AJAL

Argentinian Journal of Applied Linguistics

Volume 2, Number 2
November 2014
ISSN 2314-3576 (online)

FAAPI

AJAL Argentinian Journal of Applied Linguistics

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Volume 2, Number 2, November 2014
ISSN 2314-3576 (online) © 2014 AJAL

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Editorial introduction

We are still young and we are making every effort to spread the word of AJAL in different professional and academic contexts in Argentina and elsewhere. The 39th FAAPI Conference held in the city of Santiago del Estero in Argentina was a fruitful venue to share the aims and activities of AJAL.

AJAL was present through one panel and one workshop. Melina Porto, who is a member of our Editorial Review Board, coordinated a panel whose members were Mariel Amez, Matías Ansaldo, Natalia Muguiro, and Gabriela Tavella, all published authors with AJAL. They shared their experiences as authors and reviewers and explained to the audience how they felt at different stages of the blind review process. Issues around impact, scope, proofreading, and copyright emerged from the panel and the audience.

AJAL Editor Darío Luis Banegas offered a workshop which aimed at encouraging publication to share knowledge and attain professional growth among Argentinian colleagues. One of the benefits of publication is dissemination. According to Coleman (2014, p. 404), "publication makes available to interested readers the latest empirical findings and theoretical understandings, thus adding to what we know in a particular domain."

Although AJAL is international, it is based in Argentina, and therefore one of our aims is to give Argentinian colleagues a voice. However, to exercise post-method, decentralised, and context-responsive professional practices linked to sharing experiences and expertise through academic articles, colleagues need to respond to our call because nobody will write on our behalf. If we Argentinian authors wish to have a voice in ELT, then we need to embrace this opportunity and start writing.

In this issue voices from different parts of the world are heard discussing a variety of topics. From Spain, María Martínez Lirola and Laura Ibáñez Castejón share an experience located in a MA course where multimodal texts were used to foster new literacies, critical thinking and solidarity.

In *Mentor–mentee interactions in the practicum: Whose/Who's learning?* Gabriel Díaz Maggioli's reports on the results of a "small-scale naturalistic research pilot project" carried out in Uruguayan State Schools while Fatma Salim Al-Senaidi and Mark Wyatt focus on the importance of curriculum materials evaluation and address the problems female primary school English teachers in the Sultanate of Oman face and

how these issues relate to their wider social context.

Students' perceptions of peer feedback by Laura Levi Altstaedter and Peter Doolittle highlights a question of perennial debate, writing instruction. Their research project, located in "classes at a major university in the southeastern United States", hinges on the importance of a writing instruction approach that privileges peer feedback.

Postmethod pedagogies applied in ELT formal schooling: Teachers' voices from Argentine classrooms is the title of the compilation of articles edited by Silvana Barboni and reviewed by Estela Nélida Braun for this issue of AJAL.

Last but not least, we would like to thank our 2014 reviewers for their generous support, quality evaluations, and commitment: Nery Carmen Alvarado, Mariel Amez, Ann Borsinger, Estela Braun, María Cristina Carrillo, Gloria Carrozo, Ana María Cendoya, Erika Chrobak, Gabriel Díaz Maggioli, Claudia Ferradas, Rosana Glatigny, Susana Gullco Groisman, María Susana Ibáñez, Agustín Reyes, Alice Kiai, Gillian Lazar, Shaofeng Li, Chris Lima, Azadeh Nemati, Dolores Orta González, María Cristina Thomson, Fabiana Parano, Carolina Ravelo, Ana Inés Salvi, Vander Viana, Martin Wedell, Patricia Weller, Sue Wharton, and Samaneh Zandian.

Darío Luis Banegas and Raquel Lothringer

Reference

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Introducing culture and critical thinking in the classroom: Analysing multimodal texts from NGOs in a Masters course

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(Received 10/01/14; final version received 20/03/14)

Abstract

The multimodal nature of present societies makes clear that teaching with authentic multimodal texts can contribute to bringing different cultural realities into the classroom. For this reason, it was decided to use texts published by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in order to teach visual grammar (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006) in a Masters course in Spain. These texts were also selected because they are appropriate to teach cultural aspects, and raise awareness of the realities of poor countries; they may also foster the acquisition of interpersonal competencies. This paper offers textual analysis; this research will point out that teaching students to be critical with the discourse produced by NGOs is essential in order to unveil relationships of domination and power because discourse is always a powerful tool used to reproduce social reality.

Keywords: multimodality, visual grammar, interpersonal competencies, critical thinking, NGOs.

Resumen

La naturaleza multimodal de las sociedades actuales deja claro que el aprendizaje con auténticos textos multimodales contribuye a llevar a clase diferentes realidades culturales. En este sentido, se decidió usar textos publicados por Organizaciones No Gubernamentales (ONG) para enseñar gramática visual (Kress y van Leeuwen, 2006) en un máster. Estos textos han sido seleccionados porque eran apropiados para enseñar aspectos culturales y las realidades de los países pobres; éstos también permiten la adquisición de competencias interpersonales. En este artículo se señala que enseñar a los estudiantes a ser críticos con el discurso producido por las ONG es fundamental para desvelar las relaciones de dominación y poder, porque el discurso es siempre una poderosa herramienta utilizada para reproducir la realidad social.

Palabras clave: multimodalidad, gramática visual, competencias interpersonales, pensamiento crítico, ONG.

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ISSN 2314-3576 (online)

THE PROCESS OF convergence that has taken place in European universities in recent years has involved a series of changes in the mission of the university. It must be a formative and educational university that can create competent, educated, responsible, reflective, critical and adaptable professionals. This produces a change from the teaching university to the learning university with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). In addition, there is a change in emphasis from providing information (input) to that of learning outcomes (output) (Ahmar & Mahmood, 2010; Rué, 2007; Torre Puente, 2008).

In this sense, the university has changed from being a place to acquire concepts to a place where students acquire competencies that will help them become professionals ready for the demands of the labour market. Consequently, degrees must incorporate the acquisition of competencies such as leadership, critical thinking, and cooperation, among others. (Gómez Lucas & Álvarez Teruel, 2011). Using active methodologies is essential for the acquisition of competencies. These methodologies highlight the exchange of ideas in the classroom thanks to students' engagement and their active participation in the teaching-learning process (Ghaith, 2002; Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 2007; Slavin, 1989).

Following the classification of the Tuning project (González & Wagenaar, 2003, p.79ff.) there are different types of competencies. These authors offer two classifications. On the one hand, they can be classified as general and specific. General competencies are characterised by skills necessary for employment and to have an active role in life that would help resolve problems. They are important for all students regardless of what degree they study. Specific competencies are their own degree skills. They give identity and social and professional consistency to a training profile. On the other hand, González and Wagenaar (2003, p. 81ff.) also classified the competencies in the following way:

1. Instrumental competencies, divided into:
   - 1.1 Cognitive competencies or abilities to understand and manipulate ideas and thoughts.
   - 1.2 Methodological competencies or abilities to manipulate the environment: organize time, develop learning strategies, make decisions, resolve problems.
   - 1.3 Technological competencies or abilities related to the use of technology, computing and information processing resources.
   - 1.4 Language skills or oral and written communication abilities and knowledge of a second language.
2. Interpersonal competencies, divided into:
   - 2.1 Cognitive competencies or abilities to understand and manipulate

ideas and thoughts.

2.2 Methodological competencies or abilities to manipulate the environment: organize time, develop learning strategies, make decisions, resolve problems.

2.3 Technological competencies or abilities related to the use of technology, computing and information processing resources.

2.4 Language skills or oral and written communication abilities and knowledge of a second language.

3. Systemic competencies: capabilities and abilities on all complete systems (combination of understanding, sensibility and knowledge, requiring the prior acquisition of instrumental and interpersonal skills).

A competency-based curriculum can integrate theory and practice, relating the activities carried out in the teaching-learning process and the evaluation of it, as well as uniting different content that students should learn and the different capabilities that must be developed for this. In other words, the successful acquisition of competencies enables students to carry out professional activities effectively. We think that teaching approaches based on competencies make it possible to develop the ability to perform tasks correctly. The acquisition of competencies contributes to sharing ideas and feelings, develops critical thinking, and promotes interaction (Tsay & Brady, 2010; Wang, 2009).

In general, interpersonal competencies do not receive enough attention at university. For this reason, this article will focus specifically on the acquisition of interpersonal competencies such as the development of critical thinking. We are interested in observing the feelings and opinions students have when they analyze authentic texts produced by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). We decided to use these texts because they represent an aspect of the media which allows readers to understand different realities. As van Dijk (2009) claims, it is mostly through the media that we have contact with other cultures. In this sense, the media in general and the press in particular have power over readers. As Martínez Lirola (2013, p. 196) states, "[t]he press has the power to transmit the said issues in one way or another, which invariably has an effect in the readers' ideology and opinion."

The ideas presented in the previous paragraphs suggest that current teaching should focus not only on the use of printed texts to read or write. Today's society and the changes proposed by the EHEA and the Information and Communication Technologies (hereafter ICTs) demand new forms of *literacy*. For this reason, one of the main objectives of this article is to observe the relationship between teaching with multimodal texts published by NGOs and the teaching of cultural aspects in the classroom. Our main research questions are the following: Can a multimodal-based approach to teaching contribute to

teaching cultural aspects in the classroom? Are the texts published by NGOs effective for this purpose? Can they also contribute to the acquisition of critical thinking?

NGOs have acquired an increasing importance for mass media (Gómez Gil, 2005; González Luis, 2006). They have become sources of information for the media when news items are related with the development of poor countries. Therefore, it is essential to know how to analyse the image that NGOs present of others who are culturally different because their gaze on poor countries is constantly present in the daily press and helps shape public opinion. In this sense, being able to analyse critically the discourse proposed from NGOs on poor[1] countries is important since discourse also contributes to create relations of power and domination between cultures, people, countries, and ultimately, human beings. In Escobar's words (1995, pp. 5-6):

> Thinking of development in terms of discourse makes it possible to maintain the focus on domination—as earlier Marxist analyses, for instance, did—and at the same time to explore more fruitfully the conditions of possibility and the most pervasive effects of development […] To see development as historically produced entails an examination of why so many countries started to see themselves as underdeveloped in the early post-World War II period, how 'to develop' became a fundamental problem for them, and how, finally, they embarked upon the task of 'un-underdeveloping' themselves by subjecting their societies to increasingly systematic, detailed, and comprehensive interventions.

Understanding development in terms of discourse is the proposal of post-development theorists, such as Escobar (1995), Esteva (2000) or Picas Contreras (2001). For these theorists, development has projected a certain way of seeing poor countries, which is reflected in NGOs, because they use development discourse (CONGDE, 2010). This discourse is ideological. Consequently, post-development theorists have understood development discourse as Said (1977, p. 20) describes Orientalism:

> Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.

Choosing authentic texts Choosing authentic texts produced by NGOs offers students

the possibility of working with real language and real texts so they can observe social and cultural aspects through text analysis and be able to interpret contemporary culture (Martínez Lirola, 2013, p. 196). In this sense, it is easy for them to establish a connection between what is learned and real life (O'Keeffe, McCarthy & Carter, 2007, p. 26).

Moreover, new technologies in the classroom (NTIC) have affected all areas of our life, including the teaching-learning process. In recent years there has been a great development in digital and mobile technology. Changes in new technologies have brought changes in the modes of communication and also in the definition of literacy and their applications in the 21st century in educational contexts (Lemke, 2012; Livingstone, 2008; Merchant, 2009). There are traditional teaching tools that remain in these new contexts. However, new times demand changes in tertiary education so that learning opportunities offered by new technologies are incorporated into the teaching-learning process. Adapting to new times is a challenge for teachers and students as it is necessary to review and develop pedagogy so that ICTs, Facebook, and using virtual platforms really help students develop meaningful learning and develop the skills to be effective.

This article is organised in the following sections: after this introduction, Section Two offers the theoretical background of the article paying attention to some essential aspect of multimodal texts. Section Three concentrates on data and methodology of this study and special attention is paid to the context, the participants, the methodology and the data used in this research. Following this, Section Four offers a detailed analysis of some multimodal texts. The article finishes with some conclusions.

Theoretical Background: Using Multimodal Texts in the Teaching-Learning Process

One of the characteristics of the 21st century is the multimodal nature of societies. A multimodal text is one that combines different modes of communication (visual, written, music, etc.) All these elements have a communicative function, i.e. they have a purpose in discourse (Baldry & Thibault, 2006; Martínez Lirola, 2010, p. 82). In Baldry and Thibault's words (2006, p. 21), "[m]ultimodality refers to the diverse ways in which a number of distinct semiotic resource systems are both codeployed and co-contextualised in the making of a text-specific meaning".

The theory of multimodality developed through the work done by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001, 2006) and other authors (for example Baldry & Thibault, 2006; Bezemer & Jewett, 2010; Bowcher, 2012; Jewitt, 2009; Royce & Bowcher, 2007) has contributed to understanding how different modes of communication (language, image, graphics, sound, music, gestures, etc.) create meanings. In Kress' words (2010, p. 1):

> Each mode does a specific thing: image shows what takes too long to

> read, and writing names what would be difficult to show. Colour is used to highlight specific aspects of the overall message. Without that division of semiotic labour, the sign, quite simply, would not work. Writing names and images shows, while colour frames and highlights; each to maximum effect and benefit.

These modes are the different semiotic resources that contribute to the development of meaning through one alone or through the combination of several used simultaneously. The image plays a very important role in multimodal communication due to its importance in catching the audience's attention (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Kress, 2010; Unsworth, 2010). Following Martínez Lirola (2013, p. 198): "[W]e understand the classroom as a multimodal learning environment in which modes of communication, different to language, are present to facilitate the teaching-learning process."

Traditional literacy has generally focused on written language; the other modes of communication (visual, musical, etc.) remained in second place (Coffin, 2012). In this age of digital literacy, the learning process is strengthened by different modes of communication so that they develop multimodal texts, Power Point or Prezi presentations, or they create web pages, videos, or engage in discussions through social networks such as Facebook. The era 2.0 offers multiple possibilities to enrich the teaching-learning process; it also allows students to write and read in virtual environments, to incorporate multimedia to enhance the development of their skills, to be able to analyse, deconstruct and design multimodal texts. In Simpson and Walsh's words (2010, p. 37): "Now with interactive, multiple authoring and social networking facilities provided by Web 2.0 technologies, new pedagogic possibilities can be utilised in the classrooms."

Many teachers have already incorporated multimodal practices or elements to their teaching practices intuitively, i.e. more than one mode of communication, for example, text that appears in image in addition to written text, as stated by Knox (2008, p. 140):

> Multimodal perspectives on language and language education have only recently appeared in the literature on L2 teaching and learning. A brief consideration of the classroom practices of teachers and students shows very quickly, though, that multimodality is something that language teachers have understood intuitively for a long time.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) observe three main aspects when analysing the composition of multimodal texts, important for the analysis of the multimodal texts that we offer in Section Four: a) information value: the place in which the different elements of information appear (from left to right, from top to bottom and from the centre to

the margins); b) salience: highlights of the most outstanding elements in the page; c) frames: used to connect or separate the different elements in the page. Frames can join elements inside a visual composition and inside a written text (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001).

Context, Participants, Methodology and Data Context

Context

Hypertextuality is a compulsory subject in the first semester in the Masters programme New Tendencies in Anthropology taught at University Miguel Hernández. The purpose of this Masters course is to show students new areas of study in Social and Cultural Anthropology and the new methodologies used in this area.

This subject was taught by two teachers in the academic year 2012-2013. The first one explained the concept of multimodality and the importance of multimodal texts in society. Special emphasis was placed on the importance of text as a communicative unit that allows students to receive information about other cultures. Promoting a multimodal analysis of texts helps students develop their critical skills because they can observe how a particular society or a particular social reality is portrayed in order to accomplish a goal to persuade, to advise, etc. Then, the model of visual grammar proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) was introduced so that the students could learn how to read a multimodal text.

The second teacher explained that texts are a product of the socio-cultural reality in which they are produced. In general, people ask questions about the different social realities transmitted by texts and they also compare the realities under analysis with the ones already known. When comparing, there is a tendency to reduce and simplify that can even create stereotypes. For this reason, it was explained that texts need to be understood taking into consideration the tools proposed by the culture in which they are framed and not the ones that people who approach the texts have.

Participants

The ten students attending the MA course during the academic year 2013-2014 were a heterogeneous group because they differed in their backgrounds and ages, which was interesting in order to observe how students approached the critical analysis of the multimodal texts proposed in the classroom. There were eight women and two men. Six students had a degree in Anthropology, one in Social Work, two in Sociology and one in Communication. Their ages ranged between 23 and 55. The MA course offers the possibility of continuing with a PhD and there were students who were already thinking about the topics of their doctoral dissertations.

Methodology

After explaining the main theoretical aspects connected with multimodality and visual grammar, the teacher distributed some texts from different NGOs so that the students could start analysing them following the proposed framework. It was made clear that post-development theorists state that there are unequal relationships between rich and poor countries; the relations of domination and power can be observed in development discourse.

Consequently, the texts were selected because NGOs are sometimes intermediaries due to the role they have when transmitting the social reality that poor countries suffer and how this is perceived in rich countries. In this sense, these texts are very effective in that they contribute to teaching cultural aspects and socio-cultural differences and consequently, they are texts that contribute to the development of critical thinking (see Section Four).

Data

As we will see, due to the limitations of this paper, the next section offers a detailed analysis of only two of the different texts that were analysed in the subject Hypertextuality. These two texts have been chosen because they are representative of the main aspects that were analysed in the subject: the texts chosen were connected with the reality of women and minors in poor countries since they are the most vulnerable human beings in most societies. The different activities done in the classroom consisted of applying the main principles of visual grammar that were explained in the module (see Section Two for the analysis of authentic texts produced by different NGOs in 2012. The two texts under analysis belong to two publications of Intermón Oxfam and Entreculturas, which are two well-known NGOs in Spain nowadays.

The two NGOs undertake development projects in poor countries; they need to present them to rich countries in order to secure funding. In addition, one of the main priorities of Intermón Oxfam is the mobilisation and sensitisation of the citizens of rich countries. Entreculturas is primarily engaged in developing education, which is done not only in the poor countries but also in the developed nations because this NGO tries to raise awareness of the world's problems and create active citizenship in rich countries. For these reasons, these two organisations need communication strategies and the power of mass media. Their journals, which have supplied the texts to be discussed in Section Four, are part of these communication efforts to try to raise awareness and sensitise rich countries.

These publications are received by members of NGOs in their homes and loyalty is their objective. They are also available on the website of these NGOs so that they can be easily accessed by anyone. For Oxfam, the magazine is also distributed in 38 fair

trade shops that the NGO has spread throughout Spain. These publications are relevant because they are a medium in themselves that goes straight to the public and can help form public opinion. The fact that these publications are written by the staff of the NGO, who can be considered an authority, enables mass media to use them as sources of information.

Examples of the Analysis of Multimodal Texts that Promote Critical Thinking

One of the main purposes of this article is to show how the analysis of multimodal texts published by NGOs can bring certain cultural aspects of poor countries into the classroom. This is useful so that students acquire different competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, solidarity, which will be essential for the labour market such as the development of critical thinking, creativity and solidarity. Due to the limitations of this article, the following paragraphs will concentrate mainly on the analysis of the visuals. As regards the written text we will analyse the headings and the caption although the written language found in the different texts was also analysed in the Masters course. The analysis that follows is an example of the ones offered by the students registered in the module Hypertextuality at the end of the semester; the student is Laura Ibáñez Castejón, who is currently working on her doctoral dissertation on multimodality.

Multimodal Text 1 (MT1). Journal n. 24 (April, 2012). Intermón Oxfam (pp. 14-15). ©Pablo Tosco/IO

We have chosen the first pages of an article published in the Intermón Oxfam[2]

magazine called "Garantizar el derecho a la alimentación es posible" (Assuring the right to food is possible) because we consider this is an outstanding sample of the type of information that appears in this publication. Therefore in MT1 we find an image that shows an example of a crude reality in Guatemala. Its purpose is, on the one hand, to appeal to the readers' feelings, and on the other hand to denounce this situation. According to the analysis of information value proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, p. 179-180), it can be observed that the value of information is distributed from left to right in this multimodal text. In this way, the heading and the lead of the article appear on the left page. These are elements that the NGO offers as known information because fighting for the acquisition of the right to feed in Guatemala is part of an Intermón Oxfam's campaign that readers can know well thanks to past articles dealing with this social situation. Consequently, new information appears on the right page. The situation of shortage of food that takes place in Guatemala shows a human face: the page shows Juana and her daughter, who suffers chronic malnutrition. The people represented in this image are the same that appear in the cover of this issue of the magazine. This photograph appears with a caption that offers information about the child's disease; in this way we can observe how the combination of the written text and the visual aid communicate.

The two human beings represented are more salient than the rest of the multimodal texts that appear in the page since they appear on a white background that places them in the foreground. Moreover, they have been photographed in an individualised way because their faces and clothes can be observed. In essence, they are not part of a group, which contributes to their individualisation. We believe that this is a strategy used to highlight that there are always human beings that suffer from the social problems that NGOs portray.

However, we consider that the two depicted women have been photographed with a certain distance from the readers: they do not look at the camera and the mother seems to be absent-minded. Juana shows a lost look and she is serious; she adopts a passive attitude as she is waiting for somebody's help. There is no social interaction between readers and the human beings in the picture since they seem to be photographed only to be observed (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 140). In this way, women from poor countries appear victimised by a situation that they are not able to control. However, they have been portrayed using a horizontal angle, which contributes to establishing an equal relationship with the audience (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 139). Nevertheless, there is a certain social distance with the audience (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 138) because they do not look at the camera and have been portrayed in a long shot showing theirs bodies. Similarly, the phenotypic features of both of them and their clothes can establish a certain cultural distance with the Western public, who can easily identify them as inhabitants of

poor countries; this can be deduced from the context in which the two of them appear.

It is significant that the pessimism of the photograph contrasts with the heading of the report "Garantizar el derecho a la alimentación es posible" (Assuring the right to food is possible). Consequently, the image seems to portray the situation of Guatemala, its poverty and malnutrition, whereas the heading points out the main objective of the NGO for the future. In fact, the heading at the top of the page serves the purpose of showing "ideal information" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p.179-180), whereas the people portrayed at the bottom of the page show "real information" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 179-180).

MT1 places women in poor countries as vulnerable and in need of aid from rich countries. It is true that NGOs, in their journals, have to share the realities in which they work and they are not usually positive. However, multimodal text one stresses the vulnerability of women because it places the protagonists of the image in a passive role as they have been portrayed to be observed. They do nothing to change their situation even though the headline claims that it is possible to guarantee the right to food in order to eliminate the problems that they suffer. Thus, this text can be useful for students to unravel the mechanisms (for example, Juana's lost gaze, her standby position, the fact that Juana and her daughter have been fully portrayed, etc.) by which people can be represented as passive human beings who need help from rich countries rather than people who shape their own development.

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aor: la educación formal, la educación para adultos y la educación para la paz.

En la actualidad, y en lo relativo a la **educación formal**, el JRS apoya 17 escuelas en Lobone –cinco de infantil, nueve de primaria y tres de secundaria– y otras 29 escuelas en Nimule –25 de primaria y cuatro de secundaria–.

En estas zonas, el JRS trabaja para combatir los problemas más significativos que dificultan el acceso a la educación de la población con edad escolar: la falta de infraestructuras educativas, la falta de cualificación para la atención de menores con necesidades educativas especiales, el desequilibrio de género entre el alumnado y el propio cuerpo docente, los limitados niveles de formación del profesorado, el escaso acceso a los materiales didácticos y de aprendizaje y la baja calidad de la gestión escolar.

En cuanto a la **educación para personas adultas** no es de extrañar que los niveles de alfabetización sean muy bajos en un país que ha sufrido los desmanes de una guerra civil que ha durado más de 20 años. Por eso, la labor del JRS se centra en paliar no sólo los efectos del analfabetismo escolar, sino que también aborda la llamada "alfabetización funcional" (que abarca la formación de capacidades básicas para la vida, tales como hábitos de higiene y salud familiar, así como la formación vocacional en habilidades profesionales básicas, como la carpintería, albañilería, etc.).

Por último, el trabajo del JRS en las zonas de Nimule y Lobone incluye también la **educación para la paz** que difunde entre los sursudaneses la comprensión del Acuerdo de Paz Integral (CPA) firmado en 2005 y que ratificó el fin de la guerra civil; además de mediar en conflictos entre comunidades de distintas etnias, retornados y refugiados internos y realizar un trabajo concienzudo de integración de los soldados en la sociedad.

Sudán del Sur es uno de los países con los indicadores de desarrollo humano más bajos del planeta con una población fundamentalmente rural (86%) y dependiente de la ganadería (78%).

entreculturas7

Multimodal Text 2 (MT2). Journal n. 47 (September, 2012). Entreculturas (p. 7). © Sergi Cámara / Entreculturas

In general, the photographs used by the journal Entreculturas show a more positive view of poor countries. However, it is outstanding that in certain cases there are images such as the one of multimodal text two. This image catches the audience's attention due to a bird's eye view in which the photograph is taken, which makes it appear as an original visual that situates the audience in a superior shot with respect to the represented children (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 139). It cannot be stated that this image is a clear example that contributes to a negative image from societies in poor countries because it

does not portray situations of sadness or suffering.

Nevertheless, the audience perceives all the children who are portrayed as equal: they all have white, clean, new notebooks, which are open on the desks and their hands are on them; moreover, they all wear the same clothes. The photograph shows a very small variation in the gestures, such as having one hand on the head or a light turn of the body.

They have been photographed to be looked at, but specifically to be looked at from a superior angle, which contributes to ignoring their individuality as human beings (van Leeuwen, 2008, p.144). All the children that appear in this multimodal text appear homogeneous: they give the impression that these children who live in poor countries (this can be deduced by their phenotypic features) are equal and are similar (also some of the heads are not visible, which gives the impression that not every child is considered as a unique and differentiated subject). The school uniform they wear contributes even more to create this impression. Similarly, the uniform eliminates all the possible cultural features that the clothes can communicate.

Representing all the children in the same way makes it difficult to determine the information value of this text. The ones that appear in the first and the second rows (starting from the left) seem to have the same importance whereas the ones that appear on the third row have less importance due to the fact that their bodies are half visible.

MT2 makes reference to childhood but it is marked by paternalism. Thus, as stated above, the use of a bird's eye view allows the reader to see the children from above, which suggests superiority over the children portrayed in the image. Therefore, the attitude that the public in rich countries can adopt towards these children is the need to protect them, as if they could not defend themselves. We cannot forget that Entreculturas, in its publications, recounts the actions that have been carried out in many poor countries thanks to the contributions of its charity donors. Generally, children look similar enough as if they were all equal. They are deprived of their individuality. This contrasts with the view given by Intermón Oxfam (see multimodal text one), because this NGO wants to present the people who need help as individuals. However, with multimodal text two, in the end, the impression left on the reader is that of a group of children who need help. This text allows students to unravel the paternalistic view that some NGOs are still projecting onto people in poor countries.

Both texts promote critical thinking because once students read and analyse the texts paying attention to the main visual strategies used in order to create meaning they have a critical opinion about the way two NGOs selected to transmit the social situation of poor countries. In addition, solidarity is also promoted among students because these two texts are useful to work on emotional competencies so that students are aware of their feelings when reading these texts. However, it is necessary to be critical with the

model of solidarity that we want to develop. The texts analysed present rich countries as superior and poor countries as inferior and therefore dependent on the help of rich countries. Thus, according to Nos, Iranzo and Farné (2012, p. 220), NGOs have promoted a type of solidarity that has mobilised "[…] more their sense of charity [of citizens of rich countries] than their citizenship skills"[3].

Following Erro (2007), the definition of international solidarity that currently is being handled in Spain has not been the result of a public debate created by a conscious and responsible citizenship. This solidarity has been built by public institutions, because in the eighties, Spain began to create channels of funding for NGOs, and their corresponding media, which have conditioned the work of these organisations with their coverage of humanitarian crises in countries such as Ethiopia. Therefore, it is necessary to generate a public political debate raised by the role of the media in democratic society and the role of solidarity and international cooperation for development to be built. In Erro's words (2007, p. 68):

> When we look at the communicative dimension the goal would be to move from a 'corporate communication' conceived in private and media terms—'from' and 'for' the institution—to a 'social communication' designed in public and educational terms—'from 'and' to' responsibility and social transformation.[4]

For this reason, it is necessary to develop interpersonal competencies and critical thinking at the university in order to create citizens who care about social problems and who are able to participate in current and frequent social debates on the definitions of solidarity and international cooperation.

The analysis presented in this section has focused on the relationships between the written texts and the visuals in some texts produced by NGOs in order to understand the main strategies used when portraying the social reality of poor countries. The analysis of the two texts selected allows us to answer the main research questions presented in Section One: firstly, these texts are appropriate to teach cultural aspects in a university classroom because they portray two social problems in many poor countries such as the lack of food and education. Secondly, choosing texts published in NGOs' magazines is important because they usually know the reality of other countries well and are able to transmit their knowledge to the population in rich countries. Consequently, these texts can be used to give students the opportunity of acquiring interpersonal competencies at the university level because it is not possible to be indifferent when seeing these texts. Therefore, they are useful to develop critical thinking and the expression of feelings in addition to learning to critique development discourse.

Conclusions

Teaching with authentic texts such as the ones used in this paper helps students to establish a connection between them and the contexts in which those texts are produced and consumed. In fact, teaching with multimodal texts produced by NGOs helps students to be able to predict context from text and text from context. The way in which different people appear represented in texts can contribute to reproducing stereotypes. It can also be helpful in exploring other cultures and learning cultural aspects apart from promoting critical thinking by paying attention to the main differences between people from rich and poor countries as we can see in the texts analysed in Section Four.

Promoting the acquisition of competencies should be one of the priorities of education at any level. This contributes to the integral education of students due to the fact that it reinforces not only the importance of the acquisition of contents but also the acquisition of competencies such as being critical or sharing feelings and opinions in front of an audience, and the development of skills that can be important in the labour market and in life. In addition, using multimodal texts in the teaching-learning process promotes creativity because students can be asked to search for texts of their interest and then these texts can be used to analyse cultural aspects or social problems.

With the texts analysed in Section Four, students can learn that development is a kind of discourse that creates and recreates other human beings who are culturally different. They also allow the deconstruction of the view of NGOs as spaces that propose alternative views on other cultures because these organisations often reproduce relations of power and domination between rich and poor countries. Their definitions of solidarity are closer to charity than to a vision based on social justice and human rights. Thus, helping students to dismantle the power mechanisms of development discourse and thanks to ICTs, they will be better equipped to participate in (and even create) public debates that promote new definitions of solidarity and international cooperation. Similarly, they will be able to encourage NGOs to, once and for all, overcome the development discourse and become alternative spaces that can truly be critical about the status quo.

Notes

1. We are going to refer to countries and poor and rich since these are the most common adjectives used in the publications under analysis.
2. From October 15, 2013 Intermón Oxfam started to be called Oxfam Intermón. We will continue using the previous name because that is the one that appears in the publication under analysis.
3. "[…] más su sentido de la caridad [de la ciudadanía de los países ricos] que sus competencias ciudadanas".
4. "Cuando nos fijamos en la dimensión comunicativa el objetivo sería pasar de una

‘comunicación institucional’ pensada en términos privados y mediáticos- ‘desde’ y ‘para’ la institución-, a una ‘comunicación social’ diseñada en términos públicos y educativos- ‘desde’ y ‘para’ la responsabilidad y la transformación social”.

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Argentinian Journal of Applied Linguistics
Vol. 2, No. 2, November 2014, 23-41

FAAPI

Mentor–mentee interactions in the practicum: Whose/Who's learning?

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(Received 02/03/14; final version received 31/05/14)

Abstract

The present paper reports on a small-scale naturalistic research pilot project seeking to explore and understand the kinds of learning which ensue from the interaction between cooperating teachers acting as Mentors and student teachers during their practicum in Uruguayan State Schools. Through the use of a structured questionnaire to a randomly selected group of participants (both Mentors and Mentees), the researcher has tried disclose themes that impinge on learning from the Mentor-Mentee interaction. This study was a pilot intended as fodder for a more in-depth analysis of the Mentoring situation in Uruguay, as the country prepares to expand the mentoring model to in-service teacher development. Data were coded making reference to Wang and Odell's (2002) perspectives towards Mentoring and a tentative explanation of the learning stemming from the interaction was attempted. Also, implications for further research and practice are outlined.

Keywords: mentoring; practicum; teacher education; teacher learning.

Resumen

Este artículo comunica los resultados de un proyecto de investigación piloto realizado a pequeña escala con el fin de explorar y comprender la interacción entre docentes Mentores y futuros docentes que realizan la práctica docente con el apoyo de los primeros en colegios públicos de Uruguay. A través de un cuestionario electrónico anónimo, aplicado a un grupo de Mentores y practicantes elegidos al azar, se delinearon temas que afectan el aprendizaje que se supone resulta de la interacción entre estos actores. El propósito del presente proyecto piloto fue la aproximación a la realidad del Mentorazgo en Uruguay a fin de obtener una base sobre la misma que habilete una investigación más profunda con el objetivo de proponer cambios respecto a la implementación de Mentorazgo. Los datos se codificaron utilizando las dimensiones propuestas for Wang y Odell (2002) y se intenta una explicación inicial de los aprendizajes resultado de la interacción a la vez que se proponen futuras líneas de investigación.

Palabras clave: mentorazgo, formación docente, aprender a ser docente, práctica profesional.

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MENTORING, AS A practice in education, has taken many forms over the years (Fletcher, 2000; Johnson & Ridley, 2004; Tomlinson, 1995) and it is constantly in a state of flux given the many dimensions and forms it can take. These practices, contextually situated and highly symbiotic, have led to a "literalization" (Diaz Maggioli, 2013, p. 134) of the processes and practices of mentoring across the education spectrum leading practitioners to assume that any form of peer support is a valid source of professional learning. Hence, it is not surprising that participants in the relationship may often experience dissonances between their expectations about the process and its actual outcomes. Likewise, relevant stakeholders who have an outside interest in the relationship may be mistakenly led to believe that the learning results ensuing from the interaction are, in fact, those expected.

Given this situation, a decision has been made to frame the current study within a naturalistic, interpretive perspective. This is due to the fact that it was the researcher who noticed and elaborated a working problematization of a situation about which participants may not have been overtly aware: the extent to which mentoring relationships yield the required professional learning. According to Lake, Craig-Laker and Lea (2008, p.127),

> Locating the research within a naturalistic, interpretive methodology encourages researchers to explore the data, and promote an understanding of the data that recognises its contextually dependent nature. It also seems relevant to acknowledge ourselves as researchers and to mention the role of the social and political processes of which we are inevitably a part. Each researcher contributes values, identities and experiences to the research process, and while this should not rigidly determine particular points of view it does offer a way of seeing the research that accounts for individuality and contextuality.

Individuality and contextuality in the present study should be understood as both stemming from the researcher as well as the participants, whose voices eventually configure tentative understandings of the situations they encounter in their practice through commitment to the research process. It should also be acknowledged that the limitations of this research project are many. First, the pilot project stemmed from the author's motivation and thus, it is tinted by his lens of the situation. Secondly, given the limited number of participants involved, interpretations of their responses can only hold valid to their there and then. Thirdly, this study hints at responses that constitute the tip of an iceberg that shapes the relationships between mentors and mentees in teacher education programmes and is intended to provide a working basis for a larger scale

research project.

Theoretical Background

Definitions of the process and practice of mentoring abound in professional literature (see Hobson, Ashby, Malderez & Tomlinson, 2009). Some authors see mentoring as mostly a one-way commitment in which mentors respond to the needs of mentees (Furlong & Maynard, 1996, in Malderez, 2009). Others view the mentoring relationship as a dual commitment during which both mentors and mentees contribute experience, dispositions and skills to help consolidate the relationship which is, essentially, a learning one (Malderez, 2009; Tomlinson, 1995).

At the moment of framing the present research project, that of Shea's (1999) seemed to depict the nature of the mentoring processes in Uruguay. Shea (1999, p. 3) defines mentoring as

> a developmental caring, sharing and helping relationship where one person invests time, know-how and effort in enhancing another person's growth, knowledge and skills, responding to critical needs in the life of another person in ways that prepare that person for greater performance, productivity or achievement in the future.

While clear and almost self-explanatory, Shea's definition fails to capture the essentially interactive, two-way nature that is desirable in any mentoring relationship, one in which, ideally, both mentor and mentee derive new learnings at the crossroads of their interaction. These learnings should form the core of the mentoring experience during which participants change and evolve as a consequence of having shared time together. As Rajuan, Beijaard and Verloop (2007, p. 226) explain,

> current literature in teacher education focuses on the changes that cooperating teachers undergo in relation with other people, contexts and situations (Kilbourn & Roberts, 1991; Boreen & Niday, 2000; Awaya et al., 2003; Johnson, 2003) and how relationships are negotiated and renegotiated on the journey to professional development.

Malderez (2009) circumscribes the aims of mentoring to helping mentees choose theoretical orientations for their work in the classroom thus helping them bridge the theory–practice gap, and scaffolding the mentee's process of noticing as well as modelling skills in professional thinking, learning and planning. In so doing, the mentor is unpacking (Fletcher, 2000) his or her knowledge through a careful process of

reflective disclosure.

Malderez and Wedell (2007) delineate five main roles that a mentor should ideally fulfill:

a) *Acculturator* – one who helps the newcomer become a legitimate peripheral participant in the school community.
b) *Model* – not to be understood as a model to be emulated but as a model of enthusiasm for the job.
c) *Support* – once a trusting relationship has been established between Mentor and Mentee, the Mentor may become "*a shoulder to cry on or a listening ear*" (Malderez & Wedell, 2007, p. 87).
d) *Sponsor* – when the mentor intercedes on the mentee's behalf.
e) *Educator* – the actual learning expected of learners: learning to teach the students in the classroom.

These five roles are congruent with the ones expected of mentors in Uruguay and they form part of what can be called the *collective professional imagination*. In this sense, these roles have become *cultural realities* through discoursal practices that have been perpetuated from one generation to the next, regardless of the educational reform in place.

While reforms have called for drastic changes in the way teachers work, the collective professional imagination has remained faithful to its habitus. This has been most evident in the recurring complaints by teacher learners about the dissonance they experience in the practicum, a dissonance characterized by conflicting messages received in both their Subject Didactics course and their practicum experience with the mentors. This may be so because much of the discussion on mentoring seems to be focused on the "'end result' in terms of what is achieved for the student teacher" (Kwan & Lopez-Real, 2005, p. 277) rather than on the mediated symbiotic evolution of their professional identities. In the ideal mentoring situation, as it was expressed before, both Mentor and Mentee derive powerful learnings from the interaction.

Motivation for the Study

At this point, mentoring practices in Uruguay are framed within a sociocultural perspective where the mentoring relationship is viewed as one in which the mentee's professional development is to be scaffolded by the Mentor thus helping them move along a zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) created as they engage in learning and refining new teaching practices.

The motivation for the present study derived mainly from the informal observations

of the interaction between mentors and mentees that the author has carried out as a Subject Didactics teacher. If the dissonance referred to above were true, it could bear important consequences for teacher learning. As Wang and Odell (2002, p.485) put it,

> Studies on student teaching (Calderhead,1988; Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1987) show that student teachers learn different things from their student teaching when they hold different conceptions of professional learning and of their role as student teachers.

Disclosing the kinds of learning that ensues from the mentor–mentee dyad becomes particularly relevant to the reconfiguration of the interaction. However, in order to better understand how mentoring relationships operate in the national context, an explanatory framework for their conceptualization is needed. This framework should be general enough to allow for the unexpected answers which participants may give to the research questions, while, at the same time, being specific enough to accommodate multifaceted views of the process derived from the respondents' experience.

The framework resorts to Wang and Odell's (2002) perspectives of mentoring and describes three distinct orientations towards it: Humanistic, Situated Apprenticeship and Critical Constructivist. Given that this conceptualization spans developments in the field over the past three decades and makes reference to the main philosophical and ontological views of the process of Mentoring, it is assumed to be a valid contribution to the study.

The Humanistic perspective became popular during the 1980s and was born as a way of helping novice teachers deal with the reality shock they encountered when entering the classroom and which seemed to be responsible for the high numbers of teachers leaving the profession during their first year of teaching. This orientation sees the cooperating teacher as provider of psychological and emotional support to the mentee and obtaining, in turn, prestige and an enhanced status. While popular with both mentors and mentees alike, its downside was that many novices failed to enhance their pedagogical or content knowledge, one of the ultimate aims of mentoring (Wang & Odell, 2002). Characteristic of this model were references to nurturing and emotional support in the face of the day-to-day hurdles. Interactions within this perspective emphasised the mentor's role as an emotional crutch, leaving little space for the potential contributions the mentee could make to the relationship.

The Situated Apprenticeship perspective evolved towards the late 1980s and aimed at strengthening the mentees' field experience as a reaction to teacher education practices, which relied heavily on coursework in university settings with few effects on actual teaching. It also stemmed from a renewed emphasis on Situated Learning (Lave

& Wenger, 1991) approaches to teacher education that emphasized the need for novices to become legitimate peripheral participants of the communities of practice they would eventually become fully fledged members of (Wenger, 1998). This view emphasizes that all knowledge and theories emerge from the contexts of practice in which they are born (Roth & Lee, 2007). This perspective called for mentors to induct mentees in the acquisition of practical teaching knowledge and skills and understanding of the cultures of teaching existing in their educational institutions. With the mentor acting as a model and the mentee as his or her apprentice, the limitations of this perspective soon became evident as mentees failed to contextualize the behaviours modelled by their mentors to their own classes, or perpetuated ineffective practices learnt as a consequence of their mentoring experience. As Wang and Odell (2002, p. 497) aptly put it: "The situated apprentice perspective suggests a narrow, functional perspective on teacher learning that is intended to reproduce the existing system." Lastly, teacher mentoring within this perspective implies a predictable route from pre-service to novice to competent, which is not always feasible or necessarily linear. Again, in this perspective, it was the mentor the one with the biggest gains in the relationship although it needs to be acknowledged that mentees might have gained more in terms of skills, knowledge and dispositions for teaching.

In more recent times, a Critical Constructivist perspective has become popular. Influenced by the work of Dewey and Freire, it seeks support for novice teachers' learning to teach for social justice, given that traditional teaching approaches have failed dismally to educate the many underprivileged and at-risk populations characteristic of state-funded educational systems. For this kind of teacher education to emerge, new forms of knowledge need to be developed through collaborative inquiry. These inquiries focus on current teaching practices and continually seek to transform them towards emancipatory ends. In so doing, knowledge transformation is seen as a highly situated co-construction amongst participants. Mentors and mentees are co-generators of new knowledge and classroom practices and, together, engage in generating novel approaches to teaching (Zeichner, 1995). The power of this vision calls for educators—both budding as well as seasoned—to engage in cycles of inquiry and reflection aiming at problematizing teaching and learning for the benefit of students. Though stimulating and refreshing, this perspective is not devoid of problems. For example, given the premise that all knowledge is problematic if it is not the result of collaborative inquiry, mentees may have limited access to knowledge that others have constructed. Nevertheless, this perspective is more encompassing of the contributions of both mentors and mentees and constitutes a more desirable aim to be achieved.

These three perspectives on mentoring form the basis for the analysis of the data gathered in this study and help answer the main research question: What learnings ensue

from the interaction of Mentors and Mentees in Uruguayan State Schools?

Context of the Study

The Uruguayan National Teacher Education Council—a 31-campus Higher Education Institution—was until recently the only body providing teacher certification in Uruguay. Students complete a four-year Bachelor of Arts in Education degree with a major in a specific subject. During their second and third years, they are assigned to Mentors in the State School System, and are visited on three occasions by their Subject Didactics teacher. The Subject Didactics teacher is in charge of the Methods of Teaching course in the college. During their final year, teacher learners are assigned to a group of their own in the State School System and are expected to develop and teach the course with minimal help or support, except for that of the Subject Didactics teacher's who visits them five times during that year.

In the Uruguayan Educational System Mentors become so, solely through seniority. Having taught for a minimum of 10 years in State Schools and having been supervised by a National Inspector and obtained a satisfactory ranking, they enter a national roster from which teacher learners select the school and group that is most convenient to them, given their timetables in the college and other personal commitments. No effort is made to match teacher learners and mentors so the relationship is purely *ad hoc*. Mentors receive the equivalent of one extra group's payment for their services and are expected to welcome the teacher learners in their groups, and to add significantly to the courses taught in the college by allowing spaces for mentees to put theory into practice. There are no explicit written specifications for the Mentor's role except for an indirect mention as to their function in the National Teacher Education Curriculum. Also, there have only been two Mentor Preparation courses in the past five years that have affected only 1% of the total mentor population in the country.

It is in this context that the author decided to probe into the mentoring relationship in order to disclose the kinds of learning that ensue from the interaction. Underpinning this intention was the premise that the desired changes in pedagogical practices expected of newly qualified teachers can only happen if mentoring relationships provide the necessary scaffolding for these new learnings to emerge in the protected environment of the practicum.

It should be noted once again that the present study is limited both in scope and breadth and constitutes only an initial attempt at tackling the issue. More longitudinal studies involving larger populations will follow in order to probe the actual learning that takes place in mentoring relationships.

Methodology and Participants

The study was carried out through the administration of an online questionnaire to mentors and one to mentees. The choice of research instrument was made because of the ease of distribution and application and the resources available to the researcher. Also, with the new Information and Communication Technologies becoming increasingly more available to teachers and students in the State School System—Uruguay is implementing the *One Laptop per Child* programme nationwide in primary and secondary schools and every teacher has access to a computer with an internet connection—the researcher considered this medium preferable to face-to-face interviews or focus groups.

Mentor and mentee online questionnaires were created using a tool that reports anonymous answers. Both questionnaires focused on demographic information followed by questions regarding the respondent's perception of learning through the Mentoring experience. The content of both questionnaires was kept relatively parallel for the sake of validity and reliability of results.

Participants

Surveys were sent to a total sample of 20 teacher learners and 20 mentors in the Modern Foreign Languages Department randomly selected from the College of Education's database. Seven responses were received from teacher learners (35%) and four from mentors (25%). The return rate of questionnaires from teacher learners is considered barely satisfactory whereas the return rate of questionnaires from mentors is not adequate.

The seven student teachers had just completed a two-year mentoring experience and were now in charge of their own groups. The respondents were between 26 and 30 years of age and most had never taught before doing their first year of teaching practice with their mentors. Overall, these teacher learners acknowledged having taught for 2 to 5 years, including their mentoring years.

The following table summarizes the demographics of the seven student teacher respondents:

Sex			Male		Female	
			2		5	
Age	21–25	26–30	30–35	36–40	41–50	51+
	12.5%	62.5%	0%	12.5%	0%	12.5%
Years teaching	Less than 1	2–5	6–10	11–15	16–20	21+
	12.5%	50%	25%	0%	0%	12.5%
Before doing their teaching practice...			Never taught	Little teaching		Teaching for some time
			62.5%	12.5%		25%

Table 1. Participating student teachers' profiles.

The variables of *years of experience teaching* and *teaching experience prior to the mentoring situation* were considered relevant in so far as the respondents' diversity may indicate that, having had some or even significant teaching experience, participants may have been better positioned to assess the worth of the experiences provided during the practicum. Rajuan, Baijaard and Verloop (2007, p. 224) suggest "that protégés report more negative mentoring experiences when they perceive their mentor as having dissimilar attitudes, beliefs and values from their own."

As for mentors, out of the 20 surveys sent out only four answers were received. The demographic information provided by respondents also pointed to the diversity in the mentoring force, which seems to replicate that found in the teacher learners' population. All respondents were experienced both in terms of the scope of their experience teaching as well as their experience in mentoring.

In terms of their preparation for the role, the four respondents had engaged in some formal training for the task of mentoring. Noticeably, all of them participated in meetings with the National Inspector where the mentor role was discussed, whereas 25% met regularly with the Subject Didactics Teacher to exchange views on the Mentoring process, and 75% of the participants had taken, and passed, the Mentor Preparation Course.

The following table summarizes the information provided by the mentors:

Sex			Male		Female	
			0		4	
Age	21–25	26–30	30–35	36–40	41–50	51+
	0%	0%	0%	0%	50%	50%
Years teaching			10–15	16–20	21–25	26–30
			25%	0%	0%	12.5%
Years mentoring	2–5	6–10	11–15	16–20	21–25	26+
	50%	25%	0%	0%	0%	25%
Mentor preparation	None	Mentor Course	Teacher Ed. course, Private provider	Teacher Ed. course, Public provider	Meeting with Didactics Teacher	Meeting with Inspectors
	0%	75%	25%	50%	50%	100%

Table 2. Participating mentors' profiles.

Data collection

The questionnaires were created using an online survey tool that allowed for closed (multiple choice, drop-down menus, ranking, ordering and sorting) and open questions (essay style). Questions focused solely on the learning ensuing from the classroom interaction between mentors and mentees bearing in mind that "teaching practice in the school serves as the most significant factor in the shaping of the student teachers'

experience of training to be a teacher" (Rajuan et. al, 2007, p. 223).

All questions focusing on learning through the mentoring situation were open, guided questions, that is to say, participants could provide their own answers to a prompt given by the researcher. However, in both surveys, there was one fully open question at the end for participants to expand on items they would want to highlight.

The survey was kept open online for a total of 40 days during which time three reminders were emailed to the 40 potential respondents clearly stating the purpose of the study and the length of time the survey would remain open.

Data analysis

Data were coded using Wang and Odell's (2002) perspectives on mentoring as a framework for disclosing mentors and mentees' understanding of the learning stemming from their interaction. Responses were matched to the three main perspectives above and content areas were created for the different areas stemming from the responses. In going through this iterative process of reviewing the data and creating the content areas, Malderez and Wedell's (2007) Mentor functions were considered and other categories created. Finally, mentor and mentee's data were compared to find similarities and differences. On comparing them, it was noted that mentors made reference to learning as a two-way process whereas mentees' answers mostly referred to a one-way process. Hence, in the case of mentors' answers, the content area they emphasized as mutual was coded as such.

Perspective	Category	Examples
Humanistic	Support Care Symbiosis	The teacher was supportive She respected my time and process There was warmth in the relationship She cared about me as a person The teacher understood me and I understood her
Situated apprenticeship	Acculturation Education Modelling Support	Made me feel I was a colleague not a student How to share opinions How to make the class meaningful How to be calm when students misbehave How to try out new things How to organize and manage group work
Critical constructivist	Sponsorship Promotion of praxis Promotion of creativity	Helped me become aware of how important it is to reflect How to back up my teaching with theory She taught me to take risks

Table 3. Summary of teacher learners' responses.

The same process was followed at the time of analyzing data provided by the mentors. Again, through an iterative process of continuous approximation to the data, categories

were delineated for each perspective stemming from the answers given by participants. As explained above, the initial difficulty in analyzing these data was the fact that mentors referred to their own learning more than to their mentees' learning (even when the question explicitly required them to address the mentee). These digressions from the parameters of the survey by the respondents clearly indicate one of the potential drawbacks of such an instrument. Had the data been gathered through face-to-face interviews, the researcher would have been able to redirect the participant's answers to the issue of mentee's learning. However, the responses obtained are, in this case, much more revealing since they depict a reality about which the researcher was completely unaware. This reality makes reference to how the respondents perceive learning as a two-way process, a fact that begets the core of the present pilot project.

Perspective	Categories	Examples
Humanistic	Support (mutual) Sponsorship Education	Student teachers were a breath of fresh air. I helped them overcome frustrations. They shared what they were studying and that helped me grow.
Situated apprenticeship	Education Acculturation (mutual) Modelling (mutual) Awareness raising	Helped me realize I needed to plan my lessons better. The need to constantly update what I know. Taught me how to teach them to organize and plan better. Made me more aware of my classroom management. Helped me realize the power of cooperative work. Sharpen my intuition and "unpack" my tacit knowledge. I learnt a lot of things I am not supposed to do.
Critical constructivist	Acculturation (mutual) Support	Student teachers provided another point of view. Become more responsible for my students' learning. Made me realize how to relate theory and practice.

Table 4. Summary of cooperating teacher's answers.

Data were also analyzed in terms of frequency of response by weighing the number of responses for each of the three perspectives chosen. A further difficulty arose at the time of coding the answers of mentors, some of which seemed suitable for more than one perspective. Given the nature of the relationship depicted by the respondents and taking into consideration all answers in the same context, a decision was finally made to code them into one category, while also pointing out the need to discuss the overlap of two of the perspectives further on in this paper.

Results

Learning as Reported by Teacher Learners

From the analysis of the student teacher responses it would appear that learning happened in a wide assortment of ways. All three perspectives of mentoring were accounted for, which reflects the varied understanding of mentoring roles and relationships existing amongst participants. This is not strange given the relative lack of precision as to the specification of the role and responsibilities.

Of the three perspectives, the Situated Apprenticeship perspective obtained the most responses. It seems clear that teacher learners derived a lot of technical and hands-on knowledge from their interactions with their mentors. The main concerns they report are those having to do with day-to-day operational or procedural tasks of the teacher: *how to keep the students on task, how to organize effective learning experiences, how to plan*. All these concerns are reported as being natural in beginning teachers (Furlong & Maynard, 1995). These authors explain how beginning teachers share a preoccupation with making the class work by focusing on planning, class management and organization. However, they do not focus on student learning until much later stages in their practicum experience. Likewise, Richards, Lee and Tang (1998, in Borg, 2006) reporting on studies focusing on novice and expert teachers' cognition show how less experienced teachers focus more on procedural and technical aspects of teaching than on student learning. Reportedly, "[m]axims used more frequently by less experienced teachers were 'cover your lesson plan,' and 'fit your plan to match the time available'" (Borg, 2006, p. 103).

It could be claimed that the practical learning reported primarily by teacher learners here, focuses on *practice* and not *praxis*. Roth and Lee (2007, p. 190) explain that "praxis denotes the moments of real human activity that occur only once (Bakhtin, 1993), which distinguishes it from the notion of practice, which is used to denote a patterned form of action, inherently a theoretical signified." In other words, teacher learners perceive that they have learnt routines grounded on "best practices" rather than developed ownership of their own learning teaching. In doing this, they may replicate the behaviours that their mentors coached them into. Whether mentors coached mentees into practical concerns over more critical ones or, as a direct response to the mentees' needs rather than the mentor's own agenda, cannot be ascertained and opens up an interesting question for further exploration.

It should be noted that, besides these practical concerns, mentors also inducted teacher learners in aspects of the profession, truthfully fulfilling the socialization function expected of the mentoring relationship. Teacher learners reported being "allowed to share class time" and "being made feel they were a colleague and not a student." Both of these dispositions seem to show a concern on the part of the mentor to help teacher

learners gain legitimate peripheral participation in the profession. However, these efforts are reported as stemming from the practice and do not necessarily coincide with the reality of a professional teacher who focuses her actions as much on praxis as on practice.

The second perspective in frequency reported in teacher learners' answers is the Humanistic perspective. In this sense, what participants reported are attitudes the Mentor had which position them as an emotional helper. This may derive from the emphases on the technical aspects presented above which, when occurring in the classroom, may cause anxiety in teacher learners. In this sense, we can see how words such as *warmth*, *care*, *generous* and *humour* permeate the answers. One may speculate here that there might be a relationship between the first two perspectives: when faced with the cruxes of practice Mentees receive both technical information and emotional support from Mentors.

This situation is not unlike that reported by other researchers. For example, Kwan and Lopez-Real (2005, p. 281) explain that

> "These two clusters seem to reflect the findings of Bleach (1999) who described Mentors as providing two sides of assistance to newly qualified teachers, the personal befriending side and the professional side. This is further supported by Williams and Prestage (2002) who discuss the contrast between the professional role and interpersonal support."

The last perspective referred to by respondents in this category is the Critical Constructivist perspective. Although incipient, compared to the frequency of answers given in the other two categories, we can see traces of mentors' actions towards emancipatory practices such as *reflection*, *trying out new things*, *taking risks* and *developing grounded theories*.

Considering the aims of the current reform agenda and the data above, teacher learners' perceptions of their learning through mentoring interactions have not progressed much beyond an apprenticeship model of the craft of teaching. This model has been nurtured and supported by a caring professional but without much overt attention to modifying the practices which have reputedly led many students to failure. This orientation of mentors towards modelling technical knowledge seems to be commonplace in the profession and has been reported by Hargreaves and Fullan (2000) as a consequence of mentors' perception of themselves as experts on teaching entrusted with passing on their practical knowledge to their mentees for the sake of their survival in the classroom. Also, Eraut (1985) cites the fact that mentors occupy most of their time managing the daily events of their classrooms and do not have time to explain the reasons for their

actions to teacher learners, a situation which Fletcher (2000, p.37) calls "unpacking their expertise." One may also speculate that, given the little preparation for the role of the mentors in this study, they may lack the skills to make their tacit knowledge about teaching and learning explicit, since this is a practice not frequently requested from teachers.

Learning as reported by mentors

Responses by mentors mirror those given by mentees in terms of the frequency of their answers as coded into each of the perspectives, which constitute the working model used in this paper. We may question the relative homogeneity in the responses of mentors and mentees in terms of the mentors' influences on the professional opinions of mentees. However, as Rajuan, Baijaard and Verloop (2007:226) remind us

> "Current literature in teacher education focuses on the changes that cooperating teachers undergo in relation with other people, contexts and situations (Kilbourn & Roberts, 1991; Boreen & Niday, 2000; Awaya et al., 2003; Johnson, 2003) and how relationships are negotiated and renegotiated on the journey to professional development. The Mentoring context is one that introduces teachers to a new role in the workplace in interaction with student teachers and teacher trainers."

It can be speculated that Mentors' responses to the needs of Mentees were responsible for prompting the development of specific views about the task of teaching at hand thus yielding the same kinds of answers which mentees have given.

In the present study mentors reported a progressive awareness-raising process stemming from their involvement in mentoring teacher learners. They made reference to their own learning more frequently than that of the teacher learners'. They saw themselves mostly as models and instructors who pursued a firmer theoretical grasp of the principles and practices of teaching and learning in order to better serve the needs of mentees.

Quotes such as "My mentee helped me realize I needed to plan my lessons better," "I discovered the need to constantly update what I know" or "My mentee taught me how to teach him to organize and plan better" point at the fact that the mentoring relationship was, indeed, a two-way process of co-construction of new theories on teaching and learning while respecting the needs of the mentee. In other words, the mentors in this study seek to enhance their knowledge, skills and dispositions in light of the needs of their mentees and it is here that their professional development seems to lie. However, no mention is made to attempts at professional development outside their interaction

with the mentees.

In this scenario, mentoring seems to have become a powerful tool for the professional development of the mentor while, at the same time, serving as a conduit for unpacking mentor's knowledge. As one mentor aptly put it: "Mentoring has helped me sharpen my intuition and 'unpack' my tacit knowledge and I also learnt a lot of things I am not supposed to do."

Given these answers, one can see the boundary between the Situated Apprenticeship and the Critical Constructivist perspective become rather blurred. In terms of frequency of responses, those coded as pertaining to the Situated Apprenticeship perspective on mentoring made reference to practical teacher concerns (planning; bridging the theory – practice gap; cooperative work; and classroom management). However, when one looks at the answers coded within the Critical Constructivist perspective, one sees how the awareness-raising effect of the mentoring relationship impinges directly on the mentor's professional development as a language teacher, and as a mentor in a more indirect fashion. In this category, mentors reported the help afforded them by mentees provided them with "another point of view" or helped them "become more responsible for my students' learning."

The Humanistic perspective was also present in the same frequency as the Critical Constructivist perspective. Here, one can see once again how the presence of the mentee acts as a catalyst for the mentor's own development: "Student teachers were a breath of fresh air," and, in a more telling way, "They shared what they were studying and that helped me grow."

It may seem then, that it is the mentor who is gaining the most out of this relationship. Although this may be a bold claim, data seem to depict a process of reflective disclosure of their own learning more than an explication of how their actions result in the mentees' learning.

Whose learning? Who's learning? The contested ground in teacher learning

From the analysis of the data above, it would appear that the mentoring relationship of Uruguayan Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages contributing to this study serves primarily as a conduit for the professional development of the mentors, while providing instrumental and practical knowledge to mentees. The potential hurdle in this situation is that this practical knowledge seems to be coded mostly as *ways of doing* and it is not certain to what extent teacher learners have access to the professional thinking which guides these actions. This may point to a potential contradiction of the main charges of a mentor, which encompass, among others, helping mentees develop noticing skills, and learning to think as a professional teacher.

However, this situation may also result from a shift in the mentors' perspectives

about their role and function within the teacher education system. As Kwan and Lopez-Real (2005, p. 285) report

> ...the Mentors' change in perceptions of their roles arise from the Mentoring experience itself, through the interactions that take place with the student teachers. This could be described as a shift from a perspective of Mentoring as a one-way process to that of Mentoring as a two-way process in which both participants can benefit.

In this view, mentoring becomes an educational process for both mentors and mentees resulting in quality learning for both. Also, the situation seems to mirror the view of learning officially sponsored by Uruguayan authorities, one of joint construction of knowledge rather than transmission. In other words, the context in which this study was carried out considers mentoring practices as a way of developing a professional identity as much as a way to help mentees hone their professional knowledge, skills and dispositions.

It would appear from this analysis that mentoring practices in Uruguay are at the crossroads between one mentoring tradition grounded on the transmission of practical knowledge and one that seeks to generate a field for the further professional growth of mentors. However, the purpose of the mentoring relationship is supposed to ultimately lie in the development of the mentee's learning. It is for this sole purpose that the relationship is started.

Ironically, it is the mentors in this study the ones who seem to reap the biggest rewards from the relationship. They gain insights on new developments in the profession via the work of their mentees, keep abreast of these developments through the updated literature their mentees come into contact with, and gain a professional space of reflection from which they can deem insights into their own praxis via the opportunity to develop new practices. It may seem that the mentoring process has evolved into a form of relationship in which participants have focused on "the social nature of learning as a process but not the social nature of learning as an outcome" (Bullock & Wikeley, 2004, p. 126).

Finally, we should also acknowledge the power of pedagogical traditions. In coming to terms with the mandates of the educational reform, veteran teachers—our mentors—have had to make significant shifts to their own educational platforms and they have done so with varying degrees of success. In trying to align themselves with *new pedagogies* mentors may have intuitively, albeit unconsciously, used the mentoring ground as the territory upon which to build the new educational foundation required from them by authorities. Rajuan, Baijaard and Verloop (2007, p. 226) depict a similar situation when they say that "the current shift from traditional instruction to student-

centered learning (Wang, 2000; van Veen et al., 2001) poses a challenge to teachers' professional orientations and the way veteran teachers mentor student teachers."

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to disclose the kinds of learning which result from the interaction between mentors and mentees in Uruguay.

While one would expect the bulk of the professional learning to lie on the mentee's experience, the learning they report is mostly practical with a good dose of support on the part of the mentors. In contrast, mentors report valuable professional learning by engaging in the relationship. If one could talk about the quality of the learning experiences it would seem that mentors have the better part in this relationship since the relationship affords them multiple opportunities for professional development, which is not provided by the educational system otherwise.

This fact notwithstanding, the present research report is limited both in terms of scope and breadth. Hence, it opens up opportunities for further inquiry. Among the themes which stem from the present report we may count: how mentors develop within the mentoring relationship, how mentees manage to develop situated knowledge outside the mentoring relationship, and also whether mentor preparation courses can influence the way mentors perform their tasks. This also opens up the question of what learning should mentors develop prior to becoming so. As Gebhard (2009, p. 255) explains

> ...it is possible for practicum teacher educators to focus attention on empowering teacher learners as to how to understand their teaching. Through an understanding of how to explore their teaching, they can adapt their teaching, including their beliefs, as well as be able to continuously construct and reconstruct their teaching and teaching identies.

The processes of interaction that may yield such vision can be the fodder for further research, as well.

Finally, one area that was purposefully not tackled in this research study and which merits further inquiry, is that of the balance of power in the mentoring relationship. An important variable left out of the equation here is that the whole research project stemmed from the Higher Education Institution personified in the Subject Didactics teacher–researcher, who is often perceived as an authority figure. Even though anonymity was secured via the use of an electronic survey, respondents may have provided compliant responses.

It seems evident that in order to counteract undesired halo effects in a study of this nature, other research instruments and even other researchers need to be involved so

as to add validity and reliability to the results. The next step would be to engage in a broader study seeking to confirm or dispute the findings discussed here as a way to contribute to a redefinition of the roles and responsibilities of mentors.

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Argentinian Journal of Applied Linguistics
Vol. 2, No. 2, November 2014, 42-59

FAAPI

Involving female Omani English language teachers in evaluating curriculum materials

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(Received 27/01/14; final version received 14/05/14)

Abstract

English language teachers have an important role in evaluating curriculum materials used with their learners. Accordingly, feedback elicited from teachers should be collected, collated and referred to by curriculum planners initiating educational reform. There are very few accounts, though, of such processes and it is sometimes feared that teachers' voices (including those of non-native speaker females in Middle Eastern societies) are unheard. Drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data, this article focuses on female primary school English teachers' perceptions of their own involvement in evaluating materials in the Sultanate of Oman. It reveals that, although the teachers demonstrate awareness of materials evaluation processes, their experience of being involved in them is limited. It considers how this involvement could be increased.

Keywords: curriculum materials evaluation; English language teaching; female primary school teachers; Middle East.

Resumen

Los profesores de inglés tienen un papel importante en la evaluación de los materiales curriculares que utilizan con sus alumnos. En consecuencia, el feedback obtenido de los profesores debería ser recopilado, cotejado y consultado por los encargados de la planificación del currículo que se dispongan a iniciar una reforma educativa. Sin embargo, hay muy pocos casos en los que se realice este proceso y a veces se teme que las voces de los profesores (incluyendo las de las hablantes no nativas en sociedades de Oriente Medio) no se oigan. A través del análisis de datos cuantitativos y cualitativos, este artículo se centra en las percepciones de profesoras de inglés de educación primaria sobre su propia participación en la evaluación de materiales en la Sultanía de Omán. El artículo revela que, a pesar de que las profesoras demuestran tener conocimiento sobre los procesos de evaluación de materiales, su participación en los mismos es limitada. El artículo considera cómo podría aumentarse dicha participación.

Palabras clave: evaluación de materiales curriculares; enseñanza de inglés; profesoras de educación primaria; Medio Oriente.

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ISSN 2314-3576 (online)

IN AN ENGLISH language teaching (ELT) context, curriculum materials can be defined as anything that facilitates the learning of the English language, whether "linguistic, visual, auditory or kinaesthetic" (Tomlinson, 2003, p. 2). Examples include textbooks, flashcards and multimedia software. Choosing and designing appropriate materials is not necessarily straightforward, though. It is a reflective process that needs to be based on a clear understanding of learners' needs, awareness of which materials are culturally appropriate and knowledge of how they can be realized pedagogically in the classroom (Jolly & Bolitho, 1998). Materials produced then need evaluating: How successfully do they cater to learners' "changing and complex needs" in a world being rapidly transformed (Masuhara & Tomlinson, 2010, p. 394)?

Evaluating materials systematically is a cyclical process drawing upon learners' reactions, teachers' reflections and opinions, and evidence of the achievement of learning objectives (McGrath, 2002). Therefore, together with their learners, teachers would seem to have an important role. However, while there is increasing evidence of individual teachers in various local contexts becoming personally engaged (Masuhara and Tomlinson, 2010), much less is known about teachers' institutionally-sanctioned involvement in materials evaluation processes in diverse national contexts, particularly in the Middle East. Focusing on a sample of female primary school English language teachers in Oman, this article considers their awareness of materials evaluation processes and their experiences of being involved in those initiated by their curriculum department.

Literature Review

Teacher involvement in materials evaluation

Twenty years ago, in contexts where English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is taught, insiders such as local teachers were often ignored in materials evaluation processes, as their judgements were considered "too subjective" (Rea-Dickens & Germaine, 1992, p. 67). Instead, materials evaluation was often left to foreign *experts*, bringing a fresh perspective but lacking detailed knowledge of the specific learning/teaching context (Alderson & Beretta, 1992). However, attitudes have gradually changed and there is increasing acceptance of McDonough and Shaw's (1993) long-held view, that evaluating materials is "a very important professional activity for all EFL teachers" (p. 63). For example, Stillwell, McMillan, Gillies and Waller (2010, p. 257) argue that engaging teachers in materials evaluation encourages reflection, promotes professional development and establishes "a sort of institutional memory that prevents participants from constantly having to reinvent the wheel when addressing common problems". This implies that if an understanding of what tends to work in the specific educational context in which materials are being designed is shared, then this will be highly beneficial to

the participating teachers who are gaining localized expertise in the development of materials.

It is unclear, though, to what extent EFL teachers are involved in materials evaluation processes, particularly in the case of non-native speaker females providing primary school education in the Middle East, a group whose input might be restricted for various reasons. There are political and socio-cultural issues. For example, non-native speakers have long suffered inequality within ELT (Holliday, 2006). Furthermore, primary school teachers can suffer prejudice in many contexts worldwide in relation to secondary school teachers, who tend to be better qualified (Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007). Additionally, it may be harder for females in Middle Eastern societies to physically get to curriculum meetings as many do not drive and are reliant on transport provided by male relatives (Richardson, 2004).

Whilst the position of women has improved dramatically in recent decades in Omani society and, in the education sector, local women have become much more active (Rassekh, 2004; Wyatt & Arnold, 2012), opportunities to gain influence over curriculum management processes have been limited. This is partly because historically various middle management posts in the Omani Ministry of Education that include responsibility for the English language primary school curriculum, e.g. textbook editors, authors and advisors, have been held by British foreigners (Al-Issa, 2006), including men as well as women. Furthermore, here, as in much of the Middle East, education authorities have tended to prefer top-down models of curriculum development that would seem to confine the teacher's role to implementing pre-designed packages of materials (Al-Issa, 2007; El-Okda, 2005). In such contexts, materials evaluation processes are rarely publicised and the results of curriculum evaluation exercises tend to be in the form of confidential reports to the commissioning education authorities (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2010).

Nevertheless, despite the common tendency of education authorities in different worldwide contexts to discourage a bottom-up approach to materials development, powerful arguments for involving teachers can overcome the various objections raised. After managing to persuade Argentinian authorities to accept a bottom-up approach, Banegas (2011) initiated reforms which demonstrated that, through giving teachers space to participate, a more appropriately context-sensitive curriculum can be developed, with teachers growing as reflective practitioners through the process.

Of course, the first step towards achieving such reform in different national contexts is to get teachers involved in systematically evaluating curriculum materials themselves, perhaps as elected teacher representatives serving on curriculum committees (McGrath, 2013). Such initiatives are necessary. Where teachers are not engaged actively in the materials evaluation process, as Banegas (2011) reports had been the case in Argentina prior to his intervention, the outcomes can be deeply disappointing, with

materials provided to teachers and students after a top-down design process perhaps misunderstood, rejected and/or largely ignored by the intended users.

Teachers might be consulted at different stages of the materials evaluation process, at points identified by McGrath (2002) as pre-use, in-use and post-use. The pre-use stage incorporates what McGrath terms *armchair evaluation*, when the teacher, yet to use the materials in the classroom, comments on potential suitability. Then, once the materials are in use, perhaps being trialled on a small-scale basis, teachers might engage in "conscientious record-keeping and evidence-based reflection" (McGrath, 2002, p. 181), considering issues such as how much of the materials they are able to use unchanged and how well they appear to work. Teachers' records might be supplemented with observations of them teaching, learner diaries and plenary discussions. These might consider the interest generated by the materials, their appropriacy in terms of linguistic and cognitive challenge and whether they offer sufficient practice (McGrath, 2002). Such concerns also inform post-use evaluation, when overall suitability is also considered and learning outcomes of various kinds are assessed.

For teachers to engage fully in materials evaluation, they need appropriate infrastructure and support. If data they provide are to be collated and fed systematically into the evaluation process, this requires coordination and commitment at various levels (McGrath, 2002). In-service training focused on how to evaluate may also be highly beneficial, particularly where teachers' basic training is limited (Banegas, 2011). Studies of expertise (e.g. Johnson et al., 2006) suggest that experienced teachers may be able to contribute more to the materials evaluation process than novices, although, given the benefits of being involved, it can be argued that all teachers should be involved (Banegas, 2011).

Accounts of involving teachers in evaluating curriculum materials are rare, but two such studies were conducted over 15 years ago in our research context, Oman. We report on them below.

The research context

Oman has modernised rapidly since 1970 when there were just three schools in the whole country (Harrison, 1996) and illiteracy rates were high, particularly amongst girls and women, a situation that has now radically changed (Atkins & Griffiths, 2009; Rassekh, 2004). Initially, as the number of schools expanded, qualified Omanis were in short supply and most teachers were expatriates. However, Omani English language teachers were recruited from the late 1980s (and assigned to teach lower grades). These were Diploma-holders from teacher training colleges; the majority (over 900) subsequently upgraded their qualifications through a University of Leeds BA Educational Studies in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) (Wyatt, 2011). Additionally,

Omani graduates from Sultan Qaboos University entered English language teaching from the 1990s to teach in secondary schools. Since then there have also been recruits from private universities (Al-Balooshi, 2009) to fill continuing vacancies at all levels. These vacancies are due partly to rapid population growth, which has increased the demand for teachers, and also to the policy of Omanisation, which encourages the recruitment of Omanis and the phasing out of expatriate posts wherever possible.

There have been waves of curriculum renewal. The first specially designed curriculum was 'English for Oman' (EfO). Introduced in 1979, it was replaced in 1988 by 'Our World Through English' (OWTE), which in turn gave way to 'English for Me' (EfM) in 1999. While EfO was produced by an international publisher with the author resident for four months each year in Oman (Barnard & Randall, 1995), OWTE and EfM were both products of the curriculum department in Muscat, which, as noted above, employed a team of British expatriate authors and advisors.

These three curricula were all trialled, and although these were top-down processes they nevertheless involved teachers (Barnard & Randall, 1995; Harrison, 1996; Wyatt, 2010). In the following paragraphs, we explore the different strategies and methods (e.g. observations, interviews, reflective diaries and questionnaires) used in the trialling of EfO, OWTE and EfM.

For the trialling of EfO (which was a continuous process over a number of years, starting with lower grades as course materials were gradually introduced), teachers were selected from different types of school: boys and girls, urban and rural, mountain, coast and plain. The curriculum author visited teachers' schools twice each year, observed lessons in which they used the materials, elicited their perceptions of them orally and analysed the diaries they were asked to complete. Their lessons were also observed by school inspectors, whose observation notes the curriculum author saw (Barnard & Randall, 1995).

Observing lessons in which the new materials were being trialled was also a feature of the evaluations of OWTE and EfM. Regarding the former, which initially focused on Grade 4, since this was the starting point for formal English learning at the time, Harrison (1996) reports that school inspectors from nine (of eleven) different regions of the country (see Table 1, below, for a full list) were involved. Each region was asked to subject particular sections of the new course book to scrutiny. Inspectors, who Barnard and Randall (1995) report were asked to be impartial in focusing on the extent to which recommended procedures were followed, observed the same two teachers teach the same classes everyday for two to three weeks (Harrison 1996).

Observation was also employed in 1999, when EfM was being trialled in a limited number of new primary schools (for Grades 1-4) around the country. These primary schools were part of widespread educational reforms. Now both genders would study

together for the first time (until Grade 5 when they went to single-sex schools). English would be introduced in Grade 1 rather than Grade 4. Senior teacher posts would be created to encourage mentoring. The new primary schools, though, would employ only female teachers, which is why female teachers are the focus of our research. During the trialling of EfM, visitors from the curriculum department were often present, observing and discussing appropriate methodology for use with the new materials, according to a teacher in Wyatt's (2010) study.

Besides observation, OWTE evaluations made use of questionnaires. However, these were lengthy, difficult to analyse, did not provide the kind of information that could be of use to curriculum evaluators and may have been resented by the teachers asked to complete them (Barnard & Randall, 1995). Regional meetings with teachers were of limited value too. Such meetings require clear aims, a positive atmosphere and inclusive management that encourage participation (Harrison, 1996). The smaller-scale EfO evaluations may have done more to build positive relationships and trust (Barnard & Randall, 1995).

Were they more effective, though? Large-scale materials evaluation is highly complex, requiring various forms of triangulation (Harrison, 1996). Furthermore, even if a highly effective process is employed, so that improvements are continually being made on the basis of feedback, the curriculum may nevertheless be replaced wholesale if economic or political concerns dictate (Barnard & Randall, 1995). The same outcome may also be the result of insufficient improvements. Although it had been revised, Harrison (1996) identifies issues with EfO that may have led to its replacement.

Curriculum replacement is expensive, though, and can be resented by teachers attached to aspects of the discarded curriculum they feel work (Barnard & Randall, 1995). Continuing curriculum renewal might be a better option, particularly if teachers feel able to contribute to this. Since the 1990s, teaching has gradually become a graduate profession in Oman (in primary as well as secondary schools), with Omani teachers, including women, both assuming more responsible roles (Wyatt, 2010; Wyatt & Arnold, 2012) and gaining the experience that facilitates a fuller contribution to materials evaluation processes (Johnson et al., 2006). Furthermore, for certain graduates of the University of Leeds BA TESOL, some training in evaluating materials has been provided (Wyatt, 2011). The educational landscape has thus changed considerably since the studies of Barnard and Randall (1995) and Harrison (1996).

In this paper, we explore female primary school English teachers' awareness of and perceived involvement in materials evaluation processes in a Middle-Eastern context being reshaped since the Arab Spring by calls for greater participation in various spheres of public life (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012). Our perspective is not that of former curriculum department insiders, as was the case in the Barnard and Randall (1995) and Harrison

(1996) studies, but is closer to the periphery in terms of influence. The first-named author, senior teacher of a primary school in the fairly remote Sharqiya South region, nearly 300 kilometres from the capital, Muscat (see Table 1, below), with extensive teaching experience and University of Leeds BA and MA qualifications, has developed interest over time in involving teachers in materials evaluation. This inspired original research on which this article is based (Al-Senaidi, 2010). The second-named author, a teacher trainer/advisor in the same region between 2000 and 2002, shares a concern for listening to teachers' voices in curriculum renewal.

Research Methodology

Our research questions are as follows:

1. What awareness of materials evaluation processes do female primary school English teachers in Oman demonstrate?
2. What are their experiences of being involved in materials evaluation processes initiated by the curriculum department?

To address these questions, we have adopted a mixed methods study, using both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data will provide a broad picture of teachers' awareness of materials evaluation processes and their experiences of being involved, while qualitative data will provide in-depth insights.

Quantitative data were collected through "stratified sampling" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p. 111), which involves dividing the population into "homogenous groups, each group containing subjects with similar characteristics", and then including a proportion of each group in the sample. In this case, we targeted 10% of the female Omani primary school English teachers in each of the eleven regions of the country. In the year 2009-10, there were 1732 such teachers working in government schools (see Table 1, below).

Stratified sampling was chosen as this would provide equal access to the voices of teachers from remote regions (e.g. Al-Wusta, the capital of which is over 500 kilometres from the national capital). This principle also influenced the collection of qualitative data; volunteers from different regions would be sampled. This seemed important, as it was hypothesised that teachers from remote parts of the country could possibly be neglected in materials evaluation processes, notwithstanding the studies of Barnard and Randall (1995) and Harrison (1996), which provide no evidence of this. In the event, our study was forced to exclude the 16 teachers from one small, very isolated region (Mussandam), due to lack of accessibility.

Region of Oman	Teacher population	10% (the final sample)
Muscat	272	27
Batinah South	221	22
Batinah North	330	33
Dakhiliya	263	26
Sharqiya South	158	16
Sharqiya North	120	12
Dhahira	119	12
Buraimi	45	5
Al-Wusta	46	5
Dhofar	142	14
Mussandam	16	0
Total	1732	172

Table 1. The sample of female primary school teachers surveyed (by region).

A questionnaire was designed that, besides asking teachers to record region and number of years teaching experience, included closed and open questions, Likert scale and ranking items. One item sought to elicit teachers' awareness of materials evaluation processes by presenting five statements and asking for their degree of (dis)agreement with each (answers in Table 2, below). Others asked teachers if they had been involved in materials evaluation and in what ways. Teachers were also asked to rate criteria for materials selection for importance and highlight their most significant three from a list of 15, including: learners' ability to use the materials, sequencing, language level, cultural appropriacy, clarity of instructions, practicality and motivational potential for learners and teachers. Open questions elicited the types of changes teachers would like to see in curriculum materials provided (Al-Senaidi, 2010).

Teachers were asked if they were willing to be interviewed, and, if so, to provide contact details. This allowed qualitative semi-structured interviews to be conducted with those who had materials evaluation experience. Interview questions focused on the teachers' awareness of materials evaluation processes and the nature of their experience and training. The research was conducted according to University of Leeds ethical guidelines.

While studying in the UK, the first-named author piloted and revised the questionnaire and gained permission from the Ministry of Education in Oman to distribute it. Questionnaires (with introductory letters) were sent by electronic mail to coordinating

colleagues in different regions. There they were printed, distributed randomly, collected and scanned. For contact with an isolated region lacking Internet coverage (Al-Wusta), fax was used. 102 of 172 questionnaires were returned (60%) and analysed using SPSS 16 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). From three of 10 regions, the response rate was 100%, but from another three (Muscat, Dakhiliya and Dhofar), it was only 27-33%. The sample was therefore less representative than anticipated.

Another limitation was that only seven of the 102 respondents volunteered to be interviewed; they were from three different regions but five of the volunteers came from the same region, Sharqiya South. One of these five was selected (on the basis of her extensive answers in the questionnaire), together with the two from other regions (Dhahira and Batinah South). These teachers provided informed consent and participated in semi-structured telephone interviews with the first-named researcher, which were audio-recorded with the teachers' permission, transcribed and subjected to further analysis. The teachers, whose contributions were anonymised, were given the following pseudonyms (in no particular order): Maha, Nadia and Abeer. They were amongst the most experienced of the questionnaire respondents and were graduates, like the first-named author, of the University of Leeds BA TESOL. We now present the findings, organised around the research questions.

Findings

What awareness of materials evaluation processes do female primary school English teachers in Oman demonstrate?

To address this question, five statements, based on our understanding of materials evaluation processes and teachers' involvement in these (McGrath, 2002), were developed. Likert scale responses from the 102 teachers were as follows:

Statement	Mean score
1. Materials evaluation can involve teachers' views of their teaching aids.	4.39
2. Materials evaluation involves measuring the achievement of learning aims.	4.00
3. Materials evaluation can involve learners' reactions while using the materials.	3.96
4. Every day reflection is another way of evaluating materials.	3.83
5. Teachers don't need to evaluate the materials because they are produced by experts in the Ministry of Education.	2.45

Key: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = not sure, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree

Table 2. Teachers' awareness of materials evaluation processes.

As the table indicates, there is strong agreement amongst respondents that materials evaluation processes can involve teachers' views (Statement 1). McDonough and Shaw (1993) and Stillwell et al. (2010) feel it is important that teachers are involved. The respondents also agree that materials evaluation is concerned with the achievement of learning objectives (Statement 2); this relates to evaluation carried out post-use (McGrath, 2002). Indeed, elsewhere in the questionnaire, the biggest concerns teachers expressed about materials were whether or not learners were able to do activities and how well the materials motivated learners to participate. Learners' reactions thus seemed to feature prominently in their thoughts. There seems, however, to be slightly less awareness of *in-use* evaluation, as McGrath terms this, though Statement 3 does gain broad agreement.

There is greater uncertainty, however, concerning the relationship between materials evaluation and teachers' everyday reflection (Statement 4), even though reflective practice is encouraged in Oman (Wyatt, 2010; Wyatt & Arnold, 2012). This may be a cause for concern, as curriculum development and teacher development can be considered inseparable (El-Okda, 2005).

Regarding teachers' views as to the nature of materials evaluation processes (Statement 5), responses were mixed, as the mean score (2.45) suggests. We looked again at the raw data on which the mean was based. This showed that some respondents did indicate willingness to accept a top-down process in which they had limited involvement. Perhaps this is unsurprising, given their familiarity with such an approach, societal expectations that they will accept authority (El-Okda, 2005), and evidence that suggests inexperienced Omani female teachers (and our survey included these: Figure 1, below) can lack confidence (e.g. Wyatt, 2010; Wyatt & Arnold, 2012). However, nearly two-thirds of the teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed with top-down processes. This supports an argument therefore, e.g. as articulated by El-Okda (2005), for at least an interactive rather than a merely top-down process of materials evaluation.

Qualitative data provide triangulation here. All three interviewees identified a role for teachers in the materials evaluation process. They conceptualised this slightly differently, though. Maha emphasised micro-contextual features: "the designer should know the age and grade of the students, their culture or environment… assess if the material is [both] suitable for these learners and relates to the activities that you want to give them as a teacher". Nadia, in contrast, emphasised the big picture, reporting the process involves "gathering information about the materials from teachers, then discussing this with senior teachers from different parts of the country in conferences or meetings, then changing activities when necessary and keeping the valuable activities". According to Abeer, this "organised process" would support decision-making, so that materials could be used or adapted to fit aims appropriate to pupils' levels. In these teachers' words,

therefore, awareness of the need for in-use and post-use materials evaluation (McGrath, 2002), as a principled, systematic and carefully managed process (Tomlinson, 2003), involving teachers working collaboratively with their learners' context-sensitive needs in mind (Stillwell et al., 2010), is evident. We now turn to our second question.

What are their experiences of being involved in materials evaluation processes initiated by the curriculum department?

To address this question, we turn first to a closed questionnaire item, requiring a yes or no answer: 'Have you ever been involved in evaluating teaching materials for Grades 1-4?'

Responses were as follows: overall, only 30% said "yes". In eight of 10 regions surveyed, at least some teachers reported having such experience, although they were in the minority in every region apart from one (Dhahira, where 7 of 12 said "yes"). We did not detect any particular relationship between remoteness (i.e. distance from the capital) and involvement in materials evaluation (Dhahira, for example, is one of the more remote regions, about 300 kilometres from Muscat). However, we also looked for a relationship between involvement and years of teaching experience (Figure 1, below).

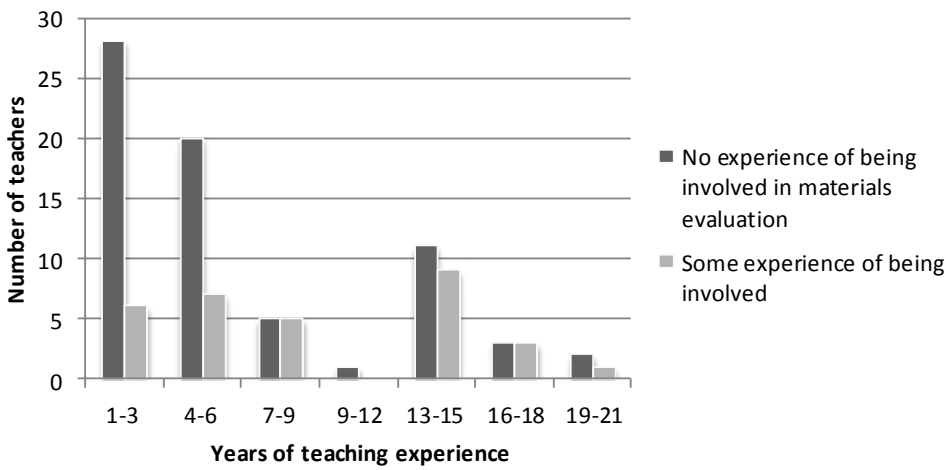

Figure 1. The relationship between teachers' involvement in materials evaluation and their teaching experience.

As Figure 1 indicates, teachers with more than six years teaching experience were more likely to report having been involved in materials evaluation than those newer to the teaching profession. This is unsurprising. Johnson et al. (2006) suggest that experienced teachers might have more to contribute to the process and it is possible

that such teachers have been targeted in materials evaluation exercises. However, even amongst teachers with more than 12 years experience (of OWTE, therefore, as well as EfM), fewer than half reported involvement in materials evaluation. When one considers arguments that all teachers should be involved (McDonough & Shaw, 1993) as well as data presented above regarding respondents' awareness of a role for teachers in such processes, this is disappointing.

As to the nature of this involvement, the most common means teachers reported of engaging in the process were through oral feedback (to senior teachers and supervisors) and questionnaires (for the curriculum department). Unfortunately, there was much less evidence of methods of contributing that can promote deeper engagement, such as those used in Barnard and Randall's (1995) study, for example diaries that are shared.

Turning to the qualitative data, interviews with Maha, Nadia and Abeer reveal that none had had specific training, apart from through their undergraduate degree, and that their experience of materials evaluation was limited. Regarding experience, Nadia, for example, recalled being asked two years before "to send a report about any mistakes" found in the course books. This was the extent of any earlier involvement she could recollect. However, if a top-down approach to materials development is employed by a curriculum department (El-Okda, 2005), such limited involvement of teachers is perhaps to be expected.

Nevertheless, all three teachers had recently (in the 2009/10 academic year) been asked to contribute to a nationwide, curriculum department-initiated evaluation of the Grade 3 materials. Initiatives to involve teachers in this way are, of course, welcome (McDonough and Shaw, 1993). Indeed, Abeer appreciated it, reporting: "I have been teaching for 15 years and they never asked us before to analyse the curriculum".

However, not all experiences of this involvement were positive. Maha recalled being summoned to a regional meeting with two other teachers from her school and being given a questionnaire to complete: "At the beginning, it was difficult for me because I didn't know what the meeting was for." She had not been provided any information in advance, "then, for half an hour they talked about the topic of evaluating grade 3 materials and books." "We were surprised", she reported; "we were confused."

A similar meeting was held in Abeer's region. Three teachers were invited from each school, Abeer related, "different teachers from different schools, not only teachers with experience. The meeting was from 8.30am until 2pm and the questionnaire was very detailed. They put us in groups to do this."

As she had not taught Grade 3 for three years, Maha felt she did not do well in completing the questionnaire, writing "only some comments" to questions such as "Are the objectives appropriate to the learners' level?" There was also a problem with resources: "They provided us with some books, like teachers' books, course books,

but not for everyone." So extra resources would have been ideal, but, given that most female teachers do not drive (and indeed tend to be chaperoned by male relatives in public places), it could have been difficult to access these during a mid-morning break, even if there was a school nearby that could provide them.

From Maha's perspective, it seems that this particular materials evaluation exercise could have been better organised. Aims could have been clarified in advance, teachers most able to contribute invited, sufficient resources provided. It is also unclear how useful to the evaluators the data collected from the questionnaire would be. As Barnard and Randall (1995) indicate, making use of such data can be problematic without careful planning. Furthermore, in the regional meeting Abeer attended, teachers evaluated materials in groups, which can increase participation, but much depends on how the group work is managed, feedback organised and license given to the expression of individual views (McGrath, 2002). Without careful management, such meetings do not necessarily produce useful data (Harrison, 1996). Indeed, trying to interpret the minutes of a curriculum evaluation meeting that had been presented to him, Harrison acknowledges:

> the right kind of atmosphere for frank and open discussion may not have been created, or there may have been domination of the meeting by a limited number of voices or perhaps the right kind of questions may not have been asked (1996, p. 290).

However, unlike Abeer and Maha, at least the teachers who attended Harrison's (1996) meeting had been given the opportunity to complete the questionnaire beforehand. If teachers are to be meaningfully involved, they need to be prepared (McDonough & Shaw, 1993).

All three of our interviewees argued for a greater role for teachers in evaluating materials. "We need to participate more", Abeer reported; "because teachers know the level of the students and what can work well with them. They know what they need and what they don't. Some topics are too difficult." These comments strike a chord with both a key finding from the questionnaire that having *achievable activities* was one of teachers' biggest concerns and Harrison's (1996) argument in the same geographical context that teachers' voices should be heard in curriculum materials evaluation. If their voices are not heard, they may not get what they want, in this particular case more practice activities (which, to consolidate new input, seems a very practical concern) and greater use of technological resources (Al-Senaidi, 2010), the latter a concern too of primary school English teachers in other contexts worldwide, for example Thailand (Graham, 2009).

Conclusions

The capacity of female Omani English language teachers working in primary schools to contribute to curriculum renewal has grown considerably since the mid-1990s, when the great majority were non-graduates with very limited teaching experience (Harrison, 1996). Various initiatives, including the University of Leeds BA TESOL, have helped produce teachers who can engage in reflective practice (Wyatt, 2010; Wyatt & Arnold, 2012) and critical materials evaluation (Wyatt, 2011).

However, this growing capacity to contribute seems under-exploited. From our perspective, materials evaluation processes do not appear more developed than those employed in the 1990s. Indeed, in some respects, the trialling procedures employed in the much smaller-scale EfO materials evaluations appear to have been more motivating for the participating teachers (Barnard & Randall, 1995). This lack of progress is a cause for concern.

Of course, our findings need qualifying. Rather than consult the curriculum department about the complex triangulations they might perform, we have adopted an alternative perspective by focusing on teachers' perceptions. While these are important, as all teachers should be involved (McDonough & Shaw, 1993), we recognise that getting an insider view may have led to a deeper understanding of the various complexities involved. Furthermore, we also recognise the *stratified sampling* (Cohen et al., 2007) employed could have reached more teachers, while ideally more than three teachers could have been interviewed. There were constraints in data collection regarding accessibility. Nevertheless, despite these limitations, our findings do point to the conclusion that there are female primary school English teachers in Oman who feel they have been neglected in materials evaluation processes but who are willing and able to participate more fully.

The curriculum department in Oman is currently evaluating Grade 3 EfM materials first introduced in 1999, which represents an opportunity to involve these teachers to a greater extent. This department, as well as those in other countries considering curriculum renewal, could consider the following principles:

- Provide teachers with in-service training in curriculum materials evaluation that includes awareness-raising of *pre-use*, *in-use* as well as *post-use* processes (McGrath, 2002).
- Elicit teachers' views of materials at the 'armchair evaluation' stage by inviting interested teachers to join scrutinizing committees.
- When trialling materials, observe them being used not just in a regular and systematic way, as in the OWTE evaluation, but also in a supportive, participatory manner that supports change processes, as in

the EfM evaluation (Wyatt, 2010).

- Encourage teachers to complete reflective diaries focused on the materials and learners' reactions to them, as in Barnard and Randall (1995). Issues such as which activities work and/or need modification, how and why can be explored.
- Support coordinators, such as senior teachers, in collecting, collating, summarising and reporting in-use and post-use evaluation; this may require management and research training.
- When designing post-use evaluation questionnaires, consider carefully how data collected support materials evaluation processes to avoid pitfalls reported on here.
- When organising meetings with teachers to discuss materials, share objectives in advance, invite those who have something to contribute and adopt supportive procedures that invite participation.

We believe that if such principles are applied in countries that currently adopt a top-down approach, e.g. in parts of the Middle East, the resulting greater involvement of primary school English teachers (including non-native speaker females) in the curriculum renewal process would better serve the needs of language learners and their families, school communities and teachers, and support continuing professional development. However, while we conceive of this as an important step, we are not suggesting that reforms should stop there. In a changing Omani landscape being reshaped by recent calls for greater participation in all spheres of public life, including education (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012), we believe that not just an interactive but also perhaps a bottom-up approach to materials development could subsequently be adopted, as in Argentina (Banegas, 2011). Though such an innovation might be some way off, dependent on both inspired leadership and shared vision, this would allow teachers to participate more fully still, in localised materials design as well as evaluation to the benefit of their learners, resulting in yet greater empowerment.

This suggests a need for action research involving teachers, again as in the Argentinian example (Banegas, 2011). Capacity building is essential, so that teachers can truly become researchers in contributing to curriculum change. This suggests that expert guidance is required (McGrath, 2013), including both mentoring that encourages reflective interaction with materials (Banegas, 2011; Wyatt, 2011) and support in writing up the research, so that it is published and shared. Access to teachers' perspectives is necessary both in the Omani context (Harrison, 1996) and beyond. Stories of teachers' engagement in materials evaluation and development, told in descriptively-rich, accessible accounts that bring contextual realities to life, in keeping with the traditions

of naturalistic enquiry (Cohen et al., 2007), have the potential to reach out to curriculum reformers everywhere.

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Argentinian Journal of Applied Linguistics
Vol. 2, No. 2, November 2014, 60-76

FAAPI

Students' perceptions of peer feedback

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(Received 19/03/14; final version received 11/06/14)

Abstract

Researchers have posited that students have different perceptions of peer feedback depending on their cultural background. However, studies on American students' perceptions of peer feedback in foreign language writing research are scarce. The purpose of this study was to investigate American students' perceptions of peer feedback in college foreign language courses. Quantitative results showed that students had overall high perceptions of the experience, with significantly higher perceptions of receiving written comments than either reading their partner's composition or receiving face-to-face feedback from their partner. In addition, qualitative results revealed that students reported receiving from their partners more global aspect comments, focused on organization and idea development, than local aspect comments, focused on grammar and mechanics.

Keywords: peer feedback; writing instruction; student perceptions; foreign language; mixed methods.

Resumen

Algunos investigadores han expresado que los alumnos tienen percepciones variadas, según su origen cultural, en cuanto a la retroalimentación que reciben de sus pares. Sin embargo, aun faltan estudios en el campo de la escritura en lenguas segundas que investiguen las percepciones acerca de la retroalimentación por pares de alumnos estadounidenses. El propósito del presente estudio fue investigar las percepciones de estos alumnos acerca de la retroalimentación por pares en clases universitarias de español como lengua extranjera. Los resultados cuantitativos indicaron que los alumnos tuvieron percepciones positivas acerca de la experiencia en general, con percepciones significativamente más altas acerca de recibir comentarios por escrito de sus pares que de leer el ensayo de sus pares o de recibir retroalimentación cara a cara. Además, los resultados cualitativos revelaron que los alumnos indicaron que recibieron más comentarios enfocados en aspectos globales, como la organización y el desarrollo de ideas, que en aspectos locales, como mecánica y gramática.

Palabras clave: retroalimentación por pares, enseñanza de la escritura, percepciones de los alumnos, lenguas extranjeras, métodos mixtos.

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ISSN 2314-3576 (online)

WRITING IS AN essential component of foreign language learning. The importance of writing as a mode of communication has been delineated by The National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project (NSFLEP) and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) in the Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century (SFLL), which encompass five FL curricular goals: communication, cultures, comparisons, connections, and communities (NSFLEP, 2006). The Communication goal includes three standards that address three different modes of communication, namely, interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational, which can all be incorporated into foreign language classes through writing instruction.

Despite the importance of writing as a mode of communication, however, research specifically addressing foreign language (FL) writing instruction is scarce, although the need for clarification of the purpose of writing instruction has been identified as essential in FL writing research (Reichelt, 2001). Several scholars and researchers focused on FL pedagogy and acquisition have highlighted the importance of peer feedback as part of the writing process (Omaggio Hadley, 2000; Shrum & Glisan, 2005) and have conducted empirical studies to investigate various aspects of the implementation of peer feedback in the FL classroom (Amores, 1997; Carson & Nelson, 1996; de Guerrero & Villamil, 1994; de Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; Hu, 2005; Liu & Hansen, 2005; Min, 2005; Min, 2006; Nelson & Carson, 1998; Tsui & Ng, 2000).

Grounded in sociocultural theory, peer feedback provides students with scaffolding opportunities to advance their zones of proximal development (de Guerrero & Villamil, 1994, 2000; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Liu & Hansen, 2005). The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving […] in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). In addition, peer feedback provides opportunities for students to reflect on their roles as writers and audience, on the negotiation of meaning needed in order for the intended message to be communicated successfully, and on the linguistic and rhetorical features necessary to achieve the communication of meaning (Hu, 2005; Kinsler, 1990; Williams, 2005).

Literature Review: Peer Feedback

In the writing process, it is essential that students receive feedback on their progress before they submit their final drafts for summative assessment, as it is through explicit relevant feedback that student writers will be able to engage in the editing and revision of their writing, thus improving their work (Omaggio Hadley, 2000; Shrum & Glisan, 2005). Scholars have highlighted the importance of responding to student writing in a variety of ways, including teacher and peer feedback (Omaggio Hadley, 2000; Shrum &

Glisan, 2005; Williams, 2005). In relation to the latter, Williams (2005) stated that "all writers can benefit from having a real audience to write for, especially if the readers can provide helpful feedback. A readily available audience in the classroom is the writer's classmates, or peers" (p. 93). Hence, the incorporation of a peer feedback component into FL writing instruction seems not only feasible but also a potential source of benefit for students.

A social constructivist perspective

A major justification for including peer feedback as part of writing instruction is the Vygotskian theoretical framework of social constructivism/sociocultural theory. Liu and Hansen (2005) explain that "cognitive development is a result of social interaction in which an individual learns to extend her or his current competence through the guidance of a more experienced individual" (p. 5), thus helping her or him advance her or his zone of proximal development (ZPD). In this sense, students who engage in collaboration during peer feedback sessions have the opportunity to negotiate meaning and construct their understanding of language mechanics (local aspect) and discursive features (global aspect).

Social interaction and negotiation of meaning have been posited to be the basis for the construction of knowledge (Doolittle & Hicks, 2003; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978). This approach involves social interactions in which "a more knowledgeable 'other' structures the learning experience in a way that allows the novice to overcome whatever limitations in skill might impede his or her attainment of a desired goal" (Prawat, 1996, p. 217). In other words, learning and knowledge construction are mediated through interaction with others (Doolittle, 1997). Another point of emphasis is the importance of this social mediation being situated in authentic environments and tasks where the individual has the opportunity to interact with others and thus "becom[e] self-regulated, self-mediated, and self-aware [through] feedback received from the environment (e.g. others, artifacts) and self-reflection on [his/her] understanding and experience" (Doolittle & Hicks, 2003).

This social constructivist perspective can be applied to the teaching of writing in a foreign language for the purpose of helping students improve their language and writing proficiency, both in terms of global and local aspects. Specifically, writing instruction in a foreign language should include peer interaction (social interaction) in the writing process (authentic task). Collaboration among peers "allows students to use language to mediate their language learning because in collaboration students use language to reflect on the language they are learning" (Shrum & Glisan, 2005, p. 25). Researchers have thus identified peer collaboration as a viable approach to help students in their foreign language development through interaction (Donato, 2004; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf &

Thorne, 2006).

One way to incorporate peer collaboration in FL writing is in the form of peer feedback sessions, which Hu (2005) defined as "a collaborative activity involving students reading, critiquing, and providing feedback on each other's writing, both to secure immediate textual improvement and to develop, over time, stronger writing competence via mutual scaffolding" (pp. 321-322). This definition highlights the significance of providing opportunities for student interaction that can help students ultimately become self-regulated learners.

Students' perceptions of the value of peer feedback

The success of a writing instruction approach that incorporates peer feedback as one essential step in the writing process is related to students' perceptions of this type of strategy (Amores, 1997; Carson & Nelson, 1996; Hu, 2005; Liu & Hansen, 2005; Nelson & Carson, 1998; Tsui & Ng, 2000). If students do not see peer feedback as a valuable and helpful process that can enhance their writing proficiency, and thus the quality of their foreign language essays, it is likely that they will not fully commit to the process.

One important aspect of peer feedback is its impact on students' motivation to give and receive peer feedback as measured through their perceptions of the peer feedback experience (Carson & Nelson, 1996; Nelson & Carson, 1998). Carson and Nelson (1996) investigated the interaction styles and perceptions of Chinese students who engaged in the editing of their ESL peers' writing. Carson and Nelson identified several perceptions of the Chinese ESL students in relation to their participation in a peer feedback experience; specifically, the students expressed a reluctance to criticize drafts, to disagree with peers, and to claim authority. In addition, students expressed feelings of vulnerability. Carson and Nelson (1996) concluded that "the kinds of behaviors that Chinese students would normally exhibit in groups are different from the behaviors that are frequently desired in writing groups" (p. 18). Moreover, Carson and Nelson stated that Chinese ESL students seemed more preoccupied with maintaining group cohesion than with giving their peers valuable feedback on their writing, recognizing "that making negative comments on a peer's draft leads to [group] division" (p. 18).

In a follow-up study, Nelson and Carson (1998) investigated the interaction styles and perceptions of Hispanic and Chinese ESL students in a peer feedback experience. Nelson and Carson again identified several themes; specifically, students expressed a preference for negative comments, expressed a preference for teacher's comments, perceived peers' comments as ineffective, and perceived the effectiveness of peer feedback differently based on cultural differences. Students' rationale for preferring teacher's comments was based on their perception that the teacher, not their peers, was the expert. In addition, students sometimes perceived their peers' comments to be

ineffective or unhelpful, especially since they "felt that too much time was spent talking about unimportant issues [including] grammar and sentence-level details" (Nelson & Carson, 1998, pp. 125–126).

Tsui and Ng (2000) also investigated students' perceptions of peer feedback. The subjects in this study were 27 Chinese students enrolled in grades 12 and 13 in a secondary school in Hong Kong in which English was used as the medium of instruction. The results of the study indicated that students favored teacher comments over peer comments, and that teacher comments lead to more revisions than peer comments. In addition, Tsui and Ng (2000) identified several results of peer feedback; specifically, peer feedback (a) enhanced students' sense of audience, who therefore viewed their peers as the real audience for their writing; (b) raised students' awareness through their giving and receiving feedback, and thus contributed to helping students transfer the ability to spot others' mistakes and develop metacognitive abilities to spot their own; (c) encouraged collaborative learning and negotiation of meaning among students; and (d) fostered a sense of text ownership among student writers, especially since students viewed their peers' comments as lacking authoritativeness, which let them decide whether to incorporate their peers' comments into their final drafts without feeling compelled to do so.

The results of these studies (Carson & Nelson, 1996; Nelson & Carson, 1998; Tsui & Ng, 2000) indicate that peer feedback is a viable option for improving FL writing that can be incorporated into learner-centered writing instruction. Not only does peer feedback help students develop their writing ability in terms of global aspects, for instance, audience-awareness and sense of text ownership, but peer feedback also helps students develop metacognitive skills, such as awareness of their own mistakes when writing, as well as group interaction and negotiation of meaning. As indicated in Nelson and Carson's (1998) study, students may perceive a singular focus on local aspect errors as unhelpful, which may cause them to become discouraged from giving and receiving peer feedback. In this sense, it is important that students, as peer editors, recognize the significance of focusing on both global and local aspects of their partner's writing in order to be able to provide meaningful feedback.

The samples in the previous three studies were drawn from Asian and Hispanic populations of students learning English as a foreign language both in China and in the United States. However, given that cultural differences can potentially influence students' impressions of this method of foreign language writing instruction (Nelson & Carson, 1998), it becomes relevant to further expand the knowledge base and thus investigate American foreign language students' perceptions of peer feedback.

The purpose of this study was to investigate American students' perceptions of peer feedback in college foreign language courses. Specifically, students enrolled in

an Intermediate Spanish class were either trained or not trained to use specific peer feedback guidelines prior to engaging in the process of peer feedback. Students were subsequently surveyed regarding their perceptions of the peer feedback process. The rationale for conducting this mixed methods study was to add to the knowledge base in foreign language writing instruction (Newman, Ridenour, Newman, & De Marco Jr., 2003), particularly understanding in more depth students' perceptions of a peer feedback experience.

Method

Participants

Sixty-five undergraduate students enrolled in four intact Intermediate Spanish college classes at a major university in the southeastern United States participated in the study. Two classes were randomly selected and assigned to Group T (n=33) and the remaining two classes were assigned to Group U (n=32). The students' average age was 19.4 years old, with 42 female and 23 male students. Regarding participants' ethnicity, the distribution was 51 Caucasian students, 3 African-American students, 2 Hispanic students, and 4 Asian/Pacific Islander students (5 students did not report their ethnicity). In addition, 11 students were freshmen, 29 sophomores, 16 juniors, and 4 seniors (5 students did not report their year in college). The average number of years of Spanish instruction these students had received before enrolling in this class was 4.25 years, including high school and college level FL instruction. In addition, prior to their enrollment in Intermediate Spanish classes, students take an institutional placement test that evaluates their knowledge of diverse grammar topics, as well as their speaking and writing abilities, to ensure that students with equivalent knowledge and abilities are placed in these classes. The students' intended level of proficiency at the end of the two-semester sequence Intermediate Spanish course, as measured with the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, is expected to be intermediate-mid in reading and listening, and intermediate-low in speaking and writing.

Instruments and Materials

Survey instrument. The survey instrument was adapted from Tsui and Ng (2000) and consisted of close-ended and open-ended questions designed to elicit students' perceptions of the peer feedback experience in which they had participated in their Spanish class (see Appendix A). This adaptation involved rephrasing several of the survey statements to better fit the foreign language focus of the class. In addition, three open-ended questions were added to the survey. Specifically, there were 10 Likert-scale questions, from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly-agree, consisting of three subsections representing three peer feedback phases: reading one's partner's essay (3 questions),

receiving written comments from one's partner (3 questions), and participating in the face-to-face peer feedback session (4 questions). A reliability analysis of the survey data, following data collection, revealed a Cronbach's alpha of .94. In addition to the 10 survey items, there were 3 open-ended questions:

1. What are some specific examples of aspects of your composition that improved after participating in the peer feedback experience?
2. What are some of the things that you liked most about the peer feedback experience? Why?
3. What are some of the things that you liked least about the peer feedback experience? Why?

Peer feedback guidelines and training. The peer feedback guidelines consisted of instructions and a set of 15 questions. The instructions prompted students to provide meaningful feedback with the purpose of helping their partner improve the quality of his/her writing. Students were advised not to concentrate on local aspects only (e.g., punctuation or grammar mistakes), but also on global aspects (e.g., organization, transition of ideas, exemplification) so that they could successfully communicate the message he or she was trying to convey to his or her target audience. Students were asked to read their partner's essay and select the most relevant of 15 questions in the guidelines and answer them thoroughly in writing, to provide meaningful feedback. Students were asked to provide this feedback on a separate sheet of paper following these formatting criteria: 12 point font, 1 inch margins, double spacing, and a two-page length. Finally, students were also informed that they could also write marginal comments on their partner's paper in addition to the other comments.

Students in two of the classes (Group T) were trained in the use of these guidelines. The training consisted of a 30-minute session in which the researcher modeled how to provide constructive feedback, similar to Hu's (2005) training sessions. The researcher provided each student with a writing sample. Using the guidelines, the researcher revised the writing sample using think-aloud techniques, describing orally what type of feedback she would give to the author and a rationale for that feedback. Students were also provided with sample written comments, which served to model the type and quality of comments regarding their partner's essay that students were expected to provide. Then, students were given additional excerpts of writing samples so that, in small groups, they could discuss the types of comments they would provide to that particular writing sample, following the guidelines. Finally, students in each group were asked to provide examples of the feedback they had given based on the excerpts, and a whole-class discussion was held in order to clarify the rationale for the type of feedback

students provided, as well as to model rephrasing of student comments to make them more constructive. The session ended with the researcher addressing students' final questions and concerns regarding the feedback process. Students in the remaining two classes (Group U) did not receive this training, but only received a copy of the peer review guidelines.

Procedure

A triangulation mixed methods design was used in this study, which included data collected concurrently from undergraduate students enrolled in four intact Intermediate Spanish classes who participated in a peer feedback experience as part of a writing assignment. The four classes were taught by the same instructor and all students completed the same writing assignment toward the end of the semester. The four intact classes were randomly assigned to one of two groups: trained peer feedback with guidelines (Group T), and untrained peer feedback with guidelines (Group U). The researcher trained students in Group T during a 30-minute training session on how to critique their peers' essays and provide them with constructive feedback.

As part of the essay assignment, students completed a sequential series of tasks. On Day 1, students completed the first task, writing the first draft of an essay, at home. The essay prompt was provided by the course instructor and consisted of two possible topics, marriage or divorce. Students were asked to write an expository section on the advantages and disadvantages of marriage or divorce, and a persuasive section where students were asked to provide advice to a friend who was thinking of getting married or divorced.

On Day 2, students in Groups A and B received a set of printed guidelines in class to provide peer feedback. Students in Group T were trained on critiquing their partner's essay and providing constructive feedback using these guidelines. Students in Group U received no training. Students in both groups then exchanged drafts with their partner.

On Days 3 and 4, over the weekend, students completed the second task, which involved reading their partner's essay and providing constructive feedback. On Day 5, students completed the third task, which involved their participation in an in-class 50-minute face-to-face peer feedback session, where students discussed their partner's essay and clarified the feedback received.

On Days 5 and 6, at home, students completed the fourth task, which involved writing a final draft taking into account feedback received from their partner. On Day 7, in class, after submitting their final draft, students in both groups completed the paper-and-pencil survey addressing their perceptions of the peer feedback experience.

Results

Perceptions of the Peer Feedback Phases by Trained and Untrained Students

In order to assess trained and untrained students' perceptions of peer feedback across the three peer feedback phases (i.e., reading one's partner's essay, receiving written comments from one's partner, and participating in a face-to-face peer feedback session), a single repeated measures ANOVA was conducted. This ANOVA was used to test for differences between trained and untrained students' perceptions of peer feedback, student's perceptions of the three phases of peer feedback, and trained and untrained students perceptions of the three phases of peer feedback. Mauchly's Test of Sphericity for equality of variances showed that the sphericity assumption was violated, Mauchly's $W(2) = .887$, $p < .05$; therefore, the Huyn Feldt correction was used.

Trained versus untrained students. The ANOVA revealed no significant main effect (between subjects) for trained versus untrained students, $F(1,63) = 0.55$, $p = .45$ (see Table 1). These results indicate that students trained and not trained in peer feedback had similar general perceptions of the peer feedback experience. Further, these results show that, in general, students had positive perceptions of the peer feedback experience.

	Perceptions of peer feedback			
	Untrained (n = 32)		Trained (n = 32)	
Peer Feedback Phase	M	SD	M	SD
Reading partner's composition	5.17	1.11	5.36	1.11
Receiving written comments	5.53	1.17	5.74	0.98
Receiving face-to-face feedback	5.51	1.07	5.45	1.15

Table 1. Means (M) and standard deviations (SD) of students' perceptions of peer feedback.

Peer feedback phases. The ANOVA did reveal, however, a significant main effect (within subjects) for peer feedback phase, $F(2,126) = 5.90$, $p = .04$. A series of pair-wise comparisons (paired-samples *t*-tests) revealed that overall, students had a higher perception ($p < .05$) of *receiving written comments* than either *reading partner's composition*, $t(64) = .415$, or *receiving face-to-face feedback*, $t(64) = .217$. There was, however, no significant difference ($p > .05$) between *reading partner's composition* and *receiving face-to-face feedback* $t(64) = .959$. These results indicate that students perceived the peer feedback phase of *receiving written comments* more positively than either of the other two phases.

Interaction between training and peer feedback phases. Finally, the ANOVA

revealed no significant interaction in students' perceptions of peer feedback between trained and untrained students' across the peer feedback phases, F (2,126) = 0.05, p = .94.

Analysis of High and Low Peer Feedback Perceivers

In order to assess whether or not students who perceived the peer feedback process more positively viewed the process differently than students who did not, a composite peer feedback score was computed. The composite peer feedback scores were simply the means of all 10 survey questions. These peer feedback composite scores were used to group the students into quartiles. The mean peer feedback composite perception score for the bottom quartile (n=16) was 4.14 (*SD* = 0.43), whereas the mean peer feedback composite perception response for the top quartile (n=16) was 6.68 (*SD* = 0.23). A t-test comparing the bottom (low) and top (high) quartiles resulted in a significant difference, *t* (30) = 20.8, p = .00. The three open-ended questions were analyzed to identify differences between those students that perceived the peer feedback process more highly (high peer feedback perception) and those students that had more neutral perceptions regarding the peer feedback process (low peer feedback perception). This analysis was conducted using a data transformation, mixed methods approach (Caracelli & Greene, 1993). Specifically, the students' responses were evaluated for common themes, these common themes were then defined and described, and finally, students' responses were re-evaluated for the presence of these themes and numerical counts were determined based on the presence or absence of the themes in each student's responses.

Composition improvement after peer feedback. The first open-ended question was, "What are some specific examples of aspects of your composition that improved after participating in the peer feedback experience?" An analysis of students' responses to this question resulted in two main categories, global aspect improvements and local aspect improvements. The *global aspects* category refers to comments on text coherence and cohesion, development of main and subordinate ideas, exemplification, flow, and organization. The *local aspects* category refers to comments on vocabulary, grammar, and punctuation. Among the global aspects category, several themes were identified: introduction and conclusion development ("I added a better opening sentence and a stronger closing"); enhancement of flow, organization, and transitions ("I was able to rearrange the paragraphs so that my paper had a better flow to its organization"); topic and idea development ("my points became more distinct"); and, incorporation of richer examples ("I also provided more examples to support my thesis"). Among the local aspects category, several themes were also identified: improved grammar accuracy ("my partner helped me fix some of my grammar"), enhanced richness of vocabulary ("my vocab choices… of my paper definitely improved"), and complex structure development

("she also helped me see that I needed more varied sentence structures").

Table 2 shows the percentages of high and low peer feedback perception students referring to each composition improvement theme.

	Perceptions of peer feedback	
Composition Improvement Themes	Low	High
Global Aspects Category		
Enhancement of flow, organization and transitions	63%	63%
Topic and idea development	31%	50%
Introduction and conclusion development	31%	44%
Incorporation of richer examples	6%	13%
Local Aspects Category		
Improved grammar accuracy	38%	13%
Complex structure development	19%	38%
Enhanced richness of vocabulary	13%	6%

Note: N=16 for both higher and lower perception groups.

Table 2. Students with higher and lower perceptions of peer feedback referring to each theme related to composition improvement.

The data in Table 2 were subsequently collapsed into a 2 x 2 matrix addressing the number of low and high perceiving students who provided global and local aspect comments in response to the "what aspects of your composition improved after participating in the peer feedback experience" question (see Table 3). A 2 (peer feedback perception) x 2 (aspect category) chi square analysis revealed that peer feedback perception was not related to aspect category, $\chi^2_{(.05,1)} = 1.57$, $p > .05$. An ensuing one-way chi square addressing the frequency of global and local aspect responses indicated that, overall, students provided more global aspect responses than local aspect responses, $\chi^2_{(.05,1)} = 4.68$, $p < .05$. These results indicate that while low and high perception students did not differ in the number of global and local aspect comments, overall, students reported receiving more global aspect comments than local aspect comments.

	Perceptions of peer feedback	
Improvement comments	Low	High
Global	21	27
Local	17	12

Table 3. Observed counts of global and local improvement comments made by higher and lower peer feedback perception students.

Aspects of the peer feedback experience that students liked the most. The second open-ended question was, "What are some of the things that you liked most about the peer feedback experience?" An analysis of students' responses to this question resulted in three themes: getting a different perspective on and a real audience for one's essay ("it is always nice to have someone else read your work and point out aspects/points you wouldn't have noticed yourself"), getting new ideas ("the discussion of the topic gave a better understanding of the views of other people on marriage"), and being able to notice one's own mistakes ("[peer feedback] allows you to see the problems in your own paper while you see them in another's paper"). Table 4 shows the percentages of high and low perception students referring to each theme regarding aspects of the peer feedback experience that they liked the most. These results indicate that students' primary support for peer feedback involved the benefits obtained from a new perspective (i.e., new perspectives and new ideas from others and self).

	Perceptions of peer feedback	
Peer feedback themes	Low	High
Themes liked the most		
Getting a different perspective on and real audience for one's essay	56%	88%
Being able to notice one's own mistakes	56%	50%
Getting new ideas	13%	31%
Themes liked the least		
Feeling unsure about the accuracy of feedback provided and received	38%	13%
Lengthy face-to-face session	19%	38%
Writing a formal critique	13%	6%

Note: N=16 for both higher and lower perception groups.

Table 4. Perceptions of peer feedback related to aspects students liked the most and the least.

Aspects of the peer feedback experience that students liked least. The third open-ended question was "What are some of the things that you liked least about the peer

feedback experience? Why?" An analysis of students' responses to this question resulted in three themes: lengthy face-to-face session ("talking for twenty mins per essay was a little long"), feeling unsure about accuracy of feedback provided and received because both students are developing their Spanish proficiency ("I am afraid I will give them wrong or incorrect advice"), and writing a formal critique ("I didn't like having to write two pages of feedback"). Table 4 shows the percentages of high and low perception students referring to each theme regarding aspects of the peer feedback experience that they liked least. These results indicate that students' primary concerns regarding peer feedback included both structural concerns (e.g.,length of feedback sessions) and proficiency concerns (e.g., accuracy of feedback given and received).

Discussion

Research has shown that peer interaction is a valuable component of foreign language instruction since it leads to language development through scaffolding processes and negotiation of meaning with peers (Donato, 2004; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Shrum & Glisan, 2005). It is important, however, to take into consideration students' perceptions of the value of peer interaction in the development of their own language proficiency, since lower perceptions may result in decreased willingness to interact with peers providing and receiving feedback, thus hindering the expected language development.

The present study addressed this issue by considering students' perceptions as part of a peer feedback experience in foreign language writing instruction. After participating in the experience, students reported their perceptions of this method of writing instruction. The quantitative findings of the study demonstrate that regardless of the type of scaffolding students received, either trained or untrained peer feedback with guidelines, all participants expressed positive perceptions of the peer feedback experience, with a significant preference for written comments.

The qualitative data suggested that students perceived that the quality of their writing improved after the peer feedback experience. Students expressed that the experience enabled them to improve their essay's organization, transition and flow, "she said to use transitional sentences, which I needed in my paper to make it flow better […] the last body paragraph flowed better after she pointed out to me it was choppy and awkward." This not only indicates that students focused on giving their partners detailed feedback of global aspects, but it also illustrates the student's enhanced metacognitive awareness when she acknowledged that she needed to make the change to her essay in order to increase its flow.

Further, previous research (Tsui & Ng, 2000) found that students assign value to the peer feedback experience in terms of its contribution to providing a real audience,

different perspectives, and raising metacognitive awareness. The results of the present study echo these findings as both higher and lower peer feedback perceiving students expressed that getting a different perspective on their essay and a different audience were some of the aspects of the experience they liked the most, "it gave my paper another person's perspective. It made me see how another person would perceive what I had written," and "the feedback helped me get a fresh perspective on what my paper was lacking." In addition, students expressed that participating in the experience helped them notice their own mistakes, thus helping to enhance their metacognitive awareness, "it helped me to think in more detail about my own writing, which made it better," and "the feedback was encouraging and had suggestions I had never thought of. I'm not confident in Spanish and enjoy any aid to making me a better writer."

In contrast, there were some aspects of the experience that students did not particularly like. Students expressed that the face-to-face session was lengthy: "we spent too long on it. It did not take very long for us," and "it took a lot of class time." Similar to some of the findings in the literature (see Carson & Nelson, 1996; Nelson & Carson, 1998), students identified their lack of confidence in providing accurate feedback as an issue, due to the fact that both students in the dyad were still developing their language proficiency, "I didn't feel comfortable editing other people's papers because I am not very helpful with my Spanish.… I don't give good comments," and "peer editing makes improving Spanish difficult since both people are at approximately the same level."

Conclusions

These findings have three main implications for instruction. First, the results clearly show that students find participating in peer feedback experiences useful and valuable in contributing to the enhancement of the quality of their writing. Therefore, these types of experiences are viable in foreign language writing instructional design, given the benefits expressed by the participants. Second, and contrary to previous studies (cf. Nelson & Carson, 1998), however, the present results show that students focused on both global and local aspects. This may have been the result of students' focusing on the guidelines provided, which included questions related to both global and local aspects. In this sense, the guidelines might have helped focus students' comments and prevent a singular focus on grammar and punctuation in the feedback provided. Therefore, providing students with guidelines may make the feedback richer and more meaningful, thus increasing students' perceived value of the experience.

Third, given students' expressed concerns with the length of the face-to-face session, the instructor might consider shortening the session to take half a class period (30 minutes). Although students were advised to discuss their written comments and elicit further clarification from their partners, it took students a shorter time than planned

to engage in the negotiation of meaning with their partner. Therefore, a viable option would be to incorporate this kind of experience into regular writing instruction so that students become used to engaging in meaningful interaction with their partner and make the experience richer.

Overall, this study shows that peer feedback is perceived highly among students and that peer feedback has immediate benefits in terms of providing students with a chance to enhance the quality of their essays, including both global and local aspects. In addition, peer feedback can also have long-term benefits, as it contributed to activate students' metacognitive awareness, which can result in enhanced writing proficiency in a foreign language.

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Appendix A

Peer Feedback Survey

1. I liked reading my classmate’s composition.
2. I found reading my classmate’s composition useful.
3. Reading my classmate’s composition helped me improve the quality of my composition.
4. I liked reading my classmate’s written comments.
5. I found my classmate’s written comments useful.
6. My classmate’s written comments helped me improve the quality of my composition.

7. I liked the face-to-face peer feedback session.
8. I found my classmate's comments in the face-to-face peer feedback sessions useful.
9. I found discussing my classmate's written comments in the face-to-face session useful.
10. My classmate's comments in the face-to-face peer feedback session helped me improve the quality of my composition.

Argentinian Journal of Applied Linguistics
Vol. 2, No. 2, November 2014, 77-81

FAAPI

Book reviews

Postmethod pedagogies applied in ELT formal schooling: Teachers' voices from Argentine classrooms

Edited by Silvana Barboni. La Plata: Argentine ELT Innovation, 2012, ISBN 978-987-28082-0-4 (pbk), Pp. 133

This book edited by Silvana Barboni shows the theory behind post-method pedagogies being put into practice in state education institutions by English teachers from the National University of La Plata, Argentina. It is the collaborative work of teachers who do not only share their teaching sequences and handouts used by students at primary and secondary schools in the Argentinian context, but who also reflect upon their experiences linking them to theory, and thus reaching praxis. Authors included are: Anabel Alarcón, Maria Marta Bordenave, Ana Cendoya, Maria Fernanda Crespi, Maria Verónica Di Bin, Alejandra Favini, Julia Garbi, Pia Isabella, Marcela Jalo, Mariana Palmieri and Mercedes Peluffo.

The book is divided into three sections: Parts A, B and C clearly outlined in the foreword by the editor. Part A authored by Barboni provides the rationale through the presentation of some ELT theoretical perspectives on teaching and learning stemming from post-method pedagogies. First there is a reference to the role of English as the language of international communication and literary masterpieces; then the author also traces ELT back to its history of colonialism and linguistic imperialism, questioning its role as a lingua franca or *frankensteinia* (Phillipson, 2008). In Argentina historically legitimized practices of *otherization* (Barboni & Porto, 2011; Varela et al., 2010) used to place native speakers in a superior position to non-native speakers and this resulted in "homogenization of practices" (Barboni, 2012, p.10) that followed methods which did not take into account our students' identities or socio-cultural contexts for teaching and learning and reproduced exclusion of students and deprofessionalization of teachers whose role was reduced to that of technicians.

This dissatisfaction with methods and the transmission model of education led to the

"imperative need to construct a postmethod pedagogy" (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p. 537) along a three-dimensional system where the parameters of particularity, practicality and possibility may foster the advent of context-sensitive language education that respects local linguistic, sociocultural and political particularities. These post-method pedagogies advocated by the authors of this book help break "the reified role relationship of theorists and practitioners by enabling teachers to produce their own theory and practice" (Kumaravadivelu, op.cit.). They have also brought about sociopolitical awareness in teachers and students as participants of dialogic mediation practices that respect the social identities of learners. Such practices make them conscious of the role of power in social interactions between native and non-native speakers in order to allow for emancipatory practices that are co-constructed in learning communities.(Johnson, 2009).

This book shares materials produced by English teachers that cater for the needs of heterogeneous groups of students in diverse contexts of our territory (Gandolfo, 2008) studying English at primary and secondary state schools. The book addresses the cultural dimension of learning and the diversity of voices present in the English language around the world. The epistemological assumptions of teachers are taken into account as they reflect critically upon their practices through enquiry-based teacher learning and they theorize providing value to the creative task of teaching and becoming engaged in communities of practice within a sociocultural perspective (Johnson, 2009). The teaching sequences and handouts present in sections B and C of this book are regarded as specific genres and symbolic artifacts that "operate as powerful documents for the interpretive eye to understand teacher thinking and innovation in class" (Barboni, 2012, p.5).

In Part B of this book there are teaching sequences for the primary school level. Each teaching sequence is preceded by questions that prompt reflection. The first handout by Pia Isabella shows a teaching sequence for second form students around the topic of peace and develops values for citizenship such as the right to live in peace and respect for other cultures. As in most of the handouts the lessons are centered on literature for children, in this case *Me on the map* by Joan Sweeney and *Can you say peace?* by Karen Katz. Other authentic materials sources such as websites for videos are provided together with ideas to develop project-based work and examples of students' productions. After each of the teaching sequences there is a section called *The theory behind it*. In this case Julia Garbi reflects on the importance of intercultural and plurilingual education for a world of diversity. She concludes that an intercultural perspective engages learners in dialogue with others, helps them forge their own identities and questions naturalized and stereotyped thought (Byram et al., 2001).

The second teaching sequence for primary education develops values such as love

and friendship through the poem *Friends* by Jill Eggleston, chants and project work. Linguistic exponents for the first form include physical characteristics of animals, colours, numbers, feelings and emotions. The reflection upon *The theory behind it* is based on the importance of scaffolding from a socio-constructivist perspective and is developed by Mercedes Peluffo. The third teaching sequence designed by Fernanda Crespi and Pia Isabella centers on May Revolution Day and pupils play games based on a story about *Tommy and the time machine*. *The theory behind it* is authored by Maria Marta Bordenave who relates Kumaravadivelu's strategic framework to the design of teaching materials that are sensitive to the learners' experiences and respectful of their own socio-cultural and historical backgrounds and thus engages students in meaningful interaction through English as a foreign language.

Also within Part B, Mariana Palmieri develops a collaborative storytelling task centered on *The Three Little Pigs*. Children make use of finger puppets and the teacher uses a retelling chart to help them dramatize the story. Alejandra Favini analyzes this teaching sequence by focusing on the importance of using authentic texts and materials that foster interactive discourse practices that depart from the traditional structurally-based texts. She claims that using traditional stories in the English Foreign Language class helps learners develop critical thinking skills and build literacy (Cameron, 2001).

In Part C the authors present teaching sequences used as secondary school experiences. The first handout was developed by Ana Cendoya for 1st Year secondary schools, around the topic of the natural world and the project makes use of ICT. The theoretical reflection by Marcela Jalo is centered on the importance of the use of technology in the classroom taking advantage of the *Conectar Igualdad* programme for secondary schools in Argentina. The importance of using internet-based project work for encouraging critical thinking skills, developing cross-curricular and interdisciplinary projects and fostering cooperative learning is enhanced as students of different learning styles may profit from them (Dudeney & Hockley, 2007). Jalo also presents a teaching handout that exploits interactive reading and genre analysis. Students are expected to engage in an ICT task-based project as a follow up to share their understanding of the text and produce their own linguistic output to be presented to an audience by making use of Movie Maker or Glogster posters. María Verónica Di Bin presents the theory behind it and relates the main concepts of post-method pedagogy to the importance of adapting materials to suit specific learning contexts and to fit particular learners' needs. She also stresses the importance of including a variety of texts and genres in class so as to develop multi-literacy skills: "teachers need to help learners develop the capacity to produce, read and interpret spoken, print and multimedia texts to become multiliterate persons" (Di Bin, 2012, p. 100). She also reflects about the importance of using focused and unfocused tasks (Ellis, 2003) built around those texts since tasks in contrast with

traditional grammar exercises provide an ideal context to let students work with the three dimensions of language: ideational, textual and interpersonal (Halliday, 1978).

Silvana Barboni presents a teaching sequence *Tales of Terror in the News* aimed at students in 3rd Year that provides students with elements of text organization and text-signaling much needed to help them improve reading skills. Anabel Alarcón expands on the theory behind it by stressing the importance of a genre-based approach (Swales, 1990) to expose students to different genres that will be reading requirements at higher levels of education.

The last teaching sequence for 6th Year secondary schools designed by Anabel Alarcón provides a highly-motivating topic for teenagers as it deals with images and articles connected with beauty, anorexia and related issues. They can develop rich vocabulary about physical appearance and personality and provide opinions as they engage in the analysis of images, songs and texts. Ana Cendoya presents an insightful analysis on the visual literacy perspective based on Callow (2008) that stresses the importance of teaching and learning how to interpret different semiotic systems in a multiliterate society.

This book is essential to EFL teacher educators and is one of *the* books that English language teachers should read to understand the new trends in curricular design for foreign languages in our country. Its rich materials and pedagogically sound frameworks provide an innovative and empowering guide for ELT professionals.

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