

## The Significance of Practicing Dialogical Learning: Through Language Education at Public Schools in São Paulo

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### Abstract

This article demonstrates the significance of “Dialogue”, as in Paulo Freire’s works, through our field study at public schools in São Paulo. Their practices indicate that their daily classwork, based on interaction among students (and/or their teacher), is indeed a dialogical activity, and that such an activity leads the students into a true learning pathway to explore the world, i.e. Freire’s Problem Posing Education. The two language classes which we observed in September 2012, of which one was Portuguese and the other English, might be defined as so-called collaborative learning classes. The practices, however, cannot be regarded as simply a method of language learning. Rather they show us the essential type of learning through language which should be promoted in a multi-cultural society as in São Paulo, and in Japan in the future. Finally I propose that one meaningful aspect of this dialogical learning lies in overcoming the individual (personal knowledge) – communal (group activity) dichotomy.

**Keywords:** language education, dialogue, public schools in São Paulo, Paulo Freire, multicultural settings

### 1. Introduction

Educational practices based on learning interaction among learners, called group work, mutual learning, or collaborative learning, are an approach that is now being adopted in many classrooms both inside and outside the country, regardless of the type of school. In language education in particular, from the perspective of attaching great importance to communication, there is a strong tendency for the approach to be adopted as a method that is closest to actual linguistic performance situations. Also, it appears that the names of these practices as methods of learning, such as pair work, peer learning, and group activity, have already been established. Moreover, as to how collaborative learning should function, it has been not only widely learned from experience in various regions, but also discussed from the theoretical aspect for a long time with respect to Piaget’s interactionism and Vygotsky’s theory of zone of proximal development<sup>1</sup>. The different directions of the point in question, either to place a personal cognitive conflict at a central point or to examine learning situations that are to be socially constructed, have been coordinated through subsequent studies, and in recent years, the concepts have been integrated, for instance,

into Bronfenbrenner’s synchronism of developmental changes in the relationship between two people (Bronfenbrenner, 1996, p. 71) or van Lier’s zone of proximal development from a perspective of semiotics (van Lier, 1996, p. 194).

However, in surveying recent arguments concerning collaborative learning (in our own country in particular), the discussion has deviated from the point of the above-mentioned traditional studies, and in the interpretation of collaborative learning as a method, a tone of argument which might be expressed as “collaborative learning is effective for learners to learn autonomously or independently” has become the mainstream. What it comes down to is that it is noticeable that collaborative learning is regarded as one of simple (or advanced, if described favorably) learning methods. It is the case that the way to adopt it as a method that contributes to improving classwork is also similar. Although any study that examines collaborative learning methodologically is certainly important, the mere examination cannot give an answer to the question, “Why do we (or should we) adopt collaborative learning?”. There have been practically no studies that consider collaborative learning itself to be ineffective, in which sense, collaborative

learning is regarded as an essential method to advance various learning programs. Nonetheless, without an understanding of why it is necessary, it is difficult to practice collaborative learning to the fullest. In a classroom where adopting or rejecting a learning method is decided depending solely on its effectiveness – for example, if learners cannot show any noticeable progress through group work – the activity in question would simplistically be considered to be meaningless. There are some extreme cases where it is avoided from the beginning, being regarded as a method that would cause chaos and confusion in a classroom. And, if there are any learners who hesitate to talk with the people present, the case would be attributed to maladaptation of the learners in question, and then the activity would no longer be effective, due to the assumption that there are differences between individuals. There are still many cases where collaborative learning itself is deemed a minor technique to be employed in order to let people learn something else, a way to attract learners' attention, or a developmental and practical activity to review and reinforce previous learning. Probably, these realities exist as a result of the fact that the significance of collaborative learning was not questioned, but the issue was reduced to a consideration of the efficiency, the personal competence, the motivation and the sense of achievement, and other factors. Without referring to what efficiency signifies in learning, what it means to learn autonomously, and what motivation is, saying "collaborative learning is effective", "collaborative learning encourages autonomous learning", "collaborative learning leads to a high level of motivation", and so forth, is nothing more than a circular argument. As long as these assertions are present, misunderstandings concerning collaborative learning will be left unresolved. In addition to that, the risk of growing bipolarization between the approaches, one in which collaborative learning is actively adopted and the other in which traditional teaching methods are adhered to, will increase.

On this occasion, as part of the research project described in the Acknowledgements, I directly experienced language education in the city of São Paulo, Brazil, and held talks with the people involved as well. The significance of collaborative learning is a result of the knowledge obtained from that experience. Naturally, it is not possible to generalize, but when looking at each practitioner's awareness in general, I perceived that they

are adopting a collaborative learning method, not because "it is useful", "it intends to improve academic achievements", etc., but because it is regarded as a philosophy or it aims at promoting democratic education. Thus, it is no longer appropriate to treat these situations collectively using the technical term "collaborative learning"<sup>2</sup>. Instead, I use the term "dialogue" in this article. This term naturally implies a broad range of meanings that makes referring to the method itself possible as well. Furthermore, while I was hearing opinions from people involved, I came upon situations as well where I often heard the name P. Freire, who was the former chair of the Board of Education of the city of São Paulo, which also influenced me to pursue the idea of "dialogue" in this article. From this point onward, I will examine how language education should be, as well as Freire's ideology, and search for clues to solutions to the above-mentioned various issues in a classroom situation.

## 2. Dialogue and Language Education

It is appropriate to say that Freire's ideology and its key concepts such as "conscientization", "dialogue", and "the problem posing (model)" have hardly become the main arguing point in pedagogic discussions in Japan so far. Still, their significance and importance have already been discussed in detail through the translations (Freire, 1979; 1982; 1984; 2001; 2011) as well as various studies (e.g. Arimitsu, 2010; Hara & Morikawa, 2007; Hara, 2011; Kurotani, 2001; Mizutani, 2006; Nishio, 2010; Nomoto, 2000; Tanikawa, 2004; Yamaguchi, 2000). I have no intention of repeating the discussions here, but as studies relating to language education remain at a low level, deemed in fact extremely rare, first of all, in this chapter I will examine this subject on the basis of the above-mentioned key concepts.

Concerning how to grasp dialogue, the saying below is often cited:

Authentic education is not carried on by A for B or by A about B, but rather by A with B, mediated by the world – a world which impresses and challenges both parties, giving rise to views or opinions about it. These views, impregnated with anxieties, doubts, hopes, or hopelessness, imply significant themes on the basis of which the program content of education can be built. (Freire, 1972, p. 66)

Through such an opinion, Freire rejected one-way

communication as a top-down process and a dichotomic educational system analogous to relations between those in authority and their subordinates. The idea is that the true nature of education is not like that, even if it is done with good intentions (“for B”) or is done on the pretext of accumulating knowledge (“about B”). Learners under a system where they are just being spoken to unilaterally are treated as if they were a mere container into which knowledge is inserted, and then they are required to accept, memorize, and recite the knowledge without comprehending its meaning. Freire criticized such an arrangement, calling it the banking model, then proposed and adopted in a practical way an educational system which would aim at eliminating the former system. This is Freire’s great achievement, which is recognized all over the world. In particular, he consistently proposed an educational system of “mutual relationships”, which is explicitly the act of “being done by A with B,” that is, dialogue. The word “dialogue”, which he referred to extensively, was not used as a method, but was used as a term originally symbolizing both the aspects of action and reflection; in other words, representing human conduct as a whole (and as it should be). It is not a concept referring only to a method, which is why it is possible even to conclude that education is dialogue<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, by classifying practice patterns into “the banking model” and “the problem-posing model”, he did not intend to state that there are two types of education; instead he formed the basis for his doctrine that education itself should be problem-posing. From there, he developed the point of his argument into the idea that the method which converts the problem-posing model into reality is dialogue as action and reflection.

Therefore, concerning the word “dialogue”, “an act making use of (spoken) language”, defined as “to talk face-to-face, to talk facing each other” (Kojien, 2008), is an interpretation limited to a very narrow sense. According to Freire, the concept of dialogue should also lie at the root of language education because education itself relies on dialogue, not because it is viewed that language education deals with spoken communication (dialogue in the narrowest sense). This very point leads to the constructive pedagogic philosophy, according to which it is not the case that dialogue cannot be conducted without using language, but rather it is the case that dialogue forms language, and thus forms subjects called learners (Utsunomiya, 2011, p. 29).

Dialogue and language education should be examined as a whole, conceptually and practically, another aspect of which is the fact that there is a tendency for the schema of the above-mentioned dichotomy to easily emerge in language education, and this should not be overlooked. Freire started with practicing literacy education in order to address revolutionary social changes concretely, which also teaches that the language of the mainstream<sup>4</sup> was then dominant as a symbol of the controller/controlled relationship. It was also Freire who criticized the perception that those who are illiterate should be treated as being in a state of intellectual starvation, and as a consequence of this perception, in language education, the pressure for measuring knowledge quantitatively is overwhelming, so that the situation where teachers are dominant over students becomes obvious. And teachers’ “knowledge” is given a different meaning, becoming “common knowledge”, and then “common knowledge” is also given a different meaning, becoming “legitimacy”, from which emerges an extremely intolerant attitude toward any deviation. In other words, if even the slightest thing is different from knowledge assumed as a prerequisite, then a negative judgement, i.e. “lacking common sense”, “wrong”, or “inappropriate”, is made. It is conceivable that this tendency is stronger in language education than in any other subject. Undoubtedly, there also exist classrooms for curricula such as social studies and science, where the power of knowledge that is deemed legitimate is tremendous; still it is difficult to imagine that we can observe many situations where, if a learner’s thoughts are different from the prerequisite knowledge, they are promptly rejected<sup>5</sup>. Meanwhile, in most language classes, if there are cases where someone pronounces “e” for “a”, someone says “hanashinai” instead of “hanasanai”, someone uses “eated” instead of “ate” in making a reply, someone mixes up deferential and honorific languages, someone does not write down the dots and strokes making up a kanji character exactly as in a textbook, someone omits a postpositional particle, and so forth, then he or she is never questioned about the reason for that. The condition of “not having knowledge”, which is supposed to be a condition for learning, leads to a stigma. In addition to that, even if someone has knowledge, unless expressing the content in a normative manner, then he or she is instantly judged ignorant<sup>6</sup>. In particular, in a situation where there is a misapprehension that

understanding can only be assessed by expression (understanding language is strictly defined as expressing it in words), being unable to express something is immediately judged as equivalent to a low level of linguistic competence. I wonder if we might not assert that learners in such a situation are “the oppressed” described by Freire.

From the above points, I can definitely state that the dialogue method of education<sup>7</sup> should be adopted specifically in the case of language education. Needless to say, implementation that relies only on ideology should be avoided because there is a possibility that it will force the doctrine, but the actual case is precisely as shown in the several studies described in the preceding paragraphs that dialogue, as proposed by Freire, is not a mere metaphysical technical term. Freire himself also proved that it is possible to put the philosophy into practice in a literacy education situation, as referred to above. The process of confirming this assertion is still the hope of the global educational world (Hara, 2011; Freire, 2001). And it even appears that education capable of directly tackling various issues which modern society faces, such as education through which we connect with the world at large, education through which we experience a connection with the environment from the global point of view, education through which we respect other people with different cultural backgrounds, and education which bears in mind sustainability within diversity, is none other than the dialogue method.

Approaches to putting the philosophy of dialogue into practice, however, are only now getting underway, even in the various parts of the world where they are being attempted. That is also the case in the city of São Paulo, and planning an actual system continues on a trial-and-error basis at each school (the survey I carried out did not actually show anything to indicate that the relevant practice is a “fait accompli”). Naturally, there is also a consideration of local background, with regional characteristics which must be reflected in trial-and-error approaches, because each community is different with regard to the race, language, history, etc. of its members. Probably, because of the diversity with respect to such factors in this city, it is difficult to adopt an education policy that proposes a unified or uniform course of action toward all practice methods in classrooms (i.e. actions based on “flexibility”, described later). Also, with regard to the cases below, it is not possible to say that they are typical of the city of São Paulo, and it is not possible to

conclude that any similar approach is being adopted in other schools, either. Nevertheless, I ventured to take up the two language education efforts described in this article, because of the necessity of following in full the process of putting the philosophy into practice, and I aimed at understanding the observation that the dialogue method manifests itself in different forms, even under the same philosophy. Moreover, as for the cases in question, I took care to assure, as far as possible, that they would not be interpreted as typical cases. This is also because, in (Freire’s) theory of dialogue, there is no concept whatsoever in which there exists a typical methodology detached from the context (without taking the context into account).

### **3. Language Education at Public Schools in São Paulo**

It is common knowledge that various countries have kept watch on the trend toward economic growth and political stability in Brazil in recent years. Also, with regard to education policy, it is said that Brazil’s more rapid action and more advanced state, compared with other countries, are remarkable. In particular, the Plano Nacional de Educação, formulated in 2001, has speeded up democratization of the system, and about ten years later it was said that a great deal of money, approaching 6 percent of GDP, had been invested in education-related sectors (Ehara & Yamaguchi, 2012). Specific guidelines (Plano Nacional de Educação 2011-2020) were established only in 2011, and thus actions at various places are probably still ongoing (on a trial-and-error basis), and still greater future development is anticipated.

Ms. Célia Regina Guidon Falótico, the current chair of the Board of Education of the city of São Paulo (as of the year 2012) also presented views which supported the consideration for and development of the above-mentioned education system. Above all, I got the impression that the true state of affairs, with 31 percent of the entire municipal budget being allotted to education-related expenditure, showed extraordinary efforts to address the issue of educational administration. The scale of public finances is certainly vast, but the substantial nature of the measures is outstanding as well. They have adopted measures; for example, “equalizing learning opportunities starting in early childhood” to correct an economic and cultural gap in education, “improving the in-service training system

without putting pressure (money-wise or time-wise)" aiming at developing teachers' skill, "revising curricula based on local requirements" with the intention of developing human resources capable of dealing with contemporary issues, "developing new assessment methods" to reevaluate traditional ones – one project after another, and they have also concentrated on improving the quality of education itself. The relevant projects are carried out by three public bodies, i.e. an administrative organ (the board of education), research institutions (universities), and executive organs (schools), in close cooperation with one another, and by involving working teachers in the projects, a process to complete the planning of the system and improve teachers' social status at the same time has also been created.

What is to be noted here is a method and a way of thinking in forming a curriculum and planning an educational system. In particular, flexibility that allows teachers in classrooms to propose their own ideas and opinions anywhere, and indeed at any time, is essential in a region such as the city of São Paulo, where various cultural values coexist and social changes are accelerating. As a result, it is inevitable that a kind of rough framework which cannot be described as a completed structure emerges, but an environment where "being unfinished" is acceptable and "a process being constructed and utilized at the same time" is itself positively evaluated deserves special mention. Also, it is probably true that the environment in question is a situation where teachers' essential specialist knowledge is put to practical use to the maximum extent, so it is quite predictable that this situation leads to the awakening of a kind of "rewarding" factor in being a teacher, because it is exactly the situation where "consciousness", "problem", and "dialogue", as described by Freire, are generated. A series of experiences, such as "perceiving the significance of an existential situation into which we ourselves are embedded in the process of reflection", "recognizing the perceived reality as a critical problem, while connecting it to concrete actions", and "facilitating changes in the community, e.g. a school, a classroom, etc., through coordinated relations with others", builds up a sense of empowerment for teachers in association with learners who also constitute an educational environment. Only in an environment with interaction, where our efforts are directly returned to the environment, while assessments from the environment are directly provided to us, can

any person concerned recognize the environment as exactly where he or she belongs. In fact, in the five schools and establishments<sup>8</sup> inside the city which I inspected, no negative talk whatsoever about the teaching profession (e.g. being busy with many things, student guidance issues, a decline in academic performance, inadequate teaching materials, the worsening environment in the workplace, etc.) was heard. On the contrary, what was particularly impressive was that they talked about the content of classwork, classroom activities, how the students appear to be doing, the teaching staff and management (the principal and deputy principal) at the same workplace, administrative actions, and so on, in a lively, very interested and proud manner.

The teaching cases described below may serve as an example to demonstrate that such a flexible approach is producing results.

### **3.1. Jenny Gomes School: Portuguese Class**

The Portuguese class described in this section was conducted on September 25, 2012. It was a 70-minute class targeting 25 students in the eighth grade<sup>9</sup>. At this school, five classes a week (one class was 45 minutes) were allotted in the schedule to each grade for a Portuguese curriculum. In the case of the upper grades, however, 2 classes were frequently conducted continuously to secure sufficient time to lead to a deeper understanding of the content.

In the classroom, six islands, each of which consisted of four desks placed together in a shape of a large meeting table with a tablecloth spread on it, were set up in advance so that up to 6 students could sit face to face at each table. According to Ms. Horikawa, the teacher in charge, the Portuguese class was held in a classroom arranged in this manner for every grade. I heard that the size and form of this group formation with six students had been selected through the accumulated experiences of successive teachers at this school and had been adopted as the best formulation.

The course of the classwork was as follows.

At the start of class, students took their pre-assigned seats<sup>10</sup>. First, cards listing the course of classwork for this particular class and points for discussion were handed out. The written content of the cards is shown below (Table 1). Next the teacher explained how to do the "evaluations" described on the cards. However, she did not go beyond a quick explanation, saying "First of

all, decide among yourselves what you want to accomplish. Later, we'll think about how to proceed in conversation with me". This was followed by a question: "What is an opinion?". Then the class would share images described by each student before starting the group work. Pursuant to the students' comments, the teacher asked questions such as "Where did you get that opinion?" and "Does a newspaper carry that opinion?", and the students responded to those questions, and thereby exchanged their ideas in a lively manner. It should also be noted that the questions asked here were "what the teacher really wanted to know", and that the teacher never intended "to check if their answers were in accordance with the ones anticipated beforehand".

Table 1 The cards handed out to students (Portuguese in the original)

<p>What to do in each group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Talk about the following questions in turn.</li> <li>➤ Take down opinions presented in the group.</li> <li>➤ Prepare a report containing the names of members of the group, the family structure for each member (including the individual ages), and answers to the questions below.</li> <li>➤ Choose who is to speak in giving a presentation on behalf of the group.</li> </ul> <p>Questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Who do you live with? What is the age of each of them?</li> <li>2. Which newspaper do you take? And how do you obtain it?</li> <li>3. Why do/don't you read newspapers in your home?</li> <li>4. How do you obtain information about socially important events that have happened on any particular day?</li> <li>5. Is it important to read newspapers? Why is this so?</li> </ol>
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The whole-class discussion continued for about 20 minutes; then the scene for discussion moved to individual groups. It appeared that they could easily answer the concrete questions like Q.1 and Q.2, but they found it rather difficult to answer the "Why" questions. Moreover, there were some students who had doubts about the true meaning of the questions themselves, thinking "Why are we being asked about such simple matters as Q.1 and Q.2?" and "Do these

questions have something to do with the other questions?", thus the heated discussion was seen developing. Naturally, in a deep discussion in depth such as this, it is inevitable that a period of silence during which no one speaks occurs. When any of the groups encountered such a situation, however, the teacher offered support immediately (Picture 1). Alternatively, there were cases where students themselves asked for support from the teacher directly.



Picture 1 Discussion in groups with support from the teacher

The support from the teacher remained limited to questions such as "What do we use a newspaper for?" and "Can we call something posted on the internet an opinion?", or to casual replies such as "Yeah, that newspaper is interesting, isn't it?". And yet every single statement was something concerning the main "questions", or something to bring out another statement leading to the next reply; for example, "Oh, you [= the teacher] think so, too?". The statements on the part of the teacher were not something to transmit or hint at an answer; rather they were to give her opinion, to say what she feels, or to show a favorable response, but only as one of the participants.

Around the time each group got to work on summarizing the discussions, actual newspapers were distributed. The students picked up the papers, and then they started saying what they thought or reading articles they were interested in, but this behavior in itself led to experiences that would expand on the answers to the questions<sup>11</sup>. At the very least, when the students found that they had not been told off for their (seemingly selfish) behavior, they came to realize that their behavior was positively evaluated as "voluntary actions".

Group work continued for about 25 minutes. Then the activity moved to a presentation given by each group.

What interested me here was the questions the teacher asked the students, i.e. "How shall we give the presentation?" and "What shall we do during the presentation?". The idea was to get the students to decide not only the way to give the presentation but also their attitude as the audience. The students expressed their thoughts by saying "The group ought to harmonize opinions and someone should give a presentation on behalf of the group", "Well, it doesn't matter if each member expresses an opinion independently, does it?", and so on, and again, the discussions became heated. It took them fully 10 minutes just to discuss the procedure. They did not come to a conclusion, but for the time being they agreed on the idea that "when one group finishes giving a presentation, let us check to see if everyone in the class has understood the content, and then do evaluations".

In this class, due to time constraints, only two groups gave a presentation. However, the time spent on discussing how to evaluate the presentation in question, rather than the time spent on the presentation itself, was increased, during which a series of diverse perspectives was expressed. Those perspectives were, for example, "whether they got support from the teacher", "whether the presentation included not only individual opinions but also summarized contents", "whether the volume of voice, the consideration for the audience (e.g. understandability) and the accuracy (e.g. consistency of points) were appropriate during the presentation". The teacher was in the process of determining a score – "excellent (A), good (B), fair (C), minimum passing (D)" – based on the opinions presented by the students, expressing those perspectives clearly by writing them on the board. Nevertheless, when any student actually asked, "So, how do you [= the teacher] evaluate the present group?", the teacher kept answering, "I don't know", trying to transmit her intention by saying, "It is you who do the evaluations". Confronted with that kind of attitude on the part of the teacher, the students burst into arguments among themselves for and against the scores, and as a result of the clamorous debate, the previously entered scores were marked with a series of asterisks "\*" (indicating that those scores were provisional).

The evaluation itself for each group was becoming ambiguous, whereas each student began to have a feeling of exaltation that they had discussed the issues to the full. Some positive feedback was offered by the

students, such as "The class was interesting this time, too", "It was fun taking part in this class" and "I understand now that there is a variety of opinions", and above all, their feedback demonstrated the depth of real substance to the class.

It is not very difficult to take a negative view of this class from the perspective of traditional knowledge transmission. The teacher not only did not explain anything to the students about opinions or information, but also did not provide them with any goals or concrete details as to what to learn in this class. Moreover, probably because of the behavior that seemed to boldly avoid any definite evaluations, it would not seem odd for the class to be judged as "being left unfinished" or "being left alone".

However, such an opinion reveals a latent view that controlling learners (= oppression) is simply guidance or normal educational practice. If acquiring existing knowledge and its conclusions were regarded as success in class, an opportunity to consider what learners have really learned would be missed.

As was also clearly observable from a disinterested position, the students surely expanded "the ability to express themselves by developing their creative imagination" (Freire, 1984, p. 45). On top of that, that expansion was supported by each individual person's awareness, as expressed in comments such as "there are various opinions" and "a one-sided evaluation is impossible to achieve". Precisely because conscientization toward such various realities lies at the root of the issue, we learn that "we cannot get others to understand us unless we try to explain our views by expressing ourselves completely", which leads to originality and ingenuity or to refinement of our expression. It is not that conscientization cannot be realized without learning, or that consciousness precedes learning. As Freire emphasized, conscientization is brought into existence in the process of learning.

The fact that the learning process itself was emphasized can be seen in the observation that a goal for the class was not presented, but also it can be presumed from the situation wherein the arrangement that the class was supposed to finish with each group's presentation shifted at some point to a discussion on how to evaluate the class's accomplishments. Although a discussion on how to evaluate was an element that the teacher had originally intended, it was not the case that

the direction in which to head had also been prepared beforehand. The teacher rather adopted unabashedly a technique that confused the students, influencing (critically) the students' thoughts by saying, for example, "But a view like this is possible to take." or "But what do you think of considering X's opinion wrong?". This can be described, though, as a process in which the teacher creates a topic while continually changing the content, not as a method that forces the students into thinking a certain way.

After class, I asked the teacher in charge, "What fruits have you reaped from classes based on these activities?"; I was given the remarkable answer which follows:

"Democratization" is probably the principal benefit. Certainly, it is not possible to state precisely effects of the activities, such as how much progress has been made and in which areas, or to express it numerically, either. Concerning the way to express the benefits, we have been considering this matter for over a decade, but we have not yet reached a conclusion. Nevertheless, I think it is delightful that the opportunity to think freely and criticize established norms has been expanded for all.

I would say that these classes demonstrate the strength of practices promoted by the philosophy of "dialogue".

### 3.2. Máximo de Moura Santos School: English Class

An English class was conducted at this school on September 26, 2012. It was a 45-minute class targeting 29 students in the fourth grade. The English curriculum started at the fifth grade level until a few years ago, but nowadays it starts at the first grade throughout the city. At most schools, a teacher (a non-native English speaker) who dwells in the region, such as Mr. Guariento at this school, is in charge.

In the classroom at this class, seven islands, similar to the ones in the classroom described in the preceding section, were set up. The class was held in the library, so round tables were used for islands, but 4 or 5 students sat face to face at each table, which was the same style as in the Portuguese class previously described (Picture 2).



Picture 2 "Dialogical" activity in the foreign language

The arrangement of the classwork was patterned in a simple style. The students performed the following sequence of actions as they unfolded, and in this way they joined in the classwork. First they learned "what they were going to do now". Next all the students familiarized themselves with pronunciation and rhythm, vocalizing in unison. Then the students exchanged words among themselves using familiar phrases, and finally they concluded the class by watching videos and singing songs. Thus the progression of the classwork was similar to the PDCA [plan-do-check-act] cycle (here stages C [check] and A [act] exchange places with each other), but this easy-to-understand pattern inspired students' spontaneous involvement in the classwork. This means that they understood what to do next without explanation by the teacher. This particular pattern of classwork had been employed continuously since the students' first year (the first grade), and therefore no students were confused about the teacher's instructions. In addition, the actual classwork consisted of 2 parts; activities for "greetings" and activities for "feelings" (Table 2).

There was another important method that had been implemented continuously, which was class management through the target language, i.e. the so-called immersion program. At this school, it was possible to use Portuguese as well in explaining a concept, letting the students talk with one another and ask the teacher questions, so probably it could be described as a more-relaxed partial-immersion program.

The teacher adopted such methods as explanations using animation clips, vocal exercises following a rhythm, linguistic presentations with an element of play, and activities utilizing the target language exclusively, well-timed and smoothly, and his skills seemed to be

considerable. And it seemed that such classwork led by the teacher gave rise to pleasure in learning a foreign language, and that the enthusiasm of the students stimulated their curiosity, as if they had been lured into another world. The method of immersion may have played a role in awakening this feeling.

Table 2 The Procedure of Classwork in this Class

First half

1. By projecting images onto a screen at the front of the classroom, different kinds of greetings (e.g. shaking hands, waving a hand, bowing, patting on the shoulder, kissing, approaching one another) are presented with illustrations. Individual meanings are checked by exchanging expressions between the teacher and the students.
2. Everyone in the class practices phrases orally that designate behavior when greeting another person, such as “shaking hands”, “patting on the shoulder”, etc., while actually engaging in that behavior.
3. “Social Practice” time: One student chooses another student; then the two of them greet each other in whatever manner they choose. By throwing a smiley ball (a handball-sized plastic ball with a smiley face on it), a student pairs with the one who has caught the ball.
4. Students watch videos about greetings created by students from another school.

Second half

1. By projecting images onto a screen at the front of the classroom, different kinds of feelings (human emotions; so-called “joy-anger-sorrow-pleasure”) are presented with illustrations. Individual meanings are checked by exchanging expressions between the teacher and the students.
2. The students practice phrases by asking someone and replying to someone about his/her feelings (e.g. How do you feel today? Today I’m happy/sad/angry.).
3. The students perform Social Practice using patterns of phrases mentioned above, in the same way as described in the first half.
4. Everyone sings a song, “If you’re happy and you know it”, in English. While singing, they perform relevant behaviors (e.g. clapping hands, stamping feet, patting on the shoulder).

However, such a method of class management and an immersion program are not in themselves exceptionally uncommon and research on their effectiveness is progressing, which is why they have been adopted nowadays in classrooms throughout the world for the study of foreign languages. Meanwhile, it is also well known that even where they are adopted, they do not necessarily produce results like the ones in this class immediately. In traditional studies, that has been attributed simply to the different levels of ability among teachers.

What is to be observed carefully in this section is that improving class management efficiency, including improvement in the teacher’s skills, is only a secondary product created when following dialogical practices. The word “secondary” does not imply that the teachers neglect consideration of whether they have the requisite skills or not, but rather that with regard to making efforts to create a high-quality classroom environment, the teachers themselves do not consider improvement of skills their personal obligation (i.e. they are not too hard on themselves). In other words, teaching practices themselves (not practices based on a cause-and-effect relationship that assumes an ideal class will be realized if only the teacher’s ability improves) lead to improving the teacher’s ability – that is the way these teachers think. For that reason, they do not aim at conducting a class so that they can evaluate it numerically in a pragmatic way, or at teaching effectively just in order to improve the students’ academic performance. They are not under the misconception that adopting various methods or using them efficiently is the final goal<sup>12</sup>. The reality is that classwork such as this is the result of the teachers being conscious that the subject of learning is the students in each and every case, and of their pursuit of everything that can be done for the students. Mr. Guariento spoke as follows, which again shows the frame of mind of these teachers.

What I want the students to feel is “fun”, “freedom”, and “confidence”. What I mean is “using English is fun”, “you can do more if you can speak English”, and “even if you feel you don’t want to speak or you can’t speak in the beginning, you can do surprisingly well if you try”. I hope this leads to an opportunity for them to get acquainted with many people and find a place where they can engage themselves so as to bring out the best in themselves.

There is no fun where there are no choices, i.e. “play”.

In this class, a general framework was presented at the beginning, but it was not of a sort that would restrict the students' behavior. As to what kinds of greetings they would choose on the spot, everything was in students' hands. Even for the decision to choose between English and Portuguese, the teacher did not give any instructions. Also, there is no freedom when freeing oneself from the existing framework, i.e. "deviation", is not permitted. However badly students might pronounce words or whatever mistakes they might make, since they were in an atmosphere where they felt they could get help from others, every student was eager to express himself or herself (during the experience and presentation segments). Moreover, there is no confidence where there is no opportunity to take up a challenge and no sense of overcoming it. Even in the worst cases, the teacher did not let a student end up with the feeling; "I couldn't do that", and even though it appeared superficially that a student had failed, he/she was praised for his/her courage in having attempted the behavior in question. At the very least, the teacher never let them feel "It was boring", and his positive attitude revealed itself in various teaching materials of his own making that he used in this class. As with the smiley ball, he freely used materials that probably any English teacher would be tempted to use without hesitation.

Creating parity between educators and those who benefit from it is at the root of Freire's dialogical practices. When I reassess the class from this point of view, although the teacher certainly presented a large amount of material, he stuck to his role as a supporter throughout. Simple as it may sound, behavior such as "maintaining a constant smile on one's face" and "tackling the issue happily from the bottom of one's heart" contributed more to creating an atmosphere conducive to progress in the classroom than the act of teaching did. Even during the time for Social Practice, in which the teacher himself took no action, he continually paid attention to the students, and when he noticed a deadlock among the students, he gave them some sort of support; for example, by immediately saying something helpful to them.

The fact that the teacher and students had a casual conversation about a certain topic, and that the teacher did not impose a one-dimensional interpretation (a definite answer) on the students, also applies in the case of the Portuguese class in the preceding section. And, above all, the classwork progressed by means of

dialogue using language freely as its core activity, in which sense probably both classes truly represent "Practicing Dialogical Learning".

#### **4. Overcoming Conflict between Individuals and Groups**

Probably, there are still many contexts in which dialogical activities are considered merely one form of learning method. In the context in question, a perception exists that "methods" of education are not determined unless its "content" is established, and "content" precedes "methods", so it can be surmised that the general consensus is that transforming methods themselves into content is quite a strange way of thinking.

However, it seems that educational practices referred to in this article may treat method as content (i.e. content = methods). This kind of classwork treats the actual overall body of activities as learning, without categorizing the two aspects separately. For that reason, whether an activity is successful or not does not depend on a conclusion that a learner acquires knowledge. In other words, whether an activity is effective or not, or efficient or not, is not evaluated by means of what a learner has acquired. Moreover, once this principle is understood, the notion that dialogical activities can cause confusion becomes completely implausible. This is because, even if the situation is seemingly chaotic, that is precisely what "learning" is. To borrow Freire's words, someone who uses a negative word such as "confusion" is already shown to be on the "side of the oppressors".

But what has to be paid attention to here is that there is a discrepancy in interpretations between group phenomena that "an activity" implies and personal phenomena that "learning" brings to mind. If one persists in the understanding that "learning is what an individual does, and an activity is what a group does", the practices described in the article could also be redefined as "group activities performed for the benefit of individuals". After all, as stated at the beginning, it is generally the case that an "activity" is considered as nothing more than a "method".

That is not the position I take in this article. I wish to conclude that having a dialogue is education, and that the world is explored through activities we call education. This process whereby a significant theme is sought is "conscientization" and "problem posing". There no

longer exists a substantial distinction between activities and learning here. As A. N. Leont'ev also stated, interpersonal "behavior" mediates between personal "manipulations" and group "activities" (Utsunomiya, 2011, p. 175). This is "activity" in a broad sense and it comprises the significance of "practicing dialogical learning".

In both of the case studies presented in this article, students are positioned as intermediaries of the world. People with whom students have interacted in daily life, what they felt or thought on those occasions, and feelings they possess personally, are taken up in a positive way. The content of classwork is not separated from "the students' world". Therefore, the students become conscious of the fact that various phenomena that emerge during class are their own problems.

Moreover, in both teaching cases, dismantling standards and constructing new perceptions by means of critical thinking occur continuously. It is not something given to students by a teacher, but it literally "occurs" in the classroom. In that sense, it can be said that content and methods emerge simultaneously.

Language education is probably the branch of education that is most capable of implementing the above-mentioned emerging process explicitly. This is because language itself has the power to build or change the world. Freire also states as follows:

Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men transform the world. To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new naming. Men are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection. (Freire, 1972, pp. 60-61)

In the teaching cases described above, "changing course", "creating a way to evaluate", etc., happened as a result of the use of words. From a commonsense point of view, one aspect of the most explicit expression of a dialogue would be "words". This is the reasoning that prompted the language teacher to state, "democratization is the principal benefit". In other words, a tool to think and criticize without restraint, and then to change the world, is exactly what "words" are.

Concerning the traditional statement; "collaborative learning is needed to develop linguistic competence",

whatever positive research results have been presented, there is something suspicious about the statement, the reason for which being that there is a fundamental conflict between the standpoints of "developing individual linguistic competence" and "maintaining group order and trying to treat everyone fairly". However, in the actual situation of language education in the city of São Paulo there was something that made me feel that it may be possible to overcome the conflict. It is commonly said that the Japanese style of education is collectivism (stressing collaboration) and Western-style education is individualism (developing individuality), for instance. Based on considerations in this article, however, there are hints that education does not work well either in the case of directing individuals or in the case of directing groups. Naturally, an individual learns in a group (because there are other people there, at least), and there is no doubt that the world to which an individual belongs is within a group. The view that dialogical activities are literally learning may be such a way of thinking, since this natural situation is already exploited to the full as it is. Alternatively, the characteristics of education in Brazil may be such that they not only bring individuals to prominence, but also bring out the strengths of individuals within a group and give consideration to the influence produced by individuals on others. The relevant research will be left to another article.

And this time, unfortunately, it was not possible to take up the teaching of the language of the mainstream, the so-called teaching of a non-identical (non-native) language in a society where a language of the mainstream exists (a pattern similar to the teaching of Portuguese as a second language in Brazil). In that situation too, it is quite predictable that the strengths of practicing dialogical learning can be brought out, but proving it in a specific teaching setting remains as a research topic for the future.

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## Notes

- 1 The major relevant literature by Piaget (1979) and Vygotsky (1978) is referred to.
- 2 In fact, none of the practitioners used the relevant term. The reason is probably that there is an understanding that, for example, collaborative learning is learning itself, and no specific significance is attached to learning collaboratively.
- 3 It would be difficult to say (in our own country) that education is collaborative learning, because collaborative learning is typically considered to be a method. In this article, in order to avoid this interpretation, the use of “collaborative learning” is restrained. When the issue is addressed in this article, the concept that “dialogical learning = collaborative learning” is adopted, and it is possible to conclude that collaborative styles are simply the forms that dialogical activities take.
- 4 This means the dominant or imposed language in a society or community (Utsunomiya, 2011, pp. 73-75).
- 5 In the case of ideas that contribute to the development of learning; for example, considering universal gravitation as a power that a magnet possesses, or treating a magistrate’s office of the Edo Period as being equal to a court in modern times, even if those thoughts are not accurate, it seems that many teachers respond positively to them.
- 6 Discussion of the hypothesis that there are no norms (standards) in languages, and that even an expression deemed seemingly wrong can provide valuable material for learning, inasmuch as it is what emerges in the process of language acquisition, and grounds for advancing such discussion are taken up in detail in Utsunomiya (2006).
- 7 Let me remind you that the expression “the dialogue method of education” is not precisely appropriate. This is because, as long as the thesis is based on Freire’s theory, education itself is a dialogical activity. In this article, I have used this expression without reservation in order to emphasize “dialogue” (by using the phrase “method of” to imply equality between dialogue and education).
- 8 The five are as follows: Escola Municipal de Educação Especial Anne Sullivan (a municipal special support school), CEU Quinta do Sol Cangaíba (a local learning center), EMEF Jenny Gomes (a municipal school), EMEF Máximo de Moura Santos (a municipal school), EMEF Bartolomeu de Gusmão (a municipal school).
- 9 On this occasion it was an open class with outside guests invited, including me, so ten minutes at the start and after the end of the class were allotted for giving a summary of the lesson plan (in a separate room) and for reviewing classwork (by asking for thoughts and comments) respectively. Normally every group gives a presentation through provision of an extended final time slot for presentation.
- 10 The group structure is changed for every unit, but basically the students decide how to form a group based on their personal relationships, deciding with whom they feel comfortable talking (informal comments by Ms. Horikawa).
- 11 Reading a paragraph of a newspaper article or some such thing and talking about it can be a method to gain insights into the problem-posing model of education (Freire, 2011, p. 192).
- 12 Naturally, that perception probably arises on occasion in the course of teaching. Nonetheless, what is important here is that a method is not considered a goal. This is a way of thinking similar to the doctrine of content = methods as described later in the final section of this article. Probably the moment a method is considered a goal, the practice of the banking model of education, according to which “a goal cannot be attained unless a method is acquired (transmitted)”, becomes unavoidable.

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