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Constructing the Teaching Process from Inside Out: How Pre-service Teachers Make Sense of their Perceptions of the Teaching of the Four Skills*

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Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the perceptions Brazilian pre-service teachers hold concerning the teaching of the four skills in English as a foreign language, with a view to understanding how perceptions relate to pedagogical practice. Data were collected during the pre-service teachers' teaching practicum and the analysis, based on six sets of information, revealed that the pre-service teachers' perceptions stem from two types of knowledge: the theoretical knowledge and the experiential knowledge built up on their apprenticeship of observation and the memories of their lived experiences. Moreover, the perceptions the pre-service teachers have of these two types of knowledge work as tenets for them to interpret and understand their teaching, as filters through which the theoretical knowledge is viewed, as a source of teachers' knowledge, and as triggers of conflicts and dilemmas as well.

Introduction

The shift in teacher education from a product-oriented into a process-oriented view has motivated research to understand the learning process future teachers go through, i.e., how they learn, what type of process they undergo when starting teaching, what experiences and knowledge they bring to their learning and teaching context, to cite just a few (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, cited in Freeman 2001). To better understand the process of learning how to teach a foreign language that future teachers engage in, Johnson and Freeman (2001) state that it is important to understand the act of language teaching from the view of the teacher, that is, it is important to get "descriptive accounts of how teachers arrive at what they know, how they use that knowledge in the classroom and school contexts, and how they make sense of and reconfigure their classroom practices over time" (p. 63).

Therefore, the study presented in this paper sought to investigate the perceptions three Brazilian undergraduate students of Language Arts Course (Letras Course, in Brazil) hold concerning the teaching of the four skills in English as a foreign language in the classroom context, with a view to understanding how the pre-service teachers construct their perceptions and understandings, how their perceptions shape their pedagogical practice, and how their pedagogical practice (re)shapes, if

so, their perceptions concerning the teaching of the four skills. For the purposes of the present study the term perception is seen as a physical and intellectual ability used in mental processes to recognize, interpret, and understand events; an intuitive cognition or judgment; a way to express a particular opinion or belief as a result of realizing or noticing things which may not be obvious to others; insight, awareness, discernment, recognition, a set of understandings, interpretations and a way of knowing (Schmidt, 1990; Haberlandt, 1994; Eysenck, 1994; Johnson, & Johnson, 1999; Richards, 1999; Gomes Filho, 2000). Perception refers to the entire sequence from initial sensations, which involve registering and coding of various stimuli perceived by the sensory organs, to the full experience of understanding. Perception, then, involves our ability to elaborate, interpret, and assign meaning to the input we receive. In this perspective, by studying pre-service teachers' perceptions in relation to their teaching we might come to understand better how they have evolved to cope with their teaching environment, and consequently, to understand better why they behave the way they do in the classroom context.

The study

The main objective of this study is to investigate the perceptions pre-service teachers hold concerning the teaching of the four major language skills--listening, speaking, reading, and writing in the classroom context. This investigation can be translated into a general question (1) How do pre-service teachers perceive the teaching of the four language skills in English as a foreign language in the classroom context? and three specific ones: (1) How do pre-service teachers materialize their perceptions concerning the teaching of the four skills by observing an experienced teacher? (2) How do pre-service teachers materialize their own perceptions concerning the teaching of the four skills in their pedagogical practice? That is: (2.1.) How do they plan the teaching of the four skills for an EFL classroom? (2.2.) How do they implement their lesson plans in an EFL classroom context? (3) How do pre-service teachers respond to their own teaching?

To do so, the participants were observed throughout their teaching practicum in three different moments: while they were observing experienced teachers; while they were planning and implementing their own classes; and while they were watching their videotaped classes. Data were collected during the required teaching practicum, and the analysis was based on 15 classroom observation reports; 25 self-evaluation reports; 25 lesson plans; 40 hours of recorded and transcribed material of the discussion sessions; 25 hours of videotaped classes; and 8 hours of recorded and transcribed material of the recall sessions.

The participants and the context

The participants, three pre-service teachers of English as a foreign language, all of them female, had already been working as English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers before they started their education course. They had relatively homogeneous background in terms of education, teacher training, language learning experiences, and were non-native speakers of English. As a group of EFL teachers, they had a wide variety of previous teaching experience: children and adult, homogeneous and heterogeneous group of students, rigid and free curriculum guidelines.

Divided into two moments, the Teaching Practicum Course at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC) is a 144-hour course that takes place in the last semester of the Language Arts Course. The first moment of the course is when pre-service teachers go to elementary and high schools to attend classes by in-service teachers. The second moment is when the pre-service teachers begin their own teaching practices, and the regular teacher of the group attends their classes. At this moment, the teaching practicum professor, who is the supervisor of the pre-service

teachers, also attends their classes in order to help them in their subsequent reflections on their teaching. These two moments are followed by written reports in which pre-service teachers critically comment on the classes they either attended or taught. The reports derived from these two moments, the discussion sessions with the teaching practicum professor, and meetings between this researcher and each participant--in which their videotaped classes were shown to them so as to have them express their perceptions about their practice--constitute the data of the present study.

Data collection and analysis

In order to answer the questions proposed in the study, data were collected during the required pre-service teachers' teaching practicum over a school semester. A total of 25 hours of class was observed, videotaped, and partially transcribed during the months of October, November, and December. During the same period, a total of 40 hours of discussion sessions and 8 hours of recall sessions were recorded and all transcribed for analysis. Data also included 12 classroom observation reports; 25 pre-service teachers' lesson plans; two transcriptions of classroom texts constructed collaboratively by the pre-service teachers and the students; and 25 self-evaluation reports. The analysis consisted of identifying, from the transcriptions of the discussions sessions, the recall sessions and the classes, as well as the lesson plans and the material designed for the classes, what perceptions the pre-service teachers hold concerning their teaching of the four skills. To do so, I focused attention on how they materialized their perceptions through the planning and the implementation of their classes and how they responded to and interpreted their own teaching. The goal was to determine whether there are discrepancies among the participants teachers regarding their teaching, and if so, where such discrepancies originate and how they are related to these pre-service teachers' pedagogical practice. Through the methodology proposed, the thinking, saying, and actions of the participants were able to be triangulated, which contributed to validate the findings.

Findings

(1) How do pre-service teachers materialize their perceptions concerning the teaching of the four skills by observing an experienced teacher?

The perceptions of the first moment of the pre-service teachers' teaching practicum--the observation period--were printed in their observations reports. The reports were about the actions and events carried out by three different experienced teachers, one of them of a public educational institution and the other two of different private ones.

When the pre-service teachers entered the classroom to observe experienced teachers, they had to identify the methodology those teachers used to teach English as a foreign language, as a course assignment. During their Methodology course, these pre-service teachers constructed a paradigm of how a foreign language class should be. That paradigm was the parameter they used to interpret what was going on in the classroom as well as to give support to their perceptions of how a foreign language class should or should not be like. The pre-service teachers were skilled to adopt a version of the communicative approach to language teaching, task-based thematic teaching. Underlying the teaching of language skills they were instructed to adopt some guiding principles. That is to say: provide students with real texts/tasks; work with relevant and meaningful themes/tasks integrating language skills; and promote safe and supportive environment for students not to be afraid of taking risks. Regarding teaching procedures, there were also some guiding principles; the pre-service teachers were instructed to maximize language comprehension and production, maximize meaning comprehension and production, and maximize pedagogical behavior.

However, while observing experienced teachers, the pre-service teachers perceived that language skills such as reading and writing were not practiced in an integrated process, but isolated, and speaking and listening were absent in the classroom context due to the fact that Portuguese was the language used for instructions and interactions. The tasks used during the observed classes were not in fact tasks, but repetitive exercises used for vocabulary and grammar memorization. In relation to the four skills, listening and speaking were absent for the reasons previously stated; reading was used for pronunciation practice; and writing for memorizing words and grammar rules. The participants also reported that the observed teachers' approach to language teaching was based on textbooks, which had structural approach to foreign language teaching/learning. The excerpts below, taken from the observation reports, show the participants' perceptions regarding teaching procedures and reading/listening tasks during the period they were observing experienced teachers:

> . . . the teacher explained the theory ((grammar)) in Portuguese, wrote some examples on the board, clarified the students' doubts, and asked them to do the activities; while they were answering the exercises she also explained their doubts. Such approach is extremely structural . . . the teacher chooses some grammar topic to follow the sequence of the book without considering the students' needs in learning them . . .
>
> . . . In the sequence, the teacher asks volunteers for loud reading . . . We know that reading aloud is pronunciation practice, and according to the communicative approach, the main objective of reading is meaning inference. Thus, reading should be done in silence.
>
> . . . The content brought by the teacher in the classes we observed ((parts of the body)) was not contextualized; the focus was on vocabulary . . . the activities did not require any kind of reflection, the first was visual ability and the second memory exercise . . .

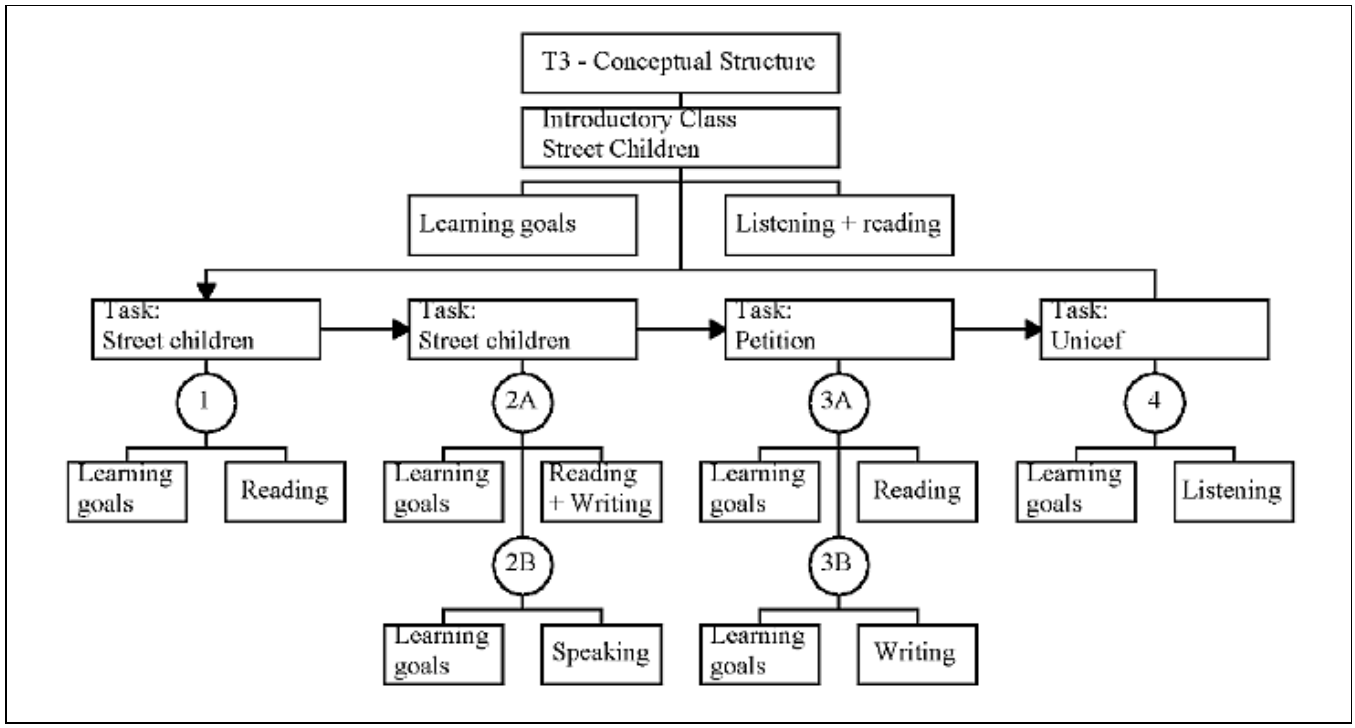
(2) How do pre-service teachers materialize their own perceptions concerning the teaching of the four skills in their pedagogical practice?

(2.1.) How do they plan the teaching of the four skills for an EFL classroom?
(2.2.) How do they implement their lesson plans in an EFL classroom context?

There are two key aspects of language teaching/learning process that are important to elucidate in order to answer this question. One is the planning process, that is, how pre-service teachers prepare and implement what happens in the classroom. The other is their perceptions and interpretations of the classroom events.

In relation to the planning and implementation processes of the pre-service teachers' lesson plans no discrepancy or inconsistency was found. Their lessons were structured around themes, in fact two main ones--Digestive System and Street Children--which formed the backbone of their lesson plans and classes. The figure below shows a sketch of how one of the pre-service teachers designed and sequenced her lessons. It is important to point out that the methodological sequence and the framework for the material design adopted by the participants, i.e., introductory class plus tasks (1/2A/2B/3A/3B/4) were provided by the supervisor professor, and as a consequence, the structural organization of the lessons was similar among the participants.

Figure 1



As shown in figure 1, the goal of one of the pre-service teachers was to work with social themes and the topic chosen was Street Children and two secondary ones, Petitions and UNICEF. In order to promote language learning, the pre-service teacher designed four tasks. In the introductory class, the main goal was to bring to discussion students' knowledge about the topic--Street Children is a real theme in the community the school is inserted in. In the first task, language learning was promoted through a reading comprehension task. The second task, designed to emphasize the content and the language practiced in task 1, was divided into two parts, a reading and a writing task, which led to a speaking task on the same topic. Task 3, a reading comprehension task on Petition in part A, whose goal was to go deeper into social topics, culminated in a writing task in part B. Task 4, a listening comprehension task based on a tape recorded text about UNICEF, led to task 5, a reading comprehension task about an institution in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil which is supported by UNICEF. The first theme, besides making students aware of social and political problems, the two other topics chosen also made them aware that they can intervene as citizens to minimize the situation of street children in their community.

Underlying the pre-service teachers' decisions in relation to the teaching of language skills there were some guiding principles they followed to select, design, and sequence the tasks for their teaching practicum. Thus, while planning and implementing their lessons, the pre-service teachers sequenced, taught, and practiced language skills in a natural, integrated and cyclical process. The tasks, based on students' knowledge and experience on the themes chosen, were organized around the themes; and designed to integrate listening, speaking, reading, and writing and engage students in problem-solving situations, which fostered students' cognitive processes. The skills were part of the process of achieving the task goals, which, in turn, were designed and sequenced to reach a major goal, the themes. Listening was perceived as a medium for learning, a channel to access language data, and integrated with other skills, a trigger for language learning; speaking, as a means to promote oral and written language comprehension and production, and as such permeated reading, writing, and listening; reading, as a medium for students to understand, recall or find information explicitly or implicitly stated in texts, and a means to interact with the text and society;

and writing, more than a supportive skill in language learning, a communicative social act. The excerpt below shows the participants' theoretical perceptions of the approach adopted for their teaching practicum--a version of the communicative approach to language teaching, task-based thematic teaching:

> The communicative approach that we studied throughout the semester privileges the content of the information and relevant interactions, focusing on discourse (Prahbu, 1994). At the same time it requires that activities promote reflections (Xavier, 1999), emphasizes the use of negotiated language (Kumaravadivelu, 1994) in order to foster students' communicative competence . . . .

Now let me turn to the second aspect about language teaching/learning process raised previously i.e., how pre-service teachers perceive and interpret the classroom events. Although the input the pre-service teachers received during their Methodology and Teaching Practicum courses had been the same, the pre-service teachers perceived, interpreted and responded to the input provided in a singular way. This attitude corroborates what the literature has shown concerning teachers' perceptions and understandings: teachers' apprenticeship of observation, lived experiences and the social context they live and work "*filter*" the way in which the teacher education is viewed (Gimenez, 1994). The discussion and the recall sessions where the moments in which the pre-service teachers verbalized their experiential knowledge regarding language teaching/learning and showed the supervisor professor the way they had perceived and interpreted the theoretical knowledge taught throughout the course.

In relation to listening tasks, one of the participants designed a listening task that required sound and word recognition from the students. The pre-service teacher's focus was on fostering students' lower cognitive process rather than the higher cognitive processes such as inferences, comparisons, judgments and so on, as proposed by the framework provided by the supervisor professor. This may mean that the pre-service teacher's experiential knowledge weighed heavier than the theoretical knowledge she was instructed to adopt, at least at that moment of her professional developmental process. The excerpt below, taken from the discussion sessions, shows the moment the supervisor provoked the pre-service teacher not only to unveil her decisions regarding the listening task, but reflect upon them, and as a consequence, bring to a conscious level her beliefs, knowledge and assumptions regarding that specific teaching/learning skill:

> **Supervisor:** Why did you ask the questions in English?
>
> **Teacher:** In order for them to listen to it. In fact, I wanted them to listen and mark what they had listened.
>
> **Supervisor:** No! What about inferences! Everything they listen has to be written here? No! Why do you do the reading tasks in Portuguese and the answers in Portuguese? They have to use logical thinking, comprehension . . . . This is still very structural! They have to make inferences. It's not possible to offer the answers like that.
>
> **Teacher:** Yes, I didn't notice it . . . But we see exercises like this one in books . . . .

Regarding speaking, the pre-service teachers perceived it as pronunciation practice besides being the most difficult skill to be fostered, practiced, and developed in the classroom context. They pointed out the number of students in class as one of the constraints to teach and control speech production. They cited the difficulty in creating real speaking opportunities, time, and the influence of Portuguese as additional factors that can cause problems in teaching speaking in public

institutions. The excerpt below shows the pre-service teachers' perceptions regarding speaking:

> **Researcher:** Is there any language skill that you think may be more problematic than others to be fostered in public schools?
>
> **Teacher:** Speaking
>
> **Researcher:** Why?
>
> **Teacher:** It's difficult to create opportunities. There are more than 20 students in class and if we want to observe pronunciation, teach pronunciation, and observe pronunciation again . . . It's difficult to create situations in which the use of the language could be real . . . . it takes time . . .

Therefore, when the issue is to promote speaking in the classroom, the pre-service teachers focus on repetition and memorization of parts of discourse or functions, as shown in the excerpt below:

> I think that dramatizing dialogues is a good way to practice speaking . . . they repeat structures . . . it's fun . . .. They perform . . . they follow a given structure . . . and they learn it.

Inconsistencies between theoretical knowledge -- how the pre-service teachers planned their lessons for the teaching practicum--and their experiential knowledge--what they usually do in other classroom contexts--could be unveiled while the pre-service teachers were talking about the design of the speaking tasks. One of the pre-service teachers wanted to check if the students had learned the structures--*Who are you? / What do you do?*--that were practiced in a previous activity. In order to do so, she designed a dialogue between two people in which they start a conversation using the structures--*Who are you?* and *What do you do?* The pre-service teacher's focus was on the repetition of the structures, she ignored the communicative purpose of the structures in a context. The excerpt below shows the moment the supervisor tries to make clear the mismatch between the pre-service teacher's focus (form) and the supervisor professor's (meaning):

> **Teacher*:*** Tell me again what was the problem with this question?
>
> **Supervisor*:*** It has no sense. There is no sociolinguistic coherence. . . . In a company meeting there are no visitors, are there? Then, the visitor says: Good morning, I'm John, from Australia. Who are you? In a meeting?! Then, a girl says, in a meeting: I'm Andrea. What do you do? In a meeting? No, no! This is *sui generis!*
>
> **Teacher*:*** In fact, I can't get the meaning. I don't understand what you are saying.
>
> **Supervisor*:*** No, you are not giving meaning to a communicative context.

A second participant also interpreted the speaking task she designed and implemented in the light of her intuitive perceptions constructed throughout her life as a foreign language teacher, i.e., her experiential knowledge. In her daily life as a language teacher, she has perceived that speaking can be acquired by beginners through repetition that, in turn, may lead to fluency and language acquisition. She also prioritizes the content of the message at the expense of a fluent and accurate performance, which suggests that she perceives the teaching of speaking related to the students' affective filter. Thus, she avoids corrections, except when errors impede communication. The excerpt below shows her perception regarding speaking:

> **Teacher:** I believe that speaking is repetition, mainly for beginners. Today, with this book, the New Interchange, for example, I deal with conversations using repetitions . . . I care with pronunciation, but as I had little time, I thought that I shouldn't care about pronunciation. At that time,((talking about her classes)) I was worried about production, I wanted them to speak, no matter how . . . Sometimes I don't care about pronunciation, I let my students free, I don't correct them all the time . . . correct pronunciation can be acquired throughout time . . . . Since communication is not hindered, I don't care about mistakes. This is the way I do. If there is communication, it's ok!

The other participant verbalized that speaking can be acquired by repetition and memorization of words and sentences through dramatizations which may lead students to make connections between form and meaning. Her perceptions are connected to the experiences she had as a foreign language student. According to her, speaking emerges after reading and writing are consolidated. So, accuracy and fluency in speaking are consequences of accurate and fluent reading and writing, as shown in the excerpt below:

> **Teacher*:*** I learned English, in fact, in the USA. In Brazil things are messy regarding language learning in regular schools. In high school, my English teacher spoke in Portuguese and taught only grammar rules. I didn't learn. The first information I had about English was through grammar, but I could consolidate my learning by reading. The more I read and wrote, the better I spoke.

In relation to reading and writing, no discrepancy was found between the experiential and theoretical knowledge of the participants. Reading is perceived as a medium for students to understand, recall or find information implicitly or explicitly stated in texts, a means to interact with the text and society; and writing, much more than copying exercise, is the product of thinking, reflection, comparison, interpretation, analysis, judgment, the result of complex cognition, as shown in the following excerpts:

> Reading comprehension should be promoted through inferences, which in turn requires an internal silence of the student in order for him to make inferences and interpretations.

> I didn't like this teaching procedure because it is a copy. For me this is copy and copy is not written production. . . . For me this is not production . . . my intention was that they had to write about their habits . . . I knew their texts would be terrible, but they would be more authentic than a single copy . . .

The pre-service teachers share the same perceptions concerning listening; it is a means to acquire language. Their classes were given in English so that by listening the students could learn the language in real situation, and as a consequence, enlarge their vocabulary. Thus, they systematized their teaching procedures regarding language use during their classes in order to promote language acquisition, as in the following excerpts:

> **Researcher*:*** Why did you use the same teaching procedures while conducting the tasks?

> **Teacher1*:*** This has to do with the approach we studied in our course. Our professor thinks that if we repeat the same structure, the students get used to it, it becomes automatic . . . this makes students feel secure besides improving listening comprehension. I have the same opinion now. If everything is spoken in English, they

can learn all vocabulary that we use in the classroom: turn off the lights, turn on the lights, the fan, turn it on, turn it off, open the curtains, close the curtains . . ..

Teacher2*:* I think like that . . . . the belief that . . . to use only English in class, the more they hear, the more they learn. Now I believe that this is important . . . .

Teacher3*:* The procedures to conduct the classes were the same because they are part of the methodology. One of the highest points of the methodology is to use the same procedures, repeating the same instructions for the students to acquire the language. The routine of the procedures leads to foreign language acquisition.

3. How do they respond to their own teaching?

An assumption underlying the study of learning how to teach is that teaching is both a cognitive and a behavioral task, and that the theories, perceptions and understandings teachers have about teaching, teachers, and learners guide their pedagogical practices (Richards & Nunan, 1990).

1. **The image of the teacher.** A significant concern during the discussion and the recall sessions was the image of the teacher, that is, the behavior and performance the pre-service teachers showed to their students and to the supervisor in the classroom context. This was evident in comments that they made about their performance as language teachers, as shown in the following excerpts:

   T3 about T1 . . . You began well . . . you were objective, calm, knew how to attract students' attention . . . you were tuned with the group, we could see that . . . you were committed to the group . . . Sometimes the teacher is more worried about her performance and forgets the students.

   T1 about T2 . . . The roll call was Ok. You have the students' feedback. You are not teaching alone. They are participating. The use of the blackboard is getting better. You managed the class very well. It was one of the best.

   T2 about herself . . . The students were ahead my teaching procedures . . . they answered before I asked them, but I thought it would be better to follow what I had planned . . .

   T3 about herself . . . I was very nervous, but it's not what I'm watching . . . I look very calm . . . the class flows

2. **Theory into practice.** Put theory into practice is one of the foci of their Teaching Practicum course. How this could be achieved was also a recurring concern of the pre-service teachers, as shown in the excerpts taken from the recall sessions:

   T1. . . I felt a better teacher during the supervised practicum I knew what I was doing . . .
   T2. . . I knew how and what I had to do to reach my teaching goals . . .
   T3 . . . During the teaching practicum we could match theory and practice.

3. **Teachers' concerns.** The participants also had different concerns in relation to what to achieve in a lesson. The first teacher identified the need to follow the lesson plan step by step, to use negotiated language to be understood and check students' comprehension, and to

stimulated students' participation as important factors to be achieved in a lesson, as shown in the following excerpts from the recall sessions:

> I had this in mind . . . to say exactly what was written in the lesson plan . . . I need the students' answers . . . I need this contact with the students. I need to know if they understand me. I need to make myself understood . . . Students learn a language by being exposed to it . . . facilitating language through the negotiation of meanings will promote indirect learning . . .

The second teacher felt that to follow the procedures planned and reach good tuning of each planned step and classroom management were important aspects to achieve in a lesson, as illustrates the excerpt below:

> When I teach, I am preoccupied in following the lesson plan step by step
>
> Sometimes the students are ahead of the planned procedures, they say before I ask them, but I follow the lesson plan anyway. I have to have a pattern . . . but sometimes I feel I do not know what to do . . . I feel that I am not going to conclude what was planned . . . I feel disappointed . . . I have to change my posture . . .

The third teacher also considered timing, the need to give students' feedback and to follow the lesson plan important aspects to be achieved in a lesson, as shown in the following:

> I was preoccupied about the time . . . I was worried about finishing what I had planned for that day . . . I forgot to check students' comprehension . . . feedback is important in learning specially a foreign language . . .

The pre-service teachers' concerns are summarized in Table 1:

Table 1--Factors to achieve in a lesson

T1	Follow lesson plans; students' comprehension and participation
T2	Follow lesson plans; time; students' comprehension
T3	Follow lesson plans; tune timing; students' feedback

4. Teaching management. Comments on how to manage specific classroom situations such as indiscipline, lack of attention and motivation and how to carry out teaching procedures effectively were a relevant aspect of the discussion sessions after classes, as shown the excerpts from the discussion sessions:

> **T3/2 about T1** . . . It was nice the way you ignored the negative comments those students at the back of the classroom made about your class . . . You were very perseverant.
>
> **T1/2 about T3** . . . It was a nice strategy to write on the board and ask students to help you write the words on the board. I liked that. Yes, I agree with you . . . You

get the students' attention, interest and increase their self-esteem. They feel what they say is taken into consideration.

5. Factors influencing successful results. The pre-service teachers also differed in their concerns and in the things they would do next time in order to obtain successful results in their lessons. The first teacher reported she would do differently as regards timing and sequencing the tasks. The second teacher's solution was to think of a new way to carry out the grammar task and manage the class. The third teacher suggested better tuning regarding time and students' feedback as the key to improve her performance as teacher, as shown in the following excerpts from the recall sessions:

   T1 . . . If they had more time to do this task, they would perform it better. I think this speaking task did not work because they had to do so many things at the same time and they did not have enough time . . . I have to give more time, I mean, between the steps of this task. Maybe one part of the task today, the other part another day and so on . . .

   T2 . . . I got anxious. They were not engaged in the grammar task. I noticed that. It was too long and they were not interested anymore . . ..The teaching procedures of this task are ok, I have to change my posture. I have to be stricter.

   T3 . . . I was worried about the time, not about their learning . . . It was amazing. I was worried in following the lesson plan and finishing it. I forgot to check students' feedback. I did not give them feedback either. There is no way to check learning this way.

   Factors influencing successful results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2--Main concern of each teacher

T1	Handling time and sequencing of activities
T2	Handling class management and procedures
T3	Handling time and students' feedback

6. How pre-service teachers view the teaching act. The different way in which the pre-service teachers monitored and described their teaching suggested the different ways they approach their teaching. T1's comments were on the performance of the teacher. T2 sees a lesson in terms of well planned procedures of instruction and T3 views the lesson in term of its effects on learners, as shown in the excerpts taken from the discussion sessions:

   T1about T2 . . . You get students' feedback. You are not teaching alone. You've got their participation. You managed this class very well today.

   T2 about T1 . . . According to the teaching procedures you had to construct the meaning of the text on the board only if there was no consensus among the students. I think these two functions have to be explained beforehand. I think you have to rewrite this procedure . . . plan the task again . . . It is not clear for the students the way it was planned.

> **T3 about T2** . . . You are not waiting the students' answers. You have to. If you are anxious, they get anxious too. If you explain very fast, things get complicated for them. I myself felt a bit lost today. You are too fast. Calm down, they will follow you.

How pre-service teachers view the teaching act is summarized in Table 3.

Table 3--How pre-service teachers perceive the teaching act

T1	Teacher's performance
T2	Planning of classes
T3	Effects on students

By analyzing teachers' verbalizations of their teaching practice, some issues arise. First, although to different degrees, all pre-service teachers were concerned with following the plan procedures step by step. This can be explained by their position; they would be evaluated according to the effectiveness between their actual performance and the planned one. Second, teachers' perceptions reflected the way they understand themselves as teachers at that stage and were related to prior experiences and theoretical knowledge as well, which corroborates the study conducted by Richards, Ho and Giblin (1996). T1's perceptions of the teaching act were more teacher-based oriented, T2's assessment on the issue revealed a continuous concern related to the planning of better classes, and T3's perceptions, on the other hand, were more student-oriented. Third, in describing what they would do differently next time, T1 suggested she would improve her timing and the sequencing of tasks, T2 would make changes in some tasks and adopt specific strategies to manage class events better, and T3 would improve some teaching procedures. Such perceptions were related to the results they got after their teaching practicum, were supported by the theoretical knowledge acquired over their course, and consequently, had a more technical focus. Fourth, although the input the pre-service teachers received during their Teaching Practicum course had been the same, the way they responded to their teaching was unique. In their learning process of how to teach, they perceived, interpreted, and responded in a singular and individual way to the input provided. This attitude corroborates what researchers (Gimenez, 1994; Lightbown & Spada, 1993; Telles, 1996, among others) say concerning teachers' decisions, and understandings of what teaching is or should be. Their experience as students and teachers, formal training, and beliefs act as *"'filters' through which the teacher education is viewed"* (Gimenez, 1994, p.42). This could be confirmed by T3's verbalizations during the recall sessions:

> During the Teaching Practicum we learned a lot, we got to match theory and practice. I learned a lot despite the fact that I've been teaching for 15 years . . . The methodology works. I believe that if public school teachers could have access to this methodology, it would be a different story for the teaching of foreign language in public schools here. The only problem is that the process of learning how to teach is very painful . . . we bring many things with us, we have a life story and suddenly we have to construct an entire new process. It's very complicated; it's a very strong internal fighting.

Discussion & Conclusion

From the analysis and interpretation of the data above it may be possible to suggest that pre-service teachers' perceptions can be grouped into two types: (1) the ones constructed during their Teacher

Education course which were consciously verbalized by the participants during the discussion sessions and materialized in their lesson plans, and (2) the ones constructed throughout their lives which were verbalized while reflecting upon their teaching practice during the recall sessions and the discussion sessions.

The former were perceived similarly by the participants and thus coherently planned and implemented according to the instruction received during the Methodology and the Teaching Practicum courses. The similar way the participants planned and implement their lessons in relation to the four skills may be justified by the unique situation these pre-service teachers were inserted. They were finishing their education course and so it was expected that they could perform the way they had been taught concerning language teaching. In fact, they would be evaluated in their adherence to the approach taught--task-based thematic teaching.

The second group of perceptions was the ones constructed throughout their lives. This group of perceptions stemmed from: the social context pre-service teachers live and work; their apprenticeship of observation; and the memories of their lived experiences as learners and teachers of English as a foreign language. The knowledge obtained from these various sources, named experiential knowledge in the literature, influenced the way pre-service teachers built up their own theory of language teaching/learning and influenced the way they perceived, interpreted, and understood the theoretical knowledge they were taught in their education course, and the way they perceived and understood what they do in the classroom context. This may explain the different perceptions the teachers had of the teaching of the four skills. This connection between teachers' perceptions of their lived experiences and the thinking and the doing of the teacher, popped up in some moments in the practicum of the pre-service teachers in this study, especially during the discussion sessions and the recall sessions when they were providing additional information, their thoughts, decisions, justifications, unknown to me and which could not be inferred from classroom texts and observation or lesson plans.

As an external observer, I could notice that there is a close and direct power relation between the perceptions of the experiences the teachers have and the conflicts and dilemmas they face, and between the memories of the experiences those teachers have and the perceptions of such memories. The more vivid the memories, the stronger teachers' perceptions: the closer the experiential knowledge is to the theoretical knowledge, the fewer the conflicts and dilemmas; the farther the experiential knowledge is from the theoretical knowledge, the stronger the conflicts and dilemmas. That is to say, the distance between experiential and theoretical knowledge may determine the amount of conflict and dilemma pre-service teachers have during their Teacher Education course. The excerpts below show some of the teachers' comments about the learning process of teaching:

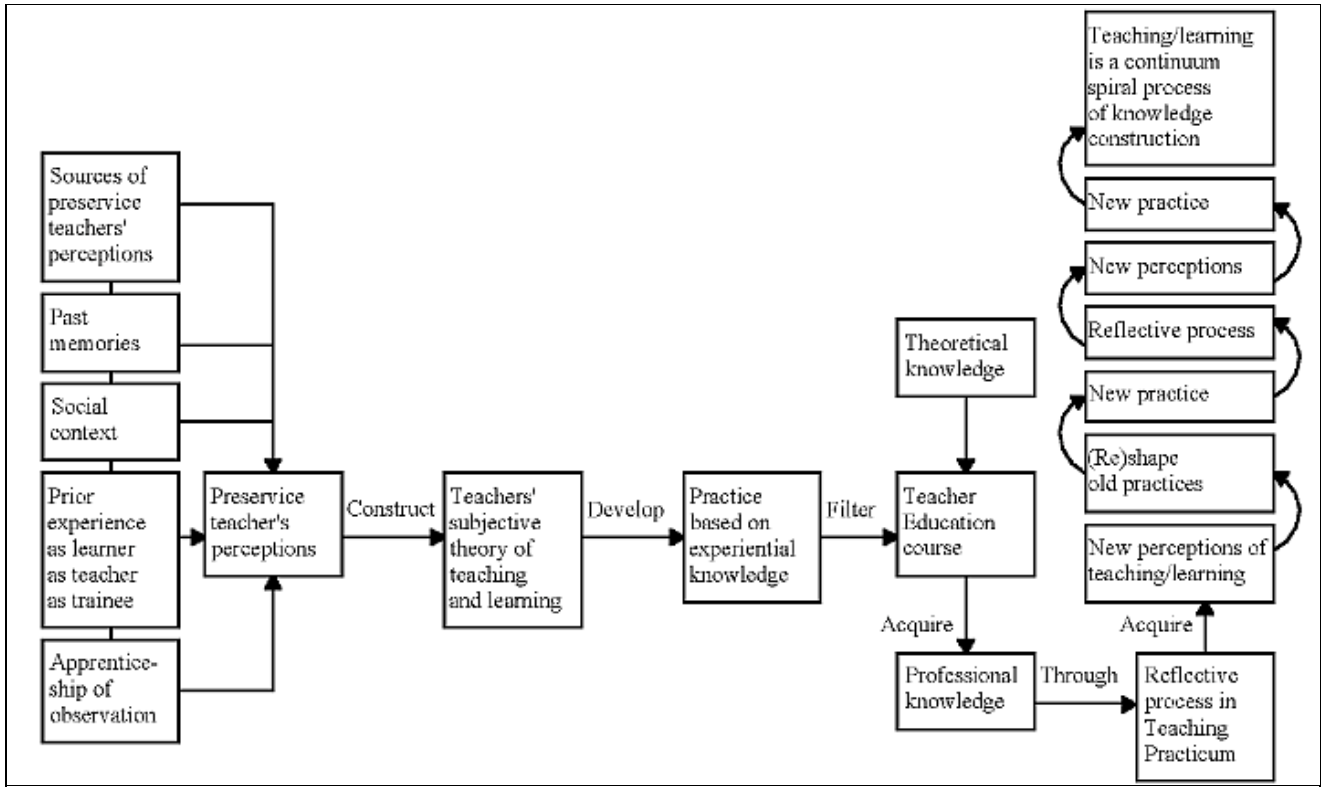
> Everything in the Methodology course was important. Every text was carefully chosen and everything fitted and constructed the same objective. Sometimes it's difficult because we are against to changing. But I think that everything was relevant including the discussion sessions, despite having suffered a lot, during the Teaching Practicum course.
>
> During the Teaching Practicum course we could put theory into practice. The methodology we learned works well . . . but the point is that the process of learning to teach is painful . . . we bring lots of experience with us . . . we have our own history of life and suddenly we get without ground and we have to construct an entire new process. It's very complicated; it is a hard internal fight.
>
> The Teaching Practicum course was fruitful, but painful. The theory learned was very

good; the way to put it into practice was difficult . . .

Thus, when teachers perceive that their experiential knowledge is supported by theory, they acquire the theoretical knowledge as part of their professional knowledge without strong conflicts or dilemmas. In this perspective, teachers' perceptions feed teachers' knowledge back suggesting that the teaching act is a continuum process of constructing the teachers' own learning process. Teaching, in this sense, is perceived as a cognitive process which begins first with the registering and coding of various stimuli perceived by the sensory organs and involves the teachers' ability to elaborate, interpret, and assign meaning to the input received. The result of this cognitive process takes form in the teachers' lesson plans through learning activities, is transformed into actions in the classroom, and is assessed for new perceptions later. Teaching then is perceived as a continuum spiral cognitive process of knowledge construction and so is a never ending process, as shown in figure 2.

The following figures, 2 and 3, show two models of teacher's perceptions interacting in the Teacher Education course the participants of the study attended.

Figure 2



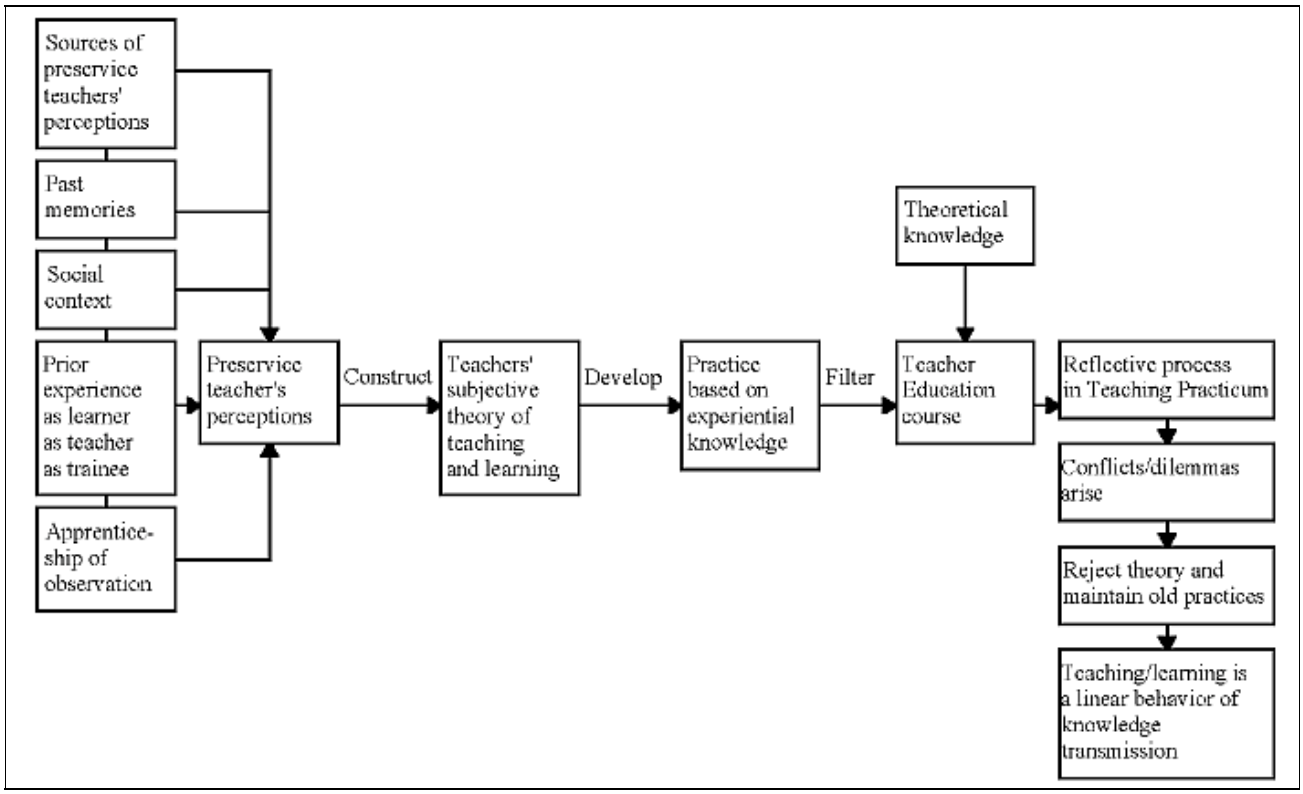
As can be seen in figure 2, pre-service teachers' perceptions stem from the social context they live and work; the memories of their lived experiences; the prior experience they get as learners and teachers of English as a foreign language, and as trainees in foreign language courses; and the learning promoted by their apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975) of all those moments. Those pre-service teachers' perceptions are going to work as tenets for them to construct their subjective theories of teaching and learning, which, in turn, are going to work as support for them to act in the classroom context. That is, pre-service teachers' practice is based on their subjective theories that

were constructed upon the perceptions of their experiential knowledge. When pre-service teachers enter Education courses, the perceptions they carry of their experiential knowledge are going to be *filtered* according to the way the theoretical knowledge in their Teacher Education course is viewed and learned. In the end of their course, pre-service teachers acquire *professional knowledge* and through reflective processes of their practice during their teaching practicum, they acquire new perceptions of the teaching and learning process, which are going to (re)shape their old practices.

Based on these new perceptions, the pre-service teachers develop new practices, reflect on them, acquire new perceptions of them, and develop new practices in a continuum. In this model, teaching and learning is seen as a continuum spiral process of knowledge construction. Such model was observed in those pre-service teachers whose experiential knowledge was not perceived as extremely different from the theoretical knowledge taught during their Methodology and Teaching Practicum courses, and in those who were mature to perceive that the theory taught was consistent and logical enough to provoke changes, at least in their perceptions.

On the other hand, when teachers' experiential knowledge is contradicted by theory, teachers tend to reject the 'new' knowledge and maintain old practices no matter how logical or sound it could be and strong conflicts and dilemmas may arise. The teaching act then is perceived as a linear behavior that intends to deliver a product, and consequently, the self-renewal of the teacher's knowledge that is intended in Teacher Education courses may not be possible, as shown in figure 3.

Figure 3



The second model, as shown in figure 3, differs from model 1 in the end of the process. When pre-service teachers engage in reflective processes during their teaching practicum strong conflicts and dilemmas arise. The pre-service teachers reject, at least at that time, the theory taught no matter

how sound or logical it could be and this may be a strong justification of the maintenance of old teaching practices. In this model, teaching and learning is seen as a linear behavior, knowledge transmission, whose goal is to deliver a product. Such model was observed in the pre-service teachers whose experiential knowledge was perceived as highly different from the theoretical knowledge taught during their Methodology and Teaching Practicum courses, and in the ones who did not seem to be ready for changes or did not want to, consequently, new perceptions were not provoked and old practices maintained, at least at the time this study was conducted.

This made me conclude that teachers' perceptions have a straight effect on the thinking, saying, and doing of the teachers; affect their decisions before, during, and after the teaching act; and constitute their professional knowledge. As a consequence, teachers' perceptions will be used as tenets on which teachers' experiential knowledge is explained, as *'filters'* (Gimenez, 1994) through which the theoretical knowledge in education courses is interpreted and as triggers of teachers' new knowledge. Considering that, it seems possible to say that perception, as understood here--an intellectual process to (en/de)code, transform, create, and produce information--can be also considered a source of teachers' practice. It is from the perceptions teachers get of their personal experiences that they construct their subjective theories of teaching/learning and practice what they perceive as coherent to such perceptions

To what extent the theory taught in Teacher Education courses is actually acquired in the sense of transforming teachers' practice, this study was not able to demonstrate and the question remains open. However, the study supports what researchers have said about experiential knowledge and its influence on teachers' action. Further, it seems to be difficult for teachers to be free of their experiential knowledge. Rather it seems to be a strong source of perpetuation of teaching models, keeping teachers teaching the way they do regardless of the way they were instructed to teach. Experiential knowledge is there, somewhere in teachers' mind, influencing the teachers' perception of their thinking, saying, and doing.

Another point to ponder is that Teacher Education courses seem to work under the undefeated assumption that future teachers will be able to transfer what they learned in their courses into effective practices once they enter the classroom. Despite the valorous attempts to contextualize theory and practice and the reflective practices in which future teachers engage in investigations of their own teaching, despite all efforts made, future teachers seem to lack confidence and the ability to think for themselves and to use their knowledge in new ways, as shown in the participants' comment after their teaching practicum:

> Instead of getting autonomy, I am insecure to prepare a lesson plan now. I've got the impression that if I do something wrong, the lesson plan is not going to work . . .
>
> But we bring lots of experience with us . . . we have our own history of life and suddenly we get no ground and we have to construct an entire new process. It's very complicated; it is a strong internal fight. Is all we bring nil? Is it nothing? Is it useless? Is it worthless?

As revealed by the participants, these pre-service teachers had to deconstruct their perceptions of teaching, which were constructed intuitively based on the unique experiences they went through in their lives as teachers and students of English as a foreign language, and construct new ones supported by theories. For these teachers, the Teaching Practicum was undoubtedly painful since their experiential knowledge was not considered in their development process as language teachers.

Theory may provide the necessary tools for future teachers, and with time and effort they may be able to modify and adapt theory throughout time. However, a skilled teacher is only part of the process in Teacher Education courses. If teaching is seen as an on-going process, teachers may also be prepared for self-discovery and self-renewal which will move them beyond theories and classroom rituals. This means that teachers have first to discover their identity as language teachers and then be prepared for the renewal--the construction of autonomous professionals who are able to practice what they theorize and theorize what they practice (Kumaravadivelu, 1994)--which demands time and strong effort from both sides future teachers and those who are involved in educating those future teachers.

Nevertheless, the construction and the development of the pre-service teachers' identity as foreign language professionals, or the construction of *"the-self-as teachers"* as wisely stated by Telles (2002, p.16), revealed to be a complex and frequently painful process (Castro, 1994; Magalhães, 2002). That is, when teachers become researchers of their own practice they have to deconstruct their classroom practices and they become aware of mismatches between what they do and what they think they do, as corroborates this study. This process requires teachers to think, review, and organize their experiential knowledge *"a movement from inside out--from "the self" to backward and to forward"* (Telles, 2002, p.18), [my translation].

Reflection requires time besides effort, as previously said, and time was something these pre-service teachers did not have, not because of personal impediments, but rather because of the political structure of the institution. This, in my opinion, is not fair either for the future teachers or for the supervisor professor who has in his/her hands the hard and daunting task of instructing, preparing, guiding, supervising, and assessing the whole learning process of how to teach, and of being the responsible for "the making of" of the critical reflective teacher, autonomous researcher and theoretician of his/ her own practice in two semesters. Collaborative work and effort need to come from all levels: personal and institutional spheres.

Thus, it seems to be crucial for those involved in teacher education programs to intervene not only in future teachers' knowledge and experiences, which permeate what they learn and how they make sense of it, but also in more complex processes that have also been built up and shaped by a variety of sources and prior experiences. It involves conceptual changes in language teacher educators' work as well (Xavier, 2003, personal communication).

Note

[*] The ideas reported in this article emerged during the time I was conducting a study on pre-service teachers' perceptions of the teaching of the four skills for my Master dissertation and as such represent a portion of it. I am open to any comment regarding the content of this article and I would welcome any addition meant to enlarge the discussion here.

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