

## **LICENCIATURA EN LENGUA EXTRANJERA INGLÉS**

### **MODELING A PRE-SERVICE TEACHER'S IDENTITY**

Research Field

The use of the English Language and its Contexts

Research Subproject

The Voices of the LLEI realities: Life stories and experiences

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## ABSTRACT

This research emphasizes on the use of the narrative inquiry methodology in order to narrate experiences of my different life stages, which guided me into completing my Bachelor's degree in Teaching English as a foreign language at the University of Santo Tomás through distance education. It involves some of the most important elements that made this accomplishment possible such as interculturality, family support, being a stay at home mother and most importantly identity formation.

The research design applied in order to develop this autobiographical study was a narrative. All data used for the completion of this project was based on the instruments proposed by Barkhuizen et al, this data gives account of my personal and academic experiences. Through the elaboration of different narratives, the transcription of the interviews, and through the analysis of different photographs about different stages of my life, I was able to reflect on the aspects of my life that could be considered turning points and that have influenced me into taking the path of searching an education after establishing a family. The implementation of a thematic analysis was applied to the different stories/narrations throughout this project, and through them, I was able to appreciate that the different life stages that I went through as: a child, teenager and young adult were the experiences that structured me into the: adult, mother, wife, daughter, student and teacher that I am today. Beyond the narration description of different life stages, I was able to conclude on which factors caused the most impact and to shape the identity that defines me to this day.

**Key words:** *Biographical Narrative, Identity, Interculturality, Self-regulation, Family support*



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## **Section 1. CONTEXTUALIZATION**

The present autobiographical study under the narrative inquiry illustrates how different factors shaped my identity as a mother and English teacher. Factors as family, cultural issues, inner motivation become a fascinating exploration zone, surrounded by the aims to learn, to be a good professional and a loving wife and mother. Life experiences, family support and processes of self-regulation were the center of this study. The autobiography was framed around the experiences I lived from the moment I left my native country, Honduras and moved to Canada. The bibliographical story also narrates episodes of my life in Canada and my life in my now home, Bucaramanga, Colombia.

The narrative inquiry approach allowed me set out my life anecdotes in a way that I could tell my own story or restory my life experiences. This allowed me to “self-analyze” the most important facts that have slowly molded the identity that to this day, identifies me.

The importance of interculturality and family support, are continually set out in the project as they are the most important aspects that have influenced me. Through the narration of different stages and experiences, I was able to self-analyze the most important life events that have impacted my identity and that have deliberately shaped me into the person I am today.

## Section 2. RESEARCH STATEMENT

The narration of personal life stories allows us to return to different events that have slowly molded us into the people we have become and defines the identity we have acquired. According to Convey (1999) “Narrations allow us to reflect on aspects of our lives that we frequently tend to ignore; even though they mark an important aspect of our identities”. It was through the execution of revisiting these stories that identity is created.

For example, the construction of my own life story allowed me to portray the hardships and the blessings that have transformed me into the person that I am today: and at the same these were able to determine what factors were the most influential when going through the process of adapting to new cultures, being a stay at home mother and at the same working on the completion of a Bachelor’s degree.

After extensively seeking for different ideas for this project, and receiving valuable guidance, I finally decided to work with what was important for me not just as a student, but also as mother seeking to comply with her personal goals. I decided that working with my own story would be an ideal way to express the importance of matters such as interculturality and its integrated process of adapting to new cultures; as well family support and the exceptional importance that inner motivation brought to my life and how these two factors became my major support systems throughout this process.

The research question for this project arose after making extensive changes to it through detail analysis of the most influential experiences that marked my identity in the different stages as were my childhood, my adulthood and most importantly, my motherhood stage.

Through the narratives, I was able to establish how these experiences have been able to contribute to the University's LLEI by setting out a confident voice about life experiences and being part of its first, and especially important macro project: Understanding and characterizing EFL in the LLEI: experiences and phenomena in the pre-service teacher's educational context.

My experience could be considered a voice that sets out that these accomplishments can have a great impact in a person's life and can motivate others to do so as well. It is certain that works such as these can act as an inspiration for others to carry out similar practices, and in the long run have a positive outcome in our community.

## Research Question

How do life experiences mold a pre-service teacher's identity?

## Research Objectives

- To retrieve information about the main characteristics and features of an EFL pre-service teacher's experience who decided to immigrate to Canada and now is living in Colombia.
- To analyze the experiences and circumstances while living, studying, working, and learning English in different milieus.
- To reflect on how the pre-service's experiences impact in the teaching practice.

### Section 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research was a result of the extensive review of different authors' texts such as Bullough (2015), Fajardo (2014), and mostly Barkhuizen (2014) where their study in the topics refer to the aim of the project. Without a doubt, these authors were the foundation of my investigation. Nevertheless, through the guidance of my thesis advisor, I was able to identify the factors that have constructed my own identity. This means that identity, as our universe, never ends; on the contrary, identity can change in form and could be sculpted constantly, these opening sentences allow me to introduce the theoretical framework.

#### Narrative Inquiry

The development of this project was elaborated through a narrative inquiry approach, this approach allowed me to analyze different life events, factors, and milestones of my life that influenced me into completing my Bachelor's degree in teaching English as a foreign language. But most importantly, which have in the most part shaped my identity throughout the years. "Narrative inquiry is the study of experience understood narratively. It is a way of thinking about and studying experience" (Clandinin & Huber, 2007, p.1) this being the primary objective in completing this project, in my case, and as Creswell states: "it begins with the experiences as expressed and told stories of individuals". (Creswell 2018).

Different life events, experiences, and stories are narrated in this project and have a great focus on identity and the shaping of this important personal characteristic. Connelly & Clandinin (2007) make a very assertive statement when they affirm “People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are, and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories”. Stories are a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful.

## **Interculturality**

Interculturality from a simple view can be defined as the “Cultural enrichment and exchange between people of different cultures” (Trujillo, 2002). However, from a more complex and communicative standpoint: “Interculturality, then, is the educational objective related to culture and communication and it is defined as “the active participation in communication helped by critical awareness and analysis, and motivated by the appreciation of diversity as the foundation of society.” (Trujillo 2002).

Based on the previous definitions, I can acknowledge that interculturality has been an essential aspect of my life that has deliberately shaped who I am. Through the continuous moving within countries from a young age, I have been forced to put my intercultural skills into practice without giving it much thought. I can almost consider this as acting on automatic mode as there were no other options but to learn from the new cultures in these new environments; but most importantly to adapt to them with a constantly decreasing amount of hesitation.

In the case of moving to Colombia, the following excerpt serves as an example:

*“Firstly, adapting to a new culture based on the communication needs, and secondly adapting to a new culture based on the way they are accustomed to doing things, in this particular example: driving without strictly following transit regulations as opposed to driving respecting these transit by-laws.”*

## Identity

Convery (1999) states: “identity is created rather than revealed through narrative”, and McAdams makes this point, even more considerable when he mentions that “identity involves putting a life together into stories that further the achievement of one’s goals and that have explanatory power” (McAdams 2001). Through this project, I will share the most important factors that have helped me achieve this important milestone as is the completion of my Bachelor’s degree while learning to adapt to a different cultures and while being a stay at home mother simultaneously.

I acknowledge Bullough’s thoughts when he states that “within the process of working out our individual identities, sharing contexts, traditions, forms of discourse and mythic cultural stories, common themes emerge and find support.” (Bullough, 2014).

Through the compilation of different images and the analysis of these; I was also able to self-analyze more about my life achievements and the positive effect that having consistent family support has represented for me. The process of picture analysis allowed me to “restory” my most

important life events. “Restoring is the process of reorganizing the stories into some general type of framework”. (Creswell 2018). This process was particularly important as it allowed me to determine what aspects to include in the completion of the project. From a young age, I was granted the opportunity to live in different countries, which allowed me to learn about different cultures and to learn to adapt to them.

As McAdams writes: life stories reflect the social and cultural worlds within which lives attain their existential meanings. (McAdams 2004). The impact that different cultures have in a person’s life is most definitely meaningful, and having the opportunity to express it through narrative is a comforting experience, in hopes that it can inspire others to reflect on their own past experiences allowing them to pursue the achievement of their goals.

Through the consideration of these definitions, I was able to understand that identity refers to numerous areas of a person’s life. However, for me, the most common and simple purpose of identity is to expose who we are now and why we are, what we are. This is applicable to different areas of our life, whether personally, socially or labor related. There are many different factors that influence the person we are today, and uncountable elements that will shape our identity into the person we will become later.

As Loftus states (2003) “memories are crucially important to identity formation, therefore it is essential to self-reflect on the different experiences that we have undergone that have been able to shape us into the person that we have become and reflect on the learnings that we have

acquired throughout the years deliberately shaping our identities; those learnings could come from the gender, the religion, the society and the cultural component. (Loftus, 2003).

Through memories we can set precedents in our personal lives and without realizing it, this inevitably makes us who we are.

For McAdams, identity then, “is an integrative configuration of self in the adult world” (McAdams 2001). However, from a personal perspective, I disagree with McAdams as I passionately believe that identity formation is a lifelong process and is composed of more than social interaction or teaching experiences in adulthood. Even though different authors discuss the importance of different identity shaping factors, I firmly believe that both positive and negative, personal and exterior factors, are all equally important as they all contribute to the shaping of a person’s identity through a more slow-paced process.

### **Language Teacher Identity**

Fajardo (2012), states “teachers take on a new identity because of the experiences gained in the process of learning to teach. This identity is formed, shaped or transformed as they participate in a teacher community and develop skills and teaching competence”.

On the other hand, Barkhuizen (2017), provides a much-elaborated definition of language teacher identity when he states that “language teacher identities (LTIs) are cognitive, social, emotional, ideological, and historical-they are both inside the teacher and outside in the social, material and technological world. LTIs are being and doing, feeling, and imagining, and storying.

They are struggle and harmony: they are contested and resisted, by self and others, and they are also accepted, acknowledged, and valued, by self and others. They are core and peripheral, personal, and professional, they are dynamic, multiple, and hybrid, and they are foregrounded and back grounded. LTIs change, short-term and over time-discursively in social interaction with teacher educators, learners, teachers, administrators, and the wider community, and in material interaction with spaces, places and objects in classrooms, institutions, and online.” Barkhuizen (2017).

Through the years seeking to complete my bachelor’s at the University of Santo Tomas. I was deeply influenced by some important events, for instance, my practicum at Colegio Victor Felix Gomez Nova, a school with a student overpopulation and with limited resources where children from different vulnerable conditions attended. This experience was of great impact on my teacher identity formation.

I must admit that even though I enjoyed having the autonomy to choose how and what to teach during these two semesters; it was hard not to notice the hardship that these students endured due to economic difficulties. As Bullough brilliantly mentions, “Like all institutions, schools represent narrative spaces within which stories are told, myths encountered, and identities form and evolve”, (Bullough, 2014) and not just for students, but this applies to teachers as well.

#### Section 4. RESEARCH DESIGN

“Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, is firstly and foremost a way of thinking about experience. To use a narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a view of experience as a phenomenon under study”. (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

The implementation of the narrative inquiry was the most appropriate method for the development of this project as it allowed me to self-analyze and become aware of the real meaning that stands behind some life stories that have shaped me into the person I am today. Bruner sets out that “the stories we tell about our lives are our autobiographies” (p. 91).

The narrative inquiry approach offered me “the opportunity to provide access to long-term experiences through retrospection and imagination. This is the most distinctive quality of narrative inquiry”. Barkhuizen (2014).

According to Barkhuizen (2014), “narrative inquiry is the only methodology that provides access to language teaching and learning, as lived experiences that take place over long periods of time and in multiple settings and context” (p. 12) just as it is being developed in the current paper. This autobiography study examined in detail my perceptions and interpretations about the important events in my life and the importance they have brought out in my identity as a teacher.

Barkhuizen & Wette affirm that in regards to the field of teacher education research; the interest in autobiographical narratives is grounded in the belief 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).

While gathering ideas of which topic to work on, I had never considered working on an autobiography for purposes of this university requisition. Generally, the topics studied in university investigations are predominantly related to academic and/or pedagogical views or applications; from my personal perspective, my life story did not seem to qualify under any of these two.

However, after some personal research and further advice from my tutor, I was able to understand that thanks to the new vision in investigation that the program at Universidad Santo Tomás has, where two different macro projects: 1. Innovative practices in English teaching and learning: practices of the LLEI pre-service teachers and 2. Understanding and characterizing EFL in the LLEI: experiences and phenomena in the pre-service teachers’ educational contexts; I was (without a doubt) able to establish that my investigation corresponds to the second macro project more specifically under the third research subproject: the voices of the LLEI realities, life stories and experiences (narrative subprojects).

Based on this, my investigation was to be executed through two different two different points of view, English and its contexts and teaching English as a second language.

My tutor helped me realize the importance of setting these experiences down on paper; not only for the personal benefit of finding out how my identity was shaped, but also to allow my experiences help inspire others in similar situations.

The instruments used to for this investigation were instruments that would reflect my personal views and perspectives on different life experiences, as Wang and Geal mention: “the narrative approach allows for a rich description of these experiences and an exploration of the meanings that the participants derive from their experiences.” (Wang 2015).

I am certain that no other instrument would have provided a more in-depth description of these experiences than narratives expressed by own words.

The instruments used to collect the data were 1. an interview or “oral narrative” by my tutor Ms. Bonilla (Annex A), 2. a narrative frame called *My life* (Annex B), 3. Pedagogical practice written narrative (Annex C) 4. a Lesson plan multimodal narrative (Annex D), *My family*, multimodal narrative (Annex E), *Return to Canada: Life in Calgary* written narrative (Annex F).

The interview or “oral narrative” (Annex A) was the beginning of a data collection process for narratives that I would later develop. The interview or “oral narrative” (Annex A) was carried out in co-construction with my tutor, Miss Bonilla. Under Barkhuizen’s philosophy, it is was considered an open interview “where the course of interview is figured out as the interview unfolds” Barkhuizen (2014).

After this interview, I began to consider the different aspects that I was bound to cover during the

investigation. My tutor asked questions that allowed me to begin my reflection process and work on different narratives thereafter. The second instrument applied was a written narrative frame called: My life narrative (Annex B). This was the process in which I spent most of my time going back to previous years of my life and which brought out the most important information in order to gather the necessary data to reflect on the shaping of my identity. Barkhuizen, et al. (2014) note, “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). This part of the process helped me realize the importance that different events and difficulties I had encountered brought to my life and the lessons it had left for purposes of my identity shaping. I believe it is important to mention that with these types of studies, “We seem to be recognizing more now that everyone has a story, even many, to tell about his or her life, and that the stories we have to tell are indeed important” (Atkinson 1995, 1998; Kenyon and Randall 1997; Randall 1995; Gubrium and Holstein 1998).

A different type of narrative that I used was the multimodal text narrative, these are as Barkhuizen states “Narratives constructed using more than one mode of data narratives. These are written narratives supported or supplemented by photographs”.

## Picture 1. Pedagogical Practice Multimodal Narratives

| Building Experiences<br>Pedagogical Practice                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Categories                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  <p>During my pedagogical practice I was able to put into practice the skills learned at the University of Santo Tomás, and I was also able to learn many new skills along the way while working with the students of Colegio Víctor Félix Gómez Nava in Piedecuesta, Santander.</p> <p>Through these experiences I was able to establish excellent relationships with my students through respectful and caring conversations. Nothing matters more than the way the students feel when they are being taught. If a student is taught in a hostile environment their learning outcomes will reflect this treatment. However, if a student is with taught with patience and understanding, the results will be outstanding.</p> <p>The methodology used was another important element that evidenced the importance of taking into consideration the students' current age and interest in order to have better outcomes.</p> <p>The experiences built through my pedagogical practice</p> | <p>In Bensons 2006, he states that "the achievement of proficiency in a second language is often a long-term or lifelong process, in which experiences of language learning and use are intertwined with experiences of life." (Benson 2006)</p> |

In picture 1, Pedagogical practice multimodal narrative, my involvement with the practice of teaching English at two different schools in Piedecuesta, Santander is demonstrated. I believe the importance of this stage was essential to the development of this investigation as it was through this process that I was able to recognize the value that that these types of experiences bring to a teacher's identity.

While working on my Pedagogical practice narrative (Annex C), through multimodal texts, I was able to also learn the importance that this stage brought for the culmination of my bachelor's degree. It allowed me to reflect on the importance of the practicum part of this university process and was able to explicitly express the importance that this experience brings to the community; especially in the community where my practicum took place which was with children from a more vulnerable and susceptible community as a result: another identity shaping factor.

“Multimodal texts also explore ways of harnessing student resources and student identity in textual composition” (Shananahan, 2013). The use of these resources allowed me to explore a different method of investigating and allowed me to convey the different goals achieved through my practicum by using text as well as images to demonstrate the achievements of my pedagogical practice.

## Lesson plan narrative and analysis

Annex D, lesson plan narrative and analysis include the description of some of the lesson plans applied during the practicum and the results it brought to my practice during these times. Some of the objectives are portrayed in this narrative and at the same time demonstrates the way the objectives were carried out to complete the goals during this time. It was rewarding to look back and identify the aspects of the learning process my students went through during my practicum and the effectiveness I encountered through them, Barkhuizen (2014) is right when expressing that “Some of these narratives are constructed for the purposes of professional development (typically some sort of reflection on practice)”, which was the sole purpose of this narrative.

## Picture 2. Family Multidata Narratives

Multimodal narratives were also used to collect information about one of the foremost important topics of this investigation, my family (Annex D). The use of these narratives served a great purpose for gathering data about myself, the importance of different life stages was exhibited for purposes of identifying important periods of my life that also lead to the self-analysis of my teacher identity and its formation.

The main purpose of using pictures was to interpret and analyze the meaning of each image; I must acknowledge that the use of pictures served significantly in finding inspiration and having

| Family                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Categories                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  <p>This is my family; they have been my greatest support and strength in each of the different processes that I have gone through in my life in the past years.</p> <p>Becoming a wife has taught me the value of companionship and support. Becoming my children's mother has been the most selfless and I have undergone.</p> <p>This role continues to teach me the meaning of life; my children have become my greatest teachers, as they are my constant reminder that I should not give up on my goals as they are always watching and learning from me.</p> <p>It has been a very difficult and endless job, but it has been the most rewarding experience I have had the opportunity to live.</p>                                                           | <p>Having available people who positively support them in this respect, including extended family members, friends and partners, seems vital in determining how well mothers cope with these experiences (Day, 1999; Duncan, 2000a; Giffney, 2002; Katsialis, 2002)</p>                               |
| Adaptability                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Categories                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|  <p>Through the experience of living in different countries throughout my entire life, I have been able to learn to adapt to different circumstances.</p> <p>I have learned to become tolerant to different cultures and have managed to incorporate into these cultures with a sense of belonging.</p> <p>Even though each country required a period of adaptations, the process has helped me to become a more respectful person because it is not possible to live in a different place without putting the value of respect onto practice on a daily basis.</p> <p>Through these years of living in different countries, I have learned to enjoy and to focus in the positive aspects of these countries.</p> <p>Learnings to live in different places is an</p> | <p>Adaptation in a new country can be described as the process of waiting for your mind to arrive, waiting for an inner peace and adjustment. For some, that never happens. For others, it takes into the new society, some are lucky enough that the process is quicker.</p> <p>(Reynolds 2005).</p> |

the opportunity to look back at these times and acknowledge the importance that these events brought to the accomplishment of many life goals and the formation of my identity. “It is not just about selecting multimodal resources, but it is also about the weight given to each mode in a particular text”. (Archer & Bruer, 2016).

### **Return to Canada (Annex F)**

Finally, the last instrument constructed for this investigation was the development of another written narrative, in this case, (Annex F), Calgary: returning to Canada. During the creation of this instrument, I was again living in Canada for a period of 6 months. This instrument allowed me to demonstrate that distance education was unquestionably the best choice in order to obtain my university studies at Universidad Santo Tomás. I was able to continue my studies while living abroad, simultaneously.

Different family experiences were described in this instrument and I was able to again categorize based on the importance of each event and reinforce the value of distance education during this time. The use of different multimodal narratives, as well as all text and oral narratives, allowed me to center my attention on the essential concepts of the data and the data recollection process. The narratives were a reconnection to these previous life events that guided me into exploring and concluding on the specific findings for this project.

## Section 5. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Barkhuizen (2014) sets the importance in data for purposes of research and analysis when he states that “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 2014). Additionally, Polkinghorne’s (1995), analysis of narratives refers to “research in which stories are used as data, while narrative analysis refers to re-search in which storytelling is used as a means of analyzing data and presenting findings. Polkinghorne (1995).

These, all important indications which were considered, and which allowed me to proceed in the analysis of the recollected data. Data analysis can be defined as the process of interpreting data; however, through this project I was able to learn that this “data analysis” required further investigation on how to execute it as there are many different strategies to apply in order to carry it out.

The data gathered for purposes of this project was analyzed under what Barkhuizen defines as thematic analysis, “thematic analysis involves the repeated reading of the data, coding, and categorization of data extracts, and their reorganization under thematic headings” (Barkhuizen 2014). However, it is also important to point out that according to Barkhuizen et al. (2014), “one of the risks involved in thematic analysis is that we tend to simply look for occasions on which predetermined themes are explicitly mentioned in the narratives. As a result, we fail to dig more

deeply into the data”. For this reason, it was important to look in depth into important topics that would allow for enough and (important data) to be brought afloat to analyze it accordingly.

The instruments used to collect the data were 1. an interview or “oral narrative” by my tutor Ms. Bonilla (Annex A), 2. a narrative frame called *My life* (Annex B), 3. Pedagogical practice written narrative (Annex C) 4. a Lesson plan multimodal narrative (Annex D), *My family*, multimodal narrative (Annex E), *Return to Canada: Life in Calgary* written narrative (Annex F).

### The interview

Through the interview that took place, my tutor made emphasis on the importance on going back to the earliest of my memories; in this case, these events went back to my first years of school and the unforgettable memory of my first day of school holding on to my father's hand. I was asked about myself, my family, my educational process, and the different multicultural experiences I had encountered throughout my life. This is where the narratives were given a starting point. As well, I consider that at this point, I was unconsciously already beginning to analyze these experiences. It was during those moments, that I realized the importance of the facts that were being brought back through the memories.

Barkhuizen makes an excellent point when he remarks that: “data analysis can begin at any point in a study, and an early start is often advisable because preliminary analyses may help refine data collection strategies.” I am certain that from this initial interview, the importance of certain

topics (as were family support and interculturality) were clear and I was aimed in the right direction into finding out about the most influential factors that shaped my identity.

### **Analyzing the interview**

As mentioned before, the interview was the starting point for this project, in regards to the different types of interviews that could have taken place in a research project, Barkhuizen states, “the format of an interview is broadly categorized as a) structured in which the questions to be raised are pre planned in advance and there is usually no flexibility in the course of the interview; b) semi-structured where the questions are planned in advance, however, there still is some room for maneuver; and c) open where the course of the interview is figured out as the interview unfolds.”

After analyzing the questions asked during this interview, I concluded that the interview that took place between me and my tutor was an open interview; through this interview my tutor started to get to know me and the story that had deeply shaped my identity; but most importantly I began to know ME much better as well.

This interview contributed greatly to the evolution of the diverse topics for purposes of this project, many different important subjects and categories arose from the questions asked by my tutor. Barkhuizen also indicates that: “in thematic analysis of narratives, categorization and the construction of theoretical relationships among abstract categories are the main analytical tools”.

It was during this initial stage that I began to research the different authors that would support my ideas and provided theoretical support to my findings.

The first step taken to analyze the interview was the “transcription”, or as Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) define, “the process of turning recorded speech into written form”. The interview was initially recorded, later transcribed, and finally categorized.

During the analysis of the interview, specific categories began to arise; I found it interesting how these categories continued to clearly reappear in the narratives constructed later. Finally, I used a color code method to identify each category, this was an especially important factor when concluding on the findings of the project.

### Written narratives

I considered Barkhuizen’s suggestion, “frames provide guidance and support in terms of both the structure and content of what is to be written. From the researcher’s perspective the frames ensure that the content will be more or less what is expected (and required to address the research aims) and that it will be delivered in narrative form” (Barkhuizen and Wette, 2008: 376).

As the interview provided an initial structure of what would be covered, the narratives allowed me to expand in terms of the content.

This process required a sufficient amount of time to self-reflect and to slowly examine the experiences concerning some of the stages of my life that I usually don't tend to consider or even remember; however, it portrays a significant amount of importance for the development of this project.

I had to go back and firstly, brainstorm the different and most important stages of my life I thought would be important to write about. Topics such as family support, moving between countries, adaptation, becoming a mother, self-motivation just to name a few. However, many more different subjects appeared through the completion of the narratives. Each narrative allowed me to focus in detail of each separate experience, this allowed me to go more in depth and provide important facts that would allow me to understand more about myself, my process, and subsequently: my identity; this being one of the most important findings of this research.

### **Analyzing the written narratives**

While progressing through the process of analyzing the narratives, I began to apply different names to each category and at the same time applied a color-coding strategy in each narrative. For this I had to reread each narrative more than once, back, and forth. I must admit that the name of each category changed many times; it was required for me to do further research through different authors in order to finally conclude on what name was the best to outline each category. Barkhuizen et al. (2014) stress that "whether themes are determined in advance or not, good thematic analysis always involves repeated reading of the data and several rounds of analysis, in which the researcher moves back and forth between the data and its coded and

categorized forms in order to refine themes and theoretical relationships" (p. 77), Barkhuizen (2014) also adds to this when he affirms: thematic analysis "in general terms, involves the repeated reading of the data, coding, and categorization of data extracts, and their reorganization under thematic headings. (Barkhuizen 2014), which was the strategy applied to name each category and analyze the data.

I slowly began to realize how these categories were somehow all interrelated and that they all specifically described different aspects of different stages of my life that lead me to become the person that I have become to the present day. This conclusively led me to set out and clearly define the findings of this project.

In accordance to Benson, Barkhuizen & Chik (2014) "narratives encapsulate a point that the narrator wants to get across; they have purpose and meaning within the context of their telling; they are used by people to manage their identities, among others." Benson, Barkhuizen & Chik (2014).

Benson, Barkhuizen & Chik (2014) narratives include the following characteristics: they are spoken, written or multimodal texts; they are produced by people who have something to tell; they are situated in time and space and involve development over time; they have structures that correspond to the developments they describe; they encapsulate a point that the narrator wants to get across; they have purpose and meaning within the context of their telling; they are used by people to manage their identities, among others.

I can conclude that the analysis of the data was an essential part of this project that allowed me to understand more in depth the purpose of the recollection of the data. Analysis data gives the project a purpose, while at the same time it gives me a much better understanding of life story and the impact of certain experiences that have molded my identity as a student, as a teacher and a mother; but most importantly as a human being.



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## Categories

### Category One: Adjustment to a new society

#### Interview 1: March 12, 2019

Interculturality from a simple view can be defined as the “Cultural enrichment and exchange between people of different cultures” (Trujillo, 2002). However, from a more complex and communicative standpoint “Interculturality, then, is the educational objective related to culture and communication and it is defined as the active participation in communication helped by critical awareness and analysis and motivated by the appreciation of diversity as the foundation of society.” (Trujillo 2002). As a young 10-year-old girl, I clearly underwent the understanding of “living the culture”, as a new student during my first move to Canada. I had no other option but to speak in English only to communicate with my classmates (I was the only Latin American student in my group therefore there was no Spanish spoken).

I had to learn to communicate in English only or else I would not be able to get around and adapt to my new surroundings. Again, adapt to the new culture to survive.

*"It was definitely a cultural shock, at first as we were used to doing some things differently. The culture itself is hugely different from The Canadian one. For example, the way people talk, it takes a little time to adapt to it. For example, in Bucaramanga people talk much faster than I used to. Although at this point I already feel that I am one more in Colombia. Another difficulty was learning to drive here in Colombia, that was one of my biggest challenges, it is a quite*

*different culture than the Canadian one. But as with language, I'm now a Colombian behind the wheel."*

According to Brown (2007, p, 64) the process depicted above constitute a phenomenon that is evident among the cognitive principles and more specifically in the principle of “automaticity” in which children learn a foreign language especially when they are living in the cultural and linguistic milieu of the language. The author asserts that we attribute children’s success to their tendency to acquire language subconsciously, this means through an inductive process of exposure to language.

#### **Narrative 1. My Life Narrative:**

*“We [my brother and I] arrived in Canada in 1993; I nervously began school at Our Lady of Victory School in Port Colborne, Ontario. During this time in Canada, immigration had not yet boomed as it did in the subsequent years; the amount of Latin American population was seldom. For this reason, and during that school year, I was the only “Latino” student in the classroom. This forced me to put my average English-speaking skills to work to survive. I was already fluent in English, I was able to fit into the Canadian culture effortlessly; even though I was a very shy girl, I was able to make a few friends easily and practice my English-speaking skills on a daily basis. The changes that until that time I had faced (separation from my father, moving to a different country and embracing a new) had allowed me to gain adaptability skills”.*

Throughout the different stages of my life I have been granted with different opportunities to live in different countries, and therefore required to adapt to their different cultures. As a young girl, I moved back and forth from my home country, Honduras to what would become my new home,

Canada. In the most recent years, while becoming a mother and wife, I have moved back and forth from the countries which I also consider my homes, Canada, and Colombia.

From a similar and assertive perspective, Jackson 2008 identified a variety of non-linguistic outcomes: *“enhanced personal growth, self-confidence, and maturity; a higher degree of independence; a broader world view; more awareness and acceptance of cultural differences; enhanced intercultural communication social skills’ and a greater appreciation of their own culture and identity”* (p. 214).

Even though adapting to new cultures involves many life changes, and the changes may result challenging due to the different cultural beliefs, I feel I was able to adapt to them quickly. However, I was not able to make sense of this until I experienced leaving each country and encountering a new adaptation process. And through the completion of this project. Today, I keep encountering the continuous opportunity of adapting to different cultures which I have learned to take as my own.

For the completion of this part of this part of my project I was living in Canada, temporarily. It took a few weeks to get used the culture again, accept the unpredictable weather and value the slow-paced life.

However, I was able to take it in quickly, and feel at ease during my time here. Feeling that again, I was home.

Based on the previous definitions, I can assume that interculturality has been an essential aspect of my life that has deliberately shaped who I am. Through the continuous moving within countries, I have been forced to put my intercultural skills into practice without giving it much thought. I can almost consider this as acting on *automatic mode* as there were no other options but to learn from the new cultures in these new environments; but most importantly to adapt to them without hesitation.

“Culture in its broadest sense is cultivated behavior; that is the totality of a person's learned, accumulated experience which is socially transmitted, or more briefly, behavior through social learning”. (Hofstede, G. 1997).

In the case of moving to Colombia, the following excerpt serves as an example;

*firstly, of adapting to a new culture based on the communication needs, and secondly adapting to a new culture based on the way they are accustomed to doing things, in this particular example, driving without strictly following traffic regulations as opposed to driving respecting these transit by-laws.*

These situations confronted me with the clear belief that things are simply done differently in different places. The adaptation process is simpler if you accept some facts instead of trying to change them.

For instance, based on the previous example, even though I was used to driving the “right way” in Canada complying transit guidelines, I had to learn how to drive the “Colombian way” by modifying some of these conducts. Even though I was not fond of the idea, it was something I

just needed to learn to do differently. However, upon my return to Canada I immediately shifted back to the driving skills required in this country. Again, I was required to adapt to these different manners of doing things.

From a young age I have been faced with the need to respect and tolerate different cultures, this has allowed to understand that each culture has a different way of perceiving and doing things.

Culture has had a great impact on me as I have learned to adapt to the different cultures that each different country relates to. Living in Canada for example, has allowed me to learn about diversity reunited in one place.

Living in Canada and its multicultural culture has enforced my understanding that the world is conformed with people with different beliefs and the fact that they are different than mine, doesn't make them wrong.

Being part of different societies with different cultures has been one of the most educational experiences that has taught me tolerance towards others. The stages of my life and the age during these stages, has made a big difference in the way these changes were confronted. The younger I was, the less I would think about these changes, younger individuals tend to change without giving it much thought.

On the other hand, the older I got, the more I would consider the changes, but the maturity obtained through the years and through these different travels has at the same time allowed me to become more easy-going.

This recurring experience of moving countries has allowed me to quickly settle into the role of a citizen of that specific country. I have felt that way in Colombia and have done the same every

time I move back to Canada. This, allowing me to slowly shape my identity not only as an English teacher, but mostly as a person, as every move is accompanied by a learning experience.

### **Category Two: Self- Determination**

In psychology, self-determination is an important concept that refers to each person's ability to make choices and manage their own life. (Cherry 2019). This ability plays an important role in psychological health and well-being. Self-determination allows people to feel that they have control over their choices and lives. It also has an impact on motivation—people feel more motivated to act when they feel that what they do will influence the outcome. This theory suggests that people can become self-determined when their needs for competence, connection, and autonomy are fulfilled.

According to self-determination theories, and based on data gathering analysis, I could determine three subcategories which I explain as follows.

### **Subcategory One: Intrinsic Motivation**

Brown (2007 p. 85) defines motivation as the extent to which you make choices about goals to pursue and the effort you will devote to that. He also describes intrinsic motivation as “motivation to engage in a task or activity for its own sake”. Intrinsic motivation theories comprise self-determination theory, flow theory, and interests (Eccles and Wigfield, 2002).

Self-determinations theory is a theoretical approach that specifies conditions leading to intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is promoted when people feel competent, self-determined (autonomy), and experience a sense of relatedness (Graham and Weiner, 2012).

One of most prevailing desires always has been to study and become a professional. From the moment I moved to Canada, I was always studying, and vehemently looking to be professional. It was the intrinsic motivation that driven by internal rewards that allowed me to engage in new projects.

### ***Annex B- Narrative 1: My life.***

*...When I was living in Canada, I loved cooking and baking, mostly baking. So, I looked around for different certified and recognized cooking schools, but they were all out of my budget. There were many schools in Toronto, which is an hour away from my then current home, St. Catharines. This meant that I had to commute to Toronto every day, for which I required a car, that I didn't have, or move to Toronto and pay a very expensive rent which I didn't have the means to pay for.*

*As I was waiting for the bus one night after a long shift at the coffees shop, I read a sign where Liaison College was advertised. Liaison College was a private culinary school, it was not big or recognized, but it was a cooking school. While looking at a pamphlet of the most recognized college in the area, Niagara College, I read about the Language Interpreter Diploma that was available. It was a part time program. Most classes were offered during the evening, meaning I could attend college after work. This became my new focus, to enroll into Niagara College to obtain a Language Interpreter Certificate.*

*During the year 2002, there was an increase of Latin American immigrants after the visit of Pope Juan Pablo II to Toronto. This meant that there was an increased need for interpreters in different government offices to communicate with this new population. This had become my new career choice, and I aimed to complete as soon as possible to increase my payroll.*

*I was able to complete my Language Interpreter Diploma at Niagara College. After the completion of the first three semesters I was required to complete the Co-op (practicum) portion of the study plan. For this part of the course completion I decided to give another city a try. I had an incredibly special friend living in Calgary, Alberta. A city in the western part of Canada that at that time was going through a Petroleum boom generating more employment than any other city in the country.*

*Law Office to complete my practicum. After a two-week search, I got an offer to work for Osler, Hoskin & Harcourt, a very well recognized law firm in downtown Calgary with branches in other cities in Canada including Toronto, Ottawa, and Montreal*

*At the end of the semester and after the completion of my practicum I returned to St. Catharines to complete my last semester of the program. I finally graduated and the law firm, for which I worked for during my practicum, offered me a permanent position...*

When I came to Colombia, this intrinsic motivation did not change, I wanted to keep studying. According to Brown 2007, the most powerful rewards are those that are intrinsically motivated within the learner” (p. 68) Thus, I looked for many universities to attain my studies, but in that moment, I had not considered distance education yet. When I encountered the bachelor’s degree in English as a foreign language at Universidad Santo Tomás; I was able to reconsider that this methodology would be ideal for my lifestyle.

There were other programs at different universities that were full time and included classes in the late afternoons or evenings; however, at that point in my life, that was not an option. I was dedicated to looking after of my family and taking care of my still noticeably young children. For this reason, distance education was my selected choice of study as it would provide me with the liberty of working at my own pace and still be home for the most time and look after my family.

Saba (2005) states that “it is important to recognize that the concept of distance education is a rapidly changing phenomenon and it is about more than using technology to reach students at physical distance from instructors.” (Saba 2005).

### ***Narrative 1. My Life Narrative:***

*“I initially read about the University of Santo Tomás online, about the program and the benefits of distance education. I would be able to study at my own pace, but most importantly, from home. This meant I would be able to still be there for my children, which again, had always been number one priority.”*

“Distance learning is an excellent method for teaching adult learners because they need flexibility to contend with competing priorities” (Galusha 1997). In my case, being a stay at home mother continued to be my most indispensable role during that time. One more time this intrinsic motivation was persuading me, and I was motivated to return to school through distance education; for me, it outlined only positive aspects to do so. However, once the journey began, it was not as easy as I thought and there were many modifications to my usual routines I had to learn to adjust to.

### **Subcategory Two: Autonomy**

According to Brown 2007 successful mastery of a foreign language will depend to a great extent on learners ‘autonomous ability both to take initiative in the classroom and to continue their journey to success beyond the classroom. (p .70). At the beginning, I acknowledge that before starting my distance education studies, I somehow had the unclear perception of it being the use of technology from home to obtain my bachelor’s degree, nothing else. However, after, I could assert that it contributes to more than that; distance education develops autonomy, self-regulation self-monitoring just to mention a few; all these are an undoubtedly essential factors related.

It is important to mention that as a mother of three children, I was not able to simply dedicate my “free time” to my studies (there is no free time when you have three children to look after!). Even when children are at school there is always something to attend to at home, from running errands, buying school supplies to grocery shopping.

Children tend to have terribly busy schedules, whether it is homework or sports, all which requires time out of the parent's schedule (especially from a mother who is learning through distance education standpoint, that is).

One of the most observed difficulties while working on assignments was how quickly I would lose my attention on what I working on and distracted myself into motherly duties, I would quickly begin to think about things that were still pending to be completed at home. For this reason, I began to self-monitor myself and worked on writing to do lists to schedule my time wisely. This is an essential step on any goal completion and conforms an important aspect of a person's identity formation.

Even though distance education granted me the opportunity to stay at home to work on completing this bachelor's degree, there were many downfalls during the process; the most important one was the lack of effective communication with some teachers and some classmates.

I learned that many times words can lose their sense in writing (compared to verbal communication that is); and because this was the only learning methodology I was accustomed to, hardships began to make their appearance even though my intentions were the best. Galusha (1998) refers to some of the most common disadvantages of distance education as "loss of motivation because of lack of face-to-face contact with teachers and peers, and lack of faculty support".

I passionately believe that even though these current times are powered by technology, nothing can substitute the appreciativeness of personal gesture, for example a smile. This eventually takes a toll in this learning process. Especially during the first classes I took, while I was still learning how to study through this method.

Distance education tends to be incredibly quiet, most notably, distance education is characterized for being very lonely. The student finds him/her self-working individually with minimal social interaction. When attending an institution to study, the human connection between peers and their teachers is always present. Somehow this physical presence makes the experience more enjoyable and manageable. simply because as humans we are social beings.

I believe there was a lot more required from me while learning through this means, even though I did have more freedom to choose when to work on my assignments, there were some contentious complications that I had to confront when I felt confused or simply did not understand something. My questions had to wait until an email was written by me, sent to the teacher, read by the teacher and finally replied back by the teacher; this tends to take a lot of time, and it was not of great help, especially when you decide to procrastinate and leave the assignment until the last minute, which also tends to happen frequently in distance education.

“Work on my own schedule” was one of the biggest misconceptions I had to endure while learning to manage my time during these years of distance learning. However, this was the process that taught me to be more disciplined during this learning process.

Moore and Kearsley state an emphatic point when they state that “While students will have more freedom and opportunity, they must also assume more responsibility for managing their own learning, in terms of when they will study, how much they want to learn, and seeking out information and resources. Some students may be unwilling or inadequately trained to accept this responsibility and will need help in making the necessary adjustments in their study habits.” (Moore & Kearsley, 1996, p. 16).

### **Subcategory three: Self-regulation**

Again, because of these encountered difficulties, I was forced to become more time conscious and organize my days to allow for all the activities of the day to be accomplished, discipline was of the essence. This self-regulation learning strategy was another learned technique that arose from learning through distance education and which granted me the opportunity to advance in my studies. Zimmerman (2016) refers to self-regulation as “self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions that are planned and cyclically adapted to the attainment of personal goals; this ability started to become stronger as I advanced in my distance education studies.”

I also began working on assignments during the evenings, after everyone at home had gone to sleep to avoid any distractions that were around during the day. Many different adjustments had to be made to my schedule to allow me to comply with all the work assigned by me university teachers and self-regulating myself was the only means to doing this.

In my case, it was essential to consider Zimmerman's (2016) definition of this term when he describes self-regulation as "cyclical because the feedback from prior performance is used to adjust during current efforts. Such adjustments are necessary because personal, behavioral, and environmental factors are constantly changing during learning and performance and must be observed or monitored."

This exact definition is a glimpse of what I had been going through since the beginning of this bachelor's degree, as are many other students who decide to learn through distance learning as well. After the completion of all my classes and my pedagogical practice in Colombia, I returned to Canada for a short period of time. I had the opportunity to continue self-monitoring myself in regards to the completion of this project, I must admit it was not easy, moving to a different country required many different adjustments to my family's life and to my own personal life and goals; however, the project was an on ongoing process. I was able to further advance in this investigation; it was a great benefit to be in constant asynchronous communication with my tutor, as it made no difference that I was in Calgary, Canada to do so.

Hrastinski (2007) presents some of the benefits of asynchronous e-learning, when he states that "it is commonly facilitated by media such as e-mail and discussion boards, supports work relations among learners and with teachers, even when participants cannot be online at the same time. It is thus a key component of flexible e-learning. In fact, many people take online courses because of their asynchronous nature, combining education with work, family, and other commitment", as it was in my personal case.

While working in this project during my stay in Canada, I encountered the experience of being unable to meet with my tutor for a planned virtual meeting for motherly reasons (caring for a fever, and earache or a sudden doctor's appointment). I was again, able to confirm the benefits of the asynchronous communication that distance education allows.

It was clear that in distance education time and space make no difference; this is one the most important advantages I was able to find through this methodology. Through this asynchronous e-learning modality, the possibility of advancing in the achievement of the completion of this bachelor's degree was magnificent as it allowed me to continue working without being in a specific location. For instance, Hrastinski (2007) indicates that: "Synchronous communication has the potential to enhance online student participation.

I was also able to self-regulate myself by researching through different means as were virtual libraries, and to my advantage while in Calgary, take advantage of doing this in the outstanding Calgary public library.

The thesis suggests that synchronous communication, as a complement to asynchronous communication, may better support personal participation.

This is likely to induce arousal and motivation, and increased convergence on meaning, especially in smaller groups. "Nevertheless, I firmly believe that even though for most of our lives we are taught to learn through synchronous methodologies, asynchronous learning can help

us become independent and more goal oriented, even better if there is a combination of these two learning methods.

The experience of learning through distance education was a process itself, even though it took some time to adapt to, I was able to learn through different discipline enriched techniques as are autonomy, self-regulation and self-monitoring how to make the best out of it; and most importantly, how to achieve a goal through it. The ways this methodology shaped my identity are innumerable, from the beginning of virtual learning, to time management as a mother, and finally to culminate an important investigation project as this one.

### Category Three: Family Support

Family support plays one of the most important roles in the development of life skills. During the early years self-confidence is established through parents' support. These skills will further develop through the adolescent years and finally are extended throughout a person's life. The reliability that we find in our family from a young age, marks the self of belonging and the independence that we will express and experience in our adulthood.

*Family social support, the exchange of material and emotional resources among nuclear and extended family members (Sarkisian and Gerstel 2004), is an important aspect of daily life. In my case, from a young age, family support has always been an important component of my life*

which has encouraged me through different and important experiences in a more confident manner.

The term “family support”, while widely used in research literature, is not easy to define. (Cross 2018). However, Pinkerton et al. (2004, p. 22) comment that family support is *“both a style of work and a set of activities”*. Activities through which I believe we learn and “become”.

Benson suggests that “learning is a matter of developing an identity. (Benson 2017), and I am certain it all begins from our early childhood years. As I return to my own childhood memories, I will never forget the first day of school. The day in which my father held my hand tightly before embarking on my kindergarten career. Without any knowledge of what I was about experience, his support gave me the confidence to happily begin this journey called education.

He (my father) as well as the rest of my family, were present for every important milestone in my life. I always felt their support through all the different (and important) stages of my life; as were my teenage years, moving to Canada after graduating high school, learning how to become independent, graduating college, getting married, becoming a mother, moving continuously within countries and finally returning to school to obtain a bachelors in teaching English as a foreign language.

My family's support was crucial after completing high school and being sent to Canada to learn to become an “adult”. I could always find in my parents and siblings’ words of encouragement, and to this day, those words have never ceased.

Leaving my home country, Honduras, at 18 years old and moving to Canada: a new country with a new culture, was a learning experience that allowed me to increase my levels of maturity at a faster rate than I expected.

### Narrative 1: My Life

*I graduated High School on June 2, 2002. By July 1, I was already on Canadian soil. The city of St. Catharines in Ontario became my new and unfamiliar home. This move initiated the journey of my “adulthood”. My older brother was already living by himself; he had left for Canada 6 years prior. This meant that I arrived in Canada with a secured and already paid for roof over my head. This was temporary.*

*My first wakeup call was the moment my brother asked for my half of the rent, I was very confused, as I assumed that after living with my parents, I would simply switch parents, and my brother would continue supporting me financially.*

*How wrong was I... ”*

While living this new independent experience, I learned that my brother's economic support was temporary, and even though this was not easy to adjust to, I could sense that his reassurance in my “growing up skills” were permanent; but most important essential in order to become the grown up I am today. Due to my brothers’ lack of economic support I was left with no choice but to learn to find motivation within myself to work hard and by this, achieving goals for my own personal fulfillment. *Family support networks can serve as protective and/or risk factors for a*

variety of wellbeing outcomes including, but not limited, to psychological, physical, and economic wellbeing. (Cross 2018).

Even though the lack of my brother's economic support became a challenge hard for me to understand back then, I was later able to appreciate all the positive effects that this economic "cut" brought to my life. *Conflict is a normal aspect of family life that affects the way family members perceive one another and their willingness to assist each other* (Clarke et al. 1999; Lowenstein 2007; Parrott and Bengtson 1999). This difficulty allowed me to become more conscious and thus, more motivated to find things that were of my personal interest and through this, add to the shaping of my identity.

Brown (2007) defines motivation as: *the extent to which you make choices about (a) goals to pursue and (b) the effort you will devote to that pursuit.* (Brown 2007)

From a constructivist view, Brown states that "each person is motivated differently, and will therefore act on his or her environment in ways that are unique. But these unique acts are always carried out within a cultural and social milieu and cannot be completely separated from that context." Brown (2007).

Learning to live independently without parents' economic support, individually choosing a career that I could afford and figuring out where I would live were some of the events that mostly allowed my identity to be shaped back then. However, I believe that every difficulty

becomes a lesson, and every lesson can become an opportunity; this being a foolproof identity shaping method.

### **The importance of family in Colombia**

When moving to Colombia in 2010, and deciding to go back to school, family support was again, an important factor in the development of this life stage. As a stay at home mother of three children, a bachelor's degree student, living in a foreign country, and dealing with adaptation, I consider the following authors make an assertive conclusion when they state that:

*“Having available people who positively support them in this respect, including extended family members, friends, and partners, seems vital in determining how well mothers cope with these experiences”* (Bay, 1999; Duncan, 2000a; Griffiths, 2002; Kantanis, 2002).

As I lacked the presence of my own nuclear family while in Colombia (my siblings and parents to this day all live in Canada), and while going through this educational and adaptation process; I found comfort and support in my extended family (my husband's parents and siblings). They supported my decision of returning to school and reassured the importance of doing so. Their support undeniably gave my self-esteem a boost, this being an essential factor when difficulties emerged due to some hardships faced through distance learning and being a full-time mother simultaneously.

In the same context, I believe it is important to also mention that *“unreliable or sporadic family support has been shown to reduce a sense of personal autonomy, increase stress, depression, and other psychological problems, and exacerbate interpersonal conflict among family members”* (Dominguez and Watkins 2003; Garrett Peters and Burton 2016; McDonald and Armstrong 1995). Therefore, the impact that family can bring to one's identity is undeniably influential.

While taking the required classes at Universidad Santo Tomás, I would rely on my mother in law to look after my children while I attended some Saturday afternoon tutoring sessions. Due to my husband's constant obligation to travel due to work, he was away during some weekends.

My mother in law died in August 2018. There has been an indescribable void left in our family after her parting. However, her support and admiration for my decision of returning to school remains. Through the process of achieving the completion of my bachelor, I have been able to add a greater value of family and the support they provide to the completion of my life goals.

### **Narrative 1: My Life**

*I decided to go back to school. This time in search to become a teacher, as our stay in Colombia seemed that would last for more than we had planned for. My husband was more than happy when I shared with him the idea of returning to school and doing something just for myself. I had his complete support from the beginning of this journey.*

### **Interview #1**

*“Tuve a mi tercera hija hace dos años y medio, tuve que detener mis estudios durante un semestre en la Universidad. Fue un poco más complicado adelantar mis estudios ya que esto requería estudiar después de traspasar cuidando de mi hija, y esto exige más esfuerzo de mi parte, y a la vez dedicarle menos tiempo a mis otros hijos y esposo. Sin embargo, mi esposo siempre estuvo muy dispuesto a hacerse cargo de los niños los fines de semana para yo poder adelantar mis trabajos.”*

It is important to recognize that my husband's support was not limited to only words of encouragement; whenever he was home and I needed help with house chores or caring for our children, I could always count on him and he would immediately assume his spectacular role of a caring father and husband.

Cooking, cleaning, diaper changing, helping with homework were just some of the roles assumed by my husband while I dedicated time to advance in my career. As a couple, we have always agreed that house chores belong to us as team, and not to me, as woman. Gratefully, this has been one of the greatest strengths in our marriage.

At the same time, I was also able to find a great amount of support in my father in law as he has always believed in my ability to become a great English teacher. He has continually contacted me about different job opportunities, which due to me constant demands as a mother, I have had to turn down. However, he has continually remained patient and continues to encourage me to find a job that will allow me to feel comfortable while complying with the dual roles of a mother and a teacher.

It became evident that the process of studying through distance learning while at the same time complying with the duties of a stay at home mother requires more than just the "will or determination" to achieve a goal of this magnitude. I am certain that it requires support, recognition and most importantly patience, from both the student and those surrounding the student/mother. As White affirms, *"research shows that students who are mothers generally have to overcome particular barriers to successfully pursue and reach their educational goals."*

(White 2009), therefore the role that family takes around the mother are crucial. Family becomes an essential factor in the completion of goals of this nature.

### **Mother of three**

In July 2016, I gave birth to my third child, Mia. The birth of Mia required more time out of my planned study time, especially during her first months of life where I was learning how to care for a newborn all over again. After seven years, I learned that I had to remaster the newborn caring skills all over again; from diaper changing to breastfeeding, but most importantly to force myself to keep up with my normal routine while the lack of sleep took over my body. White (2008) refers to some of these difficulties when she states that *“common issues and anxieties for the mothers in this study included lack of time, difficulty meeting family demands, fear of failure, stress, and anxiety, the need to set priorities and integrating family issues with study issues.”* White (2008).

During the semester that began in August 2016 at Universidad Santo Tomás, I only registered for two classes; I did not feel I could comply with the demands of dealing with more than these two classes while looking after my newborn daughter. Even with the low amount of work, compared to other semesters, I failed one of the classes due to the lack of time and physical energy to look after the assignments. Neale (2001) is very empathetic when he indicates that: *“the pressures of work and family life often force students to assign a lower priority to their study.”* Neale (2001)

This was a very disappointing and discouraging incident, I had not failed any other class before this during my time as a university student; however, my husband was of great importance during this time as his words of support allowed to again, regain my focus and retake the class and obtain a much better grade afterward.

During this time, it is important to point out that my autonomous skills were essential in the development of the achievement of this bachelor's degree. Benson claims that *“autonomy is more than being able to control one's learning, it also involves directing learning towards long term identity goals”*. (Benson 2017)

The experience of completing a bachelor's degree through distance education required not only that my immediate family (spouse and children) supported my decision of this experience, but also accepted my absence in some instances. For example, I would have to assist my tutoring sessions on Saturdays; this meant that some days I would not be available for family lunches, small gatherings and even birthday celebrations. Nonetheless, I had the privilege of marrying a wonderful man who has been my most significant supporter through this journey, and who has always been there for me to push me into completing my goals whenever I doubted myself. I had his full understanding and I was sure that I could count on him whenever my absences would interfere with our family plans.

Again, family has been without a doubt one of the most important factors in the completion of this life goal and the shaping of my identity. It is important to mention that the socio affective principles that are present during different life events are notably responsible for the end results

which include the shape of one's identity. As Benson affirms *"autonomy and identity are linked, through the idea that any sustained process of learning is also a process of becoming"*. (Benson 2017



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## Section 6. Conclusions and Implications

Conclusions aim to synthesize findings from the research process. This research project demonstrates that a pre-service teacher's identity is constantly being constructed. The learning process of a teacher is never-ending. From the early years, as are our own school years as learners; to the events we experience in the classroom as teachers, the learning achievements are endless.

Through the data collection (written and oral narratives and multidata), through the data analysis, the codification, and the categorization I reached to the findings depicted below:

1“Adjustments to new societies”, it can be concluded that from a young age, I was able to easily adapt to every new culture I was exposed to. In Canada, in my elementary school years, I had to learn to communicate in English only, or else I want not to adapt to my new surroundings. In my adulthood, learning to adapt to the Colombian culture or any other culture, was a challenge that I could later consider a goal, as later I was able to transmit this belief on to my children.

The recurring experience of moving countries has allowed me to quickly settle into the role of a citizen in each said country. My views about different cultures changed once submerged in each different culture I experience the opportunity to become part of. I slowly became part of it and learned that every society and its culture, are composed of both positive and negative aspects; however, if you focus on the positive; life becomes more manageable.

The adaptation to each of these cultures allowed me to become part of them and therefore have an open-minded perception of these societies. The automaticity that influenced me to adapt to new cultures is what opened many doors afterwards, which allowed me to accomplish different life goals, including this bachelor's degree.

2 “Self-determination & intrinsic motivation” the importance of these two essential components can be evidenced. Intrinsic motivation was an important element that allowed me to never settle and allowed me to continue to pursue my goals of achieving different objectives. Through the combination of intrinsic motivation and the application of self-determination and other important skills as were self-regulation, auto control and metacognition; I was able to complete important tasks that lead me to completion of many life goals. These skills outstood primarily in my dual role as a mother and a university student. It was always clear that my most powerful desire had always been to become a professional. However, to do so, I had to assume more responsibility in my dual roles and learn how to self-regulate my time, responsibilities, and commitments.

Through my most recent experience as I teacher, I have also been able to implement teachings about my own personal learning process with my students. The COVID19 pandemic has forced students to acquire an education through the virtual learning methodology. I have been able to share with my students the importance that self-determination and intrinsic motivation skills can bring to their own learning methods during these difficult times.

Autoregulation was essential in each different process encountered for the completion of these life goals. I was able to become a more independent young adult, a more focused distance education student and a more responsible mother. Self-determination and adaptation are very crucial categories that helped shape my identity but if you are not sheltered by a strong feeling of affection, you fail. Thus, this brings me to the third category.

3 “Family support” is one of the most important factors that allowed me to complete not only this bachelor’s degree, but most of my life achievements. Family support is essential as it provides a sense of belonging and security, especially when facing difficulties. The encouragement of a reinforcing family network is crucial for accomplishing objectives. It is important to mention that economic support from family is important, but should not be permanent, as it is through these “temporary” aids that we learn independence and self-worth.

My husband’s emotional and economic support have allowed me to achieve this Bachelor’s degree which I consider to be not only a personal achievement, but rather a family learning experience, as our children have had an important role in it. It was through this experience that we were able to teach them that life goals do not require an order and that they do not have a specific expiration date.

Identity shaping is a lifelong process, we will continue to encounter different experiences that will continue to “reshape” learning does not have an ending. However, the interpretation and the attitude with which we face it will determine how it will impact us.



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## Findings

This research project evidences that the completion of this Bachelor's degree is one of my greatest life accomplishments which I was able to attain through different learning experiences, including hardships that allowed me to get to know myself better; but most importantly through the continuous family support that I have always been granted. As well, it describes the impact that some of these experiences made in my current teacher identity and in the person that I have become. This project establishes the importance of valuable abilities as are autonomy and self-regulation, as it was through the application of these aptitudes that I was able to set out my voice for it be heard.

This research will become part of the LLEI's Research field 2 *The study of the English language and its contexts*, my particular case pertained to the second macroproject specifically under research subproject 1: *the voices of the LLEI realities: life stories and experiences*.

The research process applied directly to my personal life experiences as I was not in active practice as a teacher now of beginning the investigation. However, through continuous and significant advice from my tutor, Martha Bonilla, I was able to comprehend the importance of my story, and was guided into this research field in hopes of influencing other USTA students to do the same, I believe that our stories as students are as important, as our lessons as teachers.

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