop that.

Carl Rogers died February 4, 1987 but the seeds of his work continue flourishing in every school and classroom that believes that

The only man who is educated is the man who has learned how to learn; the man who has learned how to adapt and change; the man who has realised that no knowledge is secure; that only the process of seeking knowledge gives a basis for security. Changingness, a reliance on *process* rather than upon static knowledge, is the only thing that makes any sense as a goal for education in the modern world.” (Rogers *apud* Head & Taylor, 1997:55)

### ***3. On becoming a reflective teacher***

Rogers' ideas led me to reflect over and over about my practice as a language teacher and as a teacher educator and this gets even stronger when I go to my Spanish classes as a student. Everyday, from Monday to Thursday, after teaching English classes for semester 5 students, I hurry in order not to arrive very late for my Spanish classes. I teach English until 6:50pm and my Spanish classes start at 7:00. My students always see me running towards the car park in order to leave my teaching materials in the car and happily get my 'carpeta', with my 'libro', 'cuaderno de ejercicios' and 'diccionario'. '¡Yo voy a mi clase de español!' is what I say with a big smile trying to speak with my best Spanish accent possible. My students smile back and usually make funny comments as if to say: 'Now you know what it is to be one of us!!!' It's amazing how they love listening to my sharings of my fears and my try-outs in the Spanish class. And it's even more amazing how I've been receiving feedback from fears they didn't use to express!!! *Have I changed? Have I become more sensitive to what happens with my students due to what is going on with me as a Spanish student?*

It's interesting how I tend to play three different roles while in my Spanish classes: the role of the *student*, the role of the *teacher* and the one of a *teacher trainer*. I usually arrive as the Jocely student, and let me say, a good one! I've been trying to follow what I preach to my students; I listen to the cassette, I do the workbook activities

and I've been trying to practice Spanish as much as I can in and out of the classroom. I've also been listening to wonderful Spanish music and to my surprise I get to understand almost everything!!! I'm highly motivated and I'm usually very talkative in class. But there are times I wish my teacher could read my mind. There are times which I catch myself not understanding my teacher and the worst of all, not having the courage to say I do not understand... I hate myself at those moments because that's when I immediately swap roles and start thinking as a language teacher. I start thinking of the times I've asked my students if they have understood what I had explained and I remember the times I've had dubious answers or silence. Was the silence a confirmation of their understanding or of their lack of understanding! I recall myself preaching to my students that they should not take doubts home with them and there I am... the Spanish student taking home my silenced doubts with me while my poor teacher patiently struggles to explain. The reader might think I'm a shy person. Definitely not!!! I'm really talkative and extrovert but there I am quiet as a tomb! The reader could also think that my teacher might not be friendly so that is why I get to behave this way but the truth is that he's lovely and very patient. So what is it that makes somebody like me not express my doubts? And the answer comes from my teacher trainer side.

As a teacher trainer I believe that what happens is the fear an adult learner has of breaking the '*status quo*' he/she sustains while in a group. It is not easy for an adult learner to expose him/herself to other adults, especially when it seems that everyone else has understood except for him/her. It's awful not to understand especially after you've listened to the same explanation a couple of times... In fourteen years as an English teacher, how many times has this happened in my class? Why am I not able to perceive it on some students? Which strategies could I develop in order to perceive if my students have understood me or not? What is it that adult learners need in order to feel secure in an EFL class?

Observing my Spanish teacher through the eyes of a teacher trainer (and I sometimes feel guilty for this) I see that his classes flow in a way that students do not have effective time to use the language items he presents. I feel that if there were more moments in which the students could actually use the input they receive, the teacher would probably be able to see who is, in fact, learning the language and who is not. There are classes in which very little or even no production of the Spanish language happens: only content input. During those classes, my student side silently shouts; '*Teacher, can't you see I want to speak?*' My teacher side says: '*How many times have I provoked this feeling on my students?*' And my teacher trainer side reflects: '*A little more of awareness on lesson planning, interaction patterns and classroom management would reverse this picture.*'

Going deeper in my thoughts about my Spanish classes I see that I do not know the names of my classmates, neither do I know who they really are, what they do, how they feel, which dreams they have... We sit together for 200 minutes a week but we are still strangers to each other; we do not interact directly unless we're asked to read a dialogue or ask questions about 'la señora Chacón', 'el señor Velásquez', 'la calle Vergara' and so on... Although I like playing the role of 'la señora Chacón', and I love imitating her beautiful accent, she doesn't mean much to me. She's just a character that doesn't exist!!! I feel like talking about myself and about my living world. I want to know about my friends sitting there in my class and I want to use Spanish to discover about them, about their dreams and anxieties as real people. I feel a bit stupid for not

speaking directly to my colleagues; my teacher usually chooses who should ask and who should answer and he always repeats everything I say as if I haven't said it correctly or loud enough so that my friends can listen to me... Sometimes we spend a whole class listening to the other students reading dialogues. It's a bit tiresome because we wait very long for our turn to read and when it finally comes... it lasts so little! And when my turn comes and I am finally performing my task, the stupid feeling of inhibition seems to take over me. Why does it happen exactly at the moment in which I'm reading the paragraph I've been rehearsing while the others were reading? Believe it or not when I arrive home I amazingly get to read so fluently. Oh, how I wish my teacher could see it!!! How I wish I had more opportunities of speaking and reading in the class!!!

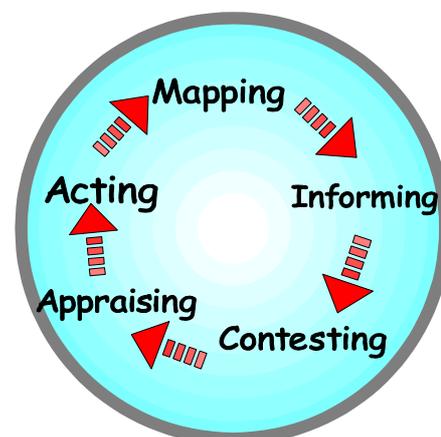
I do not want the reader of the present article to think that my Spanish classes are not good and that I do not have a happy time going to them. *On the contrary*: I love my teacher and he's really nice, funny, patient and very committed. He carefully plans his classes and he has very good knowledge of Spanish History and Geography. He's very fluent and his general knowledge of Spanish speaking countries is amazing. He adapts his level of language so that the students are capable of understanding most of the class, he brings in extra aids to make his students motivated and his classes fun. He's very popular and I love talking to him after class. But even though he's lovely, I sometimes feel shy, scared and/or I wish we'd be doing different things in class!!! Does this seem incoherent?

Might my students of English go through all I'm going through as a Spanish student? Do I promote effective moments in my classes which enable my students to get to know their classmates better with the dreams and anxieties of real human beings? Would my students prefer to be doing something else with the English they're learning? Which ones are probably shouting '*Teacher, can't you see I want to speak?*' How many feel this way? What can I do to be more aware of the thoughts and feelings my students keep to themselves while sitting in my classes? What would I discover if I could read my students' minds and hearts? Does the fact that my classes are fun and that I am friendly to my students mean that my teaching is being effective?

The ideas above are thought provoking and make me recall the reflective cycle for the process of reflective teaching adapted from McTaggart & Kemmis 1983 and Smith 1987 (*apud* Bartlett, 1990:209). The reflective cycle and the questions it suggests lead teachers to ask about their own teaching. I believe that both my Spanish teacher and myself could benefit from reflecting on the following questions:

1. What do I do as a teacher? (*Mapping*)
2. What is the meaning of my teaching? What did I intend? (*Informing*)
3. How did I come to be this way? How was it possible for my present view of teaching to have emerged? (*Contesting*)
4. How might I teach differently? (*Appraisal*)
5. What and how shall I now teach? (*Acting*)

I also believe my Spanish teacher and I would be



more helpful to our students if we did a bit more of self-monitoring and became more reflective practioners.

*Reflective teaching is a means of empowerment for teachers because asking and reflecting on WHAT and WHY questions gives us a certain power over our teaching. The more we know about our teaching, the more we can control it and open up the possibility of transforming our everyday classroom life. The process of control is called critical reflective teaching and it refers to the stance of enabling us as teachers to see our actions in relation to the historical, social and cultural context in which our teaching takes place. Becoming a critically reflective teacher is intended to allow us to develop ourselves individually and collectively as both producers and creators of our own history by understanding the principles that guide our teaching (ibid).*

According to Richards (1990:119) *There are several good reasons for the use of self-monitoring by teachers:*

1. *Self-monitoring is a means of obtaining feedback from students; a key ingredient in a teacher's continuing growth and development as a professional;*
2. *Self-monitoring provides an opportunity for teachers to reflect critically on their teaching. It enables teachers to move from a level where their actions are guided largely by impulse, intuition, or routine to a level where their actions are guided by reflection and critical thinking;*
3. *Self-monitoring can help narrow the gap between teacher's imagined view of their own teaching and reality – a gap that is often considerable;*
4. *Self-monitoring shifts responsibility for initiating improvement in teaching practices from an outsider, such as supervisors, to teachers themselves. It enables teachers to arrive at their own judgements as to what works and what does not work in their classrooms.*

Many are the approaches to self-monitoring and extensive is the literature about the benefits it can bring to teacher training and development. But which reason could be stronger than the one of answering a student's silent cry of 'Teacher, can't you see I want to speak?' with the realistic attitude of 'Yes, I see you want to speak and I'm doing the best I can to help you become the best you can be!!!'

Well, after reflecting on Bartlett's ideas I can definitively answer my own questions: "have I changed? Have I become more sensitive to what happens with my students due to what is going on with me as a Spanish student?" And my answer to the reader is 'Yes, I definitively have!'. But I've got a confession to make... better than playing the role of *la señora Chacón*, what I really like is playing the role of *la secretaria de la señoora Chacón*; she's very sexy and she speaks more than *la señoora Chacón* herself!!! I always volunteer to play her role in my Spanish classes!!!

#### **4. Action research? How did improve my teaching?**

But how did I get to live this experience of change???? How did it happen??? Well it happened when I did my first **action-research** experience. I was studying for my M.A. in Applied Linguistics when one of our professors, Dr. José Pinheiro de Souza, enthusiastically talked about action-research in the EFL class. (*He's a great professor and he's also my dear father and I'm very proud of being his daughter and ELT disciple!!!*) As one of our tasks, he invited us to live an experience of reflecting on our teaching using the tool of self-observation. But it wouldn't be an observation with an evaluation purpose but with a developmental one, **a kind of action research** experience as defined by Wallace (1998:4)

This strategy is basically a way of reflecting on your teaching. It is done by systematically collecting data on your everyday practice and analysing it in order to come to some decisions about what your future practice should be. This process is essentially what I mean by the term *action research*.

The results of my experience had such an impact on me and on my teaching that I decided to carry my M.A. research on this field, adapting Mr. Souza's Action research approach to one which could be more accessible to EFL teachers of language courses and schools. Concerning the reality of Fortaleza-Ce, until Prof. Souza, from the State University of Ceará (UECE), initiated a project called PALÍNGUAS<sup>1</sup>, action research was not a common practice among teachers and it's still not, although the scenery is slowly changing. During my M.A. research I visited a good number of language schools here in Fortaleza and observed that, in a general way, teacher educators/trainers in language schools continue to believe they are helping teachers to reflect by the formal action of classroom observation, which means going in the teachers' classes, observing them and giving a judgemental feedback on what they observed. Out of the 10 big language schools I researched, 8 have got formal classroom observation done by the pedagogical co-ordinators, the teacher trainers or even the school owners. There is no negotiation between the observer and the observed; the observer just goes in and "evaluates" the performance of the teacher. When asked about this kind of observation imposed by the schools, the interviewed teachers asserted the following:

**65%** showed **negative** feelings towards being observed...

- ⊗ It feels like we're being tested.
- ⊗ I tremble when the door opens and SHE comes in without even telling me she would come!!!
- ⊗ I fear the result of the evaluation.
- ⊗ I fear SHE will not find my class a communicative one.
- ⊗ I fear THEY might come on one of those days in which nothing seems to work...
- ⊗ It depends on how HE tells me *when* and *why* I'm going to be observed...

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<sup>1</sup> Projeto de Pesquisa-Ação na Sala de Aula de Línguas (Action-research for the Language Class) The PALÍNGUAS project, with its 13 steps, is a very academic one and was very difficult to follow and implement in language courses which have teachers with very little knowledge of principles of language teaching. Thus, the necessity for developing action-research programs and activities which can easily be followed by the profile of language teachers in Fortaleza language schools.

- ☹ I've seen a colleague lose a job after one of these attacks!!!
- ☹ I hate it but I know it's important.
- ☹ Students don't like invaders in the class...
- ☹ An observed class is not a real one.
- ☹ I don't think this observation once a year can help my development!
- ☹ I fear SHE will not like my performance.
- ☹ I don't know what's being observed.
- ☹ At once I ask myself: "What did I do so that HE is coming to observe me?"

**25%** showed **positive** feelings towards being observed

- ☺ I feel OK because I try to practice what I've learnt during my TTC.
- ☺ It's part of the process of staying in a school.
- ☺ It's important that people from the outside see my mistakes and help me develop.
- ☺ If I'm wrong... I'm a good listener and I can change!
- ☺ It means THEY'VE heard something good about my classes.
- ☺ I like the feedback.
- ☺ They have the right to see what their teachers are doing. It's quality control.

**10%** said they had no experience with being observed.

I believe these results are due to the fact that:

- a) Teachers were not really sure of the role Classroom Observation has in their schools. Was it for developmental or judgemental purposes?
- b) If there is not a relationship of trust between the observer and the observed teacher, the result of the process may not lead to teacher development;
- c) Classroom observation, the way it is happening in our schools, is not promoting effective reflective moments for the observed teachers. It is not promoting the idea of the teacher as a researcher of his own environment/classes- a teacher who discovers his/her own necessities of development. In fact it is supporting the idea of a teacher who is a consumer of theories/solutions which are observed/produced by an outsider, and not by his/her own self!!!!

I continued my research interviewing the same teachers about the way they reflected on their teaching practice. From the 150 teachers interviewed, **100%** asserted to **reflect** on their practice.

- **41%** asserted they **reflected** immediately after giving a class;
- **37%** asserted they **reflected** when they arrived home from work;
- **22%** asserted they **reflected**...
  - a) on the weekend;
  - b) when they are planning a new lesson;
  - c) when they go to sleep;
  - d) in the beginning of new semester;
  - e) when taking part in an ELT event;
  - f) when they have time;
  - g) when they see the results of their students' grades;
  - h) when they observe students are not happy in class.

Observing the answers given to the question I asked, I observed that the concept of *reflection* that most teachers have is the one of just “thinking a bit about their teaching” and sharing these thoughts with colleagues/spouse/family members. Very few teachers showed they understand reflection as a *systematic procedure*. Out of the 150 teachers interviewed, 69% asserted they had no “method/procedures” for reflecting; they “just did it” and the 31% who asserted having a “method/procedure” didn’t know exactly how to describe these “methods/procedures”.

### **5. Self-observation: a teacher developmental approach**

With the results of my research, I started thinking about developing a teacher education program in which teachers could have the opportunity of perceiving the act of reflecting as a *systematic process* and the idea of a reflective teacher as *one who assesses the origins, purposes and consequences of his or her work at all levels*. (Zeichner apud Bartlett, 1990:202) This program would be for *teachers who are willing and able to reflect on the origins, purposes and consequences of their actions, as well as the material and ideological constraints and encouragements embedded in the classroom, school and societal contexts in which they live. The goals of this program are directed towards enabling teachers to develop the pedagogical habits and skills necessary for self directed growth and toward preparing them, individually and collectively, to participate as full partners in their making of educational policies.* (ibid) The idea of developing such a program arose from the observation that most of the teacher education programs in Fortaleza-Ce, do not focus on the idea of the teacher as a reflective practitioner.

I then decided to advertise a 16 hour course entitled SELF-OBSERVATION: A TEACHER DEVELOPMENT APPROACH in which I would try to apply a developmental approach to classroom self-observation which could easily be experienced by EFL teachers. Based on Carl Rogers’ Client Centred Non-Directive approach, I elaborated the materials for the course which consisted of texts, overhead projector transparencies, and a series of humanistic activities (e.g. drawing, body language activities, market activities, singing, role-playing, among others) and I sent invitations to almost all language schools of the city of Fortaleza. The course was free of charge and participants received all the materials necessary (e.g. colourful brochure with the texts and activities, a cassette for recording their classes, notepad, pen, and other goodies) in order to take part. There was also a certificate to be handed out at the end of the course for all the participants who took part in the activities. I offered the course three times; twice in the city of Fortaleza (the encounters took place during four Saturdays), and once in the countryside<sup>2</sup>. The course was divided the following way:

**1<sup>st</sup> encounter / Becoming the best teacher I can be:** During this 4 hour workshop, teachers were introduced to the concepts of Ongoing Teacher Education, Teacher

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<sup>2</sup> In the countryside city of Crato-Ceará, Northeast Brazil, the course took place in a different way: it was a Post-Graduation course in ELT for teachers who worked in country schools and country farms. We did all the classroom activities during 30 hours and the action research report was supposed to be handed in afterwards, through snail mail or through e-mail.

Development X Teacher Training, Brown's (1994) characteristics of a good teacher. As a "homework" task teachers received instructions on how to audio-record their lessons for further reflection.

**2<sup>nd</sup> encounter / Yes, I want to become a reflective teacher!** During this 4 hour workshop, teachers were introduced to the concept of reflective teaching and they learned how to deal with Bartlett's (1990) reflective cycle. Participants also reflected on the meaning of classroom observation as a developmental tool and not as a judgemental one. As a "homework" task teachers received instructions on how to transcribe the lessons they had recorded.

**3<sup>rd</sup> encounter / Action research? How can it improve my teaching?** During this 4 hour workshop, teachers were introduced to the concepts and approaches of action research in the EFL class. Participants also watched a video recorded class, a video which is part of a material produced by CAMBRIDGE ELT called LOOKING INTO LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS (LUBELSKA, Diana & MATTHEWS, Margareth – 1997) in which they practised how to reflect on different aspects of an ELF class using the observation tools they had on their brochures. During this workshop, participants started sharing about what they had already observed concerned their own classes due to the fact that they had already recorded and transcribed their own classes. But the interesting was that this was not something compulsory: it was voluntary and this made the experience unique. As a "homework" task teachers received instructions to choose one of the self-observation checklists they had on their brochures (or to create their own checklist) in order to reflect deeper on their recorded classes.

**4<sup>th</sup> encounter / Sharings on participants' discoveries:** During this 4 hour workshop, participants were invited to experience activities in which they could share what they had discovered about themselves and about their teaching during the action research experience. At the end, participants evaluated the course, the facilitator, the materials and the value of this kind of approach to their ongoing developmental process.

Here are some of the sharings I collected from the total of the 57 course participants I had the blessing of working with:

- ☼ Oh, my voice!!! It's so loud and sometimes so aggressive!!! How do my students stand it?
- ☼ MY speaking skills are certainly being developed... I spoke most of the class, I repeated my students' answers and did not let them finish their questions. I laughed a lot listening to myself!!!
- ☼ I discovered I had studied too much grammar and forgot to study myself.
- ☼ After recovering from the initial shock, I decided I had to read more about teaching and being a teacher. From that day on I decided I would set a time to get to know more about my teaching and myself and that is what I have been doing since I woke up from "COMA".
- ☼ One week later I understood that I could use those negative feelings to change and start developing. I understood I was able to change... it was just a matter of investment!! I want to invest on myself.

- ☼ It wasn't anyone else telling me about my class... and that made the whole difference.
- ☼ I wasn't shocked. My class was ok but I thought I was a much better teacher! There's so much to do to become the best I can be!!!
- ☼ I didn't like being observed by others but I also didn't like the experience of listening to my own classes. I was running away from the experience of having an encounter with my own self!!! What was behind my fear of continuing listening to the cassettes I had recorded? What was I rejecting? My own self? The live image my students take home of me every single day??? I realised that I was afraid of discovering I was not as good I thought I was. I felt a bit ashamed... This course was proposing a practical chance of reflecting and developing... and I was denying it!!!

Since my personal experience with action research and since the experience I've had of developing an action research based project, I've been discovering loads about myself and about my teaching!!! I've been reading ferociously and I'm setting goals to improve each class. Since then I've been to a series of schools and language institutes, as well as to a good number of seminars and conferences in order to give talks and workshops about my M.A. research experience. Each day I perceive myself more involved with my development and more committed to learning about teaching.

## 6. Conclusion

I wonder why this experience had such an impact on myself and on the participants of the self-observation course? I wonder why I didn't feel this same impact after simply being observed by my supervisors and being told what to do in order to better my classes? I wonder why my colleagues and I rarely shared the feedback of traditional classroom observation and I wonder why we felt like sharing the results of the self-observation experience. I think I've got an answer: **It wasn't anyone else telling me about my class; it was my own self discovering about it and that made the whole difference...**

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