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I believe, therefore I teach: an archeology of a teacher's beliefs and attitudes in the classroom

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Take your passion and make it happen.
Forsey and Cara

Acknowledgements

I believe we must render honor to whom honor is due.

Having been through three terms of intense studies makes me think about how I made it, which means to ask who was there with me.

Since the very beginning, they, my teachers. Always willing to answer our sometimes obvious and sometimes bewildering questions, which we ourselves could not make sense of at times, they would have a smile on their faces or a look of interest no matter what. More than special thanks to Inés and Bebel! A warm thank you to Clarissa Ewald, who sensed how lost I felt and gave me the suggestion which would determine this very monograph. It was in the last semester that I realized I was beginning to write all this: Renan was the one responsible for that.

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And last but not least at all, my students, the ones who motivated and propelled me to carry out this research, out of whose hands it sprang little by little. I tried to flee, but you kept by my side.

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Resumo

ARAUJO SILVA, Ulisses; SPITALNIK, Monica (orientadora). **Creio, logo ensino: uma arqueologia das crenças e atitudes de um professor em sala de aula.** Rio de Janeiro, 2020, 62p. Monografia – Departamento de Letras, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro.

Este trabalho é fruto da necessidade, no campo do ensino – ensino de Língua Inglesa em especial – de se explicitarem as crenças dos professores. Uma vez que crenças integram as identidades, servem de motivação e também contribuem para as atitudes e comportamentos, me empenho primeiramente em apresentar a importância de se pesquisarem as crenças e as atitudes dos professores. Como crenças formam parte de contextos, uma biografia profissional é apresentada ao mesmo tempo em que os fundamentos teóricos da pesquisa são postos, com o propósito de se situar uma mudança em crenças e atitudes dentro da minha prática de ensino. Atenção especial é dada à pedagogia do Pós-Método e à Prática Exploratória, já que estas duas perspectivas têm sido meu chão atitudinal para a vida em sala de aula. A fim de se verificar como as crenças que tenho acolhido estão se manifestando, desenvolvi um estudo de caso no qual apresento as transcrições de um diário gerado enquanto eu estava em sala de aula com os alunos. Esse diário, produzido *in loco*, foi o meio para que fossem capturadas minhas crenças em plena atividade. A pergunta que subjaz à toda a pesquisa é "Por que estou agindo de tal maneira em sala de aula?"

Palavras-chave: Ensino de Língua Inglesa, Crenças, Contexto, Pós-Método, Prática Exploratória.

Abstract

ARAUJO SILVA, Ulisses; SPITALNIK, Monica (advisor). **I believe, therefore I teach: an archeology of a teacher's beliefs and attitudes in the classroom.** Rio de Janeiro, 2020, 62p. Monograph – Departamento de Letras, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro/Brazil.

This paper comes from the need, in the field of teaching – English language teaching in special – to make explicit the beliefs of teachers. As beliefs are part of one's identity and they serve as motivations and also help to shape their attitudes and behaviors, I have endeavored to first present the importance of researching teachers' beliefs and identities. Since beliefs are part of contexts, a professional biography is presented at the same time as the theoretical foundations for the research unfold, with an intention of situating a change in beliefs and attitudes in my teaching practice. Special attention is given to Postmethod pedagogy and to Exploratory Practice, as they have been my attitudinal grounds for classroom life. In order to see how the beliefs I have embraced are playing out, I carried out a case study in which I present diary transcriptions generated while I was in the classroom with the students. This diary, generated on the spot, was the means for capturing my beliefs in action. The question underlying the whole research is "Why am I acting the way I am in the classroom?"

Keywords: English Language Teaching, Beliefs, Context, Postmethod, Exploratory Practice.

Contents

1. Introduction: I believe

This is a paper about teacher beliefs. There is a need for a better understanding of teachers' beliefs, as beliefs are part of their identities (GONÇALVES, ALVES & AZEVEDO, 2013, p.67); identities and beliefs are "related in intimate and intricate ways" (BARCELOS, 2015, p. 310). Understanding a teacher's beliefs is of paramount importance if their attitudes are to be reflected upon: "Understanding teachers' beliefs helps us understand both teachers and learners' actions and decision-making processes in the classroom" (*ibid*., p. 304)[1]. Reflections on beliefs need to be part of teachers' theoretical background, the same way as an array of knowledge is part of it: learning styles, learning strategies, theories of motivation and so forth (*id*., 2004, p. 146).

I came to see the importance of comprehending my own beliefs when I realized that, in comparison with previous years, my students were responding more positively to my lessons, but not only that: I knew that my way of beholding my own job was going through a process of change. I was having different expectations towards the classroom, demaning less from them in terms of certain fixed and ideal behaviors I had in mind[2], observing and welcoming more. Contemplating that there might be a connection between both the students and myself, I considered seeking out the underlying reasons for what was – and still is – going on in the classroom setting as far as my attitudes were concerned. It was then that I decided to pay heed to the matter of beliefs.

This text somehow mirrors a process of change I still find myself in, as I read, talk, reflect and practice, all at the same time. Being accustomed to reading theoretical literature out of duty, I have been making sense of what I read not simply by undersdanding some researchers' ideas but by reading my own past experiences

[1] Defining the term "belief" is not an easy task. Barcelos (2004, p. 129) states that there does not exist a unique defintion for the concept of belief in Applied Linguistics, which poses some difficulties for the study of the theme. In the paper, she resorts to a definition by American philosopher Charles S. Pierce, according to whom beliefs are "ideas lodged in the minds of people, regarding habits, customs, traditions, folkloric and popular ways of thinking" (This is my version of Pierce's passage cited by Barcelos in Portuguese, *ibid.*). Yet, the author states that, broadly speaking, and for the purpose of studies in Applied Linguistics, beliefs can be seen as opinions and ideas both teachers and students have regarding teaching and learning languages (BARCELOS, 2001, p. 72). A definition of beliefs is provided in the section below.

[2] For instance, I used to think students were supposed to only sit down and follow my instructions. Now I see they have other ways of learning than just sitting down and copying: they may – and they do, in fact – listen to what I have to say, but end up following along in ways unexpected by me.

in light of the readings and also by reading the texts in light of my experiences. That is why I opted to expose the theory at the same time as I intertwine it with real-life examples of mine, in an attempt to demonstrate how past events can gain new understandings, be resignified and resignify our lives.

1.1. As far as beliefs are concerned

First and foremost, we need a definition, a parameter of belief. The topic is not easy and simple to deal with: Pajares (1992) points out that dealing with teacher beliefs is a matter to be handled with care: "belief does not lend itself easily to empirical investigation. Many see it so steeped in mystery that it can never be clearly defined or made a useful subject of research" (p. 308). The literature is flooded with defintions and conceptions about beliefs, which makes the issue a sandy one.

A search for a definition of "belief" will definitely lead to the problem of knowledge. Is a belief the same as knowledge? Is there a relationship between the two concepts? While some have argued that the two constructs mean the same (PAJARES, 1992, p. 313), we can move on and try to differentiate between them (*ibid.*): Nespor remarks that "beliefs often derive their subjective power, authority, and legitimacy from particular episodes or events. These critical episodes then continue to colour or frame the comprehension of events later in time" (NESPOR, 1987, p. 320), in what the author has called "episodic storage" (*ibid.*). As Pajares puts it, "Nespor argued that beliefs drew their power from previous episodes or events that colored the comprehension of subsequent events" (PAJARES, 1992, p. 310), which is a really useful remark if one is to reach a distinction between knowledge and belief: a belief is a type of knowledge, one that serves as a filter along someone's experiences, framing, coloring those.

Pajares goes on to draw on Rokeach (1968) , according to whom "all beliefs have a cognitive component representing knowledge, an affective component capable of arousing emotion, and a behavioral component activated when action is required" (PAJARES, 1992, p. 314). More narrowly speaking, knowledge is part of beliefs, which makes total sense once we return to Nespor. We can thus say that knowledge is in fact part of a belief, in that it represents a belief's cognitive

component, which in turn illuminates, frames and colors – to use his wording – one's experiences, along with affection and behavior. This is the very notion of belief I adhere to. Knowledge, intertwined with affection, propels my behavior and has a key role in my dealing with my own experiences as a teacher: "When clusters of beliefs are organized around an object or situation and predisposed to action, this holistic organization becomes an attitude" (PAJARES, 1992, p. 314).

A trait of beliefs is that they cannot be measured, so we need to find ways of inferring them, to which I shall return some pages ahead.

1.2. Identities matter

The intimate relationship between beliefs and identities claims for a glance at a more attentive comprehension of identities: identities are "people's understanding of their relationship to the world, the construction of that identity across time and space, and people's understanding of their possibilities for the future" (NORTON, 1997, p. 410 *apud* BARCELOS, 2015, p. 305). As it is going to become clear along the text, my ways of standing before the teaching profession have undergone significant changes, and these changes are due to my understanding of teaching, which I used to see as the implementation of a method. In other words, my identity has changed, and that has not happened by chance: "they [identities] develop and change as who we are is constructed within the constraints of our interactions in different settings in our lives with different people" (BARCELOS, 2015, p. 305). The role of some interactions I have had in the development of my teacher identity should become clear as this paper unfolds.

1.3. Welcome to my life as a teacher

Being an English teacher for almost twenty years now[3], I have been exposed to a great many theoretical and practical perspectives on teaching and learning. At times, such perspectives would not resonate much with me, since – now I see – I have long been shaped and limited by my early pedagogical experiences in the field of language teaching[4]. This surely has to do with my life history, personality and temperament traits – it is really hard for me to break away from principles[5]. What I do want to emphasize now is the importance of "normative discourses" (GONÇALVES, ALVES & AZEVEDO, 2013, p. 56), which in the end "constrain teacher identity by normalising the language of 'professionalism'" (*ibid*.). As a professional, I echoed a series of do's and don'ts soly because I was told that those were right – and I believed them all: I was in the "business of teaching" (*ibid*., p. 57)[6].

Teachers, especially those at English courses in my country, are usually trained according to beliefs and principles alien to them. We are led to believe that difficulties can be overcome by following teacher's guides and techniques presented at seminars, workshops, training sessions and teacher preparation programs (MOITA LOPES, 1996, p. 180): classrooms are seen as *loci* of certainties rather than those of a search for knowledge (*ibid*., p. 184). If one adheres to the institution's principles and beliefs, they are supposed to be more likely to succeed. If they do not, it must be due to their not acting by such principles.

The majority of teachers who get in contact with professional knowledge about teaching do so by means of "a 'methods' package" (KUMARAVADIVELU, 2001, p. 548). My first experience as far as a theoretical framing is concerned took place at a private English course in the city of Rio de Janeiro/Brazil, my hometown, where I still live. I had not had much knowledge about classroom practice before I stepped in, so I would teach by what I sensed was right, although the institution followed clear principles: I was supposed to teach by the Communicative Approach. The

[3] I more or less explicitly resort to the professional contexts that I have been a part of along this introduction. The identity of a teacher is socially and culturally shaped and this background needs to be brought to light if one aims to understand the beliefs held by a teacher (GONÇALVES, ALVES & AZEVEDO, 2013, p. 59; BARCELOS, 2015, p. 304).

[4] Besides having constructed a whole conceptual edifice ever since I was a school learner (NESPOR, 1987, p. 320; PAJARES, 1992, pp. 322-323).

[5] Diving into such features would be out of the purview of this text, though.

[6] Ahead in the text, I deal with the power of institutional rules in the life of a teacher.

coordinator would correct my teaching after observing my classes, as she made something clear: "You have to teach by The Communicative Approach". I had no idea what that "Communicative Approach" was and became afraid and demotivated, giving up on my "sense of plausibility" (PRABHU, 1990, p. 172)[7]. I would be reprimanded for not following a body of knowledge which had not been presented to me. At long last, I was sent to workshops and the training program that I should have attended previously – and yet, I could not realize what all that was about, except for understanding that certain practices were wrong whereas others were right. A process, however, had been set into motion: the idea that there is a unique and correct way of teaching – along with the best way of learning[8]. After all, learning and teaching are both the two tracks of a road, and I upon that I do not cast any doubt.

Right in the middle of that process I could not figure out what a method was, which is a very important both theoretical and practical foundation for a teacher (MOITA LOPES, 1996, p. 180). Knowing where they stand is key in a teacher's making options in the classroom; by knowing about methods, teachers are enabled to understand why they appreciate or tend to dislike certain methods: "They may be able to resist, or at least argue against, the imposition of a particular method by authorities" (LARSEN-FREEMAN, 2010, *To the Teacher Educator*). Having been introduced to one set of pedagogical principles alone, a teacher may feel at a loss, thinking there is something faulty about him/herself, whereas the real problem is that they have not had the chance to learn about the existence of methods (in the plural), which means knowing that there are different perpectives on teaching and learning; there are different perspectives about language. Novice teachers run the risk of simply being introduced to a method at the same time they do not have fundamental knowledge about teaching and learning, which leads to training rather than awareness and reflection (MOITA LOPES, 1996, p. 180).

[7] A "sense of plausibility" is a teacher's personal knowledge about they ways in which learning takes place. "Different sources may influence different teachers to different extents". (PRABHU, 1990, p. 172) It is a subjective concept, derived from one's personal experiences.

[8] A fruit that I still carry from those days is that speaking English only is the one way to both teach and learn. I may not believe that any longer, but I do hesitate and feel guilty for resorting L1 (Portuguese) in the classroom. I should also mention that the practice of never resorting to L1 was an instruction from the institution I worked at. I am not sure if such instruction is inherent in the Communicative Approach.

In the realm of prescriptions for teaching, Zembylas (2005, p. 469) brings about Reddy's (1997, pp. 331ff) notion of "emotives"[9]: "emotional gestures and utterances […] and their capacity to alter the states of the speakers from whom they derive". Emotives are performances expected of an individual by a community (*ibid*., p. 333)[10]. This concept is of great help in understanding my dealing with "The Communicative Approach" I was supposed to teach by, as it describes certain attitudes I had in my obedience to institutional pedagocical rules, not resorting to L1 while teaching being "the" rule. Another rule, equally important, was that I could not teach grammar explicitly. Emotives can either intensify or dissipate and as they are repeated over the years, they can deeply influence a teacher's identity: prescriptions can be internalized, leading to an internal conflict, which may result in emotional suffering (ZEMBYLAS, 2005, p. 473), which in turn can lead to guilt or shame (*ibid*., p. 477) and low self-esteem (*ibid*., p. 475). If teachers are not able to create some room for being themselves in spite of the rules imposed on them[11], they may even give up the profession. Although I went through a whole process of stress for not being comfortable with certain rules, I never considered leaving teaching behind.

The issue goes so far as to affect the relationship between teachers and their peers: those around may notice a teacher is not strictly following rules and make them feel inferior, which is something I went through not in a CA environment, but somewhere else, right within a conflict between personal beliefs and school standards[12]. It is a type of attack for being different (ZEMBYLAS, 2005, p. 475), when what Reddy calls "intensive ambivalence" - characterized by the desire to comply as opposed to the desire to act according to one's own drives - may come into play:

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[9] The quote is from Zembylas.

[10] The matter of conventional behaviors is touched upon by Spitalnik (1999), concerning affect in the classroom: certain affect markers are not sincere expressions of one's emotions. Rather, they are standardized ones. The author stands on the concept of affect as an emotion expressed.

[11] In what Reddy calls "emotional freedom" (ZEMBYLAS, 2005, p. 477).

[12] I recall being once addressed by a fellow teacher who kindly reprimanded me for not teaching the book the way I was supposed to. This same colleague once scorned me for my excitement over my students' producing formal letters as homework. The point in his joking was that any students would be able to write letters with a model in hand: a production worthy of compliments would be that of a student who could come up with a piece of writing without any assistance: "With a model..." was his remark, implying that with a model in hand anyone could make it, so there was no surprise – and there should be no pride - in pupils' writing formal letters.

> Where emotives have their greatest effects and are subject to their greatest failures […]. Cultural or conventional action patterns often come into play both in producing such situations and in helping actors navigate them. It is especially because community conventions recommend the use of emotives to manage intense ambivalence that communities may be said to have emotional styles or tones. (REDDY, 1997, p. 333)

At the sime time, I must add, novice teachers may be at an advantage. With respect to preservice teachers, Pajares (1992, p. 323) observes that "they have slight allegiance to prior expectations or ties to former practices and habits". However, the remark could well be describing novice teachers, who "need not redefine their situation" (*ibid*.). I fully embraced what I was told was the right way of viewing language and language teaching, so I had nothing to redefine or adapt to. With time, those principles and rules became my beliefs for good.

Time passed as I kept holding to the view that the CA was the only and one right way of teaching English. I would participate in one workshop or another, shifting institutions, but still working within the CA framework – and suffering to greater or lesser extents. Institution-related problems aside, I was beginning to make some sense of the approach, until I joined an English school where the CA principles and beliefs began to seem coherent – I was then doing more than following instructions only and finally came to take some pleasure at work. Nevertheless, the CA was not working as expected, which I interpreted as my fault alone[13].

Besides working for CA-oriented schools, I also had the opportunity to become aquainted with different methods/approaches at different language schools, which gave me more pedagogical knowledge and expertise. The idea that there is one and only way of teaching was present, and I believed in this idea. The Communicative Approach was the only way for me to teach by, although I had really good students elsewhere. I had an ideal teaching in mind, with ideal students.

Having entered the field of public, government-run education, I began to be confronted with a whole new reality, in which students were not there to learn English, but by force of law: the relationship of students with schools is mandatory

[13] A teacher may fail to apply a given method due to the fact that "Each method put into practice will be shaped at least by the teacher, the students, the conditions of instruction, and the broader social-cultural context" (LARSEN-FREEMAN, 2010, p. 182). It is not by chance that Kumaravadivelu (2006, p. 162) differentiates between method and methodology: "Method is a construct; methodology is a conduct". When a method is confronted by contingencies, failure may arise, since a belief in methods stands in opposition to a contextually sensitive approach. The whole matter of the relationship between rules, conflicts and suffering is again at play here.

and not always a peaceful one. The English class is one more, among the so many school subjects and activities they must attend. At the first level of elementary education in Brazilian public schools, which covers grades one to five, English is by and large seen as a plus rather than a serious school subject. This is common sense among students and families[14].

I must make mention as well of the pre-service training that I went through already in public education: all the CA principles and beliefs I had been presented to throughout my life in the private sector were reinforced, a confirmation that the CA was the one and right method. The presence of "hegemonic discourses" (GONÇALVES, ALVES & AZEVEDO, 2013, p. 57) was making itself present once again. A hegemonic discourse is not necessarily one that is able to make changes (helping people to speak English, for instance): it is one to which we end up adjusting and accommodating ourselves to by thinking and acting the way we are expected to. I remember blaming myself many times for not being able to perform the way I was supposed to, regretting the outcomes of my planning, as I believed there was a single way of teaching and learning. As Gonçalves, Alves and Azevedo (*ibid*., p. 66) state, "normative discourses (...) contribute to shaping teacher beliefs about teaching and learning"[15].

Under such circumstances, I had a whole set of beliefs (and practices, consequently) regarding my job that were up until then the reference that I had regarding both language and language pedagogy: "this is the way English must be taught". Contemplating what I should do differently was not even thought of, as I found myself in a straitjacket. What I had not realized was that those beliefs were grounded in a certain context. A different environment was right before my eyes, with new demands, calling for new postures on my part, but I had been educated – and trained - to have a (specifc) method-oriented mind[16]: a belief had been generated. I was not open to an awareness of context, and that ended up leading to

[14] As for the leading body (principals and coordinators), behaviors vary: while some do treat us English teachers as teachers, others tend to act as if we were entertainers, baby-sitters or chessmen, who are there to fill in a gap and be moved about conveniently.

[15] This is really similar to Reddy's emotives, which may refer to any environments and not educational ones only. The fundamental idea is the same, though.

[16] The very concept of "method" brings with itself the belief that certain principles are to be applied anywhere and expected to be successful. Research in English language pedagogy has reached the understanding that such an approach is doomed to failure, for each context calls for different attitudes by the teacher. The whole idea of method is an example of a context-specific principle, grounded in a dogmatic view of life. I shall return to the issue of method.

frustration and distress on my part. Here we can see the importance of one's biography, pre-service programs and school context in the life of a teacher, as highlighted by Gonçalves, Alves and Azevedo (*ibid*., p.56): "In their research [Flores and Day, 2006], it is suggested that the key mediating influences on the formation of teacher identity are biography, pre-service programmes and the school culture". My identity was that of someone who was dissatisfied with his own profession.

Referring to previous research by Rokeach (1968), Barcelos (2015, p. 310) points out that there are two types of beliefs: core and peripheral[17]. Core beliefs are harder to be changed and "are more related to a person's identity and 'self'". In retrospect, I can say that my identity as a teacher owed much to the beliefs I then supported: "our beliefs make up our identities" (*ibid*.). They were core beliefs, and that is why the encounter of such beliefs with my reality was so stressing, stressful and traumatic: I had ideal students in mind, expecting my real students to act the way I wanted them to and not the in the manner they behave in fact; my own identity was shadowing my pupils'.

1.4. Turning my professional life around

A turn came, however, after I enrolled in a post-graduation specialization course back in 2018 at Pontifíca Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro[18], the program in which this monograph is inserted. First of all, I learned that teaching goes far beyond cognition – that is to say, the subject we teach itself – having also to do with affection and social matters. At the same time, the concept of Postmethod caught my eyes, which showed me that the notion of method has been questioned – and is being overcome. The readings I began to devote myself to led to other fields of research, such as one dealing with the meaning of language and an approach called Exploratory Practice (MORAES BEZERRA & MILLER, 2015), which considers that the quality of life in the classroom should be regarded as paramount if teachers and students want to enhance learning: quality of life in the classroom is

[17] Peripheral beliefs are the ones less resistant to change. They are not as interconnected with others as core beliefs are. Rokeach (1968) uses the metaphor of an atom: core beliefs are more central, closer to the nucleus, whereas peripheral beliefs are positioned towards the limits of the electrosphere.
[18] In English, Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro/Brazil.

about being embraced and understood under whatever circumstances. It does not mean we will be happy and pleased at all times. Rather, it means that we will be together working for mutual understanding and mutual development. Planning has taken on a different role in my life: I have no longer planned so as to control, but rather to understand what is going on in the classroom, in the sense that we do not act just for the sake of fulfilling a plan. Rather, we want to be sensitive to what happens in the classroom and act accordingly, which I have tried to make clear to students: I try to show them that "you and I are working together". Once I plan a lesson, I no longer see the lesson plan as a straitjacket, to which my students and I must adapt. Each activity and procedure planned will be embraced by us and we will take care of it in our own ways. Such a relationship will point at where we can go – and are being propelled to - as a group. New situations – unplanned – will show up along the way, informing, guiding and shaping our actions, so that we become more aware of why we are acting the way we are. This opens the possibility of a lesson taking a totally unexpected outcome. Exploratory Practice "is a way of 'being' in the classroom" (MILLER, 2005) – not of imposing, I should add.

As I delved into the world of research, reading everything possible and counting on my teachers' support, I realized that a teacher's professional activity can be about research on the job (MOITA LOPES, 1996, pp. 179ff), the same way it is about cognitive and pedagogical knowledge. A key word is thus "reflection", in the sense that it is a key competence for teachers (GONÇALVES, ALVES & AZEVEDO, 2013, p. 58). In this view, the practice of teaching is not just about knowing and transmitting, but also mulling over what is being done, in a critical way: it is about correcting, reframing, reshaping and redirecting one's own activity (*ibid*., p. 59). Barcelos (2015, p. 304) makes it clear that "[reflective teaching] encourages teachers to reflect upon and question their beliefs to understand how they teach". Already looking at teaching from a critical stand, I sensed it would be interesting to write a journal so that I could stop to reflect on what changes were going on in the way I behaved in the classroom. The idea was to obtain a picture – my picture – of my attitudes, since I knew beliefs and attitudes walk together and I no longer held on to long embraced beliefs.

As an English teacher born and raised in Brazil and a speaker of L1 Portuguese, I would like to situate this present study within the domain of NNS EFL teachers, that is, "non-native speaking English-as-a-foreing-language teachers",

following in the footsteps of Aksoy (2015) and Li & Walsh (2011), who have pointed out the need of studying such teachers' beliefs.

2. This is what I believe

One way of tapping into a teacher's beliefs is by seeking to learn about their knowledge (ZEMBYLAS, 2005, p. 467), as the two notions are related. As time passed, it became more and more evident which portions of knowledge were becoming part of my belief system. Thus, I now set out to lay down the theoretical knowledge guiding and shaping the turn in my beliefs as an English teacher.

2.1. It is not about cognition only

Kumaravadivelu (2012, p. 37) makes a case for understanding "learner needs, learner motivation, and learner autonomy", a point that goes hand in hand with the three-dimensional perspectives on the classroom pointed out by Prabhu (1992): in a classroom there are pedagogical, social and personal elements interrelated, which together make up the structure of a learning environment. In a similar vein, Kuschnir (2003) sheds light on three classroom dimensions: social, affective and cognitive. These three dimensions function together the same way gears work within an engine (*ibid*., p. 48)[19].

With that in mind, I came to try to comprehend what people need to be happy and satisfied, and by paying attention to social and affective realms, I sensed more should be done in terms of propelling my students' learning. It must be clear, however, that affect is not about being happy only. Happiness and satisfaction were my points of attention at first, but that does not mean that happiness alone is to be expected from classroom interaction. Feeling understood is what everyone is after – and that applies to the classroom. When one senses they are being understood and welcomed, they experience quality of life, be that ocurring in the midst of a pleasant or an unpleasant event.

We should consider that the social and affective dimensions in the classroom must not be separated from the cognitive dimension. These three aspects are intertwined in the teaching/learning process. A good example of that can be drawn from a lesson I still have in mind: I have this really hard group of third graders, about whom the home teacher has serious complaints. They never want to take part

[19] There are other factors playing out in learning, as the author indicates herself, but she focuses on these three ones.

in anything we, the teachers, propose, which in the end leads to demotivation on our part. One day I decided to have them do something aside from copying down contents: drawing, cutting and pasting. To my surprise, they followed along. My conclusion was simple: they are not the type of students (as a whole) third graders are by and large[20]. As long as my expectation towards the group was referenced by the reality of other kids, I could not meet their needs in the sense that I was not offering what they were accustomed to embracing. In a simple sentence, "They liked it". Once the task was being carried out, they were open to learning the language items I had for the day. The point was not that they did not want to learn English, but that I had not noticed that I should change my course of action. With that done, I was able to see a new group before my eyes. I realized they could do more and they began to act differently, a consequence of my new – and unexpected alignment. By giving them manual work, I got across to them that I believed they could act and interact[21]. All that is about socializing, a need both they and I have. When such a need was met, they became affectively involved – I could see their engagement – and the content came in. Having been my whole life a "cognitive" teacher, I have come across the fact that learning is not only about contents but also about affection and socialization, which made me behold my feeling of failure as a teacher from another perspective. Once I began to shift the focus of my lessons from the cognitive to the affective component along with the social realities, my perception of teaching and learning began to change. That led me to a whole range of theoretical perspectives, which are presented and discussed in this paper. I must also mention that quiet students, who are not extroverted and do not usually reach out to others in an outgoing fashion, need to be catered to, which is an issue I am yet to work on.

[20] Third-graders engage in more board-oriented types of activites for the most part.
[21] See the concept of "languaging" in 2.2 below.

2.2. An epistemology of language: languaging[22]

The attitudes of a language teacher will be strongly influenced by their beliefs about languages, far beyond what they have been taught or instructed to do (LI & WALSH, 2011, p. 39). It is more than clear that my own beliefs about language will deeply impact both my planning and my decision-making in the classroom, and that is why the theoretical framing that I have come to embrace with respect to language must be put forth.

The Modern Era saw a foundational and deepening reelaboration of Plato's ideas on the distinction between body and soul. René Descartes' *Discourse on the Method* (1637) espouses the platonic idea of the soul as the source and reference for life. The dichotomy has since then served as a reference for all realms of life, echoing also in the study of language.

North-American linguist Noam Chomsky has in Descartes one of his precursors (MARCONDES, 2010, p. 111), one of the key points about his theory of language being the difference between *competence* and *performance*, with the assumption that the mechanism of language is within the mind (Descartes' soul): competence referes to the knowledge a speaker has of his/her language, which allows them to perfom/use (the grammar of) that given language. This mechanism within the brain is what Chomsky and other shcolars have called "the faculty of language" (CHOMSKY, HAUSER & FITCH, 2002)[23]. As a language teacher I have always heard about and seen references to such concepts as I felt uncomfortable for not being able to really grasp them, an issue addressed by Moita Lopes (1996, pp. 179 ff): teachers need to have a solid and clear foundation for teaching. Now I see that what I used to follow was an underlying assumption of Chomsky's theory of language. Although I had not studied it nor heard of it formally, I did believe that there was a mechanism of language somewhere in the brain, to be activated.

[22] After laying out a summary of the meanings ascribed to the meaning of beliefs in the field of language learning and teaching along a couple of years, Barcelos (2004, p. 132) concludes that beliefs are intimaltely associated with views about what language is: beliefs about learning and teaching languages are beliefs about language. Thus I cannot deal with beliefs about language teaching and learning without making explicit the view on language that I subscribe to.

[23] It should also be noted that Chomsky believes in "deep structure" and "surface structure": the first corresponds to the universal grammar, common to all languages, while the second is an update of it, at the empirical level. That is why the universal grammar (deep structure) can be multiply manifested as English, Japanese, Spanish and so forth (surface structure) – MARCONDES, 2010, p. 111 ff.

At the same time as the Modern Age saw the rebirth of rationalistic ideas around the soul, it also gave rise to empirical views on life, with philosophers such as John Locke (1632-1704) and David Hume (1711-1776). These and other scholars promoted a paradigm shift: the soul is no longer the source, the reference for knowledge, but empirical life is. A similar turn takes place in the twentieth century, in Chomsky's day, within the field of Hermeneutics: Heidegger (1889-1976)[24] begins to place value on the reader and deviates from pre-established comprehension of texts; who the reader is is important and this is what is to be brought to light in the work of interpretation. He is followed by Gadamer (1900-2002), who in turn values not only the reader, but also the writer, with his/her own intentions and horizon[25]. Gadamer also lays emphasis on the preceding tradition in which the reader is inserted, which means to say that reading is not only an exercise of subjectivity, but instead a coming together, an encounter between one's own view and the data presented, imposed by a work of art, for instance (GRONDIN, 2012, p. 66).

It is within a departure from pre-established, ontological ideias about reality – and about language, more specifically – that Jensen (2014, p. 1) argues that "Emotion and language belong together", a perspective that has had much impact on my classroom practice: I used to see teaching English as simply teaching people how to use one more linguistic code, but after getting in touch with Jensen's perspective, I tend to see English as one more means for communication, along with other ways – non-verbal ways - of conveying meaning. The author points out that throughout the twentieth century the domain of a structure-oriented view in language studies resulted in the overlooking of real-time language – which can be observed in chomskyan competence or saussurian langue (*ibid*., p.3). It is clear, thus, that while philosophers had made a break with ontological views on meaning (Heidegger, Gadamer), "Twentieth century linguistics was dominated by powerful form-based theories of abstractions like structuralism and generative grammar that ended up excluding the dynamics of real time language behavior as a relevant study of object" (*ibid*.)[26]. Such views portray language as an ontological, abstract, code-like system, to be used by speakers – hence the so widely known notion of *usage* versus *use*. As pointed out above, such a stand had led to some discomfort on my part, and that may

[24] In his 1927 book *Sein und Zeit* (*Being and Time*).
[25] In his 1960 book *Wahrheit und Methode* (*Truth and Method*).
[26] In a similar sense, we seem to be caught up in a methods-mindset as teachers of English, as shall be clear ahead.

be due to the probable fact that language does not work the way epistemologies grounded in ontology see it. Such perpectives are described by Jensen (*ibid.*) as "abstract theories of language", which lose sight of the importance of context for language[27].

In a different vein, Jensen argues in favor of "languaging", that is, language as activity, part of behaviors. Instead of advocating the existence of a "language system" – an essence - which will be "used" by "users", he maintains that first of all there is "activity", out of which a language grows. By means of that process, there is language as a referencial system to be enacted, but above all there is activity, real-time activity, the basis for language. The systematic, rule-governed feature of language is addressed by Jensen as "second-order construct", while the behavioral aspect is seen as "first-order": "The term 'language' therefore is taken as an umbrella term encompassing both first and second order as two different but intimately related dimensions in this specific kind of behavior" (p.2). The immediate implication of the role of verbal language within the realm of activity is that some light can be shed on it (the role of verbal language) in someone's life and the uneasiness felt by so many people when forced to deal with a foreign language (REVUZ, 1998, p. 220). Over the years I have seen both adults and kids having a hard time when trying to speak English at the same time as they have a whole verbal L1 language repertoire. They also have at their disposal ways other than words to get meaning across. Jensen not only places verbal language into a broader domain but in the end he also points to notions very interesting to us when dealing with students' difficulties towards speaking. The theoretical background proposed by him has helped me deal with my own difficulties before students' uneasiness as well: we should bear in mind that students' problems are also our problems, although from a different standpoint.

Since it is social interactions that are at stake, verbal language is seen as one of the resources human beings have at hand, in the same way they have emotions, seen as "movements" (p.3) aimed at healthy interactions with the environment, "one of the most pervasive ways that we are continually in touch with our environment" (JOHNSON, 2007, p. 66). This view brings emotions straight onto the stage of language studies, since emotions are not seen as alien to language – or better still,

[27] Context is a determining factor in recent pedagogical turns in language teaching, as will be clear.

languaging: instead, they are seen as behavior in the same sense that language is. Emotion is not understood as "an extra non-linguistic device in language use" (JENSEN, 2014, p. 3). The notion of "use" in relation to "language" ceases to make sense, as well as the hierarchy of verbal language as opposed to body language, since these are seen as behaviors aimed at interactions with the environment, with no precedence of the former over the latter. The view on language as belonging to the domain of thoughts/mind and emotions belonging to the body is called into question: "emotion is to be seen as an instrinsic part of languaging itself" (*ibid*.). In Jensen's text, the terms "emotion" and "affect" are used interchangeably. The distinctions made by some scholars are not considered by him: " 'Affect' is a more common term in linguistics whereas 'emotion' is more widespread in the social sciences and psychology" (p.2). As far as laguage epistemology is concerned, it suffices to deal with "emotion" and "affect" as "movements" concerning/concerned with one's well-being regarding their environment. Furthermore, the distinction drawn by Ochs and Schieffelin (1989) is worth mentioning: affect is about the expression of an emotion, that is, an affect is an emotion manifested. The place the authors ascribe to verbal language is a very relevant one from the point of view of languaging: "we propose that beyond the function of communicating referential information, languages are responsive to the fundamental need of speakers to convey and assess feelings, moods, dispositions and attitudes" (*ibid*., p. 9). As far as affect is concerned, both verbal language and non-verbal acts serve to express meanings other than referential information: people need to manifest affect, and that can be done through facial expressions, for instance, and words as well. Ochs and Schieffelin (*ibid*.) also remark that "Just as interactants use facial expressions to signal how they feel about entities, speakers use language for the same purpose", which means to say that both verbal and non-verbal channels are means for conveying affect. The point here is not that of languaging, according to which verbal language is a tool in the same sense as non-verbal devices, but that verbal language has an intimate relationship with affect: it serves to convey affect, which in turn is information also.

Emotion and language are intertwined – whether from a "languaging" perspective or not. Affect – both positive and negative - is not to be studied and understood as something influencing language or being described by it: it is part of language; it is part of the classroom, I should add. Similarly, Reddy (1997, p. 331) comments, regarding signs and verbal language: "But the world they belong to is the

world in which feelings occur, in which utterances and texts grow directly out of feelings." Emotions are the very foundation for verbal language and not something alien to it. Verbal language springs from and is one way of emotional expression, since "Emotions are the world-anchor of signs" (*ibid.*) – and of verbal language.

Still regarding the importance of non-verbal indications of meaning, we can point at Spitalnik (1999), who emphasizes the importance of non-verbal devices for indicating affect in the classroom[28]: recourse can be made to discursive strategies (verbal strategies) along with non-verbal behavior for performing affect. It is more than clear that not only are emotions to be observed, but also the ways in which they are expressed are to receive attention as well – both verbally and non-verbally. Communication is about integration.

2.3. Somewhere between the rainbows of L1 and L2

Students' mistakes have always been an issue for teachers and English teachers are not an exception: we are to keep an eye out for erros in speaking and writing, which are to be corrected, that is, eliminated. This has been a leading motivation for many teachers (MOITA LOPES, 1996, p. 114)

English teachers, though, have begun to pay heed to what applied linguists and psycholinguists have to say about what we have perceived as errors all along: errors may well be part of learners' interlanguage (*ibid.*). They are not devoid of logic and motivation. "Interlanguage is the student's language of transition between the native language and the target language" (*ibid.*, p. 120)[29].

Of course interlanguages are more dynamic and variable than natural languages, in that they are permeable. Moita Lopes (*ibid.*, pp. 115 ff) argues, however, that natural languages are homogeneous only in appearance. Such a view of languages as stable entities is due to Chomskyan ideal speaker/hearer (*ibid.*): natural languages are also dynamic[30].

[28] Affect here understood as a manifestation of emotion.
[29] In the original: "A IL é a língua de transição do aluno entre a língua nativa (LN) e a língua-alvo (LAL)".
[30] Although not permeable as interlanguages are, being influenced by the rules of one's L1. Permeability and fossilization are two specific traits of interlanguages (MOITA LOPES, 1996, p. 115).

It has been argued that interlanguages are related to individuals and not communities (*ibid*., p. 117), which is not true: students sharing the same L1 can perfectly understand each other whereas outsiders may not understand them; teachers whose L1 is the same as that of learners usually cater to their students' needs by adapting L2 to learners' comprehension (*ibid*., pp. 117-118)[31].

It has also been demonstrated that L2 students who share a common L1 show clear standards of "errors" (*ibid*., p. 118), for instance: Brazilian students of English will many times - even advanced students – resort to "have" to indicate existence, as in "Have a dog on the sofa", instead of "There is a dog on the sofa". This is due to the existence indicator "ter" (have), widespread in Brazilian Portuguese. Another interesting example comes from French students of English: they "may overgeneralize the English present perfect and use it where English speakers would use the simple past", which is due to the fact that French's *passé composé* takes a similar structure to that of present perfect (LARSEN-FREEMAN & CELCE-MURCIA, 2016, p. 105)[32].

From such examples, among so many others, we can see that interlanguages have specific and foreseeable traits just like any natural languages do. What teachers traditionally perceive – and reject – as errors should thus be treated as the traits of an interlanguage. This will, in fact, require that teachers take a stand as researchers, identifying what in fact are the traits of their students' interlanguage, be that an interlanguage with traits shared by most students with the same L1 or an interlanguage with traits unique to a given community.

Such a perspective lifted a burden off my shoulders, as I realized students were not committing errors simply: they were, in fact, in the process of getting into contact with a new language, experimenting with it, making sense of it. They were hypothesizing about English on the grounds of their native language, so as to achieve purposes. Does a similar phenomenon not take place among speakers of creoles? Does it not spring from being between two or more languages?

[31] This is closely realted to what Graddol (2009) has to say about English teachers: the best teachers are not native speakers of the language, but those who share students' L1.
[32] The authors provide a whole range of examples from across different L1 languages of English students.

2.4. A response to the problem of method

As already mentioned, Cartesian views on anthropology influenced not only Philosophy, but other fields of knowledge as well, language studies included. One of these fields is English Language teaching. The idea of method is pervasive in the area, where there have been along the past decades several methods, which are the results of different epistemologies and apporaches to both langauge and learning. The remaining of such posture is questioned by Allwright (2003, p.1): "the notion of method 'should' have died a natural death in language teaching circles a good many years ago, but somehow it seems to have managed to survive remarkably well". The author goes on to ask why teachers have clinged to the idea of method: the reason is probably that before so many insecurities and challenges, teachers needed to hold on to some certainty; they needed to feel secure as the world went through, for instance, political turmoils between the USA and the Soviet Union; also, there were new theories being produced at the time which tried to explain language learning, and these theories were soon translated into language teaching methods, which led both teachers and institutions to hold firmly to principles and beliefs about teaching. My relationship to the promises made by method supporters has always been a troubled one, and that is why I devote some lines to "the problem of method".

Such an answer regarding assurance makes much sense: the notion of method is rooted in a metaphysical epistemology, based on ideals, so it does bring comfort and reassurance to professionals who need to be in control of their own professional performances. There is, thus, a relationship between method and control. Allwright (*ibid*.) argues that methods are important in fact, but not with a view to controlling, but to understanding.

An event in the arena of language teaching which was supposed to be a break with methods was the appearance of Communicative Language Teaching, an approach – not a method: less prescriptive, welcoming of different methods and open to different techniques and with a focus on students' communicative needs. An approach is context-sensitive and hence less fixed than a method. CLT was born out of the dissatisfaction with audio-lingualism and the grammar-translation method back in the 1960s/70s: "CLT was a principled response to the perceived failure of the audiolingual method, which was seen to focus exclusively and excessively on the manipulation of the linguistic structures of the target language

(KUMARAVADIVELU, 2006a, p. 61). Teachers began to notice that although students could master linguistically accurate sentences in the classroom, they were not able to "use" the language outside the classroom, which led to the perception that there is more to language and communication than knowledge of grammar (LARSEN-FREEMAN, 2010, p. 122). Classroom practice then shifts from "a largely structural orientation" to an orientation that features "a partial simulation of meaningful exchanges that take place outside the classroom" (KUMARAVADIVELU, 2006a, p. 61). CLT left a very strong mark on my life as an English teacher. Since my first days in the classroom I was led to believe it was "the" method – proclaimed as an "approach" - and it would definetly make students speak the language[33]. As mentioned earlier, after a couple of years of frustration, I began to question the pertinence of such a promise, something other teachers had already experienced around the globe.

As pointed out by Kumaravadivelu (*ibid*.), CLT gained popularity in part due to its focus on learners and communication, which can be considered a paradigm shift: it is not about an abstract, ontological-fashion method, but a learner-oriented approach, in the sense that it looks towards real-life situations and that it lays emphasis on communication – and not on "pure" and ideal forms of language structures, dissociated from every-day life, in a Cartesian-like fashion. Communication became a buzz word in the late 1960s (DIDENKO & PICHUGOVA, 2016, p. 1); production – and not only recepetion – was at stake (*ibid*., p. 2). The focus on communication is due to "The rise of a social view of language" (ALLWRIGHT, 2003, p. 2); communication came to be seen not only as the main purpose of language, but also "the main means by which it is developed in the individual" (*ibid*.). That led to the idea that all teachers had to do was to get communication going so that language would somehow pop up; this view began to be welcomed by the English language teaching profession back in the 1970's, with the designing of practical and communication-oriented activities for the classroom. That came to be known either as "the communicative approach" or "the communicative method" back in the 1980's. The "Communicative Language Teaching" takes hold (*ibid*.).

[33] Since CLT was aimed at supplying the lack of communication out of class, its materials reflected the motivation underlying it. Both trainers and coordinators were, I recall, enthusiastic about it.

CLT came to be seen as "an ideal model which could suit all circumstances and cover all areas in language pedagogy" (DIDENKO & PICHUGOVA, 2016, p. 1) – a method-grounded stance. Although it was not a method, with the great positive aspect of taking real-life and communicative needs into consideration, it seemed to bear much of a method; it was treated prescriptively, letting go of the fact that different students learn in different ways. Communicative needs in society were considered, but students' individual needs were overlooked in the name of "the approach". CLT was treated as methods had been:

> The methods were expected to offer principled solutions to all conceivable classroom problems directly or indirectly related to the learning of the target language. They were, then, intended to determine what should happen in the classroom, and especially to determine thereby the learning that resulted. (DIDENKO & PICHUGOVA, 2016, p. 1)

In a similar vein, Kumaravadivelu (2006a, p. 63) underlines:

> In fact, a detailed analysis of the principles and practices of CLT would reveal that it too adhered to the same fundamental concepts of language teaching as the audiolingual method it sought to replace, namely the linear and additive view of language learning [...]. The claims of of its distinctiveness are based more on communicative activities than on conceptual underpinnings. (KUMARAVADIVELU, 2006a, p. 63)

Such a posture turned out to be really frustrating early in my teaching career as I immediately sensed that by simply following the materials given to me I was not helping my students to "speak English". In fact, this very frustration showed up also elsewhere, when I taught by a method totally different from CLT: it was clear that the method would not cater to certain learning styles and some students would not succeed. My overall impression is that the belief that a given method or approach will necessarily lead to learning functions as a straitjacket. What must be understood among those involved in the teaching of English is that a classroom is a "dynamic social situation" (ALLWRIGHT, 2003, p. 4) and not "a static mechanical one, under the total and exclusive *control* of the teacher, as if the class were a simple factory machine" (*ibid*.).

As an under-trained teacher, I remember resorting to my familiar repertoire of classroom procedures (*ibid*.) to be then reprimanded my supervisor, who was clear to point out that I was supposed to follow "the Communicative Approach". Time passed and I realized the matter was not just that I was under trained but that "the

Approach" could not fulfill the promises it was believed to fulfill: it seems that an ontological-platonic stand towards teaching will fail to look at learners as a foundantion for the development of lessons. Rather, they will be seen as recipients of principles, procedures and techniques. In fact, in the Communicative Approach, social needs are taken care of, but always with a certain framing in mind, without due attention to the fact that some people will not adjust to the approach, which is in turn treated as a method, leaving some people – both teachers and students - disappointed. A method is not designed with actual people in mind. It turned out that CLT's emphasis on communication led to a defficiency in grammar: "preference of fluency over accuracy in practice promoted such low performance requirements that it resulted in poor competence" (DIDENKO & PICHUGOVA, 2016, p. 2). Kumaravadivelu (2006a, p. 61) emphasizes that

> underscoring the creative, unpredictable, and purposeful use of language as communication were classroom practices largely woven around sharing information and negotiating meaning. This is true not only of oral communication but also of reading and writing. Information gap activities that have the potential to carry elements of unpredictability and freedom of choice were found to be useful. So were games, role plays, and drama techiques, all of which were supposed to help the learners get ready for so-called real world communication outside the classroom. These activities were supposed to promote grammatical accuracy as well as communicative fluency.

A question follows: How would students develop fluency in communication when they did not feel secure regarding structures? Fluency was supposed to lead to accuracy, but it appears that success would have come the other way around. The lack of success posed by audiolingualism was so traumatic that materials were then over concerned about real life. Students would not (basic and intermediate-level students especially) have the background required to improvise and carry out the tasks. They were too free to accomplish what in the end would turn out to be unaccomplishable. In fact, they were faced with demands they could not respond to – and neither could teachers.

That is an outcome of CLT I saw in my classrooms, but there is more to the focus on communication: many times students were lost around both classroom and homework materials. The lessons were too "real" and "natural", to the point of including humor, which I could not approach. Teaching grammar openly was a red light. We must bear in mind that we are teaching in Brazil, where there is a

structuralist tradition regarding the teaching of both L1 and L2. That is to say, people expect an outlining of grammar topics and not that teachers tell them that they are "going to learn grammar naturally".

In a broader domain, beyond specific classroom issues, it should be noted that the approach was not able to fit so many distinct teaching contexts all around the world, just as no one method could. That is why Richards and Rodgers (2001) say that methods and methodologies cannot aim at being universal; implementation will vary accross *loci* and also: different methods seem to face the same implementation problems. So it is not by chance that Kumaravadivelu (2006b, p. 163) refers to methods as "professional articles of faith" and also tackles "The Death of Method" (2006a, p. 168)[34]. We should bear in mind that "methods themselves are decontextualized. They describe a certain ideal, based on certain beliefs" (LARSEN-FREEMAN, 2010, p. 181).

Before going further, I must, however, acknowledge the role of CLT in bringing social aspects to light. The fluency-oriented lessons brought to the forefront of teachers' concerns the importance of meaningful language practice, with language in action all the time: the arena of day-to-day life in society. Savignon (1991, p. 263) refers to "competence in terms of social interaction" being brought to light and also to "the centrality of context of situation in understanding language systems and how they work" as she taps into the genesis of CLT back in the 1970s.

An answer to the problem of method – and method-oriented practices - has been put forward by Kumaravadivelu: Postmethod Pedagogy (KUMARAVADIVELU, 2001). Such view comes from the general dissatisfaction with the concept of method. Within a method mindset, "it is a teacher who is expected to analyse context features and gain sufficient expertise to decide which methods, approaches and/or strategies will guarantee learners' success" (DIDENKO & PICHUGOVA, 2016, p. 3), to what Kumaravadivelu responds with Postmethod[35].

[34] There are several examples in the literature illustrating the difficulties in implementing CLT around the world (KUMARAVADIVELU, 2006a, p. 63).

[35] Kumaravadivelu (2006, p. 60) indicates that with respect to the transition to Postmethod, English language teaching went from CLT to task-based teaching. He adds: "I do not suggest that one concept has completely replaced the other; instead, I consider the transition as work in progress". There is no doubt that methods and approaches coexist in the field and come together in the practice of teachers, even thogh we may not be aware of that.

A Postmethod pedagogy will stand on three pillars: “it is a three-dimensional system consisting of three pedagogic parameters: particularity, practicality, and possibility” (KUMARAVADIVELU, 2001, p. 538).

2.4.1. Particularity

We teach particular students, at particular spaces, at particular times, which makes teaching a particular event, and that is why context is so important if we are to be relevant teachers: “language pedagogy, to be relevant, must be sensitive to a particular group of teachers teaching a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context embedded in a particular sociocultural milieu” (KUMARAVADIVELU, 2001, p. 539). A particularity-sensitive pedagogy is a response to the the disappointment spread about by CLT, a “disillusionment” experienced all around the world, which also led to impediments to learning (*ibid*.). Particularity is a valuing of the local realities of where teaching takes place, and not the expectation that a method birthed elsewhere will be successful.

2.4.2. Practicality

The ever present opposition between theory and practice is well known among teachers. In this sense, there has been in the English language teaching literature a distinction between “professional theories” and “personal theories” (KUMARAVADIVELU, 2006b, p. 172). Professional theories are those “in the books”, the ones teachers are supposed to feed from and follow, crafted in the academia and in the offices of teacher educators, handed over through course books. On the other hand, personal theories are the theories derived from the ways in which teachers interpret and and apply professional theories “in practical situations while they are on the job” (*ibid*.)[36].

[36] The author also differenciates between “method” and “methodology”. A method is the set of foundations an expert derives “from an understanding of the theories of language”. A methodology is a teacher’s procedures in the classroom, aimed at “maximizing learning opportunities for the learner” (KUMARAVADIVELU, 2006b, pp. 162-163). There is an explicit difference between what a theorist believes and what a teacher will do, which the author so values, to the point of considering “personal theories”.

Such dichotomy is dealt with by the parameter of "practicality": teachers are actors who develop their own theories, which are grounded in practice, and they are also the ones theorizing, based upon their own practice. They are not looking to principles and beliefs alien to their own reality. Teachers are thus to "construct their own context-sensitive theory of practice" (*ibid*., p. 173).

Practicality also takes into consideration "their [teachers'] insights and intuition" (*ibid*.). Teachers have a feeling about what what may or may not work, and that is based on practice. It is a "sense-making" (*ibid*., p. 174), which finds its theoretical affirmation in Postmethod Pedagogy.

2.4.3. Possibility

The importance of context manifests itself in that a context-sensitive pedagogy soon sheds light on social, political and cultural realities present in the classroom. Will I take knowledge of Baseball as a reference right from the start while I know that my students have probably never seen a Baseball match – not even on TV? If I am to talk about professions, should I have recourse to the ones portrayed by the material only? I ought to, instead, carry out my teaching around what is possible within my contextual setting, otherwise the content is strongly doomed not to make sense. It is here that the "Parameter of Possibility" comes in (*ibid*.).

A possibility sensitive stand on the classroom considers that "The experiences participants bring to the pedagogical setting are shaped, not just by what they experience in the classroom, but also by a broader social, economic, and political environment in which they grow up" (*ibid*.). Within the perspective of context sensitivity, the parameter of possibility also looks towards ideology and identities, since language is an arena on which and through which we depict ourselves in society – politically and culturally speaking. That is why attention to a "participatory pedagogy" (*ibid*., p. 175) is also a concern of Postmethod, in which a sense of community is valued and fostered. It is life in society that points at the possibilities for teaching and learning, hence a pedagogy of possibility.

After dealing with the problems and issues associated with method pedagogies, Kumaravadivelu comes up with "three postmethod frameworks" (2006b, p. 185)[37],

[37] They are, to quote: (a) Stern's three-dimensional framework, (b) Allwright's Exploratory Practice framework, and (c) Kumaravadivelu's macro-strategic framework.

Exploratory Practice being one of them. His aim is to "focus on some of the attempts that have recently been made to lay the foundation for the construction of pedagogies that can be considered postmethod in their orientation". EP is, thus, a postmethod framework and to it I turn now.

2.5. Exploratory Practice

Still within the issue of (Post)method, I must deal with a foundation which fulfills two purposes on my journey: to provide an answer to the problem of method and to delineate a philosophy that has fed me pedagogically, allowing me to behold my own work from a different perspective.

After tackling the whole problem of a method-oriented epistemology, Allwright (2003, p. 6) devotes a section of his text to the importance of understanding as opposed to controlling on the part of teachers: controlling is, he makes it clear along his lines, a posture that comes along with a method mindset. Understanding, rather, comes in when teachers devote themselves to going further and trying "to understand what lies behind their 'problems'" (*ibid*.), which shifts the focus of a lesson to "quality of life in the classroom" (*ibid*.). We are then before the first principle of Exploratory Practice, a posture in the classroom characterized by research *in loco*,

> the full integration of a research perspective into language teaching and learning, so that course time can be usefully spent, without prejudice to the teaching and the learning themselves, on developing local understandings that will feed back into immediate course decision-making and also contribute in the long run to enhancing the long-term development of both teachers and learners. (ALLWRIGHT, 2003, p. 6.)

In EP, planning will not be imposed by the teacher on students. Rather, planning is intended to make room for generating comprehension, which in turn has the potential to inform action. We plan to understand and not to change (ALLWRIGHT, 2009, p. 173), which does not mean that changes cannot come about. So we do not simply "do" in the classroom: we walk and move upon reflection. My planning

began to take a turn: I am much more focused on the macro level than on the micro level of the lesson, leaving it more to students, althouth not wholy[38].

Planning for understanding instead of controlling/changing may frighten some teachers at first: leaving the micro-management level to work itself out may lead to the teacher's concern about losing control. However, this fear only makes sense if one views learning as controllable and predictable. We need to understand that although we can attempt to control someone's behavior – which is feasible – we are not in control of someone's learning (*ibid*., p. 5). It must be clear, thus, that planning is not left out of teaching and learning, but it takes on a new role, different from the one traditionally associtated with it (*ibid.*).

Allwright (1991, p. 196) is clear on the importance of knowing why and how ideas work, and this is one of my reasons for attempting to shed light on how my ideas are playing out in the classroom, for EP "will not only enhance the teacher's understanding of classroom teaching but also contribute to progress in pedagogic research in general" (KUMARAVADIVELU, 2006b, p. 194). Exploratory Practice is about teaching, understanding and researching coming together, hand in hand.

Since Exploratory Practice is concerned with quality of life, other principles end up following from this first one. Here are the seven principles of EP. To quote:

> 1 – put quality of life first;
> 2 – work primarily to understand language classroom life;
> 3 – involve everybody;
> 4 – work to bring people together;
> 5 – work also for mutual development;
> 6 – do not let the work "burn you out", from which a corollary follows: integrate the work for understanding into classroom practice;
> 7 – make the work a continuous enterprise, from which a corollary follows: avoid time-limited funding. (ALLWRIGHT, 2003, p. 8)

Principle 2 usually leads the teacher practitioner to formulate 'why' questions, that is to say, puzzles (MORAES BEZERRA & MILLER, 2015, p. 94; ALLWRIGHT, 2000). Principle 6, in turn,

[38] Allwright does not take a final stand on whether planning should be about macro or micro-level management. He leaves that to "the established authorities in the field" (*ibid.*). Such a notion of planning is a possibility in EP, though, as he himself makes clear: "If we abandon that belief ["determining ***both*** the teaching that would ensue ***and*** the learning that would result"] then there is still plenty to be planned, but in the context of a much diminished interest in micro-management." (*ibid.*)

> leads teachers to create and engage in Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities [...], which offer language learning opportunities as well as opportunities for the development of reflexivity about the puzzles in question. In so doing, exploratory clasroom practitioners have not only reorganized their pedagogy as 'puzzle-driven' work, but have also reinvented social life in the classroom (MORAES BEZERRA & MILLER, 2015, p. 94).

In fact, once I began to think in terms of puzzles and integration, my relationship with students gained new life, since the lessons were now being planned as a way of understanding ourselves (pupils and I). The activities were not ends in themselves but opportunities to learn more and find out about both myself and sudents. My posture was something new. I remember looking at students in a new light, as I thought: "Let me see...".

Integration of understanding and classroom life leads to the creation of "Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities" (*ibid.*), activities designed not to simply make students practice some language item or fulfill some communicative aim: rather, PEPAs are aimed at being tools for generating comprehension. They are means and not ends in themselves. Since I want to understand – and not impose - I need to plan around such purpose. The activities thought of will then be "Potentially Exploitable" ones. Whenever a task is suggested, I will have an eye for trying to learn: what is this showing me? I may prepare the same activities I have prepared elsewhere, but my posture is no longer that of someone who simply wants to have a job done on pupils.

2.5.1. The steps into Exploratory Practice

There are seven steps to EP (ALLWRIGHT, 2000), to which I turn now, as I situate myself within and around them[39]:

1 – *Identifying a puzzle*. Since the beginning of 2019 I have sensed that there is something different about my classroom behavior. As I already had some notions of EP from the previous year, I tried to turn that feeling into a question which went from "Am I really acting differently?" to "In what ways am I acting differently?". In other words, "How is that so?". As suggested by Allwright, I then turned the how

[39] In naming the steps, I have used italics to indicate that I am quoting Allwright.

into a why: "Why I am acting the way I am in the classroom?"[40]. A why question is a "puzzle" within EP, as opposed to a how question, seen as a "problem";

2 – *Reflecting upon the puzzle*. Once I had a puzzle, I began to mull it over, as I systematically delved into language teaching literature so that I could picture out what was going on, with the aid of researchers. I would then enter the classrooms with an eye out for whatever would take place that would attract my attention in terms of changes in my behavior. As my suspicions were being confirmed, I moved on to the next step;

3 – *Monitoring*. This is "a matter of gathering naturally occurring data about whatever you are still puzzling about" (ALLWRIGHT, 2000). Once I had a why in mind, I soon realized I needed a concrete how, a way of leaning on the why question: ask for students' feedback? Record lessons? Register my own impressions? I began by keeping notes while learners were engaged in group, which turned out to be a satisfying and pleasant endeavor that led me to register occurrences also outside of the classroom, after lessons. I was in the process of writing a diary[41];

4 – *Taking direct action to generate data*. Here we learn that we do not have to resort to traditional, technical, standard, time consuming devices for collecting data: my very classroom routines were the sources for generating data, something that would necessarily take the participation of students, although they would not be aware of it. Allwright (*ibid*.) points out that in EP we are to take direct action for data generation by means of everyday, regular classroom acitivities. I purposefully began to plan lessons with a view to resorting to activities and tasks as investigative tools for generating data: here the Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities would make their appearance. Those would be tools for looking at both the kids and me. I would then register anything interesting in my journal, which was in fact supposed to be a partial mirror of what would be going on;

[40] When he lays out the importance of not asking how but why instead, Allwright is tackling the mindset we teachers have of trying to always find a solution to a problem, which is also an Action Research stand. He suggests that we reformulate a problem as a puzzle by turning how into why: "How to motivate students?" into "Why aren't they motivated?", for example. Although my point of departure is not that of dealing with a problem (unmotivated students for instance, to use Allwright's example), resorting to a why question, that is, a puzzle in the EP fashion, has proved really fruitful, and that is why I decided to carry out the whole research around it.

[41] Monitoring is the first level of understanding (ALLWRIGHT, 1996, p. 3). See more in 3 below.

5 – *Considering the outcomes reached so far, and deciding what to do next*. Satisfied with my data generation and willing to keep on writing, I saw the steps I was taking would lead me to some understanding of the reason – or reasons – why I was acting differently from years before. By then I had already started to read a great deal about teaching pedagogy, which along with the data I had at hand, was a sign that I had what I needed;

6 – *Moving on*. Since I sensed some good understanding had been achieved, it was then time to design the structure of the paper and put ideas down, to finally notice that it might be the time to

7 – *Go public*. Once I realized the quality of my life as a teacher was changing for better and I could see at least a little bit of why, it was clear that some adequate understanding had been reached on my part. Allwright states that going public is about sharing our good fortune with others (*ibid*.). If the job is cheering us up, he says, then going public follows.

2.5.2. Not a method but yet OK with methods

It is clear, thus, that EP is a mindset, a lens through which we look at classroom life. It breaks away from the notion of method, which does not mean that teachers working within a method cannot do EP – not at all: EP is for everyone willing to probe below and beyond the do's, don'ts and hows of classroom procedures; it is about quality of life. In EP we can resort to whatever techniques and practices from whatever methods we are aquainted with and/or working within. It was EP that paved the road for my wondering about and questioning my attitudes as a teacher. Stepping into the classroom began to take on a different meaning in my everyday experiences.

3. Beliefs: bringing them around

Since I want to bring my own beliefs to light – which I notice have changed over the past months -, it is pertinent to ask: how can that be done? Li and Walsh (2011, p. 42) suggest that using interaction is a good method, since interaction is a good lens to look at beliefs: "learning arises not *through* interaction, but *in* interaction" (ELLIS, 2000, p. 209 *apud* LI & WALSH, *ibid*.). I began to write a diary as a result of my perception regarding the changes in my beliefs. It is a fruit of my classroom interactions and constitutes data generated in partnership with students, so it became the material to be studied.

This monograph serves three purposes:

1) to answer the following question: Why am I acting the way I am in the classroom?

In an attempt to lean on this question, I saw I needed to

2) outline the theoretical framings that have contributed to my present beliefs and practices as a teacher[42];
3) analyze some day-to-day classroom events in light of such framings.

Since beliefs cannot be openly observed or measured, we need to find ways of inferring them (PAJARES, 1992, p. 314), and that is to be done "from what people say, intend, and do – fundamental prerequisites that educational researchers have seldom followed"[43] (*ibid*.). It is by beholding what I say, intend and, above all do in the company of students, that I shall make an attempt to comprehend what some of my beliefs are, which takes us to how inferences about beliefs can be made. The following components are expected to appear in research on beliefs: "belief statements, intentionality to behave in a predisposed manner, and behavior related to the belief in question" (PAJARES, 1992, p. 315).

In order to try to reach such a goal and understand these new dynamics I now find myself in, I have made recourse to my classroom diary, written at the same time as I interacted with my groups: I wanted to be able to observe my beliefs as they

[42] This is done in the previous sections.
[43] Would that still be an example of Platonic/Cartesian epistemological stands?

were enacted[44], and also, by acting this way, I am in accordance with EP, as I bring together my efforts for understanding and my everyday practice (MORAES BEZERRA & MILLER, 2015, p. 94). The diary entries were produced at the end of the 2019 school year, after noticing changes in my own classroom behavior during the year. A diary is, within the realm of Exploratory Practice, a Potentially Exploitable Reflective Activity, since it is a means for both registering reflections and generating more reflections in the future.

With a view to devoting attention to these three purposes above, I resort to a qualitative case study, as I want to promote understanding about a a real-life, contemporary situation, with special attention to a specific context. The option for a case study brings the benefit of "providing a rich and vivid description of events with the analysis of them" (HITCHCOCK & HUGHES, 1995, p. 317).

3.1. Beliefs in context

Beliefs are intertwined with the context that we are part of. A context is not to be seen as an entity fixed and simply given, recipients of whaterver circumstances: contexts are dynamic, socially designed, full of interactions. Beliefs are connected to each other, forming a context (BARCELOS, 2004, p. 137). More than identifying beliefs and inquiring about what they are leading to, it is necessary to look at beliefs' relationships to context: how do they work within a certain environment? How are they impacting a given context? How are they functioning? (*ibid*., p.144)

Beliefs happen in society. They do not only influence behaviors; they are influenced also, which brings us to a very important trait in teacher life: decision making. What is the role of beliefs with respect to a teacher's actions? In which aspects was a decision influenced by a belief? (*ibid*.). As decisions are made in context, responding to issues within a context, it is clear that we need to understand the teaching contexts in which beliefs function, bearing in mind that beliefs bring along marks of context, but also leave marks on it.

The events described in my journal and which serve as data for this research took place at one of the municipal schools where I work.

[44] Aksoy (2015, p. 675) points out that beliefs can be either stated or enacted, which is not different from what Pajares has stated.

My school is an Elementary I School[45], which means that we teach kids from grades one to five, out of nine grades, aside from secondary education. They have classes of all the school subjects on the official curriculum. English, Physical Education, Visual Arts, Drama and Music[46] are seen as non-important areas: both parents and children regard such subjects as low-ranking in comparison with the other items on the school program[47], which is reinforced by the fact that teachers of those subjects are not supposed to grade students in Elementary I Schools. Such information may be relevant in analyzing teachers' beliefs and behaviors, mine included.

The school is located in the West Area of the city[48], not considered a rich area, socio-economically speaking. Locals range mostly between low and middle incomes. More specifically, the school stands in a low income area.

3.2. Data: where were they generated? Who triggered them?

For this study, I selected nine groups, the ones appearing in the journal entries.[49]

The selection of groups was random: over the course of a few weeks, I would simply register events whenever I noticed that something attracted my attention at the same time as I was able to stop for a moment to write (registers were made preferably *in loco*). By doing so, I prevented myself from dedicating special attention to specific groups, which might end up leading me to shape the lessons in an artificial, non-spontaneous fashion. The idea underlying the study is exactly to

[45] In Brazil, we call this type of school "Escola de Ensino Fundamental I" or more recently "Escola de anos iniciais" (school of first years/grades).
[46] Students should have at least one of the three arts on their curriculum: Visual Arts, Music or Drama. Few schools happen to have teachers of the three componentes, with groups (not all necessarily) having the three components.
[47] Portuguese and Maths are perceived as the most important components among all the others, both in elementary and secondary education. There are people, teachers included, who refer to these as "essential subjects", meaning, for instance, that these are the ones students cannot or should not fail. In the past, when single teachers were allowed to fail students – or at least keep them at school at the end of the year for extra classes -, Physical Education or Arts (Drama, Music) teachers who dared to fail a learner were bound to have problems with parents. Nowadays, PE and Arts are resorted to whenever a student has had a low performance in the "main" subjects (all the others): if we want to fail a student, then it is opportune to count on "minor" teachers to justify a student's repeating a grade.
[48] "Zona Oeste", as it is referred to by locals, authorities and the government.
[49] The number of students in each class may vary. Here are each groups's numbers. 1301: 29; 1302: 28; 1303: 28; 1304: 31; 1402: 30; 1403: 27; 1501: 26; 1502: 36; 1503: 34.

look at myself “unaware” at different moments, in different in-school contexts, certifying if the beliefs I subscribe to are manifested across different situations.

4. Beliefs where they show up, as they show up: what they show

In this section, I present my diary entries followed by interpretations aimed at making explicit the beliefs behind my attitudes. Both events and my *in loco* impressions of those are registered. I also try to indicate possible areas where there is room for improvement[50]. The underlying question all through the entries is "Why?"[51].

November 6

- class 1302

I've had some difficulties presenting vocabulary. I stop and wonder how else I can try to achieve that goal by being sensitive to the group's reality. A couple of months ago I would simply have complained and regretted that students can't do what I want them to, in this case, pay attention to vocabulary presentation. Now I stop for a moment in an attempt to devise ways to fit in with the group. Maybe I should stop and focus on something else other than content.

Experiencing disturbance when presenting a lesson is not a new experience. Stopping for a second without focusing on the problem itself, as I keep my main purpose in mind is new. I try to be sensitive to what is going on around me and I still have a purpose in mind, in an attempt to strike a balance between the syllabus and what I perceived as the children's needs. These two are not mutually exclusive.

Not being sure if content itself is a problem, I have left this issue open for futher reflection, thinking about the reason or reasons why pupils are not engaging, since I do not consider the event a dead end. It may bring about a possible chance for making sense and developing a personal theoretical insight, within the Postmethod perspective[52].

[50] Some entries have been divided so as to make the analyses easier to understand. Transcriptions are italicized.

[51] My initial aim was to comment on all the classes I registered, but as it became more and more clear that such a procedure would make the section extremely self-repetitive, I decided to select some entries only, with a view to providing a few illustrations of the beliefs outlined throughout the paper. I do not make direct references to the theory underlying my behavior. Footnotes indicate where they can all be found in the theoretical foundations section, however. All of the lessons covered during my self-observation period can be found in the appendix.

[52] Section 2.4.

A student asks if the vocab exercise can be done in Portuguese, a frequent reaction across different groups, which always frustrates me. I react by eliciting examples of English words from students' own supplies, a strategy I've never tried. Some contribute with their notebook covers and other supplies of their own.

This same student, who is always unwilling to do the activities I set up, begins to work. After some time, he comes to me for assistance and goes all the way until he completes the tasks.

From a Postmethod perspective, here I tried to cater to a particularity[53] of a student who tends to filter his language experiences through his L1: he already has a whole verbal system to count on[54]. That invites me to remember that resorting to English is not simply a matter of pressing a button in order to activate a function[55]. With the participation of his peers – a social need may have been met -, he winds up performing the task[56].

An event catches my attention: I sit down to talk to a girl who always treats her peers with this stressed and aggressive attitude, as I try to make her see the disadvantages of her behavior. Ten minutes later she yells something at me, appologizing right away for shouting, as she corrects herself.

The girl is clearly giving voice to an emotion[57], which I tried to meet, paving the road for teaching the day's content, for I cannot look at the cognitive aspect of a lesson without considering the affective dimension[58]. Her reaction was really new, considering her usual behavior. My talking to her in a friendly manner led to a change in her alingnment. Here I tried to listen to what she means through her aggressive attitudes, her languaging[59]. She is interacting with her environment, performing movements[60], and as a part of it, I tried to reach out to her. The outcome was positive.

[53] Section 2.4.
[54] Section 2.2.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Section 2.1.
[57] Section 2.2.
[58] Section 2.1.
[59] Section 2.2.
[60] Ibid.

- class 1403

After hearing about the experiences of a well-seasoned teacher, I decided to give this class some free time before I started off the lesson. This practice turned out to be quite effective, for after some time of talking, playing or leafing through some books – I allowed them to do whatever they wanted to, as long as they didn't do anything disruptive -, they embraced the activities I proposed, easily carrying them out, without much distress.

Unquestionably, the social and affective realms are playing out behind my allowing the group some free time. I simply asked myself how I could demand attention for learning a content at the same time as I was not sensitive to their need of being together[61]. Being interested in quality of life led to my action[62].

I've also adopted the habit of stopping to make it clear that I have allowed them some spare time, with room for the social and personal dimensions to be enacted, so it's their part now to behave in such a way we can all go through the lesson. They've understood it and followed along. Months ago I would have tried to force the content into the group.

This means that months ago I would have considered the cognitive dimension of the lesson only[63], not knowing about the social and the affective aspects, which would lead to a sense of disappointment. By paying heed to the three dimensions of a lesson, I put quality of life first, for people need to be understood[64].

I now need to rethink the reward system I ended up implementing, which may not have been a good attitude on my part.

- class 1501

1501 is a very disruptive group. In an attempt to make them quiet, I've designed very simple cut-and-paste vocab tasks, so that they can copy some basic content from the board and then sit in pairs to get the job done. The entire sessions are supposed to revolve around the tasks. It turns out that a significant number of kids have carried out the activities – even one of the worst behaving ones, who has also verbalized his interest in pair work.

[61] Section 2.1.
[62] Section 2.5.
[63] Section 2.1.
[64] Section 2.5.

It seems that two factors are at play here: the need for socializing at the same time they can express themselves – not necessarily by practicing the content the way I used to expect, but by copying, cutting and pasting. By working together with their peers, they seemed to be satisfied.

I simply gave up on demanding from students a posture I believed was the best towards studying and instead I tried to cater to their needs, as I realized my understanding regarding learning was not working. As a verbal language oriented person, it took a long time for me to understand people do express themselves and can live out their personal selves by means other than verbal interactions. With my students' social and affective needs being considered, I can now think of ways of moving towards oral interactions.

Breaking away from the expectation of idealized students who would just sit down and listen to what I wanted them to do, I raised a hypothesis: they might be calling not for what I saw fifth graders were supposed to perform. Rather, perhaps they would engage in a type of activity younger students would like to. I theorized upon my own practice[65]. At the same time, it must be recognized that learners were expressing themselves not by means of verbal language, which was still in my horizon, but were involved in working through physical manual work[66]. Teachers should always seek after a pedagogy of possibility[67].

A point to be considered is the reason why they do not, supposedly, act the way I expect fifth graders to act. This question should be open to the possibility that I need to rethink my own constructs as far as students' behavior is concerned: I may be working with idealized learners in mind, as I still hold on to a need to plan for controlling. I need to devise exploitable activities[68] in which students can give expression to what they think and believe themselves and also talk with coworkers about that[69].

November 11

- class 1301

I step into the classroom and elicit the names of animals I worked on the week before. They can remember all of them and even add one or two I had forgotten myself. I am amazed. I remember I had resorted to body language in order to teach

[65] Section 2.4.
[66] Section 2.2.
[67] Section 2.4.
[68] Section 2.5.
[69] Ibid.

the words. They ask me to do a word game from last class. The teacher had told me they were glad we were going to play it again.

It can clearly be observed here that quality of life, involvement and the coming together of people are at play[70]. The use of body language represents the understanding that we can get meaning across through language that is not verbal, languaging the way kids do[71].

- classes 1303/1304

I have to attend to these two groups today at the same time this afternoon. I assign something related to colors and numbers as I take the chance to introduce "age". I write the question on the board: How old are you? I instruct students to respond with their fingers. I sing a chant instead of simply teaching how to ask the question. Most of them assimilate the task. After the class, as they line up for snack time, I ask some of them about their ages by performing the chant once again. I indicate with my hands what I expect. Most get it and answer. Not satisfied, I go back to them and this time simply ask the question (without doing the chant) of five or six students. Most answer in English, one in L1 and another one with his hand, making the number.

The following day (Nov 12), I have a chance to be with one of the groups again. "How old are you?" is the first thing I ask. I go around the room asking. Several students look at me and answer either with their hands and/or orally. I then introduce a more complete answer: "I am...". They get it.

Clearly, languaging[72] is at work here: meaning is built and gotten across by means of not just verbal language but also through body language. Words, affect and gestures grow out of feelings and needs. Affects also communicate. From the perspective of communication, it will make no difference whether a response was given with words or gestures. Once this is recognized, the teacher will have more room to focus on verbal language, detaching it from the other types of languaging. It should always be clear, though, that verbal language is one possible way for languaging.

[70] Section 2.5.
[71] Section 2.2.
[72] Ibid.

November 18

- class 1303

Today I want to see how this group goes by itself without much of my intervention. I set up a simple vocab task: students pick up magazines and find examples of men, women and animals.

By doing so, I find room for understanding[73] for future planning that fits their needs and expectations.

In this group there's a girl who has received more of my attention since the beginning of the year: she doesn't talk much. Whenever I need her feedback on anything, content related or not, she quiets down, with an expression of someone who is indignant about something, without saying a word. She is always apathetic and never gets to do the tasks. I've talked to the home teacher about her a couple of times. She has the same impressions as I do: the girl seems to have problems of interaction.

Following the principles of Exploratory Practice[74], I invite the home teacher to help me figure out what is happening to the girl. By confirming my impressions, I see I have an issue at hand: she does not fit in with the rest of the group and needs to be taken care of in a more individualized, particular way[75]. Perhaps there are personal, classroom-related matters involved; perhaps the matter is more of a social, family matter. Planning should be carried out in order to understand her and whatever is called for: I need Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities[76].

Today, however, she is having trouble with her classmates over classroom supplies. They are sharing scissors and glues. She stands up for herself and even makes gestures. I notice she is not speaking much, but her hands move quite a bit. After the class period, I call the teacher aside and report on today's events. First off, I do some recap on the girl's usual behavior. The teacher confirms my impressions. When I tell the teacher how the girl reacted in the quarrel with the classmates, the teacher is surprised.

I've learned two things today about this student: (I) she wanted to engage in the activity; (II) I need to prepare activities with a more meaningful appeal in her eyes.

[73] Section 2.5.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Section 2.4.
[76] Section 2.5.

Languaging[77] seems to be working here in two directions: the student is not passive. She may not respond in the way teachers expect her to but she responds somehow: gestures and affects communicate. Secondly, I need to build up tasks aimed at encouraging her to get meaning across in her own ways before I can help her build a practice of resorting to verbal language. I am right before the need of Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities[78] to, first of all, understand why she acts the way she does.

- class 1503

I've been working on collocations with this group: eat pizza; drink water; play Free Fire. They have understood the logics of collocations. Today I have planned for a practical introduction of third person –s. I assign an exercise on the board in which calssmates' names were to be provided:

a) _____ drinks water / b) _____ plays soccer

They are to go around the classroom and find out someone who fits in with each sentence. I immediately think to myself that it would be necessary to have students ask quesions of each other so that they could complete the assingnment. I am soon reminded of the hard times I've had before when trying to practice Do-you questions with collocations and I give up on the idea of questions. Out of the blue, I hear a student ask "Drinks soda?" and I contemplate the possibility of having a hand at simply using the collocations to ask questions. I wonder if I can promote the use of a pidgin in the classroom. After all, pidgins supply the communicative needs of their speakers.

Leaving behind the ideal perfection of grammatically accurate sentences in English, I see that meaning can be achieved halfway towards English. As my main purpose was to promote engagement on the part of pupils, I conceded that "Drinks soda?" would work well. After all, the question sprang up after I had given instructions for speaking English, that is, English was the reference. Pidgins and creoles are the result of a similar setting; they are special codes springing from immediate interactions. Students' interlanguage needs to receive due attention by teachers as legitimate language[79].

They finish the written exercise and I then explain and model asking yes/no questions: "Drink water? Play soccer?". Off they go, performing the questions in

[77] Section 2.2.
[78] Section 2.5.
[79] Section 2.3.

pairs. It works so well that I realize the possibility of creating an oral game in trios. It seems most of the trios have made it.

I wrap up by throwing questions into the air for the whole group. The home teacher comes and I tell her we're going to show her what we've done today. Three of them come forward, making a trio. The teacher joins in and asks two questions she knows in English. I am considering asking for the teacher's help in eliciting from them, from time to time, what they've seen in the English class.

The point here was to involve someone else[80]: the home teacher. That had the power of showing the children they are not just "using" English for the English teacher, but that English is a means for intereaction. I wanted to motivate them by demonstrating that learning a foreign language can speak to their social needs[81].

November 21

- class 1503

Students are performing a talking task in which they ask each other what they do, for instance, drink certain drinks, play certain games, eat certain foods. I don't have any visual aids, so I rely on their previous knowledge of collocations and vocabulary items.

I notice this girl at the front will have difficulties with vocab, which is confirmed. I see the need to do a vocabulary building activity with a view to helping her recongnize the meaning of words.

As a verbally oriented person, I need to reframe my perspective on language to cover languaging[82]: vocabulary can be visually worked on. There are ways other than verbal of building up meaning in the classroom. Once again, I expect a student of a certain level of schooling to be able to carry out an activity in a certain way. We are to never lose sight of particularity and possibility[83].

November 26

- class 1202

I haven't planned anything for today and I go to the teachers' room for any resources I may have from previous lessons. I find a photocopy with pictures of

[80] Section 2.5.
[81] Section 2.1.
[82] Section 2.2.
[83] Section 2.4.

everyday activities. I decide to teach opinion adjectives: good and bad. I use some body language to perform some activities and elicit if such activities are good or bad (by also signing with thumbs up and down along with the adjectives themselves). They understand it, with some answering with hand gestures. I use real life examples. A student who is always quiet and is never responsive participates. Another one, who is always absent and never engages when present, reacts to my prompts.

Off the class goes and this always uninterested boy is quiet as he carries out the task (cutting, coloring and writing).

A really shy girl, a new student, asks for help on how to perform the task. She is not much into talking but interacts in her own way. I need to check her understanding and wonder if it would be a good idea to come close and elicit. It works. She smiles.

This a lesson in which once again the importance of a posture sensitive to ways of interacting other than verbal makes itself present[84]. We cannot assume that just because students are not speaking they are not engaging. After all, language has a heart, which is there even when verbal language shies away. By trying to reach out to the girl, I am trying to welcome her as she is, putting quality of life first.

[84] Section 2.2.

5. Final remarks

Putting on paper remarks, which are meant to be final, about a still ongoing process is not an easy task. Dealing with something so individual and personal as one's own beliefs makes the task even harder. Beliefs are itches begging to be scratched. They have long been taken for granted by me, however, in the sense that I had never realized they are behind what I find obvious and pertinent. If it had not been for a desire to learn more about English, I would not have had a try at learning about my own beliefs as an English teacher. The wish to know more about the language led to learning more about the language in other people's lives by means of my job.

With the benefit of hindsight, I can now say that understanding the importance of beliefs came at the same time as I began to pay heed to the ones I work with: my students.

Adopting a non-prescriptive stance was a novelty. Planning for understanding allowed me to: (1) delve into what I believe in; (2) look into the shifts my beliefs have been undergoing. Imposing and controlling would not have made the room that understanding made for dealing with my beliefs. Exploratory Practice is a ground for anyone after better classroom life; Postmethod means deliverance to me: I could not see beyond methods before. These are the two pillars on which this research stands, which guided me along the way. Everything else is somehow dependant upon these two perspectives on teaching.

Resorting to day-to-day diaries was the the way chosen to tap into my purpose. I should from now on consider other methods. I need to also listen to students' beliefs more attentively, by registering what they have to say. After all, here I have looked at what my impressions on what goes on in the classroom, and there is no doubt that students have great contributions to make with respect to my beliefs. Also, they need to have a say about their own beliefs, definitely: the classroom is not about "me" and "them" but about "us". It is thus clear that I need to find ways of listening to them – both regarding me and themselves.

Someone has remarked that scientific thinking is realizing and that science brings a world about. A paradigm shift brings the researcher to a new world (MAGRO, GRACIANO & VAZ, 2014, p. 25). I could not agree more.

Surely, the search for understanding which beliefs are playing out and how they are playing out in the classroom does not end here. Nevertheless, this is the very foundation marking the beginning of a journey which I hope will have a life transforming impact on many other lives to come.

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7. Appendix: diary entries

November 6

- class 1302

I've had some difficulties presenting vocabulary. I stop and wonder how else I can try to achieve that goal by being sensitive to the group's reality. A couple of months ago I would simply have complained and regretted that students can't do what I want them to, in this case, pay attention to vocabulary presentation. Now I stop for a moment in an attempt to devise ways to fit in with the group. Maybe I should stop and focus on something else other than content.

A student asks if the vocab exercise can be done in Portuguese, a frequent reaction across different groups, which always frustrates me. I react by eliciting examples of English words from students' materials, a strategy I've never tried. Some contribute with their notebooks and other materials.

This same student, who is always unwilling to do the activities I set up, begins to work. After some time, he comes to me for assistance and goes all the way until he completes the tasks.

An event catches my attention: I sit down to talk to a girl who always treats her peers with this stressed and aggressive attitude, as I try to make her see the disadvantages of her behavior. Ten minutes later she yells something at me, appologizing right away for shouting, as she corrects herself.

- class 1403

After hearing about the experiences of a well-seasoned teacher, I decided to give this class some free time before I started off the lesson. This practice turned out to be quite effective, for after some time of talking, playing or leafing through some books – I allowed them to do whatever they wanted to, as long as they didn't do anything disruptive -, they embraced the activities I proposed, easily carrying them out, without much distress.

I've also adopted the habit of stopping to make it clear that I have allowed them some spare time, so it's their part now to behave in such a way we can all go through the lesson. They've understood it and followed along. Months ago I would have tried to force the content into the group.

- class 1501

1501 is a very disruptive group. On an attempt to make them quiet, I've designed very simple cut-and-paste vocab tasks, so that they can copy some basic content from the board and then sit in pairs to get the job done. The whole sessions are supposed to revolve? around the tasks. It turns out that a significant number of kids have carried out the activities – even one of the worst behaving ones, who has also verbalized his interest in pair work.

It seems that two factors are at play here: the need for socializing at the same time they can express themselves – not necessarily by practicing the content the way I used to expect, but by copying, cutting and pasting. By working together with their peers, they seemed to be satisfied.

I simply gave up on demanding from students a posture I believed was the best towards studying and instead I tried to cater to their needs, as I realized my understanding regarding learning was not working. As a verbal language oriented person, it took a long time for me to understand people do express themselves and can live out their personal selves by means other than verbal interactions. With my students' social and affective needs being considered, I can now think of ways of moving towards oral intereactions.

November 7

- class 1402

I step into the classroom and sit down. Students begin to talk like mad. English is not seen as a school subject, along with the fact that I am not seen as a figure of authority. These two factors together help account for my students' behavior in general, I believe. Some, however, seem to be willing to learn: a girl comes to me and inquires about what we're going to do.

My posture since I entered the room has not been one of repremanding: human beings need to be in touch with each other and letting children talk and sit together means allowing them to be who they are: social beings. It means well being. If they don't feel good, then I cannot bring contents around. Otherwise there won't be much motivation other than the pure sense of obligation.

PS: I ended up not registering what went on for the rest of the period.

- class 1503

By and large, the group shows a very noisy and disruptive behavior, with their home teacher complaining a lot about them. For the past four or five weeks, I've tried a new approach: set up pair work with cutting and pasting. My job now is not to just transmit contentes, but select vocabulary items and instruct pairs on how to carry out tasks by resorting to the material assingned. They first copy something down from the board to then get together, a routine they are getting accustomed to. The vast majority of students in this group are engage in the activity. Today in special they are less disruptive and making less noise then before.

November 11

- class 1301

I step into the classroom and elicit the names of animals I worked on the week before. They can remember all of them and even add one or two I had forgotten myself. I am amazed. I remember I had resorted to body language in order to teach the words. They ask me to do a word game from last class. The teacher had told me they were glad we were going to play it again.

- classes 1303/1304

I have to attend to these two groups today at the same time this afternoon. I assign something related to colors and numbers as I take the chance to introduce "age". I write the question on the board: How old are you? and I instruct students to to respond with their fingers. I sing a chant instead of simply teaching how to as the question. Most of them assimilate the task. After the class, as they line up for snack time. I ask some of them about their ages by performing the chant once again. I indicate with my hands what I expect. Most get it and answer. Not satisfied, I go back to them and this time simply ask the question (without doing the chant) of five or six students. Most answer in English, one in L1 and another one with his hand, making the number.

The following day (Nov 12), I have a chance to be with one of the groups again. "How old are you?" is the first thing I ask. I go around the room asking. Several students look at me and answer either with their hands and/or orally. I then introduce a more complete answer: "I am...". They get it.

November 18

- class 1303

Today I want to see how this group goes by itself without much of my intervention. I set up a simple vocab task: students pick up magazines and find examples of men, women and animals.

In this group there's a girl who has received more of my attention since the beginning of the year: she doesn't talk much. Whenever I need her feedback on anything, content related or not, she quiets down, with an expression of someone who is indignant about something, without saying a word. She is always apathetic and never gets to do the tasks. I've talked to the home teacher about her a couple of times. She has the same impressions as I do: the girl seems to have problems of interaction.

Today, however, she is having trouble with her classmates over classroom supplies. They are sharing scissors and glues. She stands up for herself and even makes gestures. I notice she is not speaking much, but her hands move quite a bit. After the class period, I call the teacher aside and report on today's events. First off, I do some recap on the girl's usual behavior. The teacher confirms my impressions. When I tell the teacher how the girl reacted in the quarrel with the classmates, the teacher is surprised.

I've learned two things today about this student: (I) she wanted to engage in the activity; (II)I need to prepare activities with a more meaningful appeal in her eyes.

- class 1503

I've been working on collocations with this group: eat pizza; drink water; play Free Fire. They have understood the logics of collocations. Today I planned for a practical introduction of third person –s. I assign an exercise on the board in which calssmates' names were to be provided:

a) _____ drinks water / b) _____ plays soccer

They are to go around the classroom and find out someone who fits in with each sentence. I immediately think to myself that it would be necessary to have students ask quesions of each other so that they could complete the assingnment. I am soon reminded of the hard times I've had before when trying to practice Do-you questions with collocations and I give up on the idea of questions. Out of the blue, I hear a student ask "Drinks soda?" and I contemplate the possibility of having a hand at simply using the collocations to ask questions. I wonder if I can promote the use of a pidgin in the classroom. After all, pidgins supply the communicative needs of their speakers.

They finish the written exercise and I then explain and model asking yes/no questions: "Drink water? Play soccer?". Off they go, performing the questions in pairs. It works so well that I realize the possibility of creating an oral game in trios. It seems most of the trios have made it.

I wrap up by throwing quesitons into the air for the whole group. The teacher comes and I tell her we're going to show her what we've done today. Three of them come forward, making a trio. The teacher joins in and asks two questions she knows in English. I am considering asking for the teacher's help in eliciting from them, from time to time, what they've seen in the English class.

November 19

- class 1403

I wanted to see how they would behave without much of my intervention and a few exercises only, so I planned a simple vocabulary activity. Once they had finished the task, some stood up and began to run, walk around and/or make noise. It seems that with this group I should adopt a more guiding/assertive approach in the sense that they cannot be left by themselves to enjoy some free time. Other groups do fine after finishing their tasks: they remain seated and talk without being noisy or disruptive.

November 21

- class 1502

I had planned for vocabulary collocations in order to practice questions and give students some sense of achievement with speaking. I knew the task wouldn't be easy, since the group is really talkative. Anyways, I got to set up the exercises. Some students paid attention to the preparation drills. When I invited single students to come to the front to do the challenge of questions (modeling), they enjoyed it.

When the time for pair practice came, many got engaged whereas ~~the~~ the ones at the back of the room didn't seem to care. After a couple of m inutes the principal passed by (she is an English teacher) and I invited her in to be asked questions by students. They loved it.

- class 1503

Students are performing a talking task in which they ask each other what they do, for instance, drink certain drinks, play certain games, eat certain foods. I don't have any visual aids, so I rely on their previous knowledge of collocations and vocabulary items.

I notice this girl at the front will have difficulties with vocab, which is confirmed. I see the need to do a vocabulary building activity with a view to helping her recongnize the meaning of words.

November 26

- class 1202

I haven't planned anything for today and I go to the teachers' room for any resources I may have from previous lessons. I find a photocopy with pictures of everyday activities. I decide to teach opinion adjectives: good and bad. I use some body language to perform some activities and elicit if such activities are good or bad (by also signing with thumbs up and down along with the adjectives themselves). They understand it, with some answering with hand gestures. I use real life examples. A student who is always quiet and is never responsive participates. Another one, who is always absent and never engages when present, reacts to my prompts.

Off the class goes and this always uninterested boy is quiet as he carries out the task (cutting, coloring and writing).

A girl really shy, a new student, asks for help on how to perform the task. She is not much for talking but interacts in her own way. I need to check her understanding and wonder if it would be a good idea to come close and elicit. It works. She smiles.

- class 1301

Exceptionally, I assume the group in the first class period of the day, early in the morning. They are calm, which has never happened since February. I take some time observing how they act to then attract their attention to the topic, which is not usually an easy task. A student asks for a vocabulary game we've been playing for the past few weeks. I respond by saying that we are going to use today's new words for the game. I get to introduce the topic by doing something I hadn't planned for: by eliciting their life's examples. Contextualization works and the rest of the class flows.

It seems that their being calm may be in fact due to the time of the class. It may be that they usually get more hectic towards the end of the shift. This comes as a relief, as I have always thought their disruptive behavior is to blamed on me alone. My hope is that today's class has served to create in the group an association with a calmer behavior, as I believe our minds work by associating.

- class 1304

A student who is always unwilling to participate in class completes the first stage of the task assigned, which involves cutting and pasting. I have elicited vocab from him. He produces something with my assistance.