



**Collective Voices in Action: Experiences and Lessons From Updating the English Area
Plans in First and Fifth Grades at Alfonso López School
Action Research**

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Dedication

Najet

To my family, who have always been there supporting me and making this possible. And to myself, as a reminder of all the things I can achieve.

Diego

To my mother, my father, my brother, and grandmothers, who were always there to support me and cheer me up through this wonderful moment of my life. You have fought against all the hard times that have appeared for me to continue studying restlessly and steadily.

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	6
Resumen.....	7
Description of the Context.....	9
Facilities.....	9
English at school.....	10
The Area Plan.....	10
The English Community.....	10
Students and Teachers.....	11
Statement of the Problem.....	13
Research Question.....	16
Objectives.....	16
General Objective.....	16
Specific Objectives.....	16
Action Plan.....	16
Development of Actions.....	18
First grade.....	19
Fifth grade.....	21
Data Analysis.....	23
First Graders.....	24
Fifth Graders.....	27
Findings and Interpretations.....	30
First Grade.....	30
Figure 1.....	31
Figure 2.....	32
Fifth Grade.....	33
Figure 3.....	33
Conclusions.....	36
Recommendations.....	37
References.....	38

Abstract

This action research study analyzes the process of implementing a new English Area Plan for first and fifth graders at a public school in Medellín. This research was developed in collaborative work with pre-service teachers, cooperating teachers, and students from the previously mentioned grades. The project aimed to evaluate the feasibility and coherence of the updated Area Plan all along with the lessons learned from the three groups of participants in this process. Data was collected through interviews, drawings, and journals. Findings revealed that meaningful, student centered activities, particularly ludic activities such as: games, singing, drawing and group work, enhanced students' engagement, interest, and motivation towards the language. Results also show that collaboration between pre-service teachers and cooperating teachers strengthened teaching practices, supported area plan decisions, and contributed to a more contextualized teaching process. This study highlights the importance of following up the feasibility and coherence of area plan design, emotional factors in learning, and sustained collaboration in all levels among the participants involved in the English teaching and learning process.

Key words: area plan, teaching practices, community, elementary education.

Resumen

Esta investigación-acción analiza el proceso de implementación de un nuevo Plan de Área de Inglés para estudiantes de primer y quinto grado en una escuela pública de Medellín. La investigación se desarrolló en colaboración con profesores en formación, profesoras colaboradoras y estudiantes de los grados mencionados anteriormente. El proyecto tenía como objetivo evaluar la viabilidad y la coherencia del Plan de Área actualizado, junto con las lecciones aprendidas por los tres grupos de participantes en este proceso. Los datos se recopilaron a través de entrevistas, dibujos y diarios de campo. Los resultados revelan que las actividades significativas y centradas en los estudiantes, en particular las actividades lúdicas como los juegos, el canto, el dibujo y el trabajo en grupo, enriquecieron la participación, el interés y la motivación de los estudiantes hacia el idioma. Los resultados también muestran que la colaboración entre los profesores en formación y los profesores colaboradores fortaleció las prácticas docentes, respaldó las decisiones del plan de área y contribuyó a un proceso de enseñanza más contextualizado. Este estudio destaca la importancia de comprobar la relevancia y la coherencia del diseño del plan de área, los factores emocionales en el aprendizaje y la colaboración sostenida en todos los niveles entre los participantes involucrados en el proceso de enseñanza y aprendizaje de inglés.

Palabras clave: plan de área, prácticas de enseñanza, comunidad, educación primaria.

COLLECTIVE VOICES: ENGLISH AREA PLAN UPDATE

Introduction

English teaching in Colombian public schools continues being a challenge, especially for elementary school teachers who were not trained as foreign language educators. In this context, revising and implementing the updated English Area Plan for Elementary grades becomes essential to accomplish institutional expectations with students' learning needs and teachers' classroom context. At the Alfonso López School, this task has been strengthened through collaborative work among cooperating teachers, pre-service teachers, and the English Community, who collectively seek to build coherent English teaching practices.

Through collaborative planning, classroom implementation of the updated English Area Plan, and the collection of data such as interviews, drawings, and journals, the research documents the experiences and lessons learned by the participants involved in this process. Finally, the purpose is to identify through the lessons learned how to improve teaching practices and enrich the design of the updated area plan, also supporting the elementary school teachers in the English teaching process.

COLLECTIVE VOICES: ENGLISH AREA PLAN UPDATE

Description of the Context

Alfonso López School (ALS) is a public educational institution in Medellín, located in Alfonso López neighborhood, in the northwestern area of the city. The institution provides education from the basic level of preschool, through elementary and high school education, academic intermediate and technical intermediate. This institution stands out for its strong interest in developing, at all levels, inclusive education by promoting healthy coexistence and harmony with the environment. It is important to clarify that this institution cannot be confused with the I.E. Alfonso López Pumarejo, located in the north-central sector of the city.

Facilities

ALS was founded in 2006 as the result of merging three schools that used to exist in the neighborhood: the first one was called Cardenal Crisanto Luque, the second one Special School Alfonso López and the last one Special School Kennedy. Even though they all used to have their own buildings, nowadays, the school is situated in two buildings: the previously called Cardenal Crisanto Luque and Special School Alfonso Lopez compose now the high school building, the old Special School Kennedy is used now for elementary school. They all went under remodelling of its facilities recently.

Regarding the resources and infrastructure of the primary school building, it is composed of two floors with a patio in the middle, a playground at one end and a ground on the other side. There is also a library and a teachers' office. All classrooms are equipped with tables and chairs for the students and the teachers, a TV and a laptop for each one of them. There are also two speakers for the whole school that teachers can borrow if they are available. All of the previous resources are provided by the institution. Nonetheless, each teacher has the opportunity to organize and include items, with decorative and pedagogical objectives of their choice to their classrooms, but most of them are almost empty.

COLLECTIVE VOICES: ENGLISH AREA PLAN UPDATE

English at school

The Area Plan

The ALS has an area plan for English, covering all grades from elementary to high school. This plan is well structured and defined including Area Identification, Code of Area, Area Status, Rationale, Logical Disciplinary, Pedagogical Foundations and the sets of legal technical terms that cover it. The penultimate modification was made in 2023. The new area plan grid, with its last upgrade in 2024, has multiple specifications for all grades.

In elementary education, two hours of English are taught per week, while in secondary school it is four. The area plan has multiple divisions, the first one includes the themes to be covered during the three terms in which the school year is divided. It also has other specific features such as grade, term, time and communicative competences, and a second division for pedagogical considerations, which include Grade Objective, Basic Standards of Competence, and Basic Learning Rights. As the third and final division, the area plan grid presents a content section, which is divided into the following parts: problem situation, learning, thematic axes and performance indicators. The first and second divisions do not change at any time of the school year for any group, however they differ from grade to grade. The third division changes each term and is different in each grade. Contents vary from first to second period and from second to third. This specifies the logical content according to grade and age of students from first grade to eleventh.

The English Community

There exists a particular group at the institution called English Community (EC)¹. This group is made up of school teachers from primary and secondary who seek to strengthen

¹ This project made the institution and seven teachers of the institution worthy of the award "CALIDAD EDUCATIVA Ser Mejor", given by the city of Medellín, in its 2020 version, for the category "Núcleo bases ciudadanías del mundo".

COLLECTIVE VOICES: ENGLISH AREA PLAN UPDATE

English teaching more in line with the needs, ages and contexts of the students, and themselves as teachers. The community was created in 2019 by teacher Yohana Lloreda² in the process of her master's degree thesis. One of the main objectives of the EC was to create a space where elementary and high school teachers could share their classroom experiences and reflect on their regular English teaching practices, as Lloreda (2019) explains, the community "enabled them to build and share experiences within their own realities" (p. 7). The conceptual throughlines created and carried out up to the present by the teachers in the community are: development of teaching materials, teachers support, teachers meeting, and activities at school, each one of them addressed through different kinds of activities in the monthly meetings. High school English teachers work collaboratively with elementary school teachers to develop new activities and materials. This gives support to elementary school teachers to feel more confident at their English classes.

During the last three years, within the framework of the practicum cycle of the Foreign Languages Teaching Program (FLTP) at the Universidad de Antioquia (UdeA), a central aspect of the collaboration between UdeA and the ALS has been the mutual support established between pre-service teachers and elementary school teachers. With the arrival of the pre-service teachers, the EC received additional support that integrated their pedagogical perspectives on English teaching and learning with the experience of the in-service teachers at the institution. The community therefore aims not only to explore the use and teaching of English but also to promote a more graceful perspective of the language, embracing it and fostering its growth within the institution through alternative ways of teaching.

Students and Teachers

During this year, in elementary school, which is the context where we developed our research project, the institution has one group per grade level except for third grade which has

² With the consent of cooperating teachers, their real names will be included all along this paper with its respective last names.

COLLECTIVE VOICES: ENGLISH AREA PLAN UPDATE

two. This data fluctuates each year due to demand for enrollment, students continuity and other social factors affecting public institutions. There is a very valuable aspect to be outlined concerning the additional groups found at this institution with focal interests. *Brújula* and *Aceleración* are courses for overage students who due to social or family issues have been out of the school systems for several years. In the case of *Brújula*, we found overage students in first and second grade, and the ones who need to fulfill the objectives for fourth and fifth grade go to *Aceleración*. For both courses students need to be less than 18 years old. Each of these groups has specific objectives and students may stand out over other students in the Institution for their height and special needs conditions.

Regarding the students and teachers we worked with, there were some differences. The first grade is a single teacher course (i.e., where one teacher is in charge of teaching all subjects) taught by teacher Callahan Mejía. She graduated from UdeA as a Special Educator in 2007. Later, in 2020, she finished her masters degree focused on vulnerable populations. Teacher Callahan has 20 years of experience teaching in different courses of primary school, and has been teaching at the ALS for 8 years. The teacher is enthusiastic about learning and using English. In fact, she has an active role in the EC until the point of being the leader of primary school teachers in the community. The students in this first grade are 17 boys and 14 girls with a strong interest in singing and playing during the classes. They all come from a low socioeconomic status and it is noticeable how some of them have some previous knowledge about basic English, especially about vocabulary related to numbers, colors, or members of the family.

While first and second graders remain all the shift in the same classroom with the same teacher, from third to fifth grade teaching works differently. The English teacher for fifth graders is Gloria Elsy Arcila, she studied a bachelor of Education in Re-educational Pedagogy and a graduate specialization in Personalized Learning. She taught English several

COLLECTIVE VOICES: ENGLISH AREA PLAN UPDATE

years ago, when she worked as a teacher in an elementary school in Ciudad Bolívar, a town near Medellín. At ALS, her fifth grade group is composed of 33 students, 18 girls and 15 boys. She says that teaching English nowadays is way more complex than when she started teaching. Teacher Gloria teaches English, ethics and religion while another teacher is in charge of arts, mathematics, and Spanish. This means students must rotate from classroom to classroom in order to change the subject.

Since the beginning of our practicum in the school, we were in contact with other fellow students from the FLTP who have been part of the integration and participation in the activities defined by EC. Besides, taking into account their own experiences and ours during the first months of our practicum activities, we shaped our interests regarding the process of our research proposal. Understanding the people we worked with, both students and teachers and the particular situations we faced in every intervention in first and fifth grade, we had the opportunity to create a general perspective and analyze the exercise we develop as teachers there, and the particular needs we need to enrich in order to be better teachers and contribute to this community.

Statement of the Problem

As a result of our interventions as pre-service teachers, the meetings with the EC staff, and the interaction with the three fellow pre-service teachers who had previously worked at the school, we identified the necessity of restructuring the English Area Plan. This need had already been highlighted in some discussion with them while working in their research project “Elementary School and Pre-service Teachers Learning and Teaching Together Immersed in an English Community of Practice” (Martinez et al., 2024), where teachers expressed their concerns about the lack of connection among topics and the excess or absence of certain contents in each period.

COLLECTIVE VOICES: ENGLISH AREA PLAN UPDATE

In 2024, teacher Yohana Lloreda decided, as part of her end-of-year activities, to take on the task of updating the area plan for the following year. Her proposal consisted of changing the pre-established area plan from what is called at this school a thematic-axes approach to one based on skills and competences aligned with the governmental standards for English teaching. It also included the integration of projects at the end of each period and collaborative reviews with the teachers in charge of each course to assess feasibility and effectiveness. Taking into account that our intention was to leave a significant outcome of our practicum for the institution, and after discussing with teacher Yohana, we decided to focus our research on supporting this restructuring process, specifically in first and fifth grades.

Theoretical Framework

This theoretical framework presents the key concepts that guide this research. Action research, curriculum, co-teaching, and teaching practices. These notions provide the theory for both pedagogical and methodological aspects for this research project. As well known concepts as these are, they have been defined by several researchers and professionals. We took the definitions that we believe are the most appropriate to our context and in line with our intentions in how this research is developed.

Trying to follow our intention behind this research process, we decided to implement an action research project, as we, in our teacher role, are in charge of the implementation of the new English Area Plan in our courses. McNiff and Whitehead (2006) state that action research allows researchers to “investigate their own practice as they find ways of living more fully in the direction of their educational values” (p. 8). This idea represents the purpose we have of discovering those lessons gained during the enquiry process taking into account our own practices in the classroom. The authors also outline that this method follows the plan of identifying a concern that eventually will be analyzed in search of a way to find answers to multiple questions. This last idea is consistent with our purpose to identify our concern

COLLECTIVE VOICES: ENGLISH AREA PLAN UPDATE

respecting the properness of a curriculum in a specific context and solving doubts about what can be changed and what is going to remain as it is proposed.

As mentioned in the last idea above, curriculum is one of our fundamental concepts. The concept has been approached from different perspectives. Stenhouse (1975) defines it as “an attempt to communicate the essential principles and features of an educational proposal in such a form that it is open to critical scrutiny and capable of effective translation into practice” (p. 4). In a more recent view, Marmolejo and Mayora (2019) argue that “the lack of specificity reinforces the idea of the curriculum as open, flexible, and dynamic, since, according to scholars in the field, these should be considered ideal characteristics of the concept” (p. 11). Both perspectives emphasize the curriculum as a dynamic and adaptable construct that is subject to reflection and continuous improvement. Having in mind these definitions, we agree that curriculum allows us to analyze and modify it in order to contextualize it, turning it into a more useful tool.

Nonetheless, this process is not only carried out by pre-service teachers themselves. Cooperating teachers (CTs) and pre-service teachers work together throughout its implementation, which is where our third concept, co-teaching, takes part. Villa et al. (2013, as cited in Cuervo et al., 2024) describe different approaches to support co-teaching, such as when one teacher leads the lesson while the other observes and assists individual students as needed. Moreover, when pre-service and elementary school teachers collaborate as equals, co-teaching emerges as an appropriate approach to foster the professional development of both groups.

Another relevant topic that appears in our research process is the concept of teaching practices. During the development of the study, we noticed how we were not only implementing the update of a new area plan but how we were creating our personal way to teach while analyzing the response of our students to the classes and the topics proposed for

COLLECTIVE VOICES: ENGLISH AREA PLAN UPDATE

each level respectively. To define this concept, we address Stenhouse (1975) who asserts that a teacher must be able to research its own teaching and students' learning. This establishes a connection between theory and practice in which teachers define their way to produce knowledge based on the reflection and circumstances that the environment provides for the learning process.

Research Question

What are the lessons learned concerning teaching practices for pre-service teachers, cooperating teachers, and first and fifth graders on the implementation of the updated area plan for English at Alfonso López de Medellín educational institution?

Objectives

General Objective

To implement the updating of the English Area Plan as a collaborative endeavor among first and fifth graders, and preservice and cooperating teachers in an educational institution in Medellín.

Specific Objectives

- To describe the lessons we learned through the process of the implementation of the area plan, the relevance, and effectiveness in the teaching-learning process.
- To collect and analyze students' evidence, such as drawings and interviews, along with their responses regarding the development of the English class.
- To analyze and interpret the results obtained from the meetings with cooperating and pre-service teachers regarding the design and implementation of the updated English Area Plan.

Action Plan

Our objective with this AR was to participate in the updating and implementation of the English Area Plan proposed for first and fifth grades of ALS. Initially, projects were

COLLECTIVE VOICES: ENGLISH AREA PLAN UPDATE

proposed for the evaluation of the objectives of each period and in the process of implementation there was a simultaneous analysis in collaboration with the CTs of each course. The result of this joint work between pre-service teachers and the CTs was a course plan which was consistent and applicable to the level and knowledge of the students.

For this AR, the action plan includes several teaching and research activities. The teaching activities to accomplish the updating of the English Area Plan for first and fifth graders go from reviewing and analyzing the area plan, planning lessons according to the decisions made from the start of the school classes, to the implementation of it for the first term working together with the CTs. The research process required informed consent from students' families, the definition of data collection instruments, and the protocols for the interviews to students and CTs. Each of these steps were designed to reflect the relevance and pedagogical coherence of the English Area Plan of the elementary school.

Regarding the specific instruments we used in the research process, we selected three that help us to analyze the study from different perspectives. First, writing journals based on the evidence we, as pre-service teachers, would have from our experiences in the classroom to interpret our personal points of view. Journal writing is a self-revelatory and creative process and an essential companion for conducting action research (O'Hanlon, 1997, as cited in Altrichter and Holly, 2005). Second, we planned to collect data from students using short surveys for the fifth graders, as they are capable of expressing themselves through writing, and drawings for first graders, as that was the closest way they could represent their world and experiences. Third, both groups participated in short interviews where they had the opportunity to explain their answers and share the understandings of their learning process. Additionally, we also conducted interviews and had informal conversations with the CTs to analyze and evaluate the activities and students' response from their perspective. This is grounded in Creswell's (2009) proposals regarding data collection methods in research.

COLLECTIVE VOICES: ENGLISH AREA PLAN UPDATE

Table 1.*Action Plan*

Activity	Start	Final
English classes	February 3rd	June 5th
Informed consents	Last week of February	Collection: March
Collection of artifacts and pre-service journal keeping	February 3rd	End of first term
Meetings with cooperating teachers	Monthly meeting	End of second term
Cooperating teachers interviews	Mid-term (April)	
Students interviews	End of term	
Data Analysis and Interpretation	Start of second term	End of the year

Development of Actions

Following the process of the AR study, our goal was to start the academic year understanding the context we were studying: the teachers, the students and particularly, the implementation of the new English Area Plan. We proposed to have first meetings with our CTs to get involved in the courses, start teaching, and also to define monthly meetings with them to analyze and evaluate the process. We expected that by the end of the first term we

COLLECTIVE VOICES: ENGLISH AREA PLAN UPDATE

should have already collected the data from students' perspectives. During this whole time we also wrote our journals, leaving evidence of how we experimented the whole process. In this order, we planned to start analyzing the data during the mid year vacations. We will go in depth in the following paragraphs about how actions took place.

Even though the purpose we were pursuing was the same, the situations were different as the students were in a different moment of their development and academic processes. The ones in first grade were getting used to the school schedule and activities, and they had not had any regular contact with an English class, while the ones in fifth grade already had an experience studying English within this school context, and that made a great difference in how we develop our processes in each classroom.

First grade

The beginning of the year was intense but satisfactory for the first grade course. I (Najet) met the students and the teacher in a deeper way, establishing a pleasant contact so we could work on the best terms. During my first week, I had a meeting with teacher Callahan with the intention of understanding the context, the students and the institution, taking into account the curriculum. In the meeting, we talked about topics like students with special needs, the general behavior of the class, the context where they come from and what the teacher was expecting from me through this year. She also gave some advice about my teaching practices like how to reach students and how to interact with them, that was basically through oral and visual activities. Moreover, she talked about the skills I needed to develop with them, what she was fostering inside the classroom: developing hard skills like how to draw and paint and soft skills like teamwork. At the end of the meeting, we organize the general agenda of the course and the main dates.

The first classes were a connection moment, where we helped students in their process of coping with the school dynamics. I organized the classes to bring them their first

COLLECTIVE VOICES: ENGLISH AREA PLAN UPDATE

contact with English lessons while I also helped them to kindly comprehend that this was a new phase of their educational process and they will start to have new experiences, learn how to follow instructions and engage them with the new school schedule. My strategy to get them involved into the classes was using engaging slides presenting a framework that was divided into three moments that became four over the process: *the connection moment* that was done with a song and an exercise to tap into previous knowledge; *the explanation moment* where I introduced the topic and helped them to understand it; *the time to put into practice* and *the farewell moment* where we sang the bye-bye song. I tried not to overwhelm them with a lot of information as soon as I understood they were not able to manage it all and their attention was difficult to keep as long as it became a lot.

Following the last idea, I revised the new area plan proposal. There were many topics included resulting from teachers asking for more content as the previous plan was a little bit short (e.g., numbers from 1 to 70, body parts, pronouns and verbs, prepositions of place, school objects and places, imperative form, among others). However, in the classroom, teacher Callahan and I realized that it was impossible to support meaningful learning experiences in English if we considered covering all the contents proposed for this grade. I decided to make it short but valuable, starting to speak from the self in the first term to move into close relationships for the next ones. In the first term we explored the following topics: name, age (using numbers from 1 to 10), naming themselves as boys or girls, body parts and some basic daily routines. I left aside topics like sequential words, family members, Wh words, possessive pronouns, and verb to be. Some of them were briefly addressed in class but not as the main topics.

Along the term, I noticed how students gained confidence during the classes. Their participation was notable, asking all the time to be part of the class exercises. They began to understand basic commands we experienced like stand up, sit down; the general structure of

COLLECTIVE VOICES: ENGLISH AREA PLAN UPDATE

the class and songs we commonly sang became natural for them. Besides, they gain confidence in other skills like drawing and painting. They faced challenges that were evident during the classes, one class per week does not allow enough time to incorporate all the information they received. In the main project we developed at the end of the term about describing themselves, we saw clearly how topics like daily routines were still challenging for them. As a result of the first term, we decided to start cross-cutting classes like social sciences with the English class. The intention was to search for alternatives to make connections that reinforce their learnings through the review of shared topics such as family.

Teacher Callahan and I only had two follow-up meetings about the implementation process due to diverse factors like the activities in the school. It does not mean that we did not have time to discuss what we were witnessing. Teacher Callahan and I talked a lot about the classes in different moments like the breaks or through Whatsapp, but not as the meetings we proposed in the beginning. The data collection from students was done during the second term in an attempt to give them enough time to finish all the activities from the first term and to process all we did. For that process, we asked students to draw the English class based on the two following questions: What do you like the most about the English class?, and what comes to your mind when you think in the English class? Additionally, journals were done with the information and experience collected during every class that we had without exception.

Fifth grade

When I (Diego) arrived this year to the school, I aimed to comprehend and check fifth graders' English proficiency in order to analyze how pertinent the updated English Area Plan was for them. The first couple of weeks were scheduled to verify students' knowledge and their confidence at using the language. I realized that some topics they should have already learned, such as numbers, the alphabet, or how to introduce themselves, were not properly

COLLECTIVE VOICES: ENGLISH AREA PLAN UPDATE

learned or not learned at all. Therefore, it became necessary to reconsider the area plan and include some basic subjects.

To understand the situation above, I need to describe how the previous area plan was. When I arrived at the school in the second semester of 2024, the plan only stated broad subjects like “Countries” for the whole second term or “Weather” for the third one. It did not specify activities, subtopics, objectives, or hours per week. As a result, all the elementary school teachers agreed that the main issue was the lack of specificity. Since elementary teachers are not professionals in English teaching, working with just a topic like “Countries” for 3 to 4 months made them feel overwhelmed. When we, the pre-service teachers, arrived, they felt relieved. However, we were also a bit lost because there were no clear objectives to follow, so for that first term of our arrival and teaching process, I built my own route. For example, for the “Weather” period I started to build connections among each class, planning related activities and topics with the main subject, topics like: seasons, hobbies depending on the climate, global warming, natural disasters among others emerged as a solution for a very poor oriented term. This way allowed me to overcome this situation.

Afterwards, when I reviewed the new area plan, I noticed that it contained too many topics for each period. For the first term, the proposal included: telling the time, numbers from 1 to 1000, body parts, adverbs of frequency, connectors, possessive adjectives and pronouns, Wh-questions, daily routines and hobbies, family members, and apology/refusal expressions—all to be taught in only three months with one weekly class of 1 hour and 30 minutes. Additionally, extra-curricular activities often used class time, and national celebrations such as Mother’s Day also had to be incorporated, even though they were not part of the area plan.

Considering the situation above, the quantity of topics proposed did not match the amount of time available for the course, not only in the first term but also in the other two.

COLLECTIVE VOICES: ENGLISH AREA PLAN UPDATE

Extra-curricular activities, grade report days, vacations, and other events frequently took time from the English class, which led us to rethink the contents in the area plan. For the purpose of accomplishing the new curriculum revision, I considered it important to listen to my CT's perspective. Although I received useful advice regarding classroom behavior and general teaching tips, there was no clear guidance related to the English class, which I understand since she was not trained in the subject. This became a challenge due to my lack of experience in course planning and design, so I had the freedom to organize the content and teach the way I thought was appropriate.

In order to become aware of students' actual knowledge, I reviewed basic topics in class such as the alphabet, numbers, colors, animals, and foods, as I realized that many students did not know how to count or spell in English. Games like "hangman," simple riddles, and images representing numbers, colors, and animals helped students recall vocabulary and gain confidence while playing. In this order of ideas and after carefully observing students' knowledge, some subjects from the area plan were moved to a different term, some others were just let aside due to a matter of lack of time or for a difficulty level not according to the age of students. For example, topics like modal verbs were too advanced considering that many students were still working on basic abilities such as counting and spelling. Although some advanced subjects can be included softly by creating connections with basic topics, some other topics mentioned above, like body parts or daily routine, were more appropriate to students' knowledge and age.

Data Analysis

In this section, we are going to present the analysis of the data collected with the aim of identifying relevant patterns, tendencies and relationships among the lessons learned from all the participants as stated in McNiff and Whitehead (2006). In the following paragraphs we intend to explain the changes implemented during the research and then, we will narrate and

COLLECTIVE VOICES: ENGLISH AREA PLAN UPDATE

explain the categories that emerged from each research participant based on the data collected with the different methods.

One relevant aspect that is important to highlight is that there were some changes during the data collection processes. In the case of the first graders, even though initially we thought about a group interview organizing their drawings in a gallery for them to express their connections with the experience, some prompts provided, we had to implement them individually because they were not together the days we carried them out. Regarding the monthly meetings with teacher Callahan, instead of meetings, we had conversations in the breaks, and during or after classes. We also implemented two interviews, one at the beginning of the year and the second one after the first term finished. Additionally, the pre-service teachers' journals were used as another source of data to triangulate with the information gathered through interviews and conversations.

Regarding the fifth graders, there was also a change in the data collection process. The first idea was to give the students a form for them to fill in individually. However, the information obtained was too brief and did not demonstrate a clear connection to the questions. Therefore, an in person interview became the best option, also for knowing my CT's perspective. The interviews were all recorded and transcribed.

First Graders

When we go over the data collected from the first graders, three main topics emerged from the analysis of their drawings and interviews: activities, interaction with others and class topics. Activities come as the result of the things they like the most and remember from class. Words like cut, color, sing, draw, and write were repetitive in their answers. In the interview, two students Mario and Jairo said about the class “me gusta dibujar, pintar y unir los puntos” [“I like drawing, painting, and join the dots”], “Pues jugamos, aprendemos y nos despedimos” [“Well, we play, we learn and we say goodbye”] . Saying “good-bye” refers to

COLLECTIVE VOICES: ENGLISH AREA PLAN UPDATE

the final moment where we always sang a farewell song. This demonstrates the influence of promoting meaningful activities that connect with the abilities and activities they enjoy doing. The interaction with others was an answer both positive and negative in some aspects, as two of the four students talk about it in the sense of how they love the interaction with peers and teachers during the educational process. Luis said: “me encanta la profe, cómo aprender de todos mis amigos” [“I like the teacher, learn from all my friends”], but Jairo reported a negative experience related to the rough contact that some of this classmates had with me (Najet) when I arrived and left the classroom: “Jairo: Como jugar brusco (...) Que no se tiren a abrazarlo porque luego lo tiran.” [“Play rough(...)Do not let them rush to hug you because then they will make you fall”]. The last topic we found refers to the topics they remember the most of the classes. The main two topics they all mentioned were the family and numbers, some others were: school objects, the house, animals and greetings, giving us a general perception of the topics that were meaningful for them during the first term.

About the data collected from teacher’s Callahan interviews, we also found three main categories, the first ones are connected with Najet’s awareness: of the area plan and the students in the classroom. The third one is related to our presence as pre-service teachers in the school. When talking about the area plan awareness, teacher Callahan emphasizes how Najet’s appropriation of the plan allowed him to contextualize the class with the students’ process. “Yo siento que te has apropiado como de la malla, en la medida de que la conoces, has hecho observaciones y la trabajas. Entonces no es que llegas y vamos a hacer esto sin tener conexión al plan de área sino que todo lo que estamos haciendo en el aula está conectado.” [“I feel that you have taken ownership of the area plan, as far as you know it, you have made observations and you work with it. So it is not that you arrive and we are going to do this without being connected to the area plan, but rather that everything we are doing in the classroom is connected.”] Callahan’s interview. By taking actions and establishing

COLLECTIVE VOICES: ENGLISH AREA PLAN UPDATE

connections, I grounded the class in real situations that facilitated students' appropriation of knowledge. There is a big intention behind the whole process that is represented in the projects. The second type of awareness is mostly evident in the group recognition. In the interview, teacher Callahan stated: "Yo siento que has como aprendido a conocer al grupo, como hasta dónde pueden llegar (...) Entonces hay detallitos que si uno no los tiene en cuenta, afecta el trabajo de los niños" ["I feel that you have learned to understand the group, how far they can go(...)So there are little details that, if you don't take them into account, affect the children's work."]. Here is relevant to highlight the willingness to understand the process and adapt to it, especially regarding the children's learning pace. The third category that emerged from the interviews is how our presence as pre-service teachers triggers emotional processes in the children that allows gradual and meaningful learning. This is explained with how we motivate students simply by our presence but also through creating a class environment where they can interact comfortably. "El hecho de que llegue un profe diferente, que es el teacher, que les habla en inglés, eso es la parte, la motivación, jalónalo demás (...) Pero la motivación, o sea, ellos anhelan los jueves cuando llega el teacher." ["The fact that a different teacher comes, who speaks to them in English, that's the part, the motivation, it pulls the rest along(...) I mean, they look forward to Thursdays when the teacher comes."] Callahan's interview.

Najet's journals also exhibit relevant discoveries about the implementation process. In this section, the categories that resulted from the analysis were three that are highly connected to what teacher Callahan mentioned in her interviews. The first category is centered on the area plan understanding, as making connections between students and the plan ended up being fundamental to promote autonomy and participation among the students. This is evident in the journal when I mentioned: "I noticed that maybe the topics proposed for this first activity were too much for their level. In general, they all succeeded in introducing

COLLECTIVE VOICES: ENGLISH AREA PLAN UPDATE

themselves, but the routines were too much” Najet’s journal April 24th. Later, we discovered that motivation is another catchy element during the learning process. This was noticed through statements where Najet narrates that students’ interest in participation was very common during the classes and how music (and singing or dancing) also were fundamental to promote their attention, using the things that they like the most is always the best way to stimulate them to learn. The third category focuses on understanding the group and their needs. This category is remarked by how the recognition of their abilities, strengths and areas for improvement allowed Najet to know how to address children without demanding unreachable tasks but also bringing enough information and activities to develop based on their capacities. “I understood that activities where they are called to draw or write something are very time consuming. This is not necessarily something bad, but it’s interesting to notice how they need more time to process their hard skills”.

Fifth Graders

The four main emerging categories derived from the students’ interviews were: perception about the English course, what and how they want to continue learning, topics difficulty level, that is basically how they perceive English topics if easy or hard to learn, and learning strategies. From fifth graders’ students’ interviews, I derived that the teaching practices implemented for this English class were very interesting for them, because they were playful and ludic. José, one of the students answered: “Me parecen divertidas. Aprendemos muchas cosas nuevas también y la pasamos también muy bueno con el profe” [“I think they are fun. We learn lots of new things too, and we have a great time with the teacher.”]. Concerning what and how they wanted to learn; Carolina answered: “Más que todo, oraciones más largas para poder hablar más seguido inglés Cuentos, historia, chismes.” [“Mostly longer sentences so I can speak English more often. Stories, histories, gossips”.] The other two students, José said: “Así como, de que me gusten, sería así como, como se

COLLECTIVE VOICES: ENGLISH AREA PLAN UPDATE

dicen así... Algunas cosas de electricidad.” [“Something like, I like them, it would be like, how do you say... Some things about electricity.”] and Fabio said: “cosas como de animales, como algunas se llaman en inglés” [“things like animals, how they are called in English”].

For the third category students’ answers mainly focused on the issue of pronunciation as a challenge, and the least demanding topics were related to topics they were more familiar with like the numbers. José said, for the most difficult topic that: “el día que hicimos, que dijéramos las palabras, ese ha sido mi tema más difícil” [“The day that we did, that we said the words, that was the most difficult one for me”]. There, José was referring to the pronunciation topic, with this challenge students will frequently turn to their native language to read something in English, working not as an interruption but as a resource trying to avoid mistakes. For the fourth category, students like Carolina highlighted that working with others made a difference in learning by saying: : “Cuando estamos en grupo, grupales, pues sí (...) porque con algunos amigos que me hago, de pronto saben cosas que yo no, y me ayudan a mejorar el vocabulario.” [“When we are in a group, yes (...) because some of the friends I make group with know things that I don't, and they help me improve my vocabulary.”] or José that mentioned: “Son las actividades grupales, las salidas al tablero, porque cuando tenemos las actividades grupales, nos podemos ayudar entre nosotros. Y entonces, mientras nos ayudamos entre nosotros, podemos aprender más, porque hay cosas que algunos saben y algunos no.” [“The group activities, the use of the board, because when we have group activities, we can help each other. And then, while we help each other, we can learn more, because there are things that some people know and some people don't.”] Fabio pointed up: that working with classmates for competitions was thought provoking, “competiciones (...) porque puedes pensar aún más rápido porque quieres ser el primero, va tu cerebro más rápido aún y lo haces más rápido” [“Competitions (...) because you can think even faster because you want to be first, your brain works even faster and you do it faster.”].

COLLECTIVE VOICES: ENGLISH AREA PLAN UPDATE

These activities became their favorite way to work inside the classroom, because they supported each other with topics they do not know too well and competitiveness motivated them.

From CT Gloria interview we identified four categories: Active learning, technology use, cooperative and collaborative environment and pre-service teachers formation within the bond with the English Community and practicum cycle. For the first three categories teacher Gloria said:

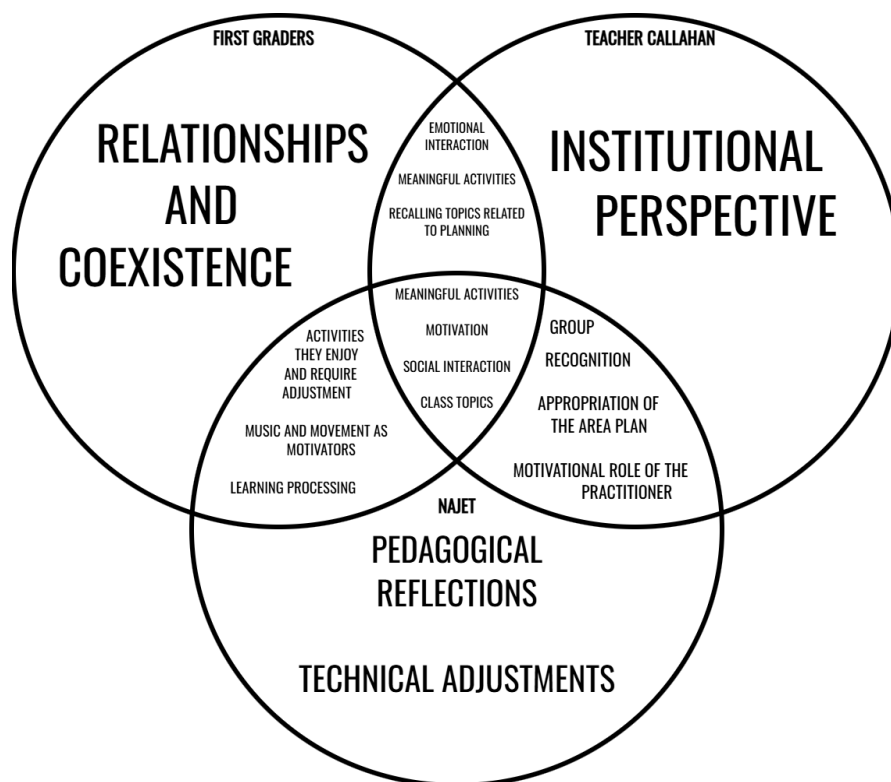
“Los estudiantes salen al tablero ellos mismos a escribir y a trabajar, eso es muy bueno. La utilización de diferentes juegos, de los recursos tecnológicos, a ellos les gusta mucho. La parte también cuando se organizan por equipos y que ellos mismos crean y trabajan en eso, eso es muy bueno” [“The students use the board themselves to write and work, which is very good. They really enjoy using different games and technological resources. I also like it when they organize themselves into teams and create and work on things themselves; that's very good.”]

She brings these ideas as a result of her observations during the English class, seeing that students are more motivated and active when some of these strategies are implemented during the class. When she mentioned technology use she was referring to the use of slides, videos and digital games used through the available resources in the classroom such as television and laptop. She mentioned that students today tend to be more engaged when technology is implemented in the classroom. She remarked that “Todas las actividades que se trabajen con ellos, en inglés, parte hasta para uno también porque uno aprende” [“All the activities you do with them, in English, are beneficial for oneself too because I learn as well.”]. Those last words are very powerful because it indicates that despite her long career and vast experience teaching, she continues learning and she does it through the pre-service teachers teaching practices inside English class.

COLLECTIVE VOICES: ENGLISH AREA PLAN UPDATE

Diego's journals were also a relevant and important source of information as well. From the journal's perspective we were able to verify and reinforce ideas and data obtained from the interviews mentioned above. A large amount of information was related to categories that appeared from students' interviews, such as: playful and ludic classroom activities, for example: “Los acertijos se convirtieron en una forma dinámica de reforzar el vocabulario y poner a prueba la memoria. Algunos alumnos respondieron rápidamente, mostrando motivación y competitividad.” [The riddles became a dynamic way to reinforce vocabulary and to test memory. Some students answered quickly, showing motivation and competitiveness”]. Use of previous knowledge, was the second category from the journal, that was related to numbers and spelling; the journals show evidence about these: “«El miedo a pronunciar no era tan visible en clases anteriores, cuando alguna parte de la clase está relacionada con los números los estudiantes demuestran más seguridad».” [The fear of pronouncing was not as visible in previous sessions, when some part of the class is related to numbers students demonstrate more security].

The connection with topics which they were already familiar with and confident at using them became a useful teaching practice to introduce new topics even when the topics were not directly related to numbers and spelling, this due to the fact that almost everything can be counted or spelled. We could also verify that competitiveness and cooperative/collaborative work are powerful teaching practices, students responded positively to every single moment that included any of these group activities, participation, engagement and willingness were significantly more visible during these three moments. As evidence of that from the journals: “Los estudiantes se mostraron motivados y disfrutaron compitiendo, a pesar de que los juegos no estaban enfocados ni creados para competir, sino para practicar.” [Students were motivated and enjoyed competing, despite the fact that the games were not focused or created to compete but to practice.”].

Findings and Interpretations**Figure 1***Venn Diagram of Findings and Interpretations in First Grade***First Grade**

One of the biggest findings regarding this implementation was the relevance and effectiveness of meaningful activities that motivate students to participate in their learning process. It was noticeable that when kids were engaged with activities like singing, drawing or coloring, the integration of new knowledge was easier and the results at the end of the term and the information recovered in the drawings and interviews allowed us to confirm those learnings. But this process needs also to follow the principle of starting from students themselves and their experiences and continue moving to the immediate context as we cannot expect children to move around topics that do not have a logical and clear purpose. Callahan also remarked it as something relevant during the implementation, as she considered that it helped a lot with the structure of the class and is coherent with the objective of providing

COLLECTIVE VOICES: ENGLISH AREA PLAN UPDATE

students with spaces for meaningful learning. That was a decision that I (Najet) decided to implement. I modified some aspects of the area plan to design classes that help students connect personally with the learning process. This approach was based on my own learnings during my educational process and is consistent with Goodman's (1986) proposal regarding the importance of connecting learners' experiences with classroom practices.

Another finding is connected to how external factors, in this case me as an external teacher who comes to class once a week played a significant role in the process. The collaborative work between teacher Callahan and me in the English class impacted not only the curricular component of the class but also the emotional dimension of the learning environment. This finding was evident across all the research participants: students made it clear when they drew and talked about the presence of two teachers in the class; teacher Callahan emphasized in her interview how this motivates them and becomes "Algo que jalona". My journals also refer to this motivation, especially when students expressed joy and hugged me at the beginning and end of each class. This demonstrates how emotional bonds and collaborative work highly influences students' engagement and shape meaningful learning experiences.

Figure 2

Mario's picture of the English class



Group recognition was also meaningful, as it allowed me to adjust topics, group boundaries and scope. Students demonstrated a solid understanding of the content addressed

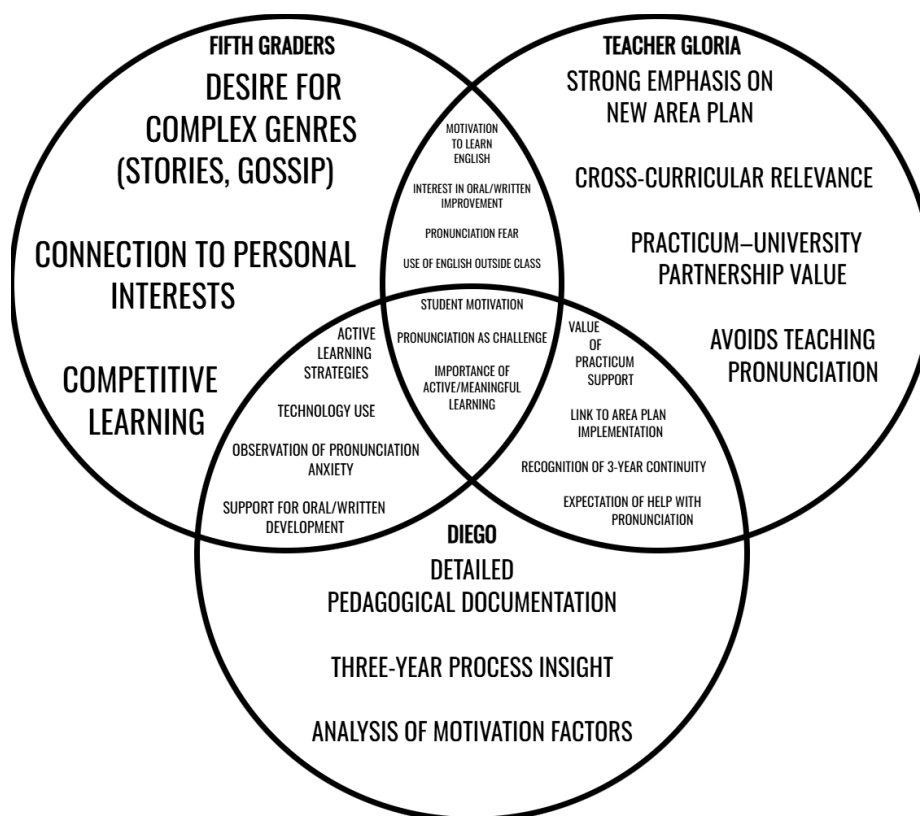
COLLECTIVE VOICES: ENGLISH AREA PLAN UPDATE

in the classes. This was evident in their answers about what they remember from the English class, where topics such as numbers, the family, the house and school objects frequently emerged. It was also reflected in the journal comments about the first end-of-term project in which students presented personal information fluently as noted in my journal entry: “they all succeeded in introducing themselves” (Najet’s journal, April 24th, 2025). Additionally, teacher Callahan expressed these advances in group understanding, both in their capacities and group control, as key elements that supported a more precise and suitable design of the area plan and class work. This reaffirms that recognizing the groups characteristics is not only something beneficial but necessary for guiding decisions and strengthening the implementation of the updated area plan.

Fifth Grade

Figure 3

Venn Diagram of Findings and Interpretations in Fifth Grade



COLLECTIVE VOICES: ENGLISH AREA PLAN UPDATE

Data analysis allows us to identify and categorize different findings in this research. As the main finding we could identify a sustained interest and motivation to learn English, also the students had a deep interest in enhancing their oral and written proficiency. Moreover, we identified a common challenge among students and cooperating teachers: pronunciation, it even becomes a fear factor towards English classes. From the cooperating teacher perspective we were able to identify the importance and relevance she gives both to the new English Area Plan and the pre-service teachers formation within the bond with the English Community and practicum cycle.

In order to be precise we will explain each of the findings above, starting by: the sustained interest and motivation to learn English. It is important to clarify that this interest is sustained due to the fact that these students started learning English with former pre-service teachers since third grade, that means that they have been part of this process for the last three years. They are deeply related with the English course and they demonstrate a very receptive attitude towards the language and the class in general. Nonetheless, it is not sustained by itself, students keep their interest and motivation also because of many other factors, such as, What they already know; and teaching practices that strive to establish meaningful connections among subjects, which go hand in hand with active learning, technology use and the construction of a collaborative/cooperative and competitive environment. This last factor is consistent with what Kato, Bolstad and Watari's (2015) explain about how "cooperative learning, which emphasizes the necessity of developing learners' social skills, tends to be described as a more structured and teacher-centered approach than collaborative learning, which presupposes the learners' autonomy to a greater extent."

Each one of the factors discovered in the sustained interest will be briefly discussed. Previous knowledge is fundamental to sustain interest among students, they feel more connected with the course with subjects that they know and control emerge during the class.

COLLECTIVE VOICES: ENGLISH AREA PLAN UPDATE

In the same way, we can use those subjects to establish meaningful and reasonable connections among the new subjects and the already known ones. Furthermore, master classes are not appealing for elementary school students, they need diversity and tools and activities related to active learning with games, technology use of virtual environments and the construction of a collaborative/cooperative and competitive environment through workteam help to be connected with the class.

In a second moment the deep interest in enhancing their oral and written proficiency. This became a wonderful evidence of students towards the language, since they want to improve their language management through the learning of more complex structures related with types of texts and genres such as stories or gossiping. In the same way they started to build relations between their personal interests and the language, wanting to learn topics beyond the ones defined in the area plan, making a link with the things they like. From the teacher Gloria interview, significant evidence emerged for this category, she explained that students are speaking in English outside the English class, asking questions about vocabulary and even telling the elementary school teachers to say things in English and they teach the teachers how to say it.

In the third category, pronunciation as a challenge not only for fifth graders but for elementary school teachers as well. From the journals and the interviews, we were able to identify that pronunciation becomes a fear factor. From the cooperating teacher's perspective, she mentioned that she is willing to teach English if needed but not if pronunciation arrives at the class, for her it is a topic too big and complex. For students, pronunciation becomes a fear factor due to the sensation of winning and losing, even when there is nothing to lose, such as a practice activity or a song. The fear of making mistakes is a challenge in which participation reduces dramatically.

COLLECTIVE VOICES: ENGLISH AREA PLAN UPDATE

For the fourth category, the new enriched area plan in contrast with the previous one emerged only from the cooperating teacher perspective. She mentioned that this new area plan allows students to go beyond the regular vocabulary and implemented it in short texts and sentences. Furthermore, the new area plan expansion offers cross-curricular connections among other subjects making it meaningful for all the members in the institution. For the fifth category, cooperating teacher Gloria highlights the value of the pre-service teachers formation within the bond with the EC and practicum cycle, mentioning its importance as human support, strengthening the practicum-university partnership and maintaining a collaboration for school improvement from several perspectives.

In summary, the findings reveal that both first and fifth graders share fundamental conditions that support English learning, particularly the role of motivation, meaningful learning experiences, and the significant influence of teaching practices and the presence of pre-service teachers. In both groups, establishing connections between classroom content and students' personal contexts enhances participation, while emotional factors such as: strengths or challenges, directly shape their engagement in the learning process. Additionally, learning becomes visible through multiple forms of evidence, reaffirming the importance of designing pedagogical environments that are coherent, affective, and contextually grounded. These elements demonstrate that although the developmental and linguistic demands differ across grade levels, the core principles that foster meaningful learning and sustained motivation remain shared, guiding the implementation and continued strengthening of the English Area Plan within the institution.

Conclusions

To conclude, the lessons learned throughout our research experience are connected one to another as the participants are connected too. For example, the importance of collaboration at every level, from cooperating teachers to pre-services teachers to elementary

COLLECTIVE VOICES: ENGLISH AREA PLAN UPDATE

school students back to cooperating teachers, was fundamental all along this research. The dialog was the basis to respond to each group's real needs. This takes us to a natural emerged reciprocity in which each participant learns and supports the other ones.

As mentioned above, another remarkable topic that emerged in our practice is the significant impact of being aware of students' needs and abilities. This awareness not only allowed us to refine and adapt our teaching strategies, but also helped us design lessons that were more meaningful, relevant and engaging for our learners. By recognizing who our students are and what they require to succeed, we can strengthen the classroom practices in order to promote a more supportive learning environment. This understanding reinforces the importance of teachers' reflections over their practices to guarantee a responsible and student-centered process.

Listening to first and fifth graders was fundamental, but in order to accomplish the objectives CT's perspective was essential. From their perspective, we were able to reinforce a previously identified situation: The lack of specificity in the previous English Area Plan. This situation was a huge drawback for elementary school teachers from ALS to teach the subject. We analyze this situation, we consider it and work on it in the new Area Plan to continue enriching the guidelines for English language learning at ALS. As mentioned in previous paragraphs, dialog and communication helped to overcome this situation and learned from several perspectives to take this new Area Plan and English classes to a new level in which English becomes significant to students and easier to teach for CTS with or without the support of pre-services teachers.

Recommendations

In light of the evidence presented and the findings of this project, some recommendations can be made to continue strengthening the process. First, it is essential to highlight the importance of teachers' meetings as they constantly need opportunities to

COLLECTIVE VOICES: ENGLISH AREA PLAN UPDATE

develop their linguistic abilities and teach language more independently. This linguistic training space must be reinforced and meaningfully connected to school activities, so that teachers can promote classroom practices with more confidence and less fear of the language. Second, the permanence of UdeA's pre-service teachers is highly recommended; however, this support should not overshadow the goal of fostering teachers autonomy. Finally, we suggest to transversalize subjects in each grade as this can significantly enhance students' learning. This allows them to improve their skills and earn confidence in the language while understanding that English is not just an isolated subject, but a tool with meaningful connections to different aspects of life and personal development.

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