

**LYING UNDER THE MANGO TREE:
Autobiography, teacher knowledge and awareness of self,
language and pedagogy.***

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*"In this world called reality, where we are forced to react, and life
leaks in everywhere, we have nothing to hold on to but
our own being." Denzin (1992:27)*

Abstract

This paper introduces "self-narrative" as a qualitative, autobiographical approach to the study of teacher knowledge and for raising teachers' critical awareness of self, language and pedagogy. The author explains the meanings and illuminates potential connections among the relevant themes that emerge from stories about his experiences as a person and a teacher of languages. A synthesis ("composite portrait") of the essential descriptions and meaningful interpretations of these experiences in becoming a teacher and teacher educator is, then, related to self, language and pedagogy.

Key-words: *self-narrative; life history; critical language awareness; teacher development.*

Resumo

Este trabalho apresenta a " auto-narrativa " enquanto abordagem qualitativa e autobiográfica ao estudo do conhecimento do professor. Essa abordagem visa a promover um contexto para a conscientização crítica de professores a respeito de suas subjetividades, linguagens e pedagogias. O autor explica os

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significados e ressalta conexões potenciais entre os principais temas emergentes das histórias acerca de suas experiências pessoais e enquanto professor de línguas. Uma síntese ("composite") das descrições essenciais e interpretações significantes deste "devir" professor e educador de professores é apresentada e, então, relacionada a subjevidade, a linguagem e a pedagogia.

Palavras-chave: *auto-narrativa; histórias de vida; conscientização crítica da linguagem; desenvolvimento de professores.*

1. Introduction

In my doctoral thesis (Telles, 1996)¹, I presented the marker events in my educational history by using a narrative, auto-biographical approach to my teacher knowledge². One of these approaches is currently being called “teachers’ self-narrative”³. I used several cinematic effects, including montage, editing, fast forward and flashback (Denzin, 1992). Advocates of this kind of arts-based research in education⁴ claim that readers of educational criticism, no less than movie goers, must be allowed space to draw their own interpretation of vicariously perceived experience. The self-narrative that I presented through a collage of selected stories about my experiences as a student, teacher and researcher was deliberately incomplete. This incompleteness allows readers space to draw their own interpretation. In this self-narrative, I did not tell all the stories that embody the themes I wanted to convey at that time. There were deliberately untold stories underlying the ones that were told. There were stories that have been forgotten, and stories I could

1 Defended in 1996 at the University of Toronto, The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Canada.

2 See Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, 1990, 1994; Clandinin & Connelly, 1987, 1994, 1995; Woods, 1987; Nóvoa, 1992.

3 See Diamond & Mullen, under review, 1996; Barone, 1995a; Diamond, 1992, 1995.

4 Eisner, 1991; Barone, in progress, 1992, 1993, 1995b, 1997; Diamond, 1997.

not remember. Barone (1995b) touches on the issue of ambiguity as one of the features of arts-based approaches to research. He points at the importance of "carefully positioned blanks or gaps" in the researcher's text. Drawing upon the work of Iser (1974), Barone relies on the notion of "the active reader" who fills in those blanks or gaps with his/her personal meaning gathered from within his/her own experiences outside the presented text (in progress, p.5). That, however, did not excuse me from my task of accounting for the stories that I told in the thesis. In it, my voices of artist/writer, student and teacher spoke over my researcher's voice. In the following sections of this paper, the reader should be able to get in contact with this narrative-of-self - an auto-biographical approach to teachers' *personal practical knowledge* (Clandinin, 1985; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Elbaz, 1983, 1987). The reader will be able to have access to those stories as I reconstruct the meanings of the marker events of my education as student and teacher. My voices as researcher and educational critic (Eisner, 1991) become salient, as I interpret, evaluate and thematize those stories.

2. Sprinkles of theory: description, interpretation, field texts and research texts

In his explanation of interpretation as one of the dimensions of the structure of educational criticism, Eisner (1991) draws the following distinction between description and interpretation:

If description can be thought of as giving an account of, interpretation can be regarded as accounting for. Educational critics are interested not only in making vivid what they have experienced, but in explaining its meaning; this goal frequently requires putting what has been described in a context in which its antecedent factors can be identified. It also means illuminating the potential consequences of practices observed and providing reasons that account for what has been seen. (p.95)

In the thesis, I supplied the description, an account of the relevant events of my student and teacher education. Due to the limitation of space, the readers of this paper cannot have access to those stories I have told in the thesis, but he/she will be able to grasp them as I reconstruct their meanings. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) call this process of reconstruction "the transition from field text to research texts" (p.423). This is how they distinguish both types of texts:

Field texts need to be reconstructed as research texts. (...) They are the texts of which one asks questions of meaning and social significance. (...) Field texts are not, in general, constructed with a reflective intent; rather, they are close to experience, tend to be descriptive, and are shaped around particular events. (...) Research texts are at a distance from field texts and grow out of the repeated asking of questions concerning meaning and significance. (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994:423)

The marker events of my educational history were told in story form. My choice of these marker events followed a language-based criterion because, as I recovered (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) those past events of my life as a student, teacher and researcher, I looked for the role and significance that language played in them. This language-based criterion is also derived from my past experiences as a student, teacher and researcher of language. The emergent overarching themes also relate to my education. What follows, now, are interpretations of those events, evaluative accounts for the stories. These accounts, thus, are not the stories, but my "research text" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994) - a text where I attempt to explain the meaning and to illuminate potential consequences of the relevant themes that emerged from the marker events of my educational history.

I have constructed a metaphor that conveys this self-reflective process - *lying under the mango tree*⁵. Like one's history, a tall mango tree takes years to grow. Lying under my own history represents my process of reflection upon it.

3. Lying under the mango tree: a dialogue with my stories

My educational experiences as a child provided me with very few opportunities for reflective thinking. The marker events in this early phase of my life evoke the general atmosphere of oppression in Brazilian society during the sixties under the military dictatorship. Oppression and a lack of a critical view of that world permeated my life. This is evident from school commemorations on Labor Day during which the working class was treated exotically and superficially. Oppression also occurred in the lack of encouragement to think, and the influence of a bad Catholicism practiced in Sunday schools, kindergarten, and the Junior High where I taught. The lyrics of the "Hymn of the Academic Youth"⁶ sound so ironic to me when considered from this contextual perspective, particularly two verses: "Thou art the Nation's lovely hope", and "Over thee stands the faith of Brazil". I wonder if educators and responsible institutions knew what they were doing to us as children. How could we become the nation's "lovely hope" and honor "the faith of Brazil standing above our heads"? How were they responding to our activities as children so that they could promote our individual growth?

When discussing the role of the elders' responses to children's activities in his "My Pedagogical Creed", Dewey⁷ (1897) insists that:

⁵ Also see Telles, 1997a for the significance of metaphors in teacher thinking, and Telles, 1997b, 1997c, 1998 for teachers' video-biographies, a kind of Arts Based Research.

⁶ "Sois da Pátria esperança fagueira. Branca nuvem de róseo porvir. Do futuro levais a bandeira, hasteada a frente, a sorrir. Mocidade eia avante, eia avante. Que o Brasil sobre vós ergue a fé. Esse imenso colosso gigante. Trabalhai por mantê-lo de pé"

⁷ Also see Dewey (1938)

True education comes through the stimulation of the child's powers by the demands of the social situations in which he [sic, the child] finds himself. (...) Through the responses which others make to his own activities he comes to know what these mean in social terms. The value which they have is reflected back to them. (Dewey, 1897:5-6)

3.1. Unquestioned pedagogies: the perpetuation of models

Today, I wonder what was the effect on my thinking and growth when a Catholic nun thought I was psychologically suspect because I could not grasp, at the age of six, what she meant by Jesus Christ being located in the holy host. What was located in her unquestioned pedagogy?

The Labor Day ceremonies of my past as a student prompt me to think that there was no attempt to show us children that there were differently imposed hierarchies among the professions in our society. The social circumstances of that time were taken as a given. They were taken as natural and not naturalized (Clark et al., 1990, 1991; Fairclough, 1992 a e b). School reproduced and perpetuated conservative, prejudiced models and the oppressive status quo of Brazilian society at the time. This was done through the organization, for example, of commemorations such as Labor Day's. They promoted the perpetuation and not questioning of the roles of male and female among the professions. A painter should be a girl. Children's questioning caused uncomfortable feelings ("Is your brother mentally ok?", said the nun to my sister). There was hypocrisy and absurdity in what was professed through the lyrics of the anthems and the content of poetry recited by the children.

3.2. A price and a reward for resistance

My idea of resistance is closely linked to Davies' notion of *competing stories* in which "teachers attempt to live out their teaching in new ways, ways suggesting a new paradigm" (Davies,

1995:55). She also discusses the moral obligations when these competing stories are nurtured and lived out within our institutions. As I recovered my past academic and teaching experiences, I perceive my moral obligations and my attempts of breaking away from oppressive education and of living out competing stories as a student and teacher. The following are a few examples of these competing stories (or resistance).

As a young man and newly graduated teacher at twenty-one, I found myself struggling against the institutional framework of a Jesuit catholic school. I wanted to introduce my students to what I thought to be a critical education, of which I was deprived as a child. As a young teacher, I was still looking for it. I wanted my students to voice their opinions about their learning process, at least. That was an opportunity I did not have and I wanted my students to have it. Instead, I saw the children polishing the apple for the teacher. And I was the teacher! I was the one who now held the power. However, I did not accept this power given to me by the educational institution. I did not want the work of my former teachers "to be eternal", as my student, Miguel, said. I went to talk to the Jesuit headmaster. Probably, in my own way, I was learning how to resist oppression by questioning and speaking back. My friend Nice and I (both at the age of eleven), learned how to resist when we skipped classes in 5th grade. At that early age, Nice and I learned the price for resistance when we were punished for stealing our school IDs from the student supervisor. As a young teacher, I was also learning the price for resistance when I was fired. There always seems to be a price for resistance, but there are rewards, as well. The actions of the Jesuit headmaster and my college teacher, for example, took me to a more progressive high school. There, I obtained a sense of myself as a professional in different ways. I was learning from both schools that the educational milieu shapes you as a teacher as much as you can shape it. I now know that the Jesuit headmaster did me an educational and professional favor when he fired me. I did not belong in that educational framework.

When considering this account of those stories told in the thesis, I think about what opportunities I had to break away from the kind of oppressive education I had as a child. Nice has been my friend since those days in 5th grade. Her presence (role) in my personal and professional life is also that of showing me what resistance is. Her failure in 5th grade and her later success as a scholar provides an example of the absurdities that abound educational institutions. We both say that "we have made it, despite our teachers and our education". The question that is left, then, is "how could we have made it?".

3.3. Chocolate, gurus, and their pedagogical care

A possible answer, I see, lies in the affective side of our families. My friend and I had in the elder members of our families certain models of resistance. My elder sisters, Zita and Lena respectively, resisted the Catholic authority of the nun, and the authority of the university rector who allowed the DOPS police access to students' records. Nice's sister, I remember, resisted the regime of our society through her "hippie" way of dressing and her readings of Sartre, Kafka, Hesse, and even (at that time of political oppression) Marx and Hegel. Although we were not reading them, we heard the elders talking about them. Nice and I emulated certain values from our families. When Zita, my sister, gave me another piece of chocolate when I admitted to having sneakily taken one from her chocolate box, she could have worked pedagogically in two different ways: she could inspire control over me, she could have turned me into a tattletail, depending on how I experienced it. However, Zita's pedagogical action worked on the contrary. She showed me the advantages of having the courage to account for my own actions. My sister Zita, in my case, was pedagogically clear when she gave me the chocolate. She told me the reasons why she was giving it to me. Here lies her *pedagogical care* (see van Manen, 1990, 1991). I remember my sisters constantly and bravely accounting for their actions, even if they had to confront the authority of my mother as a widow and head of the family. I cannot

remember having this kind of lesson or discussing this kind of issue at school. What we learned at school was meant to be for the future only, not the present (see Dewey, 1897).

3.4. Forbidden truths in basement libraries

Resistance to authority was also present in our theater group activities. We had two versions of the plays: one censored, for performing when the censors were present in the audience; and the original script, for performing when the oppressive hands of the military regime were not around us. Fortunately, we could know what they did not wish to hear. We had the "forbidden books" in the basement library of the theater where we used to rehearse. The library was really in the basement. And here I find this fact metaphorically important. We had to go deep into the basement to access certain forbidden truths. Again "they" did not want us to see what was to be seen. Theater activities became a way of freeing myself, resisting any kind of authority, even my mother's (she did not want me to be an actor, so she would cut my monthly allowance if I went to any theater rehearsal). I preferred being broke and doing what I wanted to do (theater), with the people I wanted to be. Theater activities were my first steps towards the thinking spaces that my primary school education should have supplied me.

There were times, however, when oppression could not be resisted and I found myself complying with it just by the fact of being silent. Lack of action is also an action. The story "Rifles with no Bullets", for example, describes a typical instance where I become a passive observer of physical violence when I was serving mandatory army service. The army officer who wanted to travel for free without wearing his uniform was also abusive. He was trying to use his status as a military officer to intimidate the ticket agent and delay the train with all its passengers in the station. He tried to escape, and that was when the beating started. However, once he was taken off the train, he could have been held by the sergeant and other police officers without the necessity of a beating. My friends

and I, in our roles, displayed the facade of intimidation. We were tall youngsters, dressed in green army uniforms, holding our rifles with bayonets on. But the rifles had no bullets and we, the "tall men in their uniforms", barely knew how to use them. What we fear may sometimes be imaginatively harmless, but we experience it as something harmful. What is shown on the surface is not what it is in depth - just like people, just like social relationships, just like the use of language in social interactions. There may be an infinite number of readings of that story. For me, however, a child who used to hold a position of one step behind my friend (Nice), afraid of being punished by the principal, finding about this facade of oppression can be considered an accomplishment. A further accomplishment is locating myself beside her to take up resistance.

There is one point in my narrative in which the events acquire a chronological order. I noticed it after I had "spread" the events throughout the narrative. That occurs after the story "Departures", when I leave home to go to the United States. Precisely, that was the phase of my life when, through my decisions, I start gaining more control over the directions I wanted to take. The decision to leave home was itself my first memorable act of independence from my family. It was also an act that would orient the rest of my life towards my experiences with different cultures, languages, and teaching.

3.5. A young teacher: the facade of my pedagogy

On one hand, I am fired from the Jesuit Catholic school because I try to open a channel of communication between my students and me, and because I questioned the unquestionable pedagogical practice of the school. On the other hand, I see myself unwillingly perpetuating certain models of oppression. As a teacher, I try to elicit a certain form of behavior from a boy who is poking his classmates and making distracting comments while everyone is trying to work. I oppressively intimidate this student through my institutionally granted power of academic evaluation (marks).

Ironically, I encounter his resistance through his violent verbal response which, not only was as oppressive, but also challenged my institutional authority as a teacher. Miguel, my student, was right again: *a teacher's work can be eternal*. Here I find myself replicating models of my former teachers. I must be aware of the negative side of my teaching in order not to perpetuate it onto my students.

My experiences of teaching at various affluent private schools in Brazil also made me more conscious of the class differences in the country. It also made me aware of the differences between my own social background and that of my students. The story of the mother who told her son to respect the gardener, the chauffeur and "even" the teacher is a typical instance in which such differences became evident. What else could I teach her son if she, herself, was so effective in her boy's upbringing? As a teacher of these affluent youngsters, I can now see myself at that time as a tool for the perpetuation of those class differences. I was a teacher who had experienced the culture of "América do Norte", and therefore, was considered the one to bring the best to the rich children in terms of the "Estilo de Vida Americano", the "American Way of Life" and of English language teaching, as well.

I cannot only examine the negative facets of teaching in affluent private schools in São Paulo, though. At Logos High School, for example, I had a wonderful space to develop professionally as a teacher of both English and Theater Arts. At least during its early years, Logos High School was concerned with developing its students' critical view of the world, but today I doubt the legitimacy of that concern, at least in regards to my EFL classes. The school had financial resources to provide us with current in-service education and valuable contact with teacher educators working in universities. Logos students had a special consideration for us, their teachers, since we could provide them with human elements which money and many of their parents could not: personal

individual attention, encouragement and care. Probably, this is what Miguel meant when he said that my work was "eternal".

4. Critical awareness of self, language and pedagogy: finding autobiographical connections

4.1. Critical awareness of self

The relationship between language teaching, authority and oppression has been my major underlying concern throughout this self-inquiry. Throughout the writing of my self-narrative, I was closely in touch with these phenomena of my search. I could have looked for answers and possible links through using a variety of research methodologies. However, I have given priority to qualitative modes of inquiry (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992), particularly Biography, Narrative Inquiry, and Heuristic Research, because they could account for my subjective involvement with the topics I chose to explore in my thesis work.

So many times during the research process I felt myself lost. However, I knew there was a strong personal commitment and involvement with my past. My past as a student, teacher and artist was linked to my focus of interest in the subject matter of my thesis - teacher education and critical language awareness. Intuitively, I sensed that many links existed. Making them explicit was the challenging task of the research itself.

This feeling of being lost, of anxiety, and search for personal meaning I found explained in the epistemology of Heuristic Research (Moustakas, 1990, 1994). I felt comforted in knowing that my research efforts could lead to discoveries of those links between myself as a person and teacher, and to what I searched in the topics of my thesis study. I became aware of the fact that there were links between my past experiences with oppression and authority, my language teaching, and critical language awareness. I was aware of

that fact, but not of its particulars. Polanyi considers human knowledge from the perspective of tacit knowing; that is, "we can know more than we can tell" (Polanyi, 1967:04). In my case, I knew that those links (the particulars, in Polanyi's terms) between my past as a student and my present as a teacher existed, but I could neither identify nor tell about them.

Moustakas (1990) illustrates this process of the researcher's personal involvement and search in a clear way when he talks about heuristic research:

From the beginning and throughout an investigation, heuristic research involves self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery; the research question and the methodology flow out of inner awareness, meaning, and inspiration. (...) My primary task is to recognize whatever exists in my consciousness as a fundamental awareness, to receive and accept it, and then to dwell on its nature and possible meanings. With full and unqualified interest, I am determined to extend my understanding and knowledge of an experience. I begin the heuristic investigation with my own self-awareness and explicate that awareness with reference to a question or problem until an essential insight is achieved, one that will throw a beginning light onto a critical human experience. (p.11)

As is characteristic of heuristic research, there is in my work a strong autobiographical connection between me, as researcher, and the phenomenon I became interested in investigating (Critical Language Awareness). I have experienced this phenomenon in vital, intense and full ways. This is what makes my study different from more strictly phenomenological ones. In the latter, the researcher needs not to experience the phenomenon, whereas in heuristic studies the researcher frequently also has a biographical connection with it (Moustakas, 1990:14). Such biographical connection arises from the oppressive and uncritical

context of my early education, my experiences with a second and third language (English and Japanese), and my experiences as a teacher and student. I believe these three realms of my life experiences coalesce in Language Awareness, that is, "conscious attention to the properties of language and language use" (Hawkins, 1984).

There is a transition, however, between Language Awareness and Critical Language Awareness. Such a transition occurs at the personal and professional levels of my life history. The production of this self-narrative has brought me to ask core questions regarding my own trajectory to Critical Language Awareness:

- what is the essence of becoming critical?
- what are some of qualitative aspects of this phenomenon?
- what do I mean, exactly, by "being critical"?

The origin of these questions probably lies in events such as when the Catholic nun became perturbed about my question about Jesus Christ fitting into the holy host. Being critical does not include only a natural curiosity in knowing the world around me. It also means knowing the power systems of the past, present and future that implicitly restrict my natural curiosity to know the world. It means to struggle for my freedom of questioning and my right to access the information and the education I need to grow. Such freedom can never be taken for granted. It must be painstakingly sought after in "forbidden basement libraries". It has to be conquered in the offices of authoritarian school headmasters and in the courage and support models of friends with whom we receive punishment for skipping the boredom of schools at that time. For me, the essence of becoming critical has been epitomized in my perception of the fluctuation of power throughout my past, present and future experiences. Becoming critical has been a personal movement towards four opposing directions: inward, outward,

backward and forward. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) have further explicated these four directions:

By inward we mean the internal conditions of feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, moral dispositions, and so on. By outward we mean existential conditions, that is, the environment or what E.M. Bruner (1986) calls reality. By backward and forward we are referring to temporality, past, present, and future.(p. 417)

Once I have been able to perceive myself experiencing oppression in these four directions, I can feel myself becoming critical.

4.2. Critical awareness of language

I assumed that, for Critical Language Awareness to be brought about in a language classroom, I first had to obtain my language teachers' perspectives of my past personal experiences and my social and professional environments. Subsequently, I had to consider the impact of these perspectives on my understandings of language and pedagogy. This is because I considered critical awareness of language as being side by side with my own views of the world and how I view language teaching. As a teacher educator interested in educating teachers towards critical awareness of language, I intuitively had to heighten awareness about my own and the other teachers' constructs (Kelly, 1955) and frames of reference (Mezirow & Associates, 1990) for understanding language. All these initial intuitions led me to search for a beginning in my own past stories, a beginning to my own self-understanding.

Being aware of language is not that difficult. This can be fostered by turning one's attention to the forms and use of one's own language or by simply learning or being in contact with a foreign language, as I did. The challenge lies in becoming critically aware of language. This requires the involvement of the individual's

perspectives of him/herself in relation to others and the social order in which he/she lives. Becoming critically aware of language requires major transformations of self-assessment, of personal and professional frames of reference (Mezirow, 1990). It requires a self-revisitation of one's personal theories (Hunt, 1980, 1987, 1992). I draw these conclusions from my very own personal case through my self-inquiry process. I had to turn to myself (inwards/outwards) and revisit my personal, educational and professional histories (backwards/forwards) in order to evaluate their roles in my process of growing personally and academically. Moustakas describes these processes as "self-dialogue" and "indwelling" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; Moustakas, 1990:16,24). Hunt (1987, 1992) also calls this an "inside-out approach", a bringing out of implicit theories and the qualities of experiences that remain out of conscious reach.

My participation in a foreign exchange program (AFS) at the age of seventeen provided me with the opportunity to experience a foreign language early in my life. The positive side of this experience was to learn a foreign language in a different cultural background and to know about (to confirm, I would say) the life of a different cultural community. It certainly provided me access to Language Awareness; that is, "conscious attention to the properties of [mine and my host country's] language and language use" (Hawkins, 1984). It also provided me with the opportunity to experience the cultural and financial differences between Brazil and the United States, my AFS host country. However, as a teenager, I was never critical in relation to my experience as a participant of a cultural exchange program. My personal and professional stories stress I did not have an education to be critical. By "critical education" I mean an education "to assess and reflect on presuppositions" (Mezirow, 1990:6); an education to view social practices as naturalized, as opposed to natural (Clark et al., 1990, 1991). Traveling to the United States as an exchange student was a young Latin American's realization of a dream. The dream of the beautiful upper class house in suburbia, and the magic of the 1972

Cadillacs and electric toasters. I literally "swallowed" middle class American culture along with its Mac Donald's, Dunkin Donuts, s'mores, root beers, ginger ales and Dr. Peppers.

Back to Brazil as a young teacher of English in my twenties, I would spread this culture through the textbook contents and my teaching in the classrooms. I would be considered not only the teacher who knew how to speak English, but as a person who had closely experienced the North American lifestyle. I was a perfect match for the needs of the affluent schools where I would be teaching after returning to my home country. North American middle class values mean added status to the Brazilian affluent classes. My language teaching at Logos High, for example, was merely focused on forms and techniques to achieve students' communicative competence. I never developed a critical approach to the content of the expensive imported books that I adopted in order to show cultural, economic contrasts. Rather, I explored textbook language and content in terms of target language standards to be achieved.

In summary, I doubt that American AFS students who had similar experiences with exchange programs living with Brazilian host families would have experienced similar repercussions in their professions. In this way, my "cultural exchange" experience did not reach the professed targets of the program. Although I cannot deny the positive facets of living in a different culture, I nowadays perceive the "onesideness" of the alleged cultural exchange program. Cultural exchange suggests a dialogue among cultures. North Americans do not seem to welcome aspects of our culture as much as we allow theirs to intrude into our daily living. In my case, I allowed myself to experience a monologue - I did not retain my "own unity and open totality", I did not sense "mutual enrichment", except with my long lasting relationship to this day with the members of my American host family. Bakhtin (1986) discusses "the dialogic encounter of two cultures" in the following way:

A meaning only reveals its depths once it has encountered and come into contact with another foreign meaning: they engage in a kind of dialogue which surmounts the closeness and oneness of these particular meanings, these cultures. (...) Such a dialogic encounter of two cultures does not result in merging or mixing. Each retains its own unity and open totality, but they are mutually enriched (p.7, my emphasis)

In regards to the impact of my experiences of living abroad over my knowledge of languages, I believe that my contact with a third foreign language, Japanese, worked towards enhancing my language awareness. After returning to Brazil and entering graduate school, I remember that I constantly referred to my Japanese language experience when looking for examples in one of my first courses on Discourse Analysis. For example, the stories of my experiences in Japan contain examples of Grice's (1975) conversational maxims and perlocutionary acts; and of Leech's (1983) maxim of politeness. My experiences as a learner of the Japanese language and culture frequently functioned as rich sources of linguistic data. I paid attention to the properties of language and language use, but I was only starting to be critically aware of language.

I recall Nice's farewell message given to me on the day I departed for the United States at seventeen. I have included it in my self-narrative with her permission (see Telles, 1996:24). The reason for including it was to demonstrate that, in spite of our education, it was possible to have both a controlled and artistic use of language at that age. Through this beautifully written farewell message, I can read the "unsaid" of what she said. Nice managed her written discourse by not expressing what she meant to say to me on the day of my departure. At seventeen, she articulates the language of her message consciously and skillfully in order not to fall into common genres of farewell messages. I remember her constantly saying "why should we say things in the 'normal' way if we can mean them

differently?" In that brief farewell message, I could read the love, tenderness and the pain of our separation. The message is full of wonderful metaphors of rag dolls, dresser drawers, blue jacket pockets and "invented" afternoons. In sum, the point I wish to make here is the fact that, at that early age (seventeen), and in spite of our schooling, we were using language in very special, artistic and emotional ways.

Denzin (1992) discusses the writing of emotionality. Like Barone (in progress) and Diamond (1997), this encouraged me "to write emotionally" and to make use of artistic, visual devices in the structuring of my self-narrative. Its graphic and visual organization (it had colored and black and white pictures beside the stories) also constitutes a language that accounts for the "ineffable" (Denzin, 1992) aspects of my narrated experiences. This is how Denzin (1992), when discussing Bergman's motion picture "Persona", explains the use of these artistic resources in the expression of the ineffable:

Even if the ineffable cannot be expressed in words, it can be expressed in the face, in the eyes, in the gestures, in the silences that join. These visual and heard representations express my emotionality. What is seen and then felt is itself anchored in historically specific fields of experience that move outward from the person into collective and personal time.
(p.26)

The narrated events in "mystory" (Ulmer, 1989) were not meant to follow a chronological order. Those events have been textually represented in the way they are found in my mind. These stories are in a state of constant coming and going. I either willingly or reluctantly exhume them from under my mango tree. Borrowing Denzin's (1992) metaphor, they are the background of the different personae, the masks that I wear as I proceed with my living as a graduate student, a language teacher, a lover, a friend, an acquaintance, a passer-by in the street. These stories are texts that I

call upon for performances. I, again, refer to Denzin (1992) to explain this non-linear dimension of "mystory":

These texts, however, ought not be constructed under the hegemonic system of naturalistic realism; for life is not lived realistically, in a linear manner. It is lived through the subject's eye, and that eye, like a camera's, is always reflexive, nonlinear, subjective, filled with flashbacks, after-images, dream sequences, faces merging into one another, masks dropping, and new masks being put on. In this world called reality, where we are forced to react, and life leaks in everywhere, we have nothing to hold on to but our own being. (p.27)

4.3. Critical awareness of pedagogy

My students and their powerful messages that were presented in my self-narrative tell me that I have not been a teacher who only teaches the content of the subjects I have been assigned to teach. They point at certain human qualities of the pedagogical way I behave in the classroom. van Manen (1990) associates these qualities found in teaching with those found in the parenting experience in terms of a "pedagogical care", and "pedagogical tact" (1991). In the story, "Tell me again what I have to do", I depict myself as a kindergarten child waiting to be picked up after school. The story illustrates a child lacking in self-realization and decision making. This child knows that nobody will pick him up and he will have to go home by himself, even though he expects to be picked up. Given the oppressive, adverse conditions in which I was raised within the Brazilian socio-political and academic context of the sixties and seventies, I am left with a challenging question in my search to know about myself as a language teacher. That question is "How could I, as a teacher, have come to acquire those qualities of (language) educator that are suggested in my students' messages?"

In "An Apple for My Teacher", Rubin (1987) presents famous writers discussing their former writing teachers. Most of the authors provide positive memories of the teachers who influenced their lives, and encouraged them academically. My story, however, is different from those writers. I have not been able to provide such positive images of my former teachers and my schooling. I have no flowers for my former teachers⁸. I never wanted my students to experience the empty pedagogy of my childhood school years. Doing everything differently from my former teachers has been one of the strategies I have found useful as a means of not perpetuating their teaching models. Breaking away from the pedagogical models of my past has meant allowing more space for more critical and reflective learning and teaching to occur. It has also meant focusing my attention on the personal, affective side of my students along with their language learning processes. Critical, reflective learning and teaching were hardly if ever evident in my past schooling experiences. I had to search for alternative models and experiment in my classrooms. This search through experimentation helped me to shape ways of teaching that reflected my beliefs about and my experiences with language. Another strategy of mine, to break away from models of my former educators, has been to maintain a constant and critical attitude in relation to my own teaching. This critical stand is based on frequent assessment of the results of my work and of my student's responses to it. This critical stand has also proven to be effective in keeping me attentive to aspects of my teaching that can be "mis-educative"⁹ (Dewey, 1938) and to which my students and I cannot attend at the moment our experiences occur in the classroom. van Manen (1990) illustrates how this critical stand in the form of self-assessment, questioning and doubting constitutes the essence of pedagogy. He relates teaching to his own experience of parenting:

⁸ In Brazil, the equivalent to children's bringing apples is to bring flowers to teachers.

⁹ "Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience." (Dewey, 1938:25)

So, when living side by side with adults, children soon prompt increasingly reflective questions. In other words, as soon as we gain a lived sense of the pedagogic quality of parenting and teaching, we start to question and doubt ourselves. Pedagogy is this questioning, this doubting. (van Manen, 1990:147)

Furthermore, the written messages from my students that I have collected over these years suggest a possible discontinuity from the past models of teaching that were presented to me as a student. But how could a discontinuity from such strong models have occurred? The autobiographical connections presented in this paper acquire more significance to my profession when they lead to possible answers to this pedagogically related question. This question is particularly relevant because Critical Language Awareness is not merely a matter of lesson content, but of pedagogy as well (see McKenzie, 1992; Clarke & Smith, 1992; Lancaster & Taylor, 1992). In this case, I could talk about a teacher's critical awareness of his/her pedagogy. "Content and pedagogy in critical language study must go together" (Maher & de Moraes, 1993:108) Such connection between language lesson content and teaching has led me to place my research interests within the borders of Linguistics and Language Teaching Education. van Lier (1992) points at this inter-connection between linguistics and education when discussing the Language Awareness (LA) innovation at the teacher education level. I share his idea that, "to educate teachers in LA, it is necessary to have expertise in both linguistics and education" (van Lier, 1992:92).

5. Denouement: a portrait of a person-teacher

In the process of heuristic research, Moustakas (1990, 1994) refers to a synthesis of the essential descriptions and meaningful interpretations of one's experiences as a "composite portrait". The "composite portrait" that follows, therefore, represents "the core qualities or meanings" (Moustakas, 1994:39). It

is a synthesis of my experiences in becoming a teacher and teacher educator, and of becoming more self-conscious about and critically aware of myself, my "life-world", my teaching and the languages I teach. Unlike Richardson (1992), my poem presents my own self-interview, not just that of another.

COMPOSITE PORTRAIT OF A PERSON-TEACHER

Gracias a la vida, que me ha dado tanto. Me dió el sonido y el abecedario. Con el las palabras que tiero y declaro. Madres, amigos, hermanos, y luz alumbrando. La ruta del alma del que estoy amando.

From the song "Gracias a la Vida",
by the Chilean singer and composer Violeta Parra)¹⁰

*The first time that they tried to explain me the world
They tried to do it under the badge of Cristo Sanctum and Mater
Dolorosas
They tried.*

*I had not been fully convinced and felt very suspectful, but
They told me I was abnormal, so
I accepted their explanation and respectfully kissed their hands for
their blessings
They succeeded.
I was a child.*

*The next time that they tried to explain me the world
They tried to do it under the badge of discipline and schooling
They tried.*

*I played hooky, got low grades and hung around with a pariah, but
They (through my Math teacher) told me I was trash, so*

¹⁰ "I am grateful to life. It has given me so much. It has given me the sound and the alphabet. With them the words I weave and declare. Mother, friends, brothers and sisters, and the light shining. The route of the soul of my beloved one".

*I accepted their explanation and became an average student with average grades
They succeeded.
I was an older child.*

*The next time that they tried to explain me the world
They tried to do it under the badge of army discipline and bullets in my pockets
They tried.*

*I did not do anything, I plunged into silence
They told me I was one of the best soldiers and I got an award for it
I accepted their explanation and remained silent with my medal
They succeeded.
I was a teenager.*

*The next time that they tried to explain me the world
They tried to do it under the badge of the fraternity of an international student exchange program
They tried.*

*I learned English and sang songs about love and peace among the peoples
They told me I was an exemplar young ambassador of Brazil
I accepted their explanation and became a teacher ambassador of North America in my "underdeveloped", "less developed", "third world" country
They succeeded.
I was a teenager.*

*The next time that they tried to explain me the world
They thought I was already quite adjusted to it and needed no more explanations
They did not try anymore.
Now I was the one who had to explain the world
Under my very own badge of a teacher
I taught good classes and improved my language teaching skills*

*My students progressed, scored high in TOEFL and IELTS
I was promoted and received higher salaries
They told me I was a good professional
I accepted their explanation, but did not quite understand
Under what badge I was teaching.
I was a young man.*

*The next time I tried to find an explanation to the world myself
I waved my wings and flew towards the rising sun
I tried.*

*I found many different explanations, but none of them seemed to
satisfy me
I did not accept them and realized I had to search more
I waved my wings and flew back home.
Though they were few, this time the explanations were my very own.
I was becoming a man.*

*The next time I tried to find an explanation to the world myself
I realized that I did not need to go anywhere to find it
It is here, within me
I am the one who has to confront with the stale badges under
which I teach*

*I wait for no one to pick me up in kindergarten
I find my way Home.
I want to work with other teachers who teach my Brazilian
Portuguese
I can rest under the shade of the mango tree
I understand more what lies beneath it*

*I am a man now, but I have been flying over many turbulent seas
to find that out.*

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