△ D E L T A

Artigos/Articles

Teaching to Learn: Ways of experiencing the practicum, teacher education and development

Ensinar para Aprender: Modos de experienciar a prática, educação de professores/as e desenvolvimento

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ABSTRACT

This paper draws on findings from three interrelated research projects to analyze ways of experiencing the practicum, teacher education and development from an interventionist collaborative perspective. The shared fundamentals are 1) learning and development are societal-historical activities inherent to the nature of human beings; 2) being and identifying are functions of our total life, not only of episodic engagement with some task; 3) knowledge and knowing are integral to human active engagement with the world. Results indicate how different forms of participation

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provide opportunities for colearning and for developing critical reflexivity, ethical attitude, (pre)professional confidence and autonomy.

Keywords*: Teaching to learn; experiencing the practicum, teacher learning and development.*

RESUMO

Este artigo explora resultados de três projetos de pesquisa que analisam maneiras de vivenciar a prática, a formação de professores e o desenvolvimento, a partir de uma perspectiva colaborativo-intervencionista. Os princípios compartilhados pressupõem: 1) aprendizagem e desenvolvimento como atividades sócio-históricas inerentes à natureza humana; 2) ser e identificar-se como funções da vida que se vive, não somente frutos do engajamento esporádico com algumas tarefas; 3) o conhecimento e o processo de conhecer como indissociáveis do engajamento ativo das pessoas com o mundo. Os resultados indicam que diferentes formas de participação oferecem oportunidades de aprendizagem colaborativa, reflexão crítica e atitude ética.

Palavras-chave*: Ensinar para aprender; maneiras de vivenciar a prática, formação de professores e desenvolvimento.*

Introduction

This paper draws on findings from three interrelated research projects to analyze ways of experiencing the practicum, teacher education and development from an interventionist collaborative perspective. The shared fundamentals are 1) learning and development are societal-historical activities inherent to the nature of human beings, that is, "through others we become ourselves" (Vygotsky 1931/1997:105); 2) being and identifying are functions of our total life, not only of episodic engagement with some task, i.e., teaching and learning have to be approached "through a lens that considers this participation in schooling as integral part of all the activities that a person simultaneously (synchronically) participates in" (Roth 2015:295); and 3) knowledge and knowing are integral to human active engagement with the world, meaning that "collaborative purposeful transformation of the world is core of human nature and the principled grounding for learning and development" (Stetsenko 2008:474).

Through the lens of Critical Discourse Studies and Sociocultural Activity Theory, we explore {coteaching|deliberative dialoguing} as an approach to enhance English language teacher education in public schools. Results indicate that the side-by-side participation of individuals sharing responsibility for students' learning while reflecting about the present and deliberating new future possibilities provides opportunities for colearning and for overcoming the historically existing boundaries between Campus and field-based experiences.

Working within Exploratory Practice (Allwright and Hanks 2009), an ethical and inclusive form of practitioner research that is aligned with the aforementioned fundamentals, our next experience illustrates how some written and oral genres practiced during the undergraduate initial teacher education program at PUC-Rio have been re-signified as learning and understanding opportunities. Excerpts from Exploratory Classroom Conversations, Narratives and Internship Reports show how future teachers develop their critical reflexivity, ethical attitude, (pre) professional confidence and autonomy.

Finally, we present a participatory action research project (Brandão and Streck 2006; Thiollent 2006, 2011) in which a group of university students (teachers-to-be) search for ways of helping learners who have a lower level of English than their classmates. The idea is not only to focus on the development of the learners' linguistic competence, but their learning strategies awareness. The study is also an attempt to develop methodology awareness. All the participants of the research are future teachers, so we expect that the participation in the project will contribute for the development of more collaborative, critical and creative language teachers.

Breaking away from the Ivory Tower: {coteaching|deliberative dialoguing} as an approach to enhance English language teacher education

The first experience we share is a leading project set up at different local public schools involving teacher-to-be and faculty members form the undergraduate English Language Teacher Education (ELT) Program at the State University of Londrina (UEL, Brazil), working together with school teachers throughout the school year. This specific initiative

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has been going on since 2006 and during this time things have changed a few times in response to the affordances and constraints under which the work takes place. However, the previously mentioned principle that participation in schooling is central to the being and the identifying of teachers, remains the same. The kind of teacher education we propose shifts perspective from teaching teachers how to teach to becoming teachers in the public schools.

What we mean to say is that the ELT Education curriculum and the method of knowledge production are two sides of the same process in the practice we praise: we learn to teach by teaching together beyond normative movements and predefined curricula. In other words, we teach at the "elbows of other teachers" (Roth and Tobin 2002) to learn "what is not yet there" (Engeström 1991), what is to come.

The germ cell of this endeavor relies on a societal-historical perspective of the nature of human beings which assumes learning and development to be the condition-and-result of the "*totality* of life, here with respect to the relations with others, and the societal nature of this relations" (Roth 2015:1). That is, learning and development are both fostered and constrained by the social roles and subjective positions we occupy within specific practices that, in virtue of our enactments, due to our engagement, can be transformed in the future-to-come. As argued by Mateus (2014:338),

> [a] teacher-to-be, for example, learns to teach by enacting the teacher position in situated practices where "being a teacher" is already partially conditioned by the (inter)actions that took place before her participation and that, nonetheless, in virtue of her actions, can transform a future act of participating. The action possibilities that exist for the particular future teacher within the particular practice she is engaged in are engraved in the history of social division of labor, power relations, gender, race, tools and rules, but, at the same time, are transformed by her power of acting, motives, intentions and personal histories. That makes us learners in relation to our own changing practices[4].

The concept of {coteaching|deliberative dialoguing}[5] is well documented in the works of its leading proponents Roth and Tobin

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4. Original text in Portuguese, translated by the authors.
5. The authors here mentioned use the term "cogenerative dialoguing" instead of deliberative dialoguing. More can be read in Mateus (2016).

(2001, 2004, 2005), Roth, Tobin, Zimmermann (2002), Roth (2005), Tobin (2006), as well in the local experiences (for example, Mateus 2005, 2009, 2013; Gimenez e Mateus 2009, El Kadri et al. 2017; Fiori-Souza and Mateus 2017).

What is critical to the present discussion is the fact that this teaching-and-learning activity framework demands participants full commitment to the production and sharing of knowledge among all members of the educational community and depends on formative-intervention-research-practitioner collaboration. Teaching-learning-researching-transforming are one single unit of action.

Teaching as participatory active inquiry and knowledge production depictured by this groundwork is driven by what needs to be learned to improve students' outcomes. The starting question is then "what is meaningful, and thus worth spending time on, given where our students are at and where they could go to? What is most likely to encourage students' power to act and to intervene in their realities with the language(s) we teach?". This calls for a couple of other questions both related to our own learning and actions: "what is important for us to know to help students getting there – at the here-and-now learning and at the future-to-come development? What are the interventions we are going to propose?". Finally, we look back and reflect on the process: "What learning can be assumed as result of the teaching and what are the implications for the future teaching?".
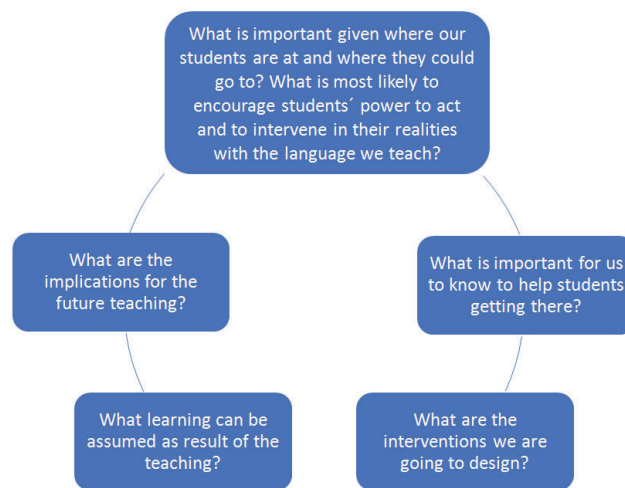

Figure 1 – Evidence based teacher learning cycle (Mateus forthcoming).

Lessons learned and their implications for ELT education praxis

There is nothing really new about the above depicted cycle in terms of questioning, analyzing, modeling and reflecting. Actually, this is a very well documented process in the reflective teacher literature. What our work highlights though is the place of participatory active inquiry and knowledge production as part and parcel of collaborative professional agency. This allows us to theoretically discuss the transformational relationship between the affordances, the positions collectively enacted by individuals and the practices that, in virtue of their occupancy of these positions, they engage in. Based on our {coteaching|deliberative dialoguing} experience we define agency as beyond the skin, beyond the individual motivation. Agency is a collective, emotional and willful decision to go beyond a given contradictory situation and put into practice by the involved social actors.

In terms of epistemological and methodological contributions, the documented twelve-year experience also brings evidence that what we know about teaching and how we come to know what we know results from our engagement in dialogical and practical transformation efforts, in line with all the cultural, historical and social challenges we face in the day-by-day classroom context. In this sense, activism is not a given possibility, but a situated, willful, practical and collective struggle.

And finally, in practical terms we also learned that by participating side-by-side and by sharing responsibility for students' learning while reflecting about the present and deliberating new future possibilities, we cherish better opportunities for us to learn and to develop professionally, emotionally and in so many other ways.

The experience reported in the next section, also illustrates how collective engagement in exploratory practice fosters mutual development.

'Work for Understanding' in Teacher Education: the contribution of Exploratory Practice

This section addresses how 'work for understanding', a central notion to Exploratory Practice (Allwright and Hanks 2009), was

integrated into our initial language teacher education program, at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio, Brazil). When it became clear to us, as the teacher-educators, that there was a conflict between our non-technicist philosophy and the teacher learners' wishes to be taught 'teaching techniques', we felt the urge to invest even more heavily in the central notions of Exploratory Practice and highlight its focus on 'understanding'. Thus, we brought the critical, investigative, ethical and inclusive pedagogy of Exploratory Practice to our pre-professional context.

The practicum courses appeared to be the best occasions to start implementing this innovation by incorporating the Exploratory Practice principles, the Five Propositions about Learners as well as such novel concepts in Exploratory Practice as 'learning opportunities', 'planning to understand', and 'quality of (classroom) life', among others (Allwright 2005, 2006; Gieve and Miller 2006, respectively). Drawing from our experience in contexts of language teaching-learning, in which language teaching and learning can be conceptualized as 'work for understanding' done by learners, teachers, coordinators, supervisors, (school) psychologists, etc. (Miller et al. 2008), we started to re-signify our language teacher education context, assuming that initial teacher education could also become a *locus* for developing 'work for understanding', to be done by language teacher-learners and their teacher educators.

The Exploratory Practice principles helped us reorient our actions in order to make sure that

> [W]e work for understanding by *involving everybody*, by purposefully *bringing people together*, because we believe in fostering *mutual development*. Since Exploratory Practice is also based on the desire to *make the work for understanding indefinitely sustainable*, *integration* of the investigative attitude into pedagogy or other professional practices has become a fundamental driving force in the framework. (Miller et al. 2018)

Another reorientation pushed us to forefront Allwright and Hanks' (2009) view of teachers and students as *learners* and to become more aware of ourselves as teacher educators and of teacher-learners as *learners* and as key developing practitioners of learning. These ideas are present in the following adaptation of the five propositions:

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1. Teacher-learners are *unique individuals* who learn and develop best in their own idiosyncratic ways.

2. Teacher-learners are *social beings* who learn and develop best in a *mutually supportive environment*.

3. Teacher-learners are capable of taking *learning seriously*.

4. Teacher-learners are capable of *independent decision-making*.

5. Teacher-learners are capable of *developing as practitioners of learning*.

(Adapted from Allwright and Hanks 2009:7)

As Miller and Cunha (2018:) have pointed out, "these propositions stand as a *manifesto* in favor of both students and teachers as practitioners of learning." We argue here that the same can be said about teacher-learners and teacher educators. These propositions systematize attitudes of respect, trust, care for individuals' idiosyncrasies and autonomies, as well as strong beliefs in collaboration among social beings. Just as students and teachers generally tend to mistrust their capacities, teacher-learners also believe that "they are not ready to teach" because "they don't know everything". It has been our intention to deconstruct these notions moving in the direction of 'working for understanding' rather than of 'working to know'. It is our hope that, if novice teachers manage to adopt such ethical and reflexive attitudes about themselves, their colleagues and their students, Exploratory Practice will have offered them "a viable alternative to technicism" (Allwright 2008:143). We have acted in this way inspired by our and Allwright's belief that "the human quality of life" in the pre-service years will provide future teachers with a "strongly supportive atmosphere" that will encourage them to accept people's "essential vulnerability" and also help them feel "reasonably confident" to "survive into the profession" and well beyond, without having to "succumb to technicism".

Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities in Teacher Education

The Exploratory Practice discursive and pedagogic actions for understanding (Barreto et al. forthcoming; Miller and Cunha 2017) have also been adapted as Potentially Exploitable Pedagogic Activities in our teacher education context. Not only do we integrate our discursive work for understanding in our classroom discussions and readings, but we have also been systematically exploiting three genres that are typical in Practicum courses. We are referring to 'Exploratory' lesson plans, 'Exploratory' final papers, and 'Exploratory' practicum reports, as the most salient examples of genres that characterize teacher education practices and that can be re-signified as learning and understanding opportunities. The excerpts below, one from each of these genres, illustrate discursive 'work for understanding' in action.

'Exploratory' lesson planning

In response to the question "What did you *understand* about your planning?", the teacher-learner is discursively working to understand her process of learning to plan. She describes how she changed her plan several times, how she reacted to her colleagues' and the teacher educator's contributions.

> *"I changed my mind, changed things and presented my ideas to Inés and my classmates on Friday. Everything was well accepted, but the game was not seen as good idea. I got an explanation about why they thought this was not the best approach. I wish I was more prepared about what I should NOT do in class. Nevertheless, I made another adaptation and turned the game into an activity."* (A.C.S.2017)

The teacher-learner's reflection indicates a wish for technicist orientations or prescriptions, but she seems to also begin to understand the possibility of planning and adjusting plans endlessly, following a personal and collective rationale. Even in this short excerpt, one can see a movement from the notion of practicum planning as 'performing and showing off' to in-progress thinking *and* collaborative lesson planning.

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'Exploratory' final papers

When asked to elaborate a final paper on their practicum experience, we have asked teacher-learners to answer such reflective questions as "What did you *understand* about your own teaching?"

> *"Nevertheless, if things had not worked out that well in terms of timing, we would have lost a great opportunity to work with their interests because of the didactic material. Maybe if we were not constrained by the obligation of using the book, we could have discussed with them which artists they would prefer to see in class, and maybe take even more than one biographical text to work with."* (Y.B.2017)

The speculative nature of this excerpt shows a reflective maturity that characterizes many of the texts in these groups. We believe that it is the effort to foster 'puzzlement' (Hanks 1999) rather than 'problem-solving' that may have helped this particular future teacher to think of possible alternatives as an imaginable appraisal of the pedagogic situation. Her critical posture is also very subtly expressed, as she moves from expressing certainties to tolerating *and* accepting uncertainties.

'Exploratory' **practicum** *reports.*

By working within the Exploratory Practice framework, we believe to have transformed bureaucratic formal reports into very personal and reflective texts. Writing impersonal reports is something that these teachers will certainly learn to do as their careers unfold but taking the opportunity to compose a text that manages to capture the emotions felt in a pre-professional experience appears to offer much more worthwhile personal learning moments.

> *"I have a constant fear of not being able to be a good teacher, not being able to put into practice everything that we reflect about and learn in the classroom, end up following the same failed system instead of going against it. But when I enter a classroom I feel certain that this is what I want to do for the rest of my life. I fought, I ran away, but I am happy inside a classroom, even with all the shouting, the mess, some headaches and having to balance the curriculum with reflection."* (A.P. B.2017)

By accepting her own vulnerability, this future teacher is brave enough to express a "constant fear" of not being able to perform as a good teacher. She also imagines herself not having the necessary strength to succumb to the system. Paradoxically, she finds "quality of life" and "happiness" in the classroom, despite the messiness, the worries and the struggle to integrate reflection into teaching. This authorial excerpt, written by a future teacher who is not particularly verbal in class discussions, suggests that Exploratory Practice may have helped her to perceive the dialectic between understanding teaching and learning as de-humanized 'work' *and* welcoming teaching and learning as part of human 'life'.

The next section presents the third project that shows teaching to learn can also promote equity, resistance and collaboration.

Equity, Resistance and Collaboration

As far as a state university is concerned, more than prepare learners to act as professionals in the job market, it must transform them to influence over the reality where they will act, in a changing perspective, based on a critical view of this reality.[6] (Fávero 1996:56)

The third research project presented in this article attempts to combine equity, resistance and collaboration. Equity because the main aim of the research is to help learners that have a lower level of English than their classmates succeed in their ELT graduate course. "Equity is not simply the act of treating everybody as equal, but to make the unprivileged ones to have the same opportunities of growth as the rest of the society in which they live" (Cardoso 2018). As for resistance, as most of these learners have less privileged conditions and come from substandard quality schools, staying at university many times is much more difficult than entering it. Another kind of resistance is that our university has been fighting against a governmental movement which is trying to make it private, and in this way, reducing the chances of receiving more students like these ones in the future. The project is also an action of collaboration because we are teachers and learners

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6. Original text in Portuguese, translated by the authors.

working together searching for answers to our common puzzles (Allwright 2002). Here we will argue that this collaboration leads to the development of critical reflective teachers.

Teachers as researchers – The researchers are (future) teachers

Teachers are constantly searching for better ways of improving learners' knowledge. Hadley (2004) classifies teachers' constant reflections on their teaching in two groups: *reflection-in-action* and *reflection-on-action*. The first group, *reflection-in-action,* considers reflections and actions taken during classes and *reflection-on-action* as reflections and actions taken before or after the classes.

Liberali (2015) groups teachers' reflections in a different way, as *practical reflections*, *technical reflections* and *critical reflections*. According to Liberali (2015), *practical reflections* focus on more functional needs and are the ones mentioned by Hadley (2004). *Technical reflections* refer to assessment and/or change in the teachers' practice based on theory, in other words, trying to adopt theory to practice. As for *critical reflections,* Liberali (2015) considers when teachers are able to analyse their social and cultural reality and attempts to transform it. In relation to teacher development, the focus of our project is to develop critical reflections, which in our case are most of the time taken collectively. Learners involved in our project have the chance of understanding what reflective teaching is by really experiencing it.

The chance of developing a more reflective view towards language teaching was facilitated by the nature of the research. We adopted a qualitative approach and applied a specific kind of action research: *participatory action research* (Brandão and Streck 2006; Thiollent 2006).

> Participatory research is social research, but at the same time it represents educational action. Thiollent (2011) includes as one of the most important aspects of this kind of research the interaction between the different agents (participants of the research). From this interaction, results the order of priority of the problems to be analyzed and the solutions to be implemented as concrete actions (Cardoso, 2018).

In the case of our study, the research participants are not only the learners who need language development, but also the others who will act as teachers and monitors. There are no research subjects; we are all agents of change.

Our participatory action research was structures using Bortoni (2008)'s representation of the relation between the teacher-researcher's reflection and action as a model (see Figure 2).
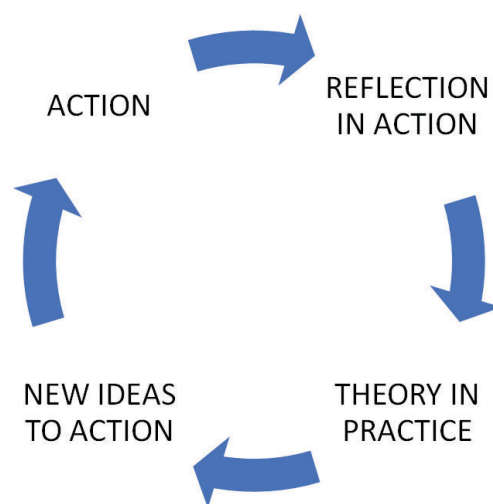

Figure 2 – The relation between the teacher-researcher's reflection and action (Bortoni-Ricardo 2008:48)

From reflection to action

We started with a first *puzzle* (Allwright 2002): to understand why so many students had failed in 2013. By talking to learners and analysing the results of the university entrance examination, we were able to conclude that they did not have the same educational opportunities as their classmates, especially for studying English.

This understanding led to a new puzzle: to find ways of developing these learners' communicative competence and at the same time develop all participants' methodology awareness. We also noticed that these learners' needs were not always related to language, but also personal, such as lack of time or motivation, and difficulties to understand or

adapt to the new environment (the university). The students who acted as monitors or teachers in the project had to take all these needs into consideration.

Our idea is to develop learner autonomy (Freire 1998), by following Scharle and Szabo (2000)'s approach, considering autonomy as a process, not a final product. "We believe that if learners were aware of their different styles, they would be able to choose learning strategies more adequate to different activities" (Cardoso 2018). In the project, identification of learning styles and the development of *learning strategies* (Cardoso 2016; Cardoso et al. 2015; Oxford 1990, 2017) have been done indirectly, while our attention has turned to language development.

We consider interaction (Silva 2011) essential for the success of the project. To assess the whole process and exchange experiences and ideas, learners involved as teachers or monitors meet at least once a month. Besides, the communication between the coordinator and other participants is constant, specially by *WhatsApp*. In other to discuss issues related to the study, publicize its results and organize events and future actions, we have created a research group: *EAL*[7]. Nowadays the research group consists of teachers who work with different languages and learners from graduate and post-graduate courses.

Positive results

The results of the project have been very positive, with less dropouts and better grades. Each year the project receives about four scholarships from different public institutions and counts with at least four graduate students as volunteers.

As for teacher development, it is possible to observe two very positive results. First, the learners involved in the project as monitors or teachers have understood that Freire's view that "we learn while we teach". In the excerpt below, one of the monitors show how the project has been important for her development.

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7. www.eal.net.br

It is important not only for helping me to clear up students' doubts and overcome their weaknesses, but also for developing my own English language skills. Monitoring was a two-way street: while helping others, we also learn, to explain a grammar topic, for example, we have to study it before and find a better way of helping these learners. (M1.2015)

As for the next example, the participant states how important the project was to their career as a language teacher.

When it comes to the role we play as monitors, the project is being fundamental, making us students and future teachers more critical and creative. According to the saying "who teaches learn twice," we have actually experienced this phenomenon. (M4.2015)

Second, these same learners have been able to apply what they have learned to other contexts, so the results are going beyond the project. The following extracts are from a participant who was already a teacher. She mentions how the reflections motivated by the project have affected the way she teaches.

With this result, I began to develop diversified classes that brought to the classroom something more dynamic and real for my students. (E1.2015)
I have proposed a questionnaire to my class at the school where I work, to understand and recognize different learning styles and to improve future classes and studies. (E1.2015)

The last example shows that M3 has rethought the whole learning process, recognizing the importance of taking learners singularities into consideration.

...we always hear about teaching strategies and very little about learning strategies. Often teaching becomes a one-way path that goes from the teacher to the student and not the other way around, and although it may work for some students, I have observed that it is not effective for everyone. (M3.2015)

By the constant process of reflection, these future teachers have had the chance of experiencing a more collaborative, critical and creative language learning process.

Final remarks

This paper is a result of our efforts to come together as members of the Teacher Education in the Applied Linguistics Study Group, at the National Languages and Linguistics Research Association – ANPOLL Brazil.

Despite our specific interests, particular contexts and different focus, we argue that different forms of participation provide opportunities for colearning and for developing critical reflexivity, ethical attitude, (pre) professional confidence and autonomy.

In the case of the {coteaching|deliberative dialoguing} the opportunities to learn are embedded in the co-extensive work between university and schools, which involves teacher educators, school teachers and teachers-to-be into collaborative critical inquiry. As stated by Roth and Tobin (2005:8), "the critical feature of cogenerative dialoguing is for the participants to create a collective responsibility for action and a shared sense of purpose".

All three experiences see "students and teachers as practitioners of learning" (Miller and Cunha 2018) and are examples of how collaboration can lead to the improvement of teachers and learners' quality of life.

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