Through the Looking Glass:
Self-observation, Awareness and Change in Teacher Education

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“Teacher development is a continuous process of transforming human potential into human performance, a process that is never finished.”
(Underhill, 1994 in Scrivener, 1994:v)

Abstract

According to Borg (2011), foreign language teacher development during the last century was already an active field of practice. However, research into the area only emerged about 20 years ago. Lately, research into foreign language teacher development has mostly focused on the knowledge, beliefs and practices of language teachers. This paper aims to contribute to the understanding of how teachers learn to teach, that is, how they acquire teaching knowledge, through a case study of a beginning English teacher and her perceptions of her own classroom context. Taking into account that research in the area of language teaching has not yet provided enough evidence that reflection may contribute to teachers' development (Borg, 2011), this paper reports on a research project that applied a well-known reflective model of teacher education (Wallace, 1991) in search of insights into the participant teacher's reflective process and whether the reflective model and the research methodology have actually helped the participant improve classroom practice.

Key words: Teacher Education; Self-Observation; Reflection; Awareness and Change

Introduction

The turn of the millennium has witnessed an important change in the field of Foreign Language (FL) Teacher Development, which was noticed by a growing interest from the part
of researchers in the knowledge, thinking and practice of language teachers. There is now a global tendency that tries to develop in pre-service teachers an awareness, at the same time reflective and critical (Ilieva, 2010; Mattos, 2011, 2012), about their classroom performance and attitudes. Besides, researchers in this area now agree that it is important to listen to the teachers’ own perceptions of the contexts that surround them.

Recently, a growing interest in designing better English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher education programs can be noticed throughout the world (Lazaraton & Ishihara, 2005). According to Freeman (1996), in order to have better teacher education programs, it is necessary to find out more about the teachers’ knowledge of FL teaching and how they learn to teach, placing the point of view of the teachers themselves at the very focus of this enquiry. Mullock (2006, p. 48) defines teachers’ knowledge, or “pedagogical knowledge base” as “accumulated knowledge about the act of teaching, including the goals, procedures, and strategies that form the basis for what teachers do in the classroom.” In a recent review of the more general field of Language Teacher Education (LTE), Borg (2011) says that traditional views on teacher knowledge divides the concept into “two separate domains - knowledge of language and knowledge of teaching” (p. 218). The author, however, highlights that current views of the concept in the field of LTE recognizes the complexity of teacher knowledge and the challenges in researching and documenting it. Borg argues that research in “LTE needs to be grounded in the study of the activities of teaching itself and the social context in which they occur” (p. 219).

This paper aims to contribute to the understanding of how teachers learn to teach, that is, how they acquire teaching knowledge, through a case study of a beginning English teacher and her perceptions of her own classroom context. Taking into account that research into LTE has hardly been able to provide evidence that reflection may help language teachers to improve their practices and actually become better teachers (Borg, 2011), this paper reports on a research project that applied a well-known reflective model of teacher education (Wallace, 1991) in search of insights into the participant teacher's reflective process and whether the reflective model and the research methodology have actually helped the participant to improve classroom practice.
Reflection in foreign language teacher education

Interested in a better understanding of the nature of teachers’ knowledge in order to be able to promote professional growth, several authors have proposed the use of reflection as an essential tool for FL teacher development.

In 1991, Wallace proposed his “reflective model” for language teacher development, one which is probably among the best-known and most highly-influential models for teacher development in the field of language teaching. Based on Schön’s (1983) ideas, Wallace (1991) suggests that teacher education has two main components: “received knowledge”, which takes the form of scientific knowledge, and “experiential knowledge”, which is related to professional experience. As Wallace (1991, p. 12) puts it, “the first kind (received knowledge) consists of facts, data and theories, often related to some kind of research” and it is largely found as part of the programs of teacher education courses. Experiential knowledge, on the other hand, derives from what Schön (1983) described as “knowing-in-action”1 and can be defined as the tacit knowledge that the teacher develops as a natural consequence of competent professional practice. In Wallace’s model, the role of teacher reflection is crucial as a tool for fostering development. According to Wallace (1991, p. 13), it is reflection that leads teachers “to the conscious development of insights about their practice into knowing-in-action.”

Figure 1 – Wallace’s (1991, p. 49) Reflective Model

![Wallace's Reflective Model](image)

Stage 1 (Pre-training) Stage 2 (Professional education/development) GOAL

1 Schön (1983) has offered a discussion of reflective practice that has been much referred to in teacher education. His understanding of reflective practice includes the concepts of “reflection-on-action”, which may occur before or after an action, and “reflection-in-action”, which occurs during real-time teaching, as a way to try to solve problems on the spot. Schön also highlights the importance of the knowledge that is embedded in the teacher’s practices, which he has termed “knowledge-in-action.”
The model, as represented in Figure 1 below, is divided in three stages: the pre-training stage, in which the trainee is at before beginning the process of professional development; the stage of professional education or development *per se*; and the goal, that is, professional competence.

As it may be noticed, the pre-training stage corresponds to what the trainee brings to the training/development process.² In Wallace’s view, “one of the crucial factors in the success of learning anything depends on what the learners themselves bring to the learning situation [because] no learning takes place in a vacuum” (p. 3) and he emphasizes that

“people seldom enter into professional training situations with blank minds and/or neutral attitudes. This is especially true of the profession of teaching, where the trainees have been exposed to the practice of the profession, either willingly or unwillingly, during their most impressionable years.” (Wallace, 1991, p. 50)

The professional education/development stage highlights the presence of two key elements: ‘received knowledge’, which are data, facts and theories associated with the profession, and the trainee’s ‘experiential knowledge’. The two kinds of knowledge, however, are linked by a reversed arrow, which symbolizes a reciprocal relationship between them. Wallace takes as a corollary that “the ‘received knowledge’ element should both directly inform the ‘experiential knowledge’ element and be directly informed by it” (p. 52). Nevertheless, the model places more emphasis on the ‘experiential knowledge’ element and on the role of teacher reflection over this knowledge as a way to achieve professional competence. Wallace says that “development implies change, and fruitful change is extremely difficult without reflection” (p. 54). Moreover, he states that it is not enough for reflection to take place, but it has to be of good quality. In his view, one of the major aims of the reflective model is to improve the quality of reflection in order to achieve increased professional development. The reflective model also argues that the trainee should “reflect on the ‘received knowledge’ in the light of classroom experience, so that classroom experience

² The use of both terminologies is due to the fact that the author himself uses both terms to describe the model: stage 1 is called the *pre-training* stage, whereas stage 2 is termed professional *development*. This contradiction may be explained because the model was proposed in a transitory time between the established context where *training* was predominant and the new suggestions for teacher *development*. 
can feed back into the ‘received knowledge’ sessions” (p. 55). The main focus of the model is, thus, on the one hand practice and reflection on the other.

The last stage of the model is professional competence as a final objective. Wallace describes professional competence as “a moving target or a horizon, towards which professionals travel all their professional life but which is never finally attained” (p. 58). For this reason, in the graphic representation of the model (Figure 1), this is indicated by a continuing arrow from the final box, showing that professional competence “is not a terminal point but a point of departure” (p. 58).

Wallace’s model is important in the field of language teacher education for several reasons. Besides taking into account the sources of teacher knowledge, the model places classroom practice, that is, practical experience, as a central requirement for professional competence. The model also prioritizes the role of reflection in the process of teacher learning and it states that daily activities and reflective practice should form a cycle that leads to professional competence. Professional competence, however, cannot be seen as a final objective, since teachers are always in the process of change and so is their professional competence.

The role of the teacher educator

Some researchers have argued that interaction with a supervisor or teacher educator may have an important role in pre-service teacher education. In Richards and Nunan (1990), several authors discuss this issue and the problems and benefits that this kind of interaction may bring to the student teacher.

Freeman (1990), for example, argues that “the student teacher can be helped to teach more effectively through the input and perceptions of the teacher educator” (p. 105). The author discusses three different forms of supervision which allow for interaction to take place between the student teacher and the teacher educator. The first one is the directive option, in which “the teacher educator comments on the student teacher’s teaching, making concrete proposals for change” (p. 107). The second is the alternatives option, in which the supervisor offers a limited number of different alternative ways to handle a previously selected point from the lesson taught by the student teacher, with the objective of developing “the student
teacher’s awareness of the choices involved in deciding what and how to teach” (p. 109). Finally, the *nondirective option* is that in which the key element is the very relationship between the student teacher and the educator, creating a dialogue that allows the student teacher to find his/her own solutions, at the same time that it allows the supervisor to participate in this process and to contribute with knowledge and experience without directing the student teacher to specific conclusions or courses of action (p. 112).

Through an ethnographic study of seven inexperienced teachers, Gebhard (1990a) also focuses on interaction in teaching practice. He describes the changes in the teaching behavior of student teachers which have been a result of the interaction between the research participants, that is, the student teachers, the teacher educator and the students. Gebhard concludes that “interaction affords student teachers chances to talk about their teaching” (p. 124), creating opportunities for change.

Gebhard (1990b) discusses six different models of teacher supervision. In the same way as Freeman (1990), Gebhard’s discussion is also based on the role of the supervisor as educator and on the value of interaction as an agent in the process of teacher development. The directive model of supervision is presented to illustrate the type of supervision traditionally used by supervisors, although this type of supervision has several limitations. In the author’s view, one of these limitations is that this model tends to make teachers see themselves as inferior to the supervisor, which can lower their self-esteem. Furthermore, the role of the supervisor in this model may represent a threat to student teachers, which can make them become defensive toward the supervisor’s judgments. Gebhard states that, in choosing this type of supervision, the supervisor runs the risk of restricting or even retarding the student teacher’s progress. Gebhard suggests other five models of supervision as alternatives to the directive model, all of them with a common objective, that is, to develop more productive teacher supervision relationships.

The same asymmetrical relationship present between the teacher and the teacher educator or supervisor can be found between participant-teachers and researchers. Moreover, many times the teacher educator may also be a researcher. Therefore, the next section will discuss the issue of asymmetry in relation to teachers and researchers.
The teacher-researcher relationship

Pica (2000) asserts that, since the beginning of classroom research, the relationship between teachers and researchers has gone through several stages. However, only very recently this sometimes conflicting relationship has become the focus of systematic research. In research projects where the FL teacher is the main focus, the issue of the teacher-researcher relationship is of crucial importance, since the participant teacher becomes the main research informant.

From the very beginning, this relationship has shown a clear asymmetry between the roles of the researcher and the informant teacher. At first, researchers tried to describe the teachers’ behavior in the classroom (Freeman, 2002). At that time, the role of informant teachers used to be purely passive and their contribution was limited to allowing the researcher or observer to watch their classes.

At a later stage, when cognitive research was dominant (Freeman, 2002), informant teachers took on a more active role. They collaborated with the researcher, providing parallel data, such as their lesson plans, and taking part in interviews or answering questionnaires. However, in this type of research, an asymmetrical relationship between the researcher and informant-teachers is still present, as it is still the researcher who detains the knowledge to analyze and judge participants’ thoughts, objectives and beliefs.

The current trend in FL teacher research, as proposed by Freeman (1996), tries to make room for the voices of informant teachers, placing a greater value on their own perceptions and interpretations. In this type of research, the relationship between the teacher and the researcher tends towards a greater balance, because the researcher does not detain the absolute truth to analyze the data. Thus, informant teachers become collaborators in all levels and the research results will depend much on their motivation to achieve deeper and more significant levels of analysis.

Reflecting on the roles of teachers and researchers, Gimenez (1999) discusses the relationship between these two professionals, trying to establish a more symmetrical relationship between them. The author states that researchers are seldom humble in their contact with teachers. Including herself among these researchers she says:

“We make them our research subjects, objects of our discoveries and very rarely our collaborators in the ‘announcement’ of the world. On the contrary,
we frequently consider ourselves superior, as we submit them to the judgment of our theoretical apparatus and define implications for their practice. Our model has been essentially a bank-like one, searching for answers that we ourselves give and which we ourselves will evaluate.” (Gimenez, 1999, p. 14)

The author suggests that researchers should make the search for knowledge more open to teachers’ contribution, so that this knowledge stops being seen as hierarchic and abstract, which would allow for the growth of a different relationship with teachers. Reis (1999) suggests that this relationship should be based on trust and says that the researcher’s objective should be “to help teachers become more aware of their practice” (Reis, 1999, p. 37), possibly working towards autonomy.

Other authors have also considered trust a fundamental issue between the researcher and the informant. Gebhard (1990a), for example, suggests that the researcher or supervisor must reveal a non-evaluative attitude. Chamberlin (2000) has examined pre-service teachers’ perceptions of trust in relation to their supervisors and concluded that “trust plays a critical role in supervision that encourages reflection and awareness of personal beliefs and values” (p. 653). The author states, however, that “trust is negotiated not only through what people say but through how they say it (...)” (p. 669).³

Nevertheless, this kind of relationship does not seem to be commonly found between teachers and researchers in the Academy, nor is it found between teachers and supervisors in primary and secondary schools or language institutes (Chamberlin, 2000; Gimenez, 1999). It is necessary to recognize that the traditional way of supervising or observing teachers for research purposes does not bring many contributions to their professional growth. On the contrary, many times the evaluative attitudes of supervisors and researchers may bring about an inferiority complex and fear in student teachers, hazarding their creativity and self-esteem (Gebhard, 1990b). Thus, investing in a more balanced relationship between teachers and supervisors/researchers seems to be worth a try, if we want to promote greater professional development for all participants involved.

³ Emphasis added.
Research design and methodology

This research was based on theoretical and empirical studies on classroom research and on FL teacher development, adopting and interpretivist and emic vision (Freeman, 1996). To this end, a case study was conducted. The participant\(^4\) was an English teacher working at CENEX\(^5\) who, at the time of the data collection process, was in the last semester of her English Major at the university. Carolina, a fictitious name, was teaching a basic course for adults (Basic IV, the last level of the basic course) and she had no other previous teaching experience. The students in her group were considered pre-intermediate students and, therefore, classes were conducted only in English.

Retrospective interviews were used as the main data collection instrument. The participant’s classes were video-recorded during one month, and subsequently the participant had stimulated recall sessions and retrospective interviews with the researcher, when she would reflect about her classes, with the help of the video tape.\(^6\) The objective of these interviews was to foster the participant’s critical reflection about her classroom performance in order to promote her professional development. The content of these interviews was categorized, expanding Richards’ (1998) reflective categories.\(^7\)

When the data collection process was over, Carolina answered a final evaluation questionnaire (see Appendix), whose objective was to check the possibility of influence of the research methodology over her practice. The analysis of the data of both the transcribed interviews and the final evaluation questionnaire revealed that reflective practice and the research data collection methodology favored the informant’s critical reflection, contributing to her professional growth. The next sections will discuss the participant’s process of change.

\(^4\) Carolina is in many ways representative of many English teachers in Brazil. However, there was no specific reason why she was chosen. In fact, teacher research in Brazil has long suffered from one problematic impediment: classroom teachers tend to be very resistant to research and often refuse to participate. Carolina was, thus, chosen simply because she was willing to participate.

\(^5\) CENEX stands for “Centro de Extensão” and it is a university-based language center where foreign language courses are available to the community in general. The teachers who teach at CENEX are preferably undergraduate language students from the Federal University of Minas Gerais, in Brazil – where the study was conducted.

\(^6\) Though there might be problems related to the use of stimulated recall techniques, it is hard to imagine how else it would be possible to elicit the kinds of teacher reflection reported here. For a recent discussion of some of the problems involved in stimulated recall, please refer to Mullock (2006).

\(^7\) Due to lack of space, the expansion of Richards’ (1998) list of reflective categories will not be discussed here. For a better understanding of the concept and a deeper discussion of such categories, please refer to Richards (1998) or Mattos (2000, 2002).
during the time of the research project. Based on the research results, an expansion of Wallace’s (1991) reflective model for teacher development will be proposed.

**Self-observation, awareness and change**

As stated above, the objective of this research project was to look for evidence of possible change in the participant’s performance due to her participation in the project, that is, the data analysis aimed at finding evidence that the reflective model and the research methodology have helped the participant to improve her classroom practice. It is not possible to say that the research methodology has caused great change in the participant’s practice. However, evidence of some change in her practice that can be attributed to her participation in this research project was found in the data. These changes become evident when we compare the content of her statements during the retrospective interviews.

The first evidence of change refers to Carolina's elicitation strategies, that is, the way she used to ask questions to her students. In the beginning of the data collection process, it was possible to notice that, when eliciting information from the students, Carolina seemed to target most of her questions to the more fluent students. From the very first interview, as it may be seen in the excerpt cited below, the participant herself notices the existence of some problems in the way she asks questions to the students, although she can not spot the cause yet:

8

R – “You told me that you have already thought about the way you ask questions. What exactly did you think?

P – Oh, it’s ... just that ... sometimes I ask a question ... and it isn’t a direct question, you know, I say the beginning of what I want to know, so that they [the students] can finish, so sometimes it’s not very clear. I think I should be clearer in this kind of question. But, on the other hand ... sometimes, it is the students themselves that, for some reason, aren’t paying attention, or they are reading the exercise, and they don’t understand what the question was or what I explained about the exercise. So, there are these two sides, I don’t explain very clearly, which I think is a problem of ... fluency...

8 R stands for researcher and P stands for participant. In brackets [ ], there are comments made by the researcher; a pause or hesitation is represented by ... and (...) represents a longer pause. The names of the participant’s students are represented only by the initial letter in order to maintain anonymity. All the excerpts here presented have been translated from the original (in Portuguese).
R – Your fluency?

P – Yes.

R – Do you think so? Do you think it’s a problem related to your command of the language?

P – Yes, I think it’s my command of the language. But, also, the way I ask the question. Instead of asking: ‘she looks like ... what?’, I should ask the correct question right away: ‘What does she look like?’ You know, I should ask the correct question...

R – You think it’s the way you structure the question, isn’t it?

P – Yeah ... Yeah, maybe it’s not so much the problem of fluency, I think it’s really the way I speak, I ... do speak in this way. Maybe it’s not necessarily the problem of language command.”

(First interview – p. 6)

In this excerpt, Carolina mentions that she had already noticed some kind of problem in her way of asking questions to the students. From her point of view, the cause of the problem seems to be, at first, her low command of the English language, but soon she notices that the cause is in her “way of talking”. To help her reflect more about the problem, the researcher talks about her perception of the event, provoking new interpretations:

R – “Something I also notice about the questions is how they [the students] answer. I noticed that you ask the question and ... they don’t answer. So, how do you interpret this? Do you think it’s because they don’t know how to answer ... I mean, here in this vocabulary part, for example, you were presenting several new words. Then, you ask, here in letter ‘c’ [pointing to the course book], “what about this girl in picture ‘c’, what can you say about her?” And they only talk about “dark, short hair”, isn’t it so? And then you go on talking about the rest of the description. Why do you think this happened?

P – Because ... I think it’s because of their level, these adjectives to describe people ... it’s always like that, they only talk about the color of the hair, or the eyes and that’s it. So I think maybe I have to provide them with more vocabulary...”

(First interview – p. 7)
Here, Carolina gets to the conclusion that there is also another problem, caused by learners’ lack of vocabulary, which is manifested through the lack of learners’ answers to her questions. As an observer, the researcher could notice that only the most fluent students used to answer her questions. Reflecting on this comment, Carolina at first thinks this is due to the fact that the other students have more problems with the command of the language. As the interview goes on and as she observes her own attitudes in the video, Carolina starts to make deeper reflections about her performance. She starts to notice that her posture in the classroom seems to influence this passive behavior on the part of the students. The following excerpt shows the moment when, with the help of the video recording, she starts to notice this influence:

R– “Yeah, I’ve noticed, since the beginning, that when you ask a question it’s always the same students who answer. And those two on the corner rarely participate.

P – Yes, J and MF, they’re the two weak students.

R – Ah ... ok.

[Other comments not relevant to this issue]

P – Now, this question of her [the student J] not answering, this is also something else I’ve thought about, and now with the video I’ve remembered, ... that I’m always ... uhm ... facing these two other students [the best ones]. This is something we never notice on the spot, but ... during the class itself the other day I noticed. I’m always facing that side of the classroom.... I have to find a way to make them [the two weak students] participate more, I think that’s what’s missing.

R – So, you have noticed that you are always facing these two students [the most fluent ones]?

P – Yes, it’s my position, my posture ...

R – And why do you think this happens?

P – Ahm ... I don’t know, ahm, I think it’s because of ... I fear they might think ... they might be ... ashamed of me, if I keep telling them to speak.

R – The ones that don’t speak?

P – Yeah. I think, maybe that’s the reason I face that side ... and ... I end up not making them participate. And ... let me think ... Yes, I think that’s it, what I have just noticed that I have to try to avoid.”

(First Interview – p. 12-3)
During the second interview, this subject is again discussed and Carolina already starts to look for solutions to the problem, as the following excerpt shows:

R – “And the way you ask the questions, going back to that which we were talking about the other day. You ask the question to everybody and, then, those who answer are those who want to or those who know, right?
P – Yes.
R – What do you think about it now?
P – Oh, I think maybe it’s better if I try to direct more [the questions]. Because ... it’s still the same ... if I simply throw the question, they tend to keep quiet.”
(Second Interview – p. 9)

From the lesson subsequent to this discussion on, Carolina starts to change her practice, applying in the classroom her reflections made during the interviews. The students’ response is immediate, that is, Carolina starts to direct her questions more and as a consequence the students start to participate more, including those who were considered shy and weak in terms of language command. Besides, Carolina takes on a new posture in front of the classroom: she starts to address all the students, trying to face each of them. Carolina notices these changes and comments about them in the third interview, as it is shown in the following excerpts:

P – “In this first exercise, where they have to say what they see in the picture ... I think MF, whom I had noticed that wasn’t participating very much, I think she has participated more. During the lesson I was thinking about what I had already reflected on, you know, about directing more the questions to them, the ones that don’t speak very much, and I think that ... that it worked well, it has started to work well, she has talked more (...) and it was even her who talked first, together with the other ones.”
(Third Interview – p. 2)

P – “… What I have noticed is that I’m trying to look more directly and the body posture itself, to give more attention to this side of the room, which I wasn’t doing, to J, and to the whole class, to all of them.”
(Third Interview – p. 3)
From this point on, Carolina takes on new attitudes in her classroom, that is, she starts paying more attention to all the students, directing her questions to specific students, instead of asking questions to the whole group, which allows for the participation of all the students. Besides, she also changes her posture, trying to look at and face all the students, and not only the most fluent ones.

This change in the participant’s practice became clear in the video recordings of the lessons subsequent to the discussion presented above. Besides, it may also be noticed in Carolina’s answers to the final evaluation questionnaire. In her answer to question 5, for instance, the participant declared:

“I believe reflecting about my classes have had a positive effect on my teaching. I have started to pay more attention to my posture in the classroom, taking care not to face certain students more than others.”

(Evaluation Questionnaire, answer to question 5)

In her answer to question 9, Carolina again comments on this issue, which once again confirms that there have been changes in her practice deriving from her participation in the research.

“Because of the self-observation process, now I try to stimulate the students to participate in an active and motivating way, but I pay attention not to stimulate some students more than others.”

(Evaluation Questionnaire, answer to question 9)

Another feature of the participant’s practice in which there was evidence of change refers to her use of translation to clarify students’ doubts or to present new vocabulary items. During the second interview, Carolina talked about some techniques that a teacher may use in order to explain the meaning of words. In the following excerpt, Carolina cites several techniques which she thought were good ones to present new vocabulary items or to explain unknown words. As for translation, she says it is a technique that should be used only as a last resource.
R – “Well, in this part, then, you are trying to explain the meaning of some words, right, through the use of definition and gestures, etc. Which approaches a teacher may make use of, in order to explain the meaning of unknown words to the students?

P – Oh, unknown words ... I think that ... synonyms, that’s very good to ... present unknown words. But, also, when it gets difficult to give a synonym, the image is the best approach: you associate with an image, or an example that may be easy to the students.

R – Like a drawing?

P – Yes ... besides the image, the drawing, or even try to make them associate the word with an image through the definition, or through gesture, like imitating a little, for example ... 

R – What about translation?

P – Ahm, translation, I think that it’s a last resource, and only if it’s a very complicated word that you can’t find an image for, you can’t draw, there’s no way to make gestures, right, so, you translate.”

(Third Interview – p. 3)

This discussion about translation did not take any longer, but during the sixth interview the same issue comes up again:

R – “There was once, during one of the first interviews, that I remember I asked you about translation. And your answer was somewhat like: ‘oh, translation only as a last resource’.

P – Uhum.

R – And now, from the last two or maybe three [video] tapes I have noticed that there has been more translation, just like now. What happened?

P – I think I wanted to make it clearer ... but I didn’t go directly to translation, I tried ... I gave some examples, I explained, and then I wanted to speak in Portuguese [students’ native language] to compare, to make it clearer. Because this is their language, isn’t it? Just like us, we also have several ways of saying the same thing. So ... I think that translating has helped, I think that ... it was good.”

(Sixth Interview – p. 4)
In this excerpt, it can be clearly noticed that the participant’s practice had already been changing since some previous lessons. In this case, it is not possible to say that the spotted change was due to discussions or reflections done during the interviews, but it is possible to see that there has been change. Possibly, the simple fact of having expressed her convictions and beliefs about the use of translation in the classroom has made the participant reflect about the subject, and consequently has provoked the change in her practice.

In her answers to the evaluation questionnaire, Carolina recognizes the importance of her participation in this research project to her professional development. Her answers to questions 1, 4, 6 and 7, presented below, show that she has considered it a worthy experience. In these answers she comments on the influence of the research methodology over her teaching practice.

“It is a very productive and pleasant experience and, therefore, very useful, as it helps me to keep track of the teaching/learning process. I can observe and reflect not only on my own attitudes but also on the students’ attitudes.”
(Evaluation Questionnaire, answer to question 1)

“I have learnt to better observe and reflect on my teaching, because I myself had to think about different practical and/or theoretical aspects of the lesson as I tried to justify my attitudes. This way, I could remember, think and rethink theory/practice, considering what was positive or not to make my performance better. Consequently, I have learnt to deal with my teaching practice better, noticing theories that may be applied or not, as well as identifying and critically evaluating methods and techniques that worked well or not in the observed lesson, and that may be used in other lessons.”
(Evaluation Questionnaire, answer to question 4)

“This experience has also had a positive effect over my process of learning how to teach. I have noticed how useful it is to reflect about my classes in order to teach better, because I can perceive what is more effective and
productive for teaching/learning. I also believe that this self-observation experience makes the process of learning how to teach faster.”
(Evaluation Questionnaire, answer to question 6)

“There was a lot of change. I am now more self-conscious of what I do; the fear of not being able to teach well or of not fulfilling students’ needs appropriately is over, or at least now I can control it, because I have the possibility to check, to confirm or to clear out any doubt in relation to what happened during the class, at the quieter moment of self-observation. During the class, I am involved with several issues at the same time, so it is more difficult to pay attention to the decisions I have to make. Now I am less anxious to achieve results quickly – to perceive the product – because I can follow the process. Another change is the fact that I can now better assess my planning, considering different forms of approaching the same lesson. And, definitely, I have now what I didn’t have before: ‘the tool’ (self-observation) to become a better teacher.”
(Evaluation Questionnaire, answer to question 7)

In question 14 of the final evaluation questionnaire, Carolina once more pointed out how important her participation in this research project was to her professional development. She reported that she had even started to use her own tape recorder during her classes in order to keep on with the process of reflection on her practice which she had started during the research.

“This research was so important to me that I have started using my tape recorder in the classroom, so that I can keep on reflecting on my teaching.”
(Evaluation Questionnaire, answer to question 14)

As it has been discussed, through self-observation, that is, as she observed her own classroom practice in the video recording, the participant has had the opportunity to reflect on her teaching and on the events that happened during her classes. As she reflected during
the retrospective interviews, Carolina found herself in an environment that facilitated her development process. This environment was created by the relationship of trust that was established through the use of the non-directive option by the researcher, as suggested by Freeman (1990) and Gebhard (1990a, b), which gave room to the changes in her practice.

Although it is possible to claim that the participant has gone through a process of change during her participation in this research project, it is not possible to say that the research methodology has provoked big or many changes in her practice, because in fact only two changes were found. This small number of changes may be due to the short duration of the data collection period, which took place during only eight classes over the period of one month. Nevertheless, it is exactly because of this short duration that it may be claimed that the small number of changes in the participant’s practice is significant.

The excerpts cited above show that Carolina has modified her attitudes and practice during the research data collection process. Moreover, these excerpts have demonstrated that these changes have been fostered by the type of reflection she made during her participation in the research project and by the favorable environment where these reflections took place. This finding reveals that the research methodology favored not only the participant teacher’s reflection but also her professional development.

An extended model for teacher development

As discussed earlier, Wallace (1991) proposed a reflective model for teacher development on which the research reported here was theoretically based. Thus, one of the objectives of the research was to promote the participant’s reflection on her own classes, so that, through reflection, she could be able to achieve better professional development. Nevertheless, based on the research results, the model could be extended.

According to what was discussed in the previous section, the methodology used in the research has fostered the participant’s reflection on her classroom practices. The use of the video recordings during the retrospective interviews, besides stimulating the participant’s memories about the classroom events, has worked as a mirror, allowing the participant to see herself in the classroom and reflect on her own performance. Self-observation, through the video recordings, has allowed the participant to achieve deeper levels of reflection on her classroom performance. It was possible to notice that, during the retrospective interviews,
each time a certain aspect of her practice was discussed, Carolina was able to make deeper reflections. For example, in the first time that a specific subject was introduced, as she thought about it, Carolina made a certain number of considerations on it. On subsequent interviews, when the same subject was re-discussed, she would make deeper reflections, always in search of answers and solutions to the problems she identified. This process of deepening her reflections is well-exemplified in the excerpts of the interviews presented here. Thus, based on the perception of such a process, some changes in the model proposed by Wallace (1991) are suggested, so as to extend its scope and more easily illustrate the process of reflection of a beginning teacher, as shown in figure 2 below.

The changes proposed for the model take into consideration that the growth in the teacher’s professional competence feeds back the process of reflection which, in its turn, becomes more intense and is made at a deeper level. The professional development stage, thus, is not a closed cycle anymore, as proposed by Wallace (1991), but becomes a spiral that leads to an ever-increasing professional competence.

The above figure offers a more complete visualization of teachers’ development process, because it shows how their performance evolves in search of constant improvement,
based on practical experience and reflection. Central elements of Wallace’s model, though, were not altered, as that which teachers bring into the process of reflection, that is, their existing conceptual schemata or mental constructs, and their experiential and received knowledge. The professional competence was also maintained as “a moving target or horizon, towards which professionals travel all their professional life but which is never finally attained” (Wallace, 1991, p. 58).

According to this model, it is possible to foster teachers’ reflection on their classroom practices, with the objective of helping them in their constant search for development. The use of the video recordings favors their reflection on their own performance. Each time the teachers look at themselves in the recordings, which works as a mirror of their actions and attitudes inside the classroom, they have the opportunity of reflecting about their performance, identifying problems and looking for solutions. The non-directive option used by the researcher helps to create a safety atmosphere to the teachers’ process of reflection (Chamberlin, 2000; Reis, 1999). This way, teachers will feel at ease in order to reflect more and more deeply, aiming at better professional competence.

Conclusion

As discussed above, this research paper reported on a study of the process of change and growth of a pre-service English teacher. Researchers in the field of FL teacher education have long claimed that the process of change is slow, gradual and constant (Underhill, 1994; Watzke, 2007). However, few papers have been able to document this process in the way it has been done here. Through self-observation and reflection, and with the help of retrospective interviews with the researcher, the participant teacher was able to perceive problems and promote changes in her performance in the classroom, aiming at her own professional development as a teacher. Thus, the results described here bring relevant implications both to the field of FL teacher education and to the relationship between the researcher and the participant-teacher.

Implications for FL teacher education

FL teacher education, especially in developing countries, is normally accomplished through undergraduate university courses. This kind of teacher education program many
times is not enough to make inexperienced language teachers feel prepared to take decisions and make informed choices about their practices. Teachers are, thus, conditioned to apply in their classrooms the techniques and procedures learned during the course exactly as they were recommended by teaching manuals or university professors (Bailey, 1996; Moita Lopes, 1996). This situation may be changed through an approach to teacher education that promotes teachers’ critical attitude towards their own work, providing alternatives to their professional development.

In the research project here presented, the methodological procedures used for the process of data collection have favored the professional development of the participant teacher. The video recordings worked as a tool for self-observation and allowed the teacher to remember her classroom events, which could be analyzed from a different point of view: the point of view of an observer. From this perspective, the teacher was able to reflect critically about the events which took place in her classroom, detecting problems and searching for solutions. This critical reflection allowed the teacher to verbalize her theories and preconceptions about teaching/learning a foreign language, while trying to justify her beliefs and classroom performance and, at the same time, becoming conscious of her practices. This critical reflection and awareness process is the first step towards the changes that may be necessary for professional development, since it promotes the teacher’s empowerment and autonomy.

Teacher education courses may benefit from the use of an approach which fosters teachers’ critical reflection and awareness, be it in undergraduate programs for pre-service teachers or in training and development programs for more experienced in-service teachers. The data collection methodology in this research has proved beneficial in promoting this critical reflection, which leads to conscious and informed teaching practices. Thus, this seems to be an adequate approach for teacher education programs, since it allows teacher educators to contribute to the development of critical awareness and autonomy in beginning teachers.

**Implications for a new researcher-participant relationship**

Lately, the relationship developed between the researcher and the participant-teacher during the data collection process of a research project has been in focus. In this relationship,
a high degree of asymmetry between the roles of the researcher and the participant-teacher is often found (Chamberlin, 2000; Gimenez, 1999). The researcher is seen as an experienced practitioner who holds the wisdom of the profession and who is able to judge the behavior and the attitudes of the teacher. The same situation is present in the hierarchical relationship between supervisors or teacher trainers and their supervisees or trainee teachers. In both cases, the relationship between the participants, only too often, tends to be based on prescriptive aspects, that is, the supervisors or teacher trainers, being experts in the profession, prescribe the way in which the trainee teachers should behave and the attitudes they should have in each situation. Thus, a model which puts the emphasis on the training aspect of teacher education is put into practice, turning the learner-teachers into customers of the greater knowledge of their supervisors or of research results.

Several authors, however, have suggested that a greater balance between the two sides of this relationship would be much more productive both to research results and to teacher development (Chamberlin, 2000; Freeman, 1996; Gimenez, 1999; Reis, 1999; Wallace, 1991). In this case, teachers leave their previous passive condition and take more active roles in their relationship with teacher educators or researchers. At the same time, this relationship no longer emphasizes the training aspect of teacher education, but it now puts greater emphasis on the development aspect, once the teacher is seen as participant and collaborator.

The research described here shows an alternative way to this asymmetric and hierarchical relationship frequently found between researchers and participant-teachers. Because the researcher has followed Gebhard’s (1990a, b) and Freeman’s (1990) suggestions, assuming a non-directive and non-evaluative attitude towards the participant, it was possible to develop a more symmetric and collaborative relationship between the researcher and the participant-teacher. As a result, both parts benefited from this approach. On the one hand, the participant found herself in a safe environment and was put at ease to reflect on her classroom performance, many times making self-evaluations, detecting problems, and searching for her own solutions. On the other hand, due to this safety context provided for the participant, the researcher obtained information and interpretations that might not have been available in case a different approach had been adopted.
Therefore, it is important to invest on a more symmetric and less hierarchical relationship, based on trust and on the collaboration of the participants involved, which will certainly bring benefits for all involved. As Ortenzi (1999, p. 45) has highlighted, “we still face the challenge of putting aside our ‘expert’ and ‘customer’ roles in order to act as partners thinking together about teaching situations.”

REFERENCES:
Bailey, K.M. et al. (1996). The language learner’s autobiography: Examining the “apprenticeship of observation”. In D. Freeman & J. C. Richards (Eds.), Teacher learning in language teaching (pp. 11-29). New York: Cambridge University Press.


**APPENDIX:**

**Final Evaluation Questionnaire**

1- How do you evaluate the experience of reflecting on your classes? Do you think it was useful or useless? Why?

2- What have you considered positive or negative about this experience?

3- Have you ever done anything similar before? (if yes, please comment).

4- What have you learnt with this experience?

5- Which effect you think this experience had on your teaching performance?

6- Which effect you think this experience had on your process of learning how to teach?

7- Compare yourself nowadays with yourself before participating in this research project. Do you see any change? Which?

8- What do you think you couldn’t change?
9- In terms of your behavior as a foreign language teacher, what do you think you will start doing in your classes as a consequence of self-observation? What do you think you will continue to do? What will you stop doing?

10- Do you believe your future performance as a teacher will be different due to your participation in this research project? Why or why not?

11- Do you believe your students have benefited from your participation in this research project? How?

12- Do you believe an experience like this would be positive for other teachers? Why or why not?

13- What would you suggest in order to turn reflection into a better tool for foreign language teacher self-development?

Make other comments if you wish: