

Ruptures and Continuities in Teaching Training Courses: An experience in the classrooms of an EFL Teachers' Training Course¹

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Summary

In his search for ways of making sense on how knowledge is constructed, Jerome Bruner considered culture as a tool for opening the doors to reality; which allows for its understanding, and thus our way to accessing to knowledge (Geertz, 2001: 22). Culture imbues our lives, and as a consequence the way we build our knowledge. And narratives are the most natural and earliest way in which we organize our experience and our knowledge (Bruner, 2000: 140). Approaching Teachers of a Foreign Language Education, especially English language, from a critical perspective is a real challenge. The purpose of this paper is to analyze a narrative experience in

that sense. This experience took place within the English Teachers' Training Course at the School of Humanities, Mar del Plata State University, and it turned into a liberating experience in a Freirian sense for those involved in it.

Key words: Knowledge Construction - Culture - Resignification of Contents - Narrative - Critical Education.

Received: 25/06/14
First evaluation: 18/07/14
Second evaluation: 10/08/14
Accepted: 15/08/14

Introduction

Those involved in the field of education, from the theoretical, research or practice perspectives, cannot avoid wondering in what ways human beings construct meaning in order to understand the world around them. This is perhaps, the main concern in the search for tools that will guide us in the construction of knowledge. Jerome Bruner found in culture the tool that opens the door to reality, that allows for understanding reality and ourselves, and in this way, to get “to know” (Geertz, 2001: 22). Culture imbues our lives, and as a consequence, the way in which we construct our knowledge.

In this respect, the education of a foreign language teacher poses a real a challenge if we try to approach practice from a critical perspective. This process is challenged by the fact that language is culture (Kramsh, 2001: 4). Moreover, according to Vygotsky, learning a language not only allows for the communication of ideas that have already been conceived but also helps reframe those ideas in ways that had not yet been unveiled (Olson, 2001:110)

The aim of this paper is to analyze an experience that took place in the context of the Teacher Training Course at the Humanities Faculty in the National University of Mar del Plata. The class revolved around narratives of students which turned into a liberating experience in a Freirian sense for those involved in it.

Narratives and critical education

Not only does Bruner consider culture as a momentous factor in the structuring of knowledge, but he considers narrative as the earliest and most natural way in which we structure it (Bruner, 2000: 140). In this sense, and due to the universal characteristics this author assigns to them, narratives give shape to the realities they create. These characteristics include dealing with a time structure, being segmented by *pivotal* events and being adjusted to genres in spite of being particular cases. (Bruner, 1990:152-155). Moreover, narrative actions involve intention since they are motivated by beliefs and values. Nevertheless, they do not determine completely the course of the narrative because narratives have multiple meanings and are always open to interpretation. In order to be worth narrating, they have to break with what is set, with the *canonical*: make strange what is familiar; make us consider new what was taken for granted (Bruner, 1990:159). These traits make narratives an ideal vehicle for the process of education.

As a consequence, the methodological source for the analysis of this experience follows the narrative approach as designed and followed by Bolívar, Domingo & Fernández and by Connelly & Clandinin. The nature of this narrative approach in educational research is based in Dewey’s idea that education, experience and life are closely interweaved (Dewey, 1998:113). Connelly and Clandinin

(1996:29) argue that narrative is the way experience is enacted and that individuals tell stories about those experiences which constitute their lives. So lives of those who inhabit the educational realm are translated in field texts and narratives about their lives and experiences by educational researchers which make evident the relationship between those life experiences and education.

In that sense experiences lived in the institutions where the prospective teachers are educated constitute the threshold of their future practices. Elbaz-Luwich considers that those practices will take form by articulating stories in the classroom with the future teachers' knowledge, values, feelings and personal aims. Those narratives would in time become collective, as they embrace their working environments' traditions and the social, cultural and historical context they inhabit. While teachers develop as professionals, the voice in their story defines itself among a polyphonic number of voices: their own voice, other teachers' voices, parents' voices, students' voices, staff and members of the government voices, as well as the politicians' and the general public's voices (Elbaz-Luwich, 2002:406). In these stories, the teacher's biography will appear echoing their school and university experiences.

According to Litwin (2009:37), the restoration of those voices and the understanding of learning as the interpretation and reinterpretation of those experiences will allow their ongoing professional growth and the breeding of a critical attitude, since

teachers play a fundamental role in building a democratic and ethical public space. For that purpose, teachers count on a precious tool for practice and enquiry... "Narratives come to our aid in understanding teaching problems in a more humane dimension and in reckoning the true sense of pedagogical contributions to the understanding of our career"(Litwin, 2009:77).

In this case, research attempts at problematizing daily work and to favor the questioning not only of theories, but of the given, the traditional, the inherited, everything that has been naturalized in the course of school biographies, for students as well as teachers. Education is never neutral, that is the reason why it is relevant to become aware of our own ideological matrix and the possibility of questioning it. This vision arises from the teaching of critical educational theorists. They think of schools as a reality that has been socially constructed and they insist on the need of emancipatory teachers, transformative intellectuals who are capable of building counter-hegemonic spaces in their classrooms (McLaren & Giroux, 1998).

Bourdieu and Passeron (1995) had been forerunners of these ideas with their notions of symbolic violence in education as well as Althusser (1996) and his conceptualization of school as part of the ideological state apparatus. Bourdieu and Passeron take categories framed by Marx, Engels (1970) and Gramsci (2000, 2004) and put emphasis in the cultural or the symbolic. The argue that the social and cultural capital that

students carry with them will determine their success or their failure within the educational system, which in turn would result in the reproduction ad infinitum of the prevailing social conditions. Nevertheless, that pessimistic, even unconcerned vision of a system with no way out would find an alternative in the principles of a great Latin-American educator: Paulo Freire. He took a critical stand towards the idea of education as training for labor market in a utopic process of development in the Third World Countries and he advocated for the possibility of an education that would induce the oppressed consciousness and thus, question the establishment.

Since Freire's work (1997, 2002, 2005) and his fusion of Liberation Theology and the School of Frankfurt Critical Theory, Critical Pedagogy resumes the progressive ideas in education (Kincheloe 2008:30) stated by John Dewey (1998). In the occasion of his debate with Walter Lipman in 1922, Dewey established that research, dialogue and dissent are fundamental for what he describes as *radical political action* which is essential for the rule of democracy. (Fleury, 2011:73). As a consequence, this movement provides education with moral and political dimensions which help the comprehension of what happens inside the classroom and how this is related to the social, political and economic external forces that determine these events (Giroux, 2008:20). For this reason they advocate resistance against the *banking* conception of education.

This idea deny the human condition of the subjects of teaching, they are considered empty vessels where content knowledge is *deposited*. According to Freire, the weapon for resistance is dialogue. Through it, people meet the world and negotiate with it in search of knowledge, turning it into a critical and emancipator dialogue. This dialogue refers to communication that does not enforce, does not manipulate but builds upon cooperation, opposing oppression (Freire, 2005:219).

Building on these concepts, a group of educational theorists living in developed countries returned to Freirean tradition and proposed to enlarge the allocation of the Third World's Pedagogy of the Oppressed to the First World's consumers' society. Giroux (1993, 1998), McLaren (1994, 1997) and Apple (1996, 1997, 2008) made Freire popular and furthered his reading in a western globalized society. Henry Giroux criticizes the tendency to reduce teachers to the status of technicians, with just the necessary skills to apply the curriculum. He describes the *proletarianization of teacher's work* which is evident in the training of prospective teachers. Instead of learning how to reflect on the principles that structure life and classroom practice, future teachers are taught, according to this author, only methodologies that deny the actual need for critical thinking (Giroux 2001:62). To oppose this technical rationale, critical educational theorists propose teachers as transformative intellectuals. Moreover, for them, schools are far from being neutral

sites: the mere fact of selecting content knowledge and the way it should be transmitted, of imposing rituals and rules, make these institutions public spaces that aim at legitimizing *specific ways of social life*. This reality claims for active and reflexive professionals with the objective of educating intellectual citizens for a free and democratic society. Teachers as critical intellectuals will be the agents of change and will contribute to make school a crucial counter-hegemonic space.

In addition, Michael Apple (1996) emphasizes how the connection between culture and power is key to preserve hegemonic relationships through education. Traditional or canonic culture is imbued by social norms that enforce and reinforce *status quo*. This is the reason why neoliberal groups fiercely defend it as the core of schools curriculum and demand its strict application. Apple reformulates the notion of hidden curriculum coined by Jackson (2001) to describe the way in which schools perform the reproductive function of the established order, teaching in an implied manner norms and values through everyday lives at school. According to Apple, behind the discourse that favors training for work and making schools more efficient, lies an attack on egalitarian and democratic values. Apple considers that the idea of *the* consumer is key. Education becomes another product, subject to the ups and downs of the market, and thus the destitute are assured the right to *choose* only schools in the outskirts, with few material and professional resources. In addition, the

abundance of regulations, and national mandatory evaluation instances make evident the lack of trust and the loss of social prestige that teachers are subject to, favoring social reproduction in the terms already established (Apple, 2006). By the same token, McLaren highlights the role of discourse in the creation, preservation and reframing of power relations (Pruyn & Huerta-Charles, 2005: xxiv). McLaren chooses the term Revolutionary Critical Pedagogy focusing on two main concepts: imperialism, economic as well as military, and the status labor holds in a capitalist society. He attempts, along with other similar theorists, to build a theoretical framework that would allow for the generation of concrete educational spaces, inside and outside schools, where the fight for change and transformation could take place. (Moraes, 2006:112).

The works of educational critical theorists, mainly Freire, Giroux, Apple y McLaren, consider schools as a reality socially constructed. As such, it may act as a vehicle for social and cultural reproduction when inhabited by teachers educated in a technocratic doctrine or as a vehicle for change when inhabited by teachers educated as transformative intellectuals. For the latter case, we consider essential to develop opportunities in which the future teachers are required to exercise critical thinking. Narratives as a classroom tool may bring about that opportunity if managed by teachers who use them as a means for dialogue and critical reflection.

Narratives as a tool for research and prospective teachers' education

When analyzing XXI century pedagogical theories, Kincheloe (2008) makes a synopsis of a whole trend of thinkers coming from very different origins that work in the field of Critical Pedagogy. They place language in a central place, since it is conceived as a social practice, which is neither neutral nor objective, and that has the potential to turn into a tool for domination and control. As a result, culture is understood as a place for struggle, always in relation to power and domination. Therefore, the process of construction and transmission of knowledge is imagined in terms of conflict. Not only research, but the subject's own perspective is considered as subject to interpretation. In this way, a critical hermeneutics is born which may help in giving sense to the world. This will be possible if the mechanisms of domination and oppression that the hegemonic cultural production induces are brought into the spotlight (Kincheloe, 2008).

Davini states that only a few relationships among individuals can reveal the way power relationships work as an educational site does, since in this case action is always supported by a set of values (Davini, 2001:53-54). Therefore, the human connections established and the way in which teachers and students build their knowledge in a Teaching Training Course will be paramount in the education of future teachers.

The strong emphasis Bruner (2000:58) gives to the narrative nature of thoughts, experience and education springs from the need to approach education from a perspective that comprises it both as an object of study and at the same time as a methodological approach. That is why Connelly and Clandinin (1994) present the metaphor of reconstruction for teachers' training. They imagine teachers' education as a way of rethinking and reconstructing the past. Teachers need a retrospective view on their lives and an interpretation of their teaching and learning experiences as part of their personal practical and experiential knowledge that constitute their identity and are embodied in their classroom performance (Clandinin, 1986; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). In order to educate future teachers as transformative intellectuals that will accomplish the development of counter-public democratic spheres within our schools (McLaren & Giroux, 1998:12-13) we need to incorporate students' personal experiences through their own narratives. This practice will enable the critical analysis of their underlying ideologies. Providing a voice to those fluid experiences is the motive of this paper. (Álvarez, Porta & Sarasa 2009; 2010)

In this case, we can approach narratives from different perspectives. The object of study or case study is the production of narratives in the context of an English Language class in the English as a Foreign Language Teachers' Training Course. At the same

time, we will make use of a narrative methodology, collecting for our data the written accounts the students produced about that class, and oral interviews with the teachers in charge.

The narratives in question were part of the linguistic, cultural and teaching training at the EFL Teachers' Training Course at the School of Humanities in National University in Mar del Plata. Overall Communication, the subject where the narratives were produced, is part of the Linguistic Abilities area which originally focuses in developing the four macro abilities, or skills, inherent to the language: speaking skills, listening skills, writing production and reading comprehension. In addition the teachers in charge of the subject believe that it is also necessary the development of a fifth skill: cultural competence (Calvete, 2006:272).

The teaching of culture in the target language is and has always been controversial. Following Kramersch, we believe that the teaching of culture in a foreign language flows from the tendency to strive for universality and the desire to maintain cultural particularity, facing the dilemma between emphasizing common features or the differences between local culture and the target language culture (Kramersch, 1996). The author points to the fact that we usually teach culture and language, and not language as part of culture. In this way, culture is only embodied as long as it reinforces differences with the *other*, not to revise them. Kramersch proposes the concept of *social process of enunciation* coined

by Bhabha (1992:57). The idea is to approach the teaching of culture with the aim of revealing the codes under which the encounters between native and non native speakers work. This is a dialogical process that attempts at placing the teaching of culture in a breaking point, a third space of hybrid characteristics that enforce an ongoing dialogue and at the same time questions the ideological foundations of difference (Kramersch, 1996).

With this purpose in mind, Overall Communication syllabus is organized around the cultural contexts of English Speaking countries, where English is spoken as a first or second language, but which may or may not belong to the First World. In the case we are studying, the narratives that were produced after watching and analyzing two films, with their respective watching guides which had been elaborated by the chair's lecturer. The topic addressed was the struggle that gave birth to the Irish Free State (1916-1922). Even though the themes of the films proposed are similar, they embody different kinds of representation as regards context of production, genre and approach. *Michael Collins* (Jordan 1996), inspired in great men's narratives, portrays the epic life of one of the time's heroes, Michael Collins. On the other hand, *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* (Loach 2006) is a domestic narrative focusing on the private relationship between two brothers in the midst of the Irish War of Independence (1919-1921) and the ensuing Civil War (1922-1923). To sum up, they represent

two different ideas as regards the role individuals play in History. (Calvete & Sarasa, 2009:2).

The narratives obtained during November 2011 emerge from these two different conceptions. McEwan and Egan consider the ability to narrate as a previous condition for more complex ways of thinking (McEwan & Egan, 1998:12, 14). Probably that is the reason why narration is part of educational tradition, so much so, that according to Jackson, students of all ages spend a great amount of their time at school listening to stories (Jackson, 1998:25). The effects of these stories are unpredictable, though sometimes they might be transformative. Even though the effectiveness of pedagogical practice is hardly measurable, we may consider that some stories enable the possibility for students to dive in their own thoughts, to awaken their intellectual desire and offer a pleasant experience deserving repetition (Jackson, 1998:48). These are reasons that make the use of stories in the classroom worth implementing. Bearing in mind this possibility, the teachers in charge of Overall Communication designed the experience for the students who took the course during 2011.

After a thorough theoretical reading that enabled the students' appropriation of categories that allow them to make a definition of a hero, a whole class was dedicated to tell the stories of great people that the students chose. After that, a radically different proposal was made: the following class the students would narrate stories about small men and women that did not fit those categories, but whose

lives were worth telling. This exercise is framed in the narrative reflective practice proposed by Clandinin, Steeves and Chung (2008:62) to encourage a critical revision of practices in future teachers. In this way, the teachers attempt to guide the future teaching practice of the students as transformative intellectuals giving space to counter-hegemonic spaces in the classroom through a dialogic proposal that respect the needs and decisions of students (Calvete, 2006:271).

The class developed exclusively around the students work. The classroom atmosphere created by the activity, the bonds enforced among students and teachers and the emotions that took place during the class made the teachers ask the students, without having considered the possibility beforehand, to reflect about the experience and put it in writing. Those narratives that represent what the students lived and the reflections ensuing about their future teaching practice triggered the emergence of categories that opens the door to a deeper analysis about the importance of experiences in the classroom and their influence in the identity formation process and practices of the prospective teachers.

Narratives as instances of critical thinking

The students were given an assignment: to research and prepare a story about someone whose life, even though not considered heroic, deserved to be told. The instructions were brief, giving a wide range of freedom for

the students to choose the object and organization of their narration. The category *hero* had been already defined by previous readings and analysis of the above mentioned films as men who had exhibit extraordinary characteristics and who deserved popular admiration, and whose lives had a messianic character to the eyes of their followers (O' Giolláin, 2006).

The idea of finding somebody who did not have any of these features but nevertheless had a story worth telling, produced *uncertainty* in the students. They had been warned by the Lecturer that the class would depend entirely on their work, so that *uncertainty* was also present in the teacher. She knew that the success of the class depended absolutely on the students and who considered the situation a real challenge. We consider that this category, highlighted by lecturer, teachers' assistant and students is relevant since it is the product of the displacement of the teacher from the center of the class. This movement allowed the students to express freely what they had chosen. Moreover it gave them the opportunity to create a space for reflection and growth or to get lost in a vacuum where the possibility to build knowledge would dilute in the artificial exchanges of mechanical practice of the target language. The students took that possibility of empowerment from dialogue in Freire's terms and lived an experience they considered memorable.

During the class, dialogue was not only established among students and teacher, or among themselves, but with their past, their present as students and

the way in which they imagined their future professional practice. When Litwin refers to the importance of narratives in a teacher's education, she highlights recovering stories, traditions, and ways of thinking and doing (2009:19), which made that outcome possible. In addition, Clandinin, Steeves and Chung (2008) make reference to three perspectives from which this can be asserted. First, they consider teachers knowledge is narrative, placing it in their past experiences, in their minds and their present practices, and in the future as they see it. Second, this knowledge is expressed in life narratives told in complex contexts, which they call *professional knowledge landscape*. Finally, they imagine teachers' education as a productive site for research held on teachers and students narratives. That is why they describe it as:

a process of learning to tell and retell educational stories of teachers and students. We imagine teacher education as a sustained conversation in which we need many responses, from diverse others, in order to be able to tell and retell our stories with added possibilities. We imagine these conversations to be with theory, research, social conditions, people from diverse cultural groups, and people positioned differently on the landscape... (Clandinin, Steeves & Chung, 2008:62)

The authors, when describing similar experiences, focus on the importance of creating spaces for narration in teachers' training courses. Hence a community that provides sustained answers is built, a community where emotion and mutual vulnerability trigger the emotional, moral and spiritual conditions provided by the narratives under our scope.

The initial lack of certainty gave way to a cooperative and respectful environment that turned in time into an authentic need to engage in the dialogue that surpassed -in time and space- the class itself. After the first stories were told, the hesitant attitude of the students became surprise, since most of them had chosen to speak about relatives: parents, grandparents, great grandparents, brothers and sisters. The teacher expressed that “when they started feeling more at ease, they dared more... They found points of coincidence in the stories they had to tell”. The accounts of students and teachers agreed in the *fluency* with which the stories were told. The teachers’ assistant said that “a story connected with the other, characters and situations were related...one led to the other”. The empathy generated by the *un-heroic* lives stories, filled with difficulties, joy, sadness and good and bad times, made many students change their original choices and decide to tell relatives’ stories that deserved to be shared. One of the students argued that “I believe that we chose to speak about our families because we all admire the ability to overcome hardships or behave bravely”. Moving stories followed one after the other: grandparents who had been abandoned or abused but could overcome that behavior and become caring parents and grandparents, grandmothers confronted with the *desaparición* of their children and the need to support and raise their grandchildren, parents who were forced to emigrate and made their way in faraway lands, not speaking the local language,

or who pursued an ideal in spite of the obstacles and hard times... The students created the empathic environment needed for the class development. Another student considered that “During the class we connected... as real human beings. Many, including me, cried when we listened to the stories”.

The category of *humanity*, arising from the dialogue and the shared values in the small heroes’ narratives chosen by the students, refers to the need of a humane and liberating education, which is a key element of a renewed curriculum. This new trend responds to the need to educate teachers who are active, critical, reflexive, who are aware of the changing social needs of their students (Torres, 2009: 97). In this context, language becomes the cornerstone in the role of transformative intellectuals prospective teachers will play, since according to Antelo, “language establishes ties. Intellectual function consists of bringing together, of linking, of proposing grammars and language games. The invention of symbols, school rituals, the presence of words with libidinal connotation such as homeland, nation, justice. Artifacts that establish ties” (Antelo, 2005:131).

Learning a foreign language has a clear objective: a command of the language that would provide the learner with the possibility of a real, fluid and successful communication. Paradoxically, in order to attain that objective, learning instances that students are offered and that seek the *practice* of the target language turn into unreal situations,

most of the time forced and lacking in motivation. The students at the Teaching Training Course are subject to these kind of practices again and again, communicative practices which in fact communicate very little. One of the peculiarities of a Foreign Language Class is that “students communicate among them in real and simulated classroom activities” (Álvarez, 2006:253). Álvarez argues that in an English class we can distinguish real instances of communicative interaction, that are usually related to its organization, and others that constitute a representation and that could be considered real “only in terms of the fictional contract proposed in the class” (Álvarez, 2006:253). According to the author, this is so since the foreign language class is a speech act in its own right, which functions under an implicit contract among the participants and that, makes possible verbal exchanges that would be considered absurd or senseless outside the classroom. Nevertheless, that implicit contract should not overshadow the role of language as a means for knowledge construction, avoiding dialogue in a Freirian sense and giving way to what critical pedagogy describes as reproduction of the status.

In the case we are analyzing, the instances of communication were *real*. The accounts of the class agree when they consider the communication achieved different from what they usually live in the classrooms, giving it a more profound, social, and definitely more *human* sense. The students remarked that “we had the opportunity to express

freely what we feel and think”. In a context where language is at the same time means and object of study, the habit of monitoring discourse, our own as well as and others’ constitutes the norm and this results in the predominance of the form over the content. In addition, the limit set to the construction of knowledge by language stated by Bruner (2000:34) in one of his tenets (constrains), is reinforced not only because the means to attain that knowledge is not the native language, but because big efforts are made to express it in a formally appropriate manner. Nevertheless, in their retellings of the class, the students stated that the enthusiasm they had to communicate their stories and the emotion they felt made them abandon the naturalized self-monitoring practice to focus in the content of what their partners, teachers and they themselves wanted to tell. They argued they felt the need to be spontaneous, that they had forgotten their concern with grammar and pronunciation. According to the teacher in charge, the true interest in achieving a real communication became highly significant. This sensation of being able to *really communicate* in a highly effective way was for many of the students an epiphany, a new way of understanding the liberating potential of a language they struggle to master.

The role of the teacher in charge was seminal in shaping the environment that made the development of the class possible. She moved from the center of the scene and stated that “it depended absolutely on the students”. She let the students take control of the class, but

they felt the teacher was responsible for that unique setting. This displacement, *keeping her mouth shut* in Finkel's terms, guaranteed for the students an opportunity for authentic inquiry (Finkel, 2008:87, 108), motivating real interest on their part, and with it, the construction of knowledge. At the same time, the distance taken by the teacher produced a physical and emotional reshaping of the classroom: she quitted the place in front of the group and took part of it, resigning her being the focus of attention. This new configuration has many advantages, such as the possibility for the students to focus their attention completely on the object of their work, in this case the stories. It also enabled the teacher to evaluate the actual learning potential of the students, since they had given up their self-monitoring usual practice and could communicate in a natural way. According to Finkel, the social character of the experience gives this kind of classes a profound emotional turn, characteristic also evident in the students' and teachers' accounts of the class (Finkel, 2008:87-179).

The narration made by the teacher about a relative just as another member of the group had as an effect the feeling that students and teacher were all at the same level, that the boundaries between them had been erased. This borders are establish by a banking idea of education (Freire, 1997:93; 2005:84). This conception establishes hierarchies where those who transmit knowledge are above those who receive it. One of the students stated that "listening to the teacher tell her story, eager to share with

us her own stories, not ashamed of being emotional in front of the class, and making us share her emotion, made us proud of having such a teacher". This feeling of leveled positions was perceived not only by the students. It is perhaps the product of the teacher's principles. By giving the choice, preparation and execution of the narratives that made up the chore of the class exclusively to the students she made them responsible for their own learning processes. She made them feel they were in charge of the class. The experience made the students aware of the importance of creating environments defined by Bartolomé as "psychologically healthy, culturally sensitive, humanizing, and self-empowering" (Bartolomé, 2008:387). Most importantly, the creation of a democratic environment for the construction of knowledge, with the possibility for the students to make their own choices and participate freely, led some students to understand their future practice as transformative intellectuals, as real social change agents: "I realized how powerful we can be as future teachers since we can teach much more than a language in class".

This is precisely one of the purposes the teacher in charge has for the class "I think I provide with a role model that is what they need". Thus, it is not by chance that she relates her biography as a student and teacher with the fact that she approached Critical Pedagogy because of her practice in this course and with the encouragement of the subject chair. She had been her tutor during the teacher's postgraduate studies and they

have produced research papers related to their experiences during the course. From her actual experience the teacher in charge of the class approached theory and dealt with it in depth through research. She argues that the attempt to build a non-threatening, sympathetic atmosphere is deliberate since she believes that the hostile environment the students live daily at their course of studies will certainly be replicated in their future practice: "The students suffer in this atmosphere, and they reproduce it as teachers". This concern about being a *different* model matches the idea of becoming a *public intellectual* (Porta, 2006:219) as opposed to the traditional model, the banking model as described by Freire.

The purpose of providing new teaching ideals for the students at the Teaching Training Course would make evident the importance of Bruner's tenets related to *identity and perspective*- (2000:53). The teacher is aware of the seminal role she plays in the development of their students' identity as prospective teachers and that her classes represent a framework for the paradigm they are building for their future practice. According to the teacher, this relationship is closely related to her own story as a student.

The emphasis put on the role of the teacher as a mediator and as the producer of meaningful learning opportunities is reflected in the hope the students express. They expect to be able to reproduce those experiences in the future for their own students and are eager to experience them again during

their training courses. That is why we consider that one of the most relevant aspects of the class we are analyzing was the opportunity students were given to reflect upon the experience taking into account that beyond being a language class, the experience was part of their education as future teachers. The subjects which are part of the Language Teachers Training Course are deeply fragmented, mostly due to tradition that to an actual regulation. The Overall Communication Course belongs to the Linguistic Skills Area and has strong cultural components due to the reasons explained above. Nevertheless the students were able to go beyond these immediate learning objectives and their own learning processes to think about their future teaching practice. We can argue that this was possible because they experienced their oral and written narratives within a process that is similar to that of the narrative inquiry. They were provided with an opportunity for personal and social growth, stressing the significance of interpersonal relationships in the way understood by Constantino in his reviews of Clandinin and Connelly's works (Constantino, 2001:108).

Conclusion

Many educational theorists, including Kramersch, express their concern as regards the issue of teaching English -as a Second Language, as a Foreign Language or as an International Language- because of the possible alienating effects that learning a highly

appreciated, but at the same time controversial language can bring about. The above mentioned author argues for the need to engage in pedagogy of commitment. This pedagogy, should focus not on the presentation of multicultural topics (such as regional foods, religions or traditions) or the proposal of social oriented debates on a superficial level, but on the reflection on how the students are ingrained with a particular discourse that determines their identities and life choices (Kramsch, 2004:40). Mercer's idea that "while using the language to learn we can change the language we use" (Mercer, 2005:17) is not irrelevant when we take into account the importance of language, as it has already been established, in the construction of knowledge (Bruner 2000; Mercer 1995).

In this trend, we consider that teachers' educators should set as primal objective the orientation of prospective teachers towards the consideration of their own ideas and actions. This awareness will allow for the development of interventions appropriate for their students needs, in their planning as well as in the choice of resources for their practice. (Porta, 2006:216-219).

The education of English teachers has been mostly rooted, paradoxically, in a positivist paradigm (Jacobs & Farrel, 2001; Johnson, 2006; Kramsch, 2004), based in learning the content knowledge that is going to be taught (the English language), the teaching methods (how to teach it effectively) and the observation and practice in a pre service period. This

traditional model is changing because of an epistemological shift in the research trends in the field of education influenced by Narrative Inquiry and Critical Pedagogy which poses questions related to identity of teachers and students, the social and economic context of the teaching practice and the variety of the language bound to be taught among others (Johnson, 2006:237).

The class that we analyzed could completely fulfill the objectives of an English language class -- the further development in the students of the skills eventually proposed -- but at the same time its dynamics gave place to morally relevant considerations on their part about their future practice. That is why we can think of this class as *political* in the sense alluded by Finkel. First, we can observe the democratic feature on the collective inquiry, which requires confidence in the group in order to be achieved. Second, there is a manifest search for effective engagement in the activity. Finally, the students' identity is developed: they show autonomy, self confidence and intellectual independence. In this way, a democratic environment for participation arises and grows (Finkel, 2008:195-196). This is not a minor ambition in the education of prospective teachers intended to become transformative intellectuals.

This role as transformative intellectuals will set teachers in the opposite side of the master explicator who *stultifies* learning, harshly criticized by Rancière. His book, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* narrates master Jacocot's experience. While doing it, the French philosopher

compares the actions of traditional teachers, which he calls *explicator*, with those of the *ignorant schoolmaster* represented by Jacocot. The former owns knowledge, and through means of explications transmits that knowledge. The student can only discover it thanks to the mediation of the teacher. The transformative teacher, in harmony with master Jacocot, is concerned with presenting to the students what they need to learn in a way that will caught their attention, that will engage them, intrigue them, cause the need to conquer it. They work and discover knowledge together in an equal footing and with mutual respect and trust. The ignorant schoolmaster poses questions, problematizes, and triggers doubts, instead of providing with answers. In this way classrooms become places where students find their voices and can speak, and where the teaching and learning practices emerge from the mutual respect and agreement between students and teachers (Rancière 2003). This kind of practice conveys truly democratic classrooms that are bound to change education, and eventually society too. We can, in this way, foresee new ways to envisage teachers' education, not just from the part of teachers, but from the students who take the initiative and decide to go beyond the usual traditional practices.

That idea of education as a possibility for change was what triggered this piece of research. The deliberate decision of the teacher in charge of the class analyzed of creating an atmosphere where students would feel *comfortable*,

term used by students and teachers alike in the collected data when they refer to the environment during the class confirms the proposal was successful. The teacher is convinced because of her ideals related to Critical Pedagogy that classes have to be developed in that kind of atmosphere. She makes a conscious effort to practice those principles within the classroom, making use of critical thinking that guides her work as an intellectual transformer. She wishes to provide an alternative model to that of the teacher as technician, and this was noticed and described by the students in their narratives.

In this way, the tool of narratives in the hands of a teacher whose aim is to multiply her transformative role in their students' future practice could originate sites for real dialogue. We refer to a liberating, empowering dialogue, key to construct knowledge in a social way and bonds that would make that social sense stronger. To sum up, an experience that breaks what is traditional in the teaching training course for prospective English teachers and which gave the students a valuable perspective on self inquiry as a tool for their professional development.

Notes

¹ The original works were submitted by the author. both in English and Spanish.

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