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**ATINER's Conference Paper Series
SOC2018-2454**

**Teacher Education in EFL:
A Critical View from a Collaborative Group of Work**

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This paper should be cited as follows:

Ramirez, R. A., (2018). "Teacher Education in EFL: A Critical View from a Collaborative Group of Work", Athens: ATINER'S Conference Paper Series, No: SOC2018- 2454.

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www.atiner.gr
URL Conference Papers Series: www.atiner.gr/papers.htm
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ISSN: 2241-2891
11/06/2018

**Teacher Education in EFL:
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Abstract

The article considers teachers as producers of knowledge, which stems not only from their practical experience but also from a critical reflection upon it. In 2016, a group of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) professors, from a public state university in São Paulo-Brazil, gathered together for eight months and formed a collaborative group of study, from which a professional landscape of knowledge was created. The rationale for developing such study lies on the premise that practitioners' research in their workplace is of paramount importance and that practitioners should be regarded as the linchpin of educational reform. Of special interest to this study are the contributions concerning the role and identity of the discipline taught (English) and special attention is paid to the issue of the teaching of a foreign language by a foreign teacher, particularly, regarding the dominant discourse in the EFL about avoiding the use of Portuguese in the process of teaching English, which underpins the concept that good EFL teachers are the teachers who do not make use of their mother tongues. Therefore, this study investigates the effect that this discourse has had on the participants' critical view on their professional roles as educators. In terms of methodology, the study resorts to narrative inquiry by making use of the professors' collective narratives (case studies, articles and movie discussions) and on individual ones (life histories), both are analysed in light of Clandinin and Connelly's (2015) tridimensional space of the narrative. Several excerpts of the narratives are shown and commented. The rounding off includes some reflections on the ability of producing knowledge collaboratively and its influence on teachers' education.

Keywords: Teacher Education. EFL. Narrative Inquiry. Collaborative group

Introduction

Much is said about the practitioner as a researcher, and in this work this epistemological stance is adopted, but firstly it is necessary to analyze the very character of research in education. Anderson and Herr (1999) cite Schön (1995) when he says that the academic researchers themselves had to pay a price to have their research accepted in the university academic community, and what was the price? Accept to frame your research under the aegis of technical rationality, which translates into the application of science or systematic knowledge to the instrumental problems of practice. The conception of professional knowledge that underlies technical rationality defines the practice as being instrumental because it makes technical adjustments between means to obtain an end that is already certain and fixed. Furthermore, it establishes that the practice becomes professional when it is based on systematic knowledge produced by schools with a higher degree of development in learning. Anderson and Herr (1999) cite Schon (1983) by mentioning the concept of dynamic conservatism coined by the latter, which consists in bringing the research professors back to the status quo composed of norms, values, and rules that when they become so omnipresent, are internalized by teachers, becoming naturalized, and then unquestionable. On the other hand,

[...] Practitioners intuitively know that when they challenge the norms, the institution's dynamics conservatism will often respond in a self-protective manner. In fact, when administration and teachers see their identities as tied up with institutional values and norms, critiquing these values and norms is often experienced as a personal attack. (ANDERSON & HERR, 1999, p.17).

The research of the practitioners is not apolitical, when engaging in an enterprise of this nature, one must be aware of the risks and controversies that can be generated, not only between the research professor and the institution, but also between the researcher and the academic, precisely because of the perspective that each one adopts in the conduct of his researches. The practitioners for being part of the context of the research desire the impartiality of the academic researchers' look; since they are outside the context of the research, they wish to have the sensations of those, but without losing the analytical perspective of those who observe from the outside. In this scenario, Mizukami et.al (2010) reports that "practitioners are struggling not only to have greater institutional impact but also greater epistemological power" (MIZUKAMI et al, 2010, p. 126). It also highlights how collaboration between practitioners and academic researchers can result in gains for both, for when

[...] practitioners engage in their own research, they tend to read more, and with greater interest, research conducted in and by the university. Ironically, a growing movement of practitioner research may lead to a greater - not less - demand for academic research (MIZUKAMI et al, 2010, p. 125).

Conversely, school day-to-day demands can overwhelm the teacher and generate situations of exhaustion, which usually translate into a decrease in tolerance and the involvement of this teacher with any situation that involves new proposals. Not infrequently, the tired and isolated teacher seeks to solve his problems by reproducing a cycle of reactions that only lead to a worsening of their reactions, which, in turn, could have been discussed among school friends. Parrilla and Daniels (2004) elaborated a sequence of reactions typically faced by a teacher in isolation:

- the teacher encounters difficulties to solve the problems on his own.
- feels lack of support and help;
- in the face of this situation, he chooses to abandon the resolution of the problem;
- takes refuge in the adoption of "safe" methods and abandons innovation, the creative pursuit of solutions and teaching methods;
- classroom life no longer responds to diversity;

All things considered, this article seeks to investigate whether a collaborative group of practitioners can create a conducive environment to foster their own professional development.

Literature Review

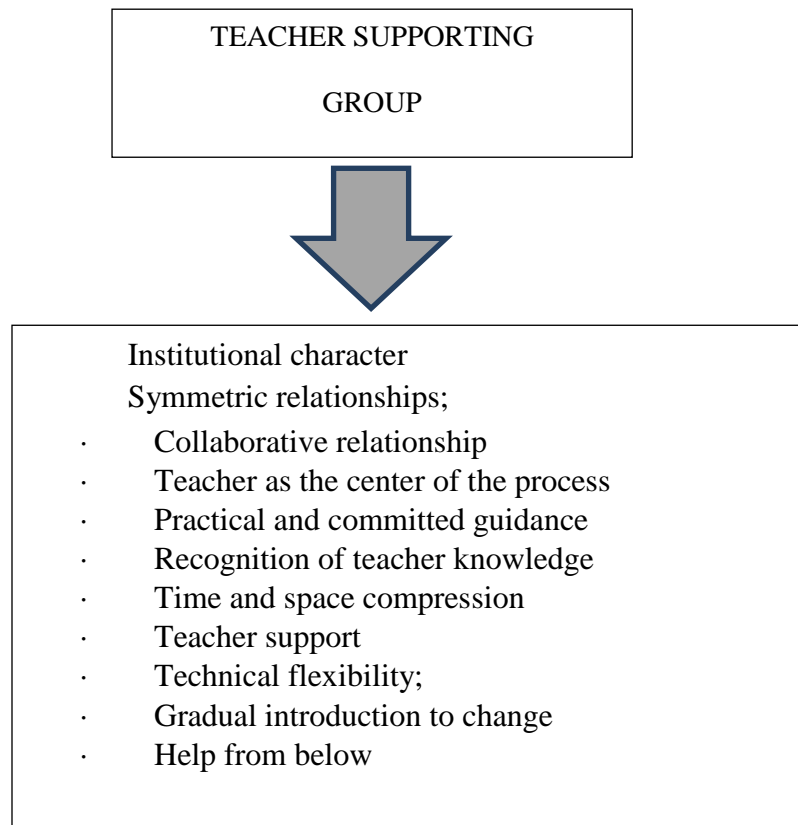
Collaborative Groups

According to Parrilla and Daniels (2004), Teacher Support Groups, hereinafter referred to as "TSGs", offer the opportunity for professionals to deal with and discuss the problems that arise in the daily life of the school and thus characterize it when they establish that

[...] oftentimes teachers exchange and ask for advice from each other, however, these exchanges occur in the context of the teachers' room, with busy professionals with multiple tasks and interactions in the same space of time. It is normal that there is no possibility of reviewing the effects of the advice received. TSGs, on the other hand, dedicate a specific time to each teacher, in a calm and pressure-free context, in which problems can be discussed with confidence and without interruption (PARRILLA, DANIELS, H., 2004, p. 11).

Once you decide to implement a TSG for the development of collaborative experiences, to the detriment of other types of groups, it is worth mentioning its basic characteristics that can be grouped into four dimensions: Rapid response to a problem and follow-up; analysis of particular concerns and case studies; non-directed and voluntary character; focus on teacher and teaching. Parrilla and Daniels (2004) elicit the basic characteristics of TSGs as follows:

Figure 1. *Basic Characteristics of TSGs*



Source: Parrilla, A.; Daniels, H.2004, p.56

- Institutional character: Support Groups between teachers are composed and directed by teachers of the same school, who meet regularly. These teachers bring and expose problems related to everyday school life.
- Symmetric relations: The professionals, members of the TSG, are on an equal footing, the hierarchy is horizontal. Even if the roles played in the group are distinct, there is a level playing field for the sharing and analysis of the other's problems.
- Collaborative relationship: There is no prescribing what to do to a colleague in the group. TSG members negotiate with the teacher who asks for help and collaboratively seek a solution.
- Teacher as the center of the process: The teacher who asks for help is not perceived as an aid recipient, which in itself would guarantee an asymmetrical relationship and dependence. The teacher who asks for help is an active protagonist in making decisions, in the search for solutions. The support is not for the person itself, but for the professionalism of education.
- Practical and committed guidance: TSG deals with practical problems, its actions focus on the practice and generate a commitment of the members of the group for decisions taken collectively

- Recognition of the teacher's knowledge: the group is mainly based on the experiences that its members bring to the discussions, hence the relevance of the teacher's knowledge about their practice.
- Time and space compression: The group offers a space for discussions and physical proximity turns this space into permanent, even if there are pre-established schedules for the meetings.
- Teacher support: making decisions and analyzing problems in a shared way means recognizing the needs of teachers and presupposes the development of a peer learning process.
- Technical flexibility: The group assumes that it does not adopt a single and exclusive theoretical line, but rather enhances the contribution of several chains of analysis. One observes the reality that presents itself and seeks, for each case, an alternative.
- Gradual introduction to change: Systems tend to a functional inertia, which can lead to stagnation and consequently to negative reactions to the modifications proposed by the group. TSG seeks non-abrupt changes through progressive measures in the implementation of its activities.
- Help from below: The professional of the institution is regarded as the basic resource, agent of changes, in search for solutions and innovation. With this, there is an autonomous and internal resource for the institution, a basic resource for the generation of greater autonomy and democracy in the school.

Collaborative Group and Professional Development

The literature on work carried out in groups for the purpose of professional development and/or improvement has been expanding, and with this expansion there is a large and heterogeneous number of names and meanings attributed to the concepts of group work, learning cooperative and collaboration. Collaborative work is mainly relational; has a transformative potential for teacher training, in its professional development and even in the organizational climate of the educational institution. John Steiner, Weber and Minnis (1998) propose that a theoretical frame of reference can be constructed for the understanding of the collaboration, with the intention of preserving the narratives as well as the procedures adopted by the group, with that, the obtained results can be communicated and, perhaps, reproduced

[...] the principals in a true collaboration represent complementary domains of expertise. As collaborators, they not only plan, decide, and act jointly, they also think together, combining independent conceptual schemes to create original frameworks. Also, in a true collaboration, there is a commitment to shared resources, power, and talent: no individual's point of view dominates, authority for decisions and actions resides in the group, and work products reflect a blending of all participants' contributions. We recognize that collaborative groups differ in their conformance to this profile and that any single group may exhibit some of the features only episodically or only after long association. (Minnis, John-Steiner, & Weber, 1998, p. C-2)

According to Grossman et.al (2000) others, but no less relevant, constituent characteristics of a professional community would be the interest for its clientele, a community of teachers emerges as a professional community for basically two reasons; when the well-being of its students is placed as a central issue and by the teacher's interest in being in constant process of learning and professional updating. As for Mizukami (2004), the various conceptions about collaboration and collaborative research have a common denominator: the potential to improve professional development by creating conditions for reflection on practice, sharing of criticism, and support for change between a group of teachers.

For an Inquiry Stance

Fiorentini & Crecci (2013), based on the works of Cochram-Smith & Lytle (2009), affirms that a critical and collaborative community of teachers is constituted when they assume the research as posture and social practice, because

[...] the construct, inquiry as stance, is intended to offer a closer understanding of the knowledge generated in inquiry communities, how inquiry relates to practice, and what teachers learn from inquiry. [...] In our work, we offer the term inquiry as stance to describe the positions teachers and others who work together in inquiry communities take toward knowledge and its relation to practice. (COCHRAM-SMITH &LYTLE,2009, p.119-120).

The research community as posture and social practice does not segregate knowledge, it seeks to unite knowledge in practice, fruit of the interaction of the teachers of the research community, with knowledge about the practice, originated outside the same. For Cochram-Smith & Lytle (2009), teacher-generated research on their practices is highly likely to increase their interest in learning from academics' practice research. To these authors, the word practice has different connotations according to its morphological category, that is, the practice has no obligation to be practical; functional, utilitarian and immediate. It should be practice, on the contrary, to be about inventing and reinventing conceptual models to imagine, configure and evaluate the daily life found in different educational environments. It is understood, therefore, that the practice, in educational environments, is extremely contextual, relational, interdisciplinary and, above all, interpretive, consequently, theoretical.

The Group Discourse

One of the most important characteristics of studying a collaborative discussion group is the potential of building knowledge together through the exchange of information in a conversation, Carroll (2005), which leads us to the premise advocated in this work that experiences of the teacher can be a source of knowledge, and it must be considered that this knowledge, socially constructed, is mediated by the teacher's discourse(s).

[...] if teachers are not critically conscious, if they are not awake to their own values and commitments (and to the conditions working upon them), if they are not personally engaged with their subject matter and with the world around, I do not see how they can initiate the young into critical questioning or the moral life (CARROLL, D; 2005, p.459).

The term discourse has several meanings, being conceptually quite complex, and thus, a single, clear and objective definition of discourse is not conceived. However, this work adopts the term discourse as referring to a system of symbols, signs and meanings through which a specific theme is understood by a particular group, since

[...] following Michel Foucault, John Dewey, and Michael Bakhtin, among others, we are convinced that professional and cultural discourses shape not just the way teachers describe their experiences but the way they have those experiences as well. professional discourses shape teacher's beliefs about curriculum and pedagogy (ROSIEK, J; ATKINSON, B; 2005, p.423).

This article, about learning and teaching development, considers the teacher able to learn whilst narrating his experiences. It is not the only way to work with teacher education, but it certainly confers security to those who embark on an investigation that aims to foster and analyze the trajectory and discursive production of a TSG.

Methodology

Narrative Research explores the stories that are lived and told. These stories are, in turn, the result of the combination of social influences on the individual, social influences on the environment beyond the individual trajectory. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) conceptualize the narrative inquiry when they state that

a way of understanding experience. It is collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that made up people's lives, both individual and social (CLANDININ, D.J.; CONNELLY, F.M., 2000 p.20 as cited in CLANDININ, D.J; ROSIEK, J.2007).

Clandinin & Connelly (2015) create the three-dimensional space metaphor of narrative research through which narrative researchers use a set of terms to think about their research. These terms are closely associated with Dewey's theory of experience, particularly the notions of: situation, continuity, and interaction.

[...] Dewey's work on experience is our creative reference to remind us that in our work, the answer to the question "Why narrative? is: because of experience. Dewey provides an outline for us to think of the experience "beyond the black

box," that is, beyond the notion of experience being irreducible so that one cannot investigate it (CLANDININ, J, CONNELLY, M, 2015, p.85).

Narrative inquiry, as approached by Clandinin and Connelly (1996) can thus be described as the study of experience as history, thus it is primarily a way of thinking about experience. Being based on experience is both a research method and a researched phenomenon. It is, therefore, that learning, whether teaching or not, occurs not simply through experience but through thinking and reflecting on it,

[...] a case takes raw material from first-order experience and places it narratively into second-order experience. A case is a reminiscent, retold, reexperienced, and reflected version of a direct experience. The process of remembering, retelling, reliving and reflecting is the process of learning from experience (SHULMAN, 1996 as cited in MIZUKAMI, 2004, p.9).

Narrative investigation occurs precisely because of the creation of three-dimensional space, defined by the set of terms: interaction (personal and social); continuity (past, present, future); and situation (location).

I have sought information in Clandinin and Connelly (1996) in their analysis of the "landscapes of teacher professional knowledge". These authors, through teachers' narratives, seek to understand how the professional environments are constituents of their professional knowledge. The landscape metaphor of the teacher's professional knowledge enables the contextualization and understanding of his practical knowledge. The idea expressed by this metaphor allows teachers to speak about situation (place), continuity (time) and interaction (space), which configures the three-dimensional space of the narrative, the authors point out that

Understanding professional knowledge encompassing a landscape requires a notion of professional knowledge as comprised of a wide variety of components and influenced by a wide variety of people, places, and things. Once we see the landscape of professional knowledge as consisting of relationships between people, places and things, we consider it both a moral and intellectual landscape (CLANDININ; CONNELLY, 2015, p.5).

These authors, through teacher narratives, seek to understand how the professional environments are constituents of their professional knowledge. The landscape metaphor of the teacher's professional knowledge enables the contextualization and understanding of his practical knowledge. The idea expressed by this metaphor allows them to speak about situation (place), continuity (time) and interaction (space), that is the three-dimensional space of the narrative. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2015), the teacher is faced with various epistemological and moral dilemmas, since the places where he transits have different moral and epistemological characteristics, often even conflicting. Such dilemmas are, for them, foci of observation. Through narratives it is possible to highlight the types of learning, the

strategies used to learn. With that put, one can affirm that the main objective is precisely to recognize oneself, to learn with our own strengths and weaknesses.

[...] narrative researchers are always strongly autobiographical. Our research interests come from our own stories and shape our narrative research plot. For us, it was our teaching experience and our strong interest in the narrative of other teachers that led us to study the teacher's knowledge (CLANDININ, CONNELLY, 2015, p.165).

Through the reporting of individual narratives, it is possible to characterize the social practice of a group. In this way, an individual interview refers directly or indirectly to a quantity of values and attitudes of the group to which the individual narrator is a part of. The landscape of teacher professional knowledge is manifold. This multiplicity encompasses "secret stories, facade stories and sacred stories," which can be observed and interpreted through narratives. And the narratives contain the essence of teachers' experiences because

The practice of teaching, on the narrative view, is seen as constructed by teachers as they tell and live stories in their classrooms. Teaching stories are in part personal stories shaped by the knowledge, values, feelings and purposes of the individual teacher. They are also collective stories shaped by traditions of schooling in the setting where the teacher works, the social, cultural and historical context within the stories are lived out and the rules and patterns of discourse that make particular forms of storytelling possible (ELBAZ-LUWISCH, 2002, p.405).

The narratives where teachers talk about their professional practices were extremely important because they are much more than good narratives, they are ways of communicating intentions, judging values and reflecting, all in the context of a lived experience. In our view, narratives are the form of representation that describes human experience as it unfolds through time (CLANDININ & ROSIEK, 2007).

Considering the theoretical approach employed in this work, the research undertaken was based on discussions and reports of four participating teachers. The collection of the transcribed data was obtained through: discussion of articles, case studies brought by the participants and life histories. The meetings occurred between June 2015 and March 2016, totaling 16 meetings, the last four of them being individual. It should also be noted that all the participating teachers were volunteers. Below an overview chart of the group's meetings.

Table 1. Group Meetings Outlook

DATE	SUBJECT OF DISCUSSION	OBSERVATIONS
30/06/2015 MEETING 1	Presentation of the research proposal.	Setting a meeting agenda for the next semester. Reading assignment for next meeting
19/08/2015 MEETING2	Discussion of the article: Teaching Learning, some contributions of L.S. Shulman.	To trigger the group discussion. After that all topics emerged from the previous meetings.
02/09/2015 MEETING 3	Teaching Case: Prof. Josefina March	Case presentation and discussion.
16/09/2015 MEETING 4	Teaching Case: Prof. Catarina Earnshaw	Case presentation and discussion.
30/09/2015 MEETING 5	Teaching Case: Prof. Carlos Thurber and Elionora Dashwood	Cases presentation and discussion.
14/10/2015 MEETING 6	Assessment policies	Meeting held after the midterm tests, discussion on ways of assessing students, the strain they put on both student and teacher. alternative solutions
28/10/2015 MEETING 7	Article Discussion: Knowledge and Teaching: fundamentals of the new reform. L.S. Shulman.	Focus on the teaching case of prof. Nancy. (character from the article)
11/11/2015 MEETING 8	Continued discussion of the article Associated to a movie: Dead Poet's Society	Given the constructive debate generated by the article, two meetings were needed so that all teachers could express their opinions.
25/11/2015 MEETING 9	CREATIVITY	Chapter-based discussion of Leandro Karnal's book: "Conversations with a Young Teacher."
02/12/2015 MEETING 10	CREATIVITY- PART 2	The theme became a burning issue and needed an extra session for discussion. practitioners brought other articles and movie references.
03/02/2016 MEETING11	PLACEMENT TEST	First day of school, discussion about strategies for applying the proficiency exam to first year incoming students. Schedule, operationalization, dissemination, evaluation criteria.
05/02/2016 MEETING 12	TRAVEL account Prof. E. Dashwood	Having just arrived from an Exchange programme in London-UK. prof. Dashwood shares with the group her experience as an international Exchange programme student. All the other practitioners had attended the same Exchange programme before

DATE	SUBJECT OF DISCUSSION	OBSERVATIONS
10/02/2016 MEETING 13	INTERVIEW Prof. E. Dashwood	Individual interview on life and professional history.
11/02/2016 MEETING 14	INTERVIEW Prof. J. March	Individual interview on life and professional history.
12/02/2016 MEETING 15	INTERVIEW Prof. C. Earnshaw	Individual interview on life and professional history.
02/03/2016 MEETING 16	INTERVIEW Prof. C. Thurber	Individual interview on life and professional history.

Source: elaborated by the author

Results and Discussions

About the Use of L1 (Portuguese) in the ELT Classroom

The topic of using the mother tongue in the classroom emerged at the very first meeting as teachers started to engage and Interact in the discussions.

One thing that came to my mind when we talk about using or not using Portuguese in the English class is that Brazil is a gigantic country, we must take into account the region where the student lives, what happens to him, socially speaking. We see, in the classroom, these differences, students who come from private schools are very different from the ones who come from the public ones. Do you really think that a foreign teacher, or even better, the publishers take that into consideration? Of course not. Look our afternoon groups, they are far below average, it is a special public, forgotten by major international publications (Catarina Earnshaw, meeting 2)

The dimension of place is made clear in the teacher's narrative when she considers students background, either from a private or a public secondary school. The dimension of interaction is also in evidence when the teacher mentions that not all groups of students receive the same attention from the publishing industry. In this case, both place and interaction influence the teacher's option for the usage of L1.

Well put Catarina, they surely need more time than the others to digest the information received. I've been doing like this, if I have a 10-question exercise to be applied to the morning groups, for the afternoon I select 5. Besides, I do make use of Portuguese more frequently to explain concepts (Charlie Thurber, meeting 2)

You need to review your assessment criteria. The use of L1 or L2 must be taken into account (Jo March, meeting 5)

In the excerpts above the concern for the assessment puts in evidence the dimension of interaction and shows how teachers adapt not only their practices, but also the use of L2 according to the groups profiles.

I think about that too. This discourse of prohibiting the use of L1 in ELT classes is a tyranny. International writers usually write pages and pages about it. I wonder why? But I think I have an answer. They need to sell themselves to the world, and they can't speak all L1 s that exist, so, they force their language on to us (Charlie, meeting 5)

Yes, and they don't teach!!!! (Elionor, meeting 5)

Above, teachers' narratives expand the space dimension by including the influence of other agents when referring to dominant discourses in ELT about L1 interference. The posture adopted is not a passive one, but a critical position.

We shouldn't be afraid, I mean, we're not translating, out of laziness, we are creating language awareness by making use of students' knowledge, their L1. That's what I think. It reminds me of that Shulman's article we read about the Pedagogical content knowledge. It is us and only us who have it, not the book writer on the other side of the planet who has no clue of the student's mother tongue (Elionor Dashwood, meeting 5).

The teacher's reflection resorts to the continuity dimension when she recalls a previously discussed topic in the group. It becomes evident that the group, itself, is producing knowledge.

The discussions on creativity in the class bring up several reflections on L2 in the classroom. Once again, the dimension of interaction reinforces the group as a space of professional development. Having the teachers together build knowledge while adopting a critical and reflective position.

I believe it is a matter of language really. There's no point in trying to complicate things if the students haven't developed their cognitive skills. All that we read is pretty nice, but applying it, in a country whether the L2 is not a mainstream one, not pedagogically sound. Our student's reality is like that, they don't use English. So, it's all very beautiful in the books, but we cannot definitely use all that we read, it takes a lot of creativity from us to adapt. (Charlie Thurber meeting 9)

Classical theory makes it all very simple, but in reality, it is not! (JO March meeting 9)

Basically, we must go through the same syllabus with all students, that's a challenge, a tough one. Without using L1, at certain moments, it is impossible to move on. I often make comparisons between the two languages when I have to explain, for example, a verb tense (Jo March meeting 10)

I see what you mean Jo, when I need to explain the difference between the simple past tense and the present perfect. The first think I do is write two sentences, in Portuguese, on the board, one in each tense. I ask them for the difference in meaning and usage. Then I write both of them in English. We compare the form. They understand it for good (Catarina Earnshaw, meeting 10)

Only those of us who teach know this. Lucky the student that has a bilingual teacher (Elionora Dashwood, meeting 10)

Narratives on the Native Speaker Teacher and The Brazilian Teacher

The discussions about assessment also highlights the issue of the English native speaker teacher and the Brazilian teacher.

Just like the students, we are always being evaluated, and you know that a monolingual assessor questions us and come with the argument that some students may not speak Portuguese (Catarina Earnshaw, meeting 11).

Typical, isn't it? We are in Brazil; the teacher is Brazilian and so are the students. The only stranger to this equation is the assessor! (Charlie Thurber, meeting 11)

And you know, students tend to dislike the so called "native teachers", at first, they cause an impact, but as the pedagogic routine is settled, they completely lose their brightness. Students come running back to us. That is typical at language institutes. We've all been through that! Haven't we? (Jo March, meeting 11)

You know, I keep thinking about that too. Can you imagine a native teacher here in our College? (Catarina Earnshaw, meeting 11)

Would never work out! Sure. Maybe at the University of São Paulo, they may be good for research, not the classroom. I would really like to see them teaching our language. Do you think they wouldn't resort to English? Tell me. (Elionora Dashwood, meeting 11).

The narratives above elicit the fact that a teacher's identity is usually defined by the amount of L2 he or she uses in the classroom. The group of teachers critically resorts to the three narrative dimensions, space, time and interaction, to demystify the underlying premise that good teachers don't make use of students' mother tongues in ELT classes.

Narratives on Teacher Education

The individual meetings, along with each participants Life history, fostered the discussion of topics previously discussed in the groups. Notably, teacher development.

The publisher's discourse is that it is up to the teacher to critically reflect and adapt over the material. But how can a novice teacher, untrained on reflective teaching, do that? They simply want a manual to follow, they crave for it, sometimes (Catarina Earnshaw, meeting 15)

You know, another problem is the influence on novice teachers. They end up being trained under the influence of imported manuals, and as we know, many language institutes love to follow those manuals, not reflecting about its appropriacy to the Brazilian reality. As a teacher trainer, I have experienced that. (Charlie Thurber, meeting 16)

Focusing on beginner teachers, the narratives above appeal to the dimensions of interaction, the relation between the teacher and the materials; and time, by resorting to previous experiences in teacher training.

Under the continuity and interaction dimensions, teachers continue their reflections by stating examples of their own practices, which reveal language and cultural hurdles in the ELT class and how they are handled by the teacher.

This reminds me of our book, unit 10. The title is "Have you ever seen a Camel?" How far-fetched is it? Our students rarely go beyond the state border. I've had students that haven't even been to downtown São Paulo, the historical centre! I've made this activity of Have you ever...? and used our city landmarks. Most of the class didn't know most of them. I was taken aback! (Elionor Dashwood, meeting 13)

And you know, it is this gap, cultural and linguistic, that reinforces the use of translation, because the students feel lost in the lesson and, naturally, find in L1 a safe harbor. That's why they insist on asking us for a translation for the word "feijoada". I tell them that this is a typical Brazilian dish, like other countries have theirs, we should learn how to explain it, the basic ingredients. Then they realize they are using language, L1, L2 and cultural references (Charlie Thurber, meeting 16)

The discussions on teacher development also point to the fact that some ELT teachers end up being talked into promoting the foreign culture without any reflection.

What is interesting is that some teachers love topics such as: Breakfast in America or The English tea. They verbalize it with a sparkle in their eyes. They simply forget that most students don't have food on the table (Catarina Earnshaw, meeting 16)

That's is a pivotal issue in our discussion, don't you think, when the teacher is colonized, what can you expect from the students? (Charlie, meeting 16)
Don't you see the importance "native speakers" get when they come, hardly ever are they questioned about their academic backgrounds, the mere fact of

being a native speaker places them at a higher level. We've seen this happen recently (Charlie, meeting 16)

Exactly, the lectures given were very poor in quality, they talked to us as if we lacked in methodological expertise (Elionora, meeting 16)

Narratives on the Collaborative Work

In the last meeting, teachers share opinions on their participation and the narratives confirm the group as a space of knowledge production and professional development.

I'm glad we're having these discussions because It's really nice to share our opinions and see that colleagues go through similar trajectories (Catarina, meeting 16).

It's not easy to have all of us together at all times, but the meetings have been very helpful and productive. (Elionora Dashwood, meeting 16).

Totally, I guess I can stand up to my beliefs when questioned by students, parents, bosses and other peers (Jo March, meeting 16).

I guess we should never stop doing this, since the first meeting I have noticed how much we have accomplished. I feel much more secure because I know how my colleagues think and that I can have your support (Charlie, meeting 16).

Final Considerations

As final considerations, it is worth mentioning that throughout the period in which the meetings were held, we endeavored to concretize the proposal of systematization of a collaborative working group that had as the guiding axis of the meetings, the teacher as producer of knowledge in its workplace.

We believe we have achieved our goal. In the analysis phase of the narratives, the desire to discuss aspects related to pedagogical practice and to contribute to the professional growth of all the participants, in a climate of respect, complicity and affection, was confirmed.

A group in which all expressed themselves with total freedom and where there was not the domain of a single perspective that prescribes and directs the participation of its members. A group always open to the proposals of themes that were generated through the discussions that took place internally.

Another point to highlight is the willingness to participate in the work. Voluntary participation was a key element in this work. It was indicative of the commitment of the participants to the construction of a collective identity for the discipline they teach, since the teachers were unanimous in mentioning that the autonomy and individual freedom they have in their teaching practice only becomes effective

when the barrier of isolationism is broken, or the sharing of experiences against the loneliness that is often established in the daily work environment, especially in an institution that is not specialized in the teaching of foreign languages and where the English language is only one among many other disciplines. As a result of the landscape created, teachers feel more empowered to make informed decisions about the way L2 should be handled in the institution.

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