

Reflective Portfolios as decolonial pedagogical practices¹

Diários reflexivos de aprendizagem como práticas pedagógicas decoloniais

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ABSTRACT

Pre-service teachers learn educational practices and teaching postures not only from the courses content but also by their teachers' approaches. Learning assessments can be used as an exercise of power that perpetuates an established colonial paradigm. Conversely, Reflective Portfolios can be conceived as an opportunity for new arising knowledge and practices. In this paper we connect teaching experiences using Reflective Portfolios with scientific literature inserting them into the context of the decolonial studies. When pre-service teachers perceive themselves as epistemological beings, they understand that knowledge derives from different sources. Consequently, they have new possibilities of pedagogical postures and practices in their future profession. Furthermore, reflective portfolio assessments grant the opportunity for university teachers to rethink practices and postures that might endorse educational power structures, to find out more about their students, and to provide formative opportunities.

Keywords: Assessment; Teacher Education; Portfolio; Decolonial Education; Reflective Portfolio.

RESUMO

Estudantes de licenciatura aprendem práticas e posturas educacionais não apenas a partir do conteúdo dos cursos, mas também pelas atitudes e estratégias de suas/seus professoras/es. Avaliações de aprendizagem podem ser usadas como um exercício de poder que perpetua um paradigma colonial estabelecido. Por outro lado, diários reflexivos de aprendizagem podem ser

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concebidos como uma oportunidade para novos conhecimentos e para práticas. Neste artigo conectamos experiências educacionais utilizando diários reflexivos de aprendizagem com a literatura científica, inserindo-as no contexto dos estudos decoloniais. Quando estudantes de licenciatura se percebem enquanto seres epistemológicos, entendem que o conhecimento deriva de diferentes fontes. Conseqüentemente, encontram novas possibilidades de posturas e práticas pedagógicas em sua futura profissão. Além disso, avaliações utilizando o diário reflexivo de aprendizagem possibilitam a docentes universitários a oportunidade de repensar práticas e posturas que possam endossar estruturas de poder, de descobrir mais sobre seus alunos e de oferecer oportunidades formativas.

Palavras-chave: Avaliação; Licenciatura; Diário de Aprendizagem; Educação Decolonial; Diário Reflexivo de Aprendizagem.

Introduction

In recent years, Higher Education Institutions and intergovernmental organizations started to engage in initiatives to improve and to update their educational frameworks and pedagogical practices. Some of these changes were motivated by economic reasons, aiming to provide market demands (BOUWMA-GEARHART; CARTER; MUNDORFF, 2021). Others constitute important collective efforts, such as the Bologna Process, an international agreement among 48 countries that, further than establishing a structure that facilitates student mobility, also states the importance of Student-Centred approaches towards teaching (CROSIER et al., 2020).

Student Centred approaches can be specifically beneficial to Teacher Education courses, which can be perceived as an environment to learn through experience about how to be a teacher. When pre-service teachers are studying, they learn both educational practices and teaching postures, not only from the course content but also by their teacher's approaches. If innovative, democratic and humanistic pedagogical approaches are taught only in theory, while classes are still based on hierarchical and conventional practices, it will be harder for pre-service teachers to explore different pedagogical paths.

There are two main teaching aspects experienced by pre-service teachers at Teacher Education courses that can reverberate across school teaching. The first one is the way students and teachers interact, with possibilities ranging from educational postures and structures that are, on the one side, strictly hierarchical, to the other side, horizontal. The second one is the comprehension about what is knowledge and, specifically, which kind of knowledge is recognized as adequate. This is necessary because students' knowledge is often disregarded, and only the teachers' and book's knowledge are appreciated (RESTREPO, 2020; SEALE 2010).

We advocate that both teaching aspects can be understood through a decolonial approach. Although decolonization is often associated with southern countries and

native people, educational processes worldwide can benefit from this perspective. Decolonization proposes an educational practice where education is understood in a broader way, regarding all learning processes, in every context, by every person. In this sense, a supremacy of heterarchical thinking is established, instead of a supremacy of hierarchical thinking. Plural forms of knowledge are perceived as valid and equally important (CASTRO-GOMEZ, 2007). Decolonial pedagogical practices aim to overcome binarisms such as valid and non-valid knowledge, hence promoting an epistemic diversity (BERNARDINO-COSTA; GROSFUGUEL, 2016).

At this paper we discuss the use of reflective portfolios as assessment practices that promote a decolonial pedagogical approach in Teacher Education. The questions guiding our work were: “In which aspects the use of reflective portfolios as decolonial pedagogical assessment practices in Teacher Education can favour meaningful learning and students’ involvement? How this assessment tool can be also useful for university teachers?”. The empirical data presented here are part of a broader research held at a course in which pre-service teachers learned about teaching theories and practices while producing a learning portfolio that was part of the assessment. The aforementioned research was conducted between 2018 and 2019 at Universidade de Brasília (Federal District, Brazil), and was the PhD research of the first author.

Learning assessments and decolonial pedagogical approaches

Learning assessments are an important part of the educational process in different settings and educational levels. Postures and practices adopted by teachers regarding assessment vary widely, changing the established relationships among teachers and students as well as among students and knowledge. Pedagogical practices which make use of strict hierarchy and devalue student’s knowledge are considered subalternizing. Subalternization is understood here as a process on which groups of people are considered as less able, less worthy – intellectually and culturally, or diminished in any other form when compared to groups who establish that themselves are the parameter for comparisons. This comprehension is based on the discussion established by Spivak (2010) about the western intellectuals classifying and dealing with the so-called third world countries. When brining the idea of students as subalterns, we aim to highlight the common situation in academic grounds where students are not perceived as epistemological subjects, once the valid knowledge, as well as the power, relies on lecturers, professors, and supervisors.

In situations where there is prevalence of subalternizing practices, both in the relationships and towards knowledge, assessments can be used as an exercise of power (ACCARDI, 2010). Assessment in subalternizing approaches can be observed when those teaching are the sole responsables for defining who is going to be approved, and also when the content parameters exclude students’ knowledge. Subalternized

practices in educational contexts serve for the maintenance of the colonial heritage, reinforcing cultural, economic, and political hegemony (CASTRO-GÓMEZ, 2007). Thus, it is necessary to provide decolonial pedagogical contexts where students are actively involved and aware of their educational processes (FREIRE, 1975), including the assessment practices.

Even though there is the comprehension that student feedback and reflective practices have a transformative impact on teaching practices and curriculum development, it often leads to tensions among university and student teachers (SEALE, 2010). Some university teachers consider that students should not take part in assessments or in any pedagogical decisions (MARINKO et al., 2016). Additionally, even when the focus seems to be on empowering students, it can be a teacher-centred approach, once it might be framed by activities that answer to teachers' actions (SEALE, 2010).

Colonial pedagogical practices, which can still be experienced in university education worldwide, do not perceive students as epistemological beings and, in the specific teacher education scenario, alienate students from the pedagogical processes they need to master. To stimulate the production of knowledge detached from colonized and hierarchical practices, students' reflections need to be promoted. In this sense, we present the use of Reflective Portfolios as an opportunity for new arising knowledge and practices, modifying an established colonial and invisibilizing paradigm.

Portfolios have different presentations and usages in educational settings, ranging from a collection of activities to specific materials produced for this purpose. They may demand, within several possibilities, work with peers, the development of a specific project, and learning diaries. Portfolios can be divided into three intended uses: for learning, for assessment and for opportunities applications. The first two commonly demand reflection.

The use of portfolios in higher education is growing worldwide in the recent years. Teacher Education is one of the main fields publishing about it, reaching 47 of the 76 papers within the eligibility criteria of a systematic review still in progress by the first author. The referred systematic review deals with papers about portfolios published from 2018 to 2022. The eligibility criteria are: (1) being a research paper; (2) within higher education; and (3) portfolios should be use as an assessment tool. Some of the findings are better integration of teaching experiences and previous academic learning (e.g., MCLEAN; PRICE, 2019; PARMIGIANI, BENIGNO; HIDI, 2019; YZDYKOVA et al, 2021), deeper learning (e.g., CHUNLIN; CHAN, 2018; FONG; BINTI; NOLAN, 2018) and enhanced reflective thinking (e.g., ALZOUEBI, 2020; SULTANA; LIM; LIANG, 2020).

Reflective portfolios can be used as a pedagogical tool that provides learning opportunities and promotes more horizontal relationships between teachers and students. Reflective portfolios can promote the sharing of students' knowledge and, by doing so, recognize and value different knowledge sources and different epistemic beings.

Instead of producing knowledge to pre-service teachers, the use of reflective portfolios enables the production of knowledge together with pre-service teachers.

Assessment in Teacher Education

Pre-service teachers are prepared for a demanding profession, where competent and immediate decisions are needed. The current generation of university students has had different educational experiences in comparison with previous generations. Society functioning and its demands changed, as well as in the educational field. These experiences influence students' perception of their abilities, their pedagogical beliefs and self-efficacy (ZIMMERMAN et al., 2017). Consequently, self-efficacy influences their approach to study as well as their process of becoming teachers.

We identify and highlight two main dangers on this issue. The first is that many students demand confirmation from the authorities of what is right and, also, accept uncritically what the authorities present to them, whether the authority is represented as teachers or literature. As it has already been said, conventional hierarchical practices still dominate teaching in universities, reinforcing students' learned attitude of reliance on authority and uncritical acceptance. This is undesirable for their future profession because it supports the maintenance of existing power practices in the teaching of subsequent generations. Similar findings were identified by Almeida, Novo and Andrade (2014), who described university pedagogical practices related to Paulo Freire's banking concept of education. The same parallel, also in higher education, was pointed out by Santos et al. (2009). The authors explain that when higher education institutions are systematically promoting automated learning when conscious and reflexive learning is needed. The second danger is that in hierarchically arranged systems, university teachers consider students' contributions as not valuable nor desirable (GUILLEN; ZEICHNER, 2018). Therefore, students have difficulties developing critical thinking abilities and keep giving and listening to opinions without the need of further references, arguments, or reflections to support them. Unfortunately, it is not understood by the students that they must elaborate their discourse and that, in order to understand the nature of many phenomena, it is necessary to engage with reflecting upon the issue, discussing it with other persons or reading literature, among other possibilities.

What we commonly see is students oscillating from expressing that their perspectives are not good enough to only sharing opinions about appreciating or agreeing with a topic, without further exploring it. These facts are unlikely to promote students' epistemological competencies, but, instead, lead to feelings of frustration and opposition to their teachers (CROOKS, 2017). Therefore, the current pedagogical trend focuses on students taking greater ownership of their learning through active engagement in the feedback process and using feedback for self-monitoring and decision-making to improve learning (HATTIE; GAN; BROOKS, 2017; RUIZ-PRIMO; LI, 2013).

Teachers' feedbacks are unclear for students, who perceive teachers more as judges of their work than interested readers. Many students believe that their teachers are not interested in their work and ideas and that their assessments are often vague, impersonal, generic, not informative, and incomprehensible (HATTIE; GAN; BROOKS, 2017). Considering that self-efficacy is achieved through formative and self-referenced feedback, it is important that Teacher Education courses provide educational settings and relationships accordingly.

The use of portfolios in teacher Education

Portfolio use appears to be a promising method in which students can be more engaged in their own learning (CHYE ET AL., 2019). Producing a portfolio may support students both in becoming more motivated in class and in developing thinking and reflective skills even if it is introduced online and on a smaller scale than program wide (CHITTUM, 2018). Regular portfolio engagement across a study program provides means for ongoing feedback communications that the usual string of course modules typically do not. Portfolios can facilitate complex feedback systems because they allow easy access to feedback comments at different stages of study and can be compared with learning outcomes at the whole process (CLARKE; BOUD, 2018).

Portfolio-related tasks can promote feedback from and to peers which provides a platform for engaging students in interactive and elaborative feedback discourse and taking ownership of their learning (CHAN; LAM, 2010; HATTIE; GAN; BROOKS, 2017). Furthermore, portfolios facilitate sustainable feedback when they encourage students to self-assess their work by comparing peer-feedback and self-assessments to the standards, criteria, or opinions of others (CARLESS et al., 2011; CLARKE; BOUD, 2018).

By encouraging students to provide formative feedback to peers on specific portfolio tasks, they develop skills in formulating feedback to be sensitive and yet sufficiently specific and useful (LAMB; KING, 2021). This experience also helps them to better deal with feedback they receive from peers and teachers, improving their learning process. It would be even more profitable if, during their studies, there are also opportunities for students to provide formative feedback to their teachers, and they have the opportunity to respond to it in partnership (FLODEN, 2017.).

Self-assessment tasks from a learning portfolio can help assure a deeper reflection regarding the learner's path, and therefore, provide more basis for self-regulated learning (YAN, 2020). Particularly, a reflective portfolio that considers students' knowledge and gives them power and autonomy can promote deeper approaches towards learning. This is due to the fact that students perform summative self-assessment, being more active in their whole learning process (NIEMINEN; ASIKAINEN; RÄMÖ, 2021).

Portfolio tasks can promote students' awareness of the importance of intentional

critique of their work, which is the basis for the effectiveness of their further learning. Moreover, the interest and motivation for using new pedagogical tools and approaches in their careers increases when they experience it during studies (MARGALHOT; GOREV, 2020). Instead of studying only the theory about Portfolios and its contribution for pupils engaging in courses, they will learn it from practice and experience, which is considered to be a better approach in teacher education (PEERCY; TROYAN, 2017). Consequently, pre-service teachers can carry on in their future profession with portfolios, as a tool to promote reflective and active production of knowledge by pupils.

As stated before, learning assessment is an important educational structure that should be reconsidered when putting efforts to design and promote decolonial practices. Further than to the change in the socio-political paradigm, important pedagogical outcomes can be achieved. Pre-service teachers who engage on their own assessments can reach significant learning by getting more involved in their educational processes (PULVERMACHER; LEFSTEIN, 2016). More specifically, those who critically reflect upon teaching and learning, seeking for innovative practices, have the opportunity to produce meaningful and authentic pedagogical knowledge (KOSTIAINEN et al., 2018; KÖRKKÖ; KYRO-ÄMMÄLÄ; TURUNEN, 2016).

Through our teaching experience in Teacher Education courses, we have been experimenting with different possibilities to promote meaningful learning, including assessments. When students answer to an assessment or write an essay, it is more important that they ponder views and experiences regarding a theme than to show a memorized answer. The ability to relate theory with practice is one of our main concerns together with critical reflection. Given that, we found in reflective portfolios the opportunity for pre-service teachers to write about topics learned in classes relating them with teaching practice and life experiences.

Furthermore, when producing reflective portfolios, they produce their own knowledge, in a process that opens space and stimulates other views than the ones owned by books and teachers. We recognize the reflective portfolio as an assessment tool for Teacher Education that can enable what hooks (2010) calls decolonial pedagogical practices, by regarding students' knowledge. When pre-service teachers perceive themselves as epistemological beings, they understand that knowledge does not derive exclusively from external and hierarchical sources. Therefore, they have new possibilities of pedagogical postures and practices in their future profession.

Methods

Research Design

At this paper we proposed to investigate and discuss about the use of reflective portfolios based on a decolonial approach in Teacher Education. More specifically, we

intended to understand in which aspects this assessment tool can favour meaningful learning and students' involvement as well as it can be useful for teachers. To build on this idea, we established a dialogue between theory and teaching experiences, relating them with outcomes from a broader doctoral research about Teacher Education (LOPES, 2020). Some aspects of this research are already described and discussed in papers, such as the student-centred approach (LOPES; NEVGI; PULINO, 2019) and the decolonial paradigm (LOPES; INSFRAN; PULINO, 2020). At the present, we focused on the specificity of the learning assessment as part of this student-centred and decolonial pedagogical perspectives that is grounded in Action Research in Teaching and Learning (NORTON, 2008).

The chosen methodological approach was an Action Research because we understand the importance of, as university teachers, to continually improve our pedagogical practices. The high demand of universities for research and publishing may decrease time devoted for improvements in teaching. Action Research is one possible solution to enable the growth of teaching skills as well as of the research production (BURNS; WESTMACOTT, 2018). In addition to that, at the specific context of Teacher Education, as it was the scenario of this research, Action Research is even more important once it provides professional development and positive change in classrooms (HINE, 2013). Action Research in Teaching and Learning allows teachers to research about their own teaching and implement modifications along the course in a constant process of: identifying an issue, thinking about how to solve it, putting changes in practice, assessing the outcomes and improving the future practices.

Moreover, when engaged in an Action Research, university teachers adopt a perspective on which their teaching knowledge and skills are not only open for change, but that the transformation can be grounded on students' opinions and suggestions. This perspective can be understood as belonging to a decolonial approach of education, once it changes the academic epistemological paradigm, where teacher's knowledge is considered to be the valid knowledge and may maintain itself unchangeable.

Sample

The research context was the course of Psychological Development and Teaching at a Brazilian university in which pre-service teachers from different subjects were enrolled. Two courses for pre-service teachers were part of this research and the students produced reflective portfolios that had a learning diary format. The portfolios were part of the course assessment and should include, in the end, a self-assessment with a grade. One important aspect of this assessment is that the grade was either accepted or enhanced by the teacher. Therefore, the fact that the material was used as research data did not promote biases in the information provided. The other course assessment was a group activity of peer-teaching.

In total, 41 portfolios were produced and 12 of them were analysed at the referred doctoral dissertation. In this paper, we will present and discuss excerpts of seven portfolios.

Data Collection

The reflective portfolios, called *Licentia Hypomnema*, had a free structure, but also three guidance questions to collaborate with the development of reflection abilities. The questions were: (1) What part of the content made me think? Why? (2) Which were the pedagogical practices used in the class that helped me learning/made it harder? Why? (3) What did I do to learn the content? What do I think about my posture as a student? The students were not limited to the questions and could choose not to be guided by them.

The name “*licentia hypomnema*” derives from a Latin word that was the origin of the term Teacher Education in Portuguese and a Greek word used by Foucault (1983) to refer to a writing exercise where the person is open for reflection. The guidance questions called attention for the fact that they were students studying pedagogical content to become school teachers. Therefore, they were invited to reflect about theoretical content as well as about teachers’ and students’ pedagogical practices.

The reflective portfolios were written between 2018 and 2019 and the identification names were chosen by them, who also signed informed consent forms. The research was authorized by the Ethical Committee of the University.

Data Analysis

A Thematic Analysis was performed in the previously mentioned 12 portfolios, resulting in four areas: (1) Good practices in the classroom; (2) Students referring to life situations; (3) Reflections on education and the professional future; and (4) attitudes and reflections as a student and as a person. The excerpts shed light on experiences as students and on their future role as teachers dealing with knowledge production and, therefore, show the use of the portfolio as an assessment tool that can promote students’ development in a decolonial pedagogical perspective.

Thematic Analysis is considered by Norton (2008) one of the best possibilities of accessing the contents generated by a qualitative Action Research in Teaching and Learning. The choice for an action research in education implies in a holistic look, which comprises the entire context involved and the subjects’ particularities (GREENWOOD; LEVIN, 2006). Thematic analysis identifies itself as inductive, without a thematic predetermination in which the information should be classified (ALHOJAILAN, 2012). From this posture and perspective, it is possible to go beyond the manifest message and reach the latent meanings, as suggests Minayo (2010, p. 353).

Results and discussion

An important topic when studying to become school teachers is the pre-service teacher's own memories from school years. They raised concern about how their own experiences as pupils could have been better. Two excerpts with reference to their experience as pupils are shown below. In the first one, we highlight an important decolonial thought that occurred due to a question about the way each one of them learned better:

It was really difficult to answer the question about the way I learn, we don't usually think about that. We lived many years in an educational system in which the teacher is the only one who has the knowledge, while the student is someone who needs to learn all the content. (Camila)

When pre-service teachers develop this comprehension about the educational structure, a path for inner and outer changes is set. They will soon be on the other side of the pedagogical framework and will have the chance to modify the way students' knowledge is handled. The second excerpt is about the relationship between teacher and pupils:

That day we had a class about Rogers and discussed empathy. This class made me think about my school days, when most of my teachers were not empathetic with students. [...] If the teacher had tried to talk to me about my lack of participation and my difficulties, maybe my experience and even my future career would have been different" (Isabela de Castro).

The relational aspect is as important as the content taught (KORTHAGEN et al., 2014). Understanding this issue from a reflection about one's own experience is a practice of reflection on action (SCHÖN, 1983) that can promote meaningful development for pre-service teachers. Their experiences as university students were also a recurring topic at the reflections. Motivation towards learning was highly mentioned, as they started to perceive what could be done by the teacher to promote a good and engaging atmosphere:

Although I am not a very active student and am easily procrastinating, I must admit that the course caught my attention since the very first day. It motivated me towards learning and I put my efforts into it. (F. T. Bueno)

On Wednesdays, right after this class I had Experimental Physics. The physics teacher was horrible, one could see he hated teaching and, consequently, his classes were really bad. At some point I thought: "this teacher should have classes with [author's name], so he could learn how to teach". It was demotivating to go from a great class (that didn't even seemed like a class) to a horrible one, boring

and with this awful and boring teacher” (Anonymous)

While identifying the importance of teachers’ role, they also identified their own feelings and attitudes changing in consonance with the pedagogical practices. When experiencing their own students’ postures changing according to different teaching approaches, they perceive the importance of developing themselves as good teachers. Furthermore, when perceiving the importance and the impact of teachers’ postures, some pre-service teachers aimed to help improving their own course practices:

I intend to discuss the dropout rates at my course in the next departmental meeting with students, aiming to change this feeling we have of being left by the teachers. (Josué)

The above motivation arose from a discussion about possible paths to be taken in university courses in order to improve students’ experience and reduce dropout. Many students face difficulties both learning contents and establishing communication with teachers. At the class, they reported feeling disregarded by teachers, which caused lack of interest, surface learning and quitting.

When students perceive themselves as authors and act like such, producing and adding knowledge to the class content, an epistemological turning point is reached. Therefore, students, and especially pre-service teachers, should be actively involved with knowledge production. The perception that themselves, as well as their future pupils, are able to reflect upon their own experiences and relate them to the theoretical content can promote significant learning (KOSTIAINEN et al., 2018; KÖRKKÖ; KYRO-ÄMMÄLÄ; TURUNEN, 2016). This self-perception of being an individual or a member of a group that produces knowledge and learns is a base for decolonial thoughts and practices (WALSH, 2014).

The Psychological Development and Teaching course was designed to provide several teaching experiences with peers, since it a course about teaching without combined pedagogical practice at schools. While engaged in the exercise of supporting one’s knowledge production, pre-service teachers managed to see theory happening (PEERCY; TROYAN, 2017). Whilst the ability to learn while teaching is already widely reported, at the course this was expanded to an experience of learning about teaching while teaching:

The teaching experience was the most interesting part for me, because I could put into action Vygotsky’s theory about the Zone of proximal development, which was not easy! I found it challenging to understand/ “to find” my colleague’s “zone”. First I tried using an electronic game to help me mediate the historical content and I had some success with it. But still, it was difficult for me to identify my colleague’s previous knowledge. The class was very good because the teacher came to us and gave me lots of ideas about how to deal with this kind of situation.

I went home with lots of things to think about. I hope it will help me become a good teacher (Freitas).

It seemed that we were playing with Mathematics. Everybody was paying attention and were curious about our explanations. It was a really powerful experience for my educational process. I felt that I really want to be a Math teacher so I can change this misconception that Maths is either boring or hard to learn. The most interesting part was that all of us could identify references from the authors in our explanations and attitudes. It shows that we really learned the course content (Gabrielle Maria).

In the excerpts above, the pre-service teachers produced and identified meaningful learning regarding educational theories and practices as well as regarding their own postures and skills. They saw themselves as teachers in development, aiming to become change agents. The students went beyond thinking about practice while studying theory or trying to remember theory when in practice, they identified an active and knowledgeable path to follow as students as well as future school teachers.

What university teachers can learn from this experience

University teachers gain experience and motivation when engaging their students in their learning process through portfolio building, self-assessment, and peer feedback. We can say from our experience that when having opportunities, most students participate in their learning actively and responsibly. Their feedbacks are thoughtful and focus on areas that they or their peers can improve. The partnership with students provides rich experiences and contact with new knowledge and can be motivating for university teachers (SEALE, 2010).

Teachers can learn with students as well as students can learn with one another because topics connected with each one's experiences, often unknown to others, are raised. All knowledge is specific and valuable (CHYE et al., 2019) and, therefore, important for the professional and personal development of the student, their peers, and teachers (CLARKE; BOUD, 2018). The portfolio can be conceived as a purposeful collection of students' efforts, growth, and achievements during time (LAM, 2014) and it is important to provide them with autonomy to choose the materials regarding the pedagogical content. In the reflections, students have the opportunity to deepen their learning and understanding about pedagogical topics, showing its importance and relating it with theory and practice. While permanently developing their own ideas, meaningful learning to teach occurs (KEMMIS et al., 2014; SOLÉ; ZARAGOZA; DÍAZ-GIBSON, 2018).

Equally important is the fact that university teachers and students get to know each other more through this approach in a context of sharing individual experiences.

They can inspire and get inspired, respect and value differences, provide emotional support, and trust each other. This is good because learning can occur in a more pleasant climate, and the participants' interpersonal skills and critical thinking can be developed (SEALE, 2010). A partnership approach also positively influences university teachers' and student motivation (SEALE, 2010; MUDRÁK et al., 2020) which can help promote a healthier work and study context and, therefore, avoid burnouts (KUITTINEN; MERILÄINEN, 2011).

Holding pedagogical experiences that endorse students' knowledge and promote development of critical reflection can reverberate into their future professions. To see pedagogical change happening in real schools after meaningful learning and active students' participation in teacher education courses is rewarding. Furthermore, reflective portfolio assessments grant the opportunity for university teachers to rethink practices and postures that might endorse educational power structures, to find out more about their students, and to provide formative opportunities in a framework closer to Schwartz's (2017) relational practice.

Final remarks

The use of reflective portfolios based on a decolonial approach in Teacher Education can favour meaningful learning and students' involvement in Teacher Education. When pre-service teachers experience a formative assessment that is based on their own abilities of producing knowledge regarding teaching and learning, it contributes for meaningful learning and for future pedagogical practices that regard and cherish pupil's knowledge and participation. The use of reflective portfolios enabled students to reflect upon their path as learners, as future teachers and, specifically, on their understandings about knowledge production and educational power structures.

We identify the urgency of encouraging students to think on their own and to perceive themselves as epistemological beings who are able to produce knowledge that is recognized by academic context. In this sense, we emphasize that not only the use of reflective portfolios might be useful for university teachers in the pedagogic aspects but also regarding knowledge production and participation in an important ongoing change of the educational system.

In a global context where power and oppression structures are not only persisting, but as well returning, the educational sphere demands a close look. It is of utter importance that Teacher Education promotes new perceptions about the roles of teachers and students. Decolonial studies provide a basis for rethinking the processes of knowledge production and fostering new practices in Higher Education that reverberate into School Education. There are many decolonial pedagogical possibilities, from the choice of themes, authors, and people in charge of mediating knowledge, to daily classroom practices and learning assessments. Here we brought a possibility of an assessment

practice that promotes reflections, exchanges between peers and also between teachers and students, as well as their own elaborations that allow the construction of more plural and meaningful knowledge. Changes in Teacher Education may encourage critical thinking and reflection, opening the paths for decolonial practices and thoughts in various contexts, from education to social and political spheres.

Considering that the findings are from one specific University in Brazil, further studies in different countries are needed. Another aspect that calls for investigation is the effect of reflective portfolios with in-service teachers. For those attempting on introducing the reflective portfolio, we highlight the importance of its open structure, in which students can write in first person and freely reflect upon their processes of learning and experiencing pedagogical content.

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