

## **Becoming a Teacher: Lessons on Agency, Participation and Learning Through {Coteaching | Cogenerative Dialogue}**

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Learning shapes subjectivities, subjectivities shape identities, and identities shape enactments that allow for different types of agency. (Moje & Lewis, 2007, p. 10).

It was a pleasure to be invited to contribute to the Scholars Speak Out section of this journal. Here, I share my reflections not only as teacher educator working at schools with teaching practicum, but also as a researcher who studies pre-service teachers' development during teaching practicum. In my Phd I investigated the learning of two pre-service teachers who were participating in my project in which I utilized a version of {coteaching|cogenerative dialogue} as a theoretical/methodological approach. {Coteaching|cogenerative dialogue}, is seen as a dialectical practice involving two or more teachers at the elbow of one another and whose primary concern is students' learning and whose secondary concern is addressing contradictions and thereby improving learning conditions (Roth & Tobin, 2005). So, I present some reflections that had the potential to lead me towards a social-historical-cultural perspective of learning for educating teachers.

Although the literature has long portrayed the benefits of collaborative partnerships between school and universities, the reality is that in Brazilian schools, teaching practicum experiences are still far from allowing pre-service teachers to be part of the school community, contributing to the school environment and forging identification with teaching. From a socio-historical-cultural perspective, investigating learning means investigating trajectories, that is, the process of "becoming a different person" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 53). As a teacher educator, I was concerned with pre-service teachers and the trajectories they were having: apathy and resistance were the normal ways of acting and being. Here, I bring

reflections about the trajectory of one of them: Aline, who was generally seeing as a passive student, resistant to the idea of becoming a teacher (even though she was in a teacher education program). For being worried with her attitudes and learning, I decided to implement a version of {coteaching|cogenerative dialogue} as a theoretical/methodological approach (Roth & Tobin, 2005).

### **Aline's trajectory**

In the project meetings, all coteachers planned or debriefed a new lesson. They were also provided with opportunities for the understanding of the teachers' complex role in the classroom, and their ethical responsibility with the students for the effective negotiation of the systems they navigate each day (El Kadri, 2014).

After recording our interactions during co-planning and {coteaching|cogenerative dialogue} and analyze them, the results of this longitudinal study highlighted the shifts in Aline's ways of acting, interacting, representing and being from the first to the second year of participation. Her ways of acting shifted from being resistant, ridiculing others, feeling unwanted and demonstrating irony, to ways of acting in which she took active positions that were more deeply engaged, and exhibited higher levels of motivation. Her ways of interacting shifted from being generally characterized by the I.R.E patterns, with few initiations of turns, resistance to participate and strong power relations, to ways of interacting featured by more symmetry, with the participant contributing to the topic of the discussion. She developed the power to evaluate, interrupt, engage in the topics initiated by others, showing willingness to participate, coordinating discussions, alternating leadership and alternating the position of the competent peer.

Her ways of representing *herself*, the students, the school/University relationship evolved from negative to more positive tones: from representing herself as someone unwelcome who does not belong, with a passive and temporary social role, and with little power to act or contribute to the school environment, to someone active, who performs transformative actions at the school and who has the capability and status to participate in the school in new ways, as being part of a group and someone who belongs. Another change concerned the way she represented the students: from

passive agents to a representation in which students are seen as individuals who act and think, and from representing the school/University relationship by irritation and negativity, to one that is marked by recognition and valorization.

Lastly, her ways of being shifted from unengaged and disempowered to an empowered one, to a legitimate participant at school who is an accountable actor, curriculum maker, a stakeholder, part of a group who acts (a 'we' identity, a group who performs transformative action and do things at school).

What could we learn from Aline's trajectory? Her case highlighted that while she was teaching English, and learning how to teach in that context, she was also developing and accepting new forms of societal relations – a form of social capital – in which she was learning how to situate herself at school in new and productive ways (e.g. enhancing students' learning, constructing solid relations to other teachers, questioning societal practices). In this process, she was not only representing the way she understood the world, but also crafting her teacher identity, that is, her ways of being. Whereas her initial contributions and ways of being may have been difficult, the persistence of all others in the relations, despite the difficult nature, *paid off* in the sense that it contributed to the change we observed.

I do not understand such contributions as causal factors but rather as part of the conditions of the activity as a whole that supports transformative actions, even if these are associated with negative attitudes, beliefs, and affectations. Aline's trajectory, therefore, exhibits the importance of creating contexts for constructing relations in teacher education programs. Here, the practical and intellectual is integrally related to the affective (emotional). Thus, even though one could see frustration, resistance, and different forms of negative affectations in the relations between Aline and her social environment (expressed in her linguistic choices), the negatively tinged experiences constituted the very context that surrounded the emergence of subsequent experiences demarcated by positive affectations. This was also visible in her ways of representing.

Particular to Aline's case, is the fact that her trajectory suggests a sense of belonging to a group, which is important for the identities novice teachers.

Being a part of a community (Bauman, 2003), means to seek safety in an insecure world. Being part of the group, for Aline, represents the same space of safety (and a hanger) in the insecure world of becoming a teacher. This is important for the field of teacher education because for effective learning to unfold, participants need a sense of belonging, or a sense that one will soon be a part of the group, thus precedes the openness to invest (Norton, 2000, p. 55) and learn.

The findings of analysis carried out outline that teachers' identities are transformed with regard to their ways of acting, interacting, representing and being: teachers tend to act as more legitimate participants at school, interact in more active ways through dialogical practices, represent themselves as agential and with the capacity of transforming their context and be an accountable actor.

The transformations of teachers' identities are thus, crafted in a context that (a) position novice teachers as accountable actors with increased power to act in their learning and the learning of others as they; (b) have relations between the participants as central to the transformations fostered by the potential arrangements; (c) and are featured by new ways of representing which are both instrument and result of new social practices. In this sense, the – {coteaching|cogenerative dialogue} – has the potential to produce (a) ways of acting and interacting characterized by more symmetrical dialogue between the participants, and more equitable power relations, (b) an increase in participants' power to act (e.g. accountable actors identities) and (c) new ways of representing (e.g. positive representations regarding themselves, the school|University relationship and the students). That is, new ways of acting result in more symmetrical dialogue, which leads to a greater feeling of agency and increases the belief in the capacity of transforming the reality, despite the initial negativity and non-agential forms of participation.

Therefore, it is evident that the teaching practicum organized through collaborative environments can provide room for the development of agency and new forms of participation as a teacher becomes respected and positioned as an accountable actor. Consequently, they learn how to be practicing participants at schools in and through participation in praxis.

According to the results, the teaching practicum organized through

{coteaching | cogenerative dialogue} and linked to a set of consolidated practices of the institution, appeared to foster agential identities. These agential identities were established in the processes by which they became members of discourse communities resisting membership, being marginalized from discourse communities, reshaping discourse communities, making new ones (Moje & Lewis, 2007) and involved taking up and taking on existing discourses or disrupting and transforming fixed discourses (Moje & Lewis, 2007).

### **Outcomes**

Aline's case may contribute to our understanding of how novice teachers engage in a trajectory of appropriation of shared practices, as a condition of belonging to the community. In other words, she developed her teacher identity in collaboration: how she positioned herself, how to be responsible for her learning and the learning of others, how to interact in the group and how to act at schools. This is important because as learning shapes subjectivities, subjectivities shape identities, and identities shape enactments that allow for different types of agency (Moje & Lewis, 2007).

Such agential ways of acting and interacting - which seemed to be the main identity transformation for Aline - are significant for teacher education programs because one of the main difficulties in the field is how to afford the expansion of novice teachers' power to act rather than merely accept (often-oppressive) conditions as they are, that is, how to engage the person in processes of agency (Matusov, 2001). Given that novice teachers are expected to work in productive ways for the development of the students and the school itself, the power to act (agency) becomes an important dimension for dealing with the complexities of our educational system.

In the Brazilian experience, actively working towards changing difficult working conditions in schools is not necessarily considered to an option in most teacher education programs, due to the constraints experienced during the practicum. Conformity, negative thoughts, and negative attitudes towards public schools may have become so habitual that it is a perpetually accepted discourse in society, making it invisible, especially to those who engage in teacher education programs (e.g. Lima, 2011).

However, Aline's trajectory seem to shed light on our understanding of the

conditions for change, and on the possibility of the common negativity during the practicum being developed into positive attitudes. It highlights the fundamental aspect of the subject-world relations: agency is played out by the relations between being subject to, and subjected to conditions in and within participation. She was subjected to {coteaching|cogenerative dialogue} and, through participation, was also subject of their process of becoming teachers. This elucidates our understanding of the potential of the practicum as an *enunciation locus* (Jordão & Buhner, 2013); positioning novice teachers in a place of *hybridization* and offering opportunity for them to exercise agency in this stage of their education.

Also, the teaching practicum organized through {coteaching|cogenerative dialogue} linked to the historical practices carried out in the institution, fostered new self-representations and representations of the school and the students. Likewise, the ways of representation fostered by this context appear relevant to the historical moment of teacher education in Brazil in which many negative representations of the teaching profession persist. These positive self-representations are significant because the way we nominate and represent the world is linked to ways of acting, which penetrate social processes and practices and shape our identities (Fairclough, 2003).

This is particularly important in Brazil where there persists this negative conception in which the teaching career is not nearly as valued and recognized as it is in developed countries (Silva, 2011) and where the images constructed by the media reinforce such representations of teachers, especially when teachers see their daily work represented in negative ways and their identities are featured as not valued or questioned (D'almas, 2011). These representations of teachers help create and uphold a professional identity characterized as negative and unattractive by students who are choosing their career (Calvo, 2011).

Thus, discursive practices are thereby critical to not only the construction of subjectivity, but also learners' subjectivities are important in affording learners' agency in those same discursive practices (Wyndham & Saljo, 1997). That is, if one can represent the world in different ways, one can create different worlds. Such ways of representing - as agential - allows for other images and possibilities for action.

In this sense, I reinforce the notion that when teachers act as curriculum makers by engaging in curricular process decisions, their agency is developed and they are re-positioned as agents of change (Craig & Ross, 2008; Scantlebury, Passoni, 2010).

This study demonstrated when teachers are fully embedded in schools through contexts that provide the appropriate structures of social/material fields of human action, the development of agency is enacted, and the general sense that we are not able to make a difference in the educational context is overcome. Aline's case is a good example of how learning shapes subjectivities, that shapes identities and consequently allows agency. It also suggests that analyzing societal relations in teacher education programs may provide the key to understanding how one develops their personality (persona) and becomes a teacher in contexts that favor these interactions.

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