

**AN EXERCISE IN QUESTIONING ONE'S OWN ACTION
FOLLOWING SMITH'S FRAMEWORK OF CRITICAL
REFLECTION***

**Um Exercício de Questionamento sobre o Processo de Reflexão
Crítica Pautado pelos Princípios de Smith**

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Abstract

This article presents an exercise of critical reflection the researcher carried out with a public school teacher, engaged in a programme of continuing education. The study focuses fundamentally on how the researcher, through questionings guided by the four forms of actions of critical reflection developed by Smith (1992), could contribute to the teacher's reflection on her own practice. The results show that the quality of the questioning and the way of conducting such questioning had a crucial role in the implementation of Smith's framework of critical reflection.

Key-words: *exercise of critical reflection; Smith's framework.*

Resumo

Este artigo apresenta um exercício de reflexão crítica que a pesquisadora desenvolveu com uma professora do ensino público, participante de um programa de educação continuada. O estudo concentra-se fundamentalmente em como a pesquisadora, por meio de questionamentos pautados pelas quatro formas de ação de reflexão crítica, desenvolvidas por Smith (1992), contribuiu para que a professora refletisse sobre sua própria prática. Os resultados demonstram que a qualidade do questionamento e o modo como foram conduzidos tais questionamentos tiveram um papel fundamental na implementação desse quadro teórico para a reflexão crítica.

Palavras-chave: *exercício de reflexão crítica; teoria de Smith.*

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1. Introduction

There has been a lot of research in the area of teacher development that has focused on the understanding of teacher's practice from the perspective of critical reflection (Kemmis, 1987, quoted at Ramos, 2003; Zeichner & Liston, 1987; Liberali, 1999, 2000; Estefogo, 2001, among others). Given that, I would like, as a researcher and as a teacher educator of a programme of continuing education, to examine in more detail what this process of critical reflection is. My objective, thus, is to analyse my performance during a reflective session¹ with a teacher and see to what extent I can lead the teacher into a critical questioning of her practice. The theoretical background for this study is based on theories of critical reflection and on the Theory of Discourse Functioning. I intend to answer the following research question through an exercise in critical reflection on my performance:

How much could I, the researcher, through questionings guided by the four forms of actions of critical reflection developed by Smith (1992), help the teacher to reflect upon her practice?

This study is divided into four parts. The first part briefly presents the theoretical background. The second focuses on the methodological aspects. The third part approaches the interpretation and discussion of the data. Lastly, final considerations concerning the study are addressed.

2. Theoretical background

This study is grounded on the forms of critical reflection discussed by Smith (1992) and on the argumentative discourse sequences provided by Bronckart (1997). The two theoretical frameworks are summarized below:

¹ I used this term following Gitlin, Ogawa & Rose's (1984) concept of reflective session, which means that the participant can count on the other to be encouraged in the process of critical reflection, in the understanding of one's own actions, in the questioning and reconstruction of one's practice.

2.1. Smith's framework of critical reflection

Van Manen (1977:226), in his work *Linking ways of knowing with ways of being practical*, presents his conception of "levels of reflectivity". He draws a distinction between three levels of reflection: a technical, a practical and a critical one. The technical level of reflection focuses basically on theoretical knowledge while the practical one consists of an analysis of actions. The critical reflection comprises the other two kinds of reflection, and it analyses teachers' actions from a broader contextual perspective, involving "moral and ethical criteria into the discourse about practical action" (Zeichner & Liston, 1987:25). The third level of reflection resembles what teaching reflection looks like to Smith (1992:295), "a socially, culturally and politically reflective approach to teaching".

This study draws upon the third level of reflection and the understanding of its conception, based on Smith's (1992) notions of critical reflection. Smith (1992) argues that in order to make teachers disentangle the complex web of ideologies that permeate their teaching, they have first to focus on what constrains them or on what limits their practice and then start working in a way that they can change those conditions somehow. Teachers should start perceiving critically the way they are and how they find themselves within their context of action.

Therefore, they should engage in critical reflection, which according to Smith (1992), involves four forms of action: **DESCRIBING**, **INFORMING**, **CONFRONTING**, and **RECONSTRUCTING**. Reflection based on these four actions involves rethinking of naturalized teaching practices and deconstruction and reconstruction of those practices into new ones. Thus, Smith's (1992) four forms of actions are instruments used by the researcher in this study to carry out a reflective session with the teacher.

The four forms of action are briefly explained below:

- **DESCRIBING**: It is the starting point of the reflective process. This form of action asks for answers to questions like "What do you do?" or "How do you do it?" as a way to organize the teaching events for further interpretation.

- **INFORMING:** The questions that intend to identify the principles that inform practice in a conscious or an unconscious way can be “What does it mean?” or “Why do you do that?”
- **CONFRONTING:** This action implies the questioning of actions from a broader socio-historical perspective. An example of a question that guides this form of action can be “How do you think your class contributed to promote the students’ awareness of their role in society?”
- **RECONSTRUCTING:** As a result of what is described, informed and confronted, there is a reorganization of actions. A question that exemplifies this form of action can be “How could you do this in a different way?”

2.2 Bronckart’s four sequences of argumentation

The Theory of Discourse Functioning, discussed by Bronckart (1997), offers four sequences of argumentation for the study of critical reflection and explains that the argumentative discourse gives one the possibility to externalise ideas and generate questionings of one’s actions. Liberali (2000:73) claims that Bronckart’s (1997) four sequences of argumentation may help researchers “to visualize the abstract models that organize critical reflection”². They are:

- **Description:**
 general contextualization of situation and actions
 Description of actions:
 detailed description of actions performed
- **Explanation:**
 explanation of procedures taken based on the understanding of theories
- **Point of view:**
 exposition of point of view and support of opinion

² The translations into English of fragments from works in Portuguese were made by me.

- Argumentation:
Conclusion or deal:
description of actions
contextualization and actions

Liberali (1999, 2000) also points out that Bronckart's (1997) four sequences of argumentation can be explained in terms of their linguistic characteristics, as follows:

- Sequence of description: use of examples, excerpts from conversations, use of the first person singular (to show involvement) or the third person (to show detachment), present or past tense verbs and verbs that indicate material processes;
- Sequence of description of actions: use of verbs that are related to material processes (like *write, erase the board*), present or past tense verbs;
- Sequence of explanation: use of explanatory expressions, use of terminology concerning theoretical knowledge;
- Sequence of point of view: use of expressions of opinion, verbs that refer to mental processes (*like, think, believe, know, understand, suppose, seem, notice*).

Given that Bronckart's (1997) four sequences of argumentation can be helpful in the examination of the process of critical reflection, they are, therefore, used to analyse how the teacher in this study constructs her argumentation along the questioning of her actions.

3. Methodology

This section is divided into three subsections. The first one presents the context of investigation of this study. The second introduces the two participants involved. Additionally, the third subsection describes the kind of data used in the study, and how data was collected and analysed.

3.1. NAP and The Open University Course

‘Universidade Estadual do Centro-Oeste do Paraná – UNICENTRO’ runs, along with the other public universities of the state of Paraná, a programme of continuing education, known as ‘Núcleo de Assessoria Pedagógica – NAP’, whose objective, in general terms, is to offer academic support to the state teachers of English.

In the year 2002/2003, ‘NAP/UNICENTRO’ ran a distance learning course for Teaching and Learning English called The Open University Course – OU course, prepared by the Open University UK, for teachers of English in primary and secondary schools in Brazil. The OU course was part of a joint project involving the Department of Education of Paraná, the British Council, and NAP/UNICENTRO.

The objectives of the OU course were to help teachers improve their knowledge and teaching of English as well as to offer them the opportunity to start reflecting on their practice. The OU classes consisted of discussions of methodological issues that the teachers were asked to carry out in their teaching contexts in the form of small teaching practices and then bring the results back to be discussed with the whole group in the classroom. At the end of the OU course teachers were also expected to plan and carry out up to three classes in their schools, involving any of the issues discussed along the course. They were asked to report on this lesson in a written assignment, which was assessed by the tutor (in this case, the researcher herself). Guidance was given along the course on how to carry out and present this assignment or, as the OU group used to call it, the project. Besides, additional tutorial classes were offered for the individual teachers to plan and discuss their projects.

Thus, taking the OU course as the context for this study, my objective was to have a reflective session with a teacher in order to see how much I, as the researcher, was able to guide the teacher into a critical examination of the work she had done as the final assignment of the course.

3.2. The participants

Data analysis of this study focused on the discourse movements of the researcher and a public school teacher, both described below:

The researcher: At the time I carried out this study, I was taking a discipline in Teacher Development in a post-graduation programme, and was also tutoring the OU course offered by NAP from August, 2002 to May, 2003, at the university UNICENTRO, in Guarapuava, Paraná.

The public school teacher: The participant of this study was a female teacher, with about ten years of experience in teaching English. She had a specialization course in the area of English Teaching, and had been a headteacher of a public school in town. She took part in the OU course, offered to eleven state teachers at NAP/UNICENTRO – Guarapuava, in the year 2002/2003, when I (the researcher) was tutoring. Before attending the OU course, she had attended the language course that was also offered by NAP/UNICENTRO for almost two years.

I chose the above-mentioned teacher as the participant of this study because she demonstrated great commitment to the tasks she had to carry out; she was, in fact, one of the most engaged teachers along the course, and showed a genuine enthusiasm for the profession. I also noticed that when we had individual tutorials for the planning of her final work, she was very open to talk about her teaching practice. Moreover, her project was a good piece of work.

3.3. Procedures for data collection

The teacher had to plan and carry out a project in her teaching context, as it was an evaluation task required at the end of the OU course. The lesson she gave was to the 5th grade (elementary school), and it was about adjectives that described characteristics of people. Her objective was twofold: a linguistic one and a social one, as the title of her project revealed: “Learning to be and to live together fostering friendship, respect and dialogue”.

Data for this research were drawn from a recorded reflective session, which lasted about one hour. The session happened a month after the teacher had developed the project.

To conduct the reflective session with the teacher, I used Smith's (1992) framework of four forms of action – **DESCRIBING, INFORMING, CONFRONTING, and RECONSTRUCTING**. By asking questions such as: 1) Describe – what do you do? 2) Inform – what does this mean? 3) Confront – how did you come to be like this? 4) Reconstruct – how might you do things differently?, I tried to lead the teacher throughout the session to reflect on the work she had done. During the conversation I tried to make the possible interrelations of the four forms of action, as they can be intermingled into one another.

3.4. Procedures for data analysis

For the analysis of the teacher's answers to my questionings, I followed Bronckart's (1997) four sequences of argumentation for critical reflection. This framework allowed me to systematize the data and to understand how the teacher externalised and explained her forms of actions. For the analysis of the questionings of my own actions, I used Smith's (1992) framework of four forms of action in order to see how I (the researcher) constructed my questionings to the teacher as well as to analyse to what extent I could help her to reflect over her actions.

4. Description and analysis of the data

The four forms of action for critical reflection work like a continuum. However, for the sake of organization in this study, I divided the reflective session into four stages – **DESCRIBING, INFORMING, CONFRONTING, and RECONSTRUCTING** – to better characterize them, as it is shown below.

I now present the description and analysis of the reflective session I carried out with the participant teacher and discuss to what extent I contributed to provide opportunities for the teacher to reflect

upon her practice. The four forms of action are presented in bold, enclosed in brackets and in capital letters, whereas the four sequences of argumentation are presented in italics, in brackets and in small letters.

Thus, this study intends to answer the already mentioned question:

How much could I, the researcher, through questionings guided by the four forms of actions of critical reflection developed by Smith (1992), help the teacher to reflect upon her practice?

4.1. DESCRIBING

DESCRIBING is the first form of action in the reflective process, according to Smith (1992), because it triggers reflectiveness. It is the stage for teachers to describe concrete events from the classroom and to organize their thinking and actions, which will work as a basis for analysis and questioning of their practice. By making questions like 'What did you do?' and 'How did you do it?', I provided opportunities for the teacher to start a process of reflecting on what she had done in class.

So, in the excerpt below, I present the action of **DESCRIBING**, as follows:

1. **T.: What did you do in the project? What was the content? (DESCRIBING)**
2. T.: The content + ³ I worked with adjectives (*sequence of description*)
3. **R.: What did you do? Describe how you developed it. (DESCRIBING)**
4. .: First + I put the adjectives on the board + I had a previous list + I repeated with them + I translated + Many times + I had them come up with the adjectives+ (*sequence of description of actions*)

³ The conventions used for the transcription of the data of this study were adapted from Hatch (1992), which are [overlappings; + pause; ++long pause.

5. **R.:** So + you had them come up with the adjectives? + **How come? (DESCRIBING)**
6. T.: I use a lot of mime in classroom.... (*sequence of description*)
7. **R.:** [Why? (INFORMING)]
8. T.: To make them notice + find out + I do not simply give the word ++ I use a lot of mime and they like it because we somehow become a kind of clown in class... (*sequence of explanation*)
9. **R.:** So, you do not simply give the word? **Do you find it important not to simply give the answer** + (DESCRIBING)
10. T.: + I use a lot of mimicry + and for the adjectives + it was a way I found + And then when they knew each word + they knew how to use them+ and they could already identify themselves with the words + so the next step ++ they had to choose + the characteristics they liked most in them and the ones they didn't + (*sequence of description of actions*)

In the excerpt above, the reiterated use of the pronouns ‘*What...?*’ and ‘*How...?*’, in turns 1, 3 and 5, showed my purpose in making the teacher describe her activities in class.

In turn 2, the teacher used a sequence of description to explain what she intended with her project, and in turn 4, she started **DESCRIBING** what she had done in class, by using verbs that denote material processes, like ‘*put, repeated, translated*’, through a sequence of description of actions.

In turn 5, I appropriated the teacher’s words and asked for more details about the way she had made the students find out the adjectives, and she started answering my question, as it can be seen in turn 6, but then, in my next turn, I interfered in her description to ask, the reasons for using mimicry in class. By asking “*Why?*”, as it can be shown in turn 7, I triggered the action of **INFORMING**, with the objective of having a view of the principles that grounded her classroom actions. The

sequence of explanation given by the teacher, in turn 8, implicitly revealed her concern with working in such a way that knowledge is co-constructed in class, *'to make them notice, find out'*.

Then, in turn 9, I tried to make this clear, so I reiterated what she had said and introduced once more the action of **DESCRIBING**, by asking *"Do you find it important not to simply give the answer?"*. However, after reflecting on my questioning to the teacher, I realized that I should have made more than simply confirming; in fact, I should have asked instead *"Why do you find it important not to simply give the word?"*. The "why question" would be a form of questioning that could lead the teacher to evaluate the so-called taken-for-granted practices of teaching. This would stimulate the teacher to question her actions and to engage her in the activity of analysing her work. Therefore, as the question in turn 9 suggested an action of **DESCRIBING** of actions, the teacher's explanation was limited to a description of her practical experience in class, as her answer demonstrated, in turn 10, *'and for the adjectives, it was a way I found'*. After this short comment, the teacher used a sequence of description of actions to go on explaining what she had done in class.

From the analysis of this segment, I noticed that the teacher could have deepened the reasons for her actions if I had, somehow, explored more her explanations in turns 7, 8 and 9. The teacher could have informed and confronted more her actions that originated from the action of **DESCRIBING** if I had made questions that established connections between the teacher's practice and teaching/learning theories. In this way, I would be helping her to move from the stage of description of her practice to the further stages, which would require the teacher to theorize her practice and to subject such theorizing to the level of questioning her teaching actions. The action of **DESCRIBING** was introduced to guide the teacher into organizing her actions, but it could work as a basis for deeper thinking and questioning as well. Thus, from this first stage I tried to conduct the questions towards the order of **INFORMING**.

4.2. INFORMING

INFORMING is the action in the reflective process used to ask for explanations of classroom action. I used questions like ‘*What was your objective?*’ and ‘*Why did you work more with speaking?*’. My purpose was to make the teacher think about and establish connections between her classroom actions and theories of teaching and learning. So, in the excerpt below, I present how I developed the action of **INFORMING** with the teacher, as follows:

- 13. R.: Did you say you worked more on speaking in class? What was the objective? (INFORMING)**
14. T.: + All the abilities are important for learning the development + But + I worked more on speaking... mimicry and they like it because we somehow become a kind of clown in class... (*sequence of explanation*)
- 15. R.: [Why did you work more with speaking? (INFORMING)]**
16. T.: [Because of communication + it is what they like most + and they do learn! + in our mother tongue + we learn first + after we learn to write + this is the same for English + isn't it? Well + + The practice is very important + the motivation is speaking, + it is a way to keep motivation high.... (*sequence of explanation*)
- 17. T.: [How was this practice with the adjectives? (DESCRIBING)]**
18. R.: Ah + first I made them practice the adjectives orally + after they wrote (*sequence of description of actions*) + And + they learn + + because the other teacher who is responsible for the group said that the students were always reminding the others about what they had learnt, about their actions towards the others + they learnt the qualities very well (*sequence of description*)
- 19. R.: How come? (DESCRIBING)**
20. .: + The teacher told me that in the following classes + they kept reminding the others of their attitudes + they really did + they continued that work + they said to the others + but “you are lazy, you are selfish ++ but you can't be like that

anymore ++ remember” ++ so they ended up using Portuguese with English + and so using the adjectives (*sequence of description*)

This excerpt shows that my questions from the order of **INFORMING**, “*What was the objective?*” and “*Why?*”, in turns 13 and 15, evidenced my interest in making the teacher ground her actions. The sequences of explanation used by the teacher, as can be seen in turns 14 and 16, are examples of the action of **INFORMING**, in which she tried to explain the procedures taken based on her understandings of the theories of language acquisition. But, as it is shown in turn 17, I ended up interrupting the sequence of explanation the teacher was developing, to ask for a description of her practices in relation to the use of adjectives, and so, I introduced an action of **DESCRIBING**. The teacher, then, answered how she dealt with the adjectives, using a sequence of description of her actions in class, and pointed out the good results of her work. Again, turn 19 is another example of the action of **DESCRIBING**. Once again, the teacher gave more details about the satisfactory feedback she had of her work and presented an example of the students’ talk to support her description.

In this segment, I tried to carry out the reflection based on the action of **INFORMING**, and what could be an exercise of this order, with the objective of making the teacher reveal the theoretical reasons that influenced her actions, ended up leading to an exercise of the order of **DESCRIBING**, in turns 17 and 19. Maybe, if I had asked a question such as “*Why did you work with the adjectives?*” instead of asking “*How was the practice with the adjectives?*”, I might have given the teacher more opportunities to think of and articulate the theories that permeate her discourse and that influence her actions, and, in this way, to explore her reasons for taking specific actions in class. As I have already said before, the action of **DESCRIBING** has a crucial role in this process of critical reflection, and I do not want to deny its importance; however, the process has to be led beyond this initial stage. Hence, in my next move, I tried to guide the teacher more to the order of **CONFRONTING**, following the steps suggested by Smith (1992).

4.3. CONFRONTING

CONFRONTING is the form of action, in the reflective process, which aims to lead to the questioning of teaching actions. My objective here was to confront what the teacher did in her project with what she thought about it in terms of educative results. Therefore, I used questions like “*You said that the students kept reminding the others about their attitudes?*” to make her see her actions in relation to the social nature of her teaching. So, in the excerpt below, I demonstrate the action of CONFRONTING, as follows:

21. **R.: You said that the students kept reminding the others about their attitudes? Do you think that your work was useful for that? (CONFRONTING)**
22. T.: Yes ++ I can understand that this work brought a kind of consciousness in terms of human relationship in class + Their relationship in class + with the teachers + and mainly with their colleagues got much better. The respect + the treatment to each other + I really think it was very good for their personal development (*sequence of point of view*)
23. **R. So do you think that your project contributed to their personal development? (CONFRONTING) + But how did you do to work with this subject of personal development? (DESCRIBING)**
24. R.: Every time + I tried to show them ++ I talked to them + I did not simply make them use the adjectives + I talked over and over ++ trying to make them reflect + They said + “Ah!, such and such are like this” + So I said + “So you have to see + he is this way + you are different + he makes things this way + you make that way + he acts this way”(sequence of description) + so I talked to them making them think about these differences + as they are in the 5th grade + they don’t take these things seriously + they don’t reflect about things and we the teachers have to try to + lead them to reflect + to think really (*sequence of point of view*)

25. **R.:** You said you brought your students to reflect about differences (CONFRONTING) + This has to do with the social role of the school + doesn't it? (INFORMING)
26. T.: + This is in fact the role of the school + we have to educate our students to be citizens + and learn to be and to live together + this is one of the cornerstones + it is not only learn to know + but learn to be and to live together + So + they have to be + to become citizens + based on the National Curriculum + we have to work based on these four cornerstones of education + this project involved ethical matters (*sequence of explanation*)
27. **R.:** So this work is based on these four cornerstones? + Is that so? (CONFRONTING)
28. T.: Yes + in learn to be + to live together + to know + and to practice + To put into practice all this knowledge + this happens because the student learns in knowledge + s/he is going to learn to be and to live together + s/he is going to take into practice + So this is the citizen we have to prepare + for the world + for the society + that is the one of the main roles of the school + it is the role of the school today (*sequence of explanation*) and it is what has not been done + and it is something difficult to do + because I believe that the teachers are not prepared for this kind of work because we learnt a lot during our graduation + the content + to teach based on contents + to to take the content to the classroom + but in fact ++ we have to learn to change + to transform our society + but for that + we have to start with our students (*sequence of point of view*)

With the question from the order of CONFRONTING, “Do you think that your work was useful for that?” in turn 21, I gave the teacher the possibility to present her point of view and argumentation concerning the contribution her class had provided for her students. The teacher’s answer can be read in turn 22, where she argued for the good results of her work, and stressed, “I really think it was very good for their personal development”.

In the following turn, number 23, I presented both the actions of **CONFRONTING** and **DESCRIBING**. I first confronted the actions taken by the teacher, through a reiteration of what she said before, "*So do you think that your project contributed to their personal development?*". Then, I applied the action of **DESCRIBING**, when I asked, "*how did you do to work with this subject of personal development?*" The teacher, then, answered, by presenting a description of her actions and by quoting what was said in class, as can be seen in turn 24. Along this segment it is important to notice teacher's concern about her role as an educator in the development of her students. This can be clearly seen in turns 26 and 28, where she consistently grounded the explanations for her actions, referring to the concepts of education found in the Parameters of the National Curriculum, through sequences of explanation.

As we can observe above, the questions of the order of **CONFRONTING** I asked in turns (21) "*You said that the students kept reminding the others about their attitudes?*"; (23) "*So do you think that your project contributed to their personal development?*"; (25) "*You said you brought your students to reflect about differences?*"; and (27) "*So this work is based on these four cornerstones?*" are reiterations of what the teacher said. My objective in making such questions was to confront the teacher's actions, in terms of what she did with her project with the results she obtained from it. It should be pointed out that in turn 25, I also presented the action of **INFORMING**, when I confirmed the following, "*This has to do with the social role of the school, doesn't it?*" I realized afterwards that this confirmation sounded as a way of inducing the teacher to answer affirmatively. I could have asked instead, "*How does this relate to the social role of school?*", and this, certainly, would be a more open question from the order of **CONFRONTING**, which would give the teacher more chances to question her actions. The consistent argumentation provided by the teacher through the sequences of explanation, in turns 26 and 28, and point of view, in turns 22 and 28, with verbs denoting mental states, like '*understand, think, believe*' revealed her capacity to examine her teaching more substantially, and it also demonstrated she could understand the social role of her work in the English classroom. Following the reflective process, suggested by Smith (1992), I continued the session, moving to the reconstruction

stage of actions. My aim was to see how much from her work she thought she could reconstruct to improve her practice.

4.4. RECONSTRUCTING

RECONSTRUCTING is the form of action in the reflective process that requires that the teacher reformulates her actions in light of the results obtained from the reflective process of **DESCRIBING**, **INFORMING** and **CONFRONTING**. By making questions like “*Would you change anything in this project if you had to do it again?*”, I helped the teacher to reflect about how she could re-plan activities in class. So, in the excerpt below, the action of **RECONSTRUCTING** is presented, as follows:

29. R.: Would you change anything in this project if you had to do it again? (RECONSTRUCTING)

30. T.: Maybe the activity I did in the third day + the way I developed it + that one that I divided into rows (*sequence of description*)

31. R.: Can you explain the activity again? (DESCRIBING)

32. T.: I divided the class into two rows + and as I would be saying the adjectives + the students had to choose between row A and B + they had to make their choice according to the adjectives that matched to their personality (*sequence of description of actions*)

I found that this activity was a bit repetitive + I think that I spent a lot of time doing that + because they had already identified themselves in the two previous classes + of course I tried to stress the good qualities + but the point was that it was too repetitive + then + I could have done some other activity to begin that class (*sequence of point of view*).

My objective was to return to what we had seen + to go over because the other two classes had been in the previous week (*sequence of description*) + but in this case + they had already learnt very well + I could notice that it was not necessary + they had really learnt in the two previous classes (*sequence of point of view*)

The question in turn 29 shows an example of the action of **RECONSTRUCTING**, in which I intended to help the teacher reflect on her project in terms of classroom actions, that is, what she thought that went wrong that could be enhanced or modified. The teacher, in turn, mentioned a certain activity that she thought could be improved, and, as can be observed in turn 31, in order to clarify what activity the teacher was talking about, I introduced the action of **DESCRIBING**. The sequence that follows, in turn 32, describes the teacher's action in classroom and is complemented by two sequences: one is point of view, where the teacher expresses her opinion about her actions and suggests a reconstruction of such actions, and the other is the sequence of description, where she describes her objective and justifies the reasons for carrying out such objective.

I see that this segment about reconstruction of the teacher's action was incomplete. For instance, in turn 32, when the teacher said, "*I could have done some other activity to begin that class*". I should have asked her what exactly she could have done or should have asked her to think of examples of activities that she could have done to implement her class, once she thought the way she carried out the activity was unsatisfactory. I think I should have explored more what she could do in a way that really led her to reorganize the class she was talking about and that I could have visualized a more thorough reconstruction of her actions.

5. Final remarks

In this section, I first summarize the results from the analysis of the data, considering Bronckart's (1997) four sequences of argumentation for critical reflection. Then, I answer the research question that guided this study.

5.1. Bronckart's four sequences of argumentation

As it was mentioned before in this study, I used Bronckart's (1997) four sequences of argumentation for the analysis of the data.

These sequences were necessary for my analysis because they served as my methodological support to systematise my data and to analyse how the teacher constructed her argumentation to explain my questionings about her actions. I could see from my analysis that the teacher's argumentation was mostly based on the sequence of description, followed by the sequence of point of view, of explanation, and of description of actions.

The recurrence of the sequence of description revealed that the teacher looked at her teaching practice mostly from a concrete perspective. This could be seen in the use of verbs that denote material processes, like *worked, use, repeat, translated, wrote, divided* that she used in order to explain the work done. She described and exemplified her actions in classroom through associations with her teaching strategies and content. On the other hand, the occurrence of some sequences of point of view along the data showed that the teacher could also discuss her own perceptions concerning what she had done. This was revealed through her choices of verbs of mental processes, like *think, reflect, see, thought, notice*. In the analysis of the teacher's argumentation, sequences of explanation were also found, which revealed how she explained her actions from a more theoretical perspective.

5.2. Answering the research question

My main objective with this reflective session with the teacher was to analyse to what extent I was able to carry out a process of reflection that could lead the teacher to reflect on her teaching practices.

As Gimenez (1999:139) points out, "the very act of having to reflect lived experiences will lead to reflection on practice. Reflection involves looking back as well as looking forward." Thus, in the role of researcher and teacher educator looking at my performance back and forward after the reflective session, I could say that to a certain extent I was able to carry out a process of reflection and could somehow lead the teacher to problematize her teaching practices resulting from the "what and why questions" that compose Smith's (1992:296) framework of critical reflection.

From this exercise in reflection, I understood that the quality of my questioning and the way I conducted such questioning had a crucial role in the development of the framework. For example, the many instances of the action of **DESCRIBING** I used throughout the reflective session provided the teacher with opportunities to describe the ‘whats’ of her practice. However, I realized that very often I found it difficult to go beyond this level of reflection. Moreover, I could have better expanded on the teacher’s practice, which was the moment when the teacher could think of new ways of implementing her actions. Yet, not only the “what questions” should be explored but also the “why questions” could engage the teacher in explaining and **CONFRONTING** more the taken-for-granted practices of teaching.

In addition, I would like to make a few points from my experience with respect to Smith’s (1992) framework of critical reflection that may contribute to further applications of this kind of reflective process.

First, I carried out just one reflective session with the teacher. I could have had better results as a researcher if I had had more meetings with the teacher. This might have given me more chances to go over the way of conducting my questioning, which could have helped the teacher to go deeper into the argumentation of her actions. Second, during the reflective session I missed many opportunities to lead the teacher to externalize the ‘whys’ of her practice. The difficulties I found during my exercise of questioning my own actions following Smith’s (1992) framework of critical reflection can be explained by what Liberali (2000:84) claims, namely that the process of critical reflection is not an easy task and “it is not true that the simple act of preparing a task following the lines of critical reflection will guarantee its development”.

On the other hand, I can see that I certainly need more practice in this kind of reflective session. I believe that it is through the experience of carrying out continuous exercises in reflection with other professionals, and mainly by being open to reflect on my own performance that I may grow up professionally. At the same time, I will be doing my part as teacher educator, by helping teachers to understand, rethink and give new meanings to their teaching actions.

Bringing the idea of reflection into the context of continuing education, I would like to stress that this exercise of questioning of practices within the context of programmes of continuing education is fundamental, because “the reflective process does not happen on its own. It is an active work which requires effort, good-will, and it happens when conditions are created for that to happen” (Celani, 2003:27). It is the role of teacher educators, through programmes of continuing education in universities, to make the bridge with the schools, offering opportunities for the teachers to talk about and discuss their practices. Following this conception of teacher development, I would like to emphasize the role and the importance of teacher educators in providing moments of interaction with in-service teachers that can lead those teachers to construct an understanding and a reconstruction of their actions.

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