

# ACTION RESEARCH AS REFLECTION: A CASE STUDY

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*Abstract: This paper aims at researching to what extent action research can contribute to teachers' continuous education by studying a theoretical frame of research that focuses on the continuous language teacher education. This investigation has been carried out in order to verify how valid it is for a continuous education to implement an action research effort taking into consideration three main aspects: the perspective of a teacher in the process of education, the view of the students who were also subjects of this study, and the perception of a school coordinator. Moreover, the purpose is to analyze the sort of relationship there is between coordinators and teachers and how the distance established by the hierarchical positions they assume in schools might be diminished through a shared and informed education. The contribution concerns the continuous education of an English teacher throughout her experience in the usage of a reflective teaching/learning process.*

*Key words: action research, teacher/coordinator relationship, reflective process.*

## 1 - Introduction

The occupation of a teacher<sup>1</sup> may suppose a journey which is done alone, that is, she prepares her classes, teaches her lessons, corrects her students' assignments, does an evaluation of her groups, all of these singly. These actions and procedures may be followed by a coordinator and discussed with other teachers in meetings. Nevertheless, it is in a shared reflective teaching process that this isolation can be effectively diminished. According to Kutz, Groden and Zamel (1993) "second language acquisition is driven by meaningful interaction, by attempts to make sense of and respond to the world" (p. 22).

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1) Henceforth the teacher will be addressed as she as the great majority of teachers are women.



Thus, it is essential that the teacher gives students the opportunity to interact with and within the language in this way. It is through this experience that learners can not only construct their knowledge of the target language, but also be more aware of themselves as well as of the culture where this acquisition is taking place. The same may be applied to the teacher as well as to the coordinator since the latter in her turn also has the role of providing for teachers an environment of interaction with her coworkers and/or the coordinator herself for learning and for continuous education to take place.

One of the ways of proposing this interaction among the teachers, the coordinator and the teaching/learning process is through action research. Representing a possibility to unite theory and teaching practice, the action research methodology presupposes the involvement of the teacher learner or teacher in a continuous process of investigation of her own pedagogical practice with the goal of promoting an action, here understood as change, which is not only educational but also political (cf. Thiollent, 1986; Maíta Lopes e Freire, 1998).

Burns (1999) argues that some of the reasons for a teacher to engage in an action research process are the following:

*"Teachers have an increasing number of reasons for wanting to conduct action research - their own professional development, a desire to develop research skills, a wish to present systematic evidence for change to their schools or teaching organisations, or completion of a university course with an action research component."* (p. 12)

I intended to further research on this topic with one of the subjects who was observed in my conclusion paper (namely, Lanius, 2002). A research in which she could reconsider some of her procedures through an analysis of her assumptions to see to what extent there was a perception of whether something has changed since then and whether the feedback given by me of the conclusions of that work were guiding as far as to cause some change in her attitude in the sense to adopt a more reflective position facing her teaching practice. Moreover, I also aimed to perceive what happened to the profile of this subject after one more year at the university, one more year teaching and one more year of systematic reflective practice. Currently, she is starting the fifth term of Foreign Languages - English. Thus, I wished to see to what extent the contents she studied along her second year and the reflection she has made have contributed for her to have a more critical view over her practice, that is, how the theory has fostered the reflective teaching of this subject and the other way round.

One of the questions posed by the teacher in the analysis she herself did of the transcriptions of her classes in the previous work (Lanius, op. cit.), was that when the students were observed, they ended up having a different attitude from the regular classes. In this way, my intention here is to investigate in the process to what extent this happened by questioning one group of her students who went through action research procedures (video recording, audio recording and observations done by the school coordinator) whether they perceived any shift in their classroom activities.

## 2.1 - The controversial relationship between the Teacher Educator and Teacher Learner

The ultimate goal to be achieved by a Teacher Educator (henceforth, TE) would be to get the autonomy from the Teacher Learner (henceforth, TL) that she is working with. In Weininger's (2001) perception, not only the learner, but also the teacher should act as an autonomous global agent. In order to achieve autonomy, teachers must have a reflective practice to observe what goes in the classroom as well as to reflect upon the reasons for what happens in her classes and the decisions to be made. The various situations in which a teacher will have to make a decision are very distinctive one from another, meaning that no rules can be applied in these circumstances (according to Perrenoud, 2002).

Nonetheless, the implementation of reflective teaching implies a continuous learning process and from the teacher's willingness to be receptive to the efforts she will have to make in this analytical view of her work. According to Perrenoud (2002)<sup>2</sup>, "aiming to achieve a real reflective practice, this posture must become almost permanent, inserted in an analytical relationship with action, which becomes relatively independent from the obstacles to be faced and deceptions" (p. 13). Besides taking time, this practice can be quite frustrating because at many times the TE has not got answers to the questions posed by

the TLs. Rather, she might even ask the teachers more questions to make them deepen their analysis of the facts being investigated. Furthermore, the supervisor may not come with the expected actions for the teacher to solve the puzzle, but try to lead her to an option of an experiment proposed by herself rather than a formula which might not be suitable for that case.

All this requires a lot of dedication from the participants (Perrenoud, op. cit.) which means that both the TE and TL should together articulate theory and practice so as to have a starting point for the decision to be made. Perrenoud also argues that "it is important to simultaneously construct very rich and deep didactic and transversal knowledge in order to equip the view and reflection of the reality" (p. 17). It is a way to ally the theoretical concepts carried by that teacher in alignment with the institution where she works and what is happening in practice in her classroom. Perrenoud (op. cit.) also notes that "it is important, from the pre-service, to create an environment of analysis of practice, an environment of sharing of contributions and reflection about the way people think, decide, communicate and react in a classroom" (p. 18). In other words, the reflective teaching process should be implemented from the start, with teachers who are beginning their career, in the pre service program, not only with those who are already in practice.

Therefore, the TE has the responsibility of not just implementing the process, but actually of going further, establishing a culture of reflection. By doing so, this

2) All the original works that were in Portuguese have been translated by the author of this paper.



practice will naturally be adopted by the teachers if the supervisor succeeds in her efforts and approaches. Perrenoud (2002) explains that "a part of the educators has discovered that their only opportunity of transforming the practices of teachers consists in creating bonds between what they do and what is proposed for them to do" (p. 23). Here, the relationship between the TE and Tls, and the model the supervisor creates is seen as a crucial feature for the agreement of the teachers in participating in action research and reflective teaching and consequently being in a continuous education process.

The relationship traditionally established between Tls and TEs used to be based on the hierarchy imposed by the occupations of the supervisor as a commander and the subordinate function of the teachers to be evaluated. Nowadays, there is a trend to establish a relationship which creates bonds of partnership, sharing and growth of all the parties involved in the teaching/learning process, one that should be continuously in development as teachers cannot consider themselves entities who know all there is to be learned. Moreover, this evaluation feature is being substituted by an analytical research of the events of the classroom. Hence, the interaction that happens between the TE and the TL should prevail moments of peer reflection, when the analysis is a fundamental tool for professional development. In this sense, what is said might be of extreme importance especially for the TL, as she is in a moment of disclosure, that is, opening her intimate dilemmas to a person who is in charge of that institution. In this exchange of information, an argumentative process

takes place. One in which "the analysis of the verbal action helps understand the influence of the instructions, of the type of relationship developed between the teacher and teacher educator, of the conflicts experienced by the participants" (Liberali, 2000, p. 71). So, sometimes, in an interaction like this, the TE may notice something that goes beyond the classroom, a difficulty which was not even perceived by the teacher in question.

The discourse used by the teachers could represent underlying beliefs those teachers might have. For instance, "explicit references to the parameters of the situation show the involvement of the interlocutor through the use of words such as I, you, and we" (Liberali, 2000, p. 72). Consequently, this piece of information constitutes a great source for the discussion to be conducted later on with that teacher. Besides that, Tls have an opportunity to think through their own analysis and reflect upon them, to try to see to what extent they were being analytical, having in mind that Liberali (op. cit.) suggests that there are three types of reflection: *technical* (emphasizing control over the natural world and theory as the means to foresee and control events); *practical* (helping solve problems from everyday action); and *critical* (emphasizing the analysis of actions in socio-historical contexts). In this sense, the kind of interest presented by the teacher can be perceived through the choice of the verbal content expressed by her, in other words, the choice of words of the teacher shows her beliefs of the teaching/learning process as well as how mature she is in her methodological approach.

One of the main advantages of this kind of procedure presented by Liberali (2000) is that "the important thing in relation to this activity was an increased awareness developed by the teacher's own attempt to discover the type of reflection she had developed" (p. 83). In addition to this, the teacher might be more engaged in the reflective process together with the TE, because as a supervisor, she will not be the only one to be analyzing things. So, that is an even better opportunity for sharing and to get the commitment from the participants as they are directly and actively involved in the process. However, for the TE to find and develop suitable tasks to this reflective work is not such an easy task. The kind of activities carried out should be systematized in a way that makes the TL comfortable with them. Besides, they should be appropriate for the goal established by the TE. Liberali (op. cit.) points out that "we must seek for new and strategic ways of helping the development of tasks that may be seen as tools for critical reflection" (p. 84). Thus, the TE has to evaluate the effectiveness of the action research tasks chosen or designed by her to verify to what extent the activities were helpful for reflection to take place. Moreover, the TE should analyze the effects the responses to these tasks will have on the TL's learning process and how this will be dealt with in the interactions between them.

Besides that, another aim educators should endeavor to attain is to have a relationship between the TE and TL that is based on respect, trust and professionalism, which implies an attitude from both parts of modesty so

as to share what each one has to offer and request. Chamberlin (2000) states that "trust plays a critical role in supervision that encourages reflection and awareness of personal beliefs and values" (p. 653). This does not mean that TEs and Tls have to agree about all they do or that they must act similarly. It goes far beyond that, it means they must be tuned in a way to have the same line of procedures, that is, one that clearly follows the same theoretical approaches, otherwise that institution would not be in harmony with methodologies. In other words, if one teacher believes a structural approach should be used rather than a communicative one while another uses the audio lingual method, students who go from one grade or stage to another would feel completely lost in terms of the learning process they are going through.

What might also occur is that there is an effort made by most institutions to be guided by the same principles in theory, but in practice this is not as concrete. To be able to apply the approach which is chosen by that institution in the classrooms is not as easy as that. So, one of the roles of the TE is to verify whether and to what extent this is happening as well as to guide the teachers who are having difficulties to do so to have a more reflective view of their teaching/learning process. This is also true for the TE, since she has the opportunity to reflect about her practices as well. As Chamberlin (2000) poses, "the need to create a meaningful learning experience for teachers has directed attention to theories and models of supervision that encourage reflection" (p. 653). In this sense, the TE also has



to establish this necessity for reflection by showing that she is actively engaged in this process, to give the example, a model to be followed.

Bearing this in mind, the success of the implementation of this reflective process is largely based on the bonds of the relationship between the TE and TL. The strength of these bonds may reflect how well this whole project will be developed throughout the teaching career, not only in the pre-service program, but especially in the in-service phase, when the TL is already testing and implementing the theories she has studied. Chamberlin (2000) argues that "to provide the best opportunities for pre-service and in-service teachers to become reflective practitioners, they must first gain a better understanding of how the teacher-supervisor relationship can enhance, or hinder professional development" (p. 654). Thus, the sort of relation that is established right from the start between the TE and TLs will play a fundamental role in the commitment showed by the TLs involved in the reflective teaching process.

In this sense, the TE, the one who possesses the hierarchy of being the supervisor, the person in charge, might be considered much more a coworker than a chief in command as she is so much engaged in the process and so close to the experiences the TLs are going through that she might be viewed as a partner indeed. Chamberlin (2000) proposes that "the role of the supervisor has shifted from that of a detached expert to that of an engaged colleague who encourages teachers to talk about their work and reflect on their practice in a new way" (p. 656). This new way

represents the view from another person, one that might have a different perspective and come with, or else lead to an alternative that might be suitable to the difficulties faced by that teacher.

Furthermore, the feedback given to the TL may enhance the kind of reflection this teacher does of her work. But not only the content of this feedback is important, the way it is given also represents a crucial aspect for the bonds of this relationship to be strengthened. That means that the way things are said in the conversations between the TE and the TLs may hinder or improve the perception of trust teachers have of their coordinators.

The discussion to be carried out might be affected by the attitude of the TE depicted not only by what she says, but also how she says it, the verbal and nonverbal content of the discourse. Thus, a key point in this study is that TEs have to be aware of their communication strategies since they carry such an important role on the perception TLs have of their supervisor's attitudes. So, whenever a TE has to address the TLs she should bear in mind that certain nonverbal behaviors such as eye contact, head nods, smiles, direct body orientation and close proximity convey a relationship of affiliation and not one of dominance, the first being considered one that constitutes an environmental issue for trust perception from the teachers in their supervisors (Chamberlin, 2000). Nevertheless, this study should be considered not as a recipe for a TE's behavior, but as a tool for reflection of their own learning process as coordinators, to how their work might be improved in the sense that she is also undergoing a reflective

process in her approach to the teachers she is working with.

In this way, TEs and TLs might get a better understanding of the hassles of a continuous analysis of their practices, but at the same time notice how profitable this process may be as a more balanced approach could actually be put into practice. Henceforth, the institution might not be in danger of "an almost peaceful coexistence between antagonistic representations and strategies" (Perrenoud, 2002, p. 9). That means that teachers and supervisors might be more finely tuned about the procedures to be adopted and should consequently dialog more systematically about the conclusions of their reflections in a way to negotiate a comprehension of the pedagogical implications of their actions in the classroom.

## 2.2 - Action Research as a contribution to the theoretical-practical education of a language teacher

A continuous education process implies an investigation of our procedures throughout our practical work as teachers based on the theories which were studied so far. Besides, a sharing of this knowledge with other coworkers enables us to deconstruct and, later on, reconstruct the knowledge of language teaching in relation to the practice of teaching and learning a language. In this way, we may gain a level of autonomy that might create an independence as well as a more critical view of our procedures. As Moita Lopes

& Freire (1998) have stated, "education involves the ability to make critical choice, which will lead into emancipation, i.e., the ability to stand on one's own shoes" (p. 148). By achieving this level of autonomy by the teacher, the coordinator may find a peer to share more about the events of the classroom and the applicability of contents to certain groups.<sup>3</sup>

This awareness of the choice we may make of the contents to be studied by the different groups we teach makes it possible for teachers to have an approach which is more centered on the learning itself and not only on the content established by a particular textbook. Moita Lopes & Freire (1998) see "research practice as crucial for teacher development rather than an approach which solely relies on content courses" (p. 147). In this sense, the teachers involved in a critical reflection of their choices may leave an approach which is more textbook centered and head to one which is much more concerned with the learning of the students.

With the sharing and negotiation of the assumptions and decisions made by the teachers with other teachers and coordinators we might achieve a level of criticism that can lead us to a deeper investigation of the theories so as to question their relevance and the applicability they have in our particular contexts. Magalhães (1997) has argued that "teachers and/or coordinators learn how to become investigators of their own action while interacting with colleagues and/or researchers" (p. 169). In this

3) Part of this discussion was presented in a paper to be published in *Formas e Linguagens* - Vol. 3.



interaction, we may also analyze the power relation established by institutions to the coordinators as well as to the textbooks they have chosen. In other words, this implies that we may see teachers and coordinators as peers who can learn together through this kind of continuous education and professionals who are able to question, to adapt and even modify the textbooks proposed by the schools where they teach. This may be considered an innovation since traditionally the coordinators are placed in a superior and unquestioned position and the textbooks as bibles whose content could not be questioned. Moita Lopes & Freire (1998) propose that "if teachers are not ready to evaluate the adequacy of whatever is said to have relevance to their practice they are not really educated" (p. 148). Hence, it is a great challenge to break this belief since both coordinators, as mentioned before, and content courses are placed on top of the hierarchy in most schools in Brazil.

If we think of the conservative ways of teaching education, we find pre-service as well as in-service courses in which "first the teacher 'learns' the content, understood as truthful, universal and general to any context in order to, in a second moment, use it, apply it in his/her class" (Magalhães, 1997, p. 171). Without ever considering the context in which these elements - the teacher, students, school and textbook - are inserted, the teacher may present to students something which is not meaningful to them and consequently these learners can get unmotivated and henceforth, may not be able to achieve the goals that were established for them. According to Moita

Lopes & Freire (1998) "the underlying notion is therefore the need for participants to get cognitively involved with their action in a particular context where they act (i.e., to understand it) if they want to improve it" (p. 148). In this sense, action-research presents a possibility for reflection of what is suitable to which situation and to whom.

After this starting point, action research has another advantage to teachers' education in the sense that it gives not only the food for thought but also room for discussion among peers and coordinators, thus making it possible for collaborative work to take place. Magalhães (1997) has argued that:

*"To collaborate, either in relation to the researcher, to the teacher, to the coordinator or to the student, means to act in the sense to explain, make your values, representations, procedures and choices clearer, with the objective to make it possible for the other participants to make questionings, expansions, restatements of what is in negotiation."* (p. 173)

By doing this, we will be engaged in a collaborative knowledge construction which can enrich not only our development as "field workers", that is, people who are involved in the practice of teaching in the classroom with the students, but also the work of researchers who investigate our practices and formulate new theories of what teaching and learning are all about. Moita Lopes & Freire (1998) have proposed that research has the following objectives:

*"Besides fostering educational development by making teachers reflect*

on their work, it may also help university researchers to illuminate their findings by making use of teacher-constructed theories. In this sense, it is not only the school teacher who learns from the university (as traditionally conceived of), but also the university researcher who learns from school-produced knowledge." (p. 150)

So, this whole process is profitable to many subjects who can be actively engaged in the learning process, i.e., "teachers and coordinators and students become subjects instead of objects of the socio-historical process" (Magalhães, 1997, p. 172). We may insert here the researcher who will be closer to what happens in the classrooms as she may get much more relevant information from the teachers who are actually involved in the everyday reality of the schools. Henceforth, the negotiation that may take place is a richer one that might offer to all the involved parties an opportunity for a sound and deep reflection of the events of language learning and teaching.

It is in this negotiation that the discourse will be fundamental since it brings together with the words all the beliefs held by the participants. Magalhães (1997) has pointed out that "it is in the discourse among the participants of the discourse exchanges that matters from the real world are questioned, understood and rethought of" (p. 175). Also, this negotiation implies a choice of the focus of the investigation, in other words, it means that the teacher can establish a priority for her research that may be discussed with the coordinator to check whether that point is an actual priority or not.

Moita Lopes & Freire (1998) have stated that "negotiating/defining the research question is a crucial point. It starts by focussing on a general theme participants consider problematic in their practice until they can more specifically indicate the question they want to investigate" (p. 151). Thus, the negotiation that is a result of this discussion of establishing priorities is a moment of reflection in itself that can be shared with peers enabling teachers to make decisions on a more systematic and aware basis. Furthermore, it makes it possible for other questions that were not thought of previously to emerge and to present themselves as more relevant than the former ones.

Another aspect to be considered as an advantage of this kind of research is to see, besides the act of thinking over our procedures as a moment of reflection in itself, the description of our actions to our peers as an instance of awareness raising towards the whole process of education. Magalhães (1997) has claimed that "describing actions already implied a rethinking of practice" (p. 179). In this way, we may not only achieve an actual continuous knowledge construction process but also a continuous reflective teaching process. This has been proposed as well by Moita Lopes & Freire (1998) when they postulate that "research does not involve the finding out of a final answer. Quite on the contrary, it is a continuous process of reflection" (p. 163). Consequently, we may not expect teachers to come out with answers to whatever puzzles them, instead we should expect and look forward to their endeavors so as to investigate in their actions the possible reasons for



something to happen as well as an alternative for something which is not working as planned.

### 3 - Methodology

The primary data resulted from two questionnaires and three interviews conducted with the subject teacher. The questionnaires were applied in different moments of the process. The first one was answered in the beginning of the research and the second one more to the end of it. Two of the interviews were carried out in between the questionnaires so as to accompany the implementation of the proposed action-research and questionnaires which were answered by a group of her students. The third one was conducted at the very end of the research in order to present to her some of the results that were observed until that moment as well as to question her of her own conclusions of the process.

The subject has been a student of the school where she started teaching since 1998 and has always demonstrated a good mastering of the target language and a good attitude towards her learning process, with a very critical and committed view of education. In the end of 2000, she decided to do the college entrance examination for Foreign Languages at Unijuí. Since she started working in the language school run by myself, she has demonstrated a very positive work. She has agreed to carry out a further investigation on reflective teaching, but at this time focusing more on action-research. There is a shift in her profile from the previous paper to the current one as she started working in the

elementary level at a private regular school. Moreover, she has gone farther in her studies at the university. She is now approximately in the sixth semester of the course, so she has probably deepened both her linguistic and theoretical knowledge.

The choice of only one subject was the result of the difference in terms of her commitment with the implemented process since a more systematized involvement with research was intended to be developed in this paper. As for the school in which this study was conducted it is a franchising of Yázigi Intermexus, a company founded in São Paulo, Brazil, in 1950.

To better understand the continuous education process of this subject, some of her students were used as a secondary source for data collection. These pupils were from a pre-intermediate group with an average age of 15. As for the three students' questionnaires they were divided in different focuses in terms of the tool used for the investigation. In other words, in order to tackle one of the objectives of this paper, that was to investigate the depth of the impact of the research tools, the questions were separated in relation to video recording, the observation from the coordinator and the audio recording in this order. In their turn, the students had to give their impressions of the classes that were recorded or observed, so that I could verify the level of interference they felt.

### 4 - Results

The results are presented in a chronological order of implementation. Primarily, the first questionnaire which

updating and preparation for reaching the status of a good teacher, and that yet one is never ready, always to learn something new, something that can happen through a collaborative reflection of her practices.

*"In my practice, certain things that were observed as efficient were assimilated in this way, for them to occur again (naturally). While the things that did not work out as expected were reconsidered, since the idea is to try to have the best class as possible."*

As observed in the example, in terms of the reflection she made of her teaching since the beginning of the implementation of this project she has shown quite a positive attitude towards the use of an action-research through the observation and analysis of her practice.

Regarding the exchange of information with the coordinator she seemed to be more comfortable with the idea of being observed than she was in the previous work (Lanias, 2002). Perhaps this was made clearer to her in the meetings we had as I tried to emphasize that one of the main purposes of observing a class is to verify whether learning is taking place. Furthermore, in this case, another great goal in the observation practice was to research in action and reflect upon the findings in an interactive way with a shared view of the data collected. When asked about how she felt currently when she was observed by the coordinator she has stated that "I do not feel that the observation is of me (anymore), but of how learning is taking place". Here, we can observe that the word "anymore" reflects the kind of concern she had in the beginning of a personal observation which could perhaps

was conducted with the subject teacher is analyzed, relating the perceptions I had in relation to what she pointed out giving as examples some extracts from her remarks. Secondly, the results obtained from the questionnaires that were answered throughout the process by the students are reported taking into account the three different tools for the data collection. The analysis was done bearing in mind their considerations in a way to perceive the impact of such procedures. Thirdly, the second questionnaire results are exposed. Finally, I expound the analysis I have made of the instruments which were used as well as of the subjects of the research.

#### 4.1 - Analysis of the first questionnaire with the teacher: triggering the process

One of the most remarkable aspects of the subject's answers was her consistency in relation to the process. She could put in a very few words the importance she is giving to the continuous education process she is going through in her place of work. She admitted that she will not have finished this process when she graduates from her university course. Quite the contrary, in her words:

*"However, it is important to bear in mind that even after the end of the course I will not have all the information nor will be entirely prepared, because I believe the good teacher is never ready, but always in education and updating."*

So we can see how aware she seems to be of the necessity of continuous



underlie a fear of evaluation and approval by the coordinator. Currently, she seems to be more at ease with the fact that the observation may make us reflect about the ways of learning whether it happens or not.

When she was asked to what extent an analysis of the happenings of a class contribute for a reflection of her procedures, she pointed out that:

*"Analyzing what happens in a class makes it possible to prepare better a following class for the reality of that group. Thus, certain procedures will be thought of and adapted for that context."*

We can see here that she has achieved a level of reflection that takes into consideration more holistic aspects of a class and how the tasks should be carried out by those individuals. Although she has not specified exactly which aspects they were she seems to be aware of them as she used the terms "reality" and "context", which shows a concern for the social issues that are involved in these kinds of interactions. On top of that, she also seems to have reached a greater comprehension of the dynamics of classroom practice converging to what Burns (1999) has suggested. Therefore, she might be more prepared to make her decisions either for class planning or classroom interactions, as she appears to be more autonomous in a risk-taking process, thus enabling her students to achieve better learning results.

4) The questionnaires were designed to be answered in Portuguese so as to facilitate students' responses. The translation of all students' utterances was done attempting to maintain the same sort of sentence structures so as to preserve the integrity of their content.

attitudes. However, a great number of them did not notice any interference in the classes. And surprisingly, a few noticed that some classmates were more playful and that there was more excitement in the class so as to call attention in the recording.

As for the learners' sensations towards their participation they were divided in two main different impressions. The first one was that they wound up getting used to it; that there was not so much difference; that they were a little embarrassed, but that there was not so much change; and that it was slightly weird, but that they tried to act normally. One of the students who had this impression stated: *"It was unpleasant, I guess it didn't change my 'repercussion' in class, unless that I got quieter".* There are even some controversial concepts in his/her answer, since the fact of being quieter did not seem to be a change facing the discomfort of being recorded, which was quite remarkable to him/her. Also, the use of *repercussion* instead of *performance* denotes a strong evidence in terms of changes. The second one was that it was an unpleasant experience; that they were quieter; more attentive; that they participated less and that they were really embarrassed. A little less frequent was the impression that there was no shift at all. One of them even remarked that there was no change, but he/she was afraid of making mistakes.

In terms of modifications in the teacher's performance the great majority stated that there was no alteration whatsoever. However, some of them claimed that she became

nicer, one of them reported: *"She gets cooler than she already is".* Thus, it seems that her approval from the students is great and has even grown further. And also that she gave more attention to them when they had some doubts; that she explained things in more detail; and that she was more enthusiastic in the class. Some also made the same remark: that the teacher spoke more in English than she usually did.

#### 4.2.2 – Response to the Coordinator's Observation

Most of the students felt the classes were more productive, since the pedagogical coordinator also helped in their doubts; that it was nice; and that they did not feel bothered. *"The interference was productive as she is one more person to whom we can refer in case of a doubt, however initially it provokes a certain strange sensation because it is someone outside of the group".* After all, there seems to be some interference, as the coordinator does represent a shift in the class interaction since the students also come to her when in doubt and not only to their actual teacher. Hence, the authority of the teacher in charge is struck by the intervention of the coordinator when she takes the leading role as seen by some of the students who turned to her for help. Some others claimed there was not any change. Some of them reported that they were quieter than normally, that the class as a whole behaved better; and that it was less messy. A few of them described a sensation of being under pressure because there was someone watching them; somebody who was observing all their movements.

#### 4.2 – Impact of the research tools – students' views

There were three different questionnaires to be answered by fourteen students from one of the subject's groups. They did not have to identify themselves in their answering sheets, nevertheless some of them did. The first one which was applied was in relation to video recording. The second one was related to the pedagogical coordinator's observation. Lastly, the third one regarded the audio recording. The students were always told about the dates of recordings or observations beforehand and were questioned right after each instrument was applied in the end of that same class.

##### 4.2.1 – Reaction to the Video Recording

When the students were asked in the questionnaires<sup>4</sup> in relation to the interference in the classes that were recorded by a video camera, most of them reported they felt embarrassed, not at ease and were even quieter or more attentive than usual. In some answers this sensation was quite clear: *"We get shier and embarrassed, interfering a little in the reading aloud,... but on the other hand, during the recording the class was quieter and more attentive".* So, we may see how uncomfortable was the feeling of being observed by a video camera as well as the shift in their



The majority said they had a better performance with the presence of the coordinator as she could help them; that they liked it; and that they got more interested in the class. One of the pupils affirmed: *"I liked this observation, because she helped us, our tendency is to improve with that"*. We may notice that the observation process for this student represented an improvement to the class. On top of being a contribution to a teacher's professional development, the observation served as an enriching tool for the students' performance in the eyes' of this learner. One of them even stated that their behavior was more natural than when the video camera was there. Some reported being very embarrassed to answer any questions; that they were being observed and evaluated. A few of them said things were normal, with no alterations. Fewer stated that in the beginning it was strange, but this sensation vanished after some time; also that they feared being evaluated, but there was not any shift in the end.

The amazing figure here is that a vast majority felt that there was not modification in the teacher's performance, that she acted as always. However, we may wonder whether she felt the questionings by the learners to the coordinator have withdrawn from her the credibility from her pupils. The feeling of trust and complicity in the student/teacher relationship might be affected by someone who gets in between this. Just one of them remarked that she was a little more attentive towards their doubts. So, we may notice that what was felt in the teacher's answers in the questionnaires is confirmed here, that is, that she is much more comfortable

attempt to highlight the lack of interference from the audio-recording. Or else, it may show a preference to this procedure in relation to the other two. Perhaps a disguised effort to request for the abandonment of the other tools in their classes. A minority argued that they were not so different; that some of them behaved better; and that the repercussion was good. Another minority stated that there was something different, but it was not as bad as the video; also that they talked a bit less when they noticed they were being recorded.

When questioned about any shift in the teacher's performance they were almost unanimous. The great majority claimed the teacher did not have a different performance. One of the students uttered: *"I believe there was no change, at least I didn't notice any difference"*. Then again here the lack of impact may be felt. There was only one who remarked that she tried to make students talk one at a time. This shows that perhaps the student had the impression the teacher was concerned in being able to identify or understand all their utterances when she would listen to the tape. Notwithstanding this fact, we may notice that this tool was the one with the least interference and impact on the students. It appeared to be the one which was more accepted and viewed by the learners as more natural. As for the teacher, both the coordinator's observation and audio recording seemed to be well incorporated into her usual teaching.

#### 4.3 - Analysis of the second questionnaire with the teacher: going further into reflection

This questionnaire was answered approximately in the end of the research. That was so in order to compare the view the teacher had of the process more in the beginning to what she stated when the research was about to finish. As she was quite mature towards the procedures and underlying concepts of action research since the starting point, there were not so many changes to be perceived.

When questioned about her current view of the relation between theory and practice in her education, she stated that:

*"I do believe in the theory I study, that is, I think this theory really works and is the best known way to educate people. So, as I have lots of opportunities to practice it, and in two different contexts, I try to do it in my professional life."*

Primarily, she pointed out that she has been having the opportunity to practice the theory she has been studying at the university, that is, the communicative approach, at both of the places where she teaches. She said she believes this theory is the best one to "educate people". We may notice that despite the difficulties one might face in working with such methodological approach, she has embraced this challenge and has been trying to implement this at a regular school as well, where the context presents itself as quite difficult to be dealt with due to this context's complexity, such as the number of students per class and/or to the heterogeneity in terms of students' linguistic knowledge.

One of the aspects that was reoccurring was that she claimed to reflect upon the things that work best

with the observation process. On the other hand, the interference by the coordinator is not so disturbing for the learners in terms of embarrassment and that actually her impression of the student's perception of the observer as an intruder has not been confirmed. On the contrary, this procedure seemed to be at least less interfering than the video recording for the students.

#### 4.2.3 - Rapport with the Audio Recording

Almost all the students did not perceive any change in the classes. What was remarkable in some of their utterances was that they did not know or notice the tape recorder. The teacher explained that some of them arrived late on that day and might not have heard her tell about the audio recording, or else, they did not hear or pay attention when she made this remark. Only one of them compared this procedure with the other observations and stated that this one was more natural. In his/her words: *"Differently from the other observations the class got more natural"*. Therefore, we might observe that this research tool is the one to cause less impact and seems to bring more faithful and trustworthy information for the data collection, despite the fact of not being able to observe the nonverbal circumstances. According to Freeman (1998), this can be a disadvantage as some important body language expressions might be missed.

Once more here, almost the majority did not notice a shift in their participation. One even reinforced that: *"I kept being as I am, I didn't change in absolutely anything"*. This emphasis may depict an



and the ones that do not. In her words: *"Basically, the most important result is that I try to keep the good aspects observed, and improve the bad ones"*. Therefore, what can be noticed is that she understands there were good results so far. However, she does not mention to have had any reflection about the reasons for having activities which work well and others that do not. Perhaps she still needs to have more experience with distinct groups so as to see that some practices might work with some better than with others. Besides, although she recognizes she is in process of education she used the word "formed" for being educated. What she refers to here seems to be in terms of product, and the goal of this research is to focus on the process. Or else, we may wonder whether she feels that the follow up from the coordinator is one which should shape the profile of the teacher or one that can be co-constructed through a sharing of beliefs and analysis of procedures.

When asked about her feelings in being the subject of a research she recognized her initial fears and her further shift in attitudes in relation to the action research process:

*"At first, I liked the idea and realized its meaningfulness for me as a teacher, but I didn't feel very comfortable with the fact that I would be observed and (probably) deeply analyzed. However, as the time was passing and I was getting nowadays I feel normal with my role as subject of a research."*

An aspect which was not mentioned before by her in the previous questionnaires and interviews, was that

she stated she has had a change in her belief throughout the studying of theories: *"the very big importance of the pedagogical knowledge, despite the language knowledge"*. She used the word "missed" for expressing the sensation she had of lacking this assumption in the beginning of her professional life.

Her perception about her development until the moment is quite positive and she believes action research has an implication on that. She reported that: *"I see myself as a not-ready person (sic), someone who is in a process of transformation"*. This was already perceived in the first questionnaire, but further on she was even more emphatic about it:

*"I think I've been improving simply by the fact that I can face the whole process more impartially and comfortably nowadays. What should come is the habit of observing myself spontaneously, and not only when I'm required to do so."*

Subsequently, the word "simply" might represent her perception of a professional growth as she can notice how mature she is becoming, that she does not consider the observation and analysis of her practice as something which may judge her as a person, but rather a procedure which might contribute for the practical implementation of the theories she has been studying. On top of that, she herself has stated the desire to carry on with such practice in a spontaneous way, then a basic requirement for a continuity for this process has arisen here, the willingness to do so.

#### 4.4 - Analysis from the Pedagogical Coordinator of the subjects' questionnaires

The action research instruments were effective in the sense that I could observe how involved the teacher, subject of this study, was in the implementation of a systematic procedure. As she once more seemed to be very committed to all the phases of the process, I believe I succeeded in the endeavor to at least entice her to always seek for a continuation of her education process and for herself to research about her practical experience. Burns (2002) argues that through action research teachers "learn more about how to tackle different aspects of teaching". She appeared to be able to do so. This conclusion is drawn from the sort of answers she gave to the questionnaires and interviews that were conducted with her. Furthermore, she was even motivated to carry on the recordings and subsequently the answering of the questionnaires by the students. She proved to be quite responsible as she was always asking me about the dates and necessary equipment for the conduction of the research tasks.

On the other hand, the use of an instrument for the learners to give their perceptions did not appear to be as efficient as some of the students seemed to be a little reckless when answering the questionnaires. This was my impression because some answered the questions as quickly as they could and were not so serious in their assertions. Despite the fact of knowing that learners do not usually have the expected commitment towards this sort of research, I still expected more from them as they

were told about the importance of such project and are part of an environment where they are not obliged to study, that is, this kind of language course is taken by those who make an option to go further in their studies of a foreign language, not to mention the fact that just a few families can afford this extra expense in our country's current economic reality. Another fact that may have hindered their involvement is that most of them are quite young, with an age range of about 15 years of age.

As for the tools which were adopted for this specific research, I believe all of them served their purpose well. The questionnaires enabled me to investigate the sort of utterances made by both the teachers and students. They did not seem to have any doubts or difficulties about the questions. The interviews and meetings with the teacher made it possible for me to reanalyze and question any kind of discrepancy in hers or the students' answers. One example was the one about the students not knowing about the audio recording. The observation and recordings of the classes were quite useful so as to investigate the assumptions the teacher and I had about these procedures.

#### 5 - Conclusions

This paper had the purpose of seeing to what extent the research which was developed previously (Lanias, 2002) had contributed for the involvement of the studied subject in a reflective teaching process, being able then to evaluate the procedures and the approach used by the observer. The evaluation should reconsider the whole process once more and in some way assess what was



appropriate and efficient for this subject and the researcher herself. Moreover, another goal of this investigation was to have a further study of an action research practice.

The research as a whole was a great contribution for me as I had the opportunity to rethink many of my procedures not only as a coordinator but also as a teacher since one can always perceive in the others some of the actions that are habitual and common to many of us. Besides, it served as a reflection for the sort of research I have been producing in the last two years, for I do believe that it was extremely rewarding to continue in the same area of investigation. This was so because it could make a difference for myself as a student in a post-graduation course and for some colleagues to whom I could at least report a little about the richness of a shared and collaborative way of developing oneself in a continuous teaching/learning education.

What was perceived so far was that the benefit of a reflective practice which enables the teacher to have a continuity in her education is one of the results of an action research practice. The success of the relationship between the TL and TE which consists of a sharing of information and experiences in an amicable level appears to be one of the key elements for an effective participation of a teacher in such a project. According to Thiolent (1986) and Moita Lopes, Freire (1998) action research suggests the participation of a researcher, who acts as a consultant, so as to propose to the subject of the research the mediation between her theoretic-methodological knowledge

and her practical knowledge. And this was one of the achievements of this research, in other words, the dialog the subject of this research and I had was constantly of a great atmosphere, as she responded to the exchanges of data and analysis in a very spontaneous way and I could perceive in myself a more natural way to implement an action research process. We could establish a negotiation in which both parties had an active and decisive voice. She was not only the subject of my research anymore, she was a subject of her own investigation. Rocha and Freire (2001) argue that: "regarding the teacher student, the action research methodology allows her to reflect systematically about many of the conflicts she experiences, it also allows her to become a subject of her own education process" (p. 97). I believe that this teacher did so. She was quite aware of all the steps to be taken and assumed the responsibility of facing this challenge with a lot of effort and dedication. Hence, I may say she was active indeed throughout the whole project.

This active position in itself demonstrates that such procedures provoked a shift in a TL who was slightly insecure in the beginning of her career around two years ago to a solid profile, a professional who endeavors to consider all the facets of any of her actions, all the implications of any of her decisions. Rocha and Freire (op. cit.) claim that those who engage themselves in action research abandon a passive attitude of non-reflective consumers of methods and theories. Though in this subject's case the situation was somewhat different. She always seemed to be quite critical in whatever it was she was involved with.

a reflective thinking into her practice. What is more, she appears to be dealing with the uncertainties of education in a very positive way. As Rocha and Freire (op. cit.) have stated "engaging oneself in a systematic action research process does not mean to say that the teacher student will be immune to any kind of conflict" (p. 103). Quite the contrary, it generates a lot of polemic discussions, therefore it leads the involved participants into reflection and further action towards the issues in question. Furthermore, the new outcomes may lead to new reflections and so on and so forth, taking the reflective process to a cycle which never ends. In this way, the meaning of the word continuous deserves its actual understanding. A continuous education that will be in development in an infinite scale.

In this sense, we can notice that she does not fear being judged or evaluated anymore. Rather, she intends to make this procedure a habitual thing when she herself decides to do the research, not solely when asked to so. In other words, she seems to have incorporated

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- UMA BREVE CONSIDERAÇÃO SOBRE O MORFEMA "WA" DA LÍNGUA JAPONESA, DO PONTO DE VISTA DE SUAS PERSPECTIVAS MÚLTIPLAS – NO ENSINO DA GRAMÁTICA COMO L2/LE\***
- Yuki Mukai  
UnB
- Resumo:** Para o ensino e a aquisição de uma L2/LE, a gramática no sentido restrito (i.e., os fatores morfosintáticos) é fundamental, porém, deve-se abordá-la à luz de perspectivas lingüísticas múltiplas, tais como a perspectiva semântica, pragmático-funcional, cognitiva, para que não apenas os professores possam traçar as características peculiares e complexas de um fenômeno lingüístico, de forma mais completa e segura, mas que também os aprendizes possam compreendê-las de forma clara e sistematizada.
- Keywords:** SLA/Foreign language acquisition; multiple linguistic perspectives; Japanese Language's grammar teaching; Japanese grammatical particle "wa".
- 0. Introdução**
- Este trabalho tem como objetivo corroborar a posição teórica referente ao ensino de L2, apresentada por Scarcella & Oxford (1992: 248), segundo a qual "a gramática é a base do ensino da língua comunicativa (a ênfase é nossa)", principalmente para os aprendizes adultos, sobretudo para os estudantes universitários. Em outras palavras, a gramática é um dos fatores mais importantes não apenas para a língua escrita, mas também para a língua falada.
- Abstract:** The grammar in the restrict sense (i.e., the morpho-syntactic factors) is fundamental for the SLA/foreign language acquisition and teaching, but it is also necessary to consider it from the multiple linguistic perspectives as a semantic, pragmatic-functional and cognitive perspective in order for not only the teacher

1) Neste estudo, a L2 refere-se não apenas à segunda língua, mas também à língua estrangeira-alvo (LE), em sentido amplo. Entretanto, normalmente, se diferenciam essas duas noções. Ex.: caso se aprenda o inglês nos países ou sociedade em que se fala/utiliza a mesma língua → L2; caso se aprenda o inglês nos países ou sociedade em que não se fala/utiliza a mesma língua → língua estrangeira-alvo (LE).