The Act of Participating or Not: Institutional, Personal Discourses and Teacher Development

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Abstract

This study investigated how a small group of part-time, non-tenured language teachers, at a public university in central Mexico, responded to the opportunity of publishing their first research article. Based upon a qualitative study we explore the teachers' discourses and the institution's to understand the teachers' positions towards this research project and how these teachers see their future teacher development within a specific context they share. The purpose of the project was to encourage nontenured teachers who, within the institution, have limited opportunities and financial support to develop as researchers. The latter is based on the reality that throughout Mexico as well as other parts of the world and within many disciplines, academic publishing is a strategy used to measure professional development among university teachers. Findings suggest that carrying out research and publishing are not participants' first priorities despite their interest in gaining tenure.

Key words: Teacher and Professional developments; Dialogical institutional and personal discourses

INTRODUCTION

Professional development is regarded as a key to quality and efficient teaching. While there are many factors that contribute to becoming a qualified and efficient teacher, the goal imply that teachers may have to change classroom practices; this involves learning, support and guidance (Ball & Cohen, 1999) which will enhance their understanding and knowledge. According to Borko (2004), however, "despite the recognition of its importance, the professional development currently available to teachers is woefully inadequate... it is fragmented, intellectually superficial, and do not take into account what we know about how teachers learn" (p.3). While we may agree with Borko, it is necessary to recognize that teacher development can occur under many circumstances, during their practice in the classroom, their school communities, professional development courses, workshops and personal inquiry.

Within teachers' professional development, it has been said that research plays an important role. Lefstein and Snell (2011) analyze the differences among classroom teachers and researchers of how research may support professional development for one group but not necessarily for the other. The latter depends, according to Lefstein and Snell, on different perspectives as each group apparently has distinctive interests (p.8). For language teachers, knowing or understanding the knots and bolts of language teaching may be the key to their professional development. On the other hand, for researchers, research is the key to a better understanding of those knots and bolts as well as other classroom phenomena. These different visions of professional development seem problematic within the institution where this study took place where research is the key to open the door to tenure and full time positions.

Research is considered an opportunity to "extend the boundaries of professional knowledge" (Hendriks et al., 2010, p.12). Borko (2004) suggests that research gives teachers a situative perspective:

The term situative refers to a set of theoretical perspectives and lines of research with roots in various disciplines including

anthropology, sociology, and psychology. Situative theorists conceptualize learning as changes in participation in socially organized activities, and individual's use of knowledge as an aspect of their participation in social practices..." (p.5)

Engaging in research provides teachers with opportunities to explore areas that they identify within their contexts. Research enables teachers to construct new practices, a means to better understand many aspects of a teacher's practice and a way to enhance their teaching context. In our opinion, research should be part of teacher development schemes as it becomes the path for deeper understandings which, according to Borko (2004) improves classroom teaching. As teachers engage in research activities, they also establish themselves as participants in communities. Belonging to these communities allows teacher-researchers to nourish their professional growth (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001). Belonging to a research community means that teachers have opportunities to construct and reconstruct their experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) as they narrate them. In this sense, participating in seminars and workshops to develop a research project that would enable teacher-researchers to write their experience seemed an interesting strategy to support part time teachers in their developmental path.

Becoming a researcher is not an easy endeavor. It requires understanding of what it takes to write first a research proposal, the research methodology, how to go about data collection, systematizing data, supporting arguments when discussing findings, etc. All these aspects take time, energy and particularly, people's interest and skill. One of the issues that seem to emerge from the discussion above are the different positions of both groups, teachers and researchers. The role of research on professional development seems less important and maybe absent in language teachers' views, while for researchers, it is a key for the developmental process.

Considering these arguments, the main objective of this article is to discuss how a small group of part-time English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers, at a public university level in central Mexico, responded to the opportunity of publishing their first research article. This is relevant given that throughout Mexico and other parts of the world and within many disciplines, publishing, a common result of research endeavors, is a way to evaluate professional development among university teachers.

For the target group of teachers, gaining tenure involves traveling through a difficult and uncertain road. Given the work conditions that nontenured part-time teachers face and which we discuss below, carrying out research and publishing involves making efforts that may not necessarily crystallize in a permanent position with all the perks this entails. The teachers' situation is complicated; on one hand, teacher development is a key to future opportunities. On the other, teacher's development is considered to be at the core of the quality of the

teachers' practice. The latter might be the teachers' goal as this is their main professional activity.

Based upon a qualitative study we explore two discourses: the teachers' and the institution's discourses in order to understand teachers' positions towards research. We analyze two perspectives, the voices of the language teachers and that of the institution which refer to rules and regulations that are mapped out in university documents. These perspectives are concerned with how teachers go about gaining tenure. It has become evident that one of our institution's policies to gain tenure involves carrying out research and publishing more and more. Therefore, we decided to look into teachers' voices as researchers and their road of professional development.

More and more teachers in Mexican universities are being asked to publish. It seems the traditional American model is being duplicated in Mexico and the phrase "publish until you perish" represents this idea. This demand from tertiary institutions appears to be problematic for English teachers who face realities that a number of research studies have identified. McNight (1992) makes mention of these realities in the following:

> ... ESL teachers suffer from low morale and low status, lack of opportunities for study leave, has high rates of attrition from the field, frequently lack a power base within their institution, and may be treated as an underclass by colleagues and superiors. (p. 30)

From McNight's quote we can understand how a non-tenured teacher's negative feelings may be due to his or her position in the institution. These feelings can also be connected to Bakhtin's (1984 following words: "To be means to communicate. Absolute death (not being) is the state of being unheard, unrecognized, unremembered" (p.287). So non-tenured teachers may feel that their state of being as teachers is not fully recognized within the institution due to their lack of position and lack to be heard and recognized. Communication is through language, written or spoken and this use of language is emergent, alive and fluid. This language is part of life whether it is personal or pblic, or even a combination. This use of language is a means that defines whether a person is a member of a community or not. In this article this community refers to the context of a university. Before we continue discussing how teachers may construct new practices through research, we should define what we mean by context.

According to Cole (1995) there are different ways to understand context. One is context as the static space where individuals act and where causal forces are also present. An alternative characterization, which we share, would be context as a dynamic space where individuals are being shaped and shape the context, as Miller & Goodnow (1995, p.8) suggest, contexts are seen "not as static givens, dictated by the social and physical environment, but as ongoing accomplishments negotiated by participants." It is important to point out that context

is not neutral. Individuals perceive context from their own perspective even when we "share" contexts. Even though when we "share" the same context, we negotiate its meaning; in the end, it does not represent the same thing to different actors. In this sense, it is heteroglossic (Bakhtin, 1981) where each actor has a particular position and understanding of the context which will probably differ. The link between context, research and publishing its results is central for our participants understanding of why they may or not engage in research.

1. DIALOGISM, OUR SUPPORTING FRAMEWORK

One of my many ways to view the teachers' voices may be through dialogue in the sense of dialogism. Yet, a dialogue in Bakhtinian terms is more than verbal interaction. Emerson (1997) explains this in the following:

> By dialogue, Bakhtin means more than mere talk. What interested him was not so much the social fact of several people exchanging words with one another in a room as it was the idea that each word contains within itself diverse, discriminating, often contradictory "talking" components... Understood in this way, dialogue becomes a model of the creative process. It assumes that the healthy growth of any consciousness depends on its continual interaction with other voices, or worldviews. (p.36)

A dialogue generates understanding and "creates the possibility of language... [it] emerges from dialogue and is its consequence... [It] is the essential medium of dialogue and self-formation." (Marchenkova, 2005, p.175). This dialogical concept plays an important role in the discussion of human experiences, shaped by cultural, historical and institutional settings (Wertsch, 1991), just like the concept of context that was defined above. It becomes important, as we try to understand human experiences, to look at them in conjunction with the contexts and discourses where they take place.

2. THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

The institution requires teachers who want to gain tenured positions to have graduate studies. As a start they must have a master's degree in the area where they work and they know they will have to eventually study a doctorate to be considered for a tenured position. In essence, they must eventually go up the academic ladder to a doctorate. To foster such need, there are a number of schemes that support full-time professors, such as partial and full financial aid, paid leave of absence while studying, a sabbatical year (of up to two years) and personal loans. However, most non-tenured teachers are part-timers and most schemes have been designed for full-time people. At the departmental level, these part-time teachers are constantly reminded that in order to gain tenure they have to continue studying if they want to participate in future

tenured opportunities. The requirements also involve publishing and participating as speakers in professional conferences, preferably international. On the other hand, part-time teachers deal with a number of issues that seem to pose several dilemmas that impinge on their academic life and future professional development. How can part-time teachers get ahead in their teacher development if, within the institution, there are few strategies to help them achieve this progression from a part time position to a tenured position?

3. RESEARCH AIMS

The aim of the research project was to gain understanding of EFL teachers' problems with research and how they also view their teacher development. Having a better understanding of the reality of teacher development in our context would inform us as to why non-tenured teachers have problems publishing. The two aims are twofold:

(a) Assuming that research is a strategy for teachers' professional development, our first aim was to understand how language teachers perceive and carry out research in their area of expertise, and

(b) As more teachers are being asked to publish the results of their research projects, our second aim was to provide an opportunity for language teachers to publish their first research article.

We look specifically at the first object in this article. The second objective is a collection of teacher articles that were a result of the project. The data from this research were gathered through qualitative methods. To achieve our aims, we take a sociocultural stance where voices are presented within a shared social context of a specific department.

4. QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AND TECHNIQUES

This research follows a qualitative research approach because we are looking at the professional lives of teachers which include their hopes, desires, struggles, lived experiences and problems. We chose qualitative research because it is "concerned with understanding behaviors from actors' own frame of reference" (Blaxter et al., 2006, p.65). Richards (2003) also confirms that qualitative research will "study human actors in natural settings, in the context of their ordinary world and seek to understand the meaning and significance of these actions from the perspective of those involved" (p.10). Actors in both of these quotes refer to EFL teachers and the university institution where they work. We will try to understand how these teachers see their future teacher development within a context they share.

To explore the professional lives of this group of non-tenured EFL teachers, we used a number of research

techniques such as: questionnaires, focus groups and open interviews for the first objective. These techniques provided us with information concerning the teachers' beliefs of research and the struggles they perceived they had for their future teacher development. The questionnaires consisted of a collection of ten open-ended questions (see Appendix) whose objectives were, first, to gather general information about the teachers and secondly, to get a sense of who had carried out research, an initial idea of what research means to them. The focus groups were conceived as opportunities for collective discussions of what research meant to the teachers. We carried out three focus groups. Each group consisted of four teachers who had developed small research projects as part of their first degree or during their MA studies. Finally, open-ended individual interviews were used to find out more information emerged during the focus groups.

The data was given a code for each technique used in the following manner.

Table 1
A Code for Each Technique

Technique	Code
Questionnaire	Q
Focus group	FG
Interview	I

Each participant was given a number which was used for every technique. For example Q-4 refers to the questionnaire that was given to the fourth teacher participant. Data was transcribed by two students of our BA in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) while data was analyzed by the three researchers comparing categories and finding common themes.

Concerning the second objective, we offered a number of seminars for the teachers on academic writing and one-to-one researcher-participant feedback. For these seminars we used narratives because they provide a basis for exploring and remembering each of the teacher's paths of teacher development. These seminars guided the teachers to develop a narrative inquiry for a small research project that was of interest to each participant in the hopes they would write their first article for publication. Narrative inquiry was chosen as a way for the teachers to delve into their lived professional experiences to find a theme for their possible paper. As well, narrative inquiry aided the reflective process. Marshall and Rossman (2006) makes mention of narrative inquiry in the following: *"Storytelling is integral to understanding lives and that all people construct narratives as a process in constructing and reconstructing"* (p.6, citing Sfard & Prusak, 2005). Le Guin (1980 cited in Mitchel, 1981) explains that storytelling is ageless and it is a bonding factor a we "story into being" (p.194). This leas us to the value of narratives as means to understand "the nature of culture and, possibly, even on the nature of humanity itself" (Mitchel, 1981, p.1). Participants' experiences "become central", as Humer et al. (2013) claim: "it is a shift toward understanding experience, experience is understood as the stories people live." (p.217). For Bruner (1986) narrative is the path to know as we construct our worlds through our experience. Through this lens, researchers may become "sensitive to the unique characteristics of human existence" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p.X). Furthermore, when looking at a narrative from a dialogical position, one can expect individuals to engage with their own voices and experiences that may help them develop a deeper understanding of themselves. This research project was based on the idea that "it is through language that individuals constantly (re)create their world... stories are discursively constructed... rather than simply describing a preexisting reality- the life story- each telling of a life is created for the specific occasion of that telling" (Johnston, 1997, p.683).

Regarding ethics, teachers who participated signed a consent form whereby we agreed to treat information as confidential and to not disclose their names.

5. PARTICIPANTS

At the beginning of the project, the group of participants consisted of sixteen non-tenured teachers. For the most part they were teachers who had some years of experience (five to ten years). All of them had a BA in a variety of backgrounds such as English Language Teaching or Business Administration; the majority of the teachers were in the process of finishing master's programs in TESOL. One had a master's degree in Education and another one a Master's of Business Administration (MBA). What they had in common is that they were EFL teachers at the same language department of a public Mexican University and they had not published a piece of academic work before.

The whole community of non-tenured English teachers was invited to participate in the project. At the beginning, eighteen teachers agreed to participate. Yet, this number became fewer as the project progressed. The reasons were complex. There were many things going on in their lives that seemed to influence their participation or withdrawal. Some of them expressed that their workload was overwhelming; others mentioned that they were having family issues. Some said they just did not have the time to spare because they were studying a distance master's program in TESOL. Yet it should be mentioned that some of the master's students pulled through with participating in this project. In total we had five teachers who submitted their articles.

Concerning the researchers there were three involved in this project: all held tenured positions. They have had ample experience in teaching, research and academic writing in their professional lives.

6. DISCUSSION

Data suggest that all of the participants were interested in gaining tenure. Given the teachers' situation in the institution, tenure would secure their job with perks such as: a monthly amount of money for publishing, paid vacations, medical care, a pension, financial support to attend conferences, opportunities to access full scholarships for professional and academic development, Christmas bonuses, higher salaries, and not being paid for just teaching hours, to name some of these benefits (part-time teachers may get a proportional Christmas bonus only if they have definitive positions or if they do not have contract hours). Besides perks there are more responsibilities for a tenured position such as committee work (in the department, division and the larger university scheme), tutoring of students, publishing and the required research. A second possible reason could be a desire to become part of a community of practice that is highly valued within our university and others. However, becoming part of the community of full-time tenured teacher-researchers seems to be in conflict concerning perceptions of their jobs and their lives as well as their desires.

All the teachers, except for one that responded to the email questionnaire (see Appendix) we sent at the beginning of the project, had some level of understanding of what research is and what it entails as the following excerpts from the questionnaire suggest:

> Research is a way of knowing the world around us. At the same time, it is a way of knowing about ourselves. Qualitative research becomes part of our skin. Personally, I believe researchers cannot separate their personal essence from their research. (Q-2)

> ...research is important because it may help us to better understand human thinking and learning... to facilitate learning among our students. We could improve our teaching methodology... (Q-8)

> [Research] combines theory and problems around me... Understand and find solutions. It is a path to discover. (Q-1)

Many of the participants had developed small research projects as part of their BA studies, or for their theses:

> At the moment I am working on my thesis; it is a small research project. I am using a mixed methods approach to research. (Q-3)

> While I was studying, I carried out two small research projects for my sociolinguistics class. I used a qualitative approach and it took me about four months. (Q-1)

Data suggest that when teachers talk about research, time is also mentioned. They know that research involves and requires time. Yet carrying out research is a complex activity and when it is coupled with other activities that they have, there are complications. The following three excerpts show this:

> ...it's important to carry out research... unfortunately my current administrative position does not allow me spend time on it. (Q-12)

> ...the problem I have encountered is lack of time (Q-3)

> ...some things like statistics that are important to know, but unfortunately I do not have time to do it. (Q-14)

The first fragment provides an insight of a part-time teacher who not only teaches but has other managerial responsibilities in the school. This is the case for many of the teachers who juggle their teaching and administrative tasks. It is quite common in Mexico for part-time EFL teachers to hold a number of jobs in order to meet their financial needs. The other two fragments show how the teachers' lack of time affects their research. Another vignette suggests that research involves not only time, but some kind of organized work that may become difficult to manage if teachers have several jobs:

> I see research as something more structural; I guess I could do research, except that right now I do not have time to really think [about] research because I have so much to do... (I-4)

In the above excerpts we see how the teachers' lack of time may affect their reasons for not carrying out research.

Regarding the recognition of research as a tool that supports professional development, participants answered the question "Do you see the need to develop a research project? Why or why not", they mentioned:

> [Research] helps me find solutions if you have a problem and if you do it correctly you'll find answers or at least an idea of where to look further. I also think that a research project is a way of professionalizing your own practice. (Q-3)

> It is very important for the teachers' professional development and for the school where we work. (Q-11)

> It is always important to develop research projects to know the world around us, to learn about ourselves and at the same time support the institution where we work. (Q-2)

> It is necessary to carry out research because we are part of society and societies evolve and change; therefore, the reasons and consequences of any event change. And, if we know the situation, we can understand it, we can find a solution...we can find a remedy against it. (Q-4)

The first two quotes mention the phrase *professional development*; this may indicate that for these teachers research is a useful strategy or way to obtain their personal growth in the profession. The third excerpt suggests that research may help teachers understand social aspects of their professional practice. The fourth fragment may mean that this teacher understands the context-bound nature of research and its value to the understanding of that context and in this case this refers to the institution where she works.

These excerpts are only but a few of the teachers' comments. At first glance, all of them recognize the value of research and seem to understand what research entails. If this is apparently the case and the teachers' main concern is to gain tenure, then our question to ourselves

as researchers was: why did most of the teachers who accepted to participate in this project abandon it? This doubt was one we asked ourselves as researchers many times trying to understand their thought process. This is a complex process that we will try to answer in the rest of this paper.

An issue that appeared constantly in the body of data collected was the theme of time as saw in some of the above excerpts. Being a language teacher in our context involves more than giving classes. It involves the selection, designing, adapting and organizing of didactic materials, making copies, designing exams and applying them to our large department and other off-campus departments which we provide our academic services. This work also included revising homework and quizzes, attending departmental and divisional meetings, carrying out the daily paper work required, to name only a few. All of these activities were mentioned by teachers during the focus groups as well as the individual interviews, as part of the activities they had to deal with during the semester.

It should be mentioned that our department is the only one in the university which prepares students to be teachers so we are considered a teaching school. This is evident in its Mission and Vision which are publically displayed in our department:

> Mission: The Language Department promotes and spreads the learning of foreign languages and the formation of English language teachers considering that self-learning is an important tool for an individual's holistic development.

> Vision: To promote leadership in teaching, research and extension through the dissemination of foreign languages. The Language Department seeks cultural understanding as a consequence of the formation of autonomous, critical and reflective individuals, the generation and application of new knowledge and the formation of English language teachers.

In other words, teachers are expected to be of service to the institution, which seems to be the natural thing to expect; but, little is mentioned concerning the different kinds of teachers (tenured vs. non-tenured). Based upon the Mission and Vision, every teacher in his or her professional development should teach, carry out research and apply it. One could say that the representation of the part-time teacher is ambiguous and only the position of the tenured teacher is evident. It is a celebration of the absence of teachers' voices who may dissent; those who may be better researchers than teachers, or vice versa; people who may wish to invest more in one activity than other. At this point, it may be necessary to explain that we are only analyzing the discourse and it does not mean that we are adopting a position for or against research as a strategy for professional development.

The Mission suggests that everyone is expected to exercise agency and act upon present situations or look for opportunities that lead to professional development to better serve the purposes of the institution. The Mission also proposes an unproblematic reality which appears to be far from the non-tenured teachers' experiences. Sampson explains "[i]t is the construction of a serviceable other, one constructed on behalf of the particular needs, interests and desires of the dominating group..." (p.4). In order to meet the needs and goals of our university, one must know what is expected of the teacher and it seems that the expectations of the university teacher is based upon the tenured teacher with little clarity of what the non-tenured teacher's expectations and opportunities include. In many cases, non-tenured teachers are not only asked to teach, but to do other professional tasks such as committee work or administrative duties. Institutional goals come into conflict with the interests and views of some teachers as the following excerpt suggests:

> ...there are teachers who want to do research and like to do research; and, there are others who'd rather be in the classroom; and I think administrations of all levels should be aware of that and not make people do things that either they are not good at or not interested in. (I-1)

Additionally, there is the imperative demand of teacher development found in the University's *Academic Statute*. It establishes that teachers must teach, carry out research, participate in community programs, tutor students and engage in constant professional development if they are tenured teachers (*Normatividad Vigente,* 2008, pp.131-132). While these demands apply for tenured teachers often the non-tenured teacher may carry out some of these duties. They will do so, with the understanding that it is not required of them to do all of these tasks. On the other hand, the *Academic Personnel Statute* classifies teachers as full-time and part-time teachers and invited scholars (Section 1, articles 2 and 3). It also establishes a difference in the kind of activities that these teachers are to carry out. Part-time teachers are said to spend most of their time teaching *(Normatividad Vigente,* Estatuto del Personal Académico, 2008, p.155). However, in the same article, it says that teachers must present an annual work plan (for the upcoming year) and evaluation of the previous year that include aims in the following areas: teaching, research, participation in extension programs, tutorials, academic leadership (*Normatividad Vigente,* Estatuto Académico, Articulo 4). During the evaluation of this work, a non-tenured teacher is only evaluated on his or her teaching. These suggest lack of clarity in terms of the activities that part-timers are supposed to carry out and perhaps ambiguity or confusion; it limits them to be able to get a full time position they would not have had the opportunity to carry out these duties. The problem, in our opinion, is that part-timers are not paid to carry out research and this does not allow for them to gain experience in research. As well they are not given paid hours to plan their classes and their needs for financial support to further academically are not contemplated and

voiced in any of the documents we checked. There is little support given to them for their aspirations' to move from a non-tenured position to a tenured position.

Changes in the public academic system in Mexico now demand higher levels of educational degrees. We ourselves were part of these changes and took part in opportunities to get higher degrees of education because we had tenured positions. Some of these opportunities were financed by our department, yet the majority was financed by the Mexican government. In essence we climbed the academic ladder by obtaining these academic degrees but with national or local university support. These non-tenured teachers have had opportunities for master's studies based upon the initiative of our department but this support is not a right and it is not constantly being offered. These non-tenured teachers seem to be overwhelmed with their heavy teaching loads but they also face the challenge of fulfilling the demands of their studies. Thus, at times, the majority of the teachers can be dedicated to academic activities, teaching and studying while leaving the remainder of their time in their personal lives.

In our context, professional demands and professional activities compete with the demands of family, social relations, and recreation. This is probably the same throughout the world. The following fragments taken from the focus interviews and an individual interview serve to appreciate these issues:

> I finished [my second job] this semester to work at home on the thesis because it was almost [finished], it was very difficult to do the two jobs and teach on Saturdays and try to write the thesis at the same time. So, time is an issue, and with children imagine! It is even more difficult, right? Money is an issue, time is an issue, and of course job security is also another part of [it]. (FG-5)

> Aha, I agree with you. Yes... yes, because when I go, I get home, the problem is that, that I don't have time to do that [work on the thesis], yeah, and I have to… like, stay awake like three in the morning, doing my things to get something done. (FG-6)

> I want my life back... vacations are coming up and they're in a week and a half? No, no, no, I want vacations... [now]. (FG-2)

> Yeah, just not having the time. The time we have is dedicated to our classes... [studying] I'm completely "wow!" (I-3)

The word *time* is mentioned five times; participants relate time to their personal lives, professional duties and their studies. The different social arenas, where these teachers participate and all the activities that their participation involves, problematize their desire to achieve their apparently important goal of gaining tenure. Time is lacking and seems to be a problem. On the other hand, as will be seen below, there are institutional discourses that also compete. While the issue of professional development does not seem to have a negative effect as the following excerpts suggest:

> It's helping us a lot and of course, studying the MA we're just getting more prepared, educated. (FG-2)

> …there're gonna be benefits in so many ways, in so many levels...the university is gonna raise the bars, so much... (I-3)

Evidence of institutional discourses seems to have a counter effect on the attitudes towards walking the necessary path to gain tenure. An example of those discourses is the mission of the Institution's Academic Development Department:

> To contribute to the academic excellence of the University encouraging constant development of its professors through institutional programs. These should offer opportunities to enhance their educational level and keep them up to date in their field. (http://www.siia.ugto.mx/apoyo_profesores/index.asp)

This statement seems to be directed to the members of the university community who is tenured professors. To fulfill the mission, the institution offers possible full financial support to full-time teachers while part-timers can only access partial funding for their professional development. This partial funding is dependent upon the will of authorities at different levels. The above ideas can represent a celebration of the absence of presence of those who are not full-time professors. Most of the time, part-timers have to search for financial support from other sources and hope there is support. There have been cases, however, of part-time teachers obtaining full financial support; these are not institutional policies, but local or personal practices that some departments have managed to develop and which cannot be offered all the time there is a request from a part-time teacher. This is the case of our department. Given that these practices are not institutional, part-time teachers do not feel as supported or even valued as full-time teachers; these feelings seem to be not the result of a personal lack of interest, but a construction fostered by the implementation and processes involved.

In relation to the above aspect, this can be discussed through a Bakhtinian dialogic lens, particularly taking into consideration the centrifugal and centripetal forces. At discourse level, centrifugal and centripetal forces are defined as competing discursive forces that constantly interact seeking simultaneously to unify and decentralize an individual's agency alongside with the situation being confronted (Bakhtin, 1981). They operate at social and individual levels:

> What is involved here is a very important, in fact a radical revolution in the destinies of human discourse: the fundamental liberation of cultural-semantic and emotional intentions from the hegemony of a single and unitary language. (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 367)

Contrary to expectation, the majority of the part-time teachers who claim that their goal is to gain tenure did not act upon opportunities to publish, such as the project that they had been invited to participate in. This was in contradiction with their apparent desire to achieve their goal. They seem to struggle in heteroglossic discursive positions as Bakhtin (1981) mentions:

At any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, school, circles and so forth... (p. 291)

On the one hand, we find teachers' voices explaining what they wish for, yet, the institution's conflicting discourses and practices are present as well. The institution and the part-time teachers have to juggle a vast number of personal issues. These apparently interfere with the teachers' desire to gain a tenured position. This issue brings us back to the topic of context. Watson-Gegeo (1992) suggests that institutional contexts, which she calls "vertical context", "may be poorly understood or even unknown to interactants," (p.53) given that it is not as near to their daily experience as their teaching community context. From data collected, it seems that participants have some understanding of the institutional context; however, their sense making of the context positions these teachers as people whose priorities do not necessarily revolve around long term goals, such as academic development to gain tenure, but, within their day to day activities, survival abilities they have developed to juggle with many different tasks. It may be that their interest is a reflection of their present within a social space where fulfilling pressing responsibilities of what it entails being part of a particular English teaching community. Their present position does not mean, however, that in another given time, they may act differently as personal interests are recomposed. Kress (1997) develops the idea of interest from a social and what could be termed a dialogical perspective:

> Interest is a composite of my experience; but it is also a reflection of my present place … I stand here now, in a social place, in a physical place. My experience, personally constructed out of my incessant readings through all my life, makes me assess my present position, and its potentials and responsibilities. It makes me read my immediately present social environment, now at this moment in a certain way. (p. 90)

Becoming part of a community of full-time tenured teachers involves personal interest and more than a straight forward strategy of following a checklist of activities, such as carrying out research, publishing, participating in conferences and so on. It apparently involves exercising agency within situations that are constrained by centrifugal and centripetal forces, which Bakhtin (1981) defines as:

> The centripetal forces of the life of language, embodied in a "unitary language" operate in the midst of heteroglossia. At any given moment of its evolution, language is stratified not only into linguistic dialects in the strict sense of the word . . . but also, and for us this is the essential point, into languages that are socio-ideological: languages of social groups, "professional" and "generic" languages, languages of generations and so forth . . . Alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-

ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward. (pp. 271-272)

The situation also involves issues of social distance and hierarchy. Part-timers are far from the status of a full-time teacher because they do not have the same access to institutional support (mainly financial). Their time is apparently less valuable as that of a full-time teacher given that they do not get paid hours to prepare classes, check homework, etc.. The struggle to be promoted is unclear while the path for promotion for full-time teachers is clear and explicit. We would argue that even though outside the Language Department, part time and full time faculties are not members of the same community where values and practices of these communities are not necessarily shared. While most full time faculty see themselves as researchers, part time teachers have specific purposes that do not necessarily involve research at certain times and for certain purposes, while at others, they do engage in research to finish their BA or their MA programs despite the presence of factors such as lack of time.

CONCLUSION

It seems that teachers question the value of their actions; their appreciation seems to be supported by a number of discourses that surround their working environment, which in Bakhtin's 1984) words "is a state of being unheard, unrecognized, unremembered" (p.287). This apparently prevents them from acting upon opportunities that appear straight forward paths to advance in their professional life, such as the opportunity of participating in this project and publishing an article for the first time. Data suggest that each individual experience context differently; decisions are shaped by experiences and interests. However, those decisions are constantly reconfigured as they establish new meanings about their context. That is, context shapes their actions in response to the lack of recognition of efforts such as pursuing a master's degree. Seemingly, they also question if investing in research and publishing is worth a scarce commodity called time when they encounter realities that call for many other activities that are more pressing. They apparently exercise agency depending of their underlying ideological systems which are also part of our conflicting heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1981).

Bakhtin's characterization of heteroglossia suggests that through language a number of aspects such as the present and past experiences within and outside a profession and used by people are represented; however, these representations are not definite, they are constantly recomposed. An example of such recomposition could be the fact that teacher's first reaction towards the project was to accept participating; however, as the project evolved, many of them dropped off at different stages. In addition to this are the future desires a teacher may have

for his or her teacher development. They are factors that lead people to act or not as was discussed above. From this stand point, one may wonder if people are free to exercise agency and seek to gain a more formal position easily within their university. This position also represents teacher development which is probably a goal for every teacher; a goal that seems to be quite relevant for the participants of this study. Apparently, they see themselves first as teachers and, if time allows, researchers. The complexity of reality is such that it appears impossible to allocate individual factors acting upon teachers' decisions of not participating in an activity that could lead to the publication of their research work. Rather, centripetal and centrifugal forces aggregate and influence an individual's agency; that is, contextual-situational factors and personal interests.

There is an apparent need for more opportunities for teacher development and higher levels of education for part-time teachers within the institution. It would be necessary to clearly establish how part-timers can be allowed to continue on with their teacher development with the hope of gaining a better position if they would like to do so. If responsibilities were the same for full-time and part-time teachers, it would necessarily mean setting up schemes to access financial support to continue studying and paid hours to carry out research. In return, part-time teachers would not seek second jobs or third jobs. If they were required to carry out research, this activity would be recognized as time paid and time invested for perhaps a future tenured teacher. Feasibly this might even develop a research culture among all teachers. At present, the unspoken divide between teachers and researchers does not support the development of such culture. If this were possible, it would also help bridge the existing gap between tenured and part-time teachers. This final supposition would benefit the work environment and also the university.

Despite the present situation of part time teachers within the university, it seems appropriate to mention that while institutional support for them is not always available, there are other financial resources for those interested in pursuing an academic career. Of all the part time teachers in this particular community, none has sought those opportunities.

To conclude we found it important to hear the voices of these teachers and reflect upon their points of views as to how they saw their positions of their teacher development and more importantly their positions of participation or non-participation. There are a number of issues that should be investigated that stem from this study. One of them is time, an issue that we all have to deal with.

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APPENDIX QUESTIONNAIRE

The following questionnaire is for a research project funded by the University of Guanajuato with the objective to research the process of becoming an investigator. We will look at the experiences and opinions of English teachers of the Language School. This research is to better understand the process of researchers in the EFL profession. The information that is gathered for this project will only be used for research.

We appreciate your time and consideration in this matter. We would also like you to spend time on these questions so that we can better understand this process and for that reason we hope you will answer these questions fully. Please return this questionnaire by November 12, 2008 via E-mail. Thanks in advance.

Name _____

Name of school where you work _____

Tenured position _____ Non-tenured position _____

What degrees do you have?

How long have you been an English teacher?

Tell us about your teaching experiences (what institutions and for how long)..

Why did you become an English teacher?

What do you consider research to be? How would you define it?

Have you ever carried out a research project? If so, explain the project(s) in detail (type of methodology, where, when, outcome).

Do you see a need to carry out a research project? Why or why not?

What advantages and disadvantages are there for research in your profession?

If you have carried out a research project, what problems did you encounter?

If you have carried out a research project, what benefits did you notice?

If you nave not carried out a research project, what are the reasons for not doing so?