



Pre-service English teachers' identity construction, and its manifestation in the teaching practices during the practicum cycle

Narrative Research

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Dedication

We would like to dedicate this research to our teacher and advisor Natalia Arias because she helped us and guided us with the journey of doing this project even though it was new for all of us. Furthermore, we would like to thank Olga Ramirez for the advisory she gave to us with her knowledge of narratives.

Cami

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Alejo

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Abstract

This study explores the relationship between pre-service teachers' identities and their teaching practices during their practicum cycle through narrative inquiry. Drawing on Mosquera-Pérez and Losada-Rivas (2021), it could be concluded that teachers' identities were divided into four categories: historical, professional, sentimental and personal. In fact, it could be deduced that these identities influenced the teaching practices that are planning, teaching, interacting with students, and reflecting about what is being taught and who the teacher is and wants to be. The participants of this study were its two authors. Data was collected through autobiographies and anecdotes about different relevant moments that could lead to an answer of how the participants built their identities as pre-service English teachers and how they portrayed them in their teaching practices during the practicum cycle. It was found that those four types of identities were present in their stories and led them to constant reflections about what they were doing as pre-service teachers and who they wanted to become after the practicum cycle was over.

Key words: Teacher Identity, teaching practices, Narrative Inquiry

Resumen

Este estudio explora la relación entre las identidades de los futuros docentes y sus prácticas pedagógicas durante su ciclo de prácticas a través de la indagación narrativa. Basándose en Mosquera-Pérez y Losada-Rivas (2021), se puede concluir que las identidades de los docentes se dividieron en cuatro categorías: histórica, profesional, sentimental y personal. De hecho, se puede deducir que estas identidades influyeron en las prácticas pedagógicas que incluyen la planificación, la enseñanza, la interacción con los estudiantes y la reflexión sobre lo que se enseña, quién es el docente y quién quiere llegar a ser. Los participantes de este estudio fueron sus dos autores. Los datos se recopilaron a través de autobiografías y anécdotas sobre diferentes momentos relevantes que podrían conducir a una respuesta sobre cómo los participantes construyeron sus identidades como futuros docentes de inglés y cómo las retrataron en sus prácticas pedagógicas durante el ciclo de prácticas. Se encontró que estos cuatro tipos de identidades estaban presentes en sus relatos y los llevaron a reflexiones constantes sobre lo que estaban haciendo como futuros docentes y quiénes querían llegar a ser una vez que el ciclo de prácticas concluyera.

Palabras clave: Identidad docente, prácticas docentes, investigación narrativa.

Introduction

This narrative project was carried out by two students from Universidad de Antioquia as their undergraduate degree project. The project was made to explore the relationship between pre-service English teachers' identity construction, and its manifestation in teaching practices during the practicum cycle. The study was developed in a public institution of Medellín during our practicum cycle there for a year and a half (2023-2024). In the following lines, you will find a description of the context and the participants of the study. Then, the second section will present the justification of the study, where we explain what led us to decide working on this topic and kind of research. The third section shows the research question and the objectives. Then, in the theoretical framework we present the three main concepts of the study: teaching practices, identity, and narrative research. After that, there is another section that presents the method and the data collection instruments. Afterwards, we are going to present our findings and the interpretation and finally, the conclusions and recommendations of the research.

Description of Context

The Institution

The public educational institution where this research project took place was in the *Comuna* 7, Robledo, between the Altamira, Córdoba and López de Mesa neighborhoods. Following the *Proyecto Educativo Institucional* (PEI) (2020), the institution's mission is to educate students comprehensively at all institutional levels (preschool, basic, secondary, and technical secondary education) by using pedagogical action programs to help them manage social and intellectual issues in their contexts. Its goal was to be a good quality educative center in 2025, recognized by the comprehensive education of its students who can perform with human quality at a social level (PEI, 2020). The school, as their PEI showed, worked under five fundamental values: respect,

responsibility, solidarity, autonomy, and sense of belonging (2020). In addition, their main objective was to contribute to social and cultural development of the community, by promoting the institutional values and indispensable competencies for coexistence, and the adequate interaction with nature and its environment.

About the neighborhood where the institution was located, 6.9% of Medellín's total population resided there. Approximately 42.8% of homes fall into the Low socioeconomic stratum, with 31.2% in the Lower-Middle stratum. Homeownership stands at 43%, while 41% of residents inhabited rental or sublet properties. The majority, 72%, resided in apartments (Alcaldía de Medellín, 2019).

The Participants

We, the authors of this research project, were also the only two participants in it. We belonged to the first cohort of the Foreign Language Teaching program at Universidad de Antioquia. One of us lived in one of the neighborhoods close to the school. He did his primary and secondary school there, and he was very familiar with the school context and values. He did one of the last practicum courses in the institution and worked with the same Cooperating Teacher. He had worked for two years (2022-2024) as a teacher at *Programa de Inglés para Niños y Jóvenes* (PINJ) from the same university. From what he had observed and experienced as a pre-service teacher in the institution, and a teacher at PINJ, he could identify that being a teacher was also being a human, in the sense that he was the same person inside and outside the classroom, that his life values and experiences shaped who he was when he was teaching.

The other participant came from a different context in which she had a very strict education. She studied at a private school in Medellín during her whole primary and secondary school years and for her it was a little shocking to see the context of her practicum, but she had learned a lot

from what she had seen. She also worked with the same Cooperating Teacher during her first practicum. The only place where she had been able to teach was during her previous practicum processes, but she thought, based on her experience as a student but also as a pre-service teacher, that there were a lot of factors that influenced the way teachers behaved and made decisions in class and most of them were connected with their identities since they were connected to past, processes as teachers and students, and expectations.

Justification

During the time of the career, we learned a lot about pedagogy and alternative ways to teach English and French, a lot of theory that was amazing to read and it was very interesting. However, when we became pre-service teachers during our practicum cycle, it was visible that most of the learnings from the university were not located in real contexts, at least not in Colombia. We saw, as Buendia-Arias et al. state, that “studies in our context indicate language teacher education programs focus on theoretical knowledge, decontextualized practices, and established international standards” (2020, p. 585). This caused that, at the beginning of our practicum process, we struggled to teach our lessons because it was difficult to apply all the theory that we had from the university in a context that was completely different to what was portrayed there. So, we thought that the students’ attitudes were the issue we needed to explore, as it was not what we read was going to happen in the classroom according to theory, and because we thought it was the factor that was shaping our teaching practices.

Then, when we started to think about this project and following what we just mentioned before, we found it interesting to explore teaching practices and students’ attitudes as we were struggling to succeed in our classes at the practicum center as we felt the students’ attitudes had a big impact on our choices as pre-service teachers and the decisions we made in and outside the

classroom. First, we decided to carry out a narrative research project, with two teachers from the practicum center and ourselves as participants of the study, the idea was to explore the effects the students' attitudes had on the teaching practices. However, as time passed, we started to read our journals and the information we collected from our experiences as pre-service teachers, and we discovered that the decisions we were making also found an origin in our identities, our stories, and the way we perceived ourselves as teachers and personas. We decided then it was tremendously important for us to understand ourselves as pre-service teachers, and doing a narrative inquiry project was the best way to explore all the factors involved in our teaching practices as pre-service teachers. It would help us not only to understand where our decisions come from, but also to understand who we were inside and outside the classroom and how it determined our practices, where we were going in the future as teachers and the elements from which we could learn to be better teachers for our students and for us.

As the reflexive pre-service teachers we became when we started to analyze our journals and find a direct relation between how we saw ourselves and our teaching practices, we found it was necessary to remark that the teacher and the persona could not be separated. As Novoa mentioned (2008), we cannot tear apart the personal dimensions of the professional ones; we teach what we are and there is too much of us in what we teach. It was amazing and exciting the self-reflective process we got involved in. Again, as Novoa (2008) pointed out, nowadays it is mandatory for teachers to be aware of ourselves and what it means to be teacher so we can carry out studies and work in ourselves to be ready to analyze our practices and continue improving. We need to be conscious of our own processes to understand the work we do and the people we are; to empower ourselves in order to be able to go over all the complex situations and expectations we face from ourselves, our students and their parents; and the best way to explore it is through

narratives, as they are a written portrait of us, our identity, and our personal and professional thoughts.

The research report you are reading had the purpose of understanding how the identity of the pre-service teachers was constructed, identifying the factors that influenced its configuration and how it was portrayed in the classroom. Salinas and Ayala (2018) said those factors include: “social relationships and interactions with others within a sociocultural, historical, and institutional context; emotions; values; beliefs; traditions; educational background; discourses; and job and life experiences; among many others” (p. 34). All of them were important to understand the process of being in front of the classroom with a group of students. Similarly, “preexisting beliefs, values, self-images and their connection to the local context” (Arrieta & Rosado, 2020; Fajardo, 2014; Guerrero & Meadows, 2015; Pinzón & Guerrero, 2018; Quintero, 2016, as cited in Buendía et al, 2020) played an important role in every decision we made inside and outside the classroom.

Trying to understand the complexities of identify configuration, we came across the definition of anecdotes and stories as rhizomatic, that means they are no vertical and are related to who we are and who we used to be, it is constantly changing, and it’s composed by many elements (Carmona, 2022). Not only rhizomatic, but also, as Buendia et al., said, “identity is formed within multiple contexts, involves relationships and emotions, and allows for the construction and reconstruction of meaning through stories over time” (2020, p. 586) and those can be seen in the past (anecdotes about moments of life that marked our history), also in the present (related to the experiences of the practicum, using periodical journals) and in the future talking about the desire to be a teacher in the future and the learning about how to handle a classroom.

Along with our desire to understand how our teacher identities are shaped, came the scarce body of knowledge in the matter of pre-service teacher identify. There was a notable gap in the

understanding of how identity has been a crucial element to recognize how the persona interacts all the time with the “teacher” and influences the decisions, behaviors and many other aspects of the classroom. A few studies have worked on the importance of the identity of pre-service teachers in the practicum time but most of them did not consider the connection between the construction of personality, emotions, values and other aspects that were crucial to understanding the actions taken in the real world facing a group of students. In a few words, the relevance of this research project lies on the fact that it used rhizomatic stories to understand the connection between “self” and “teacher”.

One final determining point to decide working on this project was the contribution it could bring to the School of Languages. The Foreign Language Education Program at Universidad de Antioquia, known as 1476, was renovated in 2018, second semester, to look for the education of foreign language teachers with foundations on critical perspectives of languages and cultures, Intercultural Education and Social Justice (Proyecto Educativo de Programa, 2022, our translation). Due to the pandemic and different personal reasons, there was only one student from the first cohort (2018-2) finishing her practicum cycle, which made it a small sample to analyze how students were doing with the new program and how it was evidenced during their practicum. For this reason, we, who came from the second cohort (2019-1), wanted to contribute with our narratives to the construction of knowledge in the School of Languages as we present detailed experiences that could provide the School of Languages with feedback on how we integrated the new curriculum into our teaching practices as pre-service teachers. Furthermore, we expect that our study could become a source of information for those students who may be interested in narrative research on pre-service teachers’ identities and practices and use it to guide their projects.

Research Question and Objectives

Research Question

How do we build our identity as pre-service English teachers and how we portrait it in our teaching practices during the practicum cycle?

General Objective

To understand the relationship between pre-service English teachers' identity construction, and its manifestation in our teaching practices during the practicum cycle.

Specific Objectives

- To identify the factors influencing our identity as pre-service English teachers.
- To analyze how these factors were reflected in our teaching practices during the practicum cycle.
- To make a connection between our past, present and future expectations and how they interact to permeate our teaching practices.

Theoretical Framework

In the following section we will provide the key concepts that guided the construction and development of this research project. First, the definition of teaching practices, regarding the actions that teachers do in the classrooms based on many factors; identity, about the self of the teachers and narrative research, which was the chosen one for this research.

Teaching Practices

To start, according to Quintero et al (2009), teaching practice is the mix of the practice, and the theory related to the pedagogical, didactical, and transdisciplinary actions teachers do

inside and outside the classroom. It is a matter of what the teachers know about their subjects and how they transform it into something students can understand and learn, shaped by how they perceive themselves as teachers, their connections to the school and the community, ethics and academic freedom (Quintero et al., 2009). We cannot assume that just the activities and the classes planned by the teachers are teaching practices; their education, principles, beliefs, and reflections on what happens in class are also included inside the concept of teaching practices.

Teaching practices also depend on cognitive, emotional, and social factors. As Sierra-Piedrahita (2018) expresses, teaching practices include reflection, looking for a purpose for learning, and interactions with their community (colleagues and students): Teachers reflect on what they teach and how they teach by analyzing their experiences; when looking for a purpose for learning teachers consider their feelings and desires to change and produce a change their classes and their students learning experiences, feeling empowered to try new things and experiment with different concepts (Henson, 2001, as cited in Sierra-Piedrahita, 2018). The teaching practices are also modified and influenced by the interactions with the teachers' community, as they discuss and reflect with their colleagues about situations and experiences lived in the classroom to listen to different perspectives and gain a better understanding of their experiences (Little, 2003; Grossman, Wineburg & Woolworth, 2001; Andrews & Lewis, 2002; Arbaugh, 2003, as cited in Sierra-Piedrahita. 2018), or when they reflect on their students' reactions and performance to make some changes to their plans, and even their behavior with the different groups.

Identity

It is a dynamic process that is shaped by sociocultural, historical and personal factors. As Mosquera-Pérez and Losada-Rivas (2021) explained, the Language Teacher Identity (LTI) is what

people usually link to teachers' practices, to their beliefs on education, and the behaviors in the classroom that characterize them inside the language teaching field. In general, according to Cooper and Olson (2020), teachers do not "use" a singular identity, but they have multiple selves that interact with the contexts, professional expectations and personal experiences from the past. It is commonly understood that there is always a "battle" between the personal self as a teacher and what are the requirements for the professional development in which the teacher must have a balance between what he/she wants and what is required to do, both being involved in the identity of the teachers in each classroom. Here, we can identify two kinds of teachers' identities, the personal and the professional.

In addition, Zembylas (2003) argues that emotions are key elements in the development of a teacher identity and that they do not just imply personal experiences that are political and social constructions applied in classroom, plus, being a teacher is a profession that involves a lot of emotional engagement, but they are able to be agents of self-transformation. Teachers' identities are mutable, and permeated by factors that surround their experiences. For this, it is possible to identify the branch of the teacher that is connected to their emotions and how their emotions are also connected to their identity.

Considering that the teachers' identities are evolving and changing, this implies that the teacher identity is starting to develop from the moment they are students, and it is shaped by many other features from the past. Del Carmen Benítez and Lucero (2009), with information that teachers have from past experiences, they can make decisions and changes that are acted according to what they think and what they took from their own teachers from the past. Additionally, a big part of the teachers' identity comes from their contexts, backgrounds, families and other broader social interactions.

As we mentioned before, we explore identity because we want to understand its relationship with our teaching practices. Related to this, we found that Ozbay Ozdemir (2024) explained that “the teaching beliefs of ones develops based on his past and present educational experiences directly affects how ones will improve his teaching practices in the future” (p. 2). Indeed, that our background, past and present experiences directly influence how and what we teach. In other words, those teaching practices are not just random decisions with no clear bases, but the results of the interactions with our experiences and what we learn from them.

Overall, we can say that teachers’ identities are a complex and evolving construction that involves several factors like personal, professional, emotional and historical. Teachers are reacting all the time to what is happening around them, and they develop a way to react to different situations considering the tools that they have. To finish, teachers’ identities are always under self-reflection in which they are looking for the answer of what kind person and teacher they are.

Narrative Research

Narrative research itself needs to be defined again as part of the theoretical framework, outside the research methodology section, as it is determinant to explore the complexity of identities, meaning construction, practical knowledge, and the personal and cultural structuration of an individual (Aceves, 1994, 2001, as cited in Bolivar & Domingo, 2006). According to Bolivar and Domingo (2006), this methodology allows researchers to give meaning and understand the cognitive and affective dimensions of an action. Bolivar and Domingo also add that:

Recounting one’s own experiences and “reading” (in the sense of “interpreting”) these events/actions in the light of the stories that the agents tell has become a peculiar research perspective. Subjectivity is also a necessary condition for social knowledge. The play of subjectivities that occur in a biographical story, based on a dialogue with oneself and with

the listener in search of a consensual truth, is a dialogical process, privileged for the construction of understanding and meaning. It is a way of bringing to light and prioritizing a narrative and dialogical self, with a relational and communal nature. (para. 7)

For us, this means we need to go over our stories and subjective perceptions of what has happened around us to be able to clearly understand the relationship between our self-perception, identity construction, and its manifestation in our teaching practices during the practicum cycle.

Moreover, according to Huchim and Reyes (2013), narrative research offers the possibility to study social and human phenomena from the perspective and life experiences of a single individual, or a group of individuals, that can be extended to different areas of study and produce and explore more knowledge about different issues. In our case, narrative research opens the gates to explore the different phenomena that can be identified when we talk about the relationship between pre-service English teachers' identity construction, and its manifestation in the teaching practices during the practicum cycle.

It is also relevant to study the pre-service teachers' cases of identity construction and teaching practices from a narrative and biographical perspective because, as Huberman (1999, as cited in Huchim & Reyes, 2013) explained, each of teacher is unique and this can only be understood from their own professional career; on the other hand, each teacher presents common aspects in their development within a group, with whom they share the same history within an educational institution.

Method and Data Collection Instruments

In this section we will define the research method and data collection instruments that we used during the process of gathering the information that we needed throughout the practicum time. For the method, we chose Narrative Inquiry because it was the one that fits the purposes of

the research. In addition, as every research methodology does, narrative research employs different instruments to collect information about the participants. From all the different existent instruments, we decided to work with an autobiography, anecdotes and *reescritura de anécdotas* (re-written anecdotes), and weekly journals written in the form of stories or anecdotes about what we lived in the classroom.

Narrative Inquiry

Before talking about narrative research, it is necessary to define what a narrative is. Following Squire et al. (2014), a narrative is an ensemble of visual, oral, written, spoken, and gestural acts (there could be more) that, with the interactions among them, construct meaning. The term narrative is very broad, as it can be focused on constructing stories and temporally ordered events, describing past events, demonstrating points of view, defining concepts, exploring the personal identity of someone, describing abstract concepts like feelings, emotions, etc. (Squire et al., 2014). The narrative research, following Squire et al., (2014), is the one in which researchers explore a phenomenon through the analysis of the personal experiences of the participants, provided in narrative materials, like spoken life stories and day-by-day journals of events.

For us, it was pertinent to explore our personal experiences through narratives because, as Van Manen (2003) explains, by transforming lived experience into a textual expression of its essence, the effect of the text is both a reflexive reliving and a reflective appropriation of something significant: a notion by which a reader gains live powerfully in your own lived experience. What we do with that is to go deep into our minds and explore all the processes, thoughts, and experiences that can be related at different levels with what we do inside and outside the classroom.

Data Collection Instruments

We decided it was pertinent to start our data collection by writing our autobiographies because, As Bolivar and Domingo stated (2006), these texts allowed us to give meaning, understand and review our complete life up to today, not only from an objective point of view but from a subjective thought that let us talk about feelings and facts at the same time. Autobiographies gave us a clearer picture of who we were and what we lived led us to build the identities we constructed. In this case, subjectivity cannot be let aside because, as Bolivar and Domingo stated (2006) also explained, “the interplay of subjectivities that is produced in a biographical account, based on a dialogue between oneself and the listener in search of a consensual truth, is a dialogical process, privileging the construction of understanding and meaning” (p. 4).

As Van Manen expresses (2003), anecdotes are narrations that highlight special aspects of people’s daily life and help us understand a phenomenon through the importance and the value the participant gives to that experience. Moreover, following Ayala-Carabajo (2017, as cited in Armijos-Yambay, 2020), anecdotes can provide researchers with pragmatical information that was not taken into account before, and, as Van Manen (2003) explains, they can build the theory for that pragmatical information as they provide valuable supporting evidence that, in our case, showed the relationship between our pre-service English teachers’ identity construction and our teaching practices. This means, the data that we collected from our anecdotes could be useful for the construction of theory for further studies about teachers’ identities and teaching practices.

We collected two kinds of anecdotes: The first one were anecdotes related to elements that influenced our perspectives on how we saw education and the kind of teacher we wanted to become; and the second one were anecdotes about people that influenced our decisions on the kind of teacher we wanted to become. The purpose of collecting these kinds of anecdotes was to provide

a clearer picture of who we were in different stages of our lives and the importance we gave to different social moments in our stories that led us to be the people and teachers we were at the time we were doing this research project.

In addition, the *reescritura de anécdotas* is important in narrative research, as it allows researchers to explore and analyze in a deeper way the human experience, but it is important to clarify that this rewriting exercise does not look for objective affirmations, again, the importance of rewriting is to explore and understand what happened in that human experience (Van Manen, 2016a, as cited in Armijos-Yambay, 2020). Following this, our idea with the re-written anecdotes was to understand better what we lived and what led us to construct the identities we have, and how that construction of our identities was portrayed in our teaching practices as pre-service English teachers during our practicum cycle. This process was made once we collected all the anecdotes and can be seen in the narrative section of this paper.

Finally, we used journals that we wrote every week about our experiences in class. The way these journals were written was as stories of the most memorable moments that we had in the school weekly. According to Janesick (1999), writing journals enriches the process of research because they consider different perspectives and reflections of events that are happening in certain moments that can create meaning. Furthermore, the journals were connected to the situations that were happening to us at the time that this research was written, so they gave context about the circumstances that we were facing, and they expressed feelings and thoughts that helped us identify our identities and how they interacted with our teaching practices in a real scenario. Click [here](#) to access our narratives.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed by following the thematic analysis proposed Naeem et al. (2023): finding common themes among the data, looking for patterns that are then interpreted for their inherent meaning; those patterns can be settled considering the key words used by the participants, being then confirmed by the meticulous reading of the data and the creation of categories. In our case, what we did to start, after reading all the narratives, was looking for themes among them, taking into account that teachers' identities could be categorized into personal, professional, emotional and historical, as it was stated by Zembylas (2003); Del Carmen Benítez and Lucero (2009); Cooper and Olson (2020); Mosquera-Pérez and Losada-Rivas (2021); and Ozbay Ozdemir (2024). With that in mind, we could create common categories that appear in both of our stories. Then, the narratives were organized in those themes to answer the research question. After that, the narratives were rewritten to have more precise information that could lead us to a clear analysis of the data. Finally, we built interpretations and reported the findings.

Findings and Interpretations

This study aimed to explore the four identities that we found in ourselves that were connected to our teaching practices. This section presents and illustrates four findings supported by the analysis of the narratives and the theory. Those are: From who we were to who we became inside the classroom (historical identity); finally, being English teachers, who did we become? (Professional identity); what I'm feeling, what I'm doing (Emotional identity) and us printed in the classroom (Personal identity). In the following paragraphs we provide an in-depth explanation of each finding.

From Who We Were to Who We Became Inside the Classroom (Historical Identity)

The concept of historical identity was taken as one that relates to past experiences, contexts, backgrounds and different moments of the earlier years (del Carmen & Benítez, 2009). Giving a careful look at the narratives collected over the course of this research project, it could be evidenced that our historical identities let us become teachers who wanted to implement activities that involved music, movies, sports and games in the classroom; bring information from different countries and build rapport with students: Loving and respecting them.

The desire to implement activities that involved music, movies, sports and games came from experiences as language learners and from the principles learned from upbringing. In Alejandro's case, he showed it in his autobiography when he was talking about a schoolteacher that left a mark on him. She talked to Alejandro's parents about his abilities which ended up in his family enrolling him in music classes. There he had different perspectives on life and after he told his teacher about the joy he was feeling, he realized that she was proud. The impact of such happening was so profound that he thinks music makes part of his life, even being a language teacher. In his teaching philosophy he stated: "I try to present students the language as something they can feel connected to, a space to learn about the things they like and enjoy, like reading, music, arts, movies, sports, etc.". In his teaching practices those activities were evident when he tried to include reading comprehension activities with self-made texts, also with mimic activities and other strategies that could make a class more enjoyable and materials that were contextualized with students' environments. Those happenings with the arts, specifically music, were important for him since he could deeply connect with this teacher from the past that stimulated the liking for human expressions of art. She also supported him in a way that he liked, creating that connection between student and teacher that marked the teacher that Alejandro is building.

In Camila's case, she expressed some ideas about her family life and how they became teachers in her first steps of life when she said in her autobiography: "They were my first teachers in life (her parents), one taught me that you should do the best and use your imagination, and creativity but also your abilities to achieve a goal and the other taught me that there are things that you have to do even if they are not of your liking". Her parents were important in her process as they represented her first encounter with teaching and their abilities, they shared it with her. Those influences from the past were distinguishable in the lesson plans that were not only mostly related to games and to using the body to learn, but also to understand that rules, even in games, should be followed even if you do not like them but they help you achieve a goal. One piece of evidence that makes it noticeable is one of her journals when she talked about an activity in class where students had to look for the names of the partners with certain characteristics in a list given by her. The problem was that students were cheating during the activity: "At the beginning I had 20 papers... and I eliminated the papers one by one because some of them were lying and just writing random names... At the end, I just had 4 papers from students who were following the conditions we set at the beginning. The rest of them complained because they lost their points... I think they had a lot of fun just like me, but they were also stressed and frustrated by losing their points for the final task."

Our narratives also showed that we had been influenced by other cultures, being connected with teachers that came from other countries. Some examples of activities that we implemented in class that included sociocultural approaches were podcasts about wars around the world; giving directions from images from cities of the world; talking about recommendations and prohibitions that are weird for us but are normal in other contexts. We both showed interest in our early life experiences with English, and in people from other countries. Regarding Alejandro, it happened with two foreigners that came to Colombia to teach English. He made it clear when he said in his

autobiography: “That year, it also began the bilingualism program in Colombia which included foreign English teachers in public schools (Fellowship Program). In my school, George and Ebru arrived, George came from the United States and Ebru came from Turkey. With them, I had the opportunity not only to learn English, but also to integrate cultural elements into my life.” Those teachers, in the long term, created a meaning in the future teacher that Alejandro was constructing because they represented something brand-new that brought new perspectives to the ideas that were replicated in Colombia. He learned that there are all kinds of people in the world and being open-minded is an open door to the universe that people are.

For Camila, she also met teachers from other countries, and they made English look like a good experience to enjoy, she said in her autobiography: “During this year the school signed an agreement with EAFIT university, so our English teachers were from that institution. There I met Allison and Peter. They were from the USA, and they were funny, engaged with the class. I used to love English class because of them, the experience was enjoyable, and I had so much fun.” In Camila’s case, having this encounter with the foreigners brought a new perspective on teaching, based on likings and interests and engaging students with dynamic and fun activities.

Additionally, we both recalled experiences with teachers from the past that were connected to our teaching practices since they left lessons such as dialogue, comprehension, connection with students, and we noticed we strive for replicating those behaviors in class. In Alejandro’s scenario, it was more related to the communication and connections formed with his students. In one of his narratives, he talked about a particular teacher, Patty, when telling the story about an argument that took place in his classroom and at the end he said about her: “She talked about the importance of love and respect, of how important it was to create strong relationships between the group, and that she was going to be there for us anytime we needed her.” That teacher marked a significant

part of his journey as a student, as she connected with him on a deeper level than just as an instructor. This is one of the values he aims to implement as a teacher.

For Camila, this connection with the teacher from the past was more related to being dynamic, but also had further connections with students that go beyond the classroom. For instance, not being focused only on teaching sometimes, but finding activities that they also enjoy is of paramount importance for her. In one of her narratives, she said: “we told Carlos, our homeroom teacher, that we wanted to win, and he took two hours of biology class to do some sort of training. We played for two hours, and we had so much fun! We were laughing and joking, and Carlos seemed to be happy too. The real game came, and we were so nervous, Carlos was there to be our cheerleader and the whole school was watching the game because it was unusual to have a final between eleven and nine graders. At the end, we succeeded, and we were the champions.” In Camila’s situation, this teacher represented not only knowledge about a topic but also being a human being that was empathetic enough to understand the needs of his students at a certain moment.

Finally, Being English Teachers, Who Did We Become? (Professional Identity)

To talk about our professional identity, we need to recall what Del Carmen Benítez and Lucero (2009), and Cooper and Olson (2020), argue about how teacher’s identity is constructed taking into account the teachers’ expectations on education, as well as their previous experiences with other teachers (when they were students or other colleagues); having a mixture of factors involved like what the teacher wants to achieve, the expectations, and personal beliefs and values. Taking this into account, and by reading and analyzing our narratives, we concluded that, in terms of professional identity, we had some expectations that lead to the reflection and awareness of

what we were teaching, as well as roles models that made us think about the kind of teachers we wanted to be.

In Camila's case, we can see her expectations on English and how she believed it is meant to be taught. In the section called *is this what I want*, from her narratives, she mentioned English was a way to learn more about cultures of the world and how different values are portrayed through language. Here, she structured in her mind the kind of English teacher she wanted to be. Alejandro's expectations regarding English were similar, showing it in his *teaching philosophy* when he mentioned "I believe languages are a transforming agent that opens the gates of a new world of culture and information. I believe languages must be presented to students as one option to access a different perspective of the world we live in and the different possibilities we have as humans and as individuals". These thoughts from both of us came from different experiences. Camila's experience was mentioned in the journal from March 4th, when she expressed, after a class in which students showed lack of respect among them, "For me being an English teacher is more than teaching English, one of our goals is that they can communicate but what about values they should have to be part of the society?". Alejandro's reflection over the kind of English teacher he wanted to become appeared when he was a high-school student and experienced new perspectives of life thanks to the presence of foreign teachers at his school. These experiences became relevant to our teaching practices as they activated a process of reflection of looking for a purpose for teaching, in this case English as it was the language we chose for our practicum cycle. This is one of the fundamental aspects of teaching practices, the reflection and awareness over the subject that is being taught (Sierra-Piedrahita, 2018).

Moreover, in both of our narratives, we identified the presence of role models (other teachers, and even classmates) shaping our professional identities and influencing our teaching practices. In Camila's narratives, we saw that she learned from different people, for good and bad.

For example, she mentioned Professor Natalia at the university, a class that she enjoyed a lot, but she realized that it was not good for everyone, mostly, for students with a low English level. Camila said “I learned two things with her (...) I learned that it is important to create an environment for all the students because not all of them have the same abilities. (...) From Natalia, I learned and applied that if students are having fun, they will understand and participate more in class”. She also mentioned how, in Practicum I, her advisor Isabel encouraged her to be a teacher at a public school when she did not feel prepared to be there. Another determining point in Camila’s experience was the not-so-satisfying Practicum III course, when she knew that she did not want to become a teacher like her advisor and classmates were neither dynamic nor open to communication.

Alejandro’s case is close to Camila’s. He learned from teachers and classmates about the kind of professional he wanted to be, from good and bad experiences as well. One of the positive ones was when he observed his French professor being an English teacher at a public school of the city. The fact that the professor and the teacher were like two different people when teaching each English or French made Alejandro realize that, in fact, he wanted to be a teacher, a human teacher just as this professor was, and as well as the different professors he had during his time at the university that showed him the importance of being passionate teachers and teaching about life and love. Something similar happened when he observed Camila, as it was expressed in his journals from September 27th and 30th, when he mentioned he wanted to be a teacher like Camila that has the capacity to overcome situations with creativity and charisma. Interestingly enough, the kind of teacher Alejandro wanted to be was also influenced by bad experiences, like the one portrayed in *Brazilian Portuguese*, where he told the story of a professor that did not allowed creativity and new ideas in the classroom, manifesting that Alejandro would never do that in a classroom and that, in fact, he preferred students to be as creative as they can.

In sum, in both of our cases, the experiences we went through with different role models, teachers or classmates, had the power to lead us to contemplate the kind of teachers we wanted to be. These experiences were so ingrained in our minds and hearts that they clearly determined characteristics in our teaching practices, such as being dynamic and creative, allowing students to be creative, being communicative teachers, and teaching about values like love and respect.

What I'm Feeling, What I'm Doing (Emotional Identity)

According to Zembylas (2003), emotions play a crucial role in shaping a teacher's identity, not only reflecting personal experiences but also incorporating political and social constructs within the classroom, plus, it is well known that being a teacher brings with it a lot of emotional engagement. Considering the emotions that we felt during the practicum cycle, career and school, we found that we wanted to be different from some teachers we met throughout our school and university lives. To put it differently, those past experiences with teachers and emotions attached to them made us want to be present and connected to students.

For Camila, she wanted to become a teacher that was open to any kind of discussion and that was always present in their students' processes. She made a reflection about her wanting to be another sort of teacher from the one she had in her practicum III as that professor was not so coherent. During that practicum she faced a professor that she did not like and partners that did not get along with her. Despite Camila feeling sadness, fear and hate when recalling those memories, she knew deep inside she really wanted to become a teacher and decided to keep going on with her career. From there, she learned that both teachers and students can connect to various emotions and feelings that may influence how we perceive places and people. By default, this emotional connection ended up affecting her teaching practices, including aspects such as

reflections and actions. In Camila's journals she expressed her desire to be a teacher that connects with students, but that at the same time pushes students to do their best in activities or evaluations.

In Alejandro's narrative, we can see that he decided that he wanted to become a teacher who accepts students' ideas and embraces their creativity. He recalled a memory of a debate in a class when a professor interrupted his team because for him the topic was not pertinent. Alejandro recalls that event with a sense of frustration as his team took very seriously the preparation for the debate and they wanted it to work out. In the end, what they got was completely different. His professor did not consider the effort and the creativity that Alejandro and his partners put into the activity. Which led to a feeling of frustration. When recalling that feeling, he understood who he wanted to be or not as a teacher based on this situation. It was clear in his teaching practices as, while planning lessons, he looked for ways to include students' ideas and open spaces for them to share them in class even when they seemed to be weird. He vividly remembered how he felt in the situation, and he tried to avoid his students feeling the same way.

As teachers, we constantly sought ways to connect with our students by fostering open communication, understanding their experiences, and empathizing with the challenges they faced, which contributed to better classroom development. For example, Alejandro recalls a moment in his narrative where we had to improvise the entire class because the Cooperating Teacher had already implemented our lesson plan without us, and we didn't have a backup plan. As Alejandro put it, "I was about to collapse, to be honest. Last week was terrible, and I was filled with anger and sadness." The situation was incredibly stressful, as we didn't know how to proceed at first. However, with the help of our students and the connection we had with them, we managed to navigate the class successfully. Since we knew our students and the activities they liked, we decided to implement an activity with rules and pieces of advice to invent a city. The idea was to trigger their creativity. They were asked to hear each other's pieces of advice and rules and assign

a name for that city. With that activity they explored their creativity, used their imagination and had a great time connecting with their classmates and us. Alejandro went from frustration to satisfaction in the same session. He now understands that, although it is humanly impossible to avoid frustrating situations, having a strong connection with students can be key to solving situations in the classroom, and that connection gave him hope.

Finally, in one of Camila's journals from April 29th, she shared an experience of anger, sadness, and feeling unseen, which, in her words, caused her to lose her voice during a class. Surprisingly, and for the first time, she and the students were able to engage in a conversation, thanks to a previous defense the students had made on our behalf. This defense somehow revealed the connection the students had with us, and it made Camila feel seen. As a result, her anger and sadness were replaced by happiness. In our case, feelings were deeply connected to our teaching practices, serving as a cornerstone that reminded us of the kind of teachers we wanted to be.

Us Printed in the Classroom (Personal Identity)

During the process of understanding ourselves, trying to look for an answer about the way we identified ourselves and shaped our teaching practices, we discovered two main findings: First, we found in both of our cases the desire to be ourselves, yet wondering if being us in the classroom was appropriate. To rephrase, preserving our personal identities even when we were teaching; not trying to portrait images of completely different people when it came to teaching, and at the same time wondering if that was the right way to behave as teachers. It is pertinent to recall here Cooper and Olson (2020) when they stated that there is a "battle" between the personal self and the professional self. It explains the struggles we encountered during the practicum cycle. And second, we found, and according to Quintero et al. (2009), that our teaching practices reflected not only what we planned and did in the classes, but also our personal beliefs, principles and reflections. In

Camila's case, her principles about using games did not represent a battle for her, whereas being a friend of her students did. In Alejandro's case, both findings coexisted, he had conflicting principles.

One clear example of Camila's battle comes from her narratives when she described how much she loved to play games, and how important games were in her life. She believed playing games was one of the best ways to learn, and that, with games, people could also learn to interact with people. In contrast, when students were interacting with her, trying to find out more about her, and specifically about her personal information, as described on April 1st journal, she battled with the ideas of wanting to establish good relations with students but at the same time, not being their friend. She also struggled with the idea of setting limits with love and compassion. In conclusion, Camila was struggling to reconcile what she truly believed in her heart with what she felt she was obligated to do as a teacher.

In Alejandro's narratives we identified love as an important value for him that shaped the way he decided to base his life on, and the way he taught. From his life story and *love is all you need*, we saw how he built a concept of love that became fundamental for him and what he considered important to when teaching. This is shown in his journal from April 15th, the drawing of the rabbit, where he talked about an experience with a student that had depression issues and how his heart was touched by that, mentioning that he wanted to make her feel that she was important and loved. However, he mentioned he was not sure about doing it as it would not be appropriate to approach students that way, and that he did not want them to see him as somebody who wanted to play the savior role. Alejandro also mentioned that, sometimes, he had had doubts about teaching languages, but he has been able to assure that he wants to be a teacher. Ultimately what was important for him was to teach students about life and love, even when he felt it could be problematic because he was going to become a languages teacher, not a "love teacher". Without

a doubt, one of the most important aspects in our teaching practices was the reflection about what becoming teachers means, something that Alejandro constantly did when he affirmed he was not sure about teaching languages, but that he was sure he wanted to spread what he considered good values among his students, so students could live feeling accepted and loved.

Conclusions

During the process of this research, we could see that its main objective, which was to understand the relationship between pre-service English teachers' identity construction, and its manifestation in teaching practices during the practicum cycle, was successfully explored through the writing of our narratives and their analysis. We could name our identities as historical, personal, emotional, and professional, and the connections they have with our teaching practices, meaning planning, teaching, and reflecting about the process of being a teacher.

We concluded that this research is pertinent to the language teaching program we belonged to, as it serves as a resource when evaluating the impact of the program as it offers an overview of the factors that influence teachers identify formation together with the experiences language pre-service teachers go through during the practicum cycle and how they face them. This information may also inform future decisions on including courses related to students' stories and how their feelings exert a role in their teaching practices.

Since this study is of a narrative inquiry nature, we recognize that we are sharing our unique personal experiences. We do not intend to extrapolate our stories to other pre-service teachers. What we do value, however, is the opportunity to share our stories, with the expectations that other pre-service teachers may identify with them and begin a conversation.

Recommendations

The kind of limitations that we faced during this process were, mainly, human limitations given the fact that, many times, memory was permeated by feelings, emotions, and sensations, making it limited and imprecise. The exercise of recalling moments connected to who we were at the time of carrying out this research project was not an easy task, and we had to resort to different strategies that in some cases were not enough. We acknowledge that writing narratives demands a type of presence that we were not completely aware of. This limitation can inform future researchers interested in narrative inquiry to consider strategies to help the participant truly connect with the experience so the “happening” can be as precise as possible.

We suggest researchers keep exploring teachers’ identities and teaching practices from different perspectives and viewpoints, not only from a narrative perspective. As we could see, teachers’ identities are influenced by different factors from the beginning of teachers’ lives, school experiences, university, classmates, etc. It would be pertinent to the language teaching field to explore if language teachers’ identities have any influence on the language they choose to teach, as well as the way they build their language teaching practices in different contexts.

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