



### Teacher Autonomy Worm

*A rather subversive worm! Started in Braga, Portugal with Flávia Vieira, stayed there to visit Isabel Barbosa, and was initially believed to have wriggled under the border with Spain to see Manuel Jiménez Raya in Granada and swum to Tenerife to see Leslie Bobb Wolff. But as Flávia reported in Aberdeen it had stayed in Portugal all the time! We reproduce the full text of her talk in Aberdeen below, integrated with her handouts.*

## Teacher Autonomy: Why should we care?

*Flávia Vieira*

**W**hen I was invited to become the “keeper of the teacher autonomy worm”, I had mixed feelings about it. Let me explain what I mean.

On the one hand, I was honoured to be invited and I thought this could be an excellent opportunity for reflection on issues that I find

absolutely relevant in the autonomy field. In fact, I believe that in the expression “pedagogy for autonomy” the notion of *autonomy* should refer both to the learner and the teacher, not just to the learner as is often the case. We have perhaps spent too much time thinking about learners and learning processes, and too little time thinking about teachers

and teaching processes. Moreover, in the history of the autonomy field, teachers have systematically been kept backstage, that is, they have not taken a central role in research and pedagogical developments. No wonder then that their interests have been overlooked. Actually, this is true in other educational fields as well. It relates to the well-known divorce between schools and universities in the production of educational knowledge, which has implications for both the nature and the social relevance of that knowledge. Unless we put teachers centre-stage, I doubt that our efforts to promote pedagogy for autonomy in schools will ever have any sustainable effects. This has been one of my major concerns as a teacher educator, therefore I felt immediately motivated to participate in this discussion on teacher autonomy.

On the other hand, I felt rather uncomfortable with the association of teacher autonomy with the “worm metaphor”. Carol Everhard’s idea of autonomy in language learning as “a can of worms” (Everhard, 2006: 2), a metaphor which is not used in Portuguese, seemed so radically different from my own view of pedagogy for autonomy that my first move when I started to write my contribution to the SIG Newsletter, *Independence* (Vieira, 2006) was to reject this metaphor and replace it by another one I had used some time before – *writing with a broken pencil*. This metaphor was essentially meant to highlight the need to manage constraints on autonomy through *risk-taking, persistence, resistance, subversion, self-determination, experimentation, and inquiry*. These are the components of professional autonomy that I identified in that text, and which I illustrated with examples from my practice as a teacher educator. I also wrote that developing professional autonomy is not about “doing as one wants” or “being free from external control”. It is rather about *striving for what you believe in and empowering yourself as a teacher* (ibid.: 24). For me, this notion of teacher autonomy entails tolerance of uncertainty, willingness to venture into the unknown and, especially, the ability to understand and deal with the complexity of pedagogical practice in schools.

It is true that Carol’s metaphor also entails the notion of complexity. In a web search carried out by Leslie Bobb-Wolff, who also contributed to this discussion (Bobb-Wolff 2007), she found the following meanings for “opening a can of worms”:

- “a source of unforeseen and troublesome complexity” (*The American Heritage Dictionary*)
- “a situation that presents difficulties, uncertainty or perplexity” (*Houghton Mifflin Company Thesaurus*)
- “a complex, unexpected problem or unsolvable dilemma” (*Houghton Mifflin Company Idioms*)

However, when I think about these definitions, it seems to me that a can of worms is something to avoid or even fear, whereas in my understanding of pedagogy for autonomy, complexity, perplexity, uncertainty, problems and dilemmas are not only integral to pedagogical reasoning and action, but also something that you should *expect* and *be willing to deal with* in a productive way.

I also had reservations about the idea of being a “keeper of the teacher autonomy worm”, and the physical translation of this idea into a fake worm with a lamp on its head, which I received in a box and was supposed to pass on to other people as I asked them to contribute to the discussion, made it even more difficult to accept. It was not just that I felt that the whole thing was rather childish and ridiculous. I also refused to assume any kind of leading role, except for the fact that I would initiate the discussion and invite other people to join in, knowing that in the end I would be here to tell you about it. Meanwhile, I kept the worm at home and I brought it here to give it back, but it never travelled around. I guess I never wanted to believe in the symbolic value of this worm. However, I believed in the value of reflecting about teacher autonomy and getting different views on it. So, I invited three colleagues to join me who are also interested in this topic: Isabel Barbosa, my colleague at the University of Minho, Manuel Jiménez Raya from the University of Granada in Spain, and Leslie Bobb-Wolff from the University of La Laguna in Tenerife. Unfortunately, only Isabel is here with us, so I sent the others this text before I came.

I also discussed the first text I wrote for *Independence* with a small group of in-service teachers I am teaching this year, in a postgraduate MA course on pedagogical supervision in language education, and challenged them to think of other metaphors for teacher autonomy, which they did.

So, what I intend to do next is to present some ideas for discussion, drawing on examples from the different contributions, including the metaphors developed by my students – Fernanda Alvim, Lídia Costa, Cristina Brandão and Estela Monteiro – who kindly gave me their permission to use them here.

I decided to call this presentation: *Teacher autonomy: Why should we care?*. I wanted to highlight the fact that teacher autonomy has received less attention than it should in the field of learner autonomy, and also point out some reasons why we should care more about it. The most obvious reason seems to be that unless teachers are free to make pedagogical choices that favour learner autonomy, there is no way that pedagogy for autonomy can flourish in schools. However, this is a simplistic answer to my question, for two reasons. On the one hand, teacher freedom does not necessarily entail a concern for learner autonomy. In fact, it can serve to legitimise undesirable

practices. On the other hand, lack of freedom does not imply that learner autonomy is not a pedagogical concern, that is, pedagogy for autonomy can be promoted in adverse contexts. I would even say that it is especially relevant in such contexts, to counteract the forces that make education disempowering.

Therefore, we need to find other reasons that justify a greater attention to issues of teacher

autonomy.

When we talk to teachers about their job, lack of professional freedom is usually one of the main aspects they point out. When I asked my MA students to think of metaphors for teacher autonomy, they also focused on the lack of freedom, although one of them moves in a different direction, underlining the teacher's responsibility for learner growth (see Table 1).

**Table 1 – Teachers' metaphors for teacher autonomy**

***THE LACK OF PROFESSIONAL AUTONOMY DUE TO EXTERNAL IMPOSITIONS, AND HOW THAT LACK OF AUTONOMY SERVES THE INTERESTS OF THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM...***

***A. The teacher as a wild animal in captivity*** 'Just as the animal adapts itself to its condition as a prisoner, so the teacher adapts her/himself to the reality imposed upon her/him'. (F.Alvim; translated)

***B. The teacher as a puppet*** 'We may seem autonomous, but we aren't, because the strings that command us are too strong to let us act freely. (...) If one of the strings fails, the puppet will not work properly and it will need to be repaired or replaced'. (F.Alvim; translated)

***THE REDUCTION OF TEACHER AUTONOMY TO DEVELOPING A PERSONAL TEACHING STYLE...***

***C. The teacher as a long-distance runner*** 'For long-distance runners, the distance and the route are pre-determined, and they know that when they decide to enter the competition. (...) Their autonomy lies only in developing the running style that best suits their strategy and competence'. (L.Costa; translated)

***DECISION-MAKING DIFFICULTIES DUE TO THE TENSION BETWEEN FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY...***

***D. Teacher autonomy as the first night out*** 'When we go out at night for the first time and venture into the unknown, it seems, at first sight, that we are free to do anything we want, since we are on our own. However, we were all teenagers one day and we know this is not what happens. Before we leave home our parents give us a lot of advice and warnings which become fixed in our minds and determine our actions. Not paying attention to them may not only prevent us from getting back home safely, but also shut the door on the possibility of going out again. (...) Even though we are no longer prisoners of our parents' protection, we are prisoners of our own freedom, which forces us to choose options and thus limits us to a certain extent'. (E.Monteiro; translated)

***THE TEACHER'S MISSION TO PROMOTE LEARNER AUTONOMY, AND THE SLOWNESS AND UNPREDICTABILITY OF EDUCATIONAL PROCESSES...***

***E. The teacher as a turtle*** 'The teacher is like the turtle laying her eggs (the students) along the beach (life), in no hurry and along no pre-determined path. On the one hand, she does that because she knows that her practice will not produce radical changes in the attitudes and behaviour of her students, whose abilities and personalities are built step by step and not overnight. On the other hand, she believes that through small gestures she is doing everything she can possibly do to enable them to follow their own path, face the unknown, take risks, fight for their goals and ideals, just like the little turtles follow their own destiny, running towards the sea, trying to survive in the ferocious world to which they are awakened'. (C.Brandão; translated)

In different ways, these metaphors point to two main reasons why we should care about professional autonomy – *the existence of constraints on teacher freedom* and *the teacher's responsibility for learner growth*. From my perspective, these two reasons become interconnected in pedagogy for autonomy, that is, because teachers want to promote learner growth, they must be willing and able to manage constraints, and in doing so, they develop the ability to improve the conditions of teaching and learning. The question to ask then is: *in what direction* should the conditions of teaching and learning be improved?

In other words, if we are interested in promoting pedagogy for autonomy, it is crucial that we ask ourselves what *vision of education and society we advocate*. For example, do we see pedagogy for autonomy as a way to make education and society more democratic and just? If so, then why have issues of teacher autonomy been largely overlooked in the autonomy field?

Lack of attention to issues of teacher autonomy can perhaps be a sign of a more general phenomenon - the de-politicisation of the notion of autonomy, especially through an emphasis on its psychological and methodological aspects and overlooking its ideological underpinnings and implications (see Benson 1997). The fact that educational knowledge is often constructed without the direct participation of teachers only serves to reinforce this phenomenon, leading to the more or less generalised assumption that the reconstruction of language pedagogy depends on *telling teachers what they should do and think*. I remember being at an international conference on learner autonomy and hearing a well-known expert in the field suggest that schools are like infected places where pure ideas of autonomy get contaminated, which is another way of saying that teachers are not doing and thinking as they should. However, as Smyth (1987: 6) puts it:

The notion that there are some groups who are equipped through intelligence and training to articulate what another group *should do and think*, is an anti-educational view.

It is anti-educational because it assumes that teachers are *technicians* whose main professional expertise consists of *applying* externally produced knowledge and not *producing* local, self-generated knowledge. It is anti-educational because it denies *the validity of teachers' practical knowledge* and their *role as critical intellectuals*. It is anti-educational because it rests on an *anti-democratic perspective* of education and society at large.

If we see teachers as expert technicians, the notion of professional autonomy makes little sense, since expert technicians are not supposed to move

beyond or subvert normative expectations. This view of teachers is not compatible with the idea of pedagogy for autonomy, unless we envisage pedagogy for autonomy as a specific kind of *regime* to be followed uncritically. The resistance of many teachers to educational and political discourses of autonomy is often a sign of rebellion against this instrumental view of their role as technicians who should conform to top-down policies and reforms, more than a sign of rejection of the idea of autonomy itself. I have worked with many teachers whose resistance to the autonomy discourse has been their starting point for pedagogical renewal, as they started to realise that pedagogy for autonomy is not some abstract concept or utopia that has nothing to do with lived experience, but mostly a way of rethinking and re-directing their experience so that *education can become more rational, satisfactory and just, both for their students and themselves*. The literature on learner autonomy can certainly inspire and support teachers, but only teachers can construct educational environments conducive to autonomy, which means that only they can decide what to think and do.

From this perspective, engaging in pedagogy for autonomy is about acknowledging and understanding the complexity of educational contexts and learning to cope with contradictions and uncertainty in empowering ways. Most pedagogical problems that teachers encounter cannot be solved, but they can be tackled differently, and promoting learner autonomy is one option whose validity can be claimed on ethical, conceptual, and practical grounds. However, it is not an easy option, and teachers need to be prepared to face more obstacles and dilemmas than they do in more traditional ways of teaching. This means that they need to develop themselves as reflective practitioners and critical intellectuals, struggling for autonomy as a *collective interest*. In a nutshell, this is what developing professional autonomy is about.

When we see autonomy as a collective interest, there is no way we can separate the idea of learner autonomy from the idea of teacher autonomy. This is why it is perhaps important to find a common definition for learner and teacher autonomy, like the one I presented in my text for *Independence* (Vieira 2006: 23):

“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” (Jiménez Raya, Lamb and Vieira, forthcoming (2007))

This definition was developed within EuroPAL, a European project I have been involved in since October 2004 together with six colleagues from different countries. (EuroPAL (*A European*

*Pedagogy for Autonomous Learning - Educating Modern Language Teachers Through ICT* is a European project funded by the SOCRATES programme, action Comenius 2.1, developed from October 2004 to October 2007. Team members are: Manuel Jiménez Raya (coordinator, Spain), Terry Lamb (England), June Miliander (Sweden), Ivan Shotlekov (Bulgaria), Turid Trebbi (Norway), Flávia Vieira (Portugal), and Agni Stylianou (Cyprus)).

Our team has spent considerable time discussing and writing about issues of teacher autonomy and the interconnecteness of teacher and learner autonomy. In fact, this has been the most controversial aspect of our work, and I think it is one of the most controversial aspects of research and teacher education that focuses on the development of pedagogy for autonomy.

I would like to suggest that arguments for teacher autonomy need to be articulated with arguments for learner autonomy, and *both need to be framed within a vision of education guided by ideals of empowerment and transformation*. The ideas expressed by the contributors to the discussion in *Independence*, issues 38-40, highlight at least four major assumptions that support this view and can thus be seen as arguments for teacher autonomy (see Table 2):

1. *Pedagogy for autonomy is an ideological choice and a re(ide)alistic activity;*
2. *Teacher and learner autonomy are interconnected;*
3. *Teachers are constrained agents of change;*
4. *Teacher development needs to be self-directed, inquiry-oriented, experience-based, collaborative, and locally relevant.*

**Table 2 – Arguments for teacher autonomy**

**I.**

***Pedagogy for autonomy is an ideological choice and a re(ide)alistic activity***

‘Pedagogy for autonomy is always a context-bound, never-ending struggle between conflicting discourses and practices, guided by ideals of empowerment and transformation. I am aware that this view is controversial, but I also think that most proposals in the autonomy literature are so de-politicised that we run the risk of seeing pedagogy for autonomy merely as one methodological trend among others, rather than a value-laden choice’. (F.Vieira, 2006)

‘Only *ideals* can push *reality* forwards, and not being able to fully accomplish them is just one more reason to keep on trying. From this perspective, dealing with complexity and uncertainty is integral to ‘re[ide]alistic’ professional lifelong learning’. (Jiménez Raya, Lamb & Vieira, forthcoming (2007); quoted by F.Vieira, 2006)

‘(...) while self-regulating their actions and behaviours, teachers, as members of a larger organization, are usually highly committed to the common good of the organization. According to the Piagetian view, autonomy entails the ability to make decisions for oneself between right and wrong in the moral realm, and between truth and untruth in the intellectual realm by taking into consideration relevant factors’. (M.Jiménez Raya, 2007)

‘The social dimension of autonomy is about voice, respect for others, negotiation, co-operation, and interdependence. (...) From this viewpoint, freedom of choice is always determined by contextual moral structures of the community’. (M.Jiménez Raya, 2007)

‘Teacher autonomy, like many other variables in modern language education, exists along a continuum. Therefore a balance between standardization and uniqueness, between license and responsibility is what teacher and learner autonomy can refer to’. (M.Jiménez Raya, 2007)

‘Can professional autonomy seem scary? *Anything* new can, of course, be perceived as scary; professional autonomy may seem scary because of the changes it implies in the way we look at all the aspects of the learning-teaching process and the implications it has for the entire educational system. Many times we stay with ‘the way it’s always been’ even if we don’t like it, due to fear of what change may involve’. (L.Bobb-Wolff, 2007)

‘People who become teachers were inevitably successful within the system, we stay in it, at least in part, because we *were* successful. (...) Many teachers, perhaps, do not perceive a need to change the way in which they work because they were successful working this way as students: why rock the boat?’. (L.Bobb-Wolff, 2007)

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‘Certainly there are teachers who are not conscious of the ideological implications of *not* working towards professional or learner autonomy. This may have to do with not having learned to think about the general implications of the educational system in which they work, not having been exposed to material (books, course, lectures, etc) which could lead them to reflect on why, how or what we teach’. (L.Bobb-Wolff, 2007)

‘Teachers who believe that education should not be democratic will not agree with the concept of learner autonomy, and consequently, may not agree with that of professional autonomy. After all, [...] general education has not, historically, been aiming to empower students’. (L.Bobb-Wolff, 2007)

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## 2.

### *Teacher and learner autonomy are interconnected*

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‘In my understanding of the expression “pedagogy for autonomy”, “autonomy” refers to both learner *and* teacher autonomy (...).The development of teacher autonomy is *not* independent from the development of learner autonomy, since one gives meaning to the other’. (F.Vieira, 2006)

‘I have implemented some pedagogical changes aimed at promoting my English and German Teaching Methodology students' autonomy, hoping to foster their willingness and ability to adopt a pedagogy for autonomy when they enter the teaching profession. (...) Going through the process themselves as learners made them believe in a pedagogy for autonomy in the school context’. (I.Barbosa, 2006)

‘This experience helped us learn how to question current practices (...); we have also been provided with a number of ‘tools’ that will allow us to face the teacher training year in a different way, that is, adopting a learner-centred rather than the most common teacher-centred approach. (CR, student teacher quoted by I.Barbosa, 2006)

‘Reading a course objective that states, “Develop the ability to reflect on one’s role as a teacher within a pedagogy for autonomy and how one can develop and change as an autonomous, reflective teacher.”, I was asked what does being ‘an autonomous, reflective teacher’ mean. A student who has no concept of what it means to reflect on their practice as a student – or a teacher who has no concept of what this means as a teacher – will have a good deal of difficulty working within a pedagogy for autonomy, or becoming professionally autonomous’. (L.Bobb-Wolff, 2007)

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## 3.

### *Teachers are constrained agents of change*

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‘Research has proved, and I know from experience, that routine, school cultures, political contexts and personal histories may often affect teachers’ commitment with a life-long learning project based on reflection upon and research into their own practice. That is when teachers most need challenging opportunities of professional development that contribute to igniting their passion for teaching’. (I.Barbosa, 2006)

‘In many countries and schools teachers have little autonomy, as the system remains centralised, competitive and bureaucratic. Critics of accountability and prescriptive instructional policies argue that these can narrow teachers' professional autonomy, discourage effective teaching, and focus on lower order learning opportunities’. (M.Jiménez Raya, 2007)

‘(...) reflective practice requires investment of the teacher’s time. Number of classes, number of students per class, administrative work all affect the amount of time and energy a teacher has to put into her work. Not every teacher has the time or the energy to add working towards professional autonomy to what she already sees as too much to do’. (L.Bobb-Wolff, 2007)

‘Teachers may feel they cannot decide about why or how they might teach differently; they may see learner / teacher autonomy as just one more imposition coming from above them which they are supposed, somehow, to implement’. (L.Bobb-Wolff, 2007)

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## 4.

### *Teacher development needs to be self-directed, inquiry-oriented, experience-based, collaborative, and locally relevant*

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‘She [a friend who gave up her MA course] was tired of reading, hearing and writing about other people’s theories without getting any stimulus to reflect on them in connection with her own practice, and she

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probably lacked motivation to explore ways of bridging the gap between theory and practice'. (I.Barbosa, 2006)

'It takes much more than words to reconstruct one's conceptual framework. In fact, if you really want to know what the *pudding* is like, you will have to eat it. Building on this assumption, and because I was lucky enough to have been introduced to the idea(l) of a pedagogy for autonomy in an experience-based way, I consider myself able to recommend the autonomy *pudding* to those who may benefit from my experience as a teacher and teacher educator'. (I. Barbosa, 2006)

'The students found it hard to assume responsibility for their own learning, after having mostly experienced a pedagogy of dependence until the 4<sup>th</sup> year of their university life. With time, however, most students started realising that *autonomy* is not just a concept or a utopic educational goal, and many difficulties were overcome'. (I.Barbosa, 2006)

'Teacher demotivation is a growing concern in modern language teaching. One of the causes for this lack of motivation is the growing erosion of teacher professional autonomy. (...) Unless teachers retain a sense of agency about why and how they might teach differently, the call for innovation in modern language teaching will likely ring hollow. (...) Self-motivated teaching can, therefore, serve as an antidote to the prevailing attitude to distance oneself from the need to assume responsibility for mediating between curriculum and context'. (M.Jiménez Raya, 2007)

'Teachers as principal agents of teaching need to be part of the process of building environments in which teams of teachers, administrators, and education experts collegially work to improve the school, redesign the curriculum, and increase the power of teaching'. (M.Jiménez Raya, 2007)

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Given the above ideas, it is perhaps surprising, to say the least, that so few publications and projects on language learner autonomy integrate teacher autonomy as a crucial issue. In the EuroPAL project, we have taken an approach that seeks to counteract this tendency and problematise the ideological nature of pedagogy for autonomy. We assume that...

By dismissing or undervaluing the issue of teacher autonomy in promoting learner autonomy in schools, we may be encouraging...

- a culture of pedagogy for autonomy as technical expertise, detached from a view of teaching as a moral and political act;
- a culture of teacher education towards learner autonomy that builds on an image of teachers as consumers of academic knowledge, rather than creative producers of practical knowledge, decision-makers and agents of change;
- a culture of research into learner autonomy that undervalues teachers' knowledge and experience and the role of school-based, teacher-led inquiry in promoting pedagogical innovation. (Jiménez Raya, Lamb & Vieira, forthcoming (2007))

#### **We further believe that...**

If we value *(inter)personal empowerment and social transformation* as educational goals, then autonomy becomes a *collective interest* and a *democratic ideal*, so that teacher and learner autonomy are like two sides of the same coin. In other words, teacher autonomy will be in the service of learner autonomy only to the extent that a philosophy of education based on democratic values is embraced. (ibid.)

This is not very different from David Little's assumption that "the pursuit of learner autonomy and the pursuit of democracy in education are one and the same" (Little, 2004: 124), which means that we need to envisage pedagogy for autonomy as a *cultural and political project* where resistance, critique and subversion become crucial components of teachers' professional competence. The question is: are we willing and able to engage in such a project and accept its consequences?

I am not sure that we are. And I am not just referring to educational researchers and teacher educators, but also to teachers. In fact...

The idea that reflective practitioners can use reflection as a tool for social criticism and reconstruction is contrary to an idyllic view of teachers working in peaceful learning communities. On the contrary, it implies individual and collective commitment to working in contexts where antagonistic ideas and conflicting interests and values emerge, constraints and dilemmas have to be faced, and everlasting tensions (authority vs. freedom,

conservatism vs. change...) have to be managed. (Jiménez Raya, Lamb & Vieira, forthcoming (2007))

However, moving in this direction does not have to entail radical changes in teachers' work. Small steps can bring about significant

changes, and developing pedagogy for autonomy can thus be defined as a continuous process of *shortening the distance between reality and ideals through opening up possibilities*. This is visually illustrated by Table 3, where the column on the right (possibilities) is meant to represent pedagogy for autonomy as a re(ide)alistic practice.

**Table 3 – Pedagogy for autonomy as re(ide)alistic practice**

<i>My ideal (what should be)</i>	<i>Reality: action &amp; constraints (what is)</i>	<i>Possibilities (what can be)</i>
e.g. I wish I could give my students more opportunities for decision-making as regards learning activities	e.g. I don't give students much choice as I must cover the syllabus and follow the prescribed textbook so that they can pass the tests	e.g. Before tests, ask students to identify their own difficulties and let them choose what to do according to their needs; I could also negotiate or let them choose homework activities
e.g. I wish my students were more motivated to correct their own written mistakes as a way to develop self-regulation strategies and develop a positive attitude towards error	e.g. I often signal mistakes and use a code for self-correction, but some students, especially those with more language problems, find it boring, difficult, tiring, or time-consuming; I always need to bring in extra activities to keep the faster ones busy, which creates different learning opportunities in class	e.g. I could select sets of mistakes from written assignments for group correction; groups might present their work to the class so as to encourage collaboration and give everyone the opportunity to reflect about a larger set of mistakes. As students get used to this practice, they could themselves select mistakes for self/peer-correction
e.g. I wish my students were more motivated to read literary texts as part of their personal growth and cultural competence	e.g. I do my best to involve them in reading tasks. Unfortunately, the literary texts prescribed in the syllabus are often detached from their lives and they find them quite boring.	e.g., we could centre our analysis of literary texts on what makes them interesting/ boring for readers, reflect on students' own experience as readers, discuss the value of literature in our syllabus and contrast the prescribed texts with student-selected home readings
e.g. I wish I could have someone (a critical friend) visit my classes and help me analyse and improve my teaching, as well as have the opportunity to see others teaching	e.g. I never felt at ease to ask one of my colleagues to engage in peer-observation; I fear they may not be willing to, and I also fear my own reaction to an outside observer – am I ready for this kind of self-exposure?	e.g. I could ask one of my colleagues to look at my lesson plans and materials and give me some feedback; I could also offer to do that for him/her; if things turn out interesting for both, we could start collaborating more and maybe later we could engage in peer observation

(Jiménez Raya, Lamb & Vieira, forthcoming (2007))

The examples above show that approaches to autonomy are context-sensitive and deeply rooted in teachers' professional history, which means that they are always *local* and *autobiographical*. This is why we should perhaps be talking about *pedagogies* for autonomy and not *pedagogy* for autonomy. Nevertheless, different approaches seem to entail some common features of professional competence which are also conditions for professional autonomy (Jiménez Raya, Lamb & Vieira, *ibid.*):

- *Developing a critical view of (language) education*

- *Managing local constraints so as to open up spaces for manoeuvre*
- *Centring teaching on learning*
- *Interacting with others in the professional community*

Some will say that these are general features of *good teaching*, so why associate them with the concept of *teacher autonomy*? I would argue that unless teacher empowerment is clearly assumed as a goal of teaching (*and* teacher education), we will be reinforcing a technical view of pedagogy that can be of little use for the transformation of schools. We will also be reinforcing the dominance of

university-based knowledge over school-based knowledge, thus deepening the gap between research and teaching. Ultimately then, we will be missing opportunities to understand why pedagogy for autonomy matters, what interests it may serve, and how teachers struggle for it day by day.

So, going back to the question in my title – Why should we care? –, and now I am referring explicitly to researchers and teacher educators, I would say that if we don't care, then our work will be of little *social relevance*, no matter how much credit it gets in the academic community.

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