

## Collaborative Language Learning in Teletandem: A Resource for Pre-Service Teacher Education\*

Aprendizaje de lenguas colaborativo en Teletándem:  
un recurso para la educación de profesores en formación inicial

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This article presents some of the results of a qualitative research project about the influences of the pedagogic strategies used by a mediator (graduate student in applied linguistics) in the supervision process of a Teletandem partner (undergraduate student in languages) on her pedagogical practice. It was done within the project “Teletandem Brazil: foreign language for all”. Based on the reflective teaching paradigm and collaborative language learning, with special emphasis on tandem learning, we analyzed the contributions of the collaborative relationship established between the graduate student and the student-teacher in her first teaching experience. The results bring about implications for the field of language teacher education in a perspective of education within practice, evidencing the experience of collaborative learning in teletandem as an opportunity for reflective teacher education of pre-service teachers.

*Key words:* Collaborative language learning, practicum, supervision, teacher education, teletandem.

Este artículo presenta los resultados de una investigación cualitativa sobre los reflejos de las estrategias pedagógicas usadas por la mediadora (alumna de posgrado en Lingüística Aplicada) en el proceso de supervisión de una practicante de teletándem (alumna de graduación en un curso de Letras). El estudio formó parte del proyecto “Teletándem Brasil: lenguas extranjeras para todos”. Basándonos en el paradigma del profesor reflexivo y del aprendizaje colaborativo en tándem, analizamos las contribuciones de la relación colaborativa establecida entre ellas, en la primera experiencia práctica de enseñanza de la alumna-profesora. Los resultados muestran implicaciones para el campo de la formación de profesores de lenguas, en una perspectiva de formación en la práctica, evidenciando la experiencia colaborativa del teletándem como una oportunidad de educación reflexiva para futuros profesores.

*Palabras clave:* aprendizaje colaborativo, educación de profesores, práctica docente, supervisión, teletándem.

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## Introduction

Technological advances over the last few years, especially those related to the Internet, have brought to our language classroom a myriad of new resources for language teaching. In the field of Applied Linguistics, we now feel the necessity of understanding how this new scenario changes what happens inside our classrooms and teachers' and students' roles. Research has been conducted on these issues in an attempt to grasp the nuances of the new contexts shaped by technological changes, but we still have to take a closer look at how technology has assisted teacher education in preparing pre-service teachers to be reflective professionals and face the new challenges they might encounter in their classrooms.

The necessity of educating student-teachers to be constructors of knowledge increases the responsibilities of future teacher educators and it appears to us that the possibility of reflecting on theory and practice should be guided by reflection models and supervision strategies that may lead to autonomy. In this sense, we present here part of the results of a qualitative research study for a master's degree in Applied Linguistics (Salomão, 2008) conducted under the influences of a reflective supervision process during a student-teacher's pedagogical practicum within a technological environment, the Project "Teletandem Brazil: foreign languages for all" ([www.teletandembrasil.org](http://www.teletandembrasil.org)). This is a thematic research project from UNESP –São Paulo State University, Brazil–, in which professors, graduate and undergraduate students participate as researchers, mediators and Teletandem partners.

Teletandem is a collaborative learning model based on tandem learning. Foreign language learning in-tandem involves pairs of (native or competent) speakers whose aim is to learn each other's language by means of bilingual conversation

sessions (Telles & Vassallo, 2006). Within this autonomous, reciprocal and collaborative learning context, each partner becomes both a learner of the foreign language and a tutor of his/her mother tongue (or language in which he/she feels proficient). Teletandem is an alternative proposal of tandem learning which makes use of technological tools available in the internet for videoconferencing, such as Skype, MSN, ooVoo, among others. The partners have an online tandem session which usually takes two hours a week (one for each language) in which they talk about a topic (which can be previously chosen), exchanging cultural information about their countries and giving each other feedback on language use, and reflect on their own learning (reflections may focus on content, culture, form, lexicon and the process of Teletandem interaction itself).

Teletandem procedures are carried out on bases of commonly agreed and shared principles of reciprocity and autonomy between the participants (Vassallo & Telles, 2006). They are autonomous in their learning but they may resort to a teacher's professional mediation or counseling if they wish.

In the first years of the Teletandem Brazil project at UNESP, mostly undergraduate students participated as Teletandem partners with undergraduate students from a number of different countries whose native languages were Spanish, French, English or Italian; and graduate students (Master and PhD candidates) took on the role of mediators (Vygotsky, 1994) of the tandem relationships.

Based on the reflective teacher paradigm, on supervision models and on collaborative language learning theories with special emphasis on tandem learning, we analyze in this article the influences of a mediator's supervision on a Teletandem partner's practice and its influences for her pedagogical practice. The text is organized as follows: first, an

overview of the literature on the reflective teaching paradigm is presented, as well as supervision models for practicum work with student-teachers. Then, the methodology and context of the study are laid out. In the next session, the findings are outlined and discussed according to the influences noticed from the use of different supervision models. Finally, we put forth our final considerations.

### **The Reflective Teaching Paradigm**

Reflective practice theory originates from the works of Dewey (1933, in Schön, 1983; Zeichner & Liston, 1996), and provides teachers with a basis for analyzing their actions in the classroom as well as rationally justifying their decisions. Dewey (1933, in Zeichner & Liston, 1996) brought great contributions to education when he envisioned the teacher as a reflective professional who should play an important role in curriculum development and educational reform. Schön (1983) used Dewey's idea of reflective practice to elaborate two very important notions of how this could be realized in our pedagogical practice: reflection-in- and -on-action. As Schön puts it:

The practitioner allows himself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation which he finds uncertain or unique. He reflects on the phenomenon before him, and on the prior understandings which have been implicit in his behaviour. He carries out an experiment which serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomenon and a change in the situation. (1983, p. 68)

The work of the reflective practitioner in the language classroom, then, involves reflection before, during and after action e.g. he/she can firstly reflect on the planning and later on what actually happened in the classroom, but during the actual class there will also be reflection and decision-making.

Van Mannen (1977), cited in Williams (1999), differentiated between three levels of reflection: technical, practical and critical. These levels would imply that one should go from simple reflection to more complex ones, as in a scale, and the last level includes moral and ethical issues, deemed the most complex. Zeichner and Liston (1996) criticize such hierarchical treatment of the levels and prefer to understand them as reflection domains, which should be considered equally important in teachers' professional development. These authors claim that we have to recognize that teachers bring their own ideas, beliefs and theories, which are filters and contribute to their professional learning.

Although the reflective practitioner theory appears to be a good start for working with pre-service teachers, it seems to lack some practical notions of how the reflective process happens. Some authors have tried to suggest actions which might be taken in order to accomplish it. Zeichner and Liston (1996, p. 6) claim the actions are: examining, framing and trying to solve the dilemmas of classroom practice; being aware of and questioning assumptions and values brought to teaching; being attentive to the institutional and cultural contexts; taking part in curriculum development and being involved in school change efforts; and taking responsibility for one's own professional development. Bartlett (1990) created a model which suggests the following phases for the reflection process: mapping (collecting evidence about practice), informing (searching for meaning and intention in practice), contesting (contesting the ideas which underlie practice), appraisal (considering new ways to renovate practice) and acting (implementing the changes).

From these ideas, many proposals of models for supervision in teacher education were created in the 1990s, an era when the perspective of teacher

training started to coexist with a new perspective of teacher development (Freeman, 2002).

### **Models of supervision**

Concerning the supervision of classroom activities and actions, Freeman (1990) brings the directive, alternative and nondirective models in a continuum which should take the student-teacher from training to development. The author indicates the supervisor as the one in charge for using the models and leading the student-teacher to effective and independent teaching.

Gebhard (1990) expands on Freeman's ideas by proposing models to be chosen according to the needs perceived. He criticizes the directive model, in which the supervisor directs, models and evaluates behaviors and actions, stating that this approach does not help student-teachers to make decisions, but to do what the supervisor wishes or tells them to do. Therefore, he proposes other models which aim at involving the student-teacher in reflection and may generate autonomy as a language teacher.

According to the author, in the *alternative supervision model*, the supervisor helps in the decision-making process by proposing alternatives to the student-teachers which will demand from them the analysis of their context in order to make such decisions. This would provide the opportunity for guidance with a window for reflection, especially interesting for inexperienced teachers.

In the *collaborative supervision model*, the supervisor's role would be to engage in a collaborative dialogue but not to overtly direct the student-teacher's work. Gebhard (1990, p. 159) states that in this model "the supervisor actively participates with the teacher in any decisions that are made and attempts to establish a sharing relationship". The author notes here that cultural issues are involved in this kind of supervision since not all teachers

may be willing to "share equally in a symmetrical, collaborative decision-making process".

In the *non-directive supervision model*, the supervisor does not provide answers, but an "understanding response", in an attempt to establish trust and freedom for the student-teacher to be able to express him or herself. In this model, the student-teacher has the power to guide the conference and make decisions without the supervisor's suggestions. Gebhard (1990, p. 161) cautions that some teachers report feeling anxious and alienated with this kind of supervision, especially inexperienced teachers.

The *creative supervision model* involves a combination of the former models according to student-teachers' needs, which may also involve the change of responsibility from the supervisor to other sources, or the use of ideas from different areas which do not appear in the models, such as peer supervision, use of metaphors, among others.

*Self-help-explorative supervision* involves both supervisor and student-teacher in self-observation and self-exploration. According to the author, "the goal to 'see teaching differently' is achieved not because the supervisor has helped the teacher to do so, but because the teacher has discovered a way to view his or her own teaching differently through self-exploration" (p. 163).

The bottom-line for a decision on the supervisory option seems to be the locus of power in each one of them. While in a directive supervision model the power rests completely at the supervisor's hands, in the non-directive the student-teacher has power to choose and manage the conference and make independent decisions. The other models would be included in a continuum that provides opportunity for jointly negotiated discussion of topics and a decision-making process that requires more or less involvement of the supervisor (the collaborative and creative models seem to generate more involvement

of the supervisor in decision-making while the alternative and self-help explorative seem to involve the student-teacher's own gain of awareness of his or her context and teaching behaviors).

Korthagen and Kessels (1999) and Korthagen (2001) also focuses on the role of reflection, stating the teacher educator's approach should be nondirective and related to the discovery of the student-teacher and of his or her own ways of learning and teaching, reminding one of the cores of Gebhard's self-help explorative supervision. His model seems to operationalize the search for real life experiences that would help the student-teacher to gain awareness of his or her teaching behaviors by a set of steps, entitled ALACT, presented in Figure 1. It may be observed that the inner part of the circle contains the phases, whose initials create the name given to the model, whereas the outside presents the competences which are connected to each step.

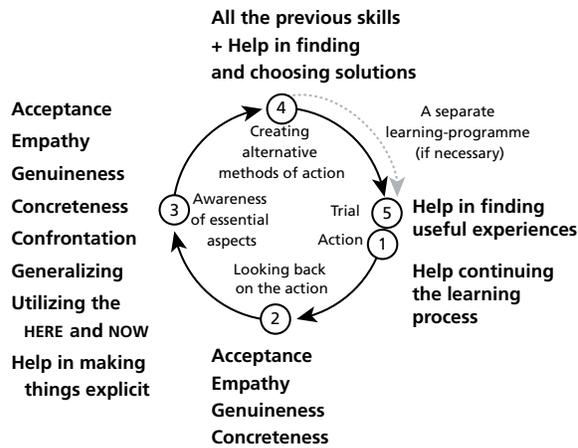


Figure 1. ALACT model (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005, p. 49).

In this perspective, the teacher educator should start the reflection process by focusing on a practical experience of the student-teacher (Action). The next step (2) involves looking back at that practical experience in search of elements which could be

discussed or questioned, and adopts some specific attitudes such as acceptance, empathy, genuineness and concreteness. The same attitudes should also be present in the next step (3), which involves bringing about awareness of the essential aspects to be discussed from practice. Other attitudes that might be added to further develop the problematization of the situations in this step are confrontation, generalizing, utilizing the here-and-now, and helping to make things explicit. The next step (4) involves creating alternative methods of action, which may involve a theoretical program to work as a bridge between practice and theory. The final step (5), named *Trial*, completes the circle by returning to the starting point and aims at giving continuity to the reflection process by a return to practice where new efforts will be made for achieving the objectives established during supervision. The new practical experience might work as fuel for new reflection development.

It seems to us that Gebhard's and Korthagen's models complement each other by bringing about the attitudes and power relations that might comprise the dynamics of a supervisory relationship which starts from practice (action) and goes back to it for a new trial after the reflective process.

Having overviewed the models of supervision in teacher education, we now present the context of the research and its methodology within the Project Teletandem Brazil.

### Methodology and Context of The Study

Teletandem Brazil is a research project from UNESP –São Paulo State University, Department of Education (UNESP –Assis), and the Graduate Program in Language Studies (UNESP –São José do Rio Preto), which aims at investigating computer assisted language learning as well as the development of language teachers within a technological context.

Its general objectives are: (1) describing the use students make of videoconferencing and instant messaging as tools and multimedia contexts for language learning in teletandem; (2) describing, from multiple perspectives, the features of the interaction and the learning process between teletandem partners; and (3) verifying pre- and in-service teacher education of the mediator in the context of Teletandem, with emphasis on his/her role and the processes of mediation.

The study presented in this article was one of the subprojects inserted in the third objective. It was a case study of one pair of Teletandem partners and their mediator and it specifically aimed at investigating the role of the mediator by analyzing the supervision strategies used and their influences on the pedagogical practice of the Teletandem partners (Salomão, 2008).

The data collection involved aspects of qualitative studies of an ethnographic basis (Bogdan, & Bilken, 1982; Erickson, 1986; Silverman, 2001), such as intense and long term participation of the researcher in the studied context, careful register of all facts and events by means of a number of different instruments (autobiographies, questionnaires, interviews, the recording of the Teletandem and mediation sessions) and analytical reflection over the material gathered.

The Teletandem partners were a Brazilian undergraduate student of languages (Portuguese and Spanish) in the second year of the course, named fictitiously<sup>1</sup> here Dani, with no prior experience in teaching; and an Argentinean undergraduate student of languages (Portuguese) with little experience in teaching.

The teacher educator, supervisor of the Brazilian Teletandem partner in the study, Andrea, had a major in languages and 6 years of experience as a language teacher, but no previous experience as a teacher educator. At the time of the study she was a future teacher educator who was working on an MA in Applied Linguistics.

The research involved the teaching and learning relationship established between the Brazilian Teletandem partner and the supervisor, student teacher and teacher educator respectively, as shown in Figure 2.

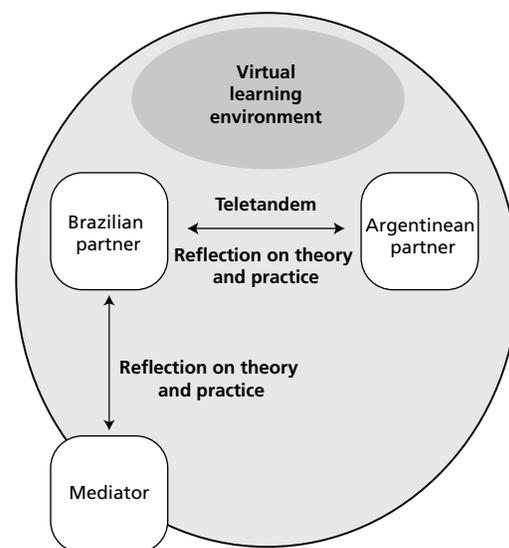


Figure 2. Context and participants.

The Brazilian and Argentinean Teletandem partners met regularly (usually twice a week) for 1-hour sessions of Teletandem, in which they taught each other their native languages (Portuguese and Spanish, respectively). The Brazilian Teletandem partner also met regularly with the mediator for supervision sessions. Both the Teletandem and the mediation session were seen as opportunities for reflection on theory and practice (Figure 2) for the

<sup>1</sup> All the names are invented in order to protect the participants' privacy, as stated in the term of informed consent.

Brazilian Teletandem partner as they provided her with a first practical experience as a teacher of her own language being supervised by the mediator (a practicum situation in a virtual learning environment).

During the 8 months of data collection (May to December, 2006), there were 22 Teletandem interactions and 9 mediation sessions scheduled according to necessity and negotiation between the Brazilian partner and the mediator, as graphically represented in Figure 3.

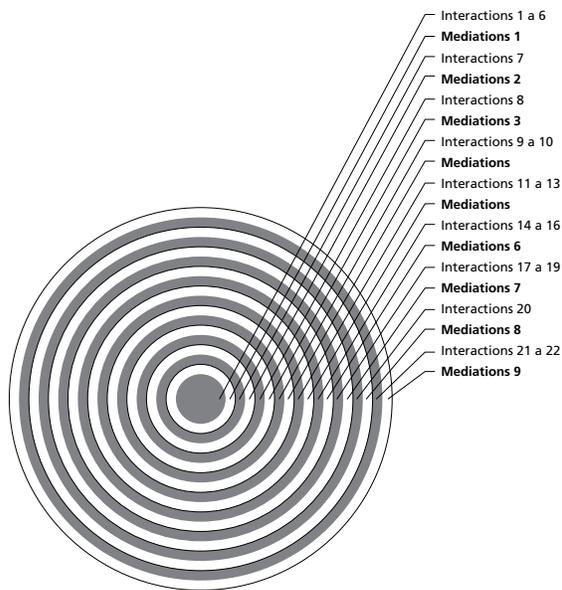


Figure 3. Interactions and mediations.

Figure 4 shows the dynamics used, which was based on Korthagen's ALACT: both Dani and Andrea looked back on the Teletandem session (previously recorded) and separately took notes in their diaries on points to be discussed during the mediation session; after this process occurred in some interactions, they scheduled a mediation session in which they discussed the most important points that they had selected and then wrote new diary entries on their reflections. Dani restarted the cycle then by continuing to interact and trying to

put in practice some of the decisions originated in the mediation session.

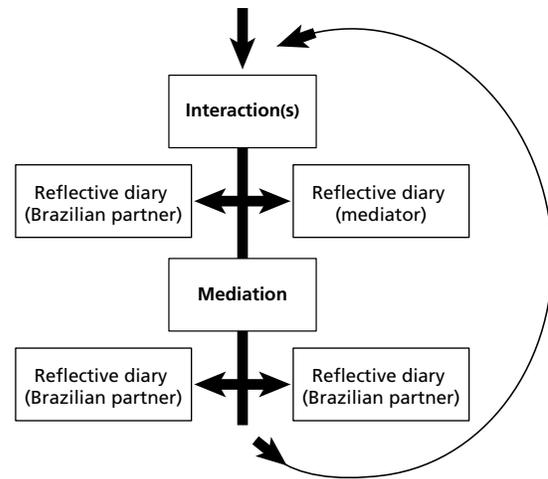


Figure 4. Dynamics of reflective work.

The data, which consisted of the interactions, mediations, diaries and questionnaires, were analyzed through an interpretative approach by re-constituting the participants' views of the events during the course of the 8 months of Teletandem sessions. The excerpts, which will be shown in the next section, were translated into English.

### Findings

Since we guided our analysis by the reflective teaching paradigm, we attempted to find movements and traces of change in the pedagogical actions of the Brazilian partner (Dani) through her reflections in the diaries and questionnaires. It is not our intention to associate one specific mediation session or action to a specific change, as a direct cause and effect movement; thus, we divide them here according to the most salient characteristics in three moments: influences of alternative and non-directive supervision, influences of self-help explorative supervision, and influences of the use of theory and reflection brought by self-exploration.

### Influences of alternative and non-directive supervision

Before the mediations began, all mediators were prepared through meetings with professors and coordinators of the research project to discuss guidelines which could direct their work, since most of them had never worked as teacher supervisors before. These meetings were guided by the reading of Korthagen (1999) and Sól (2004), and some directions for the mediation sessions were created collectively.

During the first four mediation sessions, Andrea's work seemed to be guided by the non-directive and alternative supervision models, since she did not pressure Dani or made any judgments. She did, however, offer some alternatives of action. Some of the topics addressed were error correction and feedback, negotiation of meaning and translation, preparation of themes, tandem principles (bilingualism and reciprocity), talking time of Argentinean partner, use of audio, use of

visual resources, practice of the four skills, use of microphone and benefits of oral practice, linguistic transference, moments of silence, importance of pedagogical focus in tandem learning, principles and directions of Teletandem, and lack of institutional support from the Institute in Argentina.

Andrea tried to put forth concreteness by pointing out specific moments in Dani's practice to be discussed. Her strategies for being non-directive during supervision involved questioning Dani about her actions and showing empathy and acceptance for her answers and comments. She also appeared to assist Dani by offering scaffolding for reflection and not giving ready answers or directing her work, as well as led the conversation to moments of confrontation trying not to overwhelm the student-teacher. Table 1 contains an excerpt of mediation 1 where some of Andrea's attitudes are illustrated based on Korthagen's ALACT.

**Table 1.** Excerpt from mediation 1

Mediation session		Attitudes
Andrea	I saw that you ask her many questions and I think it is nice.	Concreteness/acceptance
Dani	Yes, hum-hum.	
Andrea	And I also saw that there are moments in which you correct her and there are moments that you don't. Why is that?	Questioning/utilizing the here and now
Dani	When we are speaking Portuguese you mean?	
Andrea	Yes. I just want to know what you think. There is no problem. It's because sometimes I notice that you correct her and sometimes you don't and sometimes you do it using the caps lock on.	Concreteness/acceptance
Dani	Well, yes, I noticed this too and then there was that day [in a meeting] when somebody mentioned the caps lock. Then I don't know if I should keep on doing that or just correct her normally.	
Andrea	Well, it is an option... Do you remember the meeting when we discussed the types of error correction and so? Which type of correction do you think you are making? Remember? There was the direct one, the one with reformulation, the one with questions... Which one do you think you use more?	Help in making things explicit

Dani	Hum, there are times when she puts something wrong and I reformulate it as an answer, you know?	
Andrea	Hum-hum.	Showing that she is listening and engaged in the conversation
Dani	Then I put the correct word thinking that in this way she will see how I am writing it...	
Andrea	Hum, ok.	Acceptance
Dani	Then she will realize that it was wrong, you see?	
Andrea	And do you think she can usually realize it?	Confrontation
Dani	Well, then I don't know.	

These first mediations were more centered on a procedural level of Dani's work as a teacher, since she complained about not knowing how to deal with error correction and the Teletandem session parts (interaction, feedback and evaluation of the session) and principles (autonomy and reciprocity). As Dani had little experience in teaching, the mediator offered some alternative in terms of suggestions so that Dani would have to think about what would suit her context better.

These kinds of supervision seemed to be understood by Dani as suggestions that might take her to reflect on possibilities and adapt them to her context. In the next extract, we can see how she expresses her view on the use of pre-prepared themes for the interactions after a mediation session:

The mediator and I reflected on the use of themes for the interactions. Many hypotheses appeared, but none excluded the other. (...) If we eliminate the use of themes there is the worry that by opting for spontaneous conversation the session could exclude the pedagogical intent and become a simple chat between two friends. Moreover, themes are productive for learning about the culture and ideological aspects of a people and in this sense we need our partner's collaboration and involvement (a situation addressed in the mediation since it sometimes does not happen). However, we run the risk of trying to force our partners to keep on themes they are not really involved with. (*Diary of mediation 2*)

The problematization generated by the discussion during the mediation session led Dani to think about the subject considering different perspectives which she had not contemplated before and understand that there was not one simple answer to the matter.

During this period of Teletandem interactions, Dani started to create new strategies for error correction and make them explicit in her diaries. She also tried to structure the session according to the Teletandem principles. In terms of procedures, Dani experimented with some of the suggestions of the mediator, as well as created her own, such as sending the correction through e-mail after the sessions.

Some of the first reflections Dani makes during this period are concerned with the difficulty she had in teaching her own language, as might be seen in this extract from her diary:

As incredible as it may seem I have been finding difficulty in teaching Portuguese, since there are things I do not know how to explain, and that is making me feel bad, because I know how it should be said, but I can't explain why it has to be that way. (*Diary of interaction 7*)

When Dani viewed the recordings of the Teletandem sessions in order to write her diaries,

she also had some insights into the probable causes of the errors she had been spotting in her partners' output and related it to her own performance in the foreign language:

It is interesting how much we resort to our own language in order to express ourselves in a foreign one. (...) Doubtlessly, if my partner analyses my speech, she will find many of these resorts from my mother tongue. I believe our challenge is to try to separate our language from the foreign one, as much as possible. (*Diary of interaction 10*)

The mediation also seemed to have influenced this reflection above, since it was a topic of conversation during the sessions. The influences of self-help explorative supervision will be addressed next.

### Influences of self-help explorative supervision

In the first mediations, as presented in the previous section, the discussions seemed to involve a more technical domain related to procedural issues and difficulties. In the mediations that followed (5 and 6), there were signs of a transition to reflection over the action implemented so far and to Dani's perception of her role as a language teacher.

The main topics addressed were error correction, procedures, evaluation of the session, use of themes, parts of the session and pedagogical purposes, use of pedagogical resources, issues related to phonetics and pronunciation, communication strategies, technical and technological issues, context of interaction created by MSN, role as a teacher and a learner in the Teletandem interaction, tandem principles, and use of e-mail for scheduling and sending material. It is noticeable that some of the topics addressed are the same ones from the previous phase; however, during these mediation sessions Andrea attempted to help Dani explore the new actions she was trying to implement in her pedagogical practice by reflecting on her role as a teacher in the Teletandem partnership.

Andrea's strategies for self-help explorative supervision involved adopting a more questioning attitude that could lead Dani to analyze her pedagogical choices as a Portuguese tutor in the Teletandem session and understand and evaluate the efficacy of her procedures. Table 2 shows an excerpt of mediation 5 in which they were discussing different procedures used in two interactions.

**Table 2.** Excerpt from mediation 5

Mediation session		Attitudes
Andrea	I would like to talk about something with you. There was an interaction when she read the material proposed, it was about the use of commas. And then there was this other one when you made a feedback right on the moment. Which one do you think was more productive?	Questioning/utilizing the here and now
Dani	The one she read and the one I explained, you mean?	
Andrea	Yes, for example this last interaction and the other. Which one do you fell [sic] was more positive?	Concreteness
Dani	Ah, well, I think it was this last one, because I think it was more natural, you know, when I explained.	

Andrea	Hum.	Showing that she is listening and engaged in the conversation
Dani	You see, it is a difficulty I have to explain because I don't know if I am 100% to explain things to her. But I try to explain and then I think I start to understand it even more and then I will know how to pass it to her in a better way. I think it is better, but now I don't know, maybe it would be interesting to ask her for her opinion on this too...	
Andrea	Yes.	Acceptance
Dani	If she prefers reading or me explaining.	

It is noticeable that Dani during this stage feels freer to express her actions and analyze her insecurities. She also starts to consider the opinion and beliefs of her partner as an important factor for the success of her procedures. The influences of this kind of supervision were observed in Dani's attitudes during the Teletandem sessions, where she tried to establish some teaching procedures and reflect upon them, and also in the way she expressed her doubts and thoughts in her diaries on this first experience as a teacher (Schon's reflection on action):

When we were speaking Portuguese, I tried to explain the use of commas, since it was something she'd asked for. It was a good experience, but I felt rather insecure and nervous, since it is a part of grammar that I do not cognize as I wish I could. If I had studied more or explained better, the interaction could have been better. I was insecure and afraid of confusing her. I don't know if I explained things well. (*Diary of interaction 12*)

She blames the lack of success of the activity proposed on her lack of knowledge of the topic and inability to explain it, which demonstrates concern with formal aspects of the language. This seems to be a first move in the direction of more complex reflections than the ones she was practicing before. Mostly, her reflections during this phase seemed to

cover a practical level (Van Mannen, 1977), since she explored more and more in her diaries the new procedures she had been trying to incorporate into her practice according to the needs expressed by her partner and to the insights that the mediation and this practical pedagogical situation were giving her.

The changes in error correction during this phase can be mainly observed in relation to the fact that Dani could finally establish a moment to focus on this as she wanted, and in the attempts that she made in correcting and pointing out errors in different ways. While her preoccupation with error correction during the first phase seemed to be influenced by the mediator and by Dani's own beliefs on what teaching a language is, in this phase it also appeared to come from her perception on the gains of such practice for herself and her partner as learners.

Another peculiarity of this phase is that Dani seemed to incorporate the discourse of the mediator, noticed by her usage of academic terms in her reflections in the diaries, as shown in this excerpt:

We also addressed the difficulty of communicating when we do not know something or cannot express what we are thinking. These difficulties may be related to the knowledge of the lexicon of the language or to the lack of expressions. On the other hand, we may not be able to articulate our speech in Portuguese and it

could get worse, because nervousness can take place if we cannot maintain our turn once it is given us. (*Diary of mediation 5*)

When she writes about the “difficulties related to lexicon” and “turn taking”, her words seem to come from the mediator’s discourse in her questionings during the mediation sessions (the mediator’s research focus is interlanguage and she often uses this kind of academic vocabulary in her speech).

Ultimately, this phase is mainly characterized by Dani’s perception of her role as a teacher, a very important experience for her in the second year of her undergraduate course, as stated in her answer to the questionnaire:

Researcher: How did the Teletandem experience contribute to your education as a future language teacher?

Dani: Sincerely, I can say that after this experience I started to see in another way the “being a teacher”, and this is probably due to the difficulties found in the interactions, which are doubtlessly a very important practice for us to act as teachers even before we graduate. Even so, dealing with the difficulties did not unmotivate [sic] me; on the contrary, it only made me reconsider some aspects of my education as a teacher. (*Final questionnaire*)

It is also interesting to note that Dani sees the mediation sessions as key to the insights she had been having on the interactions, as she states in her diary:

Mediation is certainly the moment of interaction (as I believe it is a continuation of the Teletandem interactions), which gives us clues so we can draw conclusions about our position as a Teletandem partner, and also as a student and teacher. With these reflections in every new interaction we become more able and more willing to improve. (*Diary of mediation 5*)

Through her words, it seems that this collaborative work between the teacher educator and the student-teacher creates a process through which

the student-teacher can explore his or her beliefs in a practicum environment, in a reversion of the classical top-down theoretical approach for educating future teachers. In the next part of the article, the influences of the use of theory to bridge, understand and inform practice are discussed.

### Influences of the use of theory

During the third phase of mediations, Andrea started to offer theoretical support which could help Dani with the difficulties she was having in the interactions. These mediations continued to present the self-help explorative supervision characteristics; however, it was observed that a collaborative atmosphere was also being constructed through the scaffolding provided by Andrea to help Dani relate theory and practice.

The main topics addressed were affective issues and their relation with interaction and culture; error correction (causes for recurrence of treated errors; elaboration of correction; the use of implicit signaling or explicit correction; differences of error correction in chats and oral interactions; motivation and correction; interference from L1), interruptions of other people during interaction; motivation for the preparation of materials (how they were used and partner’s feedback); theory (looking back at practice, how it has helped reflection); technical and technological issues (the benefits of audio, comparisons with face to face tandem, pedagogical issues); influence of linguistic theories; knowledge acquired in undergraduate courses and observation of former teachers and professors on her practice in the interactions, perception of interactions with chat versus interactions with audio for language development, friendship (help or interference in communication and teaching).

Some of the topics addressed during these meditations continued to be the same ones already

discussed in the previous phases, but the difference now is that Andrea was conjugating them with theory according to the needs perceived in the interactions, such as the relationship between error correction and motivation, or error correction and affective issues, and Dani was having the opportunity to explore her role as a teacher and the influences

of her previous experiences as an undergraduate student. Table 3 shows how Andrea proposed a pre-activity for Dani, for mediation 7, by conjugating theory about error correction and prompting her reflections through questions related to her practice during the Teletandem interactions.

**Table 3.** Use of theory for reflection in mediations

Pre-activity for mediation 7	Attitudes
<p>The next mediation involves as a pre-activity the reading of the following texts:  <a href="http://www.lume.ufrgs.br/bitstream/handle/10183/1518/000300608.pdf?sequence=1">http://www.lume.ufrgs.br/bitstream/handle/10183/1518/000300608.pdf?sequence=1</a>                      (pp. 17-28)</p> <p><a href="http://www.ufsm.br/labler/publi/IIenpletrabso1.html">http://www.ufsm.br/labler/publi/IIenpletrabso1.html</a></p> <p>Firstly, I would like to ratify the last message sent to you and your partner congratulating both for your linguistic development and for taking on responsibilities during this project. I believe your effort is substantial and, therefore, it was recognized by your partner, who has been dedicated to the interactions despite the problems she is facing.</p>	<p>Recommendation of theoretical texts for reflection based on the difficulties Dani was having in the interactions with error correction.</p>
<p>And, by the way, how do personal problems experienced and shared by you both in the interactions influence them? Do they help to understand more about the other's culture too?</p> <p>You and your partner are getting closer and closer. How does this assist communication between you two?</p>	<p>Showing empathy and acceptance</p>
<p>Since the first interaction, what do you think of the feedback given? Have you noticed that your partner produces errors which have already been commented or corrected?</p> <p>How have you felt about it? What do you think could be lacking for a more thorough understanding?</p>	<p>Genuineness and helping making things explicit</p>
<p>How do you evaluate yourself in a tandem session: as a friend or as a teacher? If both, explain in which moments you see yourself in each role.</p> <p>I have observed that are both trying to send files through e-mail. Why don't you try to send it through the MSN? Do you still find problems in using the technological tools?</p> <p>During the interactions, there are people who enter the room and disturb the conversation, how do you react to this?</p>	<p>Utilizing the here and now and questioning</p>

<p>I congratulate you again for your intense search for material and the cartoons sent to your partner. I believe they were important. That is why I would like to know what factor in the interaction motivated you to send them. Have you tried to search for other materials to help your teaching? How did you partner react to that and how did you use them in your practice?</p>	<p>Concreteness, empathy and confrontation</p>
<p>In relation to the texts read, do you believe they helped you in your reflections? How?</p>	
<p>Thanks for your attention!</p> <p><i>Your mediator</i></p>	<p>Bridging theory and practice</p>

The influences are mainly felt in the way Dani expresses the importance of linking theory to practice. She finds it very interesting that the theory is related to the problems she is facing in her practice.

I found the text on feedback and the one on interaction in chats very productive. It's a way to incorporate the theory more productively. (*Diary of mediation 7*)

During this phase, Dani's diary entries show that she is now reflecting on her own choices and actions as a teacher and on the probable effects of those on the learner:

In the interactions in Portuguese, I am always careful not to miss any mistakes so that I can tell my partner later, since that is what I would like to happen when I speak Spanish, but I think the corrections are making my partner a bit daunting or it is even being a little boring. In this situation I do not know if I should let some little mistakes pass and correct only the most visible ones or if I should go on doing what I do. I'm also wondering if I am correcting her well or if there is a better way to do it. If it was her who was correcting me this way, I would like it, but I understand that people are different and that it is perhaps being a bit "heavy". (*Diary of interaction 20*)

One noticeable change in Dani's posture in this extract is that she states a problem that she herself noticed in relation to her partner's motivation and her possible solutions for it, which seems to be a

clear step forward from her previous attitude. During the mediation session, Andrea addresses this topic and recommends that Dani read a text on motivation in order to be able to think about how to deal with the problem. Here is how she describes the experience:

Another important aspect of this mediation was the discussion of personal issues influencing the development of interaction. Obviously personal problems interfere with our work and in this case with our studies. My partner has been through some personal problems recently and I think it may have affected a little her motivation during the interactions. In this sense it would and will be necessary for me through the preparation of interaction materials to be able to motivate her to continue our interactions and get good results. After reading the second chapter of the book "Psychology for Language Teachers", suggested by my mediator, I could pay attention to this aspect of motivation and how it is closely related to learning. I think I've got to be more attentive to the problems of my partner and know how to adapt the interaction in those moments, since if she is psychologically shaken, a session of corrections will be a little discouraging. (*Diary of mediation 8*)

It is interesting to observe that Dani's concern with error correction before aimed only at establishing a moment for it to occur, and then on different ways of doing it. But now it also included aspects related to motivation or lack of motivation generated by correction. She also started to reflect

more on the strategies she had been using for error correction and described them in her diary. But this time, instead of only outlining the corrections made, she commented on the moments she decided to interfere, which shows that she was considering other aspects besides accuracy during interaction (reflection in action), as can be seen in this excerpt:

We began our interaction with the Portuguese language and I believe it was a good interaction. On the issue of corrections, which I've been concerned with, everything went well. I tried to make indirect corrections when I realized that my partner was confused with how to write something in order to provide the vocabulary she was looking for at one point. I interfered at times I thought it would be appropriate to show the way a certain word should be written, and the rest which demanded further explanation I left for the final moments of our interaction. (*Diary of interaction 22*)

One of the reasons we believe may explain the fact that Dani started expressing her corrective choices this way now is because she is more aware of them, and the mediation was key to directing her attention to the different levels of reflection she should have as a teacher concerning error correction.

This first experience as a teacher may have helped Dani to start constructing an identity as a language teacher and to make a link between practice and theory, reflecting on teaching and learning from a practical perspective. She herself states that this experience brought her into contact with Applied Linguistics, an unknown subject for her at the time (she would have this subject in her undergraduate course only in the following year), and helped her to reflect on her role as a teacher and learner in the Teletandem experience she had been through:

The readings provided the opportunity to know theories of language teaching and even about Applied Linguistics itself, totally unknown to me before. After each reading, I reflected on

the learning process of my partner, trying to apply what I thought was relevant and would assist in her learning process. I also tried to draw from the readings points that I thought would help me learn and develop my skills on the foreign language (Spanish). (*Final questionnaire*)

For Dani, this contact with theory contributed to her incorporating in her discourse academic terms related to language teaching. This first contact with Applied Linguistics through the needs originating in her practice appeared to be extremely favorable in terms of her motivation and interest in theory which could inform her pedagogical practice as a language teacher (and even as a language learner as she states). This resonates with what Brazilian authors and researchers, such as Gimenez (2005), Paiva (2005), Vieira-Abrahão (2006; 2007), claim about the early conjugation of theory and practice in pre-service education.

In general, the supervision strategies used by the mediator seemed to generate a growing motivation for Dani to build her identity as a language teacher by looking for different ways to improve her practice as well as to better understand the reasons for her choices in the practical teaching situation she was experiencing.

As she was an inexperienced student-teacher, the offering of alternatives in the beginning of the mediation sessions seemed to bring concreteness in terms of procedures that were fundamental for her to establish pedagogical objectives to the interactions and, at the same time, the non-directive stance of the mediator made her feel free to customize the changes implemented. Then, the use of self-exploration helped her to reflect on these changes and to take a more active role in the interactions, increasingly seeing herself as a teacher. Finally, the conjugation of theory, chosen according to the needs arising from practice, brought her opportunity to bridge theory and practice based on the situations experienced

and aroused her interest for theories of language teaching, with which she had not yet had contact during her undergraduate course.

### **Final Considerations**

Our results showed that Teletandem seems to be not only an environment aimed at teaching and learning foreign languages in a virtual and collaborative way, but also an environment that may help pre-service teacher education, due to the possibility of making mediation a collaborative and knowledge-building work between teacher educator (mediator) and student-teacher (Teletandem partner).

The opportunity of combining teaching and learning within this context seems to bring to the Teletandem partners the opportunity for a first teaching practice, within which they can look at their own language through the contact with a foreign one. The exchange of roles also appears to help the student-teacher to make a more critical observation of practice since, in our study, the Brazilian Teletandem partner began to observe not only her own pedagogical methods and motivations, but also her partner's. This opportunity to observe the practice of another teacher is configured differently in Teletandem from regular practices: the Teletandem partners observed each other and swapped roles as student and teacher, which appeared in the data as something very positive. In addition, the opportunity created by the partnership between two student-teachers also seemed to enable the discussion of issues related to their undergraduate courses, as well as the comparison of curricula.

Furthermore, having a first teaching experience supervised by a more experienced person, the mediator, in the role of a teacher educator who offers scaffolds for knowledge building, contributed to enable a bridging between theory and practice

that starts in practice and relates it meaningfully to theory. The supervision models used by the mediator seemed to provide support for the Brazilian Teletandem partner as a student-teacher, to find elements in her practice that could lead her to see herself as a teacher and establish pedagogical objectives to her teaching in-teletandem. They also provided the opportunity for her to gain confidence and explore her pedagogical practice on different levels: in practical terms, by paying more attention to techniques and procedures used, changing or substituting the ones that she found to be ineffective; and, in more reflective terms, by exploring her decisions and actions pedagogically and relating them to the theory she had been reading.

We can conclude that the mediator's supervision in this relationship provided scaffold for learning by means of resolving procedural, technical, pedagogical and organizational problems that arose from an authentic teaching situation, without being directive or having a pre-established syllabus in mind. The importance of such findings lies in the fact that much of the theory on supervision has been grounded on a theoretical basis with short instances of practical examples. The experience reported here shows that the establishment of partnerships between undergraduate and graduate students for collaborative work may be useful for pre-service education in a reflective teaching paradigm and that the complexity of the relationship between the supervisor and the student-teacher is a fertile ground which still needs further mapping and investigation.

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