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Exploring the multimodal affordances of pedagogical materials and activities to foster an inclusive and transformative language pedagogy

Abstract: This chapter explores the emergent language affordances of pedagogical materials in order to foster an inclusive and transformative language pedagogy. My argument is twofold. Against the backdrop of an ecology of language learning and with a view of learning as an expansive process, I point to two possible avenues that, amongst the array of educational practices, could advance inclusivity and transformation. The multimodal affordances of pedagogical materials and activities that we engage with in day-to-day classroom life can challenge conventional meanings, both epistemically and practically, and create new ones that significantly enrich learners' lifeworlds. However, engaging in multimodal awareness needs to be framed in terms of enquiry. Embracing practitioner-enquiry helps position classroom activities as creative, expansive, and attuned to life itself in all its manifestations, both inside and outside the language classroom.

Keywords: expansive learning; exploratory practice; inclusivity; language materials; materials development; multimodal affordances; practitioner-research

Introduction

Pedagogical materials and activities play a critical part in the language classroom. According to Guerrettaz and Johnston (2013), materials mediate meaningful classroom relationships. They structure the curriculum, impact the organisation of classroom discourse, and play an important function in language learning, in part because they

complement “the unique characteristics of the language learners” (Guerrettaz & Johnston, 2013, p. 792). Within classroom dynamics, materials embed “language learning affordances” (p. 792) that are “emergent”, that is, they are unpredictable or produce unintended outcomes in relation to language learning and use. This chapter argues that pedagogical materials and activities play a further important mediating role because their multimodal affordances can serve as practical and epistemic springboards for considering and implementing a language pedagogy that is transformative and mindful of diversity. In the process of engaging with materials, classroom participants experience the multi-layered dimension of the language classroom’s unique ecology (Guerrettaz & Johnston, 2013; Kramsch, 2002; Larsen-Freeman, 2012; van Lier, 2004, 2011). Through learning activities, students can keep alive the flow of meaningful connections existing between the class activity and the life outside the classroom (Bateson, 1973; Engeström, 2016), which is pivotal for students’ engagement (Tomlinson, 2013). These connections are often neglected, at times severed because of context constraints that favour top-down pedagogical implementation and complacency encouraged by pre-formatted materials and time-bound learning objectives. However, an enquiry-based pedagogical stance is crucial to fostering an understanding of educational settings’ hindrances and engendering pedagogical alternatives.

An enquiry-based pedagogy challenges the routinisation and one-size-fits-all standardisation of pedagogical materials, particularly in settings increasingly governed by the dictates of cost-effective practices (Gray & Block, 2012). Harnessing the multimodal affordances of materials through classroom enquiry sets the ground for language teachers, as practitioner-researchers, to explore innovative avenues in language pedagogy and acknowledges teachers’ and learners’ mutual agency. It allows language teachers, while in

the field, to ascertain the fallacy of the assumption that a single activity, however well-planned, will mechanically produce the pre-planned and envisaged outcomes for all learners. This does not mean that language teachers should abandon activities or ditch learning objectives. On the contrary, an enquiry-based approach entails that even though a classroom activity might not produce predicted results, it can create a range of opportunities for learners. Indeed, its unpredictable results and unintended offshoots can benefit classroom participants by exceeding expected pedagogical interventions and learning and by connecting to participants' diverse lifeworlds. Enquiry-based approaches can be transformative, which here means expanding learning qualitatively (Engeström, 1987/2015, 2016).

The chapter begins with a discussion of the theories that support the view that both the ecology of learning and learning itself are "expansive" (Engeström, 2016), which includes an evaluation of the theories' implications in terms of inclusivity and transformation. Classroom-material practices are considered from a socio-semiotic perspective. This approach offers fruitful epistemic and practical hints for identifying the spaces in and through which classroom-material practices serve an inclusive and transformative language pedagogy. Against this theoretical backdrop, the scope for reframing a language pedagogy by implementing and embedding practitioner research in classroom pedagogy, alongside its challenges, is considered. In particular, the focus is on Exploratory Practice (EP), a form of practitioner research that I use in my language classroom. EP's inclusive and sustainable protocols, along with its focus on classroom activities as exploratory tools, ensure that an enquiry-based approach fruitfully engenders a transformative language pedagogy. References to EP-based language-classroom materials and activities are drawn from my practice as a language teacher in British higher education.

They are intended to illustrate aspects of the discussion concretely rather than provide full-fledged activities.

The chapter invites language practitioners to engage with their "artistry" (Schön, 1987) and identify the unique socio-semiotic affordances of materials and activities that best serve the unique learning dynamics of their classroom. Hence, recommendations are open-ended. They call for embedding practitioner research into pedagogical design and implementation and for revisiting the idea of professional development as an opportunity to build on practitioner research to create engagement in language communities of practice. It is essential that educators and learners engage together in enquiry-based pedagogical practices in order to challenge neoliberal trends in education and leverage the value of classroom affordances.

Theoretical Approach: The Language Classroom as an Ecology of Learning and Teaching

Today's language classrooms are rich pools of affordances for materials enhancement and development as well as opportunities to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse population of students. Guerrettaz and Johnston (2013) define materials as "any artefacts that prompt the learning and use of language in the language classroom" (p. 779), such as realia, images, moving images, virtual artefacts (websites, blogs, applications, games, digital environments, and such), texts, textbooks, and worksheets (see also Tomlinson, 2011). Materials as artefacts never stand alone. They are always an integral part of culturally mediated activity, which Engeström (2001) defines as a "collective, artifact-mediated, and object-oriented activity" shaped by a "community of multiple points of view, traditions, and interests" (p. 136). In a learning environment, such as a language classroom, an object-directed activity entails that materials are directed towards a purpose or set of purposes. An object is the "material" or "problem" in which the activity's participants

engage. For example, facilitating any aspects of language learning to achieve the desired learning outcomes is the object of a language classroom. Achieving these outcomes can be accomplished through the mediation of instruments, such as cultural artefacts, that are constituted of materials, symbols and signs, technological tools, words, and theories (Yamazumi, 2021). According to Engeström (1999; 2016), this also means that through mediating relationships cultural artefacts are transformed into new cultural formations.

Language teachers also play a mediating role as they come to make use of cultural artefacts. While within the complexity of mediation activities, this role is conscious as their activities are aimed to facilitate learning; however, offshoots and outcomes are very often unpredictable. For ease of analysis, some of these mediating relationships can be considered through the idea of teachers' artistry. Language educators bring a wealth of tools to their practice and the classroom: knowledge of the taught subject matter, pedagogical knowledge of teaching principles and strategies, as well as traditional classroom materials. Language teachers' artistry is integral to their "skilful practice" (Schön, 1987) and competence, and it includes the creation, management, and administration of traditional classroom materials (Kinsella, 2010). Artistry is an important starting point when assessing the viability of a language pedagogy that cares for diversity, inclusivity, and learners' and teachers' agency by facilitating cognitive and affective engagement while making classroom activities relevant to language learners' lives (Tomlinson, 2013).

To shed further light on the idea of mediated activity and identify potential opportunities for expansive learning, it is helpful to compare a (language) classroom to an ecological system inhabited by *living organisms* (Bateson, 1973; Guerrettaz & Johnston, 2013; Kramsch, 2002; Larsen-Freeman, 2012; van Lier, 2004, 2011). According to Kramsch (2002), an ecological approach captures "the totality of the relationships that a learner, as a

living organism, entertains with all aspects of their environment" (p. 8). An ecological approach is "a relational 'way of seeing' that enables researchers and practitioners to account for phenomena that would otherwise go unnoticed or unaccounted for" (p. 8).

Understanding learners and teachers as living organisms within an ecology of learning is tantamount to viewing them as entangled in their environments, both diachronically and synchronically. Immersed in multi-layered, complex, mediated, and multi-scalar realities, learners and teachers find themselves experiencing meaning in a continuous flux of making and remaking – they are in the middle of "layered simultaneity" (Blommaert, 2005, p. 126). Rather than stemming from distinct and replicable sets of causation within an ecology of teaching and learning, meaning and understanding emerge at multiple levels and spatio-temporal scales as part of agential interrelations (Barad, 2007).

A helpful analogy to capture classroom complexity is that of "a thick living mesh" (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 20) of affective, cognitive, practical, and ethical ecologies that mediate the micro (the private and the lived) and the macro (the global and the institutional). Mediation always produces difference and change, which is learning. However, change can be minimal, for example, if it serves adaptive goals or aims to maintain a system (Engeström, 2016). Alternatively, it can be maximal, for example, when it is transformative and yields something qualitatively new (Bateson, 1973; Engeström, 1987/2015, 2016). In other words, in the classroom preconscious and conscious experiences intertwine with socio-cultural-material conditions historically sedimented in social practice (Küpers, 2017). Learning as maximal in terms of development and growth is "expansive" (Engeström, 1987/2015, 2016), and it is achieved when learning exceeds the boundaries of a classroom or activity.

Once learning and teaching are understood as part of an ecology, which has embedded instrumentalities that connect internal and external ecologies, language educators face the challenge of harnessing the webs of multi-scalar connections and networks that constitute their practice. For instance, as part of our skilful practice as language teachers, we are aware that activities and materials must be effectively and cognitively engaging (Tomlinson, 2013) and, accordingly, we activate our artistry to make our materials engaging. We rely on activities that have been tried and tested previously as they are part of a set of conventional materials sitting in the public domain or in our personal set of resources. By doing so, we also initiate culturally mediating processes. As mentioned earlier, we are not always aware or fully in control of variables intra-acting in the activity system. Nevertheless, we frame the object of our activity through the implementation of actions akin or belonging to traditional activities. Because of the time-bound constraints of current neoliberal educational contexts, which make teachers and learners accountable for any educational failures (Block, Gray, & Holborow, 2012), we are expected and expect to achieve desired outcomes linearly from objective A to envisaged outcome B. This is an instance of adaptative activity rather than expansive.

The sections that follow argue for a diverse, inclusive and expansive pedagogy. They suggest two interlinked avenues for advancing inclusivity and transformation through material pedagogical practices. The key to grappling with the affordances of classroom materiality is to recognise their multimodal nature and embrace their potential to disrupt linear implementations.

Socio-Semiotic Perspective: Semiotic Affordances and Agency in an Ecology of Learning and Teaching

In light of the theoretical foundation established in the previous section, a socio-semiotic perspective on learning and teaching is helpful when grappling with the multimodal potentialities of classroom materials.

As was envisaged almost three decades ago in discussions concerning the status and future of literacy education and pedagogy (New London Group [NLG], 1996; Serafini & Gee, 2017), "the realities of increasing local diversity and global connectedness" and the growing "multiplicity and integration of significant modes of meaning-making" (NLG, 1996, p. 64) have created structural conditions for accommodating learners' needs and endowing them with agential opportunities to create, interpret, and remake meaning. On an educational level, these structural conditions lend themselves to an inclusive language pedagogy, one that acknowledges multiple and situated educational practices that draw on both the micro level, such as the "experiences of meaning-making in the lifeworlds" (Serafini, 2014, p. 2), and on the macro level, that is, the socio-cultural-material and historical conditions of social practice. As already noted (NLG, 1996; Serafini & Gee, 2017), conditions exist for a pedagogy that ultimately gives learners agency as meaning-makers and "designers of their social future" (Serafini & Gee, 2017, p. 2). Equally, it can be said that conditions subsist for teachers to exercise their agency as meaning-makers together with their learners.

Exponential advances in digital technologies have played an important role in generating such opportunities (e.g., web-based learning environments). In "super-diverse" settings (Blommaert, 2010; Blommaert & Backus, 2013; Vertovec, 2007, 2010), digital technologies, the World Wide Web, and portable devices have favoured an intensification of local and translocal forms of communication. These advances have ushered in multiple, situated, and multimodal ways of engaging in meaning-making. As social semiotics scholars (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2018; Lemke, 2006) have suggested, such communicative complexity

involves the dynamics of multimodal ensembles (Serafini, 2014; see also Kress, 2010), where meaning is made and interpreted through different modes of communication. A *mode* can be defined briefly as "a set of socially and culturally shaped resources for making meaning" with "distinct affordances" (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2018, p. 291); thus, a multimodal ensemble is a set of semiotic affordances that provide distinct possibilities for "human expression" (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2018, p. 291).

Semiotic affordances can relate to language, whether spoken or written, as well as visual representations, gestures, movement, postures, and artefacts (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2018; Jewitt et al., 2021; Lemke, 2006). These resources are always mixtures of more than one mode (Serafini, 2014). As Lemke (2006) notes, a purely verbal-linguistic meaning is unlikely to be found. For instance, we might understand that verbal communication is embodied, that is, it is systematically integrated with different bodily gestures. If the intended meaning is produced by drawing primarily on the speaking mode, "your voice also makes nonlinguistic meaning by its timbre and tone, identifying you as a speaker, telling something about your physical and emotional state, and much else" (p. 5). If a given semiotic resource focuses on the written mode, "your orthography presents linguistic meaning inseparably from additional visual meanings (whether in your handwriting or choice of font)" (p. 5). As for images, "[i]f you draw an image, neither you nor anyone else […] sees that image apart from construing its meaning in part through language (naming what you see, describing it), or imagining how it would feel to draw it, sculpt it, etc." (p. 5). This means that all communication is multimodal; that is, it is facilitated by a broad array of media. Equally, it can be claimed that communication is complex and ever-expanding (Engeström, 1987/2015, 2016; NLG, 1996; Serafini & Gee, 2017).

Let us consider the design of a language pedagogical activity in the form of a video-clip featuring a song in the target language, which has been adapted for a language-learning setting as part of my practitioner-enquires, as I will illustrate below. The pedagogical adaptation of a video-clip is a popular activity in the toolkit of language materials. Its popularity has been growing amongst educators due to the semiotic affordances of the Web, which can accommodate multiple modes while, as a hypertextual and hypermedial medium, allowing other media and modes to be connected instantaneously (Lemke, 2006). Several modes can be detected in both the design and the finished product of the adaptation: the visual, the aural, and the verbal; and if individuals engage with the video-clip via the medium of a touchable or augmented-reality device, then the haptic and physically experiential modes are also involved (Jewitt et al., 2017).

An extra layer of multimodal meaning-making is added when the activity is adapted into different pedagogical renditions. This occurs when a pedagogical purpose is built into a resource in order to facilitate language learning (Misham & Timmis, 2015; Tomlinson, 2011). Thus, the video-clip – in all its possible pedagogical adaptations – embeds multiple learning affordances. Whether the video-clip is an artefact around which a pedagogical activity revolves or a sequence within a broader activity, once its semiotic affordances are harnessed, they provide learners and teachers with opportunities for tapping into classroom materiality and its pool of historical and social ecologies (Engeström, 1987/2015, 2016; Vygotsky, 1978). The artefact allows learners to immerse themselves in a complex, dynamic, multimodal ensemble with diverse sociolinguistic and socio-cultural backgrounds, which enables them to express and make visible an array of identity and cognitive needs. It is in this sense that multimodal affordances unravel what is often “unnoticed or unaccounted for” (Kramsch, 2002, p. 8).

Ultimately, framing a language-classroom activity as epistemically and practically multimodal questions conventional and mono-directional forms of knowledge production and meaning-making. For instance, it challenges the traditional, logocentric approach to classroom materials, which privileges the verbal, spoken, and written modes of educational delivery and assessment, often to the disadvantage of those students who benefit from diverse ways of learning.

Reframing Language Pedagogy: Learning What Is Not Yet There and Expansive Activity

Now that the theoretical foundation and socio-cultural perspective have been established, the article shifts to arguing for a fundamental reframing of language pedagogy. Engeström's (1987/2015, 2016) notion of expansive learning introduced earlier aptly complements the ecological and multimodal framing of classroom materiality because it provides further insights into how to shift multimodal affordances toward fostering an inclusive and transformative pedagogy. Expansive learning adds an extra layer of intelligibility to the idea that language pedagogy should address the educational needs of multiple, complex, and ever-changing socio-cultural environments.

Learning always occurs within "complex, continuously changing activity systems" (Engeström, 2016, p. 209), which are unpredictably open-ended and qualitatively transformative. An expansive view of learning brings to the fore both learners' and practitioners' agential affordances. According to Engeström (2016), human learning needs become increasingly blurry: "It is not at all clear just what needs to be learned to cope with the demands of complex activities and global networks in constant turmoil. Humans – practitioners, teachers, students – are intentional and interactive beings who keep interpreting and reinterpreting the challenges and tasks they face in their own, multiple, changing and often unpredictable ways" (p. 209).

It is in this sense that learning can be understood as an expansive process. More specifically, it involves “learning what is not yet there” (Engeström, 2016). As such, learning is a qualitative process that is “led and owned by practitioners” (p. 220), who make and remake meaning on a day-to-day basis by deviating from or adapting conventional courses of action. Understanding education as an expansive process has implications for educational practitioners as well as researchers.

Each classroom activity – or, as Engeström (2016) names it, “any formative intervention” in an educational setting – defies the “laws of linear causality” (p. 209). Engeström (2001) argues against conventional theories that advocate the idea that learning is a process by which an individual or an organisation acquires “some identifiable knowledge or skills” (p. 137), which are “stable and reasonably well defined” (p. 137). Such theories assert that learning is presided over by a “competent ‘teacher’ who knows what is to be learned” (p. 137). When expected results are not achieved, both teachers and learners are blamed. As Candlin and Crichton (2011) argue, the idea of “deficit” is metaphorically deployed “to describe and categorise what might be called a measurable insufficiency” (p. 4), which entails a technical view of causality in which problems are identified and solutions are provided by either learners or teachers.

In theories of learning based on ideas of causality, learning appears to take place only within the classroom’s walls. This view severs the diverse organic whole of the learning community – with its varied sociolinguistic origins, sociocultural backgrounds, cognitive approaches, and identity claims – from vital connections outside of the classroom. In contrast, Engeström (2016) maintains that what is learnt is neither stable nor definable in advance, which makes learning emergent. Learning develops and evolves within practice,

and it is maintained when it serves the unique purposes and interests of a specific community (Engeström, 2016; Hall & Greeno, 2008).

A similar critique of linear approaches to learning activities can be extended to research interventions in classroom dynamics where researchers seek to control all variables. From this viewpoint, organised educational activities are characterised by various interventions within the learning environment – by practitioners and managers (Engeström, 2016) – as well as by interventions outside the learning environment – by "consultants, administrators, customers, competitors, partners, politicians, [and] journalists" (p. 220). In this scenario, educational researchers' interventions become "detached from vital life activities of the participants" (p. 219) because they seek "linear results" (p. 220).

The understanding and conceptualisation of both practitioners and researchers emerge out of settings of practice. They are "embodied, embedded, and distributed in human activity systems equipped with multi-layered and multimodal representational infrastructures or instrumentalities (Engeström, 2016). Because they are "inherently polyvalent, debated, incomplete, and often 'loose'" (p. 226), practices are characterised by "partial versions" of understanding and conceptualisation (p. 226). Such a looseness creates affordances that allow for the implementation of a language pedagogy cognisant of the meaningful life activities of classroom participants.

This takes us to the role educators can play in understanding the affordances of learning activities that, when framed multimodally, demand the instantiation of a transformative language pedagogy. As argued earlier, learning expands – both creatively and qualitatively – once pedagogical implementations acknowledge vital life activities and when practitioners and learners take charge of the composite nature of the learning process. Epistemically, for practitioners, this means carving out a space between intended

meaning(s) and conventional forms of meaning-making within, across, and beyond classroom activities.

Returning to the idea of activity in a system illustrated earlier (Engeström, 2001), this is characterised by being collective, artefact-mediated, and object-oriented as well as shaped by traditions, interests, and a broad spectrum of different perspectives within a community of practice. Being object-oriented means that an activity is purposeful; driven by concerns that engender attention, motivation, effort, and meaning. In other words, when designing materials, potentialities and problems must be understood in the light of tradition, historical developments, as well as current concerns. However, "an expansive transformation is accomplished when the object and motive of the activity are reconceptualised to embrace a radically wider horizon of possibilities than in the previous mode of activity" (Engeström, 2001, p. 137). Learning expands when activities afford a multiplicity of modes and allow for meaning to be grasped and made anew by learners with different capabilities and levels of linguistic proficiency.

Expansive learning has the potential to take place, for instance, when a specific activity intentionally moves away from an exclusive focus on monomodal writing, such as a worksheet on grammar or vocabulary that enacts kinaesthetic modes through physical engagement with grammatical and lexical structures. Drama activities are an example of this. As Lutzer (2013) argues, the use of drama in language learning is not merely an artistic addition to the language curriculum. Rather, it embeds "crucial dimensions of the experience of language into the learning process" (p. 35) by offering "unique opportunities to directly encounter and learn a foreign language as a whole" (p. 85).

Therefore, learning expands when a space is created for unscripted learning to emerge on multiple levels within daily language practices, which is here referred to as *raw*

semiosis. It can occur within a single mode of expression – say, between a signifier (e.g., a word or sequences of words, whether written or spoken) and an intended meaning, which can be the springboard for engaging with other modes; for instance, engaging with a reading comprehension activity and playing with the meaning extrapolated to trigger creative memory connections and embodied activities. It can also occur between a plurality of coexisting modes when involved in the complex hypertextuality and hypermodality of a video-clip. Finally, learning expands when space is created between the conventional administration of activities, such as a semiotic activity aimed at a specific outcome, and other activities or systems (e.g., an established language syllabus). Therefore, the creation of space allows for deviations from routinised classroom or institutional scripts (Ax & Ponte, 2008).

Implementation: How to Expand Learning and Pedagogical Activity

Implementation of a reframed, expansive language pedagogy entails taking a fresh look at existing activities and practices. A multimodal approach can reveal, on multiple levels, the significance of creating spaces within daily language practices. In fact, institutional settings are characterised by external and internal organisational interventions, which make it difficult for educational researchers to trace causality or the expectations that inform a particular educational practitioner's interventions. Indeed, a formative intervention is synergistically intertwined with other interventions, motives, and interests, becoming affected by and enmeshed in them. Hence, the broader and more unmitigated the space between resources, modes, signifiers, and the signified is, the more learning expands. A closer examination of the video-clip classroom activity can help clarify how multimodal awareness in the classroom enables the implementation of a transformative pedagogy.

A video-clip is a multimodal activity in a socio-semiotic frame insofar as it is comprised of audio and moving images. It entails a meaning (a signified) that is expressed through a material form (a signifier). If we frame it as an activity system (Engeström, 2001, 2016), it has distinct characteristics. First, the relationship between meaning and form is always motivated (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2018; Engeström, 2001). This means that its material form is assumed to be the most appropriate form to express an intended meaning, at least in terms of it being an artistic production, regardless of its pedagogical applications or its use by a language teacher, who recasts any of its original meaning(s) in the context of a classroom and through its use as a language-learning activity. Furthermore, since an activity system is "always shaped by the environment in which it is made" (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2018, p. 292), its material properties and historical usage in a specific environment make the activity suitable for that specific context. Any video-clip recast as a language-learning activity is shaped by the pedagogical expectations of the language environment in which the activity is designed and implemented. These expectations might include the sequencing of the activity in accordance with the methodologies associated with or the historical positioning of similar activities. For example, it involves recasting the resource as an activity using the toolkit of traditional language-teaching activities.

An activity-system approach has advantages in the sense that each mode that constitutes a given pedagogical material can potentially create meanings that transcend their conventional understanding. For instance, in a classroom, a whiteboard marker can be used to write on the whiteboard. It can also be used to write on a piece of paper or point at something on the whiteboard, a screen, or in a book (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2018). In an improvisational drama game in the language classroom, a whiteboard marker can become an arrow or a conductor's baton, or it can trigger a learner's imagination and elicit an

impromptu narrative. Any learning tool (or activity) can establish multi-layered connections. Materials that relate to diverse learners' lived experiences and imaginations can be creatively implemented, even though they concurrently belong to well-established educational traditions and historically sedimented meanings.

Learning as "expansive transformation" makes it possible to embrace "a radically wider horizon of possibilities than in the previous mode of activity" (Engeström, 2001, p. 137). Indeed, modes of making meaning are multifarious, situated, creative, and embodied, which means that virtually all language activities have the potential to enable practitioners' and learners' agency. One avenue for advancing learning as expansive transformation is through the development of enquiry-based pedagogy by both educators and learners, which will be discussed shortly. However, first it is important to acknowledge and look at some of the challenges involved in implementation.

Implementation Challenges: Contextual Constraints

Constraints are found in the modalities of implementation as well as the structural conditions under which educational activities unfold. If situational and historical constraints hinder the harnessing the multimodal affordances of classroom materials, how can educators create something *qualitatively* new, particularly when using pedagogical activities shaped by *quantitative* expectations and outcomes?

A central contradiction in current educational practices is the mismatch between expanding educational possibilities (e.g., technological advances) and education's neoliberal commodification and commercialisation (see also Engeström, 2016). The values of efficiency, calculability, predictability, accountability, quality, profitability, competitiveness, and choice (Gray & Block, 2012; Shumar, 2013; Tilak, 2008) dictate the scope of materials

design and implementation. Educational practices driven by cost-effectiveness limit the scope to foster inclusive and transformative learning opportunities.

The pedagogical activities forming the foundation of current language-teaching methodologies are the result of cultural mediation processes resulting from the traditions of practice, theories, and conceptualisations. They constitute a rich pool of educational affordances. However, under current arrangements, pedagogical activities and traditional materials become ossified and lose their aliveness and affordances. They are implemented linearly and with the expectation that, as long as they are consistently executed and received by learners, activities will produce desired outcomes in any and every educational environment. When time and resources are limited, pedagogical activity can become an end in itself, rather than an opportunity to foster expansive learning.

The challenges and constraints of the current educational environment are one reason why this chapter embraces an open-ended approach to pedagogical implementation. It acknowledges that there are contextual constraints; therefore, it suggests that educators shift their perspective on existing materials rather than providing burdensome new, ready-made activities. The next section offers an enquiry-based pedagogy as one possible, flexible model of implementation.

Implementation Suggestion: An Enquiry-Based Pedagogy

An enquiry-based pedagogy offers the possibility of enacting the qualitative transformation that has been discussed so far. This type of transformation occurs when the classroom participants are called to engage personally “in actions with material objects and artefacts (including other human beings)” (Engeström, 2016, p. 100) and, in doing so, confront the synchronic and diachronic diversity of the learning community.

Practitioner-research refers to several types of practices. These include action research, educational action research, participatory action research, teacher research, problem-based enquiry, action learning, reflective practice, and EP, to name just a few. I intentionally deploy the terms “practitioner research” (a general field of practice) and “practitioner enquiry” (individual enquiry) following Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009), thereby making the scope of the enquiry as broad as possible.

Practitioner research is a form of enquiry undertaken by practitioners to investigate their own practice or the context of their practice, mostly in collaboration with other practitioners. Teacher research is a “systematic, intentional enquiry by teachers about their own […] classroom work” (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993, pp. 23–24). The term “systematic” refers to ordered ways of gathering and recording information, documenting experiences, rethinking, and analysing classroom events; “intentional” means an activity is planned, as opposed to one that takes place spontaneously (even though the enquiry is about teaching, which itself is often spontaneous); and “enquiry” alludes to the teacher’s desire to make sense of their experience, which in turn generates questions and reflections.

Systematic and intentional qualities endow practitioner-researchers with a special epistemological status. Teachers “are uniquely positioned to provide a truly emic perspective that makes visible the way students and teachers together construct knowledge” (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1992, p. 448). Practitioner-research simultaneously involves both “research” and “formative interventions” (Engeström, 2016), allowing learning and knowledge to emerge from local settings of practice and meaningful life activities.

Implementation Example: Embedding Classroom Enquiry into Classroom Pedagogy

Enquiry-based work has been important in my own practice. My experience as a practitioner-researcher lies within the field of EP (Allwright, 2003; Allwright & Hanks, 2009;

Hanks, 2017; Slimani-Rolls & Kiely, 2018), a form of practitioner-research traditionally implemented in language education. The EP framework supports inclusive and sustainable enquiry because it stresses the importance of: (a) working to improve the quality of life; (b) understanding issues rather than solving problems; (c) involving everyone (teachers, managers, and learners) in the enquiry; (d) "bringing people together in a common enterprise"; (e) working "cooperatively for mutual development"; (f) making the work towards understanding a continuous enterprise; and (g) minimising "the burden by integrating the work for understanding into normal pedagogic practice" (Allwright & Hanks 2009, p. 260, pp. 117–118; Hanks, 2017).

EP involves puzzle-based enquiry. Both teachers and learners investigate a puzzle formulated as a *why question*. In practitioner research, an enquiry is generally triggered by a critical instance or incident, which is often a problem in the learning environment. In contrast, a puzzle is more an issue of immediate interest, which may or may not be problematic (Allwright & Hanks, 2009). EP concerns are less about improving classroom performance, and more about understanding the shared learning environment and challenging its taken-for-granted aspects. As students identify and navigate a puzzle, classroom activities are implemented to allow them to learn specific aspects of the target language while also engaging with the inquiry processes as they unfold.

Puzzles are inclusive because they are prompted by instances that emerge in the classroom, and they are investigated and understood by both educators and learners. Learners have the agency to identify and formulate puzzles as well as investigate them. For instance, my students formulated the following puzzles: "Why can't I pronounce correctly?" and "Why can't I speak although I understand?". In a teacher-education programme in Brazil

(Exploratory Practice Group [EPG], 2021), where EP has been implemented for almost three decades as a reflective tool for in-service English-language teachers, puzzles have included: “Why aren’t students interested in the subject?” “Why do we have to accept such aggressive behaviour?” “Why do I have to study English when I don’t even know Portuguese?” “Why don’t my teachers understand me?” “Why are our English classes so cool?” and “Why have I been so attracted to learning with my students?” (EPG, 2021, p. 9).

While puzzles prompt investigations into shared learning experiences in the classroom, they can also take teachers and learners beyond the scope of the individual classroom, sparking reflections relevant to learning and life itself beyond the classroom’s walls. In this sense, puzzling is both an individual, personal activity and a social one, as such, it takes into account the diversity and unique qualities of both contexts. Puzzling does not seek “solutions” to contingent problems (Allwright & Hanks, 2009). Rather, by understanding classroom dynamics, it works as a continuum between two interconnecting levels – the micro-level of subjective experiential meaning-making and the macro-level of the socio-cultural-material and historical conditions. A puzzle allows for the emergence of the mismatches mentioned earlier between the affordances of a classroom and its limitations by the current arrangements.

Moreover, EP places a strong emphasis on engaging with classroom materials, known in EP literature as “potentially exploitable pedagogical activities” (PEPAs). In an EP enquiry, PEPAs are exploratory tools that allow both teachers and learners to investigate their learning. Thus understood, activities are crucial, particularly for teachers who are busy, at risk of burnout, under-resourced, or unable to undertake the extra burden of conventional academic research. They can transform pre-existing pedagogical activities into tools of EP enquiry. Once classroom activities are integrated into daily classroom pedagogy

as investigative tools, the teacher can use artistry to enact and experience the complex activity-mediation processes that operate between educational tradition and the unique classroom ecology.

To consider the epistemic relevance of pedagogical materials, it is worth returning to the video-clip example. The video-clip is a multimodal material that *per se* embeds the potentiality for a pedagogy that is mindful of diverse learning environments and the "experiences of meaning-making in lifeworlds" (Serafini & Gee, 2017, p. 2). Indeed, it can enable learning understood as "expansive" (Engeström, 2016).

As a multimodal ensemble, the video-clip allows for meaning to be made and interpreted through different modes of communication (Serafini, 2014). For example, a video-clip can be pedagogically rendered into a number of traditional classroom activities. It can be played without sound, the sound can be played without moving images, or the image can be frozen to elicit thoughts, language, and vocabulary from learners. The clip's content can also be developed by asking learners to engage in embodied drama activities. To different degrees, these implementations will help language learners make assumptions, stretch their imaginations, retrieve previous knowledge, and consolidate their knowledge of the target language, thus establishing connections between lived experiences within and outside the classroom. The way such an activity can be implemented is a testimony to the pool of learning affordances that can be made available by teachers.

However, it is critical for teachers to gain an awareness of the qualitative difference between learning as minimal and learning as expansive (Engeström, 2016). As discussed earlier, learning remains minimal when it fulfils an adaptative end, such as meeting learning objectives per se; for example, when the potential of powerful multimodal tools is limited to the validity and success of the tool's implementation. Conversely, learning can be maximal

when an activity is explored in terms of its emerging, creative affordances. This occurs when the activity has an open-ended scope, allowing for exploration and facilitating the discovery of *what is not learnt yet*, which often emerges unsolicited. Open-ended activities make it possible for educators and learners to engage with the *raw semiosis* of materials nesting in multimodal ensembles (Serafini, 2014) and thus disrupt conventional meaning. I used videos as PEPAs linked to an investigation initiated by an EP puzzle, whether formulated by the teacher or the learners. The process of making connections between, for example, the depiction of conflict in a short film and learners' experiences of conflict (related to learning or other events) in the classroom creates space for mutual understanding of local language learning and needs.

Gaining an awareness and understanding of qualitative differences in learning is a joint enterprise played on two interlaced levels of engagement. One level unfolds in the midst of material development and implementation by working through the raw semiosis of culturally-mediated artefacts, disrupting the conventional meanings and creating space for personal relevance and experience. The second, further level relates to disrupting the hindrances of mismatches and contradictions residing in educational contexts. This level of engagement is about creating scope for becoming involved with the multimodal affordances of materials. A classroom enquiry fulfils this role and allows for experiences of meaning-making to transcend the artificial limits of a language classroom. It is at the crossroads between classroom pedagogy and practitioner-research that possibilities and opportunities to shape an inclusive and transformative language pedagogies sit.

Concluding Reflections: How to Create Opportunities to Foster Inclusive and Transformative Language Pedagogies

This chapter draws attention to the emergent language affordances of pedagogical materials and provides a framework that has the potential to foster an inclusive and transformative language pedagogy. Language educators are encouraged to adopt an ecological, open-ended approach that is attuned to the diversity of the learning community, allowing its participants to make significant connections with life itself. Two intertwined levels of engagement are indicated. The first level involves acknowledging the crucial role of teaching materials and activities for pedagogical work that gives learners and teachers agency in meaning-making when their multimodal potential is harnessed. The approach leverages educators' artistry and pedagogical knowledge in order to create opportunities for teachers and students to develop a deeper understanding of the teaching context and their learning community. The second level of engagement calls for deploying practitioner-enquiry while working alongside learners. A classroom-enquiry can be a space where participants investigate their own learning, creatively engage with the *raw semiosis* of materials, and disrupt old meanings so that new ones are continually made. A classroom-enquiry makes visible what was earlier referred as the "unnoticed or unaccounted for" (Kramsch, 2002, p. 8) and allows for experiences of meaning-making to transcend the artificial limits of a language classroom.

The framework discussed acknowledges the complexity and challenges of becoming mindful of the qualitative difference between learning as minimal and learning as expansive. It requires effort that often transcends the power that language teachers have in the today's environment. It may seem difficult to adopt an open-ended approach in light of the pressures and priorities of the contemporary educational sector, with its emphasis on quantitative benchmarks, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness. As such, the question posed

earlier as to how educators create something *qualitatively* new in the context of *quantitative* expectations can only be partially answered.

However, the insights in this chapter draw upon the understanding I gained through undertaking a developmental, reflective, enquiry-based journey in my own community of practice. This journey was made possible by opening spaces for professional development based on Exploratory Practice. In my experience, materials development and practitioner-research have become enmeshed to such an extent that it is difficult to draw boundaries between the creation of materials that are both investigative tools and pedagogical activities, and intentional work aimed at understanding and enhancing practice itself. Embracing practitioner-enquiry helps position classroom activities as creative, expansive, and attuned to life itself in all its manifestations, both inside and outside the classroom. Its flexibility means it can be used in a variety of contexts, including professional development.

Professional development is an important venue for deploying both of the two intertwined levels of engagement in order to create opportunities to foster inclusive and transformative language pedagogies. Formative events should be viewed as chances to create communities of practice where new materials, activities, and issues are addressed expansively in terms of creatively enhancing teaching practice, rather than in terms of deficit remediation or convenient additions to teachers' toolkits. Professional development should also offer opportunities to engage in inquiry processes to understand the learning and teaching environment as well as challenge its taken-for-granted aspects. This developmental journey can be as risk-taking as it is enriching.

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