

Title

WHAT LIFE ASKS OF US

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Program

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Course

Practicum IV

There was this man they used to call “Rocky” just like the famous movie character, but that nickname given by his friends was a way of mocking him for his bent for Rock music. He spent his childhood in a town whose culture offered him a lot of stuff that did not match his interests, especially in terms of music. At the age of 9, he started playing guitar in a self-taught way after finding out that none of the musicians around had any idea of the genre he wanted to play, so he was forced to do it on his own, but it ended up being something positive because he gained independence and a lot of autonomy in his life, and with that virtue at hand, that boy could repeat that same story, but this time, with the language he heard in all of the songs he had learned how to play and sing until then. In other words, his interest at that moment was not limited to play his favorite songs, but he started to be curious about the meaning of the lyrics of those songs. That is how English began to take part of his deepest interest, part of his life.

Against all odds, he became proficient in English sooner than expected, especially, after realizing that the school he attended at that time would not contribute to his perspective, he found different ways to pursue his goals, even in the middle of limitations and lack of support, except for the one provided by his older half-brother, who was an English teacher and encouraged Rocky to cross those boundaries that prevented him from achieving his objectives inherent in language as the former had done some years before with the same enthusiasm and limitations. Even though it all was said in the middle of informal conversations and with no intention of persuasion, that experienced teacher inspired that ambitious boy to follow his steps.

But there was another person who influenced Rocky as well. That adolescent looked up to his Spanish literature teacher so much, for she encouraged him to read for pleasure and was one of those who leave a mark on all the students who stand in the way of a great teacher. Rocky was sure about that because in her everyday

classes, she used to provide a scenario in which fantasy and a critical view of the stories read was always present, so it ended up building Rocky's interest in literature. With time, that interest became a habit, and that habit was sharpened when English started being part of it. In other words, music, English and literature converged upon his focal point. And of course, it all led to certain difficulties in social aspects since Rocky, instead of going out to play soccer or joining friends at the park just like he had done before, he preferred, for a while, to lock himself in his bedroom in order to play guitar and sing; or some other times read -even reread- the stories he had at hand or write lyrics, short stories or about experiences in his personal diary. In all of it, English was the transversal characteristic. The decision of sacrificing spare time with friends took its toll, but it also brought its reward since, just for the record, some years later he had the chance to share the very same stage with his favorite band ever.

Once he was done with high school, Rocky decided to take a risk that very few people close to him considered it was worth taking: strike out on his own at the age of 19, so he went to the city of Medellín and, in the middle of lacks and uncertainties, he entered the university to study journalism after following the advice of his family, some friends and teachers, who got him to follow that line, highlighting that he was keen on writing and speaking. He did not take for granted that experience and, on the way, became a teacher by accident and as strategy to cover some of his expenses. In the end, he started feeling passion for teaching and realized he was good at it, even though his performance was surrounded by empiricism. He launched into that challenge full of self-confidence, enthusiasm and entirely willing to learn from others and from what his own experience could give him in the midst of both hard and good times.

In his quest for improvement and being conscious of the necessity of getting theoretical support to his pedagogical practice, he started looking into fundamentals and leaning on the ideas of theoreticians and authoritative scholars. That is why, in accordance with this Kantian maxim: *“Experience without theory is blind, theory without experience is mere intellectual play”*(Kant, 1787)¹, he realized that some of the methods used in class and the way he directed his performance had a background and could be expressed in a more substantiated way. The time to generate an interaction between practice and theory in his experience had come.

He realized that all those findings and constructs of his teaching experience, with all the comings and goings, were very similar to what *Stephen Krashen (1981)* pointed out in regards to Natural approach, stating that *it is a method of language teaching that aims at fostering naturalistic language acquisition in a classroom setting, and to this end it emphasizes communication, and places decreased importance on conscious grammar study and explicit correction of student errors. Efforts are also made to make the learning environment as stress-free as possible”*. What caught his attention the most was that, in the natural approach, language output, that is, the one produced by the student, is not forced at all, since the atmosphere created and the constant and comprehensible input provided by the teacher let it emerge spontaneously.

With all that in mind, an unforgettable lesson learnt by Rocky from the very beginning is that everything we read, we learn, we are taught, we listen and we discuss at the university with teachers and peers has always been and will always be permeated and influenced by our interests, modes of perception and our personality. We reflect our emotions as well as our background and mastery. We cannot be one in the classroom and another out of it. Our personality determines us,

¹ Heidegger, Martin (1997). *Phenomenological Interpretation of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*. Indiana University Press.

and it does not distinguish our roles. That is why he stands with those who agree with *Barnouw (1973: p 10)*, who stated that *“Personality is a more or less enduring organization of forces within the individual associated with a complex of fairly consistent attitudes, values, and modes of perception which account, in part, for the Individual's consistency of behavior”*.

Before coming to a conclusion, I would like to mention that the teacher whose story I have told so far is not a friend of mine, not even a character I took from one of the books I have read. I have been talking about myself. Up to this point, I do not know how it all started; how I got involved into Rock and English in a cultural atmosphere that offered Vallenato and few chances of interaction in English; besides that, an English class at school that was entirely given in Spanish and a teacher that did not show any interest in the target language in a more communicative and natural approach, who unfortunately made me hate his classes after rejecting initiatives to make them more interactive.

As I said, before, I am not sure about the origin of that connection among music, literature and English that ended up being, separately and collectively, some of my biggest strengths, but now what I do know for sure is that when I decided to teach for a living, I wanted to be one completely different from the ones I had at school. It was my personal way to protest and it turned out to be one of the things I am most proud of. I truly think that I picked over journalism from a lot of options, but life had other plans for me. We ask life for future and we all know future is uncertain and unclear; in exchange, what life asks of us is what we call fate, and we can neither escape it nor avoid its knocking on our door.

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