



ESTUDIOS LINGÜÍSTICOS

**CASE PEDAGOGY IN MODERN LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION:  
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY**

LA PEDAGOGÍA DE CASOS EN LA FORMACIÓN INICIAL DEL PROFESORADO  
DE LENGUAS EXTRANJERAS: UN ESTUDIO EXPLORATORIO

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**ABSTRACT**

Discourses advocating autonomy pervade current language research and policies but teaching practices are often alien to these. This mismatch is reinforced when teacher education represents a disempowering space where student teachers are expected to assimilate and apply academic knowledge, rather than inquire into and explore their own practices. In this paper I analyse the uses of case pedagogy in teacher education for autonomy and argue that case pedagogy can fulfil this purpose. If teacher education is to promote educational change towards autonomy, it needs to focus on the professional experience of teachers and involve them directly in the reconstruction of educational knowledge and practice. As teachers analyse and develop inquiry-oriented teaching cases focused on pedagogy for autonomy, they have the opportunity to enhance their own autonomy by developing a critical view of education, facing constraints and opening up spaces for manoeuvre.

Keywords: Initial teacher education, case pedagogy, case method, cases, language teaching.

**RESUMEN**

La defensa de la autonomía como objetivo educativo está presente en la investigación sobre la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras y en la legislación educativa, pero la práctica docente suele permanecer ajena a este énfasis. Esta discordancia se ve reforzada cuando la formación inicial se convierte en un espacio de desempoderamiento en el que se espera que los profesores en formación asimilen y apliquen el conocimiento académico en

vez de que indaguen y exploren críticamente su práctica docente. En este trabajo analizo los usos de la pedagogía de casos en la formación docente para la autonomía y defiendo que la pedagogía de casos puede ayudar a la consecución de este objetivo. Si la formación de profesores ha de promocionar el cambio docente hacia la autonomía, necesita centrarse en la experiencia profesional de los profesores e involucrarlos directamente en la reconstrucción del conocimiento educativo y de la práctica docente. A medida que los profesores estudian y/o desarrollan casos centrados en la pedagogía para la autonomía experimentan la oportunidad de fomentar su propia autonomía y de desarrollar una actitud crítica hacia la práctica educativa, haciendo frente a las limitaciones y obstáculos inherentes a la misma.

Palabras clave: Formación inicial docente, pedagogía de casos, método de casos, casos, enseñanza de lenguas modernas.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past 30 years research on teacher education has focused on the exploration of teacher behaviours, teacher cognition, teacher decision making, teacher knowledge, and teacher reflection. However, as suggested by Grossman and McDonald (2008), teacher education needs to focus attention on an expanded view of teaching centred on (language) teaching as a practice that encompasses cognition, craft, and affect. We need to prepare prospective teachers for both the interpersonal and intellectual demands of teaching on the basis of our increasing understanding of teacher learning.

In addition, the field of language teaching methodology lacks a consensual framework for the analysis of language teaching. Controversy exists over central issues of language teaching such as the role of explicit and implicit knowledge, input and output, focus on form and focus on meaning, communication, learner diversity, and learner-centredness among others.

The challenge for teacher education for autonomy is to provide powerful teacher education experiences that will prepare future teachers to deal with the multiple dilemmas they will encounter in their lessons. It is impossible to help them understand the many problems they will actually come across and how to react to each one only through the presentation of different techniques and strategies. The 'recipe approach' does not work in teacher education because teaching is a highly complex and context-dependent task. Language teachers need to understand the multidimensional nature of the classroom, that is, they must learn to cope with the problem of complexity arising from the dynamic nature of learning and teaching in modern language classrooms. "Real teaching happens within a wild triangle of relations – among teacher, students, subject – and the points of this triangle shift continuously" (McDonald 1992: 1). Modern language teachers need to have recourse to several types of knowledge, social contexts, school culture, curriculum and teaching, and integrate all this knowledge to develop engaging foreign language learning

tasks. Consequently, the separation of theory from practice in teacher education courses creates a false dichotomy. It is crucial to integrate the two.

Multiple teacher education paradigms exist but in this paper I intend to analyse the use of case pedagogy (the case method) in initial teacher education for autonomy. To this end I will analyse three cases developed by student teachers. Case pedagogy has been suggested as an alternative to traditional teacher education because it can help overcome the limitations of traditional approaches in connection with the development of practical wisdom or conditional knowledge (Harrington 1995; Jiménez Raya and Vieira 2015; Jiménez Raya and Vieira 2018). Case pedagogy allows for the integration of the theoretical and practical aspects of teaching. In addition, cases can be used to raise moral and ethical issues, dispositions and habits of the mind such as helping trainees think like a teacher in complex and productive ways about practical teaching situations.

Multiple educators have argued that case pedagogy is useful for promoting critical reflection, enhancing the understanding of theory, and fostering the development of problem solving skills (Greenwood and Parkay 1990; J. Shulman 1992; Jiménez Raya and Vieira 2015). Furthermore, it reflects a view of learning to teach as a contextualised local activity, embedded in a particular context, time and space, and affected by numerous field dilemmas that teachers face in their teaching practice (Moje and Wade 1997).

## 2. CASE PEDAGOGY AND AUTONOMY

The case method can be viewed as an approach to professional experience, whose origin is to be found in the work of cognitive psychologists and curriculum theorists (Merseth 1991). Cases have a long history in the training of business, law, social work, and medical professionals. The use of cases in these fields varies considerably. In business education, for instance, the goal is to stimulate analyses, to facilitate discussion and to determine the action that should be taken. Christensen (1987: 32) maintains that “when successful, the case method of instruction produces a manager grounded in theory and abstract knowledge and, more important, able to apply those elements.” Similarly, language teacher development practices through cases should aim at combining analyses grounded in pedagogical content knowledge to empower trainees to deal with situation-specific teaching problems.

A teaching case typically presents a relevant professional problem or critical incident in a particular classroom in order to help the student teacher understand teaching in context and help them to learn to apply theory and research insights to practical situations, that is, to think and act like a teacher. L. Shulman (1992: 3) defined teaching cases as a “description of episodes of practice, a selection of reality, a slice of life, a story designed and presented as study material, an exercise, a puzzle, or a problem.” Another definition is that put forward by Lynn (1999: 42) as “a story,

describing or based on actual events and circumstances, that is told with a definite teaching purpose in mind and that rewards careful study and analysis.”

Cases, according to Kleinfeld (1991), can help students understand the meaning of events, increase their ability to frame (language) teaching problems, and improve their understanding of possible courses of action. Cases are expected to provide visions or images of the possible and increase motivation for learning about teaching through the discussion of the teacher’s choices and the exploration of alternative paths, fostering, therefore, the development of professional reasoning and practical wisdom. Cases foster experiential learning because those working on a case can observe the experience of others and make links to their own classroom practice and experience, using both as lenses for exploring other possibilities. As L. Shulman (2004: 543) puts it: “A case resides in the territory between theory and practice, between idea and experience, between the normative ideal and achievable real. Cases capture pieces of experience that initially exist solely within the life of a single individual, and they transform that solitary experience into text.”

In my teacher education courses, the ultimate goal is the promotion of pedagogy for autonomy in modern language teaching by involving student teachers in experiential learning through the use of cases, involving both case analysis and case construction. It is through these two complementary uses of cases that a pedagogy of experience is implemented in my initial teacher education courses, creating opportunities for teacher candidates to analyse pedagogy for autonomy cases and implement autonomy-oriented pedagogical inquiry.

Regarding autonomy, the paradigm underlying all the work I do<sup>1</sup> and also students do is based on Jiménez Raya, Lamb and Vieira (2007, 2017). In these two volumes the authors develop a pedagogical framework for learner and teacher autonomy. The framework is constructed around three structuring elements, namely, the context, the learner, and the teacher. Jiménez Raya, Lamb, and Vieira (2017: 17) define both learner and teacher autonomy as “the competence to develop as a self-determined, socially responsible and critically aware participant in (and beyond) educational environments, within a vision of education as (inter)personal empowerment and social transformation.” This cross-disciplinary definition highlights critical aspects of teacher and learner autonomy (criticality, self-determination, and the social dimension of autonomy) and regards the notions of learner autonomy and teacher autonomy as closely interrelated in a school context. The emphasis on the social dimension of autonomy emphasises voice, respect for others, negotiation, co-operation, and interdependence. Personal autonomy is conceived as a competence that entails self-determination, social responsibility, and critical awareness. The assumptions underlying the definition are summarised in Figure 1.

<i>competence</i>	<i>To govern oneself one must be in a position to act competently. Competence involves attitudinal dispositions, knowledge, and abilities to develop self-determination, social responsibility and critical awareness.</i>
<i>to develop</i>	<i>Autonomy is not an all or nothing concept, it is better conceived as a continuum in which different degrees of self-management can be exercised at different moments.</i>
<i>as a self-determined</i>	<i>Autonomy has an individual dimension (e.g. self-knowledge, responsible self-agency, self-regulation, self-direction)</i>
<i>socially responsible</i>	<i>Autonomy also has a social dimension (e.g., voice, respect for others, negotiation, co-operation, interdependence)</i>
<i>and critically aware</i>	<i>Autonomy has moral and political implications and involves the cultivation of an inquiring, independent mind.</i>
<i>participant</i>	<i>Autonomy involves assuming a proactive and interactive role.</i>
<i>in (and beyond) educational environments</i>	<i>Formal educational settings can and should allow individuals to exercise the right to develop autonomy, and thus promote lifelong learning, which may occur both within and outside of an educational institution.</i>
<i>within a vision of education as (inter)personal empowerment and social transformation</i>	<i>Learner and teacher development towards autonomy assumes that education is a moral and political phenomenon whose goal is to transform (rather than reproduce) the status quo. In this sense, autonomy is a collective interest oriented by democratic and emancipatory ideals.</i>

Figure 1. Definition of learner and teacher autonomy: Basic features  
(Jiménez Raya, Lamb, and Vieira 2017: 17-18)

Jiménez Raya, Lamb and Vieira (2017) suggest that pedagogy for autonomy is operationalised through ten pedagogical principles that are to be regarded as inter-related conditions that favour it. Those principles are:

- Responsibility, choice, and flexible control
- Learning to learn and self-regulation
- Integration and explicitness
- Autonomy support
- Engagement and intrinsic motivation

- Learner differentiation
- Action-orientedness
- Conversational interaction
- Reflective inquiry
- Formative assessment, assessment for learning and assessment for autonomy

### 3. WHY CASE PEDAGOGY

Some researchers argue that the rationale for case pedagogy stems from theoretical and empirical perspectives on the social and situated nature of cognition (J. Shulman 1992; Sykes and Bird 1992). Case pedagogy assumes that knowledge is constructed, built on prior knowledge, related to experience, can be modified and, hence, provides (student) teachers with insights into alternative teaching solutions by encouraging them to think of alternative teaching practices.

In addition, case pedagogy presents teaching in context (typically as stories of teaching), giving trainees the opportunity to understand the situatedness of evidence and the relationship between theoretical and practical knowledge, as well as the moral nature of teaching (L. Shulman 1986; Harrington and Garrison 1992; Fenstermacher and Richardson 1993; Jiménez Raya and Vieira 2015).

Sociocultural theory contends that knowledge is situated in – and develops from – the contexts of its use. Therefore, if knowledge is situated in social contexts, then learning to teach should also be situated in sites of teaching and learning (J. Shulman 1992; L. Shulman 1992; Shabani 2016). Furthermore, sociocultural theory maintains that “situations co-produce knowledge through activity” (Brown *et al.* 1989: 32). The promotion of conceptual understanding and the development of practical wisdom require attention to situations of use. This insight is underlined by Brown *et al.* (1989), who compare concepts to tools typically used by craftsmen in guilds where they learn to use them through participating in the community of tool users actually working on authentic tasks.

Spiro’s and colleagues’ work on ill-structured domains is particularly relevant for the understanding of and the development of expertise on teaching. Ill-structured domains such as language teaching are characterised by uncertainty and ambiguity (Spiro *et al.* 1988). This notion can “help prospective teachers understand the contingent and contextualised nature of teaching” (Grossman 1992: 231). Case pedagogy is a promising starting point from which we may develop both “habits of thought and knowledge of particular content” (Grossman 1992: 232).

Sociocultural theory (Vygotsky 1978; Cole 1985; Smagorinsky 1995) provides a particularly suitable framework for studying teachers’ thinking about teaching while they participate in discussions on language teaching issues, too. This theory stresses the social nature of learning by positing that the social and the individual are, according to Cole (1985: 148), “mutually constitutive elements of a single, interacting system”. A sociocultural perspective contends that learning encompasses the use

of cultural and symbolic tools such as language, texts, and experiences to forge understanding of the subject under study (Smagorinsky 1995) while we engage in specific activities within specific environments (Rogoff 1990; Tulviste 1991). These tools are of a diverse nature and can range from the concrete to the abstract, and may be paper and pen; reading, writing, and dialogue; experience; or theory, discourse, and ideology. From this perspective, learning to teach involves more than learning a variety of methods, techniques or strategies for teaching a particular process or concept, although these are tools for appropriating understandings of the worlds of modern language classrooms and schools.

According to Smagorinsky (1995), the focus on tools for mediating thinking emphasises the generative and contextual nature of learning. Therefore, images generated by specific tools can in turn become tools for thinking and learning. Vygotsky (1986) contends that as people make use of tools such as language, experience, and information, they generate new understandings that reshape the tools they have used. Consequently, tools can be regarded both as generating issues and images and as being reconstructed by them. Accordingly, it is possible to see images as a kind of organising framework or tool for thinking about teaching and understanding teaching cases and for reflecting on practice (Clandinin 1986; Clandinin and Connelly 1996).

Furthermore, learning as a contextually bounded (situated) activity is shaped by the purpose, situation, and activity of learning itself. The configuration of people in the learning setting exerts a decisive influence on it. Learning is more effective when it occurs through active participation in an authentic setting and fosters greater levels of engagement, is relevant, and transferable. Yet, situated learning is more than just learning by doing; it requires a deeper embedding within an authentic context. This situatedness is a key factor of the learning environment and thus needs to be considered in a cognitive apprenticeship.

In case pedagogy, learning is situated but abstract knowledge is not ignored. My approach presupposes that concepts and cases are to be taught simultaneously, not separately, that is, practice-in-concepts and concepts-in-practice. I go along with Rosiek's and Clandinin's (2016) statement claiming that the task of teacher educators is to work in experiential ways with teachers and prospective teachers to help them claim their places as curriculum makers. Teacher education for autonomy has to inform student teachers about pedagogical options but most important of all it needs to encourage the active exploration of the best pedagogical option and the exploration of their possible teacher selves (Jiménez Raya 2021).

#### 4. USES OF CASES IN TEACHER EDUCATION

Two uses of cases have been identified in the literature: a) cases for analysis and discussion and b) case construction. They both represent complementary perspectives necessary for effective teacher development from my viewpoint.

#### 4.1. Cases for analysis and discussion

Several aspects impinge upon the way teachers see the world of teaching and learning, as well as on the way we shape our lives and the lives of our students in schools. To understand and explore the pedagogy for autonomy puzzle in modern language education, teacher candidates will need to uncover the forces that impinge on the processes of teaching and learning, look at their ideas and actions from new perspectives, and discover unconventional routes to follow (Jiménez Raya and Vieira 2011). To this end teacher education needs to embark teachers on a journey of self-discovery and self-reconstruction through critically looking into teaching practices. A crucial element in learning to teach is reading and analysing other teachers' cases. Cases used as a basis for discussion involve student teachers with real-life teaching and provide opportunities for the trainees to think and act as a teacher. According to Darling-Hammond (2006), student teachers in initial teacher education read "context-specific narratives about students, teaching events, or teaching learning environments, then analyse and interpret those narratives in the light of other knowledge from research, theory and experience" (119). These cases are created for pedagogical purposes, that is, to create opportunities for those who may interact with them to become familiar with teaching procedures used by other teachers to meet students' needs, and to uncover student teachers' tacit assumptions and beliefs (Jiménez Raya and Vieira 2015). Merseth (1996) identified three purposes: cases as exemplars; cases as opportunities to practice analysis, the assimilation of differing perspectives, and observation of action; and cases as stimulants to personal reflection. L. Shulman (1992) maintains that cases can be used to achieve the following pedagogical purposes:

- teach principles or concepts of a theoretical nature
- develop precedents for practice
- convey moral or ethical principles
- teach strategies, dispositions, reflection and habits of mind, and
- illustrate visions or images of the possible

Usually these cases take the form of narratives or stories. Stories are said to provide meaningful form to experiences modern language teachers have lived through and make it possible for others to share and learn from their own experiences. Some experts speak about the storied nature of teachers' knowledge and their power to influence and transform our lives (Noddings 1991). Thus, 'stories of teaching' can become "catalysts for pedagogical conversations among members of school communities" (J. Shulman 1992: XV).

Cases can take different formats, namely, case studies, case stories, imaginary or real scenarios, vignettes, critical incidents and other possible anecdotes of practice. In my initial teacher education courses at the University of Granada, the cases I use



were constructed by a group of colleagues during the EuroPAL project (See Jiménez Raya and Vieira 2011) as well as cases constructed by student teachers in previous years. Teaching as a complex activity requires parsing in some way to study it and to share what is learnt. We have to come to terms with the pedagogical purpose of the case, i.e. with what we intend to teach through the case. Jiménez Raya and Vieira (2011) used ‘themes’ as a means to facilitate learning opportunities to case readers. Therefore, cases were built around a ‘theme’ that matches the focus of the teacher’s approach to pedagogy for autonomy (e.g., “Self-regulation”). Figure 2 below presents the structure of the cases.

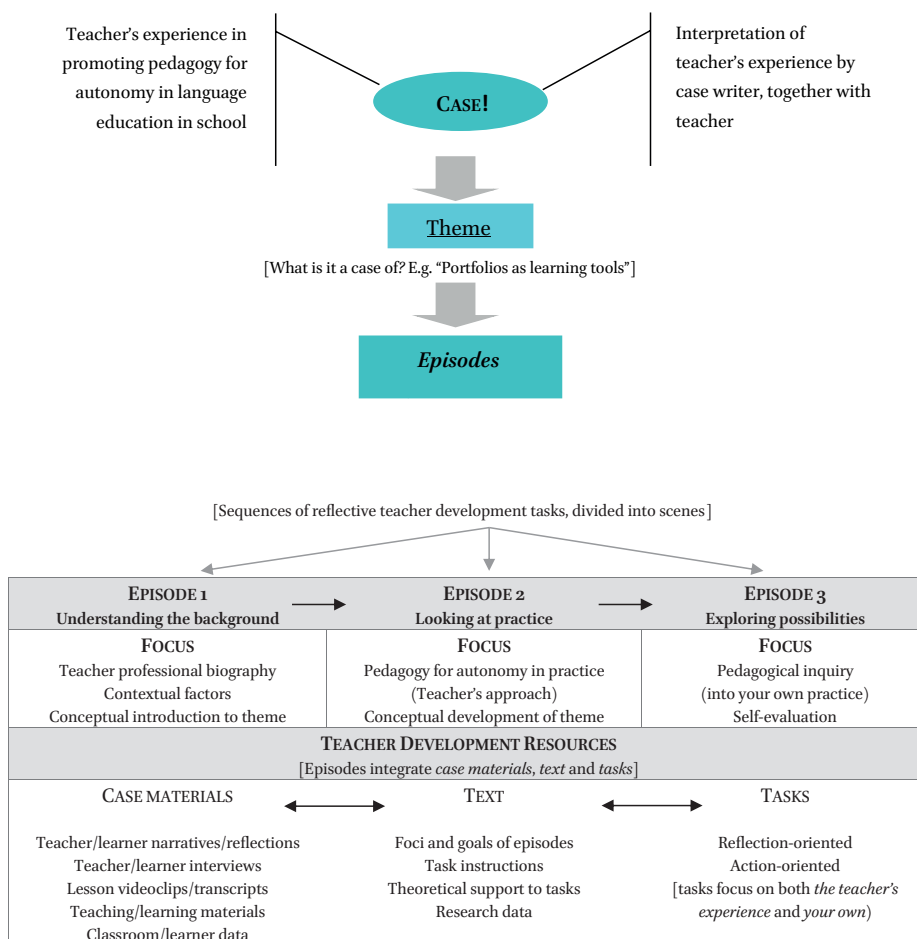


Figure 2. Case structure (Jiménez Raya and Vieira 2011).

Focusing cases on a theme gave us the possibility of incorporating knowledge derived from relevant research on language teaching and learning into a form that is meaningful and useful for teachers. Additionally, it allowed for a straightforward combination of theory and idiosyncratic practices (Jiménez Raya 2009). Cases are divided into three 'episodes': *Understanding the Background*, *Looking at Practice*, and *Exploring Possibilities*. In turn, episodes are segmented into 'scenes' which are labelled according to the methodological focus of each theme. Episodes and their related scenes integrate three types of teacher development resources: case materials (selected from each case teacher's experience), text and reflective tasks (designed by the case writers), and insights from relevant research on pedagogy for autonomy. Cases were constructed by the case writer but the case teacher had the opportunity to provide feedback on his/her case. Additionally, all EuroPAL team members read and provided feedback to the author of the case so as to ensure the internal cohesion of the material. Cases were also sent to an external evaluator who provided feedback. Cases were constructed through careful observation and study of the teacher's approach to teaching, through discussion, analysis of lesson plans and teaching materials, and the analysis of students' produced materials so as to enable the researcher to describe and interpret what was happening in class and create learning opportunities for those who may interact with the case.

Various pedagogical procedures have been suggested for case analysis. In my teaching, typically student teachers read them at home and then the teacher development and reflective tasks are used in class as the basis for discussion. The role of the teacher educator is first and foremost to guide the discussion, listening attentively to what is said, fostering critical reflection, and asking questions to help student teachers uncover their hidden assumptions and beliefs, to clarify issues in connection with the case, and to point out links with theory and research. The role of the teacher educator is also to provide theoretical input through direct instruction or suggesting relevant literature. Theoretical input empowers teachers by expanding their perspective and understanding of teaching and learning and also develops their capacity to analyse critically language teaching episodes.

Research on case discussion/analysis supports the use of cases for teacher development, both pre-service and in-service. For instance, Goldblatt and Smith (2004) concluded that case discussion helped teachers alter views. "Reflecting on dilemmas exposed personal theories, values and ethics. Deliberating on the complexity of a teaching tension often challenged teachers' deeply seated contentions. Competing interpretations of the same situation resulted in participants looking critically at themselves." (342) There is a general consensus derived from research in other professional fields and recent research on teacher education that stresses the following benefits deriving from the use of cases:

- Cases facilitate the development of critical analysis and problem solving.
- Cases encourage reflective practice and deliberate action.
- Cases foster active, experiential, responsible learning by involving teachers in their own learning/development process.

#### 4.2. Case construction

Practitioner inquiry refers to the systematic, intentional, self-critical inquiry about one's work in educational settings. Case writing essentially provides student teachers with opportunities to reflect critically on their teaching experience and derive meaning from it, empowers them, and supports self-directed learning. In line with Rosiek and Clandinin (2016), one of our responsibilities as teacher educators pertains to the provision of spaces where they can begin autobiographical inquiry that will enable them to question, affirm and/or change how they know and what they know about language teaching. Teacher education must inform student teachers about pedagogical options but most important of all it needs to encourage the active exploration of possible solutions to students' learning problems. Case construction differs from case analysis in that the cases are created by the student teachers themselves on the basis of experiences with students during their internship. They provide an opportunity to focus on learning problems and plan interventions that are monitored critically.

Case construction provides opportunities for the development of vital teaching skills in learning to become a reflective teacher such as taking the initiative, adopting a critical, reflective stance towards teaching, planning an intervention and collecting data to look critically into its effects to check whether the situation improved. Vieira (2012: 58-60) identifies five major gains in the use of case writing: agency in professional development, complexified vision of education, reconstruction of pedagogical action, repositioning the self in relation to others, and closeness of language to experience.

In case construction, student teachers design a small-scale action research intervention during their internship, aimed at promoting pedagogy for autonomy. This is implemented in the classroom and then a report is produced. The case is expected to have a particular focus. The question "what is this a case of?" is crucial in helping them narrow down the scope of their intervention. Having to decide on the focus of the pedagogical inquiry develops the habit of interrogating the effectiveness of teaching practice and paying attention to learning problems. This is done in negotiation with the school supervisor and should always be based on the close observation of students. They are encouraged to discuss their case with me once they have sketched it. The feedback provided involves making suggestions on the teacher's plan, data collection procedures and instruments, and the recommendation of relevant literature. The main stages of case construction are:

- Observation of students and identification of problem or area for improvement
- Negotiation of intervention with the school supervisor
- Planning an autonomy-oriented intervention
- Development of teaching materials
- Choice of data collection procedures and design of data collection instruments with a dual purpose, namely, a pedagogical and a research purpose
- Discussion of the plan with the teacher educator
- Implementation
- Analysis and written report

Case narratives are expected to be written in a personal style while combining a rigorous scrutiny of the experience on the basis of relevant theoretical knowledge and the data collected. The suggested structure for the case report is:

- Introduction: *What is it a case of?*
- Description of the experience: *What? Where? Why? How?*
- Evaluation of the experience (gains, shortcomings, constraints)
- Implications for future action

Planning a case involves a critical analysis of the context, learning about the students and their learning difficulties, brainstorming and researching possibilities, designing instruction based on the previous, negotiating with school and academic supervisors and students, providing instruction, collecting and analysing data to determine how effective the intervention was while continuing to make informed instructional decisions. To some degree case construction follows the steps of a formal action research project.

Practice-as-inquiry (Weinbaum et al. 2004) involves several components. Since practice-as-inquiry is firmly rooted in the teacher's personal experiences in the classroom and the school, it involves analysing critically some aspect of one's teaching practice or assumptions, situating the aspects being examined within a larger research perspective. It also involves critical reflection that should lead into some transformative action and a better understanding of the assumptions behind practice and a revision of ideas about teaching. A teacher also needs to consider why a particular experience or incident is significant, what questions it gives rise to about his/her instructional practices, and the ways it alters the teacher's assumptions about teaching and learning modern languages. In this process, self-evaluation, self-monitoring and reflection occupy a central place. Furthermore, pedagogical inquiry enhances transformative learning and can be a powerful strategy against the reification, decontextualization and technocratization of knowledge about teaching (Vieira 2009). According to Pascale (1990), inquiry is the engine of vitality and self-renewal.

Below three cases constructed by student teachers are presented in a table format (see Table 1). In the first column, I present a summary of what following Kincheloe (2003) I call 'exciting vision of language education'. The exciting vision is where they are expected to describe the methodological approach they would like to follow. "The exciting visions represent goals or aspirations for the future, that is, hoped-for and feared possible selves that orient their vision to the future self. By focusing on the construction of their future teacher self they had to envision themselves as teachers and think about pedagogical content knowledge" (Jiménez Raya 2021: 220). Maybe rather than a theory of language teaching what we need is a vision, 'an exciting vision of language teaching and schooling' (Jiménez Raya and Vieira 2018). In the second column, a summary of the pedagogy for autonomy cases constructed by the three students are presented. The analysis of the cases is done using the framework for autonomy developed by Jiménez Raya, Lamb and Vieira (2017). The information presented on the cases includes the title (What is it a case of?), the goals, a brief description of the main language teaching activities/tasks, and the principles of pedagogy for autonomy identified in my analysis of the cases.

My analysis of the cases presented above and previous research on the effects of case construction (Jiménez Raya and Vieira 2015, 2018; Jiménez Raya, Lamb and Vieira 2017; Jiménez Raya 2021) leads me to conclude that the five teacher empowerment gains identified by Vieira (2012) have also been gains achieved by my students in general and in particular by the students whose cases are presented below. These students have assumed greater agency in their professional development by actually pushing reality forward through the exploration of innovative teaching practices rather than just doing the textbook exercises the tutor asked them to conduct. Furthermore, their vision of education has developed towards learner-centredness and is more elaborated than it was at the beginning of the module as can be seen when comparing their initial vision of language education with their 'exciting vision' formulated at the end of the module as a conclusion to the learning portfolio. They also show greater awareness of the complexity of language learning and teaching. Regarding the reconstruction of pedagogical action, it is evident from the brief descriptions and analysis of the cases that they looked critically into students' previous educational experience and that the focus of cases shows openness to innovative practices, a concern for learners' deficits, awareness of constraints and the search for spaces for pedagogical manoeuvre. As for repositioning the self in relation to others, the evidence indicates that the cases were constructed in negotiation with their school supervisors. The cases, as I have emphasized several times, are the result of the negotiation with the tutor of alternative methodologies. For instance, Javier was told that he should ask students to write an opinion essay and give students some tips on how to do it. Javier taking into account his vision of language teaching developed two task-based lessons with a focus on learner autonomy on how to write an opinion essay. As for the closeness of language to experience, the efforts to produce the case report and the participation in

Table 1. Students teachers' cases and exciting visions.

Javier		
Initial vision of language education	Exciting vision	Case
<p>"Even if it sounds utopic, I would like to be the best teacher ever. I want to make my students learn while they enjoy the task. But I also would like to make them love the English language and to make them see it as a useful tool for their future in all possible senses (professional, personal, cultural...). Ideally, it would be also great if my students see me as a model and a trustworthy person to whom they can resort if they need it. In this respect, not only do I want to help them learn English but also instil some good values into them."</p>	<p>Teaching is a highly complex activity.  <i>Vision of the classroom:</i> The communicative classroom.            Language as a skill  <i>Goal:</i> To make students communicatively competent.  <i>Approach:</i> Task-based language teaching  <i>ELT teaching principles</i>            Foster autonomy            Active learning            Learner-centredness            Responsibility            Positive classroom atmosphere            Self-regulation            Learner differentiation (This is one of the most challenging aspects for me, but a challenge that I will try to successfully overcome)            "...I have been able to know myself better: I have been able to measure the space that exists between where I am currently and where I want to be as a language teacher... <b>This is not just empty rhetoric.</b>"</p>	<p>"<i>Writing an opinion essay</i> - A case for the implementation of pedagogy for autonomy with Bachillerato students in Spain"  <i>Number of lessons:</i> 2  <i>Goals:</i>            Improve writing skills            Develop alternative strategies            Foster lifelong learning and autonomy  <i>Final task:</i> Writing an opinion essay  <i>Activities/tasks:</i>            Reflecting about the writing process            Video: The six thinking hats            Planning writing tasks            Writing task: 'In your opinion, should homework be eliminated from schools or is it a useful, essential tool for learning? Discuss.'            Template with coloured hats to support the planning of the essay &amp; organization of ideas (Group work)            Editing and revising through peer feedback            Drafting final version            Lesson evaluation grid  <i>Pedagogy for autonomy principles:</i>            Responsibility, choice and flexible control            Learning to learn            Reflective inquiry            Action-orientedness            Engagement &amp; Intrinsic motivation            Autonomy support            Formative assessment...  <i>Vision of the classroom:</i> Task-based learning</p>

Table 1. Students teachers' cases and exciting visions. *Continuation.*

Lucía		
Initial vision of language education	Exciting vision	Case
I want to be a motivated, dynamic and creative teacher.	<p>Teaching should be viewed as the development of lifelong learners.</p> <p><i>Approach:</i> Task-based language teaching &amp; Project work</p> <p><i>ELT teaching principles</i></p> <p>The basic principles underlying my vision of language education are:</p> <p>Maximizing learning opportunities</p> <p>Promoting learner autonomy</p> <p>Skills integration</p> <p>Responsibility</p> <p>Creation of an acquisition-rich classroom</p> <p>Learning to learn</p> <p>Reflective inquiry</p>	<p><i>A guide for exchange students</i></p> <p><i>Number of lessons:</i> 3</p> <p><i>Goals:</i></p> <p>To reinforce autonomy, creativity, choice and self-confidence</p> <p>To develop awareness of their willingness to communicate</p> <p>To develop the language skills</p> <p>To self-evaluate</p> <p><i>Final task:</i> Podcast – Guide for exchange students</p> <p><i>Activities/tasks</i></p> <p>Let's think about it (Reflective activity on speaking)</p> <p>My commitment (reflective questionnaire)</p> <p>Listening comprehension (Video)</p> <p>Role-play (Brainstorming)</p> <p>Podcast - Guide for exchange students</p> <p><i>Pedagogy for autonomy principles:</i></p> <p>Responsibility</p> <p>Learning to learn</p> <p>Reflective inquiry</p> <p>Action-orientedness</p> <p>Differentiation</p> <p><i>Vision of the classroom:</i> Task-based learning with a focus on autonomy</p>

Table 1. Students teachers' cases and exciting visions. *Continuation.*

María		
Initial vision of language education	Exciting vision	Case
<p>The kind that inspires, certainly. The kind that awakens curiosity, amazement, motivation, ambition. The efficient kind. The close-to-her-students kind, the supportive kind, the funny kind.</p>	<p>I believe that education is exciting only if we perceive it as a human experience, before anything else. Being able to relate to the students, to be seen as approachable, empathetic, eager to learn are qualities that make a great teacher. Wanting to make learning entertaining and motivating are other. Being ready to step out of the comfort zone (the “text-book zone”) would be yet another one. If our goal is to help students learn English, then providing them with real-life communicative situations, providing them with practice is the answer. Education, as I’m starting to understand it, is a process of inviting truth and possibility, of encouraging and giving time to discovery. It is, as John Dewey (1916) put it, a social process – ‘a process of living and not a preparation for future living’. In this view educators look to act with people rather on them. My exciting vision of education can definitely be summarized by TBLT: autonomy, meaning, communication, language in context, authenticity, creativity, freedom. Less TTT (teacher talking time) and more STT (student talking time): more problem solving, more decision making, more thinking, more active participating. I might even go as far as saying that I encourage less teaching, and more allowing learning to happen through research, through discovery, through practice. I think that the teacher’s job is not to teach, since we’ve already established that he is no knowledge expert, content-holder, his job is to create opportunities for learning to take place.</p>	<p><i>A book of short Stories</i>  <i>Number of lessons: 4</i>  <i>Goals:</i>            Foster motivation, autonomy and reflection            Develop writing skills  <i>Final task:</i> A short story  <i>Activities/tasks:</i>            Needs analysis            Listening to a short story ‘Love apple’ and discussion of characteristics            Reading a short story of their choice, focusing on story and formal aspects            Introduction to final task and to characteristics of short stories (Powerpoint) and reflective questionnaire            Negotiation of deadlines and grouping arrangements            Learning contract            Pre-task questionnaire (about how they feel about the task, the negotiation done so far and contract)            “The Happy Prince” by Oscar Wilde video activity            Writing a short story            Final self-assessment and evaluation questionnaire            Presentation of final product (a booklet produced by Sofia with all short stories)            To conclude the lesson, thank students for their participation and express my most sincere gratitude, surprise and pride in their creations, results, and abilities.  <i>Vision of the classroom:</i> Task-based learning</p>



the module activities have expanded their educational metalanguage. Writing about their experience fostered critical thinking and theorisation of practice through the integration of experience, theory, and practical wisdom.

## 5. CONCLUSION

For too long, research on language learning and teaching has mostly been the concern of researchers, not teachers. Hence, one of the goals of any teacher education programme should be the avoidance of practices that inspire teachers to become passive technicians who merely develop the capacity to teach following the prescribed textbook. Professional development is a continuous process that is based on a critical understanding of the profession. Professional development is mostly about change in one's deeply entrenched beliefs, assumptions, attitudes to, and personal theories about language teaching, so we need to provide meaningful experiences that facilitate professional and personal learning and growth. This can only be achieved through powerful teacher education practices that encourage teacher critical thinking, inquiry, reflectivity, initiative, and agency in responding to the challenges of pedagogy for autonomy in modern language teaching. The arguments for case pedagogy are many. Some have been presented above. Nevertheless, I want to stress that the combination of case analysis and case construction can contribute to the creation of powerful teacher education contexts to mediate teacher thinking and learning and facilitate professional development.

All in all, there is a general consensus derived from experience in other professional fields and recent work on teacher education highlighting the following benefits from the use of cases:

- Cases facilitate the development of critical analysis and problem-solving
- Cases encourage reflective practice and deliberate action
- Cases foster active, experiential, responsible learning by involving teachers in their own learning/development process
- Cases promote pedagogical inquiry, involving student teachers in experience-based learning through case construction and case analysis

The only way to improve learning is by improving the quality of teaching. This is the challenge of 21<sup>st</sup> century modern language teacher education. An experiential case-based pedagogy fosters both learning and unlearning, encouraging professional renewal and empowerment. This can be achieved by inspiring student teachers to scrutinise and reconstruct their personal theories in the light of the current understanding of the profession, thus enhancing their capacity to renew language teaching practice.

Case pedagogy represents an “interspace between reality and ideals where the academic and professional worlds intersect, giving rise to hybrid epistemologies, negotiated languages and exploratory practices. In this interspace, teacher educators

and teachers can become involved in a joint struggle for more democratic education” (Jiménez Raya and Vieira 2018: 97).

However, constraints exist. In my experience they are of two kinds: external constraints and internal resistances (Jiménez Raya 2017). External constraints refer to the administrative obstacles because the actual planning and implementation of the case is dependent on the practicum. Student teachers have to wait until they get to schools and know the school teacher and the students before they can start planning their case. Usually about half of the student teachers cannot actually develop and implement the case until the end of the academic year. This sometimes creates some friction with the administration of the MA programme because of the delay in the evaluation of students. The way teacher education works, the way higher education is organized, and the way decision-makers treat faculty results in a system conducive to the maintenance of the status quo rather than to innovation. In addition, policy regulations typically represent an important obstacle to teacher educators’ power to make professional decisions and a serious obstacle to their autonomy and to innovation. Nevertheless, I would like to stress that the notion of teacher autonomy is not about being free from external constraints but about developing a professional sense of agency as a teacher (educator), about willingness and ability to find spaces for manoeuvre, to navigate through constraints. It is about exploring possibilities, usually in adverse settings. A bump in the road is either an obstacle to be fought or an opportunity to be enjoyed...It is all up to you (Davet Rayala).

On the other hand, internal resistances refer to the human tendency to resist change. These affect the teacher educators themselves. Some authors maintain that the way we teach is characteristically determined by an unexamined cluster of beliefs about learning and teaching. These beliefs influence the type of interventions we choose in our teaching practice (Assen *et al.* 2016, Hung 2011). Teacher educators often feel threatened when their belief system is challenged. The results are the perseverance phenomena of theory maintenance. As suggested by Pajares (1992: 318), “people grow comfortable with their beliefs, and these beliefs become their ‘self’, so that individuals come to be identified and understood by the very nature of the beliefs, the habits, they own.”

As teacher educators we should be open to change and willing to be critical of ourselves and our work in the classroom and prepared to overcome internal resistances, external constraints and, most important of all, willing to explore the space of possibility in our teaching.

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