REVIEW

GT-PA: Including Classroom Teachers In Teacher And Learner Autonomy. Flávia Vieira, ed. *Struggling for Autonomy in Language Education: Reflecting, Acting and Being*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2009.

This book is a collection of nine chapters written by different members of the Working Group-Pedagogy for Autonomy (GT-PA) whose principal interest lies in improving and humanising the teaching and learning processes by providing space for both teacher and learner autonomy that will lead to analytical and constructive reflection and action at the same time as it fosters a sense of self that will allow for simultaneous academic progress and personal growth. In the face of conflicting discourses and practices in mainstream education across Europe, the authors refer to a set of shared values and principles in their "struggle" to find a place for continued personal and social reconstruction through the empowerment of teachers and learners.

In her introduction to the book, the editor, Flávia Vieira, reflects that although researchers have played an important role in theories of autonomy, classroom teachers have generally been excluded from this enquiry, leading to a view of autonomy as an idealistic or utopian trend rather than a possibility to be explored in real classrooms. She suggests that autonomy should be viewed as a whole school, cross-curricular project, involving all disciplines and areas of development in order to broaden its focus of contexts, methodologies and partnerships; critical acting, reflecting and being would then become the material products of differing, idiosyncratic situations experienced by teachers,

teacher educators, students and researchers across the globe, contributing to the understanding of diverse valid meanings of "autonomy" which all form part of teacher and learner empowerment.

The different chapters in the book are accounts of personal teaching, learning and research experiences held together by the desire for transformation of educational practice through a critical observation of teaching/learning processes, reflection on implementation and change, and the building of sufficient confidence in our convictions to be able to continue to act, reflect and change in a continued cycle of improvement enhancement and empowerment, even when these convictions are not in line with mainstream policy.

A central question in the first chapter is how teacher empowerment is enhanced through promoting pedagogy for autonomy. Vieira begins with a theoretical focus on autonomy as a collective goal and a major interest for teacher education which in turn will lead to autonomy for both teachers and learners in schools. Autonomy here is defined as "the competence to develop as a self-determined, socially responsible and critically aware participant in (and beyond) educational environments, within a vision of education as (inter)personal empowerment and social transformation"(15). However, she also recognises the paradox for teacher educators in promoting that autonomy, since it is they who hold the ultimate "power to empower"; in all teacher/student relationships ultimately the teacher is able to exercise power in a way that is not available to students. For this reason, it is essential to view autonomy as a facilitative, and not a coercive, power that provides tools for creatively

dealing with constraints in order to transform contexts so that questioning, change and progress can take place.

The author goes on to describe a case-based approach to teacher empowerment leading to learner autonomy in language classes which was implemented by her research group, illustrating how a set of individual cases, each with a different theme, can be used to promote general principles of pedagogy for autonomy. This may be used across disciplines and cultures to foster the inclusion of classroom teachers in developing and renewing educational practices.

The second chapter deals with the use of portfolios in pre-service teacher education as a means to developing reflection and action as a path to professional autonomy. Through four case studies with different focuses, the author demonstrates how portfolios can contribute to a humanistic approach to teacher education and supervision by providing an insight for the supervisor of trainees' learning processes which at the same time allow student teachers to participate actively in their own evaluation.

Chapter three also deals with the use of collaborative journals but in this study, as well as the trainee teacher and the supervisor, a third student teacher is also involved in writing constructive observations of the lessons, providing a new perspective to the overall view of the classroom situation. These collaboratively constructed texts allow for teacher and supervisor development that can lead to the co-construction of teachers' professional knowledge.

The following chapter looks at a task-based approach to English language teaching and learning and attempts to evaluate whether tasks impact on students both in terms of language learning and of encouraging autonomy. The chapter describes an ambitious collaborative research project where all aspects of the tasks are negotiated between the participating students and teachers (major aspects of the task, ongoing planning, design of micro-evaluation—in terms of task impact on learners' attitudes and progress as well as predicted vs. actual outcomes of the tasks—and overall evaluation of the project). The results of such a wide-reaching project are inevitably difficult to present since so many as-

pects and variables are involved that tight methodological planning from the outset is extremely difficult. The author recognises this, but points out the value of the project findings in terms of their possibilities for teacher reflection and professional improvement. Anyone wishing to embark on action research (especially into a task-based approach) will find the chapter useful, both for its thorough theoretical analysis and its self-critical analysis of the project presented, both in terms of process and product.

The "good language learner" is the topic of the fifth chapter which revisits the "good language learner" lists of Rubin and Naiman et al., finding that the characteristics enumerated largely coincide with those we have come to consider to be typically displayed by an autonomous learner. The author sees two sides to the concept of "the good learner"; a person who has successfully learned a lot of language and also one who has successfully learned how to learn and who will continue to acquire language knowledge and skills beyond the confines of the classroom. In the author's context of foreign language learning in Spain, the results of language study in terms of time and effort invested are notoriously unsuccessful and this leads to a reflection on the impact for higher education of the process of European convergence, where student autonomy and learning outside the classroom are of paramount importance. Here, Bobb-Wolff argues, the responsibility of teachers will not only be to encourage student autonomy, but also to create the conditions in which this can become a reality.

Learner-centred teaching is also the focus of the following chapter, but this time seen from the perspective of the beliefs and practices of experienced teachers. Sultan Erdoğan, sets out to investigate the extent to which there is a theory-practice gap between experienced teachers' theories of good teaching and what they actually do when faced with practical constraints. Through examples of case studies using a framework of Personal Construct Theory, Erdoğan shows how, due to their unique personal construct systems, two learner-centred teachers differ widely in their approach to teaching and in their response to dealing with the constraints

their teaching contexts present, and even in what they actually perceive to be constraints.

Chapter eight explores the concept of learner readiness for autonomy. Vieira and Barbosa describe a questionnaire-based study that focuses on teacher and learner views of learner agency in the language learning process. They find that learners perceive themselves to have a moderate degree of readiness for autonomy, while their teachers perceive them to be much less ready to become responsible for their own learning. Both teachers and learners continue to recognise the central role of the teacher in the classroom. The authors see in these findings evidence of the "struggle" of individuals for autonomy within the education system and propose that this be subsequently shared with other professionals through groups such as the GT-PA in order to gradually make up an informing current of ongoing and sustainable study that may influence and transform constraining educational settings.

In the penultimate chapter, reporting on a study of the degree of learner autonomy that is built into secondary school syllabi, the authors clearly lay out the reasons why change in education is needed in order to develop the compe-tences necessary for coping with the demands of today's global society. They conclude that across the entire secondary school curriculum the lack of explicitness in syllabi limits the extent to which autonomy is fostered, making it dependent on individual teacher interpretations and implementation.

The concluding chapter of the book deals with the relationship between practitioners and researchers in teaching and shows how top-down professional development has not been successful in bringing about substantial evolution in classroom practice. Jiménez Raya skilfully synthesises the idea running through the whole volume that, for effective change to take place in education, it is necessary for forums such as the GT-PA to provide the space for teachers, teacher trainers and researchers to reflect, recount and listen to each others' experiences and "struggle" for the autonomy that can make a difference. This book will undoubtedly inspire the desire in all practising teachers to become part of that current and help them to see that however small their contribution may seem, it will never be insignificant.

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