



The role of responsive mediation in the development of a novice English teacher's understanding of the teaching of listening

O papel da mediação responsiva no desenvolvimento do ensino de compreensão oral de uma professora de inglês em início de carreira

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Abstract: when adopting a Vygotskian approach to teacher education, it is believed that social interaction between an experienced teacher and a novice one has the potential to propel teacher development as the former provides mediation that is responsive to the latter's current needs. With this in mind, the present study is aimed at investigating how a novice English as a foreign language teacher develops her understanding regarding the teaching of listening as she is mediated by a more experienced other who uses the teacher's manual suggestions as a starting point to inquire into her practice. To do so, the study counted on nine classroom observations which were followed by interviews

in which a more experienced peer mediated the teacher towards a better understanding of her teaching, using the teacher's manual to elucidate the pedagogical concepts behind the textbook activities. Results indicate that responsive mediation provided to the teacher led her to revisit her practice, imbue it with meaning, and consequently (re)conceptualize it as the teacher's professional activity seemed to have become closer to a communicative one – in consonance to the teacher's manual suggestions – both her actions and justifications reverberating the moments of interaction with the more experienced teacher. In short, the study illustrates how interaction with a more experienced peer may potentially allow teachers to (re)conceptualize their teaching and, consequently, develop in the profession.

Keywords: social interaction; responsive mediation; teacher development; teaching listening.

Resumo: uma abordagem Vigotskiana à formação de professores concebe a interação social entre um par experiente e um professor em início de carreira como um elemento que pode potencializar o desenvolvimento deste profissional, o caráter responsivo da mediação às necessidades do professor sendo um elemento chave no processo. Dito isso, o presente estudo visa investigar como uma professora de inglês como língua estrangeira em início de carreira desenvolve seu entendimento em relação ao ensino de compreensão oral ao ser mediada por um professor mais experiente que parte das sugestões do manual do professor para mediá-la. A professora teve nove de suas aulas observadas, seguidas de entrevistas nas quais um professor mais experiente a mediou – ao usar o manual do professor para elucidar os conceitos pedagógicos que regem as atividades do livro-texto – a caminho de um melhor entendimento de sua atividade profissional. Os resultados indicam que a mediação responsiva levou a professora a visitar sua prática, atribuir significado a ela e, conseqüentemente, (re)conceituá-la ao passo que as aulas pareceram aproximar-se de uma abordagem comunicativa ao ensino de línguas – indo ao encontro das sugestões do manual – sendo que suas ações e justificativas reverberaram os momentos de interação com o professor mais experiente. Por fim, o estudo ilustra como a interação com um par mais experiente tem o potencial de levar professores a (re)conceituar sua prática, conseqüentemente impulsionando seu desenvolvimento profissional.

Palavras-chave: interação social; mediação responsiva; desenvolvimento docente; ensino de compreensão oral.

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1 Introduction

When it comes to foreign¹ language teacher education, providing professionals with opportunities to reason about their practice is a process which has the potential to propel their development. In the past few years, research in the area has been focusing on the movement of having teachers revisit what they do so as to imbue it with meaning, aiming at a better understanding of the various aspects they have to deal with when both planning and teaching. In this vein, studies have shown that interaction with more experienced peers may allow novice teachers² to become aware of and – possibly – overcome inconsistencies between what they know and what they actually do, fostering the (re) conceptualization of teachers' professional activity (AGNOLETTO, 2019; ARSHAVSKAYA, 2014; BIEHL; DELLAGNELO, 2016; DALLIGNA, 2018; DELLAGNELO; MORITZ, 2017; JOHNSON; DELLAGNELO, 2013; VIEIRA-ABRAHÃO, 2014).

These studies are grounded in Vygotsky's (1987) Sociocultural Theory (SCT), whose main claim is that the genesis of human cognitive development lies in the relations people establish with the world around them, which requires, in most cases, the existence of a more knowledgeable other to assist them in gaining the knowledge that has been culturally and historically constructed. Along with that, the Theory posits that these relations are not direct, but mediated by socially constructed auxiliary means, human language being the most pervasive of them as it allows people to deliberately think about and act upon the world (LANTOLF; THORNE, 2006, p. 17-18). With this in mind, Johnson and Golombek (2016) come up with the concept of *responsive mediation* – which captures the vygotskian view that assistance should be directed at one's maturing capabilities – in order to advocate for the sort of interaction in which a more experienced peer³ is responsive to a novice teacher's responses after the latter is inquired into their practice.

¹ Despite the longstanding discussion about the use of the terms second, foreign, additional, and L2 when it comes to language, the present study adopts 'foreign' to refer to any language which is not one's L1.

² Since there is no consensus regarding the concept of "novice teacher", the present study considers "novice" teachers who have up to 2 years of experience with teaching.

³ This "peer" being either another teacher or a teacher educator.

When having their first experience(s) as teachers, these professionals typically resort to tools that provide them with guidance as regards the choices they make, teacher manuals standing out among these resources. While helping teachers introduce and explore the activities in textbooks, these materials may prevent teachers from actually thinking their classes and reasoning about their choices (AGNOLETTO, 2019; AGNOLETTO; DELLAGNELO, 2018). In this context, having a more experienced peer provides responsive mediation that brings pedagogical choices and teacher manuals together may potentially lead novice teachers to reason upon what they do, consequently resulting in a better understanding of how to approach different textbook activities, which, in turn, have different pedagogical aims.

With this in mind, the present study aims at investigating how a novice EFL (English as a foreign language) teacher develops her understanding regarding the teaching of listening as she is mediated by a more experienced other who uses the manual's suggestions as a starting point to inquire into her practice. Therefore, the main research question that guides this study is:

RQ: How does a novice EFL teacher develop her understanding regarding the teaching of listening as she is mediated by a more experienced other who uses the manual's suggestions as a starting point to inquire into her practice?

In order to carry out this investigation, the following specific research questions were designed:

- 1 – How does a novice teacher understand the teaching of listening in the beginning of her teaching practice?
- 2 – To what extent does this understanding change by the end of the study?
- 3 – How does mediation provided by a more experienced teacher foster change in this understanding?

In order to answer these questions, this study counts on classroom observations and interviews carried out with a novice teacher throughout one academic semester. More detailed descriptions of the data collection materials and procedures will be given in the methodological section of this work. Before that, the next section presents the main tenets of SCT, as well as the way it informs the area of teacher education.

2 Sociocultural Theory and Teacher Development

The central claim of SCT is that higher forms of cognitive development originate in the social interactions people establish with the world around them (LANTOLF; THORNE, 2006, p. 59). In this context, the concept of *mediation* comes into play as the Theory posits that most of such interactions are not direct, but mediated by socially constructed auxiliary means (e.g. language) that enable humans to go beyond their current capabilities (LANTOLF; THORNE, 2006, p. 59). However, not every sort of mediation has the potential to propel development – the assistance given needs to be directed at one’s maturing capabilities, or in vygotskian terms, on one’s *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) (VYGOTSKY, 1978, 1987). Vygotsky (1978, p. 86) defines the ZPD as the distance between one’s potential developmental level (i.e. what they can do with assistance of a more expert peer) and their actual developmental level (i.e. what they can do by themselves). Moreover, Lantolf and Aljaafreh (1995, p. 622) claim that the assistance negotiated between the pair novice-expert peer needs to move from implicit to explicit, being offered when necessary and withdrawn when the novice appears to be able to deliberately regulate their own actions. In this vein, it becomes important that the novice externalizes their reasoning to the expert (AGNOLETTO; DELLAGNELO, 2018), opening up a window through which the latter can access the former’s ZPD and provide them with mediation that has the potential to push development.

Along with the discussion presented above, the concept of *internalization* deserves attention since it represents the intended result of mediation that is directed at one’s ZPD. According to Vygotsky (1978, p. 56-57), this concept is the result of a series of transformations that originate externally and interpersonally – the individual being either object-regulated (i.e. mediated by objects) or other-regulated (i.e. mediated by people) – so as to become internal and intrapersonal, with the individual being able to self-regulate (i.e. to control their own thinking and actions without any apparent external assistance). In the words of Lantolf and Thorne (2006, p.153), internalization is “[...] the mechanism through which control of our natural mental endowments is established” as the socially constructed mediating artifacts are brought into thinking activity. As mentioned above, this happens through mediation that is directed at one’s ZPD.

Among the aforementioned socioculturally constructed mediating artifacts, language is at the center of Vygotsky's theory. The Theory posits that language has two main functions: (i) it enables humans to interact with one another; and (ii) it enables humans to make sense of and act upon the world, being both a tool for communication and thinking (OLIVEIRA, 2001, p. 42-43). Therefore, the *word* (i.e. language) is central in SCT, providing humans with concepts through which they understand the world around them. Vygotsky (1987) splits these concepts into two types: *scientific concepts* (i.e. the ones learned through formal instruction) and *everyday concepts* (i.e. the ones learned through practical experience). Although he emphasized the role of scientific concepts in fostering human psychological development, Vygotsky claimed for "mergence" between the two types of concepts, since

[...] the weakness of the *everyday* concept lies in its *incapacity for abstraction*, in the child's⁴ incapacity to operate on it in a voluntary manner. Where volition is required, the everyday concept is generally used incorrectly. In contrast, the weakness of the scientific concept lies in its *verbalism*, in its insufficient saturation with the concrete. This is the basic danger in the development of the scientific concept. The strength of the scientific concept lies in the child's capacity to use it in a voluntary manner, in its "readiness for action. (VYGOTSKY, 1987, p. 169).

When it comes to a sociocultural approach to teacher education, Johnson (2009) states that the main goal of the area is the one of providing teachers with relevant scientific concepts, as well as unveiling their everyday ones, so they can complement one another as they merge, a process that results in the concept's internalization. When explaining the way SCT may inform teacher education, Johnson states that

Fundamental to this theoretical perspective is the notion that changes in social activity effect changes in individual cognition. Within the context of teacher education, therefore, teacher cognition emerges out of participation in external forms of social interaction (*interpsychological*) that eventually

⁴ It is important to highlight that Vygotsky's studies focused on children's psychological development. However, the pair child-adult has been extended to the notion of less experienced peer-more experienced peer in different fields of study.

become internalized psychological tools for teacher thinking (*intrapsychological*). Thus, the dialogic interactions that unfold in the practices of teacher education represent the external forms of social interaction that teacher educators hope will become internalized psychological tools for teacher thinking (JOHNSON, 2015, p. 516).

In this context, it is clear that the role of teacher educators – or more experienced peers – is the one of providing teachers with mediation that is directed at their maturing capabilities (i.e. ZPD) in order to foster the creation of mediational spaces that have the potential to propel their professional development. Anchored on Vygotsky's construct of mediation, Johnson and Golombek (2016) come up with the concept of *responsive mediation* to claim for the importance of more experienced peers to be contingent on teachers' needs during moments of interaction, this notion reflecting Lantolf and Aljaafreh's (1995) view that mediation should move from implicit to explicit, providing teachers with the sort of assistance they need in order to develop in the profession. In light of that, as Johnson and Golombek (2016, p. 28) advocate, it is essential to recognize the upper limits of teachers' potential, in other words, the higher levels of development within their ZPDs that indicate the sort of mediation they need in order to best benefit from the assistance provided. Briefly speaking, sociocultural studies that aim at investigating teacher development have been: (i) inquiring into teachers' practices so they can externalize the reasoning behind their choices (which potentially unveils their ZPDs) and revisit what they do; (ii) introducing scientific concepts (i.e. theory) related to the profession for teachers to use them as lens to look at their everyday counterparts (i.e. practice); and (iii) providing mediation which is responsive to the teachers' responses that result from such inquiry in order to foster growth within their ZPDs (AGNOLETTO, 2019; BIEHL; DELLAGNELO, 2016; DALLACOSTA, 2018; DALLIGNA, 2018; DELLAGNELO; MORITZ, 2017; JOHNSON; GOLOMBEK, 2016). As Johnson (2015) points out, teachers need prolonged and sustained opportunities to revisit their practice and imbue it with meaning in order to internalize the knowledge they need to develop in the profession, this process being fostered within the situated practices of teaching.

After having lay out SCT's main concepts and how they can inform the area of teacher education, the following section presents the methodological procedures followed to conduct the present investigation.

3 Method

Based on Vygotsky's work, the present qualitative study⁵ follows a microgenetic analysis (WERTSCH, 1985) of human psychological development. This type of investigation focuses on the short-term formation of human cognitive processes, being defined by Wertsch (1985, p.55) as a sort of "[...] short-term longitudinal study". Thus, studies of this sort are interested in the very specific processes (i.e. microgenetic ones) that come into play during one's psychological development. This is in consonance with the present study's main objective, whose focus does not lie on a final product: its main concern is the novice teacher's developmental path as she is mediated by a more experienced peer, instead.

The study's participants were one novice teacher of English as a foreign language (EFL) of the English Extracurricular Program at a federal university in the south of Brazil, and a more experienced peer, who is also a teacher in the same Program, as well as one of the present article's authors. In order to protect the novice teacher's identity, she will be referred to as "Grace". Grace was a 47-year-old student in the last year of her English language and literature undergraduate program, pursuing a license to teach. At the time Grace participated in the study, she was taking an elective course whose focus lay on having students engage in theoretical, reflective, and practical activities. It is important to mention that the course was mainly based on a communicative approach to the teaching of English, being aligned with the material the Extracurricular Program adopts.⁶ Moreover, it was Grace's very first teaching experience, which characterized her as a novice teacher. This aspect was in fact the reason why she was invited to participate in this study. Regarding the researcher, he was a 23-year-old graduate student and had had about five years of experience with the teaching of English in three programs at his

⁵ The research project was sent to our university's human research ethics committee, granting the approval under number 86591518.3.0000.0121.

⁶ This will be further explained in the section.

university by the time data collection took place. Furthermore, he had gotten two degrees in English Language and Literature (a license to teach and a bachelor's degree), his undergraduate thesis being conducted in the area of teacher education through a sociocultural perspective. At the time the study was conducted, he was in the second year of his master's program and had finished all its compulsory and elective courses, his study focusing on the way SCT informs teacher development. The experience reported above granted him the position of a more experienced peer in comparison to Grace.

As for the English Extracurricular Program, it is an outreach project held by the Foreign Languages and Literatures Department of a university in the south of Brazil that offers courses in eight different languages.⁷ The English Program adopts the textbook *Interchange* as one of its materials (which includes a teacher's manual), whose reasoning is rooted in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). As mentioned by Cardoso (2004, p. 8), such approach places great emphasis on meaningful communication from the learner's point of view, aiming at developing students' communicative competence through activities that resemble real life interaction. Therefore, the textbook and teacher's manual are designed in ways that enable students to have contact with communicative contexts they take part in outside the classroom. Besides that, it is important to mention that the Program's teachers are encouraged to teach in accordance with CLT.

Concerning the data collection procedures, the researcher accompanied Grace every other class⁸ for almost one academic semester, a total of nine classes being observed. During these observations, the researcher would write down any aspects of the teacher's practice that he believed deserved attention, always keeping in mind the main tenets of CLT. Right after each of these observations, interviews were conducted with the teacher so as to have her externalize the reasoning behind her practice, the researcher mediating her – through inquiry, explanations, and the teacher's manual (focusing on the CLT aspects behind it) – towards a better understanding of what she did or should have done instead. These

⁷ For more information about the Extracurricular Program, please access <http://www.cursosextra.com/>.

⁸ Since it was Grace's first experience with teaching, not every class was observed so as to avoid being rather invasive.

interviews will be referred to as “mediator-mediatee interactions” (MMIs) and were all recorded with a cell phone. In addition, it is essential to mention that different aspects of the teacher’s practice were discussed during the nine MMIs held. However, due to length constraints, the present paper brings into discussion a single aspect that was extensively dealt with Grace during most MMIs: the teaching of listening.

In order to analyze the data collected, all the MMIs were transcribed. After reading the transcripts, only MMIs 3, 5, 6, 7, and 9 were chosen for analysis, since these ones corresponded to the classes in which Grace taught listening through the textbook’s activities. The analysis focused on excerpts that best show (i) how the teacher approached the listening activities of Interchange textbook, (ii) how she explained the reasoning behind her practice, (iii) how the researcher attempted to provide her with responsive mediation so as to foster the development of her understanding of the teaching of listening, and (iv) how the teacher’s practice and speech changed from the beginning of the MMIs to their ending, somehow reverberating the aspects discussed along the semester.

After having the methodological procedures adopted in this study described, the following section illustrates how data was interpreted in light of the theoretical background presented.

4 Data analysis and discussion

The present section presents and discusses excerpts of the MMIs in which the researcher and teacher dealt with the teaching of listening. As previously mentioned, the mediation provided took into account the principles of CLT since both the materials used by the teacher and the program in which she teaches follow this approach.

To start off, MMI 3 refers to a class in which Grace had her students do a listening activity from the textbook about the capitals of Japan, Argentina, and Egypt. Students had the countries’ names written down in the textbook and had to listen to an audio passage so as to check their capitals and what visitors should see and do in those cities. In order to introduce it, Grace had students open their textbooks to the activity page and said “It’s a listening about these three capitals”. The following excerpt illustrates the moment in which Grace and the researcher discussed her practice

Excerpt 1 (MMI3)

G⁹: (...) I did the brainstorming last class, talking about Japan, Argentina and Egypt... What they knew about these places. What they heard about them...

(...)

R: Last class?

G: Yes, last class. So, we didn't have time to do it (the listening activity) last class, so that's why we did it today.

R: And do you think they'd remember what you discussed last class?

G: I think so. Because it's something they brought... like, they said some things about the countries... things they knew.

(...)

R: Don't you think like... if you had asked them again what they knew about those cities would've helped them? Because it was like... from Wednesday to Monday, there are five days, and they had seen other things during this period...

G: Ok.

R: You know? So maybe if you had asked them again to say some things they knew about Egypt... like "What can we find in Egypt?" (...) in fact it's one of the manual's suggestions.

G: YES! So I did that last class, and I didn't think about doing it again.

The excerpt shows that Grace, following the manual suggestion in order to introduce the activity to her students, brainstormed about those places with them. What happens is that the listening passage took place in the following class, and Grace did not resume the brainstorming. In light of that, the researcher brought this aspect into discussion. The interaction between him and Grace, as he inquired into her practice, signaled her unawareness regarding the pedagogical intent behind the manual's suggestion. It looks like she did not understand that the idea was to activate students' prior knowledge about the topic being dealt with so as to alleviate eventual comprehension difficulties due to lack of context that, together with language limitations, would likely lead to

⁹ "G" stands for "Grace" while "R" stands for "Researcher".

negative impacts on the task. We thus infer that, at this point, Grace was object-regulated (LANTOLF; THORNE, 2006), mechanically following the manual, without thinking through her action or understanding the implication behind its suggestion.

The interaction above opened up a mediational space (JOHNSON, 2009) that could potentially lead Grace to develop her understanding of the aforementioned implication. In order to provide her with responsive mediation (JOHNSON; GOLOMBEK, 2016), the researcher decided to explicitly present and illustrate some concepts lying behind a communicative approach to language teaching, as the following passage shows

Excerpt 2 (MMI3)

R: (...) maybe if you had asked them to think about it again... like “Hey guys, do you remember last class when we talked about these countries? Do you remember what we talked about?”. And just like, had them think about these things again... it could’ve helped them better listen and better understand...you know? Cause some words are normally new to them. Like “pyramid”. It’s not something that they usually know (...) And if they had discussed about it, they could’ve come with “oh, no Egito tem pirâmide”, then you’d be like “Oh, how do you say that in English?”. Maybe they’d be better prepared for that. Right? So this idea of pre-listening, it’s always good to do it right before you listen to the passage, you know? Cause you had like 5 days from Wednesday to Monday, ok? So it was not contextualized (...) when you contextualize, when you do these pre-listening activities... you help them understand beforehand what they’re going to listen to (...) for example, if I know it’s about Brazil, I know it probably won’t mention things about the US. You know?

The excerpt above illustrates the researcher’s attempt to help Grace understand the manual suggestion – to prepare students for the listening passage while exploring both vocabulary and background knowledge due to the positive effect these aspects have on comprehension. By giving examples of how Grace could have introduced the activity, the researcher aimed at showing her how the act of asking students about the countries could have led them to come up with vocabulary they would listen to. Besides that, the end of the excerpt illustrates the way the researcher

aimed to show her how contextual knowledge may narrow down the topic of a listening passage, making it easier for students to understand it.

Moreover, when seeing a potential mediational space being created, the researcher introduced the concept of *pre-listening* to Grace in an attempt to have her further understand the manual's suggestion and the examples given in light of this concept. As Vygostky (1987) says, it is through concepts that humans deliberately and successfully operate in the world, the *word* being paramount in organizing one's thinking.

Moving on to MMI 5, Grace had her students do a listening activity which was a conversation between a customer ordering some food and a server at a restaurant. The following passage illustrates the moment in which the researcher and the participant started discussing what Grace did

Excerpt 3 (MMI5)

R: (...) You said "Now, guys, we're going to listen to an audio passage, I want you to pay attention to something. We have two guys talking." Then you asked "Where are they?". And you asked "What kind of restaurant is that?" "Look at the menu, look at the picture." Why did you do it this way?

G: (...) I have some friends that talked to me about that. To explore more the picture... To work first with the picture, to hide the text. Ask like "Did you see here? This is the customer, this is the server..." Try to use the picture to work a little bit more with them. Maybe to contextualize better... Something like that (...) It's something new. I'm trying... I think it's the second or third time I'm doing that. I'm still working on that, you know? Trying to contextualize more, maybe.

This passage makes it clear that Grace's intent was to use the picture in the textbook to contextualize the activity to students. As she herself stated, some "friends of hers" have talked to her about that. It is important to remember that at the time Grace was participating in the present study, she was taking a course in her undergraduate program about teaching, in which the professors dealt with – among other aspects – teaching through a communicative perspective. Differently from MMI3, this time Grace seemed to be aware of the pedagogical intent behind asking students those questions, indicating that a new ZPD had been created, pointing to aspects of her teaching which were under the process

of maturation. This becomes even clearer when Grace mentioned that contextualizing is “something new” to her. As Vygotsky (1987) suggests, it is within these very zones that intervention is most transforming, signaling to the researcher what his mediation should be responsive to.

In order to further explore Grace’s understanding of contextualization, the researcher then inquired into it

Excerpt 4 (MMI5)

R: So as you said, you were contextualizing, right, providing them with context... Can you tell me what advantages this idea of presenting a context has for them? In this case, for listening.

G: I think for them, it’s like... They speak more when they’re trying to work with the picture.

R: You mean... they speak with you?

G: Yes, because they can try to find or to remember the vocabulary. Try to remember the words. So in my opinion it helps them practice speaking... and learn or remember vocabulary.

R: So, you said this helps them practice speaking, right?

G: Right.

R: Can you think of any advantages of it in relation to the listening passage? Cause you were exploring the picture, then you’d get to the listening.

G: The listening... I think it helps them with pronunciation. Because some words... I think all the words for them. And even for me. It’s good to listen, you know? Listen to the words helps you learn how to pronounce that.

Although Grace seemed to have aimed at contextualizing the listening activity to students, when being directly asked to externalize her understanding of such strategy she came up with an explanation that did not match its intent, saying that providing students with a context allows them to speak. By noticing how distant her explanation was from the real pedagogical intent of contextualization, the researcher provided her with further mediation by, once again, inviting her to reason upon the advantages of contextualization concerning the listening activity. One more time, Grace brought into discussion another aspect that did not match the strategy intent: teaching pronunciation. However, it is interesting to see that her answer somehow reverberated the idea of

presenting new vocabulary to students discussed during MMI3 (Excerpt 2). The incoherent nature of her responses points to the upper limits of her ZPD (JOHNSON; GOLOMBEK, 2016), therefore, being essential for the researcher to provide her with further responsive mediation so as to foster her understanding of the use of contextualization in listening activities.

With this in mind, the researcher shifted from implicitly mediating Grace's reasoning (through questions) to explicitly doing so (through explanations and examples)

Excerpt 5 (MMI5)

R: (...) here you have the customer and the server, you know? So there are the relations between the people, the place where they are, what you have in the image, like the menu etc... And when you ask students the questions, it helps them pay attention to the possible vocabulary that's coming. For example: "What kind of restaurant is this?" The guys not in a very sophisticated restaurant, you know? So, students probably would not think of snails, salmon... food like that. When you had students look at the picture, they saw "Today's specials are cheeseburger and fries...", you narrowed it down, helping them activate previous vocabulary they have in relation to that context (...) so you said that this may help them with pronunciation, but the main goal of this part is to help them focus on what's coming in that specific context, it helps them get ready to listen to the passage.

As can be seen in this excerpt, besides telling Grace what she can achieve by providing her students with contextual knowledge, the researcher gave her examples of how using the context of an activity may help students understand the listening passage, explicitly telling her one of this strategy's goal, possibly mediating her towards a better understanding of how this process works. In alignment with MMI3 (Excerpt 2), the researcher attempted to show Grace – in a more direct way, being "responsive to her responses" (JOHNSON; GOLOMBEK, 2016) – how context may foster students' understanding of a listening passage by narrowing down its topic, as well as allowing students to activate previous knowledge related to such topic.

As the discussion went on, the researcher compared a suggestion from the manual to what Grace actually did in class, as shown below

Excerpt 6 (MMI5)

R: So when students were about to listen to the passage, you said “I want you to pay attention to what he orders and how he does that, if it’s possible. The words he uses to ask for food”. The manual suggests “Write this summary sentence on the board: The customer orders spicy fish/spicy chicken and rice, a salad with blue cheese/vinaigrette dressing, and an iced coffee/tea”. You didn’t do this, but you asked them to pay attention to what the guy’s ordering, and you added this idea of having students pay attention to how he orders the food. Can you tell me why you did that?

G: Because we worked with modal verbs before, and I told them about “would” and “will”, already, but I know it was a lot to pay attention before, so this time I wanted them to pay attention to the modal verbs, you know? I was trying to... I don’t know. Maybe have the students notice the words.

R: The modal verbs?

G: Yes, “would” and “will”.

R: Ok. Can you tell me what the main focus of this activity is?

G: I think the main focus is on modal verbs.

R: Ok. What I mean is... In relation to their linguistic skills, what do you think the main focus is? In this conversation (silence)... No?

G: No.

R: Listening?

G: Yes.

R: Right?

G: Ok.

R: Cause you set the scene, you contextualized it, you prepared them to listen...

G: Uhum...

R: Then you gave them focus. “So you are going to listen to this...”. You focused on the content, on what the guy orders. (...) When you asked these two things (what the guy orders and the modal verbs) they had to pay attention to these two different ideas.

G: Yeah, and for them it can be difficult.

R: It can be difficult. When the book suggests “Write down the summary sentence...”, students would choose one of the options (spicy fish/spicy chicken; cheese/vinaigrette dressing; iced coffee/tea) right? (...) can you see what the intention of writing this down is?

G: Maybe for them to pay attention to the listening?

R: Yes. But to what, specifically?

G: Uhm... Just to... the words? The pronunciation? I don't know.

R: No, no... to this specific idea (pointing to the guy's order). Right? You told them “There is a server taking a customer's order, pay attention to what the guy orders”. If you write the summary down (...) you help limit what they have to pay attention to.

When being inquired into the activity's main goal, Grace explicitly said that it focused on “modal verbs”, implicit mediation provided by the researcher (“Can you tell me why you did that?”; “Can you tell me what the main focus of this activity is?”; “In relation to their linguistic skills, what do you think the main focus is?”) not being enough to help her reason – from a communicative stance – about her choice. As interaction went on and the researcher had her revisit what she had asked her students to do, she realized that having them pay attention to both the content of the listening and the modal verbs “can be difficult”. In another attempt to implicitly mediate Grace towards a better understanding of the manual's suggestion, the researcher did not succeed as she, once again, cited pronunciation as the goal behind the suggestion given, which made him explicitly tell her that doing what the manual suggested would have limited the students' attention to specific information in the passage. The excerpt above shows the importance of shifting from implicit to explicit mediation during expert-novice negotiation in the ZPD (LANTOLF; ALJAAFREH, 1995), the former providing mediation that is responsive to the latter's current needs, this having the potential to propel one's cognitive development (JOHNSON; GOLOMBEK, 2016).

In the 6th class observed, students had a listening activity about a TV game show. The way Grace chose to introduce the activity shows reverberation of the past interactions with the researcher as regards the concept of pre-listening, as the passage that follows illustrates

Excerpt 7 (MMI6)

R: So, there's this listening on page 94 about "Game Show". Before doing the activity you asked students "Do you watch TV?" "Do you like TV?" "Do you know 'quem quer ser um milionário'?"

G: Yes.

R: Then you explained what the program was about. Why did you do that?

G: Because I was trying to... Contextualization? Contextualize?

R: Uhum.

G: To them. To prepare them, as a pre-listening, maybe.

R: Uhum.

G: Something like that. Cause the listening is a TV game show, so it's a passage about this kind of TV show. So I was trying to work with them.

It is important to mention that the only direction the teacher's manual gave to introduce this activity was "Set the scene. Explain that students are going to hear three people on a TV game show". Instead of directly doing that, Grace explained what a game show is by drawing a parallel between the activity students were about to listen to and a very famous Brazilian game show so as to, as she herself stated, contextualize it to students. Moreover, she connected the concept of contextualization to the one of pre-listening, showing that she recognizes how the former is used as a strategy to prepare students for the passage that is about to be played. Needless to say, at the same time that this shows reverberation of our past interactions, Grace was also possibly being mediated by her professors of the undergraduate course she was taking during the data collection procedures, whose focus was, among others, on the importance of contextualizing every activity in a classroom. It seems like Grace's everyday and abstract knowledge have started to merge (VYGOTSKY, 1987; JOHNSON, 2009), as she both decided to contextualize the activity by citing a famous Brazilian TV show to her students and explained the reasoning for doing so by contextualizing. This signals development within Grace's ZPD, which points to her future independent (and deliberate) control over the use of contextualization as a pre-listening strategy, as the concept seems to be moving towards her internal mental functioning (i.e. internalization).

Another moment of interaction between Grace and the researcher may signal development within her ZPD, as she was inquired into the reasoning behind another suggestion of the manual

Excerpt 8 (MMI6)

R: Then you said “We’re going to listen to a passage of three people on a game show”, which is one of the manual’s suggestions. Then you wrote down the focus questions the manual suggests on the board.

G: Yeah.

R: Students had to listen to them and fill in blank spaces with the superlatives (e.g. Which country has the _____ population?)

G: uhum.

R: Can you tell me why do you think the book suggests writing these questions down on the board?

G: I think... to... uh... get their attention. Because it’s a long passage, you know?

R: Uhum.

G: I think it’s, like, to draw students’ attention to something specific (...) to a specific point to help them focus (...)

R: Details.

G: Details. Yeah (...) now I see that if you do not give something for them to look, or to listen to, it gets difficult for them, cause it’s too much information, all together... you know?

The passage above clearly shows reverberation of the discussion Grace had with the researcher during MMI5 as regards focusing students’ attention on specific information during listening activities. It seems like the MMIs have been helping her revisit her practice and imbue it with meaning, (re)conceptualizing her teaching, corroborating the notion that the development of teacher expertise originates in the socially situated activities they engage (JOHNSON, 2009).

In the same class, further evidence of the past interactions with the researcher was found when Grace explained the reasoning behind her choices while introducing another listening activity. The passage was about New Zealand, and in order to introduce it Grace asked students what they knew about the country. When being inquired into the reasoning for doing so, Grace answered

Excerpt 9 (MMI6)

G: Uh... To work... Cause the manual suggests that, right?

R: Uhum. But...

G: It was supposed to be with the books closed, but because the text was there, already, before, I didn't ask them to close their books. But I tried to do the uh... to brainstorm... you know? The topic. Like, they were going to talk about New Zealand, so "What do you know about New Zealand? What do people have there?"

R: uhum...

G: Things like that.

R: Why do you think this is helpful? Well, do you think this is helpful?

G: Yes, I think so. Uh... I think when we brainstorm... Can I say that? Yeah, it's kind of a brainstorm...

R: Brainstorm? Like, if they cite many things that they know about New Zealand, yes, you brainstorm things about New Zealand.

G: Yes, or even, like... When I ask something, I think it helps them to get the previous knowledge?

R: To activate previous knowledge?

G: Activate! Activate! I was thinking about the word.

R: ok. Knowledge about what?

G: Not just about New Zealand, but the words they'll see in the Conversation maybe...

Grace's immediate response was to refer to the suggestion given by the manual, which was to ask students what they knew about New Zealand. Therefore, it seems like she sees the manual as a tool she can rely on. However, it is important for her to understand the intent behind such suggestion in order to make informed decisions as regards her practice. Thus, as she developed her answer, the researcher aimed at being responsive to it by inviting her to further explore her ideas. As a result, differently from previous moments of interaction in which Grace mentioned that the goal of asking students some questions before listening to a passage is the one of having them speak or focus on pronunciation, the teacher's answer echoed the discussion regarding the role of using those questions as a pre-listening strategy that aims at offering context and thus help students activate previous knowledge and anticipate

vocabulary that might come up in the audio passage. It is interesting to see that she even tried to use the exact word that the researcher did when discussing such pedagogical intent with her (MMI5), which is signaled by the fact that she explained her reasoning by posing a question (“I think it helps them to get the previous knowledge?”), being confirmed by her repetition of the word “activate” right after the researcher used it when responding her. Grace not only mentioned contextual knowledge (“Not just about New Zealand...”) as focus of asking students those questions, but also activation of vocabulary students would listen to, once again being aligned with the previous moments of interaction with the researcher. This passage may indicate that the sort of mediation provided by the researcher in MMI5 was responsive to Grace’s maturing needs, leading her to develop within her ZPD as regards her understanding of the pedagogical implications behind a communicative approach to the teaching of listening. Besides that, this highlights the importance of having teachers externalize the reasoning behind their actions, since it is mainly by doing so that their ZPDs may become evident so more expert others can provide the sort of mediation that propels development (JOHNSON, 2009).

In MMI 7, the researcher inquired into Grace’s choice of, once again, making use of questions in order to explore the picture that accompanied the listening activity. The passage was about a woman who was asking her coworker out on a date. Grace followed the manual’s suggestion to introduce the activity by asking students the following questions: “What do you think about the people in the picture?”; “What is the relationship between them?”; and “What do you think they’re talking about?”. The following excerpt illustrates such moment

Excerpt 10 (MMI7)

R: (...) at the beginning you asked them to look at the picture and you asked them some questions. Why did you do that?

G: (...) in the pictures we have the opportunity to know, maybe, new vocabulary. Like “apron”, which is something they didn’t know. Hm... “coffee machine”, things like that. I try to bring new vocabulary for them, or work with the vocabulary they have.

R: Uhum.

G: Something like that. Usually, when I work with pictures is for something like that.

R: Ok. Cause they're going to have a listening activity, and you work with the picture. How would this help with the listening?

G: I think the manual suggests working on that to help them see... "Ok, it's two people working together and they're talking about something..." Then when I ask the focus questions they are like "Ok, it's two classmates working and they'll talk about some invitations"...

R: Yeah, by the questions you could see it was about invitations.

G: Yes, uhum. I know sometimes, or almost every time, I try to get the pictures... I think the pictures are an opportunity for them to work on new words. Sometimes I forget... Maybe it has a different goal.

In her explanation, Grace did not explicitly mention the concept of pre-listening or the idea of helping students activate vocabulary related to the specific situation they were about to listen to. In fact, what her externalized reasoning seems to reveal is that the aim of asking students questions related to the picture is the one of working with/learning new vocabulary, however, she did not mention how this would be related to the listening passage itself. On the other hand, when further being inquired into how those questions would help students with listening to the passage, Grace implicitly referred to context when mentioning that the questions "(...) help them (students) see... 'Ok, it's two people working together and they're talking about something...' Then when I ask the focus questions they are like 'Ok, it's two classmates working and they'll talk about some invitations'." However, at the end of the excerpt Grace went back to the idea of working "on new words", and mentioned that there may be other reasons for asking students those questions. In order to provide Grace with further mediation so as to have her revisit her practice and further reason about the implication behind what she did, the researcher provided her with responsive mediation, in a more explicit way

Excerpt 11 (MMI 7)

R: why didn't you just open the conversation and said "Ok, you're going to listen to two people. Pay attention to what they talk about."?

G: Because we learned here and in the undergraduate program that if we have focus questions we're gonna help our students focus on something in the conversation, so it'll help them focus on the conversation.

R: The focus questions were the ones you wrote after you asked the questions about the picture, right? These questions of the picture are not focus questions for the listening.

G: They were in the manual.

R: What I mean is that these are not focus questions of the listening. These ones "What are they doing? Look at the picture..."

G: ah... Ok! No, no. The focus questions are "Why can't Miguel go on the date?" (...)

R: yes! They'll prepare students to listen (...) I'm talking about the questions related to the picture.

G: It was kind of a pre-listening.

R: Ok.

G: You know? To help them focus on the picture and then, with the focus questions, they'd focus on the audio passage.

R: Ok. Cause if you draw students' attention to the picture by using these questions they'd know what's happening (...) you'd be providing them with context, right?

G: And I'd be providing them with context.

By posing a question about an aspect which had been previously discussed with Grace (first two lines of the excerpt), it became clear that there was some misunderstanding as regards the implication behind using the questions suggested by the manual to explore the picture that accompanied the listening – which aim at providing students with context, helping them activate previous knowledge they have regarding it – and the intent behind the questions used to focus students' attention to specific parts of the listening activity – whose main goal is to have them listen for details. It is interesting that she referred to both the course she was taking in the undergraduate program and our meetings in order to justify her choices. This indicates that other-regulation (LANTOLF; THORNE,

2006) has been allowing her to revisit her practice. However, it seems like the mediation provided by her professors and by the researcher did not suffice for her, Grace, needing further explicit mediation in order to understand the different aims of the different questions the manual suggests for working with the listening activity from a communicative perspective. The moment when she tried to justify herself by saying that the questions “were in the manual” right after being questioned by the researcher, indicates that object-regulation was still playing a greater role in her actions than other-regulation (LANTOLF; THORNE, 2006): she did what the manual suggested without having a clear understanding of its intent. Her “aha moment” seems to have taken place only after the researcher explicitly told her that the questions she asked students about the picture were not the questions that would lead them to focus on specific information of the listening passage, as her response illustrates: “ah... Ok! No, no. The focus questions are ‘Why can’t Miguel go on the date?’.” Her response shows her ZPD coming into play, an interpretation that is further corroborated when she stated that the questions related to the picture were “kind of a pre-listening”, reverberating past interaction with the researcher and pointing – once again – to a need for mediation so as to further develop her understanding of a communicative way to teach listening. By seeing this window into Grace’s ZPD, the researcher explicitly told her that by asking students the questions about the picture she would be providing them with context, once again bringing the concept of contextualization into light so as to allow Grace to use it as a lens through which she can revisit her practice.

Just as in MMI 7, in the 9th one there was some echoing of the past interactions with the researcher in Grace’s speech and practice, however, there was still some misunderstanding as regards the implications behind the manual’s suggestions. Students were about to listen to a passage in which two college friends were talking about future plans after they graduate. It was their graduation day, so in the picture there were many students wearing graduation gowns and caps, holding their diplomas. In order to introduce the activity, Grace followed the manual’s suggestion to “Use the picture to set the scene” and made several questions to students, such as “What do you see in the picture?”, “We know it’s about graduation because...”, and “What do you think they’re talking about?”. The following excerpt shows how interaction with the researcher

developed right after he asked Grace about her intention when asking students those questions

Excerpt 12 (MMI9)

G: (...) Now I can see how to work with it (the book) when it's ok for me to do so. This time was ok because the conversation and the way to... the contextualization and the warm up questions, the focus questions, everything was in the direction I wanted. You know? It was going to the grammar focus box.

(...)

R: So, basically, asking these questions... you think they'd lead to the grammar focus?

G: Uhum. Yes.

(...)

R: ok. So, when I asked you why you decided to follow the manual's suggestions, by asking students those questions, you mentioned the grammar box. Can you think of any other reasons to use these "warm-up" questions, as you said, at the beginning?

G: Uhm... No. No, because when I planned the lesson I was just thinking about the grammar part.

(...)

R: What do you think would be different if you had just opened the book and said "so, listen to these people talk about future plans"?

G: I think this works in the same way we discussed before.

R: What do you mean?

G: I need to give them some focus, something to pay attention to, because if we don't do that... I know listening is something hard for them, so if I don't give some directions they'll just trip (...) If I give them something to think of, they'll need to pay attention to the listening so as to see like "oh, what are they talking about?"

Although Grace cited "contextualization" and the focus questions of the listening passage when answering to the researcher's inquiry, her aim was to focus on the grammatical content the unit dealt with. It is true that, as a textbook that follows a communicative approach to language teaching, Interchange introduces its grammatical contents in the section "Conversation" (i.e. listening activity), in order to have students' focus on functional aspects of language – contextualized – over form. This might

explain why Grace came up with such response. However, since she and the researcher had been discussing the way the manual leads teachers to provide students with context before listening activities, the answer given was not the one expected. Therefore, the researcher inquired into any other possible reasons for using the so called “warm up” questions, but Grace could not come up with any other explanation. Therefore, a shift in the sort of mediation took place – from more implicit to more explicit (LANTOLF; ALJAAFREH, 1995) – the researcher comparing Grace’s action to a very direct and decontextualized way of giving instructions to students (as it was done in MMI7 – excerpt 11). As a result, Grace was able to refer to the past interactions held with the researcher (which illustrates other-regulation taking place), the idea of contextualizing the conversation to students being implicit in her speech as she said she would have to “give them something to think of” in order to have students think “oh, what are they (the people in the listening) talking about?”.

It appears that Grace has not yet internalized how the pictures that follow the listening passages allow her to provide students with contextual knowledge. The following passage presents further evidence of such issue, as she explicitly cited she is not sure about how to put the concept of contextualization into practice

Excerpt 13 (MMI9)

R: And why did you decide, as the book suggests, to explore the picture? I mean, to ask questions about the picture.

G: I think it’s a good way to start. You know? Working with the picture... We talked about that before, and I talked about that to other teachers too... About how to explore the pictures, how it works for them to help them focus on what the audio passage is about. If I work with the picture I can say... They’ll think “Ok, if there’s a picture of a graduation party, the audio passage is about it”.

R: So you basically provide them with context.

G: Yeah. I think so.

R: Why do you think so, you’re not sure?

G: I’m not sure about contextualization. Sometimes I think “Ok, what am I supposed to do? What am I supposed to ask? What do I need to do to get what I want?”. So it’s still a little hard for me.

R: But what you did is contextualization. When you ask them these questions about the picture, you know? You're setting the mood, you're preparing them to listen, you're "limiting" the context. They're wearing graduation gowns, graduation caps, it's their graduation day. They're probably talking about future plans (...) You provide them with context. If you had just said "I want you to listen to two people talking, ok? Tell me what they're talking about". Do you have any directions?

G: No.

One more time, Grace referred to both the interactions she has had with the researcher and with her professors. However, the idea of contextualizing the listening through the pictures did not seem to have resulted in further development within her ZPD, since she needed explicit inquiry into her practice so as to come up with the idea of focusing students' attention on what the passage was about. Furthermore, as Grace did not use the concept of contextualization in her answers, the researcher decided to bring it into light, which revealed Grace's insecurity as she stated that she does not know what she is supposed to do so as to bring the concept to the concrete plane. As a manner to be responsive to Grace's responses, the researcher explained to her that she had, indeed, contextualized the activity by asking students the questions, mentioning how it can prepare students to understand the passage.

Since this was the last MMI, there is no further data to be analyzed in order to investigate whether this last interaction led Grace to develop within her ZPD as regards using the pictures to contextualize listening activities. Moreover, the data presented so far suggests that Grace is not able to self-regulate yet, her actions still being mostly object (i.e. through the manual) and other (i.e. through the researcher and her professors) regulated, which indicates that more MMIs would be needed in order to keep propelling the internalization process of the aspects of her teaching that were discussed with the researcher, specifically when it comes to contextualization, as Grace herself acknowledged. However, when comparing Grace's practice and justifications from the beginning of the classroom observations to the end, it can be seen that the teacher has moved away from explanations that are distant from the pedagogical intents behind the manual suggestions, the development of a communicative way to teach listening taking place, which signals Grace's development within her ZPD as her speech reverberated mediation

provided by the researcher along the MMIs. Furthermore, considering that her ZPD has evolved, Grace will hopefully be able to look back at these MMIs and have the skills and qualifications to progressively understand the importance of pre-listening activities and contextualization.

5 Final remarks

Briefly speaking, the present study illustrates the way teacher professional development can be enhanced through responsive mediation provided by a more experienced peer, as researchers in the area point out (JOHNSON; GOLOMBEK, 2016).

By answering the first specific research question – How does a novice teacher understand the teaching of listening in the beginning of her teaching practice? – there seemed to be a lack of understanding regarding the teaching of such skill, this being signaled by the teacher's unawareness of the intent behind the manual suggestions, as well as her justifications that focused on the development of other linguistic aspects (i.e. speaking and pronunciation) while activities aimed at preparing students for listening. As regards the second question – To what extent does this understanding change by the end of the study? – it could be seen that the teacher developed awareness and understanding of some pedagogical implications regarding the teaching of listening by the end of the MMIs, both her practice and speech pointing to some ideas dealt with the researcher during their interactions, such as the importance of pre-listening strategies (i.e. the use of contextualization and questions to focus students' attention on the ideas of the listening passages, as well as to activate vocabulary related to them). Finally, when it comes to the third research question – How does mediation provided by a more experienced teacher foster change in this understanding? – being responsive to the teacher's responses appeared to have led Grace to revisit her practice and develop a better understanding of teaching listening, this being pointed out by the way the teacher's practice and speech reverberated the interactions with the researcher. It is essential to highlight that providing the teacher with mediation directed at her maturing needs (i.e. ZPD) was paramount during the study, constituting an essential aspect of a sociocultural approach to teacher education (JOHNSON, 2009). However, need for further mediation was instantiated by the teacher during MMI 9, as she herself explicitly acknowledged she was still unsure about contextualization, pointing to the non-internalization of the concept.

When it comes to the main objective of this study, which was to investigate how a novice EFL teacher develops her understanding regarding the teaching of listening as she is mediated by a more experienced other who uses the manual suggestions as a starting point to inquire into her practice, it was noticed that responsive mediation provided to the teacher led her to revisit her practice, imbue it with meaning, and consequently (re)conceptualize it. Although further mediation seemed to be necessary in order to foster a thorough understanding of the aspects dealt with, the teacher seemed to have become closer to a communicative approach to teaching, both her actions and justifications reverberating the moments of interaction with the researcher. In alignment with a vygotskian view on human development (VYGOTSKY, 1987), the present study adds to the body of research in the area which claims for the importance of providing teachers with opportunities to revisit their practice and reason about it through mediation of a more experienced peer. Therefore, this study brings into light how a sociocultural approach may contribute to the area of teacher education, illustrating – as advocated by Johnson (2009, 2015) – that it is inside the situated practices of teaching that L2 teacher development can be supported and enhanced.

In order to conclude the present paper, we find it important to consider that although a more expert other plays a pivotal role in the sort of interactions presented here, this does not neglect the part taken by a less experienced peer in the whole process. As stated by Agnoletto (2019, p. 100), it is the very “[...] dialectical quality of the interactions established [that...] enables development to take place, pointing [...] to the importance of mutual attunement”. In other words, both more and less experienced other should be “in sync” so as to foster professional development. Therefore, this study illustrates how having teachers externalize the reasoning behind their choices potentially creates mediational spaces that can be explored by a more expert other, who guides these teachers through developmental processes by introducing scientific concepts in light of these professionals’ practical experience. It is during these moments that responsive mediation may allow teachers to revisit their actions and robustly develop the way they think about them. In the words of Johnson and Golombek (2016, p.21), this sort of mediation plays “[...] a crucial role in exploiting the potential of what Vygotsky called symbolic tools—social interaction, artifacts, and concepts—to enable teachers to appropriate them as psychological tools in learning-to-teach and ultimately in directing their teaching activity”.

Authors' comments

Every author was involved in the following steps when conducting the study: (i) designing it (objectives, research questions, and procedures for data collection and analysis); (ii) writing the paper (from the introductory section to the concluding one - Maria Ester Wollstein Moritz focusing on the introductory and concluding sections, while Adriana de Carvalho Kuerten Dellagnelo and Matheus André Agnoletto focused on the literature review and methodological sections. When it comes to the data analysis section, the three authors were actively involved in it); and (iii) formatting the article. The only process which did not involve the three authors was the actual data collection: Matheus André Agnoletto was the one who observed the classes and conducted the MMI sessions with the participant teacher.

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