



UNIVERSIDAD SANTO TOMÁS  
PRIMER CLAUSTRO UNIVERSITARIO DE COLOMBIA

My Life as an English Teacher: An autobiographical narrative

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Universidad Santo Tomás

Faculty of Education

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PRIMER CLAUSTRO UNIVERSITARIO DE COLOMBIA

MY LIFE AS AN ENGLISH TEACHER: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVE

RESEARCH REPORT

RESEARCH FIELD

The use of the English Language and its Contexts

RESEARCH SUBPROJECT

The Voices of the LLEI realities: Life stories and experiences

Research report presented as a requirement for the title in

Bachelor of English as a Foreign Language

DIRECTED BY:

Mg. Sandra Milena Rodríguez

SANTO TOMAS UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

BACHELOR OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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## ACCEPTANCE NOTE

The research project “MY LIFE AS AN ENGLISH TEACHER: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVE” presented by BIBIANA MARÍA RODRÍGUEZ GÓMEZ as a final project to receive the title of Bachelor in English as a Foreign Language has been approved.

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Bogotá, September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017



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## ABSTRACT

When talking about English teachers in the Colombian context, it is impossible to unify them under a unique description; on the contrary, there are diverse realities that describe them. Each reality comes from a collection of experiences and paths that determine the practice of such teachers. One of these realities is the one portrayed in the autobiographical narrative inquiry of the bilingual teacher working for private bilingual schools presented in this project. Such narrative was carried out in a collaborative research project for the Research Mentorship Program of the Bachelor's in English as a Foreign Language of Universidad Santo Tomás, Bogotá. The autobiographical narrative inquiry was done through narrative frames, teacher reflective journals and a Language Learning History. It aimed at collecting data related to the learning and teaching experience of the pre-service English teacher to make sense of their impact in her current practice as a school teacher in one of the bilingual schools of Bogotá. The data was examined through a thematic analysis under three main themes: Pre-service Teacher Beliefs, Going from untrained English teacher to professional English teacher, and English Learning and Teaching contexts. The analysis also rendered emerging subthemes such as Beliefs before being a pre-service teacher, Self-training, Pedagogical transformations based on training, and Pedagogical transformations based on classroom practices, significant experiences as a pre-service teachers, English language education and Sharing experiences with other teachers. Such analysis offered powerful insight on the role of reflection and beliefs for the pedagogical choices made by the English teacher.

**KEY WORDS:** autobiography, narrative, pre-service teacher, thematic analysis, English teaching



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## 1. CONTEXTUALIZATION

According to Ellis (1997), “teachers of second and foreign languages, it might be argued, do not exist as a collective, but are highly differentiated in terms of their background knowledge, their personal goals, who they teach and the conditions under which they teach.” (p. 246). Therefore, knowing that we are preparing ourselves to become English teachers, we must understand how our personal histories may impact our jobs.

During my studies in the Bachelor’s Degree in English as a Foreign Language, I took part in the Research Mentorship Program offered by the Faculty. There, we focused on gaining deeper understanding of the different aspects of teaching and learning English. One of these aspects focused in the research field “The use of the English Language and its Contexts”, and it revolved around the fact that, although English teachers share their occupation, they are far from sharing life stories. Every teacher may be considered a unique world, with a particular voice portraying their own life stories and experiences. Given the latter, and the fact that narrative inquiry is “concerned with analyzing and criticizing the stories we tell, hear and read in the course of work” (Webster and Mertova, 2007, p. 7), Professor Sandra Rodríguez as our research leader and Paula Camila Gómez, Diana Torres and I, as the researcher students, decided to carry out a collaborative narrative inquiry to analyze and compare the history of three English teachers performing in different backgrounds to characterize their experiences and determine their role in their teaching processes.



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Based on the fact that “in telling their stories of experience teachers necessarily reflect on those experiences and thus make meaning of them; that is, they gain an understanding of their teaching knowledge and practice” (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008, p. 374), and given that I have performed as an English teacher for over 20 years, I decided to focus on my own personal story to make sense of it through an autobiographical narrative. In this sense, I aimed at answering my research question: How does an autobiographical narrative portray the English teaching and learning experiences of a pre-service English teacher?

This autobiographical narrative was carried out with the help of a language learning history and several teacher reflective journals around the topics of English teaching, English learning and Teacher training. These instruments were scrutinized through a thematic analysis that focused initially in three main themes shared with the other participants: English learning, English teaching, and Sociocultural context. However, through the scrutiny, new general themes were identified: Pre-service Teacher Beliefs, Going from untrained English teacher to professional English teacher, and Educational context. In the same way, the following emerging sub-themes were identified correspondingly: Before being a pre-service teacher; Self-training, Pedagogical transformations based on classroom practices, Pedagogical transformations based on professional development, significant experiences as a pre-service teacher; English language education, and Sharing experiences with English teachers. (Refer to table 1)



The reasons behind the selection of an autobiography were that, firstly, it would provide myself with information on the role my background, my knowledge and the conditions in which I am teaching are playing in my teaching process. And secondly, it would be used to share this information with the Research Mentorship group to be compared and contrasted with the stories of the other two teachers in order to the characterize socio-academic experiences of teachers of English as a Foreign Language, which in the end, would provide the Program of Bachelor in English as a Foreign Language meaningful information of students with similar stories like mine.



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## 2. RESEARCH STATEMENT

Throughout my studies at Santo Tomás University, I have come to meet several classmates who are currently working as EFL teachers, just like me. Although we share the same occupation, everything else is far from that. Our teaching process was different; such was our access to teaching resources, or the amount of exposure to the language. There, I realized that teaching English as a Foreign Language in Colombia is an occupation that can take many shapes.

Later in my process, I joined the Language Research Mentorship Program where I was able to understand that Language Teaching is always embedded in a socio-academic context that can be analyzed as part of our formative process. Moved by the premise of Ellis (2012) where he states that “teachers hold beliefs about teaching and construct their own personal theories of teaching (Woods, 1996) which potentially influence how they act.” (Ellis, 2012, p.12), the Research Mentorship group decided to offer insight on the socio-academic experiences of different EFL teachers in Colombia.

One of the discussions of the group revolved around the premise that, although there were a limited number of methods for teaching English condensed in any teaching manual; there are countless applications for them depending on the person or the place that carries them out. As a result, in the Research Mentorship group, we decided to create a team of three students and a leading teacher to explore the many aspects of teaching English as a Foreign Language. This



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group was constituted by Professor Sandra Rodríguez as the research leader and Paula Camila Gómez, Diana Torres and I as the researcher students.

Centered in the statement that “teachers of second and foreign languages, it might be argued, do not exist as a collective, but are highly differentiated in terms of their background knowledge, their personal goals, who they teach and the conditions under which they teach.” (Ellis, 1997, p. 246), the group decided to carry out a collective project under focused on the socio-academic experiences of three English teachers to gain comprehension of the singularities and realities that characterize the pedagogical practice of the EFL classroom within different educational and regional contexts. To do so, we agreed to simultaneously collect, analyze and compare the stories of three English teachers performing in different contexts to make sense on how their life events have permeated their teaching practices.

My contribution to the project would be my voice as an English teacher performing in a bilingual private school. Furthermore, it would present the story of my 20-year long career woven with my story as a student looking to become a professional teacher. This story may be summarized as follows: I have been performing as an English teacher for over 20 years. I was hired to teach English to adults because I could speak it. I had been educated in bilingual schools and had a fluent use of the language. Later in my career, I shifted from adult education to primary education, but teaching young minds differs significantly from teaching adults. After 9 years of performing as a teacher in bilingual schools, I decided that I would study a Bachelor’s



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degree. Throughout my education, I have discovered all the aspects that are truly involved in teaching: pedagogical principles, the didactics of English, teaching throughout the ages and teaching throughout the levels. I also had the chance to see that teaching English in the conditions I do differs greatly from teaching English in public schools or in rural schools. Given the above, I decided to inquire my own voice.

“Because narrative inquiry is an ongoing reflexive and reflective methodology” (Clandinin & Caine, 2012, p. 171), the reconstruction of my autobiography through narratives would allow for reflection on the way my social and academic experiences have impacted my current and future practice. I would narrate my life as a teacher to analyze it and make sense of it to either continue making the same moves or steering clear from them. Just as stated by Barkhuizen and Wette (2008), “in telling their stories of experience teachers necessarily reflect on those experiences and thus make meaning of them; that is, they gain an understanding of their teaching knowledge and practice” (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008, p. 374). My reconstruction was necessary to offer myself meaningful input on the role my beliefs and choices in my professional development as a teacher of English as a Foreign Language.

By understanding the role that my personal history holds in my teaching practice, I would be able to profit from it when the situation demands it, or steer clear from it when it goes against the goal of my class, my students or the institution I am working at by assuring that my choices and practices are based on sound reflection. In the case of the Faculty, it would offer information for



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other pre-service teachers who have had their own bilingual education to take that into account when setting up the program. Finally, it could become a reference when compared to other teachers in order to understand factors such as the daily amount of language exposition, the role of English in the institution, the ages of students, the understanding of English didactics, that go beyond the personal stories and those that are inherent to the person itself, such as English-learning process, teacher training or lack of it, motivations to join the Bachelor's program, providing useful insight on the decision-making process regarding the program for Bachelor's Degree in English as a Foreign Language and the eligible candidates.

## 2.1 Research question

How does an autobiographical narrative portray the English teaching and learning experiences of a pre-service English teacher?

## 2.2 Research objective

To interpret autobiographical narrations in order to portray the English teaching and learning experiences of a pre-service English teacher.



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### 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There is a growing tendency of making sense of the events and situations that happen in the everyday activities of a classroom to profit from them in hopes of making teaching or learning more effective. One way of doing so is through narrative inquiry. In this type of inquiry, the researcher collects stories to analyze them and build from them. In the educational field, these stories may be told from the perspective of the teachers or from the point of view of the students. In any case, they look for patterns and connections that otherwise would be meaningless. Sometimes, the researcher teacher happens to be the voice that wants to tell the stories to make their experience fruitful. In such case, the inquiry takes the form of an autobiographical narrative, and it portrays the experiences that the researcher teacher wants to tell to make meaning of their practice.

#### 3.1 Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is understood as the study of experience as story, in other words, it is a way of thinking about experience as a way of making meaning of the person who lived it. In other words, in a narrative inquiry experience is the phenomena; to use narrative inquiry is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomena under study. Creswell (2013) states that narrative stories are told with a specific intention, and always happen within specific places or situations, providing meaningful insight on the role of the socio-academic context of the teacher. These



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stories will later be analyzed and understood by recognizing the structure of the story and the patterns that may be used for studying each experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990) in the hopes of relating them to the actual values and choices that constitute her teaching practices. Ellis (2012) states that “teachers hold beliefs about teaching and construct their own personal theories of teaching (Woods, 1996), which potentially influence how they act.” (Ellis, 2012, p.12) In this sense, narrative inquiry offers a light into those beliefs and the ways they have impacted their practices because narrative inquiry is “concerned with analyzing and criticizing the stories we tell, hear and read in the course of work. It is also concerned with the myths that surround us and are embedded in our social interactions.” (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 7). In doing so, it documents essential events that evidence their value in the course of a person’s life. Just as literature makes sense of studying a written text, a narrative inquiry takes a person’s account of a given moment of their life and analyzes it to establish implicit connections among the elements.

“The main strength of narrative inquiry lies in its focus on how people use stories to make sense of their experiences in areas of inquiry where it is important to understand phenomena from the perspectives of those who experience them.” (Barkhuizen, Benson & Chik, 2014, p. 2) Creswell (2013) states that these stories are told with a specific intention, and always happen within specific places or situations, providing meaningful insight on the role of the socio-academic context of the teacher. According to Barkhuizen (2008), Narrative Studies allow teachers to analyze life experiences around education to make sense of them.

“Narrative inquiry brings storytelling and research together either by using stories as research data or by using storytelling as a tool for data analysis or presentation of findings.” (Barkhuizen, Benson & Chik, 2014, p. 3). Given this, Polkinghorn (1995) defines the first one as “analysis of narratives” where the stories are used as data, and the second one as “narrative analysis” where the stories are used for presenting and analyzing data.

### 3.2 Narrative in Educational Research

When used in an educational context, narrative inquiry will account for theoretical ideas about educational experiences as lived and told stories. “Because narrative inquiry is an ongoing reflexive and reflective methodology” (Clandinin & Caine, 2012, p. 171), the reconstruction of a teacher’s life through narratives will allow for reflection on the way their social and academic experiences have impacted their current and future practices.

Barkhuizen (2014) defines key characteristics for narratives in language teaching and learning. On the one hand, he states that, just like storytelling, narratives are spoken or written texts; on the other, they are produced by people who have something to tell, so they always embed a specific point that the narrator wants to get because they always have purpose and meaning within the context of their telling. Finally, narratives are always located in a given time and space and occur during a period of time.



Because of the latter, Yoder-Wise and Kowalski (2003) highlight that focusing into teachers' stories about their learning and teaching experiences may yield relevant aspects of their practice, such as recurring themes, actions that represent values, priorities, concerns, interests and experiences; the effect of choices; the influence of past actions in their behavior; or looking for what worked, among others.

### 3.3 Autobiographical Narrative

When a person refers to their own lived experiences, this may be considered an autobiography or a memoir; however, when talking about narratives, Barkhuizen, Benson, and Chik (2014) differentiate autobiographical narratives from memoirs because the first offer an analysis that provides support as a research study. For this matter, the researcher collects stories related to the topic of interest; these stories become data to be analyzed in hopes of making them meaningful. According to Barkhuizen, Benson, and Chik (2014) "self-narratives, or the stories people tell about themselves, help us to understand the ways in which individuals situate themselves and their activities in the world." (p. 2). In this same train of thought, Brady (1990) explains that an autobiography is more than just collecting facts based on memory; on the contrary, it is the construction of meaning based on the interpretation of the researcher's past.



Given the above, autobiographical narratives are becoming more frequent with time because “in telling their stories of experience teachers necessarily reflect on those experiences and thus make meaning of them; that is, they gain an understanding of their teaching knowledge and practice” (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008, p. 374). Such is the case of Fang’s (2006) autobiographical narrative on her role as a language learner and a language teacher in China where she concludes that her use of and autobiographical narrative has allowed her to consider the values and beliefs that shaped her professional life as a language learner which enabled her to “identify valuable strengths from my lived experience, which has helped me to better understand myself, my students and my professional landscape.” (Fang, 2006, p. 128)

### 3.4 The voice of the English teacher

Narrative inquiries give a special value to the experience of teachers through their voices as the narrators of their lives, whether to be analyzed in collaboration or to be dealt with in a self-exploratory manner. They become significant because “through this process of reflection, making connections between past and present events and speculating about future implications, teachers will experience awakenings (new ways of telling stories) and quite possibly transformations (reliving stories with changed actions)” (Coulter, Michael, & Poynor, 2007, p. 107). On their part, Clandinin and Connelly (1986), consider that narrative study of schooling “offers (teachers) opportunities for reflection upon their practice particularly at moments of contradiction and discontinuity to allow novice teachers to begin to reconstruct their narratives of



experience" (p. 386). Finally, Carter (1993) remarks the that “in acknowledging teachers' voices a different world for teacher educators might need to take shape, perhaps a world shaped by helping teachers come to know their own stories” (p.8) Given the above, narrative studies empower the voices of English teachers, not only for their personal growth, but for the benefit of fellow teachers who may benefit from them.



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## 4. RESEARCH DESIGN

### 4.1 Descriptive Research

According to Ellis (2012) descriptive research aims at producing qualitative and quantitative accounts of academic processes, the factors that influence them and their impact on the language learning scene. It “emphasizes the need to understand phenomena in their cultural and social contexts.” (Ellis, 2012, p. 42) and it relies on observation and self-reports provided from the participants. This type of research may be cross-sectional or longitudinal. Whereas the first one refers to collecting data at a static point in time, the second one refers to research that is carried out throughout a period of time. (Ellis, 2012). As for the analysis of data, Ellis (2012) states that this kind of research may use a deductive analysis based on “a set of predefined or expected themes or themes used to code the data.” (Ellis, 2012, p. 46).

### 4.2 Narrative Inquiry

Narrative Inquiry is a type of qualitative design in which “narrative is understood as a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected” (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 17 cited by Creswell, 2013, p. 70). “It begins with the experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals” (Creswell, 2013, p. 70) to later be analyzed and understood by recognizing the structure of the story and the patterns that may be





used for studying each experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). In other words, the collection of data is a collection of stories about a specific topic that will be later analyzed to find patterns, connections and relationships among them to make sense of the participant's reality. This process is defined by Barkhuizen (2011) as narrative knowledging and it happens when there is knowledge construction as a result of narrative research activities “of (co) constructing narratives, analyzing narratives, reporting the findings, and reading/ watching/listening to research reports” (Barkhuizen, 2011, p. 395)

According to Barkhuizen, Benson, and Chik (2014), every narrative inquiry follows the principles listed below because they

are spoken or written texts

are produced by people who have something to tell

are situated in time and space

involve development over time

have structures that correspond to the developments they describe

encapsulate a point that the narrator wants to get across

have purpose and meaning within the context of their telling. (p. 7)



According to Barkhuizen (2008), Narrative Studies allow teachers to analyze life experiences around education to make sense of them. Hence, contributing to the intention of this study of determining how those life experiences shaped the beliefs and choices on the practice of the in-service teacher. In summary, “the main strength of narrative inquiry lies in its focus on how people use stories to make sense of their experiences in areas of inquiry where it is important to understand phenomena from the perspectives of those who experience them.”(Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2014, p. 2)

When the collection of stories is done by the same person who is telling them, that is that they are recorded and analyzed by the subject of study, it is defined as an autobiography (Ellis, 2014) According to Barkhuizen, Benson, and Chik (2014) “self-narratives, or the stories people tell about themselves, help us to understand the ways in which individuals situate themselves and their activities in the world.” (p. 2). In this way, this autobiographical narrative contributed to the characterization of the experiences that shaped my life as an English teacher and my activities in the world.

This project came to life as a research exercise in the Research Mentorship program, aimed at understanding the lives and experiences of EFL teachers. After discussing with the group members, it became evident that behind every English teacher, there is a whole story that explains their philosophy of teaching, their pedagogical moves and their beliefs. Such was my

case. I had been educated in bilingual schools, I had been an English teacher without any formal training. Then, I became a school teacher in bilingual schools and it was then that I became a pre-service teacher when studying my Bachelor's in English as a Second Language. As a result, I selected my story to be analyzed through an autobiographical narrative inquiry.

In the particular case of this study, the approaches to narrative inquiry were, on the first place, the analysis of narratives because the stories were used as data that was classified, analyzed and reported to make meaning of my own experience. Secondly, it was autobiographical because it was centered on the collection of my personal stories, reporting my individual experiences, and chronologically ordering the meaning of those experiences. (Creswell, 2013); and, finally, focused on content because it was centered on narrative inquiry as a resource for research on language teaching and learning and the narrative content of the personal stories to be coded around given themes and not in the use of language they made.

The purpose was to categorize the pedagogical actions that emerged for the teaching and learning processes of English as a Foreign Language based on the autobiographical stories and narrations of my life as an English teacher in various contexts and my role as a pre-service teacher taking part of the Research Mentorship Group of the Bachelor in English as a Foreign Language; contributing to the characterization of the experiences that shaped my life and activities in the world.

Narrative inquiry is based on spoken or written texts situated in a particular time and space and they always have a purpose or meaning within the context there are telling. In this sense, “in narrative inquiry, it is not uncommon to adopt multiple methods of data collection” (Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2014, p. 16); among them, interviews, teacher journals, learner diaries, language learning histories (LLHs), narrative frames and classroom observation, typically focused on a life history approach to capture long-term experiences. However, according to Barkhuizen, Benson, and Chik (2014) these experiences can be arranged in one of two sequencing modes, the retrospective or the concurrent account. Whereas the first one focuses on the past experiences and the way they may have affected present practices; the second one focuses on both, past and present experiences providing information of lived experiences and incidents that may have happened during the data collection process.

Given the above, it is important to start by mentioning that the accounts followed a concurrent sequencing mode because this research was part of a formative process where I am still an undergraduate student participating in a Research Mentorship Program, therefore, incidents occurring during the data collection process were recorded, categorized and analyzed.



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### 4.3 Instruments

Being an autobiographical narrative, the instruments used for the data collection were carried out through written narratives in the role of participant in a research project constructing the written texts, analyzing them and publishing the findings. They took the form of an autobiographical account including a language learning history and reflective journals of two kinds, non-narrative and narrative. The first one was structured and followed a form provided by the University, but it was not told as a story; the second one, was a narrative account written as a story, keeping in mind the principles of a narrative inquiry.

Their definitions and procedures will be explained in detail below.

#### 4.3.1 Language learning histories

“Language learning histories (LLHs) are retrospective accounts of past learning. They are the written stories of language learning experiences.” (Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2014, p. 37). They can be as extensive as all the life span of a person’s learning experience or they can be limited to smaller units like school years, semesters or classes.

LLHs lead to learners’ metacognitive awareness of their own learning because while writing them, they have to pinpoint and reflect on the aspects that have contributed to their learning

process. It helps them understand who they are, what helps them, what hinders them and what they need to do in the future.

A single, life-long Language Learning History was completed for the purpose of this project comprising events from preschool education to the university studies.

#### 4.3.2 Teacher Reflective Journals

These are “written reflections on teachers’ practices, teaching contexts, emotions, development, and language learning. The purpose of these journals is for teachers to reflect on their own experiences of teaching and learning to teach.” (Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2014, p. 40)

When they are written as autobiographical accounts, they may include epiphanies or critical events in the teacher’s life. Topics for journals range from personal reflections related to their teaching context, teaching practices, philosophy in education to personal and professional development.

As part of the formative process of the Pedagogical Practice, three non-narrative journals were completed. One related to a class plan, one to a video recording of a class, and the last one as a final reflection of the pedagogical practice. Additionally to those, a narrative journal entry

was completed for my experiences in self-training, another one for my experience with formal teacher-training, and a final one for my experience as a pre-service teacher taking part of the Bachelor's in EFL. Each journal entry was at least 3 typed-pages long.

#### 4.4 Procedure

According to Creswell (2013), the procedure for a narrative inquiry follows these steps:

It begins by selecting the one or two stories to be analyzed. Once this is done, data, in this case, the collection of stories, is gathered. They must be organized chronologically and they must be collected individually. They will later analyzed to find patterns, connections or relationships.

Following the procedure proposed by Creswell (2013), I selected my personal story. With the guidance of the principles established by Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik (2014), I created written texts that had the purpose of telling about my role as an in-service teacher interwoven with my role as a student in a Bachelor's program; being an autobiography, written accounts would be more suitable than oral collections because there was no need for interviewing or carrying out oral reports.



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These stories were always located in a specific time and place and portrayed a chronological development over time. For every piece of data, I intended to get my point across; I retold every aspect that I considered relevant to understanding my role as an English teacher and my pedagogical moves in my present time. Finally, I wrote each one of them having in mind their relevance for my inquiry. To do so, I started by writing an autobiographical account that presented information connected to my learning of English, my working experience, my educational process as a Bachelor and any other relevant aspect of my life as an English teacher. This had the intention of highlighting the most relevant aspects of my life as an English teacher. This account would be used to determine the topics to be covered in the narrative accounts. Later, as part of my academic process, I elaborated reflective journals that accounted for my pedagogical practice as a pre-service teacher. These journals were guided exercises that followed a pre-established form. They were meant to offer insight as for the decisions made, their impact on the class, the students and myself, and the contrast between the pedagogical choices with the theoretical support. Finally, I wrote narrative accounts of other aspects of my teaching and learning experience such as my self-training process, my teacher-training process or my experience with the program of Bachelor's in EFL. For these last accounts, I focused on the given aspect and narrated the events that were relevant to it. (For further details, refer to the appendixes)



Once I had collected my data, I began a thematic analysis focused initially in three main aspects established in the Research Mentorship Group: English teaching, English learning and Socio-Academic Context. As part of the formative experience, I coded my instruments with the help of Nvivo software to look for correlations and to have a more precise analysis of the coding. As a result, some themes were renamed and some subthemes came to life.

#### 4.5 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to “the relationship between the findings of narrative inquiry studies and the underlying “realities” they purport to represent.” (Barkhuizen, Benson & Chik, 2014, p. 90). In other words, it refers to the level of credibility and confirmability that narratives may have. Since narratives are always told from the perspective of the narrator, Pavlenko (2007) explained that these realities must be seen as one of the following three types: life reality (how things are or were), subject reality (how things or events were experienced by participants), and text reality (ways in which things or events are narrated by the participants.) On this matter, Barkhuizen, Benson & Chik (2014) remark that they cannot be taken as a transparent window for the stories and events portrayed in them. However, when talking about an autobiographical study, they explain that there is no conflict because “we can trust the researcher to tell the story that he or she wants to tell.” (p. 91)



Given the above, this research may be considered trustworthy in the sense that it was carefully carried out having the principles of narrative inquiry in mind. As an autobiographical narrative, the stories were told with the sole purpose of providing the most meaningful data for the research. On the other hand, the accounts related to the pedagogical practice were delivered through the standard forms established by the University; hence, providing the required information related to actions, beliefs and reflection, as expected for this matter.



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## 5. DATA ANALYSIS

The data was scrutinized through a thematic analysis. “In general terms, it involves repeated reading of the data, coding and categorization of data extracts, and their reorganization under thematic headings.” (Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2014, p. 75). “Analyses of narrative content (Polkinghorne's analysis of narratives) follow the procedures of coding for themes, categorizing these, and looking for patterns of association among them” (Barkhuizen, 2011, p. 401). On the matter, Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik (2014) assure that such analysis “opens up the possibility of comparing the narratives in a data set, of establishing shared themes, as well as highlighting individual differences.” (p 77) contributing to their comparison for contrasting them and identifying patterns. As Polkinghorne (1995, p.15) argues, thematic procedures have the “capacity to develop general knowledge about a collection of stories,” but the knowledge that is produced is “abstract and formal, and by necessity underplays the unique and particular aspects of each story.” (cited by Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2014, p. 81)

Thematic analysis “involves repeated reading of the data, coding and categorization of data extracts, and their reorganization under thematic headings.” (Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2014, p. 75). In this type of analysis, major themes are presented first and they are followed by the corresponding subthemes and extracts from the narratives to serve as illustration.



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In the case of this research, the themes were determined in advance. There were three initial themes, as follows: 1. Language Learning, 2. Language Teaching, 3. Socio-academic context. However, during the process of coding the data, the general themes were modified and resulted in: 1. Beliefs, 2. English teaching, and 3. Educational context.

## 5.1 Translation of Data

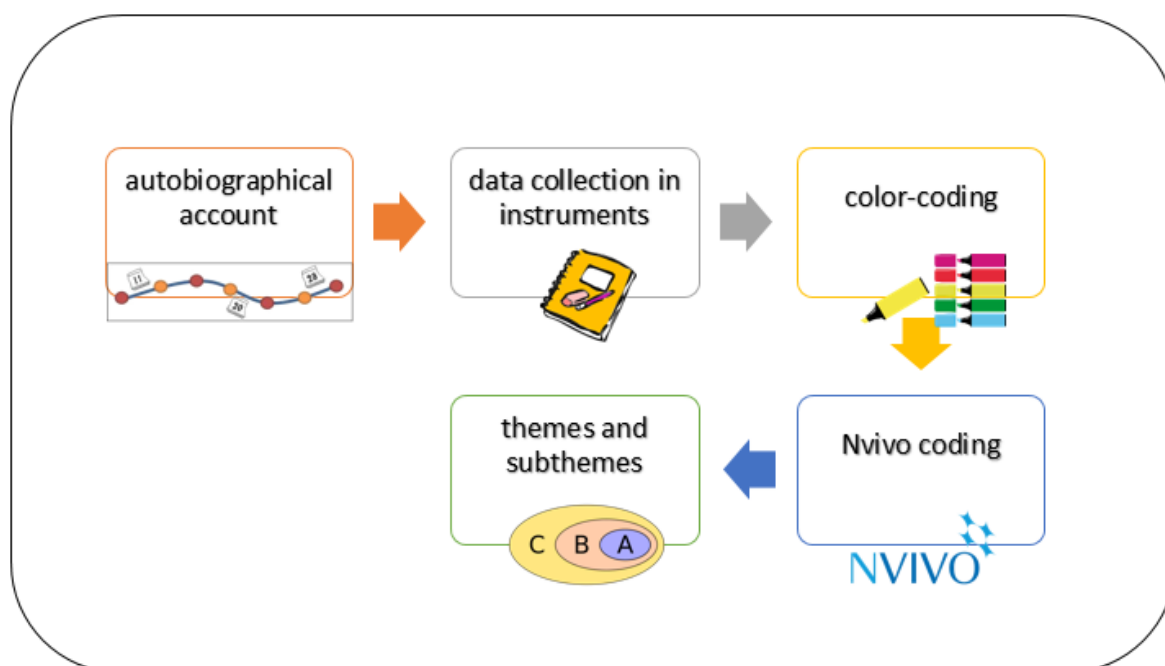


Figure 1. Data translation process

Being a thematic analysis, every story, reflective journal and autobiographical account was read and reread to make sense of it. Initially, since this project was part of a collaborative research exercise, the documents were analyzed in the lights of the three pre-established themes

mentioned below. With that purpose in mind, the documents were color-coded by hand to look for evidence of the themes.

Later, continuing with the formative process in research, the same documents were coded with the help of a data analysis software. Through this process, the themes were redefined, and new subthemes were created. (Refer to table 1) For example, my narrative did not offer relevant evidence towards my process of learning English, but it did offer a lot of input towards my educational context in broader terms. Another theme that emerged was the one related to Beliefs. Throughout my narrative, I constantly refer to what I used to think, or how my beliefs towards teaching are different.

The coding exercise offered the opportunity to identify examples for each emergent theme and the initial one. It also offered a meaningful exercise for interpreting my data and making sense of my personal experience. The software created a correlational diagram (see figure 2) and a word cloud that highlights the most frequent words in my instruments. (See figure 3). With the themes, the sub-themes, the correlational chart and the word cloud, I was able to draw the conclusions to be presented on the next section.



| THEMES                                                                  | SUB-THEMES                                                        |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Pre-service Teacher Beliefs                                          | 1.1 Before being a pre-service teacher                            |
| 2. Going from untrained English teacher to professional English teacher | 2.1 Self-training                                                 |
|                                                                         | 2.2 Pedagogical transformations based on classroom practices      |
|                                                                         | 2.3 Pedagogical transformations based on professional development |
|                                                                         | 2.4 Significant experiences as a pre-service teacher              |
| 3. Educational context                                                  | 3.1 Bilingual education                                           |
|                                                                         | 3.2 Interaction with other teachers                               |

Table 1. Themes and corresponding sub-themes that emerged from the coding of data

## 5.2 Themes and Subthemes:

### 1. BELIEFS OF A PRE-SERVICE TEACHER

Throughout the analysis of the accounts, it is very evident that my beliefs guided my transformations. In this sense, recording them helped me understand how every aspect of my life as a teacher has impacted my beliefs, and as a result, my actions. For example, I stopped considering that grammar was central to the teaching of English, especially when teaching young minds. There is an evident shift from intuitive beliefs to theory-grounded opinions and choices.



*“In my opinion, now I was prepared enough to call myself an English teacher. I felt confident because I was prepared for that since I knew all the grammar explanations. My life as an English teacher - August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017*

*“After working at language schools for over 7 years, I felt that I was getting stuck in my professional life. I didn’t have to think too hard in my classes because I had “mastered” the grammar and the didactics.”*  
*Teacher Training Provided by Schools – June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017*

### 1.1 Before being a pre-service teacher

There is a clear shift in beliefs before studying the Bachelor’s in EFL and after going through this professional development process. The accounts show a more intuitive and less grounded set of beliefs that shaped my practice at the time. My choices were based on trial and error, imitating successful teachers or misconceptions of the teaching of English.

*“In my opinion, now I was prepared enough to call myself an English teacher. I felt confident because I was prepared for that since I knew all the grammar explanations.” My life as an English teacher – August 21, 2016*



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## **2. GOING FROM UNTRAINED ENGLISH TEACHER TO PROFESSIONAL ENGLISH TEACHER**

Teaching English has been a permanent role in my life, from the moment where there was no formal education on teaching training until I got it through a Bachelor's Degree on English as a Foreign Language. One way or another, there was always an interest on making decisions that favored the students, whether they were founded on theory or not.

*"I started preparing my classes with the help of grammar books to be ready to offer a satisfactory response to those whys. In my opinion, now I was prepared enough to call myself an English teacher. My life as an English teacher – August 21, 2016*

*Throughout my education, I discovered all the aspects that are truly involved in teaching: pedagogical principles, the didactics of English, teaching throughout the ages and teaching throughout the levels." My life as an English teacher – August 21, 2016*

### **2.1 Self-training**

Throughout my career as an English teacher, I had made pedagogical choices based on intuition; I looked for things that were important for my job and looked for ways of preparing



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myself for the job. In this sense, before going to formal education, I educated myself in the rules of grammar and in the didactics of English as a Foreign Language. This permeated my current practices as a teacher because many of them I still use in the present.

*“But teaching young minds differs significantly from teaching adults. So, in this opportunity I started replicating what my teachers did when I went to school; once again, without understanding why or if those choices were correct.” My Life as an English Teacher – August 21, 2016*

*“Since I wanted to be a good teacher, I started learning the grammar rule that corresponded to each lesson so that I could be ready just in case any of them would ask a question related to that But I feel proud of myself because most of my strategies were self-taught and self-discovered and they taught me how to be creative and fun for my students, who are the ones that truly matter in this process.” Teaching Myself How to Become a Better Teacher – May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017*

## 2.2 Pedagogical Transformations based on Classroom Practices

The accounts evidence several changes in action based on observation of my own practice. What I stopped doing, what I started doing, etc. But they were not related to the knowledge that



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comes from formal education, they came from my personal reflection of the classes and the activities that I performed in my every day practice.

*“Through observation of successful classes I was able to see that games are highly efficient. So now I began to integrate games as much as possible in every class.” Teaching Myself How to Become a Better Teacher – May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017*

*“This first school did not offer me much training but it sure helped me remember how I had been educated at a bilingual school. All those positive memories were put into practice, especially those that I knew that had been a struggle for me.” Teacher Training Provided by Schools – June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017*

## 2.3 Pedagogical Transformations based on Professional Development

As mentioned before, the narrative evidences a series of actions taken on the knowledge acquired through the teacher training obtained from both, the workplaces and the university. This decisions shaped the practice in a permanent way and motivated me to justify my every move on theory and not on intuition or trial and error.



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*"I started changing my classes, I stopped trying to teach my primary students any grammar rule. I also began thinking about meaningful ways in which they could interact with the language in a concrete way. I discovered the importance of games from the didactic point of view, not from the intuitive one. Even my ways of assessing their knowledge changed. I can say that I was able to give a sound foundation to some of the choices I did before starting the Bachelor's, but I was also able to merge my successful practices with my newly acquired knowledge." "Studying a Bachelor's – June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2017*

## 2.4 Significant experiences as a pre-service teacher

I have had a long journey from the moment I was hired to teach English based on the fact that I could speak the language despite the fact that I had no teacher training or skills to do it, to the moment where I finished my studies in the Bachelor's Degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language, where every choice and every pedagogical move is based on theory and solid foundations. However, in between, there were many other moments that crossed my path that shaped the teacher I am today; meeting other teachers, reflecting on my successful activities, receiving formative teacher training from schools, among others.

*"My career as an English teacher began over 20 years ago. I was hired to teach English to adults because I could speak it." My life as an English teacher – August 21st, 2016*



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*“If being a teacher was what I really wanted in life, I would have to make it professionally; I would study a Bachelor’s Degree. “ Teacher Training Provided by Schools – June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017*

*“In the end, I can say that, after 5 years of dedication to understanding the nuts and bolts of teaching English, making the decision of studying a Bachelor’s Degree on Teaching English as a Foreign Language was one of the best investments that I have made.” Studying a Bachelor’s – June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2017*

### **3. ENGLISH LEARNING AND TEACHING CONTEXTS**

The kind of education I received drove me to the profession I have today, however, every aspect of my professional life has offered some benefit to my career. Not only the fact that I can speak the language fluently, but every training, every course and every interaction with fellow teachers has contributed to shape my practice.

#### **3.1 English Language Education**

It all started by being hired because I knew how to speak English fluently. But later on in my career, I made some pedagogical decisions based on the way I had been educated, what worked and what did not because now I was a teacher at a bilingual school. Definitely, having had a



bilingual education played an essential role in my practices as an English teacher in bilingual schools. It provided a reference for imitating those things that contributed positively and eliminating those that were useless or not pertinent.

*“This first school did not offer me much training but it sure helped me remember how I had been educated at a bilingual school. All those positive memories were put into practice, especially those that I knew that had been a struggle for me. But it was in the second and in the third schools where I did get meaningful teacher training.” - Teacher Training Provided by Schools - June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017*

### 3.2 Sharing Experiences with English Teachers

Being in touch with other teachers definitely has had an impact on the kind of teacher I am today. I learned from them and their experience. I shared opinions with them; we grew together. But in the case of the practice, it gave me the chance to work with someone who is not like me, but totally different. Merging our styles and watching him perform definitely had an impact on my own practice.

*“I also had the chance to see that teaching English in the conditions I do is a privilege compared to teaching English in public schools or in rural schools.” My life as an English teacher – August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2016*



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*“When working at Winston-Salem, I was lucky to meet two of the best language teachers. They not only offered grammar rules, but they also came up with strategies for students to remember them easier, like riddles, chants or hieroglyphs.” Teaching Myself How to Become a Better Teacher – May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017*



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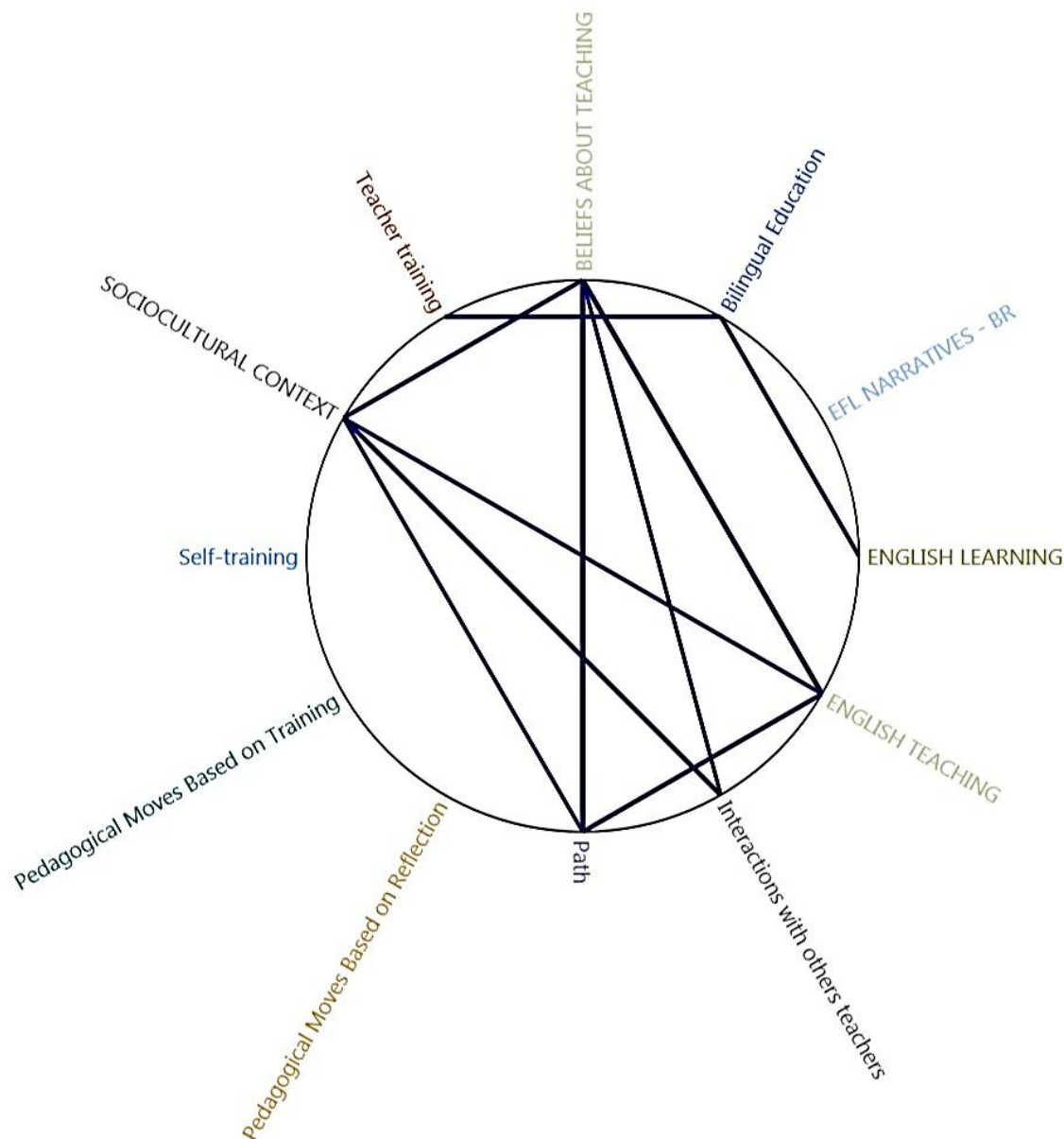


Figure 2. This map shows the correlation between categories according to their coding. It was created by Nvivo using the coefficient of Sorensen. It shows the similarities presented in the coding of the resources.





Figure 3. The word cloud above presents the most frequent words within the different narrations analyzed through this narrative. There three most popular words in the narrations are students, teaching and English. The word count was elaborated with Nvivo and it comprised the 8 instruments that served as data to be analyzed in this narrative inquiry.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The Narrative Inquiry of my personal experience allowed me to evidence the evolution from intuition to theoretical grounds. It highlighted the importance of teacher training, on the one hand, and teacher-to-teacher interaction, on the other one. While the former proved to give solid foundations to pedagogical choices, the latter provided different perspectives towards the teaching of English, enriching the know-how of the practice. In this sense, my autobiographical stories and narrations offered meaningful insight of the experiences that came from the teaching and learning of the language and their role in the pedagogical transformations that emerged from them.

Another meaningful aspect of analyzing my own story came in the shift of beliefs that I had towards teaching, the role of English and the rationale behind my pedagogical moves. In this sense, my autobiographical narrative evidenced what Ellis (2012) stated when remarking that “teachers hold beliefs about teaching and construct their own personal theories of teaching (Woods, 1996) which potentially influence how they act.” For instance, since I thought that knowing the grammar rules made me an excellent English teacher, I did not consider the Bachelor’s in EFL as my first choice, or I planned lessons for my primary students around those grammar rules. Later on in my life, when I shifted from a grammar-based belief towards a principles-based belief, my classes and materials offered a lot more than grammar, and sometimes, they did not even contemplate it as a core element of the lesson.



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The analysis of narratives became an opportunity for establishing connections between meaningful events of my life as a teacher and a student that otherwise would appear to be meaningless. For example, it gave me the chance to identify the roles that fellow teachers have played in my professional life, not only as a way of understanding that each one of us is a unique teacher with a particular story, but also in my professional growth through their assistance or their modelling. Another example is the role of my personal reflection, but not the one fostered by the academic process, but the one that came from the critical point of view that I used throughout my teaching life. Needed to be said, this reflection became evident to me after the analysis of my narrative accounts and reflections.

Many times I have shared with my fellow teachers the story of how I, arrogantly, thought that I did not need any training on the teaching of English, but how my process throughout my studies in the Bachelor's in EFL humbled me to the point where I recognized that knowing English grammar does not make me a professional English teacher. By reading my accounts in chronological order, I can see a clear evolution from a non-educated teacher, to a pre-service teacher, to a professional teacher of English. While the first actions were based on trial and error, intuition or random acts of reflection, my current choices are always thought through and founded on theoretical support.



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Nothing proves to be more evident of this last point than my pedagogical practice. Had I taken over this task at the beginning of my career, I would have failed to offer a meaningful and successful course to my teenage students. Every activity, every topic, every material was designed having in mind the specific group of students who enrolled in my class. This was not random, it was the result of the collection of experiences as a non-educated teacher supported by the formal training received from schools and from my program in Bachelor of EFL. My narrative inquiry proved that the success in my course was due to a long process of education and personal reflection towards my teaching career.

Given the above, by reflecting on my practices and my learning processes, I became aware of essential aspects of language learning that I have experienced to transfer them into meaningful strategies when teaching. For instance, and I would say the most important of them all is understanding the role of the age in my students' ability to learn the language. Not only that, but also how the age group brings a set of variables that used correctly, result in successful classes; motivation, interests, suitable activities, to name a few.

My reconstruction was necessary to offer myself meaningful input on the role my beliefs and choices in my professional development as a teacher of English as a Foreign Language. The awareness generated by the analysis of my narratives has led me towards keeping certain practices like carrying out a needs analysis, or staying away from other practices and moves like



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basing my English classes on grammar rules and rote practice. This would not have been evident to me if I had not retold my story with the purpose of dissecting it to make sense of it.

According to Ellis (2012), “there are obvious advantages in teachers sharing the results of their research – both for themselves (in terms of the feedback they will receive in a public forum) and for other teachers (who can benefit from the insights the research provides).” (p. 26). In this way, by making sense of my autobiography, not only will I use that information to make informed choices about my practice and my career, but my voice will contribute to the characterization of the voices of students in the program of the Bachelor’s of English as a Foreign Language.

By understanding the role that my personal history plays in my practices as an English teacher, I may use that information to replicate them when they prove to be successful or stop using them when they were not. This would assure myself and the places that I am working at that my teaching practice is the result of deep reflection founded on theory in regards to factors such as the daily amount of language exposition, the role of English in the institution, the ages of students, the understanding of English didactics, among others.

On the other hand, my project has nourished a collaborative research carried out in the Research Mentorship Project, as such it will provide the voice of a bilingual student who came in



search of a professional development, a voice similar to other students in the program, providing meaningful insight on the role of the Bachelor's in EFL in the education of such students.

In the case of the program of Bachelor in English as a Foreign Language, it would offer information for other pre-service teachers who, as myself, have been performing as untrained English teachers who were hired because of their bilingual education to take that into account when setting up the program.

Finally, it could become a reference to understand factors that are inherent to the person itself, such as English-learning process, teacher training or lack of it, motivations to join the Bachelor's program, providing useful insight on the decision-making process regarding the program for Bachelor's Degree in English as a Foreign Language and the eligible candidates.



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Vigencia por seis años

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## ANNEXES

### 1. Non- Narrative Instruments

#### 1.1 Reflective Journal

#### 1.2



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| STUDENT'S NAME: _____                                                                                                       |                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| JOURNAL # _____                                                                                                             |                                                                                                           |
| School and/or community name: _____                                                                                         |                                                                                                           |
| Group: _____                                                                                                                | Session / Class #: _____                                                                                  |
| Date: _____                                                                                                                 | Place: _____                                                                                              |
| Activity to reflect on: _____                                                                                               |                                                                                                           |
| Purpose of the activity: _____                                                                                              |                                                                                                           |
| Description                                                                                                                 | Reflection/ Analysis                                                                                      |
| What I & my students did in during the lesson (very detailed description)                                                   | What I think about what happened<br>Make explicit difficulties or unexpected situations during the lesson |
| Evaluation: What I might do in further sessions to get better results<br>Suggestions I do myself to improve further lessons |                                                                                                           |



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## 1.2 Video Reflection



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FACULTY OF EDUCATION

BACHELOR IN

FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Pedagogical Practice V

Bibiana María Rodríguez Gómez

November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016

### Video Reflection

This is the link to the video:

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0BzQFIdIq8fXmZVlPeVA3OWdOQzA>

### Reflection

#### 1. *What were the positive aspects of this class?*

The purpose of having them use what they want to and have to express plans and their action plans was achieved. They were able to form the controlled-practice sentences and were able to provide their own examples. At the end, they were able to create their own plans connecting sentences logically.

Students were able to interact in unrehearsed situations because the materials helped them in this purpose. The convention of the bubbles helped them carry out their activities as it was expected. The spinner offered them enough practice to understand the use of time expressions in a fun way. This was verbalized by some of them.

Another aspect that was positive was that only 10 actions were introduced at the beginning of the class but, with the help of their vocabulary, these were expanded to serve personal needs.

Despite the possible issues that could have arisen from their limited vocabulary in relation to the creation of plans of action, students were able to provide coherent plans. Of course, their sentences were basic, but made total sense.

Finally, the self-evaluation was carried out with some assistance and little translation. They understood what they had to do and answered it as expected. Their answers were honest and realistic.

#### 2. *What went wrong? What happened differently from what had been planned?*

This activity was planned as a way of talking about their big plans. Understanding that teenagers are not great planners for the long run, I planned it for short-term goals. Though they understood the structures and the vocabulary, some of them gave immediate plans like the costume they wanted to wear that night for a Halloween party. In the future, I can anticipate this problem and differentiate a simple plan from a goal.

I would have liked a little more movement within the class, but students got intimidated by the camera. If this had not been present, I am sure they would have come to the board to point out the right image. This was evident in the first section of the video where I asked Sergio to come and show me and he said no. However, I also think this was also the result of the type of activities that were planned. They did offer interaction, but everything had to be done in their places. After watching the video, I decided to plan a more active lesson for the last class. They had to stand, write on the board and sit in the floor instead of just staying in their chairs.

#### 3. *What aspects do you feel you should improve? How can you do it?*

The calendar was too small for them to read the sentences inside the boxes. I anticipated this problem once it was pasted on the board and decided to write the plans bigger on the board using arrows to show the sentence they represented. Although it didn't affect the activity, it is for sure something to have in mind next time.

While watching the video, I was able to notice that they were constantly participating, but it was evident that they were sitting in their chairs for a long time. I could make the interactions of the double-sided task cards in a way they have to stand up and look for their partner. The spinner activity could be done in rotating groups so they interact with more people while moving around the class.

Although the vocabulary expansion came from their ideas, it was basically carried out by me. Sometimes I did not hear their ideas, or recorded something different because the spoke too low and the acoustics of the place did not help either. I could think of a different way to get the same results but in a more dynamic fashion and



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## 2. Narrative Instruments

### 2.1 Autobiographical Account

My Career as an English Teacher

By Bibiana Rodríguez

Account elaborated on August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2016

My career as an English teacher began over 20 years ago. I was hired to teach English to adults because I could speak it. I had been educated in bilingual schools and had a fluent use of the language. In that moment that was believed to be enough; however, when asked about the reasons to use a specific structure instead of another, I was not able to provide logical information. I started preparing my classes with the help of grammar books to be ready to offer a satisfactory response to those whys. In my opinion, now I was prepared enough to call myself an English teacher.

Later in my career, I shifted from adult education to primary education. In that opportunity I was hired because I had experience teaching English for over 7 years. I felt confident because I was prepared for that since I knew all the grammar explanations. But teaching young minds differs significantly from teaching adults. So, in this opportunity I started replicating what my teachers did when I went to school; once again, without understanding why or if those choices were correct.

After 9 years of performing as a teacher in bilingual schools, I was sure that I wanted to be a teacher for the rest of my life. In that moment I decided that I would study a Bachelor's degree. Since I had been doing this for so many years, I did not consider English as my first choice. I thought that my practice and personal





## 2.2 Teacher Reflective Journals

### Teaching Myself How to Become a Better Teacher

By Bibiana Rodríguez Gómez

Account elaborated on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017

After getting a job as an English teacher at a language school, I remember feeling embarrassed because I could not offer a proper explanation to students who relied on my knowledge of the language. I remember asking one of my workmates the answer to a question that one of the students asked me, but I failed to answer. It was then when I realized that the clue was on the grammar rules. He offered a sound and sensible answer based on grammar rules. Since I wanted to be a good teacher, I started learning the grammar rule that corresponded to each lesson so that I could be ready just in case any of them would ask a question related to that.

Later on, when working at Winston-Salem, I was lucky to meet two of the best language teachers. They not only offered grammar rules, but they also came up with strategies for students to remember them easier, like riddles, chants or hieroglyphs. I did take some of their ideas, but I also made that part of my own practice. I would look for the logic behind the rule and come up with a fun, different way to teach it. Since I taught from true beginners to advance students, I can say I learned all the essential grammar of English. But Winston-Salem had a specific methodology that had to be followed in every class. So there was no space for creativity beyond the memory tricks.

When my job at Winston-Salem was over, I began at a language school called American English Institute. This was when I began exploring different methods for teaching English. I already had the grammar knowledge and the memory tricks. Now I had to come up with a creative way to get my students talking and enjoying English. At the time I didn't know this was called didactics. For me it was class creation. Through observation of



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