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**Teachers' reflection upon their practice:
Coursebooks and the language teacher's role in
education**

DEPARTAMENTO DE LETRAS
Curso de Especialização em Língua Inglesa

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Monografia apresentada ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras da PUC-Rio como requisito parcial para obtenção do título de Especialista em Língua Inglesa.

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Acknowledgements

- To my beloved parents, Márcia and Edmundo, for their constant love and support.
- To my dear husband, Rodrigo, for his love and patience throughout my monograph writing process.

- To my classmates and professors at PUC-Rio for exchanging knowledge and professional experience.
- To Maria Isabel Cunha, my advisor, whose guidance, support, patience and kindness helped a very desperate student.
- To Clarissa Ewald because, throughout her own investigation, she was willing to kindly help me.
- To Ruan Nunes who was not only my classmate, but also my friend and partner in almost every group work.

Abstract

Freitas, Mydiã Christina Reis de; Cunha, Maria Isabel A. (Advisor). **Teachers' reflection upon their practice: coursebooks and the language teacher's role in education.** Rio de Janeiro, 2013, 38 p. Monograph – Departamento de Letras, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro.

I have noticed that teachers, myself included, tend to complain about coursebooks in the teachers' room and we sometimes do not stop to think about our role as educators. Exploratory Practice has been developed as an approach to understand language classroom life with the emphasis on understanding rather than problem-solving. The sense of plausibility is related to teachers' perceptions to the teaching they do and how these perceptions may be influenced by several factors regarding our learning and teaching experiences. By using the Exploratory Practice approach and the concept of sense of plausibility, this monograph aims to at least try to understand what the teachers' views of themselves are. A PEPA was done in order to analyze how the dialogue between teachers' senses of plausibility can be a learning opportunity that may lead us to a better professional quality life. Although there was not time enough to investigate teachers' interaction deeply, it was possible to realize that we teachers usually do not reflect on our roles as educators because we are influenced by mechanical teaching techniques imposed by institutions and our past experiences as learners.

Keywords: Exploratory Practice, Sense of plausibility, teachers' reflection, coursebooks, language teachers' role in education.

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1. Introduction

The teachers' room is one of the most singular places to hear and share beliefs and complaints. These beliefs and complaints may involve materials' features teachers and students (dis)like, learners' needs and their parents' demands, institutional expectations that usually come along with schedule incoherences, and the institution's audit visits among others. We, teachers, talk about all sorts of tasks and convictions that surround our professional and personal routine, but one complaint that has really caught my attention was related to good vs. bad coursebooks since it is a recurring topic in the teachers' room and a topic that I myself also like to talk and complain about.

My colleagues and I tend to compare coursebooks we work with by highlighting what we consider efficient, and which things we change or simply omit. In these conversations, we also include our previous experiences, opinions and laments. Sometimes, these conversations are basically quick moaning moments during the breaks and we hardly ever have time to really discuss and investigate the things that bother us and how we could achieve learning from that. Although I am not a coordinator or teachers' monitor, I usually feel unsettled by formal pedagogical meetings that tend to prescribe the institution's techniques towards language teaching instead of encouraging debates related to teachers' questionings, worries or even aptitudes. I believe I am not the only one because it is noticeable the differences between the conversations in the teachers' room and the speeches in the pedagogical meetings. There are everyday challenges in teachers' routine and we sometimes complain excessively about everything or pretend everything is fine instead of reflecting upon the way we feel in relation to our role as educators and as human beings.

According to Allwright (2003), Exploratory Practice (EP) has been developed as an approach to help understand the quality of language classroom life with the emphasis on understanding rather than problem-solving. Exploratory Practice allows teachers and learners to investigate what happens in the classroom in order to develop their own understandings towards language learning and teaching. Although EP focuses mainly on the relationship between teachers and learners, I believe that Exploratory Practice can also help teachers reflect upon

their role as educators by observing themselves and their colleagues. How can this dialog among colleagues somehow raise reflections about being a teacher? How can Exploratory Practice contribute to teachers' professional development when teachers are discussing about their daily routine in the teachers' room, for example? How can this discussion/lament turn into a learning opportunity?

At first, my questioning was: Why do teachers usually complain about coursebooks? When I formulated this research question, I included myself in the group of teachers mentioned because I tend to complain about some activities or even entire lessons found in coursebooks. Since I started teaching, I have observed that teachers are often talking about coursebooks that they do not like thanks to diverse teaching and learning beliefs or because there is a kind of mismatch between the materials and the learners' reality. I intend to investigate the relationship between teachers' role in class, affect and coursebooks in order to try to understand how the reflection about these three elements can make me ponder over myself and my colleagues' professional principles and practices. This project is not about coursebooks' aspects like layout or grammatical topics, but it aims at the understandings that can be emerged when two or more teachers discuss about their role as educators, beliefs and historical backgrounds.

Regarding the teachers' discussion about their beliefs, Prabhu's concept of Sense of Plausibility may bring some thoughtful contribution towards the teachers' opinions about their role as educators. Prabhu (1990, p. 174) claims that the interaction between different senses of plausibility lead all participants involved in a process of developing diverse understandings. The Sense of Plausibility is related to "teachers' subjective understanding of the teaching they do" and it is based on several factors raised from teachers' background as learners, exposure to different methods, among others. I believe that the senses of plausibility presented in this investigation highlight not only understandings, but also the need that we, teachers, have to share and reflect upon our questionings instead of merely talking about methods and solutions to classroom routine problems.

I do not intend to propose solutions, but this project aims, or at least tries to, to understand what the teachers' views of themselves and of the materials they use are. As I mentioned before, the relationship between teachers and coursebooks caught my attention because we tend to complain about many aspects related to

them. Brian Tomlinson affirms that teachers can ensure a match between learners and the materials used. "Every teacher is a materials developer" (In Tomlinson, 2003:1)¹. I believe that teachers' realities are not so straightforward. It is debatable to affirm that teachers are really aware of their ability in adapting materials, to assert that they feel comfortable when they have to adapt materials or even that they are allowed to adapt materials in the institutions they work at.

In general, language institutions reinforce the idea that teachers should guarantee that a coursebook fits students' needs by following a specific second language learning approach and institutional rules. Institutions' trainings usually affirm that competent educators are able to adapt materials taking into consideration prescribed guidelines. Institutions' trainings are not open to teaching perspectives that are based on teachers' principles and debates are only possible if they are focused on techniques.

The teachers' room seems to be one of the only places teachers share beliefs and questionings that truly provide some reflection on teaching practice and its relation to adapting materials. Although the conversations in the teachers' room are usually brief and superficial, teachers' opinions tend to contribute to a better understanding of our role as educators. By using the Exploratory Practice approach and the Sense of Plausibility, this project is an attempt to grasp reflections that can emerge through teachers' interaction among peers and how this interaction can provide professional growth.

¹ TOMLINSON, B. (2003). *Developing Materials for Language Teaching*. Continuum Press.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Exploratory Practice

Exploratory Practice (EP) has been developed as a set of principles which promotes understanding towards teaching/learning issues within the practice instead of prescribing a set of classroom practices (Allwright, 2005:353). EP is a form of practitioner research that highlights the importance of creating opportunities to reflect upon puzzles that emerge from the experiences lived in classroom/workplace through pedagogical activities (Miller, 2010:3). Teachers and learners try to comprehend their puzzles based on their own social and institutional knowledge in order to look for understandings rather than try to solve problems. According to Allwright and Miller (In Miller, 2010:5):

“Exploratory Practice is being developed not in order to offer a way of changing our practice, (...), but in order to offer a sustainable way of developing our understandings within our practice, with the absolute minimum of intrusion, and the maximum of benefit.”

As was mentioned before, Exploratory Practice is understood as a set of principles which values understandings aroused through teachers and students' reflection upon teaching/learning experiences. Allwright (2005:360) explains that these principles bring teachers and learners together as classroom research practitioners:

Exploratory Practice in Six Principles plus Two Practical Suggestions

Principle 1 - Put "quality of life" first.

Principle 2 - Work primarily to understand language classroom life.

Principle 3 - Involve everybody.

Principle 4 - Work to bring people together.

Principle 5 - Work also for mutual development.

Principle 6 - Make the work a continuous enterprise.

Suggestion 1 - Minimize the extra effort of all sorts for all concerned.

Suggestion 2 - Integrate the "work for understanding" into the existing working life of the classroom.

The principles and suggestions above are able to guide the POTENTIALLY EXPLOITABLE PEDAGOGIC ACTIVITY (PEPA) which is a classroom activity that can be adapted to generate information about teachers and learners' puzzles. The PEPA helps the aggregation of teachers and learners' points of view in terms of teaching/learning puzzles and it is investigated by them so that they can come up with their own understandings of life in the classroom. A PEPA is carried out due to the fact that EP "is a way of getting teaching and learning done so that the teachers and the learners simultaneously develop their own understanding of what they are doing as learners and teachers (Allwright, 2006:15)."

Allwright (2003:9-10) claims that there is an educational understanding by which "good teaching" causes "good learning", highlighting the idea that teachers' determined actions correspondingly regulates students' learning. This idea represents a controlled view of education derived from the notion that a specific method/theory provides a set of principles that prescribe a range of classroom activities and offer different classroom results. This educational view assumes that the classroom is a "static mechanical" situation rather than a "dynamic social" one. To contest this concept, Allwright (2003:10) proposes the notion of planning for understanding by providing and making great use of language learning opportunities.

The concept above that sees the classroom as a "static mechanical" situation is named by Dick Allwright as planning for control. According to Allwright (2003:21), the conception of method was developed to prescribe a meticulous control of both teacher and learner behavior. Planning for control is associated with the belief that is essential to determine teachers' actions so that students' behavior and learning can be respectively controlled. This notion of control in order to achieve a perfect and effective education is not "humanly possible". And the concept proposed by Dick Allwright to highlight the notion of integrating understanding the classroom life into teaching and learning activities is the concept of planning for understanding. Allwright (2003:20) affirms that when the work for understanding is incorporated, it becomes possible to think of it as a continuous process in the classroom. And, to clarify this idea he says:

“And this fits very well with the perception that we cannot expect to reach an understanding of something and then assume that that understanding is going to be valid for the rest of our lives. Life, especially life in the classroom perhaps, is volatile, and constantly puzzling. So our last principle is that work for understanding should be continuous, not ‘projectised’.”

I believe that planning for understanding may also generate learning opportunities for teachers to work on their own puzzles and questionings. EP facilitates research perspective into language teaching and learning because it raises understandings that will be important for decision-making processes and also long-term development of teachers and learners. Allwright (2003:13) explains what is there to understand by saying that:

“At first sight it may seem obvious that what the profession needs to understand, and perhaps the learners also, is what works and what doesn’t, so that class time is not wasted on ineffective language activities. And certainly, when teachers talk about what is puzzling about what happens in their lessons they seem most likely, at least initially, to come up with “micro-method” problems (such as: “How can I get my learners to use English in group work, instead of their first language?”). But when teachers probe further, and try to understand what lies behind their “problems” (to turn their “how” questions into “why” ones), the discussion seems inevitably to settle on what it seems only appropriate to call the “quality of life” in the classroom.”

Although Exploratory Practice mainly assists teachers and learners to investigate what happens in the classroom in order to develop their own understandings towards language learning and teaching, I believe that EP can also help teachers reflect upon their role as educators by observing and analyzing themselves and their peers. We, teachers, constantly think about how we see ourselves professionally and when there is learning opportunities related to our role as educators - a discussion between teachers can somehow raise reflections and give them the chance to exchange understandings about being a language teacher.

2.2 Sense of Plausibility

According to N. S. Prabhu (1990:172), teachers operate by working with some personal conceptualization of how their teaching causes desired learning along with a notion of credible causality for them. This conceptualization can emerge from several factors that include the teachers' experience as a learner, exposure to methods while training as a teacher and what a teacher knows or thinks of other teachers' practices and points of view. Prabhu (1990:172) affirms that:

“The resulting concept (or theory, or, in a more dormant state, pedagogic intuition) of how learning takes place and how teaching causes or supports it is what may be called a teachers' *sense of plausibility* about teaching. This personal sense of plausibility may not only vary in its content from one teacher to another, but may be more or less firmly or fully formed, more or less consciously considered or articulated, between different teachers.”

Teachers' perceptions of how teaching should be conducted are somehow “borrowed” perceptions of experiences related to the time when they were students, teacher-training's ideas throughout their careers and also a combination of perceptions developed overtime in the course of actual teaching (1987:225). To Prabhu (1990:173), it is important to take into account the teachers' sense of plausibility regarding its activeness so that a sense of involvement can take place for teachers and also students. The sense of plausibility is not about classifying what a good or bad method is, but it focuses on the teachers' engagement instead of a mechanical teaching process. Therefore, it is only possible to have productive teaching when there is an engaged sense of plausibility (1990:172).

In the first paragraph of the introduction, I have said that the teachers' room is a place where beliefs and complaints about daily activities and dilemmas are shared. These beliefs and complaints tend to be brief moaning moments that are rarely reflected upon. The everyday activities and the institutions' demands represent the teachers' routine which usually make us focus on methodological issues, giving no room for personal reflection of our role as educators most of the time.

What I notice in teachers' room relate to Prabhu's (1990:174) explanation about how hard it is to maintain an active sense of plausibility due to the burdens encountered in routinisation. In order to keep a teacher's sense of plausibility alive, he highlights two sources of influence. The first source rises from the ongoing teaching activity, reaffirming the notion that the concept of sense of plausibility is dynamic. The second one is based on the interaction between different senses of plausibility which is described by Prabhu as an important basis for understandings outside the classroom. He explains that this interaction between different senses of plausibility rises from an articulation and debate among teachers.

The sense of plausibility is essential to the PEPA analysis in order to classify the types of teachers' perceptions of what teaching is in the notes and recordings and to try to identify and explore elements in teachers' discourse that indicate overroutinisation. The concept of sense of plausibility will be essential to the analysis of the discourse registered in the notes and the recordings generated during the PEPA. Emerging categories will be teachers' perceptions of what teaching is, signs of overroutinisation and indication of the teachers' own identities.

3. Methodology

I intend to use the ethnography qualitative tradition in an attempt to interpret and analyze the meanings of the teachers I work with and that I bring to the puzzle proposed. The data gathering was carried out through a PEPA activity and my own observation by taking notes and recording myself and four teachers who work with me.

Although a PEPA is not a way of doing research in a conventional way, it was incorporated in this monograph in order to work for understanding classroom life through the perspective of teachers' senses of plausibility in a peer discussion.

3.1. PEPA

The PEPA (Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activity) is an unintrusive way of collecting data in order not to create extra work, but to incorporate teachers and students' investigation in the classroom routine. The PEPA, as an everyday classroom activity, can be slightly adapted in order to generate information about a puzzle. I believe that the PEPA can also be used in the teachers' room routine so that we can bring understandings about our practice while we work together. The everyday conversations between colleagues in the teachers' room can be adapted into an instrument that could be called "talking for understanding" in which talking would take place with the intention of using the occasion for deeper understandings of the realities of the classroom and the language school in general.

By using a PEPA, there is a pursuit of intensifying the quality of classroom life. A conversation in the teachers' room can be a learning opportunity when resignified into an activity that generates information to the participants to understand their puzzle – for example, why teachers complain about coursebooks. By using the PEPA among colleagues, teachers who are willing to understand their teaching beliefs and questionings would pursue a better professional quality life.

I thought about using two questions for the PEPA activity: "what makes a good coursebook?" and "what makes a good language teacher?" Teachers would

read each other's answers in order to reflect upon their roles as educators. The discussion would be recorded and then teachers would listen to themselves so that they could identify the topics raised throughout the discussion. At first, my main intention with this activity was to engage them in the most conversational and informal way possible in order to make teachers feel at ease. I told them that although I was interested in talking about coursebooks, I wanted to focus my research on how language teachers see themselves and discuss what our roles are as educators. I did not want them to think that this activity was a process of evaluation.

Before planning any interviews, I tried to answer the questions so that I could establish topics that I could approach during my conversations with other teachers and also to compare my answers before and after the teachers' interviews. I took notes and recorded myself so that I could try to understand and analyze my opinions as well.

3.2. Participants

I work in a very well-known and admired language school that is located in a privileged area in Nova Iguaçu. We have students and teachers coming from all the cities that constitute the Baixada Fluminense. Some teachers also work in two or three different places and have to deal with different learning approaches, teaching methods and coursebooks.

I am one of the participants because I do believe that it is necessary for me to reflect upon my practice and my teaching/learning beliefs so that I can try to understand other teachers' points of view and also try to realize how I can develop professionally while seeking to understand my constant complaints towards coursebooks and how these complaints are deeply involved with who I am considering myself to be as an educator.

Four teachers who work with me also took part in this investigative process and shared their contributions regarding language teaching and coursebooks. I have decided to change their names because I did not want to expose them. Two of them are working there since the beginning of this year. They also work in another school and, obviously, deal with different materials. The other two have been working there for more or less two years and they do not

work in another school. One is a novice teacher who is an undergraduate student of Language Arts (Letras) and the other is an experienced teacher.

These teachers decided to participate for different reasons. The two teachers who have been working there since the beginning of the year said that for them reflection upon their practice is somehow part of their professional life thanks to the fact that they have to deal with different teaching approaches at the different places where they work. They think that sharing their experience and reflecting about all this, can contribute to a better understanding about their profession.

The two teachers who have worked at the language school for approximately two years were straighter to the point to justify their participation in this project. They accepted my invitation because they wanted to help me, but they said that reflection upon their practice is not a novelty anymore. They explained that this reflection process upon their role as educators is relatively recent because it began when they took part in online courses supported by our language school. They also affirmed that the reflection raised by the online courses has helped them question their behavior in class.

4. Findings of the study

The data collection was carried out through notes and recordings so that teachers' beliefs and opinions about coursebooks and being an educator could be analyzed. The notes and recordings were obtained by asking the teachers to take part in the PEPA. The recordings registered the peer discussion in relation to what teachers had written about the two questions. The purposes of this study are to reflect upon the similarities and differences between their oral and written speech, to compare teachers' opinions and to relate teachers' opinions to EP principles along with the sense of plausibility concept.

At first, I planned to reunite all teachers to participate in the PEPA activity in just one meeting. However, it was difficult to manage just one meeting thanks to teachers' incompatible schedules. I ended up organizing two groups that had the same availability. The notes and recordings I organized present **Group 1** and **Group 2** to refer to my colleagues' points of view and **Mydiã** to highlight my beliefs. Teachers' answers were organized in groups in order to grasp how teachers' interaction was lead and how their contribution as a group indicates ideas that developed during the discussion. My discourse stayed apart because this monograph also aimed at my reflection upon my sense of plausibility and how my involvement with this monograph represented a learning opportunity so that this analysis could provide understandings that contributed to my professional growth.

This section is organized in two parts: comparing teachers' point of view and relating the teachers' views to the Exploratory Practices' principles and the sense of plausibility' concept. Both sections unfold the data's investigation through perspective of Exploratory Practice and of the sense of plausibility perspectives. The appendix presents the data collected and its arrangement throughout the analysis.

4.1. Comparing teachers' points of view

The topic being investigated is broad. When I first thought about reflecting upon teachers' opinions (including my own), I honestly did not realize how vast the teaching concerns or plain speech reiterations are or even the several ways in

which they can be analyzed. It is not only a matter of preparing interviews and then writing a manual of what is right or wrong in language teaching. It also involves understanding to what extent these teachers are or whether they are aware of the reflection process or willing to plan for understanding the classroom life. The topic being investigated is broad because investigating teachers' reflection on their practice is much more than just pointing out mistakes and giving advice.

To deal with teachers' opinions is to deal with human beings that have diverse historical backgrounds, personalities, pressures and senses of plausibility. The topic is far from being simple and this project does not intend to run out every possible element of teachers' opinions and deeply analyze teachers' awareness and willingness to the planning for understanding process. The data collected is only a slight glimpse of teachers' reasoning regarding the way they see their practice.

Deeper understanding and an appropriate investigation of teachers' view of their practice would require an extensive process of gradual analysis towards the teachers' opinions and their respective routines taking into consideration other teaching/learning approaches and even the contribution of theories and concepts related to psychology. I believe that this monograph is a first step for further investigation throughout my academic life.

This project aims to start trying to bring some thoughtful contributions of how teachers think about being an educator by analyzing this brief data collected through the PEPA activity. In order to analyze the opinions expressed in the notes and recordings, I tried to condense teachers' main principles so that I could compare them to the Exploratory Practice's principles and to debate if they presented senses of plausibility and elements of overroutinisation.

In this first part of the investigation, the data collected are described by detailing teachers' notes and my own notes and the discussion we had after reading all the notes. The description was organized based on the two questions elaborated for the PEPA.

What makes a good coursebook?

Group 1

Teachers Lília and Fábio equally point out the students' different profiles as the most important aspect when it comes to assert that a coursebook is good. However, they justify their statement by presenting different reasons. Fábio claims that the coursebook has to be adapted to the profile of the students and be coherent to their reality and age. Lília reinforces the idea of giving importance to students' profile by highlighting the use of multiple intelligence tasks as the example of meaningful activities.

The need for having meaningful activities is reinforced. I had written this topic on my notes and I just couldn't stop saying something and agreeing with Lília regarding meaningful pictures. The discussion about meaningfulness continues when Fábio questions the relevance of teaching American and British holidays while Lília makes a brief observation on the discrepancy between pictures and cartoons and the way Brazilians understand humor. It is important to notice that they decided to discuss about the way Brazilians are in English despite Portuguese being our mother tongue.

The relation between humor and pictures came up because I questioned them about their procedure towards pictures and cartoons that have nothing to do with the subject being taught. I asked this question in an attempt of extending the discussion of meaningful pictures, but I ended up having a surprising and brief response. I should have tried to examine the question more carefully. Perhaps the strength of a new topic got me confused. Lília not only highlights the discrepancy mentioned above, but also relates the way we are taught to understand humor with the way we are taught to expose our opinions. She concludes this idea by saying that we (Brazilians) are not used to debating. Fábio agrees by nodding his head and attributing this to being a Brazilian thing. What Fábio actually says refers to a short conversation before the recording session when he said that Brazilian education does not influence or motivate students to expose and express their opinions.

The other issue discussed was closely related to gaps between activities and lessons. Both teachers affirmed that coursebooks usually present activities or lessons that have no connection in terms of grammatical and subject content. Lília emphasizes this opinion by adding how difficult time management is when the teacher is willing to make a smooth and meaningful link between activities and

lessons. But, the suggestion added at the end of Lúdia's turn does not really explain how this issue can be dealt with by teachers and students.

If we think about the huge amount of information related to language learning, we will realize that it is not really possible or even practical to fill all the gaps between activities and lessons. The idea of teachers always providing a significant continuity endorses a stereotyped view that we have to be super teachers.

Group 2

Both teachers relate a good coursebook with the idea that it has to be meaningful. Although both of them highlight the importance of students' needs and reality, they justify this by pointing out different characteristics. In the recording, Mariana admits that she hasn't thought about grammar and later on states that their opinions are almost the same. She proves her point by adding the Nayara's view of visual elements for children to her opinion that teenagers should have the opportunity to get involved with interesting topics and adults talk about professional life in general.

It is important to notice that Mariana tried to apologize for not thinking about grammar. I did not say that they had to come to an agreement. They did not need to have the same opinion, but she reinforced that their opinions were almost the same though she did not talk about grammar in the notes.

To condense all the ideas expressed and exchanged in the notes and discussion interactions, I organized the main principles presented about coursebooks:

A coursebook

1. has to consider students' different profiles and ages.
2. needs to have meaningful activities.
3. presents linked activities and lessons.
4. explains grammar in a contextualized way.
5. has interesting topics according to the age group.
6. takes into account students' reality.
7. fits students' needs.

In the part of coursebook, we all focused on students' different profiles and needs so that teachers could guarantee students' learning process. This specific topic seems to be the one we all agreed with. The only indication of method is the reference to the Multiple Intelligence theory. However, it was not cited in order to defend a specific learning method. The teacher mentioned this by focusing on students' heterogeneity.

What makes a good language teacher

Group 1

There was an extra teacher when we talked about what a good language teacher is. This teacher, who I decided to call Thaísa, made a few contributions throughout the discussion, but she did not really participate in the whole activity.

On the subject of a good language teacher, the first topic of the discussion was related to teachers' ability in mastering the language. On their notes, when they could have been more thoughtful, they do not mention this. Lídia and Fábio both agree that good language teachers should adapt themselves to the students' profiles and different approaches. Thaísa added to this idea by giving her definition of dynamism. She believes that a dynamic teacher should make students feel comfortable.

Soon after, I asked a question related to a series of coursebooks that is used to teach both teenagers and adults. Lídia and Fábio made a relation between adapting the materials and making learning meaningful. Lídia continues to talk about meaningful learning, but focusing on interpreting the Fábio's opinion about the importance of mastering the language.

Fábio believes that mastering the language is closely related to academic education. Although he did not explain what he means by mastering the language, I understood it as being proficient in English grammar, listening and speaking based on previous informal conversations I had with him in the teachers' room. On the one hand, Lídia highlights that it is not only important to speak English, but also to know how to deal with people. On the other hand, she believes that the universities in Brazil do not teach novice teachers how to deal with people. She

believes that teachers “have to find a way to learn it anyway”.

Fábio concludes what mastering the language is by affirming how important the ability to teach is. The ability to teach is defined as the ability to make things easier to students.

Group 2

When they answer about being a good language teacher, they present some differences. Nayara affirms that a good language teacher has to know the subject being taught, to be organized, to facilitate students’ understanding towards the learning process and be perceptive to students’ needs. Mariana follows a different path to portray a good language teacher because she focuses on two ideas: teacher should like his/her job and has to be connected/updated with everything that implicates what is happening in the world. In the recording, Nayara adds to Mariana’s opinion that teachers should like their job to the ideas she had mentioned in the notes. Mariana stresses that a good language teacher has to know everything because English is not only related to grammatical points, but it also refers to cultural knowledge. Nayara agrees by giving an example related to her experience regarding the need to be updated. Some of her students are constantly asking her songs of bands/singers she doesn’t know of, for instance a McFly’s song. And, Mariana reinforces her opinion and, at the same time, makes a bridge to Nayara’s classroom life experience example by stating that “you learn as much as you teach”. By discussing which would be the main topics of their discussion, they managed to join their

By systematizing the ideas expressed in their notes and recordings, their main principles regarding the role of a language teacher are:

1. to master the language
2. to know how to deal with people
3. to make things easier and meaningful to students
4. to like his/her job.
5. is updated regarding what is happening in the world.
6. is organized.

In the part of language teacher, we have three different facets. Firstly, we keep on worrying about facilitating students' learning. Secondly, we reproduce our institutions' principles that we have to be guided in the approach we work with and master the language in the sense that we can ensure learning. Finally, we not only worry about ensuring learning, but we at least want to show our students that we are willing to learn and we are keen on seeing them as human beings.

Mydiã and the groups' point of view

One of the first things that are important to highlight is the fact that I only interacted with the first group. Although I did not say much, I made a few comments and questions in an attempt to try to somehow understand myself in their opinions and to get to know a bit more about their own beliefs. While I was transcribing the recordings, I remembered that I felt more at ease with the first group because I identified some of my beliefs in their discourse.

Although I felt more comfortable with the first group, I realized that my notes and recordings also had things in common with the second group. I started organizing the recording data with group 2 and my own recording because they were shorter and it would be easier for me to organize at the time. I transcribed these recordings in a very busy week of correcting tests.

To sum up the content of the notes and recordings', my opinion about coursebooks and the role of language teaching are the following:

A good coursebook

1. Raises students' interest with meaningful activities.
2. Has an interesting layout.
3. Presents a logic sequence of topics.

A good language teacher

1. Facilitates and ensures students' learning.
2. Adapts materials according to students' needs and teachers' beliefs.

In comparison with the groups' contribution, I used an alternative way of pointing out what is important to consider when we talk about the relationship between coursebooks and students. I decided to use the verb "raise" to indicate how essential students' interest is and to emphasize the interest I focused on the need of having an attractive layout.

However, when I talked about what to expect from a good language teacher, I described the stereotype of a super teacher who plans to control the learning process instead of planning for understanding. My contribution to this part is similar to the other teachers' contributions and they do not provide much reflection upon our practice regarding a deeper investigation aiming at understanding of our role as educators. I believe that this investigative process can be seen as a starting point for reflection.

4.2. EP principles and the Sense of Plausibility' concept

When describing Exploratory Practice, Dick Allwright introduces the idea of "quality of life" in the language classroom. By analyzing all the opinions we expressed in our discussion and notes, it is possible to say that we are all worried about our students' quality life. We all focused on taking into consideration their different profiles, ages, needs and realities. However, we did not take into much consideration our quality life in classroom, the teachers' quality of life.

The indication of our emphasis on students' success in class is found when we focus on the topics we mentioned to justify what constitutes a good teacher:

1. To facilitate students' learning process.
2. To ponder over students' needs.
3. To make things easier and meaningful to students.

Although students' quality life is important, it is not possible to cover all the aspects of their needs and ensure learning. According to Prabhu (1990:171):

"It is, ultimately, difficult to tell what learning has taken place intended by the teaching, and what has taken place independent of it (or, indeed, what in spite of it)."

One of my purposes in investigating teachers' reflection on their practice was to compare my opinions to others' in order to bring understanding regarding my role as an educator. Although I want to reflect upon my practice, I gave the most superficial answer regarding what a good language teacher is. The language teacher I portrayed only focuses on students' needs and success in learning. And when I say "success" I refer to the verb "ensure" I used in the notes. I contradicted myself when I said a teacher should be a mediator and at the same time affirmed that a teacher needs to ensure students' learning.

I repeated Mariana's speech that "we (teachers) need to know everything" and, by reiterating this speech, I am somehow defending the idea that we have to be super teachers. On the one hand, the reflection process raised in this investigation highlights a view that teachers have to control the learning process in an efficient way. On the other hand, there is some mention of the quality life of a teacher when Nayara refers to Mariana's opinion by asserting that "teachers need to, as she said, like his job, what you are doing".

Another idea discussed by Dick Allwright is "work primarily to understand language classroom life". It seems that we are all worried about work for better teaching rather than work for understanding the classroom life. Although we may present a discourse that denotes thinking about our practice, we still are mainly focused on teaching solutions. This kind of behavior is totally comprehensible thanks to the institutions' demands we face every day, but teachers' sense of plausibility should be discussed and accepted as a pedagogic reality.

We stated principles that echo a little bit of what the institutions we work at expect from us. For example, we believe that a good teacher is someone who:

1. Masters the language.
2. Knows how to deal with people.
3. Is updated regarding what is happening in the world.
4. Is organized.

The first and the second beliefs were related to what teachers defined as "the ability to teach". This ability to teach embraces being organized using all the steps prescribed by the method and the institutions' principles and being updated

not only regarding news and entertainment, but also technology used in the multimedia environment created by the institutions. All these beliefs represent our institutions' principles and they say little about our own perception about being a language teacher.

Teachers are constantly worried about doing everything according to the approach the institution we work at uses as teaching principles. Teachers are always worried about solutions because they need to be in agreement with the institutions' expectations in order to keep on working there. According to the article "Insecurity, Confusion: Common Complaints of The First-Year Teacher" by Niebrand, Horn and Holmes, administrators can convey mixed messages:

"A principal might visit the classroom of a master teacher, observe loud, excited group work in progress, and be delighted at the 'active learning'. That same principal might visit the classroom of a novice teacher, observe loud, excited students, and be dismayed at the 'lack of control'." (1992:86)

The authors of the article state that novice teachers are afraid of being evaluated. The article mentions on the same page that when novice teachers fear being a failure, an unspoken question emerges: "Will I receive a contract next year?" However, I believe all teachers are afraid of that because they do not want to be considered a failure by their peers (or see themselves as a failure).

Institutional pressures, demands and expectations can lead us to a mechanical teaching process by which we constantly reproduce methods' techniques. It is reasonable to assume that there is almost no room for teachers to reflect upon their role as educators. In general, we basically attend pedagogical meetings in which are discussed approaches and techniques. Although we attend pedagogical meetings, we teachers do not discuss other relevant issues to our job rather than efficient techniques that solve classroom problems. Lídia's statement about education in Brazil is clear: "we are not accustomed to debate, right?" This statement not only describes our students' profiles, but also indicates that teachers mimic a mechanical teaching process prescribed by institutions' methods and approaches and do not expose opinions.

By analyzing myself, I saw that I am also driven by the institutions' principles. I have highlighted the importance of adapting materials taking into consideration the teachers' beliefs. I wonder if teachers (including myself in this

group) consciously know what their beliefs are. We, teachers, tend to reproduce speeches learnt in teachers' training sessions and our learner experience. It seems to me that I have (un)consciously reproduced a speech which defines a teacher as someone who usually focuses on results and solutions to the classroom life through methodological techniques rather than reflecting about what my sense of plausibility is in many different occasions and situations.

The "involvement of everybody" and the "work to bring people together" are issues dear to Exploratory Practice. It is present in all teachers' speech that we do care about our students' involvement. As Thaísa mentioned, we want to make students feel comfortable in class rather than consider it a burden. We want to facilitate their learning process and adapt materials that take into considerations students' reality. We also do this because the focus on students' needs is part of our institutions' orientation.

Exploratory Practice moreover values "work also for mutual development" and "making the work a continuous enterprise". Lídia said Brazilians are not used to debate. I think teachers want to sustain an active sense of plausibility in the learning process, but we usually are controlled by institutions' notion of what the best method is in prescribed techniques to be used in classroom. I believe that the only way to make planning for understanding a continuous enterprise is to work for mutual development through reflection rather than by repeating a mechanical teaching process.

Language institutions are always strict to teachers when it comes to monitor a set of rules determined by what they consider as the best method ever adopted in language teaching. Teachers have been constantly working at different places and learning what the best method is in teacher trainings. It seems that there is almost no room for reflection in order to work for mutual development. I believe that most of the time our sense of plausibility is a reflection of what we learn in teacher trainings regarding the relation between teaching, what the best method is and effective learning. We teachers learn to plan for controlling language classroom life instead of working or understanding it.

We teachers have to keep in mind that there is no best method because learning outcomes do not depend only on good teaching and good techniques. The best method should always be reexamined depending on the situational context,

the teachers' and the learners' sense of plausibility. Prabhu (1990:168) affirms that teachers have to take into consideration that there is no best method:

“(...) we have no adequate notion of what “best” might mean – or that the notion of good or bad needs to be reexamined and clarified.”

Planning for understanding means that teachers should investigate their own practice by reflecting rather than reproducing beliefs that not always have to do with our personal teaching principles. This planning for understanding our teaching principles has to be opposed to the idea of planning for controlling our behavior in an attempt to determine students' learning. I believe that quality life in classroom does not involve only students, but also teachers' reflection upon their practice and the way they see themselves. Allwright (2003:19) said that:

“(...) when teachers talk about what is puzzling about what happens in their lessons they seem most likely, at least initially, to come up with “micro-method” problems (such as: “How can I get my learners to use English in group work, instead of their first language?”). But when teachers probe further, and try to understand what lies behind their “problems” (to turn their “how” questions into “why” ones), the discussion seems inevitably to settle on what it seems only appropriate to call the “quality of life” in the classroom.”

Most of the topics raised above refer to a loyalty to the past and the need of sustaining a prestige in relation to colleagues and authorities. We are usually influenced by and driven to a mechanical teaching process imposed by institutions and our past experiences as learners. I believe that we sometimes do not reflect on our role as educators because reproducing macro discourses gives us stability regarding our behavior in class. Prabhu (1987:224) says that:

“Stability is provided by classroom routines which support shared expectations of behavior and act as a framework for some balance between conflicting motives and self-images. Patterns of classroom activity, therefore, are not just teaching and learning procedures; more importantly, they are forms of routine through which teachers and learners play their appointed roles and regulate their relationship with one another.”

5. Final Considerations

This monograph did not intend to solutions or answers to teaching problems related to coursebooks or to the difficulties related to the language teacher's role in education. The key words to this work were “understanding” and “reflection”.

As I said before, the reflection upon teachers' practice is broad and it would require a more detailed investigation with teachers in order to develop better understandings on the issue. Later on, I realized that I did not give the opportunity to truly raise a discussion about complaining. When I asked about a good coursebook, I emphasized what we teachers consider to be an ideal coursebook rather than complaining about what we dislike. Now, I recognize that I should have adapted my approach on the theme in order to deepen the investigation towards the complaining aspect of our job.

The teaching/learning issues pointed out in the teachers' peer discussion may not bring problem-solving ideas, but they highlight reasoning that can lead to investigations of our own in order to fulfill our professional goals and hopefully reach professional growth.

The discussion with these teachers allowed us to reflect a little bit more on our practice. In the teachers' room, we usually make brief comments or have superficial conversations about habitual tasks, but with this activity, we teachers took part in an investigative practice and reflected upon coursebooks and our role as educators. We exchanged beliefs that I had never heard in our everyday work. We, teachers, may sometimes reproduce opinions that are not our own regarding our practice and this does not indicate lack of beliefs. However, it highlights how important it is to integrate the Exploratory Practice's pursuit for understanding the quality of professional life to our everyday work.

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7. Appendix

Notes

The notes below are organized in the way teachers wrote them on the paper. Teachers Lília and Fábio, for example, exposed their ideas in topics and they are not structured into paragraphs.

Group 1

Lília

What makes a good coursebook?

- Has to be adequate appropriate for the age. - Has to be meaningful.
- Has to present multiple intelligences tasks. - Text / act. in one book.
- Should offer extra act. - 'Clean layout'. - Extra material – online / CDs.

What makes a good language teacher?

- Understanding sts' profiles: how to deal / what to teach. - To be organized.
- Have support – guide. - Academic background. - Like to deal with people.

Fábio

What makes a good coursebook?

- It's the one that you can get sts involved with, respecting the target public.
- Work on the 4 skills. - Challenging questions.
- How to involve: pictures, grammar, meaningful activities. - Linked activities.
- Enough practice to make sts internalize the topic.

What makes a good language teacher?

- Adapt into the many different types of students and approaches.
- The ability to make things easier.

Group 2

Nayara

What makes a good coursebook?

A good coursebook needs to have visual elements (pictures, in order to help the students' understanding), deal with students' reality and raise their interest to the topic, and a part dedicated to grammar in order to make them internalize the grammar part in a contextualized way.

What makes a good language teacher?

There are different topics that need to be taken into consideration when we refer to a good language teacher. A good teacher has to know what s/he is teaching, to prepare the classes in advance, try to facilitate the topics to make students understand them easily and to feel students' necessity in order to solve their problems.

Mariana

What makes a good coursebook?

A book that fits students' needs. If the book is to be used with teenagers, it should have interesting topics for them, dynamic activities to keep their interest. For adults it should have topics about some professional careers for example, and for kids the appearance is very important because it's what calls their attention.

What makes a good language teacher?

A good language teacher should be someone who likes what he/she does. Someone who keeps him/herself connected. Language teaching involves much more than just English for example. You have to be updated with what's happening at the moment and what has been happening in the world.

Mydiã

What makes a good coursebook?

- Meaningful activities are one of the most important things in a coursebook

because students can get involved in the learning process.

- Logic sequence of topics (grammatical, speaking activities, etc).
- A layout that raises students' interest.

What makes a good language teacher?

- A good language teacher tries to ensure students' understanding towards the topic being taught.
- A teacher who adapts the materials according to students' needs and the teachers' beliefs and personality. I do think it is not always possible to do that, but I can try to do it.

Recordings

The recordings present three different settings even though the same PEPA activity was applied. My recording was not done in group because I decided to use it as comparison with my own behavior in group and my notes. In group 1, there is an extra teacher that I called Thaísa. This recording was done in the teachers' room and this teacher arrived by the end of the first question and she wanted to take part in the conversation. In group 2, the recording was done in a separate room because the teachers' room was being used at the time.

Group 1

What makes a good coursebook?

Fábio: A gente botou muita coisa parecida. (<i>A few seconds later</i>) So, in English or in Portuguese?
Mydiã: Vocês que sabem.
Lídia: In English.
Fábio: Yeah... In English. (<i>A few seconds later</i>) Actually, you have mentioned many things that I think it is necessary. It has to be adapted to the profile of the students we are teaching. I mean... if you are teaching kids it has to be connected

to the reality of the kids. And you cannot use the same material for adults, for example... I mean we gotta think about this. It seems obvious, but that is it.
Lídia: I like the idea of having multiple intelligence tasks because it is connected to understanding students' profiles. Then, if you identify that there are very interpersonal students or kinesthetic students and so on, you need to have activities for each profile. And, then all of them will feel comfortable dealing with it. And, I think these activities have to be meaningful otherwise they lose interest.
Mydiã: I thought about that too. When I think about a good coursebook, I think about meaningful activities.
Lídia: And meaningful pictures as well.
Mydiã: Meaningful pictures. That's so true.
Lídia: Brazilian materials, for example, maybe present the picture of an international driver of Formula Indy and nobody knows him here in Brazil. And, then you tell the name of someone from here, but the book... You are adapting anyway, right? You are trying to make that activity that is not meaningful for that class, meaningful at the moment.
Fábio: Once, I attended in a lecture and a guy was talking about holidays we teach students in the classroom. We basically teach about American and British holidays. But, unless you are going to live there, you don't have that necessity at all. Because, for example, living in Brazil, we are gonna receive tourists here and then you have to talk about carnival. But, the students don't know anything about carnival in English. They know in Portuguese, but they don't even know words like samba school or how to pronounce carnival. That is something that is connected to be meaningful. Sometimes we teach the whole story of Thanksgiving or the whole story of Halloween, but it is not meaningful to students because they don't live that.
Mydiã: And, when you have pictures like cartoons and they have nothing to do with what is being taught, but you have to exploit the picture?
Lídia: Sometimes it is related to the kind of humor. The way you are taught to understand humor, to expose your opinions. We are not accustomed to debate, right?
Fábio: But, that is a Brazilian thing, right? And one thing that I miss in many books is that the activities are not connected. Sometimes you are talking about one

thing in activity 1. Then you have to move to activity 2, but they simply don't match. There is no links. There is nothing together. It seems like there is a gap in your lesson. I start talking about something and then I simply say "Ok, guys... Now, in number 2...". You do something totally different. I guess this a very huge mistake some book writers make.

Lídia: The problem is you have to adapt, you have to make a smooth link between activities 1 and 2, for example; but the coursebook is designed for a 50-minute class or a 60-minute class. Then you can finish the subject or you have parts of the content of the lesson... I mean you have a little bit of the end of the lesson in the beginning of the other day and then you get late forever. And you don't have what I think it is important. I think that the book should propose extra activities. Online, DVDs... whatever. Even paper activities, right? Regular ones. But you can't do it because you have to find a way to link one lesson to another. And, how do you do it?

What makes a good language teacher?

Fábio: Maybe master the language. (*Everybody laughs*)

Thaísa: Master the language and dynamism.

Mydiã: But, how do you define dynamism?

Thaísa: Dealing with kids, thinking about different ways to teach (not every day, obviously), but try to make them feel comfortable in every lesson. I mean, if it is necessary, ask students to sit down on the floor. To make them feel that they are not only in the classroom, but that they are learning together in a funny way.

Fábio: I wrote something that you have to adapt yourself to the different students' profiles you have and approaches as well.

Lídia: I totally agree with this.

Fábio: I mean you are not going to teach kids the same way you teach adults. For sure you are not. And, also, even sometimes you have two groups of kids and some kids like playing and some kids don't like playing.

Mydiã: And how do you guys do with Interlink? Because the Interlink... I mean the same book series is used for adults and young adults.

Lídia: We adapt. I think we do.
Mydiã: But, you change a lot or just a few things?
Lídia: For example, there a lot of questions related to work. What does a teenager know about work? They can only talk about school. Then you ask them to talk about school and if they think it is boring to talk about school, then you talk about something else. So, again, you are adapting course material to make them speak, to make them...
Fábio: To make it meaningful.
Lídia: To make it meaningful. I think that when you talked about master the language you are talking about academic background. I think you have to be a teacher. You can't just speak the language and teach. You have to know how to deal with people and this is very difficult. Actually, we don't learn this at college. But, you have to find a way to learn it anyway.
Mydiã: You have the part of Psychology, but it is really fast.
Thaísa: And it is not exactly about interpersonal skills.
Mydiã: No. It is about Behaviourism and all the other theories.
Thaísa and Lídia: Exactly.
Fábio: The ability to teach, I would say. I think it is kind of obvious, but I guess we need to have the ability to make things easier to students. Some people do have the ability to make things harder. (Everybody laughs)
Thaísa: They master the language, but they can't even help somebody.
Fábio: I had a professor at college and sometimes I felt like "why am I here?" I mean if I just read the book, it would be so much better. We, English teachers, have the same issue. Some English teachers are just so bad. That's connected to what you said (<i>teacher 1</i>). It is not really necessary to master the language, but you need to have the ability to teach it. I mean I speak Portuguese, but that doesn't mean that I am able to teach it.

Topics: Coursebook – Good layout, be adjusted to students' age, Multiple Intelligence tasks, has to be meaningful and linked activities. / Language teacher: Master the language, be guided in order to master the way you have to teach in the place you work at, show empathy to your students (see your students as human

beings instead of seeing them as objects with books) and be organized.

Group 2

What makes a good coursebook?

Mariana: I haven't thought about grammar.
Nayara: You need to have a part to explain grammar, but it need to be in a contextualized way.
Mariana: But, the opinion is almost the same. Topics that appear to each age group. Kids, lots of pictures. Teenagers, things they are interested in. Adults, talking about jobs...
Nayara: Real life. They need to see the book and... Ok... This works with me and happens with me.

What makes a good language teacher?

Nayara: I think that is the most difficult. Yes? I think that teachers need to, as she said, like his job, what you are doing, and need to know what you are teaching and to prepare lessons.
Mariana: You were more practical here. I just imagined that to be a good language teacher we need to know everything because English is not only English. It is a language and it is alive. Just knowing grammar points and words is not going to make us good teachers. We need to know a little bit about everything. Music, films, history, geography and mathematics. If people refuse to be connected / updated, they are going to be soon... retired.
Nayara: Because all the time they ask for something new and you have to know to give to them, to show something different.
Mariana: Because if you don't, somebody is going to give them what they need and is going to take your place.
Nayara: Of course. Now, I have to look for something about McFly because all my students... "Teacher, teacher, show that song..." I don't remember the name of the song. They asked me it yesterday.

Mariana: But, that is the part of being a teacher. You learn as much as you teach. They teach us a lot and that is very good.

Topics: Coursebook – Interesting and fits students’ needs. / Language teacher - Need to be updated and willing to learn as much as to teach.

Mydiã

What makes a good coursebook?

I believe that a coursebook should raise students’ interest by engaging them in meaningful activities, a layout that calls their attention and a sequence of topics that somehow establishes a link between the lessons and activities.

What makes a good language teacher?

I think that a good language teacher should try to facilitate the students’ learning process, being a mediator. And facilitating students’ understandings towards a topic being taught involves trying to adapt the materials according to students’ needs and teachers’ beliefs.

Topics: Coursebook: Meaningful activities, an interesting layout and logic sequence of topics. / Language teacher: Facilitate students’ learning process and adapt materials.