

WHAT MEDIATES THE CLASSROOM PRACTICES OF AN EXPERIENCED TEACHER? A FOLLOW-UP STUDY

O QUE MEDEIA AS PRÁTICAS DE SALA DE AULA DE UM PROFESSOR EXPERIENTE? UM ESTUDO SUBSEQUENTE

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Abstract

Considering that developing a robust reasoning teaching is a lifelong process, in this study we analyzed the classroom practices and the reasoning teaching of a now experienced teacher who participated in Agnoletto & Dellagnelo's (2017) study while still a novice teacher. To collect data for our study, we observed three of the participant's classes and interviewed him after each observation. The participant also answered two semi-structured questionnaires inquiring into his use of textbooks teacher's manuals and his perceptions of himself as a teacher. Our findings show that his practices are mediated by aspects of his scientific and everyday knowledge and that he has developed a more robust reasoning throughout his career. Despite these positive findings, he has not yet developed to his full potential as his scientific knowledge is not yet internalized and interwoven to his everyday knowledge.

Keywords: Teacher Education; Sociocultural Theory; Reasoning Teaching.

Resumo

Considerando que desenvolver competências para justificar comportamentos pedagógicos é um processo longo e contínuo, neste estudo analisamos as práticas de sala de aula de um professor que participou do estudo de Agnoletto & Dellagnelo (2017) enquanto ainda era um professor em início de carreira. Para a coleta de dados, foram observadas três aulas deste professor, o qual foi entrevistado ao final de cada aula. Ele também respondeu a dois questionários sobre o uso de livros do professor e sobre como se percebia como docente. Nossos resultados mostram que o participante tem seu reasoning mediado tanto pelo conhecimento científico quanto cotidiano e que, ao longo de sua carreira, desenvolveu um reasoning mais robusto. No entanto, apesar desses resultados positivos, ele parece não ter ainda desenvolvido todo o seu potencial, pois seu conhecimento científico ainda não está internalizado e entrelaçado com seu conhecimento cotidiano.

Palavras-chave: Formação de Professores; Teoria Sociocultural; Comportamentos Pedagógicos.

Introduction

Teaching is a very complex activity which involves different aspects such as: who teachers are, who teachers' students are, what students know, what students need to know, what beliefs

teachers have, what beliefs students have, what content teachers need to teach, how to best teach these contents, how students learn, what they are expected to do with what they learn, what the school policies are, what the education policies in the country are, and so many other things that can make this list go on and on. Complexities such as the ones mentioned act upon what teachers think in all stages of their careers, what they do in their classes, why they do the things that they do how they make sense of all these things, and how such aspects influence their classrooms. According to scholar Johnson (1999), these complexities affect the way teachers reason their teaching.

Considering that developing a *robust reasoning teaching* (JOHNSON, 1999) is a lifelong process, in this study we analyzed the classroom practices of a now experienced teacher who participated in Agnoletto and Dellagnelo (2017) while still a novice teacher. Our objective was to compare this study's findings to the findings of Agnoletto and Dellagnelo (2017). Considering this, the following research question guides the current study: “How has the reasoning of a now experienced teacher developed during the three years after his practice was questioned?”

In the quest to answer the research question above, this study⁸⁰ is presented in four parts. The first section presents our theoretical framework. The second section introduces the participant, the context, and how data was collected. The third section brings in the data analysis and discussion, and finally, the last section displays the final remarks.

The development of reasoning teaching in the lens of sociocultural theory

Nobody learns or develops in a void, so, at the core of a sociocultural perspective to human development, which extends to L2 teacher development, is the premise that human development is a “dynamic social activity that is situated in physical and social contexts, and is distributed across persons, tools, and activities” (JOHNSON, 2009, p. 1). This means that it is in social interactions, which are mediated by culture, context, and language, that forms of higher mental functions develop.

In this vein, following Vygotsky, this study assumes that a sociocultural stance to L2 teacher development enlightens how essential the activities in which teachers engage are for the formation of teachers' cognition. Moreover, according to Childs (2011, p. 68), the sociocultural perspective can

⁸⁰ This research was conducted as part of the requirements for a postgraduate course named “L2 teacher formation under a sociocultural perspective”. The course was taught by Professor Adriana de Carvalho Kuerten Dellagnelo at the Graduate Program in English from UFSC. Professor Adriana's course, experience and feedback were of great importance for this research.

also offer L2 teacher education a “theoretical lens through which to “see” his struggle to conceptualize L2 teaching, a struggle that follows a “twisting path” (VYGOTSKY, 1987, p. 156) shaped and reshaped by context”.

With this in mind, reasoning teaching is a useful concept to understand the “cognitive activity that undergirds teacher’s practices: the reasoning that determines the doing of teaching” (JOHNSON, 1999, p.1). This concept elucidates that there is no right or wrong way to teach therefore there is no recipe for it because teaching actually depends on a range of considerations, and that one’s teaching will be probably grounded in the teacher’s knowledge and beliefs.

Johnson (1999), the scholar responsible for coining the reasoning teaching term, exposed and explored how intricate the reasoning of teachers can be in her book “Understanding Language Teaching: Reasoning in Action”. As a way to summarize her detailed presentation of this concept, we present below a short explanation of what reasoning teaching is in the author’s words.

Reasoning teaching represents the complex way in which teachers conceptualize, construct explanations for, and respond to the social interactions and shared meanings that exist within and among teachers, students, parents, and administrators, both inside and outside the classroom. Simply put, reasoning teaching reflects the complex ways in which teachers figure out how to teach a particular topic, with a particular group of students, at a particular time, in a particular classroom, within a particular school (JOHNSON, 1999, p. 1)

In situating ‘reasoning teaching’ within a sociocultural perspective, one assumes that if relationships and culturally constructed tools play a central role in organizing human forms of thinking (LANTOLF; THORNE, 2006), then the culturally established relations that teachers have with the world of teaching will inform how they think about their teaching and will mediate them along with the development of a more robust reasoning teaching. An important physical tool for this relation are teacher’s manuals, which are the books that provide guidance to teachers on how to approach course textbooks.

In this vein, the teacher’s manual is a very important tool for teachers’ development as it is a tool that is often part of teachers’ lives. This resource enables “the construction of social and physical realities” (LANTOLF; THORNE, 2006, p. 63), thus providing teachers with ways to engage in a movement that imitates the outside/expert behavior. In other words, the teacher’s manual can help teachers develop their agency in class, which means that through the repeated use of this tool, teachers might develop from being under the regulatory agency of others (the teacher’s manual) to being self-regulated and not dependent on the use of this physical tool to function in the social world (their classrooms). It is through a movement that happens from the outside to the inside that “both the

organization and the means of social activity are taken over entirely by the individual and ultimately internalized, leading to the development of mediated, voluntary, historically developed mental functions” (VYGOTSKY, 1987, p. 21), affording teachers to become self-regulated.

This movement from outside-in is referred to as internalization in Sociocultural Theory, and teachers will only internalize scientific concepts, in this study represented by the pedagogical implications materialized in the teacher’s manual, if they are sensitive to those particular contents. Vygotsky (1987) pointed out that “to become consciously aware of something and master it you must first have it at your disposal” (p. 189), that is, teachers must have the pedagogical implication and concepts within their potential of development to be able to develop them because as Vygotsky (1987) already indicated, development does not arise from without.

When teachers are in the position of actual teaching, they might have already formed, up to some level, intellectual representations of good or bad teaching practice throughout their lives that they might not even be aware of. Such representations might have been developed throughout practical activities, therefore representing spontaneous concepts. For this reason, it is important to point that “while conscious awareness is absent in spontaneous concept, however, it is a basic characteristic of scientific concepts” (VYGOTSKY, 1987, p. 191). Scientific concepts do not arise spontaneously and are in close relation to instructions, for this reason the L2 teacher development field must recognize that the development of scientific concepts (systematic body of knowledge) is paramount to the promotion of a more robust teaching reasoning.

Teacher’s manuals, as physical tools, enable teachers (novice or not) to construct the social and physical realities that they may need in their classrooms, putting at teachers’ disposal the expert’s reasoning that will be of some help only if the systematic body of knowledge presented by teachers’ manuals lies within teachers’ intellectual potential as part of their spontaneous concepts. In this vein, it is possible to summarize spontaneous concepts as being the concepts learned in daily activities and interactions, while scientific concepts are concepts only learned by means of formal instruction. Considering the presented above, this study assumes that “the development of spontaneous and scientific concepts are closely connected processes that continually influence one another” (VYGOTSKY, 1987, p. 177). Consequently, the frequent use of teacher’s manuals can help teachers develop, assimilate and/or internalize scientific concepts/pedagogical implications that populate their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

The ZPD is a well-known concept from Vygotskian studies, and it represents a metaphorical space that indicates the distance between someone’s actual level of development and the level of

performance that they can achieve with collaboration, direction, or some kind of help (VYGOTSKY, 1987). The use of the teacher's manual by teachers might provide them with the collaboration, direction or some kind of help that they might need that if situated within their ZPDs can create a potential for mental processes to occur.

Focusing at an already mentioned mental process, it is important to clarify that the internalization process aforementioned is not an outside-inside passive transmission but a transformative process. The frequent teacher's manual use can help teachers interpret the pedagogical implications materialized in the teacher's manual and construct personal meanings that allow them to function in an informed manner. This way, not only do they transform socially provided material into their own, but also transform them into psychological tools that mediate and regulate their practices.

As a dialectical theory, whenever the process of internalization is brought into discussions, Sociocultural Theory (SCT) accounts for the importance of considering its counterpart, namely externalization, to understand how the internalization of semiotic material from the social world transforms into personal understanding (LANTOLF; THORNE, 2006). The externalization process helps to unveil the internalization process that is taking place, as it can unveil the reasoning behind teachers' teaching for the teachers at the same time that it opens their reasoning also for teacher educators. The externalization process enables teachers "to recognize the interrelationships between what they know and believe and what they do in their classrooms" (JOHNSON, 1999, p. 11), while also opening teachers' reasoning for teacher's educators scrutiny allowing teacher's educator 'see' what scientific concepts and pedagogical implications are already internalized by teachers, the ones that are still under development, and the ones that are ripe for development. The externalization process can take different forms, and traditionally, in teacher education, teachers' externalization may happen via narratives, dialogue journals, inquiry, among others.

Considering the presented above, the next session provides information concerning the method used in this study.

Method

This study follows the same path of a previous study carried out in 2017 in which a novice teacher – here referred to as Alex⁸¹ – has his practice investigated as he reasons his decisions and

⁸¹ We thank the participant, who kindly accepted to participate in our follow-up study and promptly responded to our questionnaires and interviews.

actions when deciding not to follow the teacher's manual (AGNOLETTO; DELLAGNELO, 2017, 2018). As unveiled in Agnoletto and Dellagnelo's study, Alex's pedagogy was mainly mediated by concepts and beliefs that tended to be unconscious. Although he was able to justify his class behaviors at times, he sometimes failed to understand the pedagogical implications of the suggestions offered in the manual. Those findings revealed that, at that point, Alex lacked agency concerning his practice. However, results also showed that the teacher was thoughtful and motivated, and attempted to (re)conceptualize his teaching. In order to investigate his development throughout the last three years, this study looked into Alex' reasoning for not following the teacher's manual. The results obtained back in 2017 will be compared to the ones from the current study, which should allow us to trace if and how this teacher developed his reasoning teaching into a more robust one.

Context and participant

This study was carried out at the Extracurricular project of foreign languages administered by the Foreign Languages and Literatures Department of Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (henceforth UFSC). The project offers five different language courses, being English one of them. Its teachers are undergraduate and graduate students from the language programs of the university. Unlike other language institutes, this project accepts teachers with no prior experience. Consequently, several undergraduate students have their first teaching experiences within the context of the project. Once new teachers have been accepted, they go through a stage that includes observing classes of more experienced peers, writing reflective reports, and having individual sessions with the coordinators of the project.

Concerning the material, the English courses adopt the Interchange 5th edition series, which follow the Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLT). Teachers in the English Extracurricular program are provided with Interchange textbook, teacher's manual, and presentation software.

As aforementioned, *Alex* is the same participant from Agnoletto & Dellagnelo's study (2017). Back then, he was a 19-year-old undergraduate student of the English Program and was a novice teacher at the Extracurricular project. Now, he is a graduate student and a more experienced teacher, with three years of experience at the Extracurricular courses. Alex currently teaches two different

classes of different levels: a level-three class and a level-six class.

Instruments and Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis

To collect data for this study, we: a) observed three of Alex's classes; b) interviewed him after each class observation; and c) asked him to answer two semi-structured questionnaires.

The participant had his 16-student level 3 class (Interchange 2: Part A) observed on three different occasions. During the observations, the researchers did not interact with Alex nor with his students. The purpose of the class observations was to take notes of the teacher's classroom practices focusing on the moments in which Alex did not follow the suggestions made in the teacher's manual. Based on these notes, we wrote the questions that guided the subsequent interviews.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted after each class observed so as to have the participant externalize the reasoning behind his choices to adapt or skip the procedures and activities suggested by the teacher's manual. The interviews were not conducted right after the observed classes because the participant had to teach another group. Thus, they took place face-to-face, one hour and a half after the class observations, that is, once the participant had finished teaching his second group of the evening. This meant that we had enough time for the interviews, while also ensuring that the participant was still able to remember what had happened during his classes. All the interviews were recorded and later transcribed.

The first semi-structured questionnaire was sent prior to the observations and interviews. It had 6 questions inquiring into the teacher's use and perceptions regarding textbooks and teacher's manuals, namely: a) Can you think of advantages and disadvantages of the use of textbooks?; b) How important do you think the teacher's manual is? Why?; c) Do you like the teacher's manual from Interchange?; d) Do you think teachers need to follow every step of the teacher's manual? Why?; e) Have you ever felt the need to change/adapt/skip any activities from the Interchange textbook?; and g) Would you be (more) comfortable with preparing the classes without using the teacher's manual?

The second questionnaire addressed Alex's perceptions of himself as a teacher. It was sent after all observations and interviews have happened. In this second questionnaire three questions were asked, namely: a) How would you describe yourself as a teacher?; b) How do you think your students perceive you as a teacher?; and c) Do you think your perceptions of yourself and those that your students have of you are associated?.

With the questionnaires answered and the interviews transcribed, we proceeded to analyze the

data by revisiting the transcriptions, audios and questionnaires, trying to unveil the reasoning behind Alex's teaching practices when not following the instructions given by the teacher's manual. Our findings are presented and discussed in the following section.

Data analysis and discussion

To reach the objective of this study, we sought to unveil the reasoning that mediates Alex's practice. It is crucial to remind the reader that unveiling ones' reasoning may not be an easy task because sometimes teachers do not stop to reflect on the reasons why they act the way they do in class. Consequently, for teachers to be able to expose the reasoning behind their practices, they have to be conscious of the things they do, otherwise, they might not be able to explain the reasoning behind their actions as they might not have stopped to think/reason upon them. Creating opportunities for teachers to reflect on their doing is, as aforementioned, an efficient form of enabling them to "recognize the interrelationships between what they know and believe and what they do in their classrooms" (JOHNSON, 1999, p. 11).

The first major change we found in Alex's development was that he seems to be conscious of his actions as he is able to reason upon them. In Agnoletto & Dellagnelo's study (2017), the authors showed that Alex, then a novice teacher, could not yet reason upon his decisions in class:

[...] most times Alex was not able to explain why he adapted such suggestions, saying that some of them were not followed because he forgot to do so, which means that it was not a conscious decision (AGNOLETTI; DELLAGNELO, 2017, p. 35).

At that time, Alex had only months of experience in teaching. Now, three years later, Alex grew into a more experienced teacher who has been teaching in the same place, with the same books (different edition, though), and thus the same methodology. During these years, he has had time to get acquainted with the way of teaching within this environment (the Extracurricular project), and developed his reasoning teaching through the use of different tools necessary for his teaching, one of them being the teacher's manual.

With the excerpt below, we depict a situation in which the researchers (henceforth R), while inquiring into Alex's (henceforth A) practice, observed that he may have internalized some of the teacher's manual orientations, becoming more self-regulated and less object-regulated as he did not check the book for instructions while conducting his practice into the same direction oriented by the teacher's manual.

Excerpt 1:

R: O.K. So, do you think this (activity) was intended ... do you think it was intended as more of a listening activity or, as you said, something targeted at the structure?

A: Well, I don't think I checked the book for that.

R: If you didn't check the book, what do you think it intended?

A: I don't remember what the teacher's manual says about this, but I think it was more to show students a specific vocabulary or structure, rather than, you know, a specific listening objective.

R: So, basically, what you just stated is what the teacher's manual brought. (Interview 2)

If on the one hand Excerpt 1 indicates Alex may have internalized some pedagogical practices as he is able to externalize reasonable pedagogical implications for doing some activities, on the other hand we also found moments in which we wondered whether he was aware of the pedagogical implications of some activities that he decided not to include in his class, even though he was capable of justifying his decisions. It is our interpretation that he at times resorts to his beliefs instead of enacting his practice informed by theory. This is the case of pre- and post-listening activities, as displayed in the excerpt below, where it is possible to observe that Alex is familiar with the signs 'pre-listening' and 'post-listening', but these scientific concepts apparently still need further development, because even though he names these activities, showing they might be within his zone of proximal development (ZPD), his reasoning for not applying pre-and post-listening activities are superficial and do not show a real understanding of these concepts meaning that he is resorting mostly to spontaneous concepts and beliefs.

Excerpt 2:

R: So, O.K, I have one more question about this. Overall, what do you think is the role of pre-activities, such as pre-vocabulary activities, pre-listening?

A: Yeah, I think it is something that can be really helpful, but I think that in most cases it is not really necessary. *I like to think that, also, that the students, if they really need the vocabulary, that they might either ask me, or they might collaborate, discuss them with the groups, try to solve the missing vocabulary, and if necessary, they can call me.* I think that pre-vocabulary is something that can be helpful, especially with those words that we know that the students are going to have more trouble. (Interview 2)

By claiming that it is not really necessary to apply these types of activities, the teacher is not clear enough as to when they are necessary then and how he decides when it is or not important to resort to these resources. Additionally, by saying that "if they [students] really need the vocabulary, that they might either ask me, or they might collaborate, discuss them with the groups, try to solve the missing vocabulary, and if necessary they can call me", he clearly shows that he is not considering pre-vocabulary activities and the fact that some unknown words need to be clarified for students before they are presented them in a text to avoid these words to get in the way of students'

comprehension fact that should be considered as a important pedagogical implication.

This interpretation is reinforced in the next excerpt (Excerpt 3), where Alex is depicted conducting a speaking activity (see Picture 1 below) and skipping its part B. In excerpt 3 it is possible to see the reasoning behind his decision on skipping part of the activity, and it appears that what mainly mediated him at this moment were his beliefs and spontaneous concepts (underlined in the excerpt below) instead of scientific ones, which resulted in him not doing the pre- and post-activities (presented in italics in the excerpt below), which are always indicated and explained in the teacher's manual.

Picture 1: Interchange 7

INTERCHANGE 7 Free advice

A GROUP WORK Look at the problems people have. What advice would you give each person? Discuss possible suggestions and then choose the best one.

<p>1</p>  <p>"I'm moving to a new apartment with two roommates. How can I be sure we get along well and avoid problems?"</p>	<p>2</p>  <p>"A co-worker has asked to borrow my brand-new mountain bike for the weekend. I don't want to lend it. What can I say?"</p>
<p>3</p>  <p>"My family and I are going away on vacation for two weeks. How can we make sure our home is safe from burglars while we're gone?"</p>	<p>4</p>  <p>"I have an important job interview next week. How can I make sure to be successful and get the job?"</p>
<p>5</p>  <p>"I'm going to meet my future in-laws tomorrow for the first time. How can I make a good impression?"</p>	<p>6</p>  <p>"I'm really into social networking, but in the past week, five people I hardly know have asked to be my friends. What should I do?"</p>

B PAIR WORK Choose one of the situations above. Ask your partner for advice. Then give him or her advice about his or her problem.

A: I'm moving to a new apartment with two roommates. How can I be sure we get along well?
B: Make sure you decide how you are going to split the household chores. And remember to . . .

INTERCHANGE SB 121

Source: RICHARDS; HULL; PROCTOR, 2017, p. 121.

The decisions that Alex made during the development of this speaking activity seem to be based more on his beliefs than on the pedagogical implications (scientific concepts) of exploring pictures and checking vocabulary prior to students' performance on the activity. Exploring pictures and vocabulary in groups (as in a pre-activity) activates students' prior knowledge of the things they might need to successfully complete the task at hand (such as vocabulary, grammar structure, or even

the understanding of the mechanics of such activity). In other words, the group work in part A of this activity (picture 1) serves to check students' understanding of the task and language, and also to model newly presented language in an environment that both takes them off the spotlight and allows them to monitor the language being produced by possible volunteers to the activity. Part B of this activity, the pair work, serves to encourage students to use the language in a less stressful context, and increases their speaking time.

In the excerpt below, it is possible to notice that Alex recognizes that activity B is another opportunity for students to practice the linguistic goals of the task at hand, which shows that the pedagogical implications (scientific concepts) of this activity are within his ZPD. However, they might not always be part of volitional processes. This interpretation is reinforced by the fact that although he recognizes the pedagogical implications of such pre- and post-activities, this was not enough to mediate his practices as he believes that the activity would be repetitive for his students, a belief that seems to align with his thinking that a disadvantage of following textbooks and their teacher's manuals is that "textbooks obviously don't take into account the specificities of each classroom" (Questionnaire 1). Although textbooks and teacher's manuals do not account for classroom specificities, they account for pedagogical implications which do not appear to be mediating Alex's reasoning. In our interpretation, his belief mediated his choice to skip some pre- and post-activities including part B that would be an opportunity for his students to practice in pairs what they had been done in the group. This decision resulted in Alex missing a chance for students to practice the language in a more private and meaningful way, which would be the pedagogical reason for the book having a group activity as a preparation for a pair-activity practice within a communicative teaching approach.

Excerpt 3:

R: Ok...do you think you followed the instructions from the book, like step by step, or do you think you've changed it? Can you recall that?

A: No... Well, to be honest, I'm not really sure because **I didn't look at the instructions specifically before this class**, but I guess... I did. [pointing at the instructions given by the teacher's manual that the researcher opened in front of him, he continues his reasoning] *I didn't ask them, for example, the first part here I didn't ask them if they ever get advice from friends or family, I didn't focus their attention on the pictures necessarily, I also generally don't do this...ah... I generally don't read all of the situations before the activity*, it's something that if the doubt shows up then, I always let the students know that if they're confused about a particular word they can ask me during the activities, so I don't do, I don't read all of it beforehand with them. Ah... so, yes, I gave the first one as an example, I didn't write the ideas on the board, only at the end, yeah! I think it's basically it, I didn't do part B as well, I only focused on part A because, and before you ask me why, ahhh...because **I thought it would be too repetitive**, because they already had to come up with the solutions in groups, and the second part of basically, okay, so the same situations asking the partners for advice...**it would, I think, I thought it would be repetitive** (Interview 1).

Our interpretation of the pedagogical implications being in Alex's ZPD not yet fully developed is reinforced by the occurrence of these skipping activities in other moments of his classes. We understand that he could consider the activities repetitive while also having a robust reasoning about the need to skip them if he could justify it basing this decision not only in his immediate perceptions (spontaneous concepts). An example of how he could have shown a more robust reasoning teaching could be the scenario of him choosing to reduce the number of examples used in group work, and in pair work asking students to choose from the ones that have not been explored in the group work. This way, he would be showing a more solid understanding of the reasoning behind these different grouping arrangements, as already explained above, while also reducing the repetitive effect.

Alex skipped activities which he deemed repetitive more than once. Because of this, excerpt 4 depicts the moment when we inquired into his decision of skipping part B of the Word Power activity in Unit 8 (picture 2 below). At this moment, another aspect that mediates Alex's reasoning was unveiled - the "element of time".

Picture 2: Word Power

2 WORD POWER *Ways to celebrate*

A Which word or phrase is not usually paired with each verb?
Put a line through it. Then compare with a partner.

1. eat	candy	sweets	a mask
2. give	presents	a celebration	money
3. go to	decorations	a wedding	a party
4. have a	picnic	beach	meal
5. play	games	candles	music
6. send	cards	flowers	a barbecue
7. visit	relatives	food	close friends
8. watch	a birthday	a parade	fireworks
9. wear	costumes	invitations	traditional clothes

B PAIR WORK Do you do any of the things in part A as part of a cultural or family celebration? When? Tell your partner.

Source: RICHARDS; HULL; PROCTOR, 2017, p. 50.

Excerpt 4 shows that the "element of time" was another important aspect mediating Alex's reasoning teaching. When inquired if he had done every part of the activity proposed by the book, Alex externalized that he skipped part B because he initially thought this activity was just a

preparation for the speaking section of the book, but while reasoning about the rest of the activity that he skipped, he realized that part B was already somehow related to production (underlined in the excerpt below). The skipping part B of the Word Power activity (Picture 1), although presenting this new ‘element of time’, also presents the aspects already discussed above of him not yet having robustly developed his understanding of the pedagogical implications (scientific concepts) imbricated in this activity as it introduces vocabulary that students might need to do the proposed tasks. However, this externalization process seemed to open Alex’s thoughts to social influence (JOHNSON, 2016). After realizing that the reasons he externalized did not match his prior explanation (underlined in excerpt), the ‘repetitive’ belief emerged again along with the new ‘element of time’ (in italics in the excerpt). Then, considering the interaction depicted below along with the discussion already presented, it seems that these two elements (time and the repetitive belief) mediating Alex during this practice.

Excerpt 4:

[While talking about the Word Power activity, R tries to paraphrase Alex]

R: ok, so you said that it was here to prepare [students] for production in the next activities?

A: hmmm, I think not so much production because, well, they didn't form any sentences, they kinda more, it was kinda more of an analytical activity in the sense that 'ok, then I have these words here and I think this one doesn't really go, so...

R: [pointing at Word Power activity] Yeah... and, did you do the whole activity proposed for here.

A: No, I didn't do part B.

R: So, what is part B here? What is the goal of part B here?

A: Well, part B is for speaking, then yeah, there would be a bit of production, ah...I skipped it a bit *because of time*, and also because...I thought perhaps the answers would be too similar in the sense that ok, students don't... at least the students I have in this classroom they don't come from vary, varied backgrounds, so varied backgrounds, so, you know, *I thought it might be a little repetitive* like oh yeah my relatives, well, we watch a parade...hmm... we watch a parade in the carnival. Oh...mine too, so.

R: ok, about being repetitive, do you think it would make any impression on students?

A: Oh, no...I don't think it would make much of a negative impact, like... *it had an element of time* as well.

R: Ok, just pushing a little, it was like a matter of time

A: Yeah!

R: mostly,... [inaudible]

A: Mostly, not only but mostly, yeah.

R: Ok, and if you had had time, would you do it? Do you see any importance of this [part B activity] here?

A: Yeah...I might have done it, but I don't think it's indispensable, so... Well, I didn't do it, but yeah. (Interview 1)

Excerpts 3 and 4 help us understand, as already briefly indicated, that although the pedagogical concepts of pre- and post-activities are within Alex’s ZPD, they do not seem to mediate Alex’s practice as he externalizes that part B activity on the Word Power may not be “indispensable”.

Moreover, there is another aspect that Alex's externalization depicted on excerpt 4 that helped us see that the constant presence of the issue of repetition (as in "I thought it would be too repetitive" in excerpt 3 and "I thought it might be a little repetitive" in excerpt 4) might also be related to his concern for the well-being of his students. Having said that, we believe that he might choose to skip the parts of activities he considers boring and repetitive, despite their important pedagogical implications because he wants to keep students entertained and not annoyed. This interpretation can be reinforced by Alex's answer to the question "How do you think your students perceive you as a teacher?" from questionnaire 2.

EXCERPT 5:

But I'd say students notice the conscious effort I put into making class an enjoyable moment, and I think at least for the most part they don't see that as interfering with the seriousness of the learning process. (Questionnaire 2)

This 'well-being aspect' that seems to mediate Alex's teaching appears more clearly in the last class observed. This class was not book-based for which Alex has prepared two speaking activities. Alex was inquired into the reasons why he designed this class the way he did, and while he reasoned about the activities he proposed for this last class, the aspect of students' well-being became more explicit than before as he justifies that his intention was "to light things up" (in italics) in excerpt 5A. We are going to break excerpt 6 in four parts (6A, 6B, 6C, and 6D) as all the next excerpts are going to discuss features of what we are calling the 'well-being aspect'.

Excerpt 6A:

R: So, why did you design this activity the way you did at this moment in the semester?

A: So, hummm...one of the reasons that I chose this activity specifically, like, right now was that the last few classes that I had been teaching prior to the last Thursday class, which was when we started, we did the first part of the activity...ah... it was that the last few classes had been really, very book-based, like, like, well, the classes you saw, you accompanied, for example, most of them were... I don't remember if I brought anything from outside of the book during those classes, but that was kind of the idea, like, getting something different to do...and I also chose this activity, well, it's an activity very game-like, well, "you need to be very clever, so that you fool the other group or your opponents, and hummm..." you know, *to lighten things up, I guess, was the main reason to bring it...* (Interview 3)

In excerpt 6A we see that what seems to mediate Alex's decisions for this class was his desire to "lighten things up", a decision that is likely based on impressions (spontaneous concepts), such as that book-based classes might be less attractive to students than game-/tasks-based classes. However, at this point in his externalization, Alex seems to think about the pedagogical reasons, bringing into consciousness some scientific concepts, behind the activities he chose (excerpt 6B) for this 'free-book class'. He recalls that the activities proposed provided few new vocabulary inputs, at the same time that the 'game-like activities' required the students to communicate more freely, so students had to

be able to form sentences with different structures and for varied purposes. Yet, after reasoning a bit about the pedagogical implications of the activities proposed articulating a hierarching systematic knowledge (scientific concepts), perhaps because he knew we were inquiring into his reasoning teaching, he ended up going back to the ‘well-being aspect’ of the activities (everyday concepts) that seems to mediate him the most.

In excerpt 6B below, it is possible to observe that, even though he considers the pedagogical potentials of the activities he chose for this class (articulating some scientific concepts), the main aspect that seems to have mediated Alex’s choice of activities appears to be the well-being of his students in the form of different activities capable of lightning things up, which we understood as being activities directed only at the immediate need of being enjoyable for students.

Excerpt 6B:

R: ok...

A: because, I mean in terms of content, it does, you know, kind of teach some vocabulary, but it is like, perhaps 5 or 6 words, one or 2 of them, they already know...and I guess it also helps them to practice, you know, sentence formation which is something that few students might have said that... for that class [in which they studied such topic/structure/vocabulary] they might have said that they have had trouble with sometimes... *But, yeah, the reason I'm saying it, it was mostly to light up and do something a bit different.*

R: Ok, so the main goal would not be the vocabulary itself...

A: No.

R: but this, like, the well-being of the students, like the lighting up...

A: yes!

R: providing a chance for them to engage in a fun activity...

A: yes...exactly, I think that had been missing a bit, perhaps from the last... two or three classes... (Interview 3)

Alex cares for his student’s well-being, and his students’ well-being pays him back as the students enjoy participating in his class. This aspect was externalized by Alex in his answer to the second questionnaire, in which we asked him to reflect on how he perceives himself as a teacher, as well as on how he thinks his students perceive him.

Excerpt 6C

I think as a teacher I see myself more as a mediator or something in that sense. I leave room for a certain degree of autonomy on the part of my students – for instance [...]. I make sure that students know I’m there to help them learn in whatever part of learning is necessary [...]. For me, this environment is vital for students to learn, as it makes them much more motivated. You might have noticed during the classes you observed that I make a lot of jokes and sometimes talk to the students for a few minutes before class, and this is to further establish more of an informal setting. So, to sum up, I think I see myself as a teacher who is concerned with presenting information and being there for students when they have doubts during the learning process, and also trying to create a positive and stimulating class environment. I believe most students perceive me in the same way; this “informal” side of the class is one of the things they usually give me feedback about, as well as my willingness to help students one on one at any time, especially those that encounter more difficulties. (Questionnaire 2)

Alex does not seem to be mediated by the Subject Matter Knowledge⁸² or by the General or Pedagogical Content Knowledge (that requires more articulation of scientific concepts), but by the Knowledge of Context, which, according to Johnson (1999) would be the knowledge that language teachers have about both the ecology of learning in second language classrooms and the culture of this type of environment, in other words, it can be said that Knowledge of Context is something teachers develop in social interactions in L2 environments.

Teachers have practical and experiential knowledge of what students like or dislike, and what type of environment they feel more comfortable with because they (teachers) have been to these places before (the apprenticeship of observation, in other words, spontaneous concepts). As can be read in the underlined passage of Excerpt 6D, Alex even externalizes it when he mentions one of his student- memories and says *“I remember that I had teachers in the past that I was absolutely excited to, about going to their classes, like, you know, as an example when I took Didática, my teacher, my professor was very good, and I remember it was Wednesday morning, 8:30 AM, but I was thrilled to go there”* (Interview 3). The apprenticeship of observation can act “as an indelible imprint on most teachers’ lives and minds, influencing their knowledge, their reasoning, and their teaching practices” (JOHNSON, 1999, p. 23).

We believe that Alex’s concern for his students’ well-being is grounded on his apprenticeship of observation being then part of his Knowledge of Context included as part of his spontaneous concepts. This aspect is also reinforced by Agnoletto and Dellagnelo’s (2018) findings that also pointed to Alex’s concern for his students’ well-being. The authors wrote

Alex shows to care about his students’ likes and well-being, and this brings to class something they enjoy so as to promote a less tiring and more engaging environment and as such substantiate the process of learning a foreign language (AGNOLETTO; DELLAGNELO, 2018, p. 33).

This concern with the well-being of his students is still a characteristic of Alex’s teaching practice that can be traced back to Alex’s educational experiences both as a student and as a teacher. This is observable when he externalizes that he tries to teach his classes in a way that he thinks that is most enjoyable for students, because he, as a student, liked classes such as the one he tries to deliver (Alex’s answer to R’s last question in the excerpt below). His apprenticeship of observation and Knowledge of Context, in other words, spontaneous concepts, clearly mediated his reasoning teaching

⁸² Based on Shulman (1986) teachers’ professional knowledge is made of four general areas: subject matter knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and knowledge of context.

during the last class observed, as the rest of his reasoning, depicted in excerpt 6D, shows.

Excerpt 6D:

R: And why would that be important?

A: oh, yeah... I think it is important because...hummm... I like to... I like to make the students feel comfortable in classes, and... you know, to the possible extent that it would also be fun, so... I've always tried to... you know, to balance these two things, like, ok, so... you know, I'm seriously teaching the content, etc, but also trying to make it as fun as possible, so that, you know... I don't want for example students to think, hummm "oh my God, tonight I have English class", you know, sometimes they do feel that but, you know, I want it to be for...if that happens, I want that to be for other reasons, not because the class is boring... I remember that I had teachers in the past that I was absolutely excited to, about going to their classes, like, you know, as an example when I took *Didática*, my teacher, my professor was very good, and I remember it was Wednesday morning, 8:30 AM, but I was thrilled to go there. So, you know, I won't always manage to do that but I like them to think of classes as something, as a place to learn but a place that is also nice to be in.

R: hum hum, so, this type of class, with this type of activity was a class that you enjoyed when you were a student?

A: yeah! (Interview 3).

Final remarks

This study had the objective of analyzing the classroom practices of a now experienced teacher of English through a sociocultural perspective. We attempted to answer the following research question: “How has the reasoning of a now experienced teacher developed during the three years after his practice was questioned? Regarding the research question, some of the reasons behind Alex’s practices were unveiled through inquiry into his decisions, externalizations, and reflections. We found that Alex is mediated by scientific and spontaneous concepts. However, spontaneous concepts seem to mediate him more as presented through the analysis of his beliefs (presented in excerpt 1, 2, 3 and 5), as well as his concern for the time he has to cover the amount of content he has during the semester (presented in excerpt 4), and his concern for his students’ well-being (excerpts 5A, 5B, 5C and 5D).

We also found that Alex has developed a more robust reasoning throughout his career. While Agnoletto and Dellagnelo (2017) reported that Alex was mostly unable to explain his adaptations, this study shows that he is now able to reason upon his actions and can externalize the reasons behind his teaching. Even when his decisions were divergent from the manual’s suggestions or from the acclaimed practices of CLT, he was able to justify his choices without much hesitation which means that he is now more consciously aware of his practices which is an essential step for the development of scientific concepts.

Despite these positive findings, we noticed that he has not yet developed to his full potential, as he is sometimes mediated by his apprenticeship of observation (spontaneous concepts). This



finding means that although he seems to have developed some scientific concepts, they are not yet internalized and interwoven to his spontaneous concepts, resulting in them being two separate things, as his practice does not seem unconditionally informed by theory. In this regard, it is relevant to note that teacher development is a lifelong process and that Alex is in his developmental process. The good practices he has already internalized since a novice teacher have raised his ZPD ceiling, bringing news challenges with it. With hope our interactions have assisted Alex to further reason upon his teaching and that this may help him become an even better professional.

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