

The teaching practicum as a locus of multi-leveled, school-based transformation

ABSTRACT

The teaching practicum is often considered as a compulsory activity for enculturating new members into the teacher community by providing opportunities to experience teaching in action. However, the practicum is rarely conceptualized in terms of its transformative potential. In this paper, we report the results of a 2-year ethnography study of a teaching practicum in Brazil based on the {co-teaching | cogenerative dialoguing} model. Our study shows that the practicum does not have to be a mere induction experience but that it also may be the transformative locus for (a) the practicum participants (new teachers, school teachers, teacher educator and students) and (b) school and university/school relationships, and (c) of the practicum activity itself. The results show the potential of the practicum to transform individual and collective agency. Implications are discussed for reorganizing the teaching practicum.

Keywords:

Teaching practicum; transformation; coteaching/cogenerative dialogue.

Introduction

The completion of a practicum constitutes an integral (compulsory) part of teacher education in many jurisdictions. It is a means of “socializing” or “enculturating” newcomers to the field and to provide actual experiences in what the certified teacher-to-be will be doing. However, classroom teachers frequently consider the teaching practicum as disturbance—so that even if a principal were willing to host teachers-in-training, s/he might “struggle to identify suitable cooperating teachers” (Roth & Tobin, 2002b, p. 100)—rather than as a means for transforming teaching, learning, schools, teachers, or education. That is, the real opportunities that arise from increasing teaching staff that come from hosting and working with new teachers (with different kinds of knowledge and experience) and teacher educators are not generally realized. In many settings, a closer examination at the teaching practicum and its context reveals contradictions. The ways in which the teaching practicum has been conceived and organized in many teaching education programs have been questioned regarding to the opportunities provided towards the recognition (or not) of the practical knowledge participants bring and to the creation of more

sustainable relations between school and university. Moreover, models of the practicum of most programs support a teaching conception in which the knowledge is transmitted by the university and applied at schools (Matusov & Hayes, 2002). As a result, the practicum ends up being a period of experimentation in practice with little contribution to school life and teacher development. Although the teaching practicum is considered one of the most important and strongest mediating influences on teacher development (Ferrier-Kerr, 2009), the literature often reveals negative aspects. New teachers often describe the practicum as a time to endure and acquiesce and as an experience that is inconsistent and disempowering for them (Rorrison, 2005). This is so because they often experience a disassociation between the demands of their placement schools and those of their teacher education courses (Trent & Lim, 2010). Moreover, new teachers frequently complain of the limited feedback they receive from either the university or their school-based mentors (Koerner, O'Connell-Rust, & Baumgartner, 2002). This dissociation and the contradiction of feeling with lacking of support and simultaneously lacking of autonomy results in the feeling of having no power or control—over themselves or the conditions (Dobbins, 1996). On the other hand, teacher educators lament the lack of innovation in teaching practicum (Hamman & Romano, 2009) and schools often are not that receptive to new teachers, their learning needs and the developing “sense of becoming” a teacher. There are also frequent tensions arising from the power relationship in the triangle that includes the new teacher, cooperating teacher, and teacher educator (Danielewicz, 2001).

Accounting for those contradictions, the literature has long emphasized to the importance of specific dimensions of the teaching practicum that would enhance the experience including: (a) the need of establishing partnerships between school-university (Mule, 2006), (b) the need to align teacher education to school development (Dam & Bloom, 2006), (c) the involvement of all stakeholders in the process of teacher education (Lambson, 2010), and (d) the whole aim of the practicum is redirected towards renewal and change rather than the transmission of a set of predetermined teaching skills (Stallings & Kowalski, 1990). However, the teaching practicum continues to face contradictions: (a) theory and practice tend to be seen as separate, (b) few

interactions occur between school teacher, new teachers and teacher educators, (c) the teaching practicum generally does not contribute to schools, and (d) cooperating teachers are not often involved in innovation (such as, redesign the curriculum).

To address these and similar issues, a radically different approach has been proposed and tested: {coteaching | cogenerative dialoguing} (Roth, Lawless, & Tobin, 2000; Roth & Tobin, 2002b). In this approach, individuals seeking teaching certification are immediately placed in schools, where they work at the elbow of experienced teachers (i.e., “coteach”). University supervisors, researchers, and others interested in finding out what is happening in these classrooms also teach. Periodically, all those who have taught get together to talk about what has happened and to make sense for the purpose of generating future courses of actions (thus, “cogenerative dialoguing”). The two integral parts of the approach, coteaching and cogenerative dialoguing, relate as praxis to (local) theory and therefore stand in a dialectical relation (Roth et al., 2000). In this way, it is a form of revolutionary praxis designed to deal with contradictions. Because those in training are integral part of the school system, Roth and Tobin (2002a) propose the notion of “new teachers,” which acknowledges the contributions these individuals make to the setting generally and to student learning specifically.

The outlined approach—i.e., coteaching paired with cogenerative dialoguing—was used in a modified form in a redesigned teacher education program in southern Brazil. The purpose of this paper is to present the results of a study that followed a cohort of new teachers, a schoolteacher, and a teacher educator over a 2-year period in a practicum context that brought about multileveled transformations for participants and participating institutions and to understand opportunities arising from this particular model of teacher training—{coteaching | cogenerative dialoguing} (Roth, Lawless, & Tobin, 2000). After present the background to our research, we show how the initial change process from the traditional to the new teacher education program was permeated with tensions and contradictions and how the teaching practicum ended up being transformative through the addressing of these contradictions, the redesign of the curriculum, and the engagement

in cogenerative dialoguing meetings. We end by discussing how the teaching practicum ended up being a locus of transformation for all the participants.

Background of the study

Introduction

This study was conducted in the context of a Brazilian teacher education program that provides scholarships to individuals seeking certification to teach in the public school system of Brazil. The scholarship recipients often have prior experience, having taught in private schools, which do not require state certification. Many contradictions permeate the Brazilian practicum settings.

First, teachers-in-training often see the school as a place where they execute and implement projects, in some settings without consulting with schoolteachers. In some cases, teachers-in-training regard schoolteachers as professionals with no real power to act and more worried about preserving their image than about anything else (Xavier, 2006). Studies also report that during the practicum, new teachers feel that they are not respected in the school context and they do not see themselves as teachers but as undergraduate students (Ortenzi, et. al., 2003). The general attitude is to regard the teaching practicum as a period of experimentation and implementation of theories all the while a general sense develops about the existence of an abyss between the contents of university courses and the realities of the actual classroom.

Second, schoolteachers involved in the practicum often view it negatively: (a) as a disturbance when they have to be observed and (b) as requiring additional work over and above their regular load arising from supervision. As a result, they frequently do not feel responsible for the processes of educating new teachers and bringing them into the profession. The practicum is viewed as making a marginal contribution to the quality of their teaching and professional development (e.g., Biazi, Gimenez, & Stutz, 2011). Sometimes, schoolteachers take the practicum as an opportunity

to be relieved of their normal tasks, which allows them to complete other tasks: the new teachers are seen as assistants and monitors with little commitment and responsibility for the school environment or as users of the school setting and inexperienced learners (e.g., Xavier, 2006).

Third, Brazilian schoolteachers often deem unsatisfactory the way teacher educators relate to schools. As a result, teacher educators often experience resistance when they ask schoolteachers to (a) accept new teachers into their classrooms, (b) participate in teaching rather than relinquishing teaching duties to the new teachers, or (c) allow the new teachers to observe (Biazi, Gimenez, & Stutz, 2011).

Redesigned practicum: coteaching, cogenerative dialoguing, and expansive learning

In this study, we followed one cohort of new teachers over the course of their 2-year practicum experience at the State University of Londrina. The practicum is a compulsory part of the teacher education program and takes place during the third and fourth year. Its main purpose is to provide room for the development of theoretical and practical knowledge regarding the teaching of English in public schools. The teacher educator responsible for this cohort (first author) had proposed to her cohort and the cooperating teacher a model previously implemented and studied at the University of Pennsylvania: {coteaching | cogenerative dialoguing} (Roth & Tobin, 2002; Roth, Lawless, & Tobin, 2000a). This model situates teacher education in the schools and provides opportunities to simultaneously reflect on *actual* experiences for the purpose of understanding teaching and learning.

Existing research shows that this model allows teachers-in-training to become legitimate participants in the everyday practice of education even prior to their official certification (Roth, Tobin, Zimmerman, Bryant & Davis, 2002). {Coteaching | cogenerative dialoguing} is based on the idea of expansive learning that arises from collaboration, which in fact transforms an existing activity into a new one. It creates a zone of proximal development for both students and teachers. This zone is created by “the distance between the present everyday actions of the individuals and

the historically new form of the societal activity that can be collectively generated” (Engeström, 1987, p. 174). For this author, learning occurs in and through the process of facing and resolving contradictions of systems through the re-orchestration of voices and participants’ different points of view and approaches (Engeström, 1999a). That is why dialogue assumes such an important role in the present work. In the practicum implementation studied here, the possibility for expansive learning was anticipated to arise from both coteaching and cogenerative dialoguing components.

The central motto of the perspective is this: *coteaching is colearning in praxis* (Roth & Tobin, 2006). By co-participating with full responsibility in teaching with another person, particularly with an experienced teacher, new teachers come to enact appropriate teaching, i.e., teaching habitus, as a way of being in the world (Roth & Tobin, 2001). Since the essence of coteaching is to maximize teaching and learning in the here and now of actual (revolutionary) praxis, it is mainly concerned with the learning of students followed by removing contradictions from schooling and thereby improving the conditions of learning. In this model, existing boundaries between academic research and everyday teaching are leveled for the purpose of enhancing learning and student as its primary subject, and the student’s changing relation to the world (learning) was identified as the primary and constitutive motive of coteaching (Roth, Tobin, & Zimmerman, 2002). That is possible because as teachers take collectively responsibility by teaching together, at the same time, rather than dividing up tasks to be done independently as frequently occurs, as the events of the classroom unfold there are more teachers to deal with them in ways that afford the learning of students (Roth & Tobin, 2001). For this perspective, therefore, “coteaching is based on an equitable approach to teaching, and in articulating differences between teachers in terms of their different life histories and experiences” (Roth & Tobin, 2001, p. 16). The guiding principle of coteaching is, therefore, not to blame another coteacher about a classroom situation if one has not done anything to change it *in situation*; instead, every participant takes integral part in the collective responsibility for maximizing learning (Roth et al., 2004). It is based on the premise that by working with one or more colleagues in all phases of teaching (planning, conducting lessons, debriefing, grading), teachers learn from others without

having to stop and reflect on what they are doing at the moment and why they are doing what they are doing (Roth & Tobin, 2006). By leading to an increase in opportunities for teaching, coteaching provides newcomers with opportunities of learning to teach, coteaching plays a significant role in shaping teacher's identity (Wassell & Lavan, 2009).

Cogenerative dialogues are conversations in which all those involved in coteaching together plan lessons, debrief a preceding lesson for the purpose of redesigning teaching approaches, and theorize past events for the purpose of better understanding. The heuristics for successful cogenerative dialoguing sessions are designed to bring the voices of all stakeholders to the table on an even footing all the while recognizing the differences that arise from their biographies and institutional positions (Roth & Tobin, 2002a). Cogenerative dialogue has the potential not only for new teachers to become legitimate participants in the everyday practice but also to afford all stakeholders to learn subject matter, learn to teach subject matter and at the same time, assume collective responsibility for teaching and learning (Roth, Tobin, Zimmerman, Bryant & Davis, 2002). Because teacher educators, practicum supervisors, and researchers participate in creating locally theory grounded in common classroom experience, the traditionally experienced gaps between theory and practice tend to disappear. Studies show that {coteaching | cogenerative dialogue} offers an alternate method for preparing teachers that emphasized situated learning within a construct of collective responsibility, reflection and mutual respect (Tobin & Roth, 2006), the introduction of culturally relevant curriculum in urban settings (Tobin, Roth, & Zimmermann, 2001), and the creation of locally relevant theory (Roth, Lawless & Tobin, 2000b) besides fostering a powerful context that provides new opportunities for enhancing the learning of high school students. Moreover, the {coteaching | cogenerative dialoguing} dialectic contributes to the expansion of opportunities for the evolution of the activity system of preparing teachers and it plays an important role in identifying disturbances and theorizing underlying contradictions within this system (Milne, Scantlebury, Blonstein, & Gleason, 2011).

Participants

The cohort studied here included 18 new teachers all of whom were seeking certification to teach English. They had different kinds and amounts of prior teaching experience: some had already been working as teachers in private institutions and others had no prior experiences. The responsible teacher educator (first author) was one of the coordinators of the scholarship program in teacher education. The cohort met weekly at the school during four hours of cogenerative dialogue/co-planning meetings at a time when the schoolteacher (Alice) was scheduled to have her planning time. Each pair of new teachers was responsible for one group of high school students in the third of their four-year program alongside the schoolteacher and the teacher educator (Michele). In this way, they were teaching four classes of 50 minutes a week. As a result, the cohort was at least 3 mornings per week at school besides being involved in additional cogenerative dialogue sessions at the university and eventually extra participation at school meetings.

Data sources and analysis

This paper is based on a 2-year ethnographic study that documents a practicum based on the {coteaching | cogenerative dialoguing} model. All forms of engagement of the cohort are documented in various ways. First, audiotapes were used to record coteaching, cogenerative dialogue sessions, talks new teachers gave in seminars, and individual supervision sessions. All recordings were transcribed literally yielding more than 8,000 pages of transcripts. All written assignments that the new teachers completed were assembled into portfolios. The new teachers, schoolteacher, and teacher educator kept journals, which also entered the database. For the purposes of this paper, episodes of all the activities and tasks carried out during his two-year experience in the teacher education program were selected. The evidence on which our claims are based includes all episodes that exemplify the changes found in the entirety of the dataset. We then described these episodes to deepen our sense of what was happening in each situation. We

repeatedly met to discuss our emergent understandings generally and any different understandings specifically. The present report is the result of this iterative process of analysis, writing, and discussing emergent understandings. We then organized our narrative around the final report that one of the new teachers (Paula) wrote on transformations that occurred with the redesign of the English language curriculum. We came to this study with different perspectives in at least two respects. Author 1 was the participant teacher-researcher. The second author is co-supervisor of the first author's dissertation. He was not involved in the data collection and, therefore, brought an outside, etic perspective to the data. However, he had done extensive theoretical and empirical groundwork in teacher education. The different perspectives allowed us to deal with the blind spots that frequently comes with the emic perspective, because what goes without saying tends to be a hidden part of work practice.

Practicum as locus of transformative practice as seen from within

In this section, we focus on teachers' trajectory during the 2-year program in which curriculum was discussed, taught, re-organized, and evaluated by cohort members and high school students. In our narrative, we exhibit the contradictions that existed in the teaching of English and the teaching practicum. These contradictions were addressed in cogenerative dialogues, which became a locus of expansive learning, inherently leading to empowerment, on the part of all participants.

The following account exhibits how (a) the redesign of the curriculum emerged from an attempt to deal with the existing contradictions in the teaching of English and teaching practicum; (b) possible starting points (e.g., students' context) were generated when teachers engaged in cogenerative dialogues; (c) the aims of the curriculum were shaped as teacher's co-taught daily and their actions, contents and materials were being created in and through praxis; (d) the cooperating teacher engages as accountable actor beyond their institutionalized positions and is empowered to contribute to the redesign of the curriculum; (e) contradictions were experienced

during the whole process and were responsible for the expansive agency of teachers; (f) high-schools students felt the transformative potential of the activity; (g) teachers valued the experience and evaluated them based on high-school students' feedback; (h) the process of working together resulted in a English curriculum based on the premise of "acting in the world" and new relations in teaching practicum; and (i) by means of joint action, the curriculum was re-designed and new relations emerged from the process.

Dealing with contradictions in the teaching of English and in the relationship between university and school

From that, from the identification of our problems/contradictions, we moved to an attempt to innovate the curriculum used for the teaching of English. (Paula, new teacher, in her final research-based paper)

The redesign of the curriculum emerged from an attempt to deal with the existing contradictions in the teaching of English and the teaching practicum. The cohort started in 2010. After participating in a number of lessons, the new teachers, schoolteacher, and teacher educator discussed the teaching of English. This discussion revealed many, seemingly insurmountable contradictions: existing negativity and a lack of trust provided little hope that improvement was possible.

Contradictions

The new teachers initially tended to believe that the teaching of English in public schools was in a mess because the resident schoolteacher (Alice) did not know the language enough to teach it appropriately. In this meeting, one of the new teachers (Isabela) resentfully suggested that the teacher educator should be in the classroom to know how it really was. Isabela also said she knew

how the teaching practicum worked and that teacher educators usually told new teachers what to do but that they did not know themselves how to teach effectively. The cohort members just wanted to “do what they were supposed to do” and finish the practicum.

The schoolteacher (Alice) believed that the university did not pay enough attention to schools and just used the school as a laboratory for new teachers. Alice talked about how she used to feel when the meetings between university-school took place:

There were occasions I did not want them [new teachers] in my classroom. Many [new teachers] came to us to have just their observation done, and, when the time of teaching came, they did not return back. I knew that their observations, most of the time, consisted of criticisms of the teacher. But, so what? They criticized, but nobody used to come back for teaching, why was that? This situation was very comfortable for them. Then, the difficulties that many new teachers face when they have to find a teacher that accept them (happily) in the classroom. (From Alice’s journal)

The teacher educator (Michele) was primarily concerned with the development of the new teachers rather than with the learning of the students in the classes where her supervisees taught. Other contradictions arose from the different schedules of school and teacher education program. School begins in February, whereas university courses start in March. Because the new teachers arrived after school had already started, their perception as “temporary teachers” was underscored. There were also contradictions with respect to the curriculum. The discussion regarding the teaching of English revealed that a curriculum organized around grammar dissatisfied both teachers and high school students.

Addressing the contradictions

During the first meeting at the school, participants discussed the path to be taken by the cohort. The teacher educator acknowledged the contradictions in the practicum and proposed {coteaching | cogenerative dialoguing} as an operating mode for the practicum that could deal with the contradictions. The cohort members took the proposal with a mix of surprise and challenge. To address the different start of university and school, the cohort decided that better results would be achieved if the practicum started at the beginning of the school year. This was implemented during the second year of the program.

The group agreed that change was required to move from the emphasis on translation and grammar to “something else.” The new teachers had attended a lecture by a Chilean professor who had recommended a move away from organizing the English curriculum around grammar. The schoolteacher, who had recently completed certification, knew about studies that challenged the focus on grammar. But she felt unable to do anything about it, as her diary entry shows: “What can we do? By myself . . . no way!” She knew something had to be done but did not feel capable of bringing about change. The teacher educator believed that the communicative and genre approaches that she had employed in private institutions also could be used in public schools. Although participants knew that there is a need to change, what the “something else” should be was not clear to any of them. There appeared to be a collective sense, however, that whatever they designed should allow high school students to “act” through language.

The discussion about curriculum change revealed another contradiction in the public system: the teaching materials organized the enacted curriculum in ways inconsistent with the mandated curriculum. Paula reported in her final research paper that in the book adopted by the school “the majority of the exercises were mechanical and did not demand much critical thinking from students, nor the ability to recognize language-in-use. . . . Most of the exercises were in Portuguese and had grammar as their ultimate objective . . . and the texts were non-authentic.” Abandoning the traditional teaching materials used and producing a new one was considered a solution for dealing with the contradiction that the national curriculum guideline emphasizes the teaching of English as social practice but authorizes books organized by grammar. But new books

emphasizing the social practice approach were not available. The cooperating schoolteacher was aware of this inconsistency. But teaching consistent with the organization of the textbook made it easier for her than aligning with the mandated curriculum in the absence of appropriate teaching materials. The decision was made to start planning classes based on themes and students' needs.

Cogenerative dialogues on possible starting points

How have we built [the new curriculum]? We knew the context of the students through games, questionnaires, and diagnostic evaluation to know where we were coming from . . . what do they want? What do they know of English? (Aline, new teacher, during a teaching practicum conference)

The discussion from where to start was based on the cohort beliefs and the consideration the national guidelines for the teaching of English. The main issue that arose from the discussion was the need to base the curriculum on the high-school students' needs. The group decided, as Aline would later report during a teaching practicum conference, to use a questionnaire during the first week of coteaching. The group used games and questionnaires to get to know the students and administered a diagnostic tool to evaluate students' level of English. This evaluation—which was based on national examinations and tested the content supposedly covered during the previous grade—showed that students neither had the knowledge of the language expected for their grade level nor the skills to understand the language-in-use. The analysis of the university entrance exam that all students at the grade level take showed that the abilities required for success include reading ability of texts such as editorial cartoons, news, recipes, and comics. However, few students in the class taught exhibited understanding and completed. The group therefore decided that students should at least be able to *comprehend* English texts.

Based on the questionnaire results, the core of the curriculum was to be grounded in students' lives and ideas. These were taken as the start point for redesigning the English language

curriculum. Making decisions about the curriculum locally meant to think it in terms of situated practice: based on themes, contents, and needs of the students mediated by the (new) teachers' beliefs and the national guidelines for the teaching of English. The new teacher Aline talked about the issues they face during a seminar. She emphasized that "the contextualized approach" was one of the most important features of the curriculum the group produced.

These first cogenerative dialogue sessions did not only produce a new orientation to the curriculum and teaching of English. It also changed the way in which the participants engaged in the process and with each other. All members of the group began to feel more comfortable contributing to the redesign of the curriculum. Their participation in the sessions increased as they began to realize that what they were doing would *actually* change the curriculum. There was a sense that they were doing something very uncommon in the practicum. There was a spiraling effect, as changing participation was associated with changing practice of cogenerative dialogue, which, in turn, provided the condition for further increasing levels of participation in coteaching and cogenerative dialoguing. The more participants contributed, the more they felt empowered and increased their contributions.

Building a new curriculum through coteaching

At least this group we are working with . . . they have many difficulties working with reading, with text. (Evelyn, during a cogenerative dialogue session)

Change became apparent not only in and through cogenerative dialoguing but also through participating in teaching. Coteaching was an important feature for the redesign of the curriculum as it allowed teachers to reconfigure daily their next actions, curriculum content, and teaching materials. Consistent with one of the cogenerative dialoguing heuristics (Tobin & Roth, 2002a), coteaching provided participants with a common experience that they could subsequently use as specific case materials to be discussed during the cogenerative dialoguing sessions. With

coteaching, the aims of the curriculum also started to take shape. Whereas the participants knew they wanted to move away from a grammar-oriented curriculum and whereas they did not exactly know what to do to bring about such a move, it now started to emerge that they wanted their students to be able “to do something” with the English language. But during the early parts of their coteaching experience, the participants noticed how difficult it was for students to understand a text. They apparently lacked the required vocabulary and reading strategies, as Mariana pointed out during a cogenerative dialogue session: “I think they do not have the, this reading and comprehension ability.” To organize the curriculum by themes, meet students’ interests, and deal with students’ needs, the teacher collective decided that the primary aim of their work should be to assist students in learning to read (i.e., reading abilities and vocabulary).

Co-planning as locus to engage in curriculum production

The curriculum was redesigned by all stakeholders: schoolteacher, teacher educator and new teachers. This made all the difference. (Paula, during a teaching conference)

The longer the group cotaught and was engaged in praxis, the more participants felt empowered to contribute to the redesign of the curriculum. We show in this section not only how teachers engaged in co-planning meetings producing the new curriculum and acting as accountable actors but also how institutionalized positions of power changed and all participants became teachers and learners simultaneously.

Based on the needs identified while coteaching, the group felt the need to produce situated materials to deal with the (local) needs of *these* students. The schoolteacher was a great defender of this idea, emphasizing that the person “who produces is the one who knows more what it is about.” The excerpt below is but one example of how cohort members enacted shared responsibility for the production of curriculum during cogenerative dialogue meetings when they planned lessons and produced materials to be used in the class. Estéfani begins by suggesting a

particular temporal organization of the activities. Others reply and collectively evolve the proposed approach

Estéfani: Yea, but for all, right . . . I think it is nice to do it before they write the profile.

Jeff: Like writing on the board, like, basic sentences, because they never change, they are all the same.

Mi: It might be. How can we nominate it? Useful expressions?

Jeff: My name is, I AM . . .

Evelyn: I like to . . .

Alice: I dislike . . .

Jeff: I want to . . .

In this episode, Estéfani and Jefferson are debating procedures to the implementation of the curriculum. Michele accepts their contribution as valid and tries to expand Jefferson's idea by suggesting a "title" for the part of the class. Jefferson, Evelyn, Alice (the schoolteacher), and Estéfani contribute to the discussion offering expressions that should be taught to the students according to the theme of the unit.

Besides contributing to the engagement of new teachers in the production of the curriculum, co-planning meetings also provided all teachers involved with opportunities to learn. The teacher educator and the schoolteacher, for example, learned from the new teachers how to use social media in the classroom with the students. As they were preparing the lesson and including new technologies in the curriculum, the new teachers assumed the role of the more competent peer guiding the preparation of the activities. In one instance, Evelyn assumed the role of the competent peer and taught Alice (the schoolteacher) and Michele (the teacher educator) on how use social networks. In this situation, rather than being relegated to a "student teacher" identity, whose role was to learn, Evelyn was "in the know" and guided the development of the construction of the lesson as she dominates social networks. Although her institutional position

was that of a new teacher doing a required practicum, she fully assumed her role in the collective responsibility and contributed to the curriculum design in ways that neither schoolteacher nor teacher educator were able to. In the same process, Evelyn—as all new teachers—also became an accountable actor who exercised agency in the situation.

These and similar episodes in our database demonstrate and exemplify how cogenerative dialogues fostered not only curriculum development but also the transformation of the cogenerative dialogue and the participation of individuals. The cogenerative dialogue sessions exemplifies how more horizontal relations in teacher education programs emerged (rather than hierarchical, “ruling” relations of power) and how the teaching practicum was transformative for all participants—though in different ways for different individuals.

Tensions and contradictions experienced during the process

This change was not only difficult for students who a few times asked when they were going to learn something but also to us, student-teachers who also had been taught grammar and translation during our school life, and therefore did not know whether it was possible or not to change it. (Paula, final research paper)

The changes described above were not linear, without resistance, tensions, or contradictions. There was no one-way street to a happy ending. Rather, tensions and contradictions permeated the entire transformative process. As the group was redesigning the curriculum and the prior contradictions were being addressed, two new, major contradictions arose in the activity: neither the high school students nor the coteachers were confident with the new approach and neither schoolteacher and teacher educator nor the new teachers were used to relations that demanded a great deal of collaboration.

The new teacher Paula later reported the issue of not being sure with the approach used by pointing out the reactions of the high school students towards it. As in most of the classes they

were not merely learning grammar in the way they used to, students felt they were not “learning English.” In fact, they frequently asked, “When are we going to have content?” This fueled the contradictory feeling of the new teachers who, while wanting to innovate, also felt they were not “teaching” English. What they were doing in the present context was different from what they have done attending English classes themselves (often in private institutions). That is, while wanting a new curriculum, they were not sure what they were currently doing would work. There was also a strong sense that if the group did not teach grammar they were not teaching English. This is clearly shown in the teaching materials produced, where traditional structures sneaked in although the group was trying to focus on teaching English as social practice. Jefferson reported on this in a journal entry:

After a long time teaching with no explicit grammar, I realized that students—some of them—felt uncomfortable with the fact of not having lots of grammar (rules, etc.) some of them even told me they did not understand the purpose of working with charges, editorial cartoons, etc. . . . Although our purpose (our [cohort]) had already been explained to the students, I found it understandable and I came back to approach grammar in more explicit ways. (Jefferson, journal entry)

Such tensions permeated the whole process as a back and forth pendulum between the new social practice approach and the old approach focusing on grammar. Although the new teachers were reading about new approaches at the university and trying out new ways of organizing the curriculum in the teaching practicum, they did not believe in its transformative value at the school where the focus was on keeping the status quo. Thus, Paula reported the lack of belief in their own power to transform the context they were in, which is clear when she suggested that they “did not know whether it was possible or not to change it.”

Another tension experienced during the process was the constant struggle whether the group was focusing too much on language or on citizenship. Influenced by the national guidelines and

led by their general belief that the teaching of English in private institutions yielded better results, many new teachers struggled with the national policy. Paula's comments confirmed our observations about how doubts and anxiety permeated the whole process and how each decision was the result of teachers debriefing in cogenerative dialogues: "Many times we had doubts and questioned whether or not those choices were the best for our students. A few times we doubted that we could actually do anything different during our teaching practice experience."

The schoolteacher Alice also talked about two main tensions during the process regarding relations: She did not feel included in the group because of some attitudes of new teachers and because of the rhythm of work of the teacher educator: "In the beginning, at the time of the adaptation in what concerns the relationships; I did not feel part of the process, kind of excluded . . . Another difficulty was to follow Michele's rhythm of work, but then, we found a pace." However, Alice subsequently articulated how, in and through the process, initial contradictions in the school/university relationship were being dealt with through negotiation and participation in the {coteaching | cogenerative dialoguing} practice. The request for collaboration for redesigning the curriculum created an activity that started to distance itself from the traditional practicum. Contradictions were openly identified during the cogenerative dialogues not only concerning teaching approaches but also concerning the relations between the participants with different institutional positions. Dealing with these, however, required time and continuous participation and engagement. In fact, although there were negative sentiments in and towards the relation with other stakeholders, these very negatively tainted relations constituted the context and conditions in which change occurred. As new teachers, schoolteachers, and teacher educator increasingly took their part in the full responsibility for student learning and as positive feedback from the students came in, the situation changed.

Evaluating the enactment of the curriculum and the participation in school collective meetings: teachers attitudes towards the experience

In general, I felt it paid off since the job we are doing here has given us a good feedback.
(Tati, during a cogenerative dialogue)

The participating, new and experienced teachers' confidence in the redesigned curriculum steadily increased until the end of the second year. Although tensions and contradictions permeated the whole process of construction and enactment of a new curriculum, all teachers involved considered it a positive experience and demonstrated a great deal of satisfaction. This sense of achievement is grounded in (a) the feedback of students (as Tati reported in the excerpt above), (b) the proof that they could actually transform the curriculum in a public school in ways they initially thought impossible ("these doubts were only lessened after 2 years teaching, when we had the opportunity to confirm that our objectives and activities done in class were exactly what the national exam for high school (ENEM) asked for," Paula, final paper), and (c) the ways in which this cohort started to be perceived by others. Thus, during a meeting held by another teacher educator, members of the {coteaching | cogenerative dialoguing} cohort were the only individuals reporting success: they stressed they had learned a lot by evaluating their own teaching and by co-planning classes with Alice and Michele. The new teachers attributed their successes to the fact that they were working closely with both classroom teacher and teacher educator.

Constructing together a list of criteria to analyze their own curriculum was important to the emergent sense of achievement. The coteachers felt responsible for the curriculum and its evaluation, as Mari stated during a public discussion: "We are evaluating what we have done. We also discuss a lot our own practices, what has worked or not. We implemented the curriculum, that was ours, we created and implemented at school and each class had a curriculum that fit their needs."

Despite obvious successes, however, the group did not indulge or revel in feelings of success. The group members identified existing contradictions and insufficiencies that their curriculum was not addressing. For example, there was evidence that the high school students were not

developing oral skills in English to the desired levels. They were uncertain about whether they sufficiently encouraged the amount of English spoken in the class.

The curriculum “Acting in the World” and new relations as product of societal relations

We do not have that model anymore, from grammar as the core and the classes coming out of the grammar. (Aline, during a teaching practicum conference)

By the end of the second year of work at the school, the coteachers had redesigned the English language curriculum at the participating school. It afforded not only new ways of high school student participation as they used English to act in the world but also the teachers’ confidence in themselves as agents of change. The main feature of this experience of redesigning the English curriculum was the fact that grammar was no longer the core of the curriculum.

In the end, the group has succeeded in enacting a transition from a traditionally grammar-focused curriculum organization to one that made students’ use of English for “acting in the world” a priority. In their redesign, the group addressed existing difficulties in reading and the lack of vocabulary by emphasizing reading and writing as important features. The new curriculum was organized around specific themes and opportunities for acting in the world regarding social issues such as smoking (e.g., producing Twitter messages stating personal positions about the smoking ban), extreme poverty (e.g., producing a blog reacting to a sad story on poverty), social networks (e.g., producing profiles) or around genres (e.g., understanding and creating an advertisement, editorial cartoons, or comic strips). The new teacher Estéfani, reports the implications of having a new organization for the curriculum: “the results, in general, were the great participation within the groups and the groups with the whole class, participation of most students and a meaningful final product, both for us and for them, what naturally was motivating.”

Besides having the curriculum redesigned by the end of the second year, new relations emerged from the participation in the program. The schoolteacher (Alice) reported that she no

longer (not as much) minds having new teachers in her classroom—as long as the English teaching is improved and that she changed her mind regarding teacher educators:

Today, the presence of new teachers does not bother me so much, because I believe I have been through so many phases of teaching that at the moment. What really interests me is if I/we are going to improve the teaching of our discipline despite our limitations and the system. . . . It also changed my view regarding the teacher educator. (From Alice's journal)

Evidence of transformation was available in the wider school community. The school staff started to value the presence of the new teachers as they recognized the engagement of the latter with and commitment to the school. In the teacher educator's journal, an episode described exemplifies the new kind of relations that arose from the 2-year teaching practicum.

Today, in staff room, Lilian [the educational coordinator] came to talk to me and said that the new teachers are great. She said they were responsible and committed with school, that they distinguished themselves from the other groups of new teachers . . . they felt to be “the teachers” of the class because [students] even go after her to solve issues, besides participating actively on the Student Evaluation Board and other schools meetings. She said she was surprised because they even “know the students and call them by their names. (From Michele's journal)

Aline (a new teacher) also remarked on the changes in the school-university relationship and in the way she sees schools through the director movement to come to talk to the group and recognize their work:

He came out of his position, as a principal, and went there to talk to us, to say like this, look, congratulations, the work has been ah, demonstration, recognition of our practices.

By the end of the year I wanted to talk about the negative side but our path at school has shown that this barrier is falling down in a way that if today I had to talk about these demonstrations I would only have positive things.

Mariana also reports in her diary how she changed her mind and constructed new relations to the school as she participated on the school Student Evaluation Board: “I did not imagine that the school (supervisor, coordinator, director) really got involved so much in student’s development. They even know their names.” She commented on the professional development week by saying “I really liked the freedom teachers have to expose their opinion. It shows the school is open to changes.”

Teaching practicum as locus of transformation

Our study provides evidence for the transformative potential that derives from fully integrating practicum participants in school affairs generally and in the redesign of curriculum specifically. In this section, we address three salient issues that arise from our study: (a) The practicum becomes the locus for the transformation of new teachers, practicing schoolteachers, teacher educators, and students; (b) the practicum becomes the locus for the transformation of schools, university/school partnerships, and the practicum itself; and (c) much of this may be the result of the expansive learning that occurred in the formation of a new form of activity that was collectively generated.

Transformative locus for new teachers, schoolteachers, teacher educator, and students

Through the redesign of the curriculum, the teaching practicum became a transformative locus for the participants (new teachers, schools teachers, teacher educator and students) in their role as agential subjects and their own identity as part of the activity: it challenged the ways the participants were seen and saw themselves in the practicum. For the new teachers, the practicum

was transformative due their engagement in the uncommon process of collectively redesigning a curriculum together with their cooperating teacher and their teacher educator. Consistent with findings in other studies that participating in the curriculum construction is crucial for the developing of teachers' agency (Craig & Ross, 2008), our study shows that the active engagement in the production of the curriculum allowed the new teachers to see that their knowledge really counted. Such participation is also transformative for new teachers as they acquire an agential identity in the process as it positions teachers as agents of change (Craig & Ross, 2008). In our study, the practicum participants, initially convinced that the status quo in the public school system could not be changed, experienced in and through their own actions that the conditions could be changed and that they were not merely determined by them. This change was possible by contributing to the collective work, in which the individuals overcame the limitations of their individual subjectivities as seen in the case of the schoolteacher Alice, who had not been prepared to make curricular changes on her own. In the process, the group dealt with numerous contradictions, including the tension arising from the mandated focus on the teaching of English as social practice, on the one hand, and the grammar-focused textbooks and prior teacher experiences, on the other hand.

Our study provides evidence for the transformations that the new teachers experienced in regards to their identities. Rather than being seen as disturbances within the school environment, they came to be acknowledged as esteemed contributors to the learning of students. As the new teachers were able to assume the position of authorship on the curriculum due an activity system that empowers collective action, new possibilities were available for legitimate participation at the school. The practicum was a unique locus for decision making and development of a sense of authorship and freedom on the process and on the self. It resulted in the transformation of all the participants in accountable actors of teaching who took responsibility not only for their learning but also for that of others. The new teachers experienced a sense of agency and autonomy that allowed them to see themselves as responsible, capable, and relevant actors in the educational

system. The new teachers felt that their integral involvement in praxis contributed to overcoming the gap between theory and practice.

The study exhibited transformations on the part of the schoolteacher and teacher educator, who no longer were dispensers and regulators of knowledge but came to be learners within the collective activities of the group. The cooperating teacher Alice learned (about) new approaches to teaching and began seeing herself as someone being used to host teachers in training to someone whose knowledge is considered valid. She changed from being a problematic teacher, always criticized by university personnel, to a valued participant in the training of new teachers. In the process, Alice acquired a sense of agency, autonomy, and positive orientation. Working collectively with others, she changed from being forever tired and frustrated with too much work to become an agential schoolteacher who contributed to making curricular transformation possible. By becoming an integral part of the group, Alice was enabled to face and handle the contradictions arising from the mandate of the national guidelines and available textbooks and to participate in the redesign of a local curriculum and the production of teaching materials.

Also, the teacher educator had many opportunities to learn at work, which arose from being an integral part of the group, contributing to the planning and enacting of teaching, reflection on teaching, and redesign of the curriculum. By participating in the praxis rather than remaining in the position of the evaluator of the new teachers, she came to better understand the tensions and inner dynamics involved in daily teaching.

This study revealed the transformative potential of the teaching practicum for high school students. Although the students in this study did not participate in cogenerative dialogues as those in other studies (e.g., Roth et al., 2002; Roth et al., 2004), they nevertheless were consulted so that the redesigned curriculum could meet their needs. Thus, students, their needs and their context were the starting point for the production of the new, locally oriented curriculum. Second the high school students also participated in the evaluation of this curriculum, which actually repositioned them as accountable actors in its redesign. Students reported a sense of gratitude as they realized they were able to deal with the English language as the teaching made sense to them. They were

enabled to develop reading levels sufficient for succeeding on the university entrance examination. They were part of a transformation that showed the widespread Brazilian adage “it is impossible to learn English in public schools” could be overcome.

Transformative locus for schools, university/school relationship and the teaching practicum

Redesigning the curriculum afforded not only the transformation of the curriculum and the selves, but also the transformation to the English teaching at the school, the relationship between university/school, and the teaching practicum. For the participating school, the curriculum redesign was transformative. As the primary aim of teaching practicum was to enhance the learning of high school students, the change of the English language curriculum also began to transform the school. Recognizing the learning of English as a way to act in the world and therefore, providing more opportunities for students doing so, meant transforming the possibilities students have for acting in the world (this is especially important today, where English has the status of a lingua franca). Our study provides evidence that these real opportunities arise from increasing teaching staff in the classroom (as {coteaching | cogenerative dialogue} presupposes two or more teachers working together), an increase that comes from hosting and working with new teachers has the potential to improve school environment. The approach capitalizes on the potential for new teachers to contribute to enhance student learning and, in so doing, to overcome traditional limitations deriving from the sense of overload teachers often experience.

This study revealed that the practicum has the potential to contribute to transforming the school-university relationship because it allows (a) the production of knowledge to be in the hands of those who have been excluded from this process (cooperating teachers and new teachers, for example, producing the curriculum and analyzing it), (b) the returning of teacher educators to be part of and actually contribute to the teaching of schools (the teacher educator participating more actively in the practicum), (c) the development of new social relations (as teachers and school

staff interact over time), (d) the enhancement of teaching (high school students being able to read in English), and (e) the redesign the way the participants see themselves and are seen by others.

In keeping with prior studies in which school/university partnerships have the potential not only to bridge the theory/practice gap and open up opportunities for the sharing of knowledge and skills between sites but also simultaneously renew the settings that are part of the partnership (Stephens & Boldt, 2004), the study revealed a transformation of the teaching practicum and English teaching at schools because of the active collaboration of teachers.

The context we report on was transformative as it dealt with the main contradictions and challenges pointed out in the literature to be overcome during teaching practicum in several ways. Our results are consistent with the idea that expansive learning occurs when historically new forms of activity evolve that transcend the mere acquisition of “societally existing or dominant forms as something individually new” (Engeström, 1987, p. 187). Thus, the practicum in the {coteaching | cogenerative dialoguing} model has the potential to be transformative by developing historically new forms of activity. This form of the practicum positions teachers as agential subjects rather than as patients subject and subjected to.

This paper reveals the positive effect of joint action on the emotional engagement of participants, which contrasts the negative aspects sometimes reported in the literature (e.g., Rorrison, 2005). Working collaboratively was experienced as empowering, because teachers achieved more than if they were by themselves (Dobbins, 1996). This was especially evident in the case of Alice, who initially said that she was not able to transform the curriculum and then, during this study, became an integral part of the curriculum redesign while working with others. We show that the collaborative professional learning also had effects on high school students, leading to increased achievement levels, as well as to great levels of support and autonomy to the new teachers. Such changes are more likely to contribute to reconceptualization of teaching practicum (Koerner, O’Connell-Rust, & Baumgartner, 2002).

Traditional roles of participation also changed: the teacher educator was also teaching, the cooperating teachers was also enacting the role of co-supervisor, and the new teachers assumed

the role of teachers to cooperating teacher and teacher educator. These new roles eliminated the contradictions that research reports to arise from the differential power of new teachers, cooperating teachers, and teacher educators (Danielewicz, 2001). In this study, there was one main goal common to all teachers: to enhance student learning.

{Coteaching | cogenerative dialoguing} as context for generating a transformative teaching practicum

The {coteaching | cogenerative dialoguing} model plays an important role in our study as it provided the structure that enabled teachers to reflect with others on shared instructional experiences. In this model individual agency is expanded because of its integral, constitutive relation to collective agency that arises from relations. Collective agency allowed us dealing with and overcoming contradictions of the practicum in its previous forms. This reorganization of the teaching practicum afforded not only the transformation of the curriculum but also—and simultaneously—the transformation of teacher selves and the teaching practicum as a system of activity. As teachers redesigned the curriculum, they also evolved new identities as transformative agents in a school system that insiders recognize as resisting change. {Coteaching | cogenerative dialoguing} created, as in other settings including elementary schools (Stith & Roth, 2010), the context and resources for a development towards increased levels of agency. In our perspective, they were seeds to this transformation that allow the relationships to be otherwise.

This study sheds light on the opportunities that arise from collective agency and the possibility of overcoming the sense of negativity towards schools during teaching practicum. Although some participants felt that they could not change the reigning conditions, tremendous transformations across all aspects of the school-university partnership were observed. That is, as participants brought about a new collective form of teaching activity, the English language curriculum, teaching practicum, relations between participants, and so on also changed.

Coda

In this study, many contradictions in the educational system ranging from the state level (curriculum guidelines inconsistent with available teaching resources), to university (teacher education programs and practicum), and school (low achievement, teachers feeling incapable of bringing about change, resistance to working with university) were overcome when multiple stakeholders came together to generate a new form of collective activity: {coteaching | cogenerative dialoguing}. In this new form of activity and the collective agency that it brought about, the contradictions were not only addressed but also resolved. This does not mean that the road to the ultimate success was easy. Rather, new contradictions arose that required attention, such as bringing about a change in the relations that the traditional division of labor institutes between new teachers, teacher educators, and schoolteachers. In the process of changing the English language curriculum, the practicum itself evolved into a new form characterized by new ways of relating across institutional positions. We firmly believe that additional possibilities of transformations will arise when teachers-in-training no longer are viewed as necessary evil or disturbances in schools but as legitimate participants in the educational enterprise writ large. Not only future studies but also further efforts to change policy in teaching education programs might be designed to involve the institutionally designated (elementary, high school) students, school administrators or parents. Although we are not able to envision the nature of the resulting changes, we would anticipate (considerable) change to occur in teaching and learning.

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