CHAPTER 9

ELT Primary School curriculum design in the 21st century: introducing the intercultural perspective in Latin America

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Introduction

In this chapter we describe how we developed an ELT curriculum design for primary school with an intercultural perspective for the context of the Province of Buenos Aires in Spanish-speaking Argentina in Latin America in 2007. English is a foreign language in this country. As we shall explain later, this intercultural dimension turned this curricular document into an innovative initiative in this setting, after a century of conceptualizations of ELT which had focused exclusively on the linguistic side of foreign language learning.

We start with a brief outline of some current theoretical developments in foreign language education in general, and ELT in particular, which have motivated this innovative experience and have served as its theoretical foundation at the same time. We then provide a brief description of our context, essential to grasp the challenges involved in curricular development in this region. A significant part of this chapter centers on a detailed description of the processes of conceiving and actually writing the curricular document that we ourselves underwent as curriculum writers. The focus is on how this document has purposefully taken account of this intercultural dimension of ELT in Argentina. Basically, this was done through the ways in which its components were organized and developed. Our task as curriculum developers was to find ways in which this perspective was both explicitly and implicitly stated in the document. On the one hand, explicit information was conveyed with reference to intercultural issues in the introductory part, the objectives, the content, and the teaching strategies presented. On the other hand, there was an implicit treatment of diversity in classroom practices in terms of the ways in which children are expected to learn and teachers are expected to teach from the point of view of a process based methodology. At all times we strive to illustrate these processes with extracts from the curricular document itself.

We then proceed to present the concomitant teacher education program especially designed to support this curricular innovation in the province of Buenos Aires. Here we explain our understanding of teacher education,

namely a conception that radically distances itself from teacher training. We are particularly detailed in our description at this junction, and this is intentional. The motivation for this is simple: we believe that the professionalization of teacher education, as conceptualized and carried out in our setting, must accompany a curricular innovation like this one for it to be successful in reaching real classrooms and real pupils around our province. Finally, we present a practical example of this teacher education program through an extract of a teacher development session as actually implemented in this setting in 2007.

Acknowledging the intercultural dimension of ELT in curriculum design

The design of an English curriculum for primary school in Latin America requires an analysis of what it means to teach English to children in the 21st century. English has become a language of international communication in a globalised world (Paran and Williams, 2007), which means that to use English today requires the ability to interact with different users of the language, namely native speakers and those for whom English is a second, foreign or additional language. Language users and learners worldwide appropriate English in order to create their own meanings and interpret others' meanings in increasingly complex and varied social, cultural and historical contexts (Kern, 2001).

The inclusion of an *intercultural* dimension (Byram and Doyé, 1999; Byram et al., 2001) in the rationale for ELT today needs to be considered in relation to the complexity of the teaching contexts of the classrooms of this century. These classrooms are part of fluid, dynamic, and complex societies and in consequence they necessarily reflect diversity in its social, historical, cultural, geographical, economic (and other) dimensions. Educators are required to consider this diversity within the classroom through teaching practices that acknowledge the multiple and varied backgrounds of their students in these different dimensions, i.e. a cultural background characterized by diversity in gender, social class, ethnic background, educational background, age, religious and sexual orientation, special capacities, etc (Thisted et al, 2007). Consequently, in order to recognize different voices and to be able to convey their own voice in discourse (Kramsch, 1998), children need to be exposed to language learning experiences with a rich cultural component as from early ages. In addition, they need to be respected as exponents of that diversity through the different and subtle ways in which they are recognized both as learners and social subjects. Put differently, they are acknowledged and respected as individuals with unique cultural identities (Coetzee-Van Rooy,

2002). From the foregoing, an English primary school curriculum which aims at the development of children´s intercultural competence and the respect for their own identities needs to acknowledge an intercultural perspective by prescribing intercultural practices throughout its design.

This line of thought constituted the main motivation and justification to undertake the writing of a new curricular document for English in primary school: one that purposefully took account of this intercultural dimension.

Our context

We have chosen to focus on our experience in the province of Buenos Aires for two reasons. The first one is practical and concerns the fact that we both have been born in this province, and have lived and worked in it all our lives. We are extremely familiar with the workings of education in English in this setting, a setting with unique characteristics as we shall describe next. The other reason is that this is the biggest and most influential province in the country from whichever point of view one looks at it, be that cultural, social, political or economic. Understandably enough, this province has historically led the way as far as educational policy and curricular developments in other provinces in Argentina are concerned.

The Province of Buenos Aires is characterized by a complex system of education with a primary school population of 1,5 million children. Complexity is based on the sociocultural, economic, geographical and other differences that are found along the territory of the province and its population, with schools that respond to the needs of children who come from the diverse realities that the Province of Buenos Aires presents. For example, one school out of four is rural (with no more than 10 pupils per form). While in some regions such as *Trenque Lauquen*, 50 percent of the schools are rural, other regions only have 1 percent of rural primary institutions. Responding to density in population, a district such as La Plata has 120 primary schools, while a district such as Salliqueló has six primary schools in all. There is a huge number of schools with extended timetables, i.e. special school programs to cater for disadvantaged children. Some schools are located in very poor areas (underdeveloped, or disadvantaged by their economies, social contexts, enormous distances from the capital of the country, etc.) while others are located in areas of high income per person (rich districts). Most schools receive immigrant children mainly from other countries in Latin America, especially neighboring countries. There is also an important aboriginal community distributed alongside the territory of the Province whose children attend state primary schools. In

consequence, there is an increasing number of children who speak Spanish as a second language in primary school and for whom English is a third, an therefore additional (cf. second) language.

Added to this, our classrooms in the Province of Buenos Aires are part of complex societies, as in all parts of the world, in which the contact and confrontation with Otherness is unavoidable. Within a federal system of Education such as the one in Argentina, and other countries in Latin America and worldwide, it is necessary to provide all children with the knowledge and skills in English to help them become communicatively competent in the international language while simultaneously responding to local (regional) needs and respecting the children's individual cultural identities. In this framework, conveying an intercultural perspective in the text of the curricular document itself was paramount, in particular an intercultural perspective that considers the individual, the local and the global in the teaching of English as an international language in this setting.

We now turn to the description of how this curricular document took the intercultural dimension of ELT into account in our context. This section involves first the explicit aspects and then the implicit ones.

Explicit treatment of diversity in the curriculum through intercultural issues

We explicitly focused on diversity in the main body of the document through the treatment of intercultural issues, in particular through the need to develop intercultural competence in children by means of teaching practices that address the cultural dimension of language education.

Intercultural elements in the introduction

The document highlights the need to confront children with Otherness to enrich children´s perspectives of the world and of their place and self identity in that context (Thisted et al., 2007). For that to take place, children need multiple opportunities to interact with texts (oral, written and other) in a multiplicity of formats and through various means and resources. Unlike Europe and the US, the direct intercultural encounters with members of other cultures (e.g. through short visits abroad) typical in these settings is unthinkable for the children in Argentina and other countries in Latin America, i.e. developing or under-developed countries with young economies, pervasive poverty and unemployment in disadvantaged areas, and emerging democracies. It is through their encounters with multiple and

varied texts that our children will experience their contact with the peoples of other cultures, their habits, behaviours, values, beliefs, etc.

We understand culture as the knowledge and perception, thinking and action schemes which are not presented as given but rather are part of dynamic processes of symbolic production that characterize the representations and practices of social groups (García Castaño and Granado Martínez, 1999). From this perspective, all social practices involve cultural meanings, mediated by language. This curriculum design explicitly recognizes, in its introduction, the role of language as a vehicle, a symbol and a representation of culture (Kramsch, 1998) when it states:

> From a wider perspective, contact with a foreign language confronts children with difference and allows the approach and the inevitable experience of the other, the different, the foreign, and the diverse. To teach English to a child is to give them opportunities to interact with texts and/or people of other cultures and so enrich their cosmovision, their socio-cultural context and their place in such a context, fortifying their own identity. Confrontation with difference through a foreign language helps children to become aware of the principles that make democratic life possible, stressing the common bonds of humanity and every other aspect that joins human beings.[1] (Diseño Curricular de Educación Primaria, 2008: 320)

[1] All the extracts of the Curriculum Design that are quoted in this paper were translated into English by the writers. For a more accurate citation, the Spanish original version is offered in the corresponding end notes: "Desde una mirada más amplia, el contacto con la lengua extranjera confronta a los niños con la diferencia y permite el abordaje y la vivencia inevitable de lo otro, lo diferente, lo ajeno, lo diverso. Enseñarle inglés al niño es brindarle oportunidades para interactuar con textos y/o personas de otras culturas y así enriquecer su mirada del mundo, de su entorno socio-cultural y de su lugar en dicho contexto, fortaleciendo su propia identidad. La confrontación con lo diferente a través de la lengua extranjera estimula la toma de conciencia acerca de los principios que hacen posible la vida democrática, enfatizando los lazos comunes de la humanidad y todo aquello que une a los seres humanos."

Intercultural elements in the pedagogic rationale

The pedagogic position that underlies this curriculum design conceives of good teaching as that which stimulates reflection on the social practices carried out through language. The document explicitly prescribes a focus on the creation and interpretation of discourse in the primary school context. In other words, teachers are expected to help children identify, understand, and respect the different voices in discourse by considering the context in which language is used as well as the role, position, status, knowledge, attitudes, etc. of the participants in written and oral communication. When children can read the multiple voices present in any L2 text, and can make their own voices heard in interpreting those texts, they will appropriate English, each one in their own ways, to face and negotiate the world, decoding its multiple systems of symbolic, social, and cultural meanings (Cots, 2006).

This curriculum design presents language as interaction in which spoken and written texts are used to mediate the speaker's/writer's intended meanings. The document encourages children to understand, from very early ages, that the goal of written and oral communication is to establish a negotiation of meanings by means of which convergence between the speaker's/writer's intention and the listener's/reader's interpretation is aimed at though not always achieved (Widdowson, 1984, 1990).

> The teaching of English in Primary School must focus on the construction of meaning. In that sense, teaching a language implies teaching to create and interpret meaning through oral and written texts in specific historical, social and cultural contexts.[2] When an adult teaches a child a language, what they do is help children to signify a communicative intention by means of a certain linguistic pattern so that the intention is understood as such by the community of speakers who use the language taught in a particular context. (Diseño Curricular de Educación Primaria, 2008: 335)

[2] "La enseñanza de inglés en la escuela primaria debe centrarse en la construcción de significados (meaning). En tal sentido, enseñar una lengua implica enseñar a crear e interpretar significados por medio de textos orales y escritos en contextos sociales, históricos y culturales específicos. Cuando un adulto le enseña la lengua al niño, lo que hace es ayudarlo a significar una intención comunicativa por medio de una determinada forma lingüística para que dicha intención sea entendida como tal por la comunidad de hablantes de la lengua que se enseña en un contexto particular."

The curricular document is innovative in this area of the world because in general, foreign language education in this setting misses, in its daily pedagogic reality, its cultural dimension as well as its conception as genuine, purposeful communication. In practical terms, this means that literacy tends to be taught as a series of disconnected and de-contextualized skills, mainly linguistic, which lead children to assume that meaning is self-contained and can be derived by simply inspecting the language in a text with sufficient detail.

Intercultural elements in the general objectives

Communication as seen from a discourse perspective necessarily involves intercultural awareness since "Whenever we are engaged in interaction with others, we perceive and are perceived ourselves in terms of our social identities, one of which is our ethnic identity" (Byram et al.,2001: 7; Thisted et al., 2007). The children's identities pervade all learning, including the learning of foreign languages. Children are individuals with idiosyncratic identities which involve multiple and varied dimensions such as language, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, educational background, physical appearance, special capacities, and others (McCarthey and Moje, 2002; Peyton Young, 2001). This aspect is recognized and overtly expressed in the document in the main objectives of ELT in primary school, which are to:

- Promote the development of intercultural competence and the strengthening of their (the children's) own cultural identity by enabling the processes of social integration.
- Develop practices of the language centered on the creation and interpretation of meaning by taking into account the communicative needs of the children.[3]

(Diseño Curricular de Educación Primaria, 2008: 321)

The strengthening of children´s cultural identities as an aim in the English class is something new in the context of Argentina. In fact, previous curricular documents listed objectives in terms of the children´s linguistic development alone, without any allusion to the cultural issues involved when interacting in and through English. These objectives point out two

[3] * Promover el desarrollo de la competencia intercultural y el fortalecimiento de la propia identidad cultural favoreciendo los procesos de integración social.
* Desarrollar prácticas del lenguaje centradas en la creación e interpretación de significados (meanings) atendiendo a las necesidades comunicativas de los niños.

new dimensions in the English class in Latin America. On the one hand, the treatment of cultural issues becomes unavoidable if children are to become competent users of English in a global world: we acknowledge that our children are likely to interact in English with speakers with diverse cultural identities and they will therefore need to find and develop their own voices within that diversity. On the other hand, this English curriculum design acknowledges the children´s identities for the first time in this setting. The meanings children need to express through English become central in this curriculum – meanings which derive in part from who they are, and which at the same time will influence who they become in the future. This curriculum document assumes that who the children are, what they believe in, how they live, and what family, community, and school environments they are immersed in makes a difference in how they learn, how they engage in literacy, and what role language learning in general and L2 learning in particular play in their lives (Burgess, Hecht and Lonigan 2002; Gee 2001). In this curricular document, the teaching of English as a foreign language in this country is conceptualized as a tool for identity exploration, personal and affective development, and intellectual, social and moral growth.

Intercultural elements in the treatment of literature

In this curricular document, literature is viewed as a powerful tool to scaffold the language (Bruner, 1978; Cameron, 2001; Read, 2007) and to develop intercultural competence. Through literature, especially multicultural literature, children develop an insight into the ways other people behave and feel allowing for the development of empathy, understanding, respect and also personal identification. Literature works in interface with language, that is, the language of literature is a good model of how language is used for different purposes in different contexts with varying communicative values. Literature also allows learners to interpret how literary texts represent and symbolize the world they live in and how language is used to solve problems and create effects.

It is also important to notice that children´s literature in English today is an outstanding resource of target culture, source culture and international culture materials (McKay, 2002). Yet, as Goshn (2002: 176) points out, the power of literature to "transform, to change attitudes, and to help eradicate prejudice" through the topics it presents and the ways it presents them has been neglected in the ELT profession in this area of the world. This neglect is reflected in most ELT curricular documents in Latin America. Probably, the omission of literature might be due to a structure-based trend that has prevailed for more than fifty years and that has guided the selection of the

linguistic exponents presented to children on the basis of language selection criteria alone. Added to this, the linguistic exponents to be taught have for years been presented in artificial, stereotyped, culturally inappropriate contexts, contrived by textbook writers to suit wide markets, with a strong disregard for the genuineness and authenticity of such materials for their intended audiences. These materials deprive foreign language learning of its social and communicative character by presenting the language as "a manifestation of linguistic rules for display and not a realization of linguistic rules for communication" (Widdowson 1984: 64).

Quality literature is an exponent of how language is used with mastery, it shows how skilled users of English resort to a linguistic code to convey meanings and achieve purposes. Unlike traditional approaches to ELT that resort to simplified readers in the first years of instruction, this curriculum design favors the use of literature, both in the form of canonical and non canonical texts. It is well known that children need to read literature that presents their cultural heritage (Opitz, 1999) in a variety of formats (Brown, 1999/2000; Goldstone, 2001/2002; Short, Kauffman, y Kahn, 2000) integrating different languages (published, visual, graphic, etc.) (Garrett-Petts, 2000; Styles y Arizpe, 2001). Through literature, they can all identify with the characters they feel represented by. Literature offers the possibility of learning about the similarities and differences among people and to consider different view points (Joseph, 2005; Perini, 2002; Lehman et al., 2000). Quality literature selections which are authentic and rich in cultural details (Harris, 1999) and that celebrate diversity (Joseph, 2005) as well as common human bonds (Tkinson Smolen y Ortiz-Castro, 2000) by showing people of different cultures doing similar activities, are recognized in this curricular document to be very powerful educational materials.

In particular, we believe that multicultural literature becomes relevant as a tool for children´s development in primary school. As Barta and Crouthers Grindler (1996) explain, multicultural literature serves several purposes such as fostering opportunities to learn more about others and to assess individual and social responses to the cultural context. It also creates opportunities for children to participate in the lives of others (Harris, 1999; Miller, 2000/2001) challenging stereotypes based on issues of race, gender, social class or religion (Atkinson Smolen y Ortiz-Castro, 2000; Josepth, 2005).

The design of this new curriculum introduces literature in the English primary class as a means to learn both language and culture in a powerful way, placing literature as one of the three contexts in which the language is learned, the other contexts being the children´s daily lives and school

subjects. The text of the document refers to this when it reads:

> The peculiarity of literary texts is that they foster the reader's personal identification with the posed situation, the characters and their experiences, and become an ideal textual space to work on cultural aspects. The children interpret the texts according to the way they represent and symbolize the world that surrounds them, both at a personal and local level, as well as social and global.[4] (Diseño Curricular de Educación Primaria, 2008: 340)

Since literature is a new tool for teachers in the curriculum, the curricular document provides examples of the literature that can be used and of how it can be used. In all cases, the focus of the document is to challenge teachers´ prejudices on the use of literature in an ELT class in primary school and to describe the ways in which literary materials can be used not only for language learning but also for intercultural development. Some of the literary materials included are different versions of traditional tales. An example of this is the inclusion of "Little Red Riding Hood" as written by Tony Mitton and Roal Dahl. Similarly, highly acknowledged children´s authors of different ethnic backgrounds such as Mary Ann Hoberman, Eric Carle and Pat Mora are included within the suggested literary bibliography for the primary class.

Intercultural elements in the treatment of reflection activities

Reflection leading to awareness on how language operates in discourse and on how it is used to convey meanings is prescribed for the primary classroom in this curriculum design. Both language awareness and intercultural competence are necessary for lifelong learning to take place. When children become language analysts and ethnographers in the process of becoming literate in English, and when they become conscious of the mechanisms available to them to interact with others and of how people use language as a vehicle of cultural identity, they are more likely to address diversity outside the class in a confident and successful way (Byram, Nichols and Stevens, 2001). They will also develop critical thinking skills as a result

[4] "La particularidad de los textos literarios de propiciar una identificación personal del lector con la situación planteada, los personajes y sus experiencias, los convierte en un espacio textual ideal para trabajar aspectos culturales. Los niños interpretan los textos a partir de cómo representan y simbolizan el mundo que los rodea, tanto a nivel personal y local, como social y global."

of the metacognitive activity required by the reflection activities suggested in the curricular document. This is exemplified by the following curricular prescription in relation to the development of attitudes, knowledge and skills for intercultural competence (Byram, 2000; Byram et al., 2001) through explicit reflection stages in the primary class:

By means of reflection activities that embrace linguistic, cultural, affective and attitudinal aspects, the teacher:

a) Stimulates interest in and motivation for learning English.

b) Fosters awareness with regard to what children can do with the language.

c) Gives feedback to help children keep on learning and developing positive attitudes towards the language and its speakers.

Examples of these activities are to reflect upon:

a) What has been learned in the last classes and systematize the use of language.

b) The language register used, the kind of text needed for certain actions, the grammatical rule put into work to carry out a certain language practice.

c) The diverse linguistic contents used depending on what the speaker wants to say.

d) The different ways people of diverse cultures have to do the same activities.

In all these cases, the children's affective realm is involved in relation with the learning of a language and of its speakers.[5]

(Diseño Curricular de Educación Primaria, 2008: 344)

[5] Por medio de actividades de reflexión que involucran aspectos lingüísticos, culturales, afectivos y actitudinales, el docente:

a) Promoverá el interés y la motivación por aprender inglés.

b) Estimulará la toma de conciencia sobre lo que los niños pueden hacer con la lengua.

c) Brindará información de retroalimentación para que el niño siga aprendiendo y desarrollando actitudes positivas respecto de la lengua y de quienes la usan.

Ejemplos de estas actividades son reflexionar sobre:

a) Lo que se ha aprendido en las últimas clases para sistematizar el uso de la lengua.

b) El registro de la lengua que se usa, qué tipo de texto se utiliza para determinadas acciones, qué regla gramatical se pone en funcionamiento para llevar a cabo una cierta práctica del lenguaje.

c) los diversos contenidos lingüísticos que se usan según lo que se quiere decir

d) las diferentes maneras que personas de distintas culturas tienen para realizar las mismas actividades.

En todos estos casos se involucra la afectividad de los niños en relación con el aprendizaje de la lengua y sus hablantes.

Intercultural elements in the organization and selection of content

The peculiarity presented in the document is that it is an example of Type B curricula (Breen, 1987; White, 1988) in which what is taught is integrated with how it is taught. This is the reason why content is drawn as a system constituted by topics, tasks, functions and linguistic exponents –all four elements operating as parts of a whole. Topics, tasks, functions and linguistic exponents as presented in the document were developed to facilitate children´s recognition of Otherness and the self through language use. Firstly, the topics were selected to allow for the treatment of social issues by introducing contexts of language use with a rich variety in terms of the cultural and social aspects involved. The socio-cultural matrices included are used to teach the language and aid learners to become ethnographers in the process (Byram, Nichols and Stevens, 2001). This is the case of contexts such as: *Human activities, Social organization, Me and my world, My neigbourhood, My city, My province, My country*. The document encourages educators to guide children to become aware of everyday aspects of their lives (e.g. neigbourhood, city, province) through observation and analysis but at the same time, to distance themselves from these immediate aspects in order to inspect the wider socio-cultural contexts surrounding them (country, aspects of humankind such as human activities shared by different regions in the world, etc.).

Secondly, the intercultural perspective is strongly supported by the selection of language use options presented for each of the contexts (children´s daily lives, school subjects and literature) by means of which children can perform a variety of functions in the creation of discourse and Discourses to solve tasks. To illustrate this point, let us consider the following language exponents taken from the document:

A: Have you got ...?

- Yes, here it is [requested action] / Yes, I have.
- I'm afraid not [apologising] / No, I haven't / I don't think so

Through the example it becomes clear that children can use these linguistic exponents for a variety of purposes such as requesting, asking about possessions and apologizing. Different forms can be used in different contexts with different interlocutors. Probably, if the child is denying the possession of an object following her teacher´s request for the object "Have you got a...", the expected answer would be "I´m afraid not" while the same response to a classmate´s request for the object would be "I don´t think so". Our example shows that language use options as presented in the document allow for culture sensitive choices in the construction of discourse in terms

of who their interlocutors are and what children´s purposes are in the interactions they participate in.

Thirdly, the language selection presented aims at working with diversity in the way people talk and live, that is, how the linguistic exponents used by speakers convey their cultural meanings. It is important to point out that examples are given so as to facilitate an understanding of how teachers are expected to draw content in their school syllabi, in particular because of the novelty of the approach in Argentinean school practices. In all the examples provided, culture is seen as difference in that different people, of the same national identity in this case, can and in fact do have different cultural backgrounds expressed in the language they use. Added to this, cultural stereotypes are identified and explicitly challenged through the examples offered. In the following selections, diversity is presented in terms of age and family organization.

> *When I was five, I could ride my bike.*
> *My grandma is very old but she can ride a bike. She reads books to me.*
>
> *There are different families.*
> *This is my family. It´s a small family, but I'm happy.[expansion]*
> *There´s my mum and my sister in my family. Pedro is living with us for some time. [temporary information]*

In the first example, the stereotypical description of the elderly grandmother with a walking stick is broken by a grandma who can ride a bike as well as read books. In the second case, we find an example of a family that differs from the typical four member nuclear family in this country: there is a single mother with two children and the mother´s partner is living with them. These examples, as well as all the others present in the document, deliberately encourage educators to look for alternative examples in the portrayal of reality. Learners are provided with texts and tasks that encourage them to compare and contrast their own cultural norms, values, behaviours, etc. to the cultural parameters of others.

This methodology of comparison and contrast, however, encourages learners to move beyond dichotomies or binary divisions (upper and lower, Western and Eastern, White and Black, Occident and Orient, etc.) toward a "Third Space" (Chien-Hui Kuo, 2003, 234; Kramsch, 1993) "by opening up a space of translation, a place of hybridity (...), a transformative and subversive force by which the production of cultural difference is mobilized (...), an ongoing process of relating to otherness" (Chien-Hui Kuo, 2003,

234). The curricular document assumes that individuals in a given culture draw on multiple resources to make sense of the world and to make sense of oral and written texts. As children live and participate in multiple worlds, they occupy the in-between spaces of two (or more) cultures. Being "in-between" different resources, funds of knowledge, or discourses affects their literate, social, and cultural practices (Moje et al., 2004).

An illustration of this can be found in the examples of how to use different versions of the same literary piece. The ways in which different versions of the same story can be read in class help children develop an awareness of these multiple worlds in which characters live. Also, through the activities of analysing the paralinguistic features of books from different historical and cultural settings as they relate to the stories and the discourses of their characters, students are encouraged to dive into the hybridity of these third spaces generated through literature in the class.

Implicit treatment of diversity through a process based methodology.

The implicit treatment of diversity was conveyed mainly through a process based rationale which assumes that all children are different when it comes to learning and that teaching contexts are different for different teachers. A process based curriculum recognizes diversity and caters for it within the classroom. We know that different children will learn different things from the same lesson. Conversely, different teachers will make different decisions depending on their specific classroom contexts and learner contributions (Breen, 1987).

In the way objectives are defined.

Unlike product oriented curricula, a process based curriculum focuses on the process of learning and teaching, not the products to be achieved. In other words, the learning and teaching experiences that children and teachers accumulate throughout the years spent in the school system as part of a lifelong process. In this respect, a process based curriculum design does not prescribe fixed learning outcomes to be reached by all learners without consideration of individual differences. Instead, it takes account of individual development as a continuum throughout life, assuming that there will be differences both among children and also within each child´s process development. Therefore, this document abandons the traditional conception of objectives as fixed attainment goals and identifies, instead, *traces of development*, i.e. the clues of linguistic, socio-cultural, and personal development that each child shows in his/her performance

throughout the process. A trace of development considers the idiosyncratic nature of language learning and recognizes diversity within the classroom: we acknowledge that children will learn in different ways according to their own needs, learning styles and cultural background, among many other factors. All this can only be measured by process evaluation instruments which provide individual feedback and aid children to work on their own idiosyncratic processes. Unlike previous curricular documents prescribing summative tests, this document introduces different compulsory forms of process based assessment instruments such as portfolios, on-the-run assessment, self evaluation, peer assessment, interviews, observation grids, projects, etc. on a performance basis. This means that the emphasis is placed on what children can do as they perform tasks using language and how this communicative competence evolves through time in a continuum. Educators are given a list of traces of development to guide their analysis of children´s performances and these operate as a "can do" checklist comprising both oral and written language.

In content selection

A process based rationale is also present in the way content is drawn, since we understand content as a fusion between the tasks that children are meant to do in the classroom and the language they use to carry out those tasks based on different topics. What children do in the class is inseparable from the language they use to that aim. Language will be acquired when it caters for the children´s idiosyncratic communicative needs while doing these tasks. This means that content will be appropriated differently by different children according to their individual communicative needs as they perform these tasks. Once again, a process based curriculum allows for the treatment of diversity within the classroom as teachers create rich contexts for learning and expect each and all children to profit in different ways. Diversity in children´s linguistic, socio-cultural, and personal development is considered a natural outcome of a process based curriculum, allowing for freedom of expression: children will learn to say what they actually want to say.

To exemplify this point we can consider the lexical treatment of grammar that strongly marks the way linguistic exponents have been presented in the document. Unlike more traditional approaches to content design, a question such as "Do you like hamburgers?" can be answered with a variety of responses that go beyond the traditional "Yes, I do"/ "No, I don't" choice into more realistic and communicative responses such as "Mmm ... Not really", "Yummy", "I love them!" This curricular document incorporates and encourages this kind of responses for the first time ever.

A culture bound teacher education program for curricular innovation

Curricular design that considers the cultural element as a central issue in language education requires the curricular designer to consider various dimensions by means of which intercultural aspects can be drawn. Through both explicitly and implicitly stated information, it is possible to write a document which prescribes an intercultural perspective in English as a Foreign Language as a school subject in coherence with the needs of our learners as citizens of the 21st century (Starkey, 2007). We have argued in our discussion so far that this curricular document has indeed taken care of this dimension for the first time in Argentina.

Yet, we were fully conscious that our description in this previous discussion of the rationale, principles and decision-making behind the process of actually creating the document would not be enough to guarantee that the curricular innovation would become a day-to-day reality inside classrooms. It is well documented that teacher responses to school reforms, in particular curricular innovations, differ greatly among individuals. In other words, teachers may clearly decide to implement the innovation (to a lesser or greater extent, and in various and idiosyncratic ways) or they may strongly resist new policies and curricular prescriptions (Johnson, 2009; Halpin, 2005).

With the specific aim of facilitating the transition in this respect, i.e. to assure teachers' gradual acceptance of the innovation, a teacher education program was developed and implemented in the Province of Buenos Aires as part of the new educational policy developed under the Law of Education 26.206 (2006). Unlike the previous teacher training courses which had proliferated up to then, this teacher education policy explicitly and conscientiously recognized the diversity of teacher profiles existing in the system and purposefully addressed this diversity through teacher education provisions that were also culture bound. What do we mean by this?

Teacher education might be understood simply as a learning stage towards the development of a body of knowledge and skill that constitutes the basis for the discretionary judgment that professional activity requires (Freidson, 2001). Or rather, the learning that takes place during teacher education can be understood in its social and cultural dimension. From this perspective, it is the result of interaction, the result of a negotiated experience that shapes teacher agency and that sees teachers as members of a community of professionals within specific institutions. The formation of a teacher´s identity as defined in these terms is a social process by means of which teachers become active participants within a community of practice

(Wenger, 1998). In recognizing the social and cultural nature of teacher learning we are thus acknowledging the impact that teacher education has in the way it shapes our forms of belonging to a professional community (Johnson, 2009; Roberts, 1998; Burns and Richards, 2009).

Moreover, as Wenger (1998: 103) says: "Communities of practice cannot be considered in isolation from the rest of the world, or understood independently of other practices. (...) Their histories are not just internal; they are histories of articulation with the rest of the world." Therefore, as curriculum writers immersed in this specific socio-cultural setting, we were to expect changes both in the configuration of particular communities of practice as well as in the ways in which the teachers in this teacher education program were socialized into them. Consideration of these aspects was fundamental for this innovation (as they are, for that matter, for any educational change, be it global, societal, curricular or institutional).

To develop a teacher education program that considers both the subjective as well as the collective aspect of teacher professional development was by no means an easy task in a system with more than twenty thousand English teachers. To begin with, a number of decisions were taken with respect to the theoretical basis of the program. These decisions can be summarized as follows. The teacher education program involved:

- A flexible structure, allowing teachers to decide upon their own learning. Options included traditional off-school courses, formal technical in-school dialogic assistance in schools (with the presence of a teacher educator in a given school), or simply informal conferences with teacher educators. While teacher educators in the districts performed the role of advisors and coaches, these teachers were encouraged to choose the best option for them. They decided upon their own roads and they had the last word on what they understood was best for their own learning.

- A program with a type B curriculum, focusing on the creation of the necessary conditions for reflexivity and inquiry. The program consisted of a wide variety of courses and formal dialogic assistance meetings and was based on the analysis of authentic case studies, scenarios and situations in the teachers' own settings. This allowed for a strongly contextualized application of the theoretical framework that supported the new curriculum into actual classroom and school practice. We include an example in an appendix at the end of this chapter. The case studies were developed through the narration of a story of a specific teacher in a specific context of work. As Johnson and Golombek (2002:

5) point out: "narratives are not simply stories of individuals moving through and reflecting on experiences in isolation... [they] are social and relational and gain meaning from our collective social histories." In this respect, we thought that narratives as case studies were particularly relevant to help teachers delve into their own personal theories, inquire into the principles that lead teaching practice and challenge their naturalized assumptions.

- A process based approach to teacher learning, allowing for a diversity of outcomes and a respect for idiosyncratic teaching trajectories. Assessment meant assessment for learning, which we came to understand as the basis for further learning. For example, in off-school courses this was done through constant self assessment tasks, peer coaching and portfolio assessment of the final project. The narrative element was also used as a process based assessment instrument to help teachers self-assess their own processes in school based dialogic assistance. This was done through teacher diaries that helped them reflect on their knowledge in action and develop deeper insights into their own teaching experiences and learning processes.

- The use of research and theoretical developments in the field of ELT to guide all teacher education activities so that research was seen as necessary to solve real world problems in the classroom. Teachers were encouraged to carry out their own research based enquiries (be it teacher research in study groups or proper action research projects).

- A wide perspective on the role of teachers within institutions and within a specific system of education with its constraints and possibilities. These perspectives present in the suggested educational provisions involved working with other stakeholders in the system (head teachers, appraisal officers, teacher educators, students of teaching courses from higher education institutions) within groups and within specific institutions.

- The development of a communication scheme within districts and regions in the province of Buenos Aires, with the purpose of developing wider communities of practice with specific needs related to their local situations. These communities operated as support groups for teaching as well as for further learning. The communication scheme aimed at developing the cooperation and collaboration elements of a democratic teacher profile that Sachs (2003) mentions as part of a platform for rethinking teacher professionalism.

Challenges and possibilities

The teacher education program faced many challenges, in particular considering the diversity and complexity involved in a system with more than twenty thousand English teachers as mentioned before. How could such a big number of teachers be reached with only fifty available teacher educators distributed along the territory of the province? Could teacher agency be respected at all times, even when teachers decided not to consider the development possibilities we were offering? In what ways does a State enforce a new curriculum policy that is part of a social and political project without coercing teachers? These are but a few of the challenges we faced.

These obstacles notwithstanding, a culture bound teacher education strategy is the only possible option within a professionalization policy whose ultimate objective is social justice. We share Johnson`s (2009: 114) view that "L2 teacher education must take into account the social, political, economic and cultural histories that are "located" in the contexts where L2 teachers learn and teach". This conception acknowledges EL teacher education as teacher learning emerging "through social interaction within a community" (Burns and Richards, 2009: 4). Such a view required us to recognize that the notion of teacher identity is a dynamic construct: "teacher – learners negotiate their identity through the unfolding social interactions of a particular situated community, in relation to its specific activities and relationships" (Ibid, 2009: 4). Learning takes place collaboratively, mainly through interaction with others so that "advances in knowledge and refinement of interpretations of knowledge take place as a result of collective, supportive, endeavour" (Cunningham, 2008: 2). This conceptualization of EL teacher education emphasizes the centrality of dialogue in an INSET program in that it offers the opportunity for a teacher learner "to clarify one´s own meanings ... support changing views of self as teacher" (Roberts, 1998: 45) and develop teacher agency in connection to "broader questions about education in a democratic society" (Zeichner, 2009: 119).

It is well acknowledged that through interaction in a learning community, teachers enrich in two main ways. Firstly, they develop what Eraut (1994: 71) calls "a disposition to theorise" an aspect of teacher cognition that a teacher should develop in teacher education in order to keep learning for life. Such a theorising disposition "to interpret, explain or judge intentions, actions and experiences" (Ibid: 71) involves a disposition to apply theory in context specific situations and to reflect upon how theory has been used. This can only be reached through cycles of activity "in concert" (Roberts, 1998:

46) involving listening to and participating in teacher discourse, observing other teachers teach, and practising and discussing one´s own teaching in collegial ways (Eraut, 1994: 69). Secondly, participation in communities of practice through the self narration arising from context bound interaction gives rise to "more active, spirited debate about policy and practice" (Sachs, 2001: 158) leading towards renewed teacher professionalism and the formation of what Sachs calls "an activist professional identity" (Ibid: 158) that present day ELT education requires.

In other words, the fact of "co-construct[ing] with L2 teachers locally appropriate responses to their professional development needs" (Johnson, 2009: 115) helps develop teacher agency and reflective practice beyond technical rationality. Change for quality teacher education within "a social justice agenda" (Zeichner, 2009:17) is certainly possible when reflexivity is at the basis of teacher learning through inquiry based practices. As Johnson (2009: 123) states, "it is the substance of that inquiry that will enable them [teachers] to function as transformative intellectuals." All of these initiatives were aimed at providing a quality knowledge base for teachers in terms of the knowledge, performances and dispositions necessary to work in a culturally responsive way (Ibid: 26) in the complexity of present day teaching contexts.

This teacher education program was implemented two years before the curricular innovation took place and has remained till now. More than six thousand teachers have been involved in some kind of development activity to day. The intervention done from the State has aimed at the creation of a professionalization strategy congruent with the ideological aspects that supported this specific curricular innovation. Though much needs to be done yet, the program implemented as described here shows that sustained teacher education opportunities as part of an intercultural project for the teaching of English as a foreign language has resulted in better learning opportunities for teachers and improved teaching practices in the end. This is what teachers have mentioned in the assessment feedback they have provided to ministry officials. This is what teachers are increasingly showing when they display teaching plans to school authorities. It is clear that no quality teacher education can become a fact if the focus is placed on fast results rather than quality processes for transformative action.

Conclusion

Although ELT provision for young learners has been an area of interest in the profession in the last decades, ELT in compulsory primary school

is a relatively recent phenomenon in most parts of the world where English is not a native language. The fact that English is absent from the Primary School curriculum in many of these settings does not seem to be in congruence with the interest of educators around the world in ELT methodology, the remarkable increase in the availability of research and materials development in the field, or the importance that parents attribute to English as a key lifelong educational content for their children, or in other words, their conception of English as "cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1977; Luke, 2003: 133). In most countries in Latin America English has been taught in secondary school for some time now but it is still a missing subject in state primary classrooms in most systems of education. The need to cater for ELT education as from childhood is evident in the role English has acquired as an international language. When it comes to the so called democratization of knowledge (Tedesco, 2005; Popkewitz, 2006), being a competent user of English is crucial in order to have access to knowledge and information in academic, work, and other environments. Therefore, most scholars anticipate that English is bound to be included in the primary school curriculum worldwide in the near future (Graddol, 2006).

Similarly, much is being discussed worldwide about the professionalization strategies that should accompany curricular innovation. Yet, little has been done to the moment in different parts of the world to overcome strong accountability tendencies that are enforced at the expense of teacher agency. The underlying belief here is that more accountability will result in better teaching practices. The experience reported in this paper recognizes that in the evolutionary nature of teacher learning, both self agency and the communities teachers participate in simultaneously shape their identities. As Roberts (1998: 44) states, "teachers (...) 'navigate' their professional and personal lives within such a [social] landscape, and, as their landscapes differ, so will the course and nature of their development." In this respect, we have explained how a teacher education program designed to support a curricular innovation policy has been developed, and how it has respected teacher agency. All of this has been possible, of course, because these efforts were accompanied by the political decision to move towards emancipatory practice in coherence with a curricular policy that acknowledged intercultural issues. In this sense, the legal frame of these political decisions has been central to guarantee the strong investment that the educational actions described here require. In Argentina, this was possible through National Law 26.075, passed in 2006, that establishes an increase in educational investment from 4.7 net income in 2006 to 6.0 in 2010, which means twice the amount of most Latin American Countries as seen from UNESCO documents on the region (UNESCO, 2001).

If we understand "the teacher as a key actor in the process of educational transformation" (Tedesco, 1997: 23) when applying a progressive agenda, teacher education should develop in line with that social justice agenda. Any policy that considers teachers are "agents of the state" and that brings them "to the forefront of educational reform to improve education quality" (Tatto, 2007:10), needs to be based on the ethical principles that guide professional activity. Such policy should also be developed in collegial ways in blunt contrast to traditional training based course structures which have dominated the teacher education scene for years and years. Finally, when an educational policy places a strong emphasis on the role of educating children in a foreign language like English as a means to reach intercultural understanding among peoples, then, the teacher education program that goes with it should be based on how to help teachers develop in democratic teacher learning contexts that enhance their professional role and give them a voice as transformative intellectuals.

The experience reported in this paper can be relevant for those involved in curriculum policies in places where ELT is an area of development in the Primary School system, in particular, non-English speaking countries where English functions as a foreign or second language, or English-speaking countries with an increasing population of linguistically diverse people whose first language is other than English (eg. USA). This experience can also be of interest to curriculum developers in other parts of the world where English is taught as an additional language in primary school, in particular, in places characterized by pervasive diversity in contextual terms as was the case in our context of work. Finally, this chapter can be of interest to researchers and scholars worldwide who are studying process based methodologies in primary school policies due to the fact that this is still an area of little application in ELT compulsory schooling, irrespective of its extensive theoretical development.

Appendix

The following is an example of a communal task (i.e. a teacher education instance in which all teachers in a certain district or region were present) that was used as part of this teacher education program in 2007. This case in point comes from a course for primary school teachers in which they were expected to discuss a number of questions based on a specific case study. The basis of the case study was the implementation of the curricular prescriptions in the new curricular document (Diseño Curricular de Educación Primaria, 2008) by one specific teacher in the Province of Buenos Aires. We include below the actual sequence as it was used in a real

teacher education development session throughout the province of Buenos Aires, with more than a thousand teachers participating in the off-school course in February 2007.

Analysing stories for use in the class.

For this session, teachers got together in groups of three or four. The teacher educator handed in the stories Fly Guy by Tedd Arnold and When we went to the park by Shirley Hughes to each group of teachers. The purpose of this session was to inquire into the ways in which culture is present in teaching materials and how these can be useful to help students become intercultural speakers. These stories were chosen because they included different types of cultural content of different societies around the world. They also helped teachers reflect on the ways in which stereotyped visions of reality can be challenged and changed through teaching activities.

The stories can be summarized as follows. Fly Guy is a story about an American boy who has a fly as pet. It describes his adventures with the fly at school. When we went to the park is a story in rhyme that tells what a British young girl does when she goes to the park with her grandfather. Teachers were expected to analyse them following these directions:

You are teaching English in 5th form in a state school of the province of Buenos Aires. Students have already had 2 weekly classes for the last year and a half. They can speak about themselves (name, age, nationality), their abilities, likes/dislikes. They can talk about their families and pets. They have just learned to talk about their daily activities.

TASK 1: Analyse the story Super Fly Guy by Tedd Arnold using the following questions:

- Is this a real book or is it specially written for language learners?
- Will the content engage learners?
- What values and attitudes are implicitly and/or explicitly embodied in the story?
- How is discourse organised?
- What is the balance of dialogue and narrative?
- How is language used?
- What new language is used?

In their small groups, teachers explored the linguistic, cultural, and social issues that they thought would impinge upon the reading of this story by pupils in a 5th form classroom in a state school of the province. In this

specific session (4th meeting), their discussion permeated the realization of how these considerations played a role in reading in this setting. In particular, they stressed the importance of non-linguistic factors here. Given the prevailing linguistic focus in all prior curricular documents for English in primary schools in the province, this session was especially insightful for these teachers.

Teachers then proceeded to task 2.

TASK 2: Read the story When we went to the park by Shirley Hughes and agree on an answer to these questions:

a) What society is the story depicting?
b) What cultural content can you identify through linguistic and paralinguistic features?
c) What national stereotypes are conveyed through the story?
d) How is this relevant to your teaching contexts?

Groups collaboratively reflected on each question, fully justifying their decisions. By asking questions, making comments, giving their opinions, and justifying these opinions, their perspectives on these issues, many times unconscious and hidden, became apparent and were clarified and enriched. The questions were unusually inspiring and thought-provoking, as most teachers had seldom consciously stopped to think about issues of culture and stereotyping and their significance. Participants were encouraged to add questions on the basis of their experience as foreign language educators in their specific educational contexts and to discuss. As corollary of this discussion, the following question generated further reflection: "How can we as teachers become more sophisticated in our understandings of culture and the meanings of culture that we embed in our daily classroom practices?"

Overall, these teachers became aware of the importance of the social and the cultural (beyond the linguistic) in ELT in their settings, both at a theoretical level and at the level of their day-to-day classroom encounters. Concomitant with such awareness was the appreciation of the complexity and the responsibility that being a responsible educator in this sense entails.

The following extracts from three teachers, produced in response to this teacher development session as described here, gives a flavour of the kind of discussion that was generated:

> "Teaching sequence 2 [provided for the story Fly Guy] is coherent with the new curriculum design because the contents are taught in a context. The children are experiencing what they are learning: they are involved in a rich learning situation that stimulates language learning and they fulfil the communicative demands rather than the linguistic criteria." (School teacher from Pilar district)
>
> "The learning activities we, teachers, carried out were very useful even though some of them were very hard for me. This shows that we never know all and that we need to develop professionally for life" (School teacher from La Plata district).
>
> "It is evident that the new curriculum design proposes a change of approach (or an emphasis on certain approaches that started to be used some time ago) that is necessary to cater for an education of quality for all students." (School teacher from Berisso district).

These brief extracts reflect some of the major theoretical underpinnings behind this curricular innovation, such as issues of identity (both of students and teachers as learners), the educative conceptualization of foreign language teaching, cultural diversity, teacher education, teacher agency and others. We clearly see how these teachers, by relating their practices in the classroom to historical, socioeconomic, educational and personal events, have been influenced and transformed in different ways. Their exploration of relevant experiences of this kind provides the foundation for their understanding of how literacy practices can be constructed and continuously re-created in the classroom. This uncovering of significant experiences is also powerful because it makes teachers, like those in this case, more sensitive to their learners' needs in terms of their multicultural development in complex, fluid, and subtle ways.

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