

**THE ROLE OF INSTRUCTIONAL SUPERVISION
IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF LANGUAGE
PEDAGOGY**

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Abstract

Dans le contexte de la formation initiale des enseignants, l'encadrement par tutorat des élèves professeurs joue un rôle décisif dans la construction/rénovation de la pédagogie dans les écoles. En 1995, l'Université du Minho a mis en place un projet de tutorat auprès d'élèves professeurs de langues étrangères qui développe une approche de recherche-action pour la formation de ces enseignants, permettant ainsi une cohérence forte entre une approche auto-réflexive dans la formation des enseignants, et une approche centrée sur l'apprenant dans l'enseignement de langues. Pour ce projet, a été construit un cadre théorique commun pour le tutorat, l'enseignement et l'apprentissage, ce qui a des implications importantes pour les objectifs, le contenu, les rôles et les stratégies de la structure de tutorat. Cet article présente un certain nombre des principes et des implications de ce cadre théorique, et montre l'importance d'envisager l'encadrement des futurs enseignants et la pédagogie de l'enseignement des langues comme des tâches intégrées qui favorisent le potentiel d'émancipation inhérent à tout processus éducatif.

1. A FRAMEWORK OF PRINCIPLES FOR SUPERVISION, TEACHING, AND LEARNING

Instructional supervision¹ is a potentially productive area of articulation between teacher education and school pedagogy. Because it is essentially about enhancing teacher and learner development, it necessarily entails a confluence of teacher and learner development theories and practices, thus requiring some kind of articulation of both into a common framework.

The diagram in Figure 1 p. suggests a framework of basic homological principles to make the supervision of language teachers a coherent and purposeful task: *experimentation, reflection, enquiry, sense of direction, awareness, integration of theory and practice, transparency, and collaboration*. These principles derive from two trends — *learner-centred language pedagogy* and *reflective teacher education* — and also represent developmental aims of supervision, teaching and learning

Rather than a theoretical construct, the framework represents a *practical theory of supervision* that results from my and other colleagues' continuous work as supervisors of student language teachers in training, and as teachers and researchers in the fields of teacher education, supervision and language didactics. As a practical theory, it is based on practical, theoretical and ethical justifications whose validity has been scrutinized through systematic evaluation within an ongoing pre-service supervision project we set up in September 1995, where student teachers of English and German as foreign languages are involved in action research as a teacher/learner development strategy². I will not focus on the project itself, but

¹ This project — "Reflective pre-service teacher training through action research" (funded by the Centre of Studies in Education and Psychology, Institute of Education and Psychology, University of Minho) — involves a team of 4 university supervisors — Maria Alfredo Moreira, Isabel Marques and Graça Branco, apart from myself — and student teachers of English and German in their *practicum* year (5th grade Teaching Degree students). Students are placed in groups in local schools where they teach one class per school subject. Their work is supervised by an experienced school teacher together with a university teacher. Although some school supervisors collaborate in the development of our project, it is our responsibility to develop it with the student teachers who are assigned to us (around 30) every year.

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rather on some assumptions underlying its guiding principles and on their implications for the role of supervision in the education of language teachers and in the innovation of school pedagogy.

2. ASSUMPTIONS

The first assumption refers to how supervision, teaching and learning relate to one another. Although involving different degrees of complexity, they have one element in common: learning. This *centrality of learning* means several things : the first one is that, even if the classroom is the direct focus of attention, development actually occurs at the three levels; secondly, learning at each level can be itself an object of enquiry, so that learning about learning becomes a central component; finally, an ongoing dialogue across the three levels is necessary and the adoption of homological principles is considered to be a key-requisite of coherence and purposefulness within the approach.

The second assumption is that the definition of what is involved in the professional development of teachers must necessarily integrate a conceptualization of what education *can* and *should* be, i.e. *the direction of teacher education should be closely related to the intended direction of educational change* (Zeichner & Tabachnik, 1991; Zeichner, 1993 ; Gore & Zeichner, 1995). From our perspective, educational change should entail the enhancement of teacher and learner empowerment within a view of school education as *transformation*. Instructional supervision can then be broadly defined as *the theory and practice of the regulation of teaching and learning processes, where teaching and learning are conceived as personal and social activities with emancipatory power for both teachers and learners*. The quality of supervisory practices is thus directly related to the extent to which it manages to develop self-regulating

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individuals (teachers and learners) who take an enquiry-oriented approach to their action.

A third assumption closely connected with the last one is that *reflective teaching teacher education and a pedagogy for autonomy in the school context are defensible approaches*. Several theoretical and ethical reasons might be pointed out to support this claim, even though these approaches still represent a counter-discourse to prevailing educational practices. I would stress the need to look closely at practical experiences and to listen to what their participants have to say. What I am suggesting then is that *theoretical and ethical considerations have to be validated through participatory evaluation of practice, on the basis of multiple sources of evidence*, and also that *evaluation must include the criteria of feasibility and relevance*. School-based projects are thus crucial to advancing towards a more realistic evaluation of the practicality and situational appropriateness of educational principles, and school-based supervision can be a productive field of experimentation with that aim.

A final assumption refers to the mode of teaching which better enhances the enactment of the principles in the framework. I would like to suggest that *a research-mode* will facilitate the operationalisation of those principles since it involves a systematic and collaborative enquiry about practice whose aims are a) to achieve a better understanding of particular educational situations, b) to act upon those situations in order to bring about change and innovation, and c) to improve one's understanding of larger educational contexts (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Through its emphasis on an epistemology of practice, action research encourages a view of professional knowledge as provisional and tentative, as well as a view of teaching as an exploratory, developmental, self-regulating task. Its primary focus on pedagogical issues facilitates a learner-centred approach to teaching which also induces learners to become "researchers" of language and of learning processes, a basic requirement of autonomous learning.

Given the assumptions above, what then is the role of instructional supervision in the education of language teachers and in the innovation of school pedagogy ? How do the

suggested principles influence the goals, content, roles and strategies of supervision ?

3. IMPLICATIONS

Instructional supervision should aim at *helping teachers uncover, scrutinise and elaborate their practical theories* (Handal & Lauvås, 1987) through enquiry which involves processes of description, interpretation, confrontation and reconstruction of practices (Smyth, 1989). The main focus of enquiry is what happens in the classroom, but also the institutional and social contexts where teaching and learning take place, as well as the processes of supervision and teacher development themselves. This means that the content of teacher development programs should include technical, conceptual and moral aspects of the teaching profession and involve reflection about the legitimacy and feasibility of the means and aims of language education. Supervisors should become *facilitators of change* by taking a *clinical dialogical approach* (see Waite, 1995) whereby student teachers are *given scope for choice and for reflection on the purposefulness and coherence of pedagogical thought and action* ; purposefulness and coherence can be enhanced through a *research-mode of teaching* that encourages an exploratory view of the profession and should be assessed in theoretical, ethical, and practical terms.

It is also the role of supervision *to enhance language pedagogy that is learner-centred and has learner autonomy as a goal*. In our experience in the school context, a pedagogy for autonomy essentially seeks to facilitate an approximation of the learner to the learning process and content, by setting conditions which increase motivation to learn, interdependence relationships, discourse power, ability to learn and to manage learning, and a critical attitude towards teaching and learning. Our role as supervisors is to help student teachers integrate these goals into their teaching purposes and to explore action strategies which are coherent with them, in a progressively skilful way ; their work involves reading on the topics they select for their action research projects, constructing and experimenting materials either with the learners or as self-awareness instruments, collecting and analysing learner data for process evaluation purposes, reflecting systematically on practice (collaboratively, in pre- and post-observation sessions,

and in their research diary), organising the project materials into a project file, and making a global evaluation of their projects, where the learners' perceptions and outcomes are taken into account. This means that the substantive pedagogical content of supervisory sessions will be at least partially drawn from recent developments within the area of autonomous learning, taken as public discourses to be confronted with the student teachers' own representations of teaching and learning. The role of the supervisor as *informant* and *critical consultant* is crucial to providing theoretical input and making it relevant to the student teachers' needs, goals and perceived problems. Again, a research-mode of teaching instigates teachers to direct their intentions and priorities towards learner development that promotes pro-active attitudes towards the language and the language learning process, language awareness, cognitive and metacognitive knowledge and strategies, decision-making skills and initiative in discourse, to name just a few areas within a learner-centred approach.

Finally, supervision should aim at *empowering teachers to become autonomous practitioners*, encouraging them to take a decisive role in the understanding and transformation of educational situations ; this means moving away from a "chameleon-like" survival strategy (Handal & Lauvås, op.cit.) to a *position of shared authorship* which facilitates the development of a pro-active stance towards the profession. The accomplishment of the emancipatory goal requires an understanding of teaching situations as problematic — uncertain, unique and value-loaded (Schön, 1987) —, thus demanding that teachers learn to *tolerate ambiguity* as a necessary component of decision-making processes. The role of the supervisor as *supporter*, *negotiator* and *manager of tensions* is of great importance to encourage a realistic view of professional situations without losing sight of pedagogical intentions and purposes, so that dilemmas become part of professional development rather than unsurmountable obstacles to change. Because empowerment is a continuous process, a *developmental approach* to supervision is appropriate, where the degree of supervisor direction is continuously adjusted to the teachers' readiness (i.e., willingness and skilfulness) to undertake pedagogical decisions and actions on their own (see Glickman et al., 1998). The goal of empowering teachers to become autonomous practitioners also entails the acknowledgement of

their *voice* as becoming professionals, so that the development of teachers' discourse (both interactive and private, in oral and written form) should be a goal of supervisory strategies that encourage self-expression, professional dialogue, and the acquisition of a specialised language.

One last remark should be made about the implications of the suggested framework for the development of supervision as an area of enquiry into language teacher development and language pedagogy. The principles also apply to *the supervisor-as-learner*, who should become researcher of his/her own action. Within our project this takes the form of collaborative enquiry through participatory evaluation of supervisory processes and outcomes on the basis of various sources of evidence. Areas of enquiry may include the discourse of supervision, student teachers' representations of supervision, teaching and learning, changes in their pedagogical attitudes, knowledge and abilities, learners' perceptions of their action, and language learning outcomes.

4. JUSTIFICATIONS

The main question underlying this paper — what is the role of instructional supervision in the development of language pedagogy ? — led me to consider other subordinate issues : how do teacher education and language pedagogy relate within the context of supervision ? what assumptions are involved in a practical theory of supervision that is justifiable in theoretical, practical and ethical terms ? how do those assumptions determine the goals and tasks of supervision in practice ?

The suggested answers clearly point to one direction — *instructional supervision can be a productive field of experimentation towards a coherent and purposeful articulation between reflective teacher education and learner-centred language pedagogy through action research*. I now summarize what seem to be the major justifications for these options on the basis of our team's work.

From a *theoretical* point of view, the articulation of a reflective approach to teacher education with a learner-centred approach to language teaching through action research seems to be valid ; a common framework of principles enhances a

to be valid ; a common framework of principles enhances a *coherent relationship between supervision and pedagogy, thus reinforcing the educational purposefulness of both enterprises.*

From a *practical* point of view, the ongoing evaluation of our work as supervisors has shown its *feasibility and relevance to all the actors involved : supervisors, student teachers and learners.* This evaluation is done on the basis of multiple sources of evidence : lesson observation (clinical supervision cycle), student teachers' project files including their research diaries, and data from questionnaires to the learners and student teachers about the impact of teaching strategies and the development potential and constraints of action research as a pre-service teacher development strategy.

Finally, from an *ethical* point of view, we believe that the principles which guide our approach are *morally defensible*, at least in the context where we work. Although they may sometimes represent a counter-discourse to prevailing educational practices, there has been a growing awareness among participants of the need to move beyond the limits of what education *is* and to face the challenge of what it *can* and *should* be.

I will finish by adding the subtitle of the Colloquium to the title of this paper: the role of instructional supervision in the development of language pedagogy — *answers and questions.*

The answers to the questions raised above are not as definite as they may seem, nor is the suggested approach without problems. I have only summarized the "state of the art" of a practical theory of supervision which I and other colleagues have been continuously elaborating within our professional work with student language teachers in training. However, as José Saramago once wrote, and I hope I will never forget his words in my role as a teacher educator and researcher, *there are always answers waiting for the right questions to be asked.*

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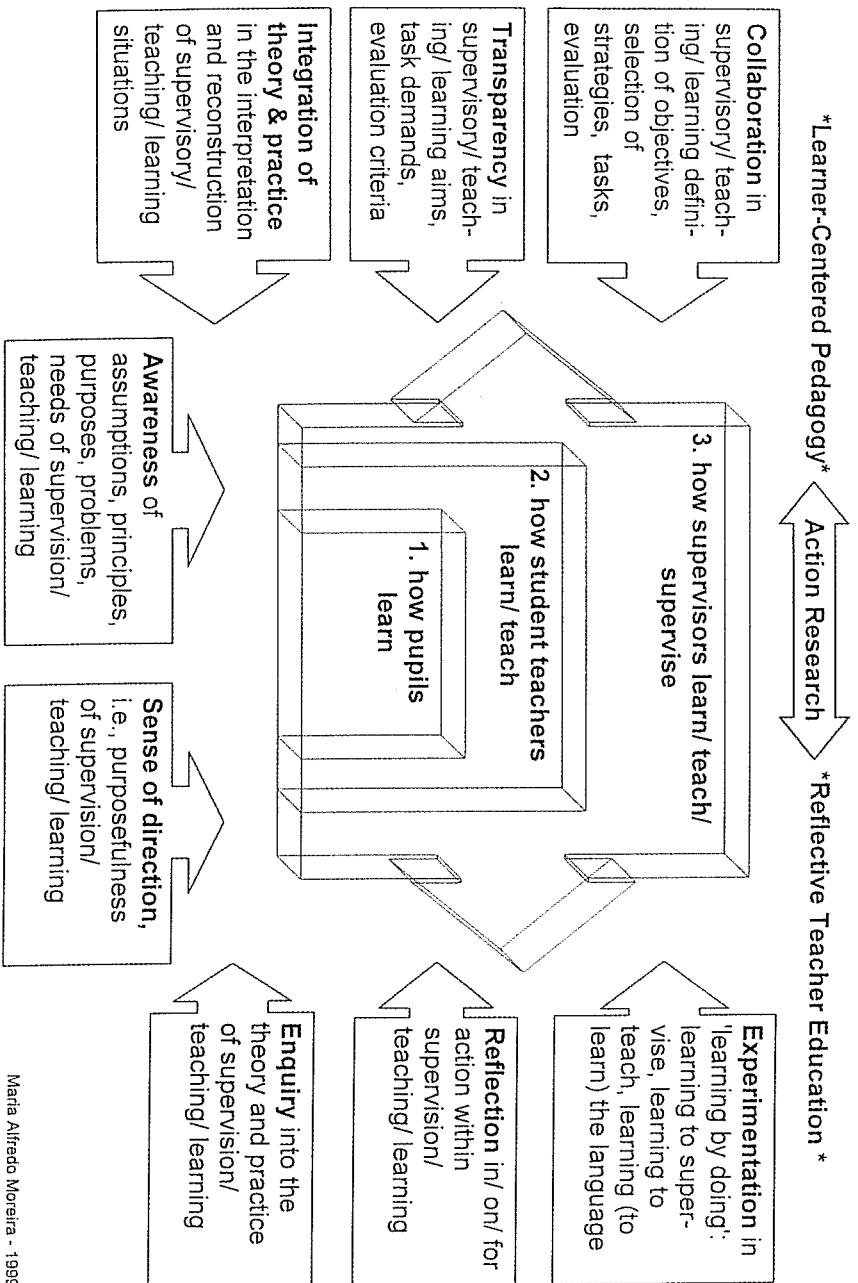
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FIGURE 1: Operating Principles in a Common Framework for Supervision, Teaching, and Learning



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