Foreword

The deep turn: Education for autonomy at a time teachers need hope

I came to know the work of the authors of this book through a thorough exploration of the post-Little research literature: David Little had done so much for students’ autonomy, but who are his heirs? It was for me a serious concern: what if the trend came to an end after Little? Actually not. I am thrilled to recognize here the major work of pedagogical thinkers I fully support as partners in the creation of what I named the Deep Turn in Education (Tochon 2014).

This book starts with an interrogation: how can we account for the gap between research results and classroom practice, as regards motivation research in particular. We sometimes seem to act to the contrary of the best interests of the learners. Norms have developed that constrain the vision of what a classroom is, what a learner should do, and how languages should be taught. Normalizing schooling practices tend to be hierarchical, and students have not much choice other than becoming subservient to the system rather than active creators of their world. Even learner-centred pedagogy is often pretext to enforcing rules and verifying appropriate behaviour. The focus is most often on control rather than freedom to learn. As long as democratic rationales stay at the level of discourse, they remain ineffective to stimulate the forms of equalitarian partnership that are required to stimulate democratic learning in the classroom. The classrooms remain stuck in misleading preconceptions and most often become locations for mini-dictatorships. In teacher education as well, we come to a contradictory situation in which applied linguists tell teachers they should listen to the learners, without the linguists listening to the teachers to whom they speak and thus implementation strategies have long reigned when they should themselves become the focus of change.

The critical components of autonomy (self-determination, social responsibility, and critical awareness) are nice to express, but to be integrated they need to be discussed in practice, in reference to actual cases, what this book does beautifully. This book is an attempt at bringing fresh air and democratic practice into the classroom. It responds to such fundamental issues as how do we “author our collective world?” (Benson 2000) As the authors have emphasized in their works since 2007, the ideological nature of teaching must be considered and reflected upon with the teachers. It is not that researchers can observe the ideological nature of their work independently: a dialogue must be established, through various forms of training circles and video study groups for increased feedback.
and improved awareness of how and why we act as teachers in certain ways whose *habitus* have formed through ideological and microcultural traditions.

Thus in the reflections that will be proposed in the various chapters of this book, there is a message of hope: change is possible, but the forces that impinge upon curriculum freedom and choice need to be examined thoroughly, and criticized. Open structures must be proposed to interrupt the status quo. If the goal is to go beyond mere wishful thinking and create actual means for empowering learners to learn on their own way and become parts of curriculum decision-making, the landscape needs to change: parents need to be informed, principals need training, school boards and districts must approve the more democratic direction, and ministries must stop posing control and standardized performances as the keys to success. A pedagogy of engagement is only possible if both the learner and the teacher are allowed to be engaged, and if this engagement for social causes that can be language- and culture-related (dealing with linguistic human rights, discrimination, issues of language status and ideology, heritage learners) is not under the pressure of fearful administrations that favour practices which do not disturb anyone within a mould of conformity. For autonomy to become more than a theoretical leitmotiv, flexibility should be planned within a system of free slots, such as permitting students to have free chats on free topics, communicate about doubts and directions, reorient the course of action, as so many baby steps that build in the teacher a sense of trust: yes it is possible, and freedom can be born from the interstices of choices offered more and more often to students eager to be in charge of their learning.

Students need to breathe; schools need to open their windows. One component of the current heavy pressure in Education is the managerial accountability system installed by economists who tend to believe that schools can be handled like factories. Such conception increases measures that are counter-intuitive for any practitioner of education: they focus on decontextualized knowledge and a system of expectations in which everyone must absorb the same contents at the same pace in the same order and must target the same instructional products. The word “Education” itself loses meaning in such standardized environments. Therefore the authors posit and reiterate often in the book that autonomy is not a matter of technical expertise: it is a moral enterprise and democratic action in which trust is being built at many levels. Trust and the moral and spiritual dimensions of education then are to replace the technical and bureaucratic logic of accountability. There are still very few cases for the *lingua franca* of autonomy. The *lingua franca* might be plural. This book proposes an ethics of action with cases as illustrations of what pedagogy for autonomy might be. Yet the specificity of contexts prevails.

Autonomy must become an educational reality: who wanted schools to be the common places where students lose hope and relinquish their creative potential due to the many bureaucratic constraints that suppress motivation and legitimate the lack of involvement? Many schools design failure rather than success, as will be emphasized in Chapter 1. Students most often learn to be servile pawns rather than learning to be autonomous creators. The market-centred discourse focuses on objects rather than the subject, on competition and comparisons rather than uniqueness and cooperation in the diversity of personal abilities. Narcissism and repression prevail where sharing and caring could reign.

The conceptual frameworks that inform the reflection on autonomy may vary, as demonstrated in this book and in Zembylas and Lamb (2008), whether a Kantian, rationalist view is adopted, or a communitarian or feminist, or a postmodern view is adopted. Thus self-reflection is inevitably framed, and looking for new, open, dynamic and complex frameworks that can account for the free development of negotiated forms of autonomy appears even more crucial nowadays that surveillance is overwhelming, school assessment has been transformed into what might look like an instrument of oppression, and standard outcomes are imposed in curricula that articulate various forms of coercion limited by disciplinary boundaries, a situation which is contradictory with the idea of democratic education. Thus the topic of this book is of high importance, and it is timely. Despite its focus on professional skills, the Common European Framework for Languages may permit personalized projects and social action. It transcends communication and targets cultural understanding, civic engagement and creativity. Nonetheless we need shared acceptance that a variety of frameworks may always be required to see things otherwise and open new spaces for reflection and action. Beyond domestication lie unchartered territories, such that even the term knowledge needs to be problematized if we are to enter a caring rather than violent knowledge society. We must face the limits of the Kantian rule of Reason. The major challenge of shared autonomy lies in the way it requires us to rearticulate essentialized notions that were fixed as ancient forms of what we know, and discover that beyond words commonly used to describe and enact education are forms of betrayal because those who speak are imposing views from which they benefit in their social positioning and superior status.

Top-down global policies need to be interrupted. Information campaigns often hide lobbyists, pro-industry scientists and think-tanks manipulating public opinion in the direction of the financial interests of a few (Oreskes and Conway 2011). School reforms are currently used to disempower teachers and their instigators most often lie about their actual goals (Gorski and Zenkov 2014). The dismantlement of public education serves interests that may be detrimental to education in favour of democratic values. Therefore it should be clear that the
goal of the transformative reforms suggested in this book are not to benefit an industry—for instance globalizing new technologies or simplistic and instrumented approaches to hybrid and blended learning—but they rather aim at the moral enhancement. Schooling may have become a vast operation of enslaving the children’s mind to orient it toward profitability rather than critical reflection. The purpose of autonomous and critical thinkers and active citizens is certainly not identical to creating obedient consumers.

The best instruments, such as a diary, may be imposed in normalizing ways. Even students' reflective thought has become an oppression, as the daughter of a friend said: “I must write a diary after each activity but the teacher uses it to spy on our thoughts; she requires self-criticism and we get bad grades if we criticize the class, her teaching or the master plan!” Thus journaling once initiated as a mandatory activity becomes a controversial tool for compliance. Simply defining and imposing a grammar already is a reification of duties, a “must-do” which in its ineluctability imposes rather than promotes, and reduces potentials in the name of “someone who knows best.” What really counts, however, should be the learner's investment of time and energy in language exchanges and the exploration of cultural texts that shape proficiency.

This comes back to the positioning of Jacotot in the Ignorant Master reported by Rancière (1991). That positing someone who knows and someone who does not entails creating a dependency upon the knower who then will have power over the ignorant. Placing the teacher as a Socratic equal who admits peering with students in the exploration of themes about which not much is known by either parties may alleviate the sense of “non-knowing” as a form of prejudice and stimulate discoveries for both teacher and learner. Such open curriculum based upon projects that are emerging from subjective interrogation may guide teaching methodologies to entirely new conceptions of what can be done in a classroom environment. Autonomy must create the paradigm shift. Autonomy cannot be an isolated box, it functions within a social system. The whole system requires opening, at all levels, like Russian Dolls: the learner, teacher, principal, district board, local and national curricula need to open the Pandora box of autonomy. It must become a systemic enterprise. We need to open our systems of education, not through one definitive backward design, but through a plurality of inquiry-based, evolutionary forward models. Such models require multiple freedom slots for adaptation and personalized decision-making. As Chapter 1 emphasizes, it is all about the creation of opportunities to learn.

Thus many crucial points will be raised in this book both in terms of the needs and advantages of autonomous learning and autonomous teaching. This message is crucial for quality learning and intrinsic motivation, yet how will it be understood in a context in which the professions of both teachers and teacher educators are under an unprecedented attack and become the scapegoats of politicians? We do not currently live in an educational system that trusts its teachers. The neoliberal push towards privatization places the teacher as one of the agents of the public sector, targeted as the enemy of so-called economic freedom. This obviously is a short-sighted view, as freedom is being lost in many respects through such a neoliberal move towards a narrower definition of education capital. The renewed struggle for civil rights gives civil servants a voice that deserves respect: they most often are disinterested actors, working close to their neighbourhoods and living day-by-day the cruel condition imposed on more and more children. This condition is imposed for the sake of sometimes absurd and paradoxical regulations which, adding to the teacher’s tasks the burden of bringing evidence of efficient learning, create so much struggle that there is no more time for real and deep learning (Tochon 2011). Within this context, speaking of autonomy for teachers may sound like a nice utopia, yet a utopia we should cherish, as it is the condition for students' learning autonomy.

This book details sound research data demonstrating this relation between teacher autonomy and learner autonomy, from Little (2007) to Jiménez Raya, Lamb, and Vieira (2007), showing that the lack of autonomy is highly demotivating for humans and goes against the educative grain. Deep learning is only possible with some form of autonomy (Tochon, Karaman, and Ökten 2014). Therefore the whole concept of teacher effectiveness must be reviewed in the light of the need for autonomy.

The progressive agenda, articulated with references such as transformative education in the background, is thus clearly delineated. Yet there are aspects of its proposed enactments that inherit from school-like templates, since this is the way we learned to communicate with peers in the field of Education: rubrics of well-organized criteria, narrative profiles with specific descriptive sections, guidance as to the ways to proceed to reach autonomy as a learner or as a teacher, as a teacher educator (an aspect that is particularly innovative). While I am not persuaded that metacognition can be stimulated by an analytical grid and I see limitations in preformatted rubrics, nonetheless the rubrics might help some teachers to negotiate instructional agreements and clarify learning trajectories, with a focus on processes rather than products.

This book proposes a methodology. The very issue of methods, when we deal with complexity, needs to be questioned. As methodology derives from epistemology, and defines our way of understanding autonomy and its context as something that can be reproduced, it implies guidance; and the role of guidance vis-à-vis autonomy deserves attention because of its paradoxical orientation. Beyond methods and frameworks, it is the authenticity of the teacher and the teacher educator that are interrogated. What is the border between suggestion
and manipulation? Can we manipulate students in the direction of their autonomy? Can we organize autonomy for others? What is our imprint on otherness and will we respect the othernessing process, when pedagogy takes off, and students or teachers decide to differentiate themselves in an unexpected direction? Role play is a very good example of learning in action; the initializing question might be: On what themes and topics would you role play? Are the topics stimulating awareness raising processes? Thus the scaffold in an approach to autonomy relates to the type of open support provided to adapt to the aspiration of the learners, which may be organizational, procedural, cognitive, socio-affective and moral, for instance. Vis-à-vis all types of supports I would like to add a grain of salt: we need instructional organizers, but there comes a point when students need what I named “unorganizers”: suspension marks, empty slots, places for their own decisions. This brings to the fore the idea of anti-methods or counter-methodologies, dear to Feyerabend and adopted, in the field of languages, by Kumaradivelu (2003). This will be the focus of Chapter 2.

Craft, technology, science or art, teaching keeps a crucial role as pedagogy for autonomy requires skillful action and excellent training. Creating the conditions for autonomous learning is not merely a matter of letting things go. “Lärcher-prise” (letting go) does not suffice. Students need training to become independent curriculum planners. The way to do it may vary with populations, environments and local cultures. From incomplete conceptions of teaching limited to presenting information and evaluating its acquisition to more elaborative and adaptive instructional models, placing the learner as the curriculum builder in a deep approach to knowledge situates the extreme of respect, empowerment, democratic action and sense of justice. Teaching becomes “educating.” Obviously there is an apparent paradox and possible aporia in proposing teachers to become mediators and architects of student autonomy. Indeed there is still structure. In a sense educative action is then related to proposing various templates from which students can choose a path for personalized action. Once they know the templates they can modify them and adapt their action to various forms of reasoning, apprenticeship and sharing. This characterizes the forthcoming educational trends – witness the growing appeal for personal learning environments, blended and hybrid learning. The trend could become post-actional in the sense that action might be superseded by a moral, transdisciplinary uncovering process (Tochon 2014). Autonomous teams of learners may increase significantly their proficiency level compared to students in courses alternating the communicative approach and task-related focus on form, which represents the current mainstream (Tochon 2013). The difference is in the motivational energy released by letting students doing it their own way, whatever structure they may use to do so.

Fading, moving from a space of constraints to a space of freedom requires tact, nuances, and subtlety. It is a matter of humane sensitivity, wisdom and empathy within soft advising approaches. Autonomy impels a reframing of how we define effectiveness. It may appear at first less “effective” to use induction rather than imposing a deductive instruction, however the opposite is true: choosing complexity creates conditions close to real life action and provides a much better preparation to immersive situations than sequences of exercises. Therefore such deep approach may be said “quasi-immersive.” As well, intuitive problem solving implies creative use of prior knowledge in the building up of language apprenticeship. Uniqueness and singularity prevail. The complexity of this enterprise is emphasized in Chapter 2, rightfully so, as students, teachers, contexts, locations and time differ and bring their influential ramifications in the meanings that may frame and reframe the concept of autonomy.

Teacher reflection on student autonomy has become a buzzword in teacher education settings, as Chapter 2 mentions. Yet finding depth in reflection and reflective practice is not a given. It requires reinventing and imagining new conceptual frameworks more open to the new purpose. Moving on from obedient training to self-sufficient education entails changing drastically the positioning. It is a philosophical revolution that goes along a more humane definition of educational science. From the consuming of objects of knowledge to a sense of becoming an agent of change, volunteer teachers can be trained to set conditions for civic society and social action. Yet these words need to take their full meaning: not in the type of collective agreement witnessed among Hitler Youth with a pre-SS mood, but as responsible citizens in charge of critically reflecting on idiosyncratic paths towards the improvement of the current state of affairs, with criteria such as freedom, humane participation, volunteer engagement in topics of excellence, thriving for enacting the designed imaginary that was conceived for a project of society in which time and space are propitious for sharing but also silent, for action but also respect for the living space of others, for professionalism and critical purposefulness.

The case method helps connect theory to practice and supports real-world performance, as will be illustrated in Chapter 3. Development is then perceived in the continuity of professional life. Slices of life are storied in a way that facilitates their assimilation and translation into action. Cases address the complexity of situations and support practical and theoretical reflection. They allow teachers to communicate through experience and can be explored through various approaches: foundational and theoretical, pragmatic and practical, narrative and phenomenological, casual through critical incidents. They nurture reflection, encourage initiative and develop innovative imaginaries through contrastive interpretations. Teachers can see examples of pedagogy for autonomy that inte-
grate practical and theoretical knowledge; navigating though the complexities of personalized cases. They place teachers as participants in their development (how could it be otherwise) and therefore are quite homonymic with the concept of critical autonomous learning at the level of the teacher. Practical wisdom is thus enhanced with an understanding of the relativity of situations. They contribute to a perspective of teacher knowledge that is episodic, anchored into events of interactions in real life.

We need to move away from the fixist definition of instructional guidance to a more multifaceted and dynamic approach of shape shifting templates, used by learners and teachers as they wish to, with the sincere and delicate touch of hybridity that the authors neatly propose. This is why the authors of this book encourage teachers, in Chapter 4, to write and share their own cases and vignettes of practice. The educational materials proposed in this book focus on self-directed learning: guidance is proposed in the form of templates that provide choices and an abundance of resources to the students (Lamb 2008; Jiménez Raya and Vieira 2011). We reach here the limitations of the book format: maybe digital templates could allow learners and teachers to adapt the formats and contents, that should be flexible and negotiable lines of behaviour, potentially reinvested and reshaped, modified at will, and reorganized.

The issue is to expand and refine the lingua franca of cases (Lee Shulman) for autonomous language learning. Such third idiom (Ira Shor) emerges from vocational dialogues in which teachers inquire into the specifics of their action and create new wording, innovative conceptions, and a new grammar for classroom analysis. This resembles the archaeological work of Foucault on the undigging of the artifacts of practice, in which various selves are excavated with the purpose of being polished and serving as illustrations and exemplars of what best practices can be in regard to learner autonomy. Then the principles of case construction may apply and narratives of autonomy emerge in a way that is detailed without being dogmatic, and personal but sharable. If things go well, indexes of satisfaction connotate experiences and genuinely lead the pathway to more successful attempts on the agenda of transformation. In a sense, such agenda is “un-schooled” – not unrooted, on the contrary, but it proceeds from what the authors title the “de-schooling of professional knowledge:” marking turning points and, at best, what I named the Deep Turn in World Language Education. Journaling one’s own cases builds trust in oneself and may help re-learning, through writing, a repertoire of teaching selves, creating an experiential memory in which practice and theory merge as praxis – the third space of reflection-in-action.

Within this whole perspective, what becomes of the role of the teacher educator? This will be the subject of the fifth chapter. Teacher educators may become architects of autonomous professional learning. In a homologous way, the idea is to scaffold potentials to learn in self-directed ways through tailored examples and freely chosen creative work. Tyromenies of tasks may look too enumerative to reach the heart of teaching for autonomy, the soul of teaching, the sacredness of that other space where mind, heart and action merge into a sense of dynamic oneness. They should be understood as potentialities, such as instructional organizers being invisibly polarized by unorganizers within the dialectic of learning and unlearning. Thus rather than a pedagogy of cases, it should be understood as a panoply of ways of approaching life, and the life of a language and culture in particular. Competencies cannot be reduced to molar units taught in isolation. Learning tasks make sense when integrated in social acts of expression that contribute to identity building. They give access to a world of bi-understanding, in which the hybrid Janus faces two languages and cultures, a dual perspective that instrumentation has much difficulty to represent.

It should be said in this foreword that the authors of this remarkable book have done not only constructive work but demonstrate the way of the future: creative, open, complex, and optimistic. Conceiving of autonomy as a collective interest is a strong stand that may go against the grain of the day-to-day functioning of many educational institutions. Indeed schools as well as teacher education are highly (hetero) regulated institutions, in which autonomy might be only expressed as an ideal that is rather rarely met by facts. As the authors demonstrate, and particularly in the chapter on teacher cases, autonomy is a conquest that requires personal and community involvement and engagement in a long period of time, and it is a difficult enterprise. To be sure, the contexts and conditions for it to happen are not always garnered and there is much to do to allow that imaginary to incarnate itself. However, the bread is half-baked, and almost ready to be shared, as a sign of recovery of the sacredness of teaching and deep value of Education.

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François Victor Tochon
University of Wisconsin-Madison and
University of Granada