

Towards a Professional Practice of Language Educators

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INTRODUCTION

Prior to the exposition of the concepts that constitute the floor of our proposal it is important to say one or two words about the still prevailing conception that guides the educational actions of TEACHERS, SCHOOLS and EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS throughout the world: THE TEACHING LEARNING PROCESS.

THE TEACHING LEARNING PROCESS (Henceforth TLP) actions of which are oriented by the SCHOLASTIC, STRUCTURAL, BEHAVIORIST and POSITIVIST views, which constitute its theoretical foundations, has produced a gregarious, non creative population contributing thus to impede the possibility of knowledge production by and the fulfillment of that population as human beings, i.e., as investigative, social, political beings.

All this impedes, in most cases, the development of the students' potentialities, of their creativity, self-reliance, capacity to express themselves, and their social awareness. What the students develop is only INSECURITY, DISABILITY TO CREATE, INTERPRET, AND EXPRESS THEIR OWN REALITY, that is, A GREGARIOUS PERSONALITY DEVELOPS, in most cases; SELFISHNESS OR OSTRACISM in other.

'The practice of THE TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESS is the institutionalization of irrespectfulness to the sense of

*being. It is the process of teaching and learning not to be oneself, of not knowing, not creating, not transforming, not interpreting, of learning not to express oneself''**

Only a very small percentage of those who go through the TLP in the SCHOOL, and in the HOME, because most homes share with the school some of its fundamental traits (AUTHORITARIANISM, IRRESPECTFULNESS, THE TEACHER'S ATTITUDE), manage to survive and develop healthier than the majority.

This occurs because two or perhaps three of the environments which provide the experiences whose effects shape our personality (the school, the home, and *the peer-group*) have been helpful and encouraging through *respect, understanding, patience, and knowledge of the individual's traits*. To express it in one word, according to Erick Fromm, through LOVE. LOVE is a process of knowledge. No one loves that which he/she does not actually KNOW.

The TLP in Colombia and, for that matter, in most parts of the world, has impeded the development of the *investigative capacity* of the subjects of the Process and so their **Integral Development (ID)** -*Development of Creativity, self-reliance, self-expression and social awareness*¹

Let's also say a word about the way the TLP evaluates what it calls LEARNING. The form the evaluation of certain practice takes is always determined by the

1 Puerto, C. J. The Diary of Experiences: 1999.

epistemological principles underlying that practice.

The type of Evaluation practiced by the TLP is characterized by the use of techniques for “recovering” the information “entered” by the teacher in the students’ brains by means of behaviorist techniques and rote exercises of the sort of substitution and repetition drills.

The mechanical, repetitive, static conception of the process of knowledge which characterizes the TLP obviously cannot generate a different way for evaluating. The practice of the TLP requires a way of “evaluation” consistent with that practice, i.e. an “evaluation” intended to recover the data “deposited” by the teacher in the students’ brain during the development of his/her subject.

This fashion of evaluating a process of knowledge ignores what is essential: **The Process and its Actors and Subjects**. It only takes into account the superficial elements of the process, that which is tangible and measurable, the appearance of the events, what seems to be happening: The “results” of learning or more clearly, the mechanical repetition of unrelated data, and information disconnected from the reality of the participants in the learning process.

This situation demands immediate action towards the creation of adequate conditions to favor and promote **Real Participation**² from the actors of the Educational process, that is to say, actions that encourage the growth of **Research** as the axis and motor of that Process.

It is our interest to share a way of working

² Puerto, C. J. The Realization of Knowledge and of Language: 1999.

which has proved to be a good start for the achievement of the goals we propose for the Educational Process, namely:

- **The Integral Development** of the subjects of the Educational Process.

- **The Development of the Investigative Capacity** of the subjects of the Process, beginning by favoring the strengthening and sharpening of their *Observation Capacity* and the *Description of events, actions and things* that take place during *the Educational Process* aiming to develop the *participants’ conceptualizing and investigative capacity* thus enabling them to **Produce Knowledge** and improve the Process itself.

- **The adequate development of the Knowledge Realization Process** (Development, Appropriation, Rationalization, Production)³.

All this occurs only in the case when REAL PARTICIPATION occurs, and this, in turn, takes place only in the case when RESEARCH takes place.

1.0 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 THE REALIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE (RK);

Research is the means Humanity has always used in the process of approximation to the knowledge of their natural and social reality. It has been by *WORKING, OBSERVING, EXPERIMENTING, RATIONALIZING AND THEORIZING THEIR PRACTICE*, i.e. by doing *RESEARCH*, that human beings have *DEVELOPED, ACQUIRED and PRODUCED Knowledge (i.e. Realized*

³ Idem.

Knowledge) of the world from the time they used their first tools, and perhaps even before then, to the present.

Only the SCHOOL with its misconceptions and practices has been able to impede the proper development of knowledge and consequently of the individual.

The Process of Knowledge Realization is a continuous, ongoing, everlasting spiral movement, made up of hundreds and thousands of **experimental actions**⁴ manipulating the object of knowledge and its component elements in a specific reality (space and time). These experimental actions trigger off and are accompanied by continuous **analysis and synthesis** of experience becoming thus more and more refined. A subsequent *RATIONALIZATION* of this practice creates the conditions for new knowledge to be produced. This, in turn, affects and improves future practice, and the process goes on continuously improving.

It is a research process whose first stage is the *DEVELOPMENT* of previous knowledge. This stage, in turn, begins through *SENSATIONS* that motivate *PERCEPTION*, this encourages *EXPERIMENTAL ACTIONS*, which sharpen *OBSERVATION* and carry this to the level of *APPROPRIATION*. If an adequate *RATIONALIZATION* of that experience is encouraged, it creates the necessary and sufficient conditions for *PRODUCTION-OF-KNOWLEDGE* to take place.

This approximation to the comprehension of the object of knowledge is continually

⁴ The author's translation of Freinet's "Tanteos Experimentales".

determined and influenced by the social practice of those who take part in the process. It is the process of Knowledge Realization carried out in an environment of **understanding and respect that** contributes to the *Integral Development (ID)* of the participants.

THE REALIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE: A RESEARCH PROCESS

1.2 INTEGRAL DEVELOPMENT (ID):

In the context of this paper, the ID of a human being implies the development of self-reliance, self-expression, creativity, the investigative capacity, the capacity to listen to the other, and the development of his/her Sixth Sense.

These are fundamental traits, essential for all human beings. (For more detail, see Puerto, C. J. 1999a)

1.3 Research as an Educational Process

Every human being with a normal brain possesses the capacity to do research, that is, to get to know, create, interpret, transform the reality and through all this express him/herself. This capacity grows healthily if conditions of *respect, understanding, support and cooperation* are created permitting thus to start the process of *Knowledge Realization* taking into account his/her previous knowledge, perform in a free way their own *experimental actions*, carry out their own *observations* and encourage *rationalization* of the experience in the Knowledge Realization Process.

1.4 Pedagogy Science that Studies the Educational Process

In the context of this Proposal, *Pedagogy* is

understood **not** as the Area composed of an aggregation of subjects -General Psychology, Developmental Psychology, Psychology of the Adolescence, Psychology of Education, Administration and Curriculum, Evaluation, General Didactics, etc.- which although today present a modification in the way they are referred to, they do not achieve real interrelationships among them or with the social and academic context in which their teaching takes place. The case is clear. The problem is not the way those subjects are called, but how they are approached and what epistemological conception lies behind it.

Pedagogy is understood and practiced here as the science that reflects upon the **Educational Process**. This is understood as the unity, the synthesis and conjunction of the **Realization of Knowledge** in a particular area and the **Integral Development** of the participants in that process, development that takes place only in the case **Research** takes place.

The reflection is necessarily supported by other sciences such as Psychoanalysis, Sociology, Anthropology and Linguistics, and by disciplines such as Epistemology and Philosophy of Sciences. These are central for the support and contribution they can make to the analysis of the problems, to go deeper and wider in the analysis and understanding of the subject matter and of the process of its realization, as well as of the interests that may emerge from the Rationalization of the experiences lived throughout the Educational Process by both Students and Educators.

In the case of the Realization of a particular knowledge, for instance **the Realization of Language**, the rationalization of that experience would find excellent support in, besides those

mentioned above, Semiotics, Psycholinguistics, in the interesting and modern discipline, the analysis of Discourse, as well as in enlightening theories like the Communicative theory of Language, Neurolinguistics.

This Proposal intends to put forward and hopefully across as well, that the fundamental objective of the Educational Process should not just be to learn or teach the subjects proposed in a syllabus, it should not just be the Acquisition of knowledge in any specific Area; it should not even be the Realization of Knowledge.

The fundamental objective of the Educational process should be, or rather, must be to contribute to the **INTEGRAL DEVELOPMENT** of the subjects of that process: Students and Teachers. The Realization of Knowledge through Research, is the means.

2.0 THE DIARY OF EXPERIENCES (DE)⁵

"It seems to be the case that the human mind has first to construct independently the shapes for then be able to find them in the world. The true Kepler's great deeds are excellent example of this assertion: Knowledge does not emerge from experience alone, but from the comparison between the intellect's inventions and the facts observed."

A. Einstein

The Diary of Experiences is a document that both students and teachers build up with the product of the *rationalization of their experiences during and throughout the process of Knowledge Realization in the school.*

Its keeping is voluntary and the document

⁵ For further information about the D.E. see C. Puerto. 1999-a.

⁶ Translated by C. Puerto.

is personal. **The fundamental and only objective of keeping the DE is to have an instrument to rationalize experience.**

When we **write** our experience, we **organize** it; when it is organized we can **understand** it better, if we understand it better we are in better position as to **produce knowledge** or, in other words, **to theorize about our practice.**

There exists, of course, differences between the student's and the teacher's diary.

2.1 THE TEACHER'S DIARY (TD)

"A previous image of the world is necessary for one to be able to re-cognize it"⁷

José Arturo Muñoz

This document is constructed with the observations and rationalizations of at least the following aspects related to the students' personality and behavior:

2.1.1 ATTITUDES

"...to drive ever further and beyond its boundaries the creative powers of experience and knowledge, ... demonstrate the familiar steps within the frame of an enlightening simplicity, that of life, magnificent phenomenon, yet the most trivial and universal."⁸

C. Freinet

While we are carrying out our activities in the classroom or out of it we can perceive or notice individual or group attitudes towards different aspects of life.

⁷ In José Arturo Muñoz. 1992:24.

⁸ C. Freinet. *Los Métodos Naturales*. Tomo 1 (Translated by C. Puerto).

To become aware of these attitudes helps us to continuously evaluate our way of working and thus be able to think of ways to improve it. This also permits us to discover certain students' problems and so know more about them, and thus be in a better position to encourage them when it is necessary and support them when it is appropriate.

2.1.2 APTITUDES

The cognitive distortions together with the internalized norms with which children enter the school hinder and limit their development. The Educator must be able to create the conditions necessary to rescue and encourage the students' investigative capacity, starting by promoting the development of their previous knowledge in the process of realization of new knowledge.

We can also discover certain aptitudes in each one of our students, aptitudes which distinguish and characterize them.

To discover students' aptitudes and find ways to encourage them to develop their aptitudes contributes greatly to the KRP and to the students' ID.

2.1.3 PROBLEMS

If our students are to be the subjects of the KRP it is extremely important that we, the teachers, become aware of the different problems our students may be facing, problems that may be affecting the KRP and/or the students' ID negatively and so find out ways to improve the situation.

2.1.4 INTERESTS

To discover specific interests in our students and encourage and support their

development is to find an ample and secure entrance to start the development of a relationship quite different from the academic one. It is a relationship that stems from the recognition, respect and encouragement to the development of individual, not individualistic, interests. It is a relationship that grows stronger every day and improves our knowledge of the students in order to know when and how to support or encourage individual students, supporting thus both their **Knowledge Realization Process** and their **Integral Development**.

2.1.5 COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

This refers to specific aspects of the progress each student has been able to achieve in the KRP of his/her area of knowledge. Here we will take into account the students' difficulties, achievements, problems. Here it is important and helpful to have, as a complement to the DE, a folder to keep the production of each one of the students and of each one of the work groups.

It is important to notice that the foregoing is possible only when our way of working permits **Real Participation** to take place, that is, when we use **Research** as the means for carrying out the KRP. (Idem 2)

3.0 THE PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

In the light of the foregoing analysis, the need for an immediate action is apparent. An action whose materialization progressively creates the necessary and sufficient conditions for the development of an Educational Process (EP) whose implementation synthesizes both **the Realization of Knowledge** and **the Integral Development** of the participants

in that Process. That necessary action is RESEARCH. Research as the means to access scientific knowledge of our social and natural reality, action that when performed in and from the school we shall call RESEARCH AS AN EDUCATIONAL PROCESS.

4.0 A PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE FOR A LICENCIATURA IN MODERN LANGUAGES

Based on the foregoing conception of The Educational Process (EP) and of Pedagogy, our proposal of a Professional Practice for a Licenciatura Program in Modern Languages has three moments in its development:

Rationalization of the Educational Process, Development of Degree Work Projects, and Orientation of the Educational Process -OEP- in an Educational Institucion.

These Moments are temporal, spatial and qualitatively different for the Student-Educators and for the Educators. Let's see:

4.1 Student - Teaching (EdS)

"It is not the eye which endows man with the power to see, it is the eye which is endowed by man with the power to see."⁹

Paracelso

4.1.1 FIRST MOMENT Rationalization of the Experience in the EP or Initial Stage of Development - Appropriation - Production of Knowledge. (I-VII Semester).

The First Moment of the EdS' Professional

⁹ Quoted and translated by C. Puerto from Muñoz, J.A. 1992:22.

Practice starts with the rationalization of their experience in their EP. This Moment has two levels of Rationalization: The **Individual Reflection** and the **Collective Reflection**. The former has its materialization in the **Students' Diary**; the latter in the **Shared Reflection Sessions** in which students and teachers socialize their reflections and rationalizations.

The individual rationalization activity starts right from the beginning of the first semester of the Licenciatura in Modern Languages through to the end of the sixth semester when the EdS write out and hand in an essay giving an account of that rationalization. This activity progressively makes clear and defines problems, interests and/or topics the students may want to study in a wider and deeper way.

During the sixth semester of the Licenciatura the essays are presented and supported by the students, interests discussed and analyzed, problems on which students showed concern about finding an alternative solution are approached and grouped according to the students shown preference.

In this way possible lines of emphasis start their definition so that they can be developed during the **Second Stage of the Professional Practice: *The advanced Stage of Development-Appropriation-Production of Knowledge: The Degree Work.***

Let's take a close look at the different aspects of the First Moment of the Professional Practice.

4.1.1.1 Individual Reflection or The Educator-Students' Diary of Experiences (ESDE);

The gravest of errors about writing is to believe like many, that one should not write

as one speaks.¹⁰

To keep the Diary is one of the responsibilities of the Educator-Students' throughout the Licenciatura Program, it is personal and voluntary in the sense that it won't be revised or graded by the Educators. It is the rhythm of **the students' Investigative Work** and the dynamics of **the Shared Reflection Sessions** that mark the commitment with the construction of their Diary of Experiences.

The sole and fundamental objective of the Journal is to create a space for the EdS to rationalize in writing their own experience in the Educational process. This allows them to organize that experience, understand it, share it in a clearer and more precise way and eventually produce knowledge about that Process; besides the important development of their capacity to reflect and express their reflections which that activity encourages and fosters.

Writing is, second only to Creative Work, the tool, or better, the most powerful instrument of thought. Writing is so powerful that it permits the materialization of thought on paper or on a screen and mull over that thought.

The ESDE characteristics are determined by those of each Moment of their Professional Practice.

As was stated above, during the First Moment -I to VII Semester- two levels of reflection took place: *The Individual Reflection and the Collective Reflection.*

¹⁰ Translated by C. Puerto. Quoted by Elisé Freinet in the Preface to Celestin Freinet. *Los Métodos Naturales*. Tomo III.

1) Individual Reflection

"... to know how to learn and to learn how to know, the sight, the intelligence and the memory are not sufficient; it is also necessary to know how to hear, to be able to listen what resounds (tón psophón akowein)... it is necessary to know how to close the eyes to listen better."¹¹

J. Derrida

This considers two aspects the Students take into account in their Diaries:

1.a- A follow-up of his or her process of Language Realization, of their achievements, problems and difficulties, the way they tackled the latter, the results obtained from tackling those problems and difficulties in such way, their discoveries and realization,...

Those problems and difficulties have to do both with linguistic aspects and behavioral and personal ones. On the former the Students-Educator would take notice of the problems, difficulties, discoveries and realizations on phonetics, morphology, syntax, etc. and systematize this information. About the behavioral and personal they would realize their limitations, possibilities, and how to face them. They would realize the quality of their interpersonal relationships and how they affect their Knowledge Realization Process and their Integral Development.

1.b- Notes and observations about the Educators' ways of working, their actions and attitudes, and how they influence on their KRP and on their ID. This will permit the EdS to become aware of the events

¹¹ Derrida, J. 1989:63 "Las Pupilas de la Universidad. El Principio de razón y la idea de Universidad" En Jaques Derrida. ¿Cómo no hablar? y otros textos. (Quoted and Translated by C. Puerto).

that encourage or hinder the creation of the necessary conditions for the proper development of the Educational Process. In other words, The Educator-Students are doing Pedagogy.

2) Collective Reflection or Shared Reflection Sessions

Creating the conditions that foster the students' autonomous thinking i.e., that they are able to properly support what they think and say, aims at developing and structuring active members of the community, that is, participator, critical citizen with the capacity to recover the thrill of the unexpected findings, their creative capacity, so that all these endow them with the valor to be able to deform and transform the established models and imagine new and better ones for the benefit of humanity.

The Diary keeping activity and the realizations and knowledge so achieved would remain incomplete and undeveloped if the opportunity to share and socialize them is not provided. This is the role and the function played by the **Shared Reflection Sessions**.

These are monthly sessions held during one morning or one afternoon in which EdS and Educators of each one of the groups meet in order to share their observations, realizations and findings attained during and through the rationalization of the Language Realization Process. This activity becomes an actual contribution for the permanent and continuous evaluation of the curriculum, its activities and its actors. These sessions generate tasks, correctives, plans and projects for the transformation and improvement of the elements and the actors of the Licenciatura Program and the Educational Process in general.

This activity suggests and implies other activities which complement it, namely:

- * Written Reports or Acts of each one of the Sessions.
- * A Biannual Auto-evaluation Meeting in order to complement and synthesize the Written Reports.

The foregoing materializes our conception of Pedagogy. Both Educators and Educator-Students are doing Pedagogy, are reflecting upon the Educational Process in order to understand it, improve it, and transform it.

To this reflection, of course, the other areas of the curriculum sorted out for that purpose, must contribute effectively.

4.1.2 SECOND MOMENT; Advanced Stage of Development-Appropriation-Production: The Degree Work VIII to X Semester.

This Second Moment of the students' Professional Practice takes place in three stages:

4.1.2.1 First Stage: Ante-Project. (VIII Semester)

During the eighth semester the EdS in teams of maximum five and minimum two in cooperation with one or more Advisor-Educators think out an Ante-Project which polishes, widens and deepens the problems and/or the interests singled out during the previous stage of the EdS' Professional Practice whose rationalization is presented in the way of an Essay by the end of the VI semester, and the problems and interests identified, analyzed and its definition started in the VII semester.

This is actually the beginning of the

definition of the Lines of Emphasis of the Degree Works. These may approach aspects, problems or interests in the foreign language, in pedagogy or in linguistics, in Literature or in any of the humanistic areas. These are broad lines which may suggest finer ones that synthesize those problems or interests found by the EdS or by the Educators.

These Lines have in common the Orientation of the Educational Process in an Educational Institution. This constitutes the Third Moment of the EdS' Professional Practice of which we shall talk about below.

4.1.2.2 Second Stage. The Degree Work Project (IX-X semester)

The work done during the VIII semester, the ante-project, is presented to the Languages Department two weeks before the end of this semester and carried out during the IX and X semesters.

4.1.2.3 Third Stage, the project Report (X Semester)

By the end of the X Semester each one of the Degree Work Groups are required to present and support in a public session the Final Report of their Degree Work Project.

The adequate fulfillment of the requisites of these three Stages of the Degree Work constitute the Degree Project of the Educator Students.

4.1.3 Third Moment: Orientation of the Educational process -OEP- (VIII and IX Semesters).

When the EdS arrive at this Third Moment they already have in their power a high level of understanding of what the

Educational Process is and implies, that is, *the synthesis and conjunction of the Realization of Knowledge and the Integral Development of the Participants in that process.*

That understanding is achieved through the research carried out by the EdS during the previous semesters about their own Educational Process and in the Seminar of Pedagogy in the VII semester. The research the EdS started in the first semester continues all through their career and probably for the rest of their lives.

The level of understanding of the Educational Process enables the EdS to direct this Process at any level of the Colombian Educational System. The level of competence in the Foreign Language enables them to work other fields related with Language and Language Realization.

4.1.3.1 The O E P Project (VIII-IX Semesters)

The OEP students are required to produce and carry out a Research project in the Educational institutions in which they orient the educational process. The project should consider at least the following aspects:

- ◆ Presentation or Introduction
- ◆ Objectives
- ◆ Contextual Framework:
 - Premises-location, area of influence
 - Social and cultural Aspects
 - Conceptual Aspect (Educational concepts and practices predominant in the school)
- ◆ Conceptual Framework: -Theories and concepts guiding the Educator Students' educational work in the school

- ◆ Method
- ◆ Activities
- ◆ Evaluation
- ◆ Conclusions and/or recommendations
- ◆ Bibliography

5.0 EVALUATION

The Professional Practice (PP) evaluates both the Process of Knowledge Realization (PKR) and the Integral Development (ID) of the subjects and actors of the Educational Process (EP)

To evaluate the PKR is to follow up its development, step by step, in and by each one of the participants who are the only and actual responsible of the Process. It is to carefully observe the participants' progress in the construction of knowledge, it is to realize the epistemological obstacles and obstacles of other types encountered on the way to knowledge and in the process of constructing it, it is to take notice of the strategies used for facing and overcoming those obstacles and to look synchronically and diachronically at the effects and the results of those actions.

To evaluate the ID of the subjects and actors of the KRP is to observe carefully, sensibly, respectfully, consciously and conscientiously, and jointly, the rhythm, the progress and growth of their self-confidence, creativity, self-expression, investigative capacity, capacity to listen to others and social awareness as well as, and jointly too, improve the conditions to encourage and foster the progress and the ascending movement by the infinite spiral of knowledge. It is to determine the requisites and the right moments for providing encouragement and support for the adequate development of the KRP and the ID of the participants.

In other words, *to evaluate the EP is to Rationalize that experience* in terms of the contribution our Professional Practice has meant to the KRP and the ID of the subjects and actors of the Process.

For the achievement of the foregoing, this proposal puts forward and supports the importance of the construction of the **DIARY OF EXPERIENCES** by each one of the participants in the Educational Process, and to carry out the **SHARED REFLECTION SESSIONS** between Educators and Educator-Students as the means to sharpen observation, to verbalize experience, to objectivize the description of the events observed, thus achieving a better understanding of the Process in order to transform it for the benefit of the educational population.

Carrying out what has been said in the foregoing in the way it is proposed in this paper would give origin to an Educator-Researcher committed to the constant improvement of the EP aiming at the Integral Development of its actors for the benefit of society.

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