



The Lived Experience of a Public-School Language Teacher

Narrative Inquiry

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Dedications

We would like to dedicate this project to Silvie, who helped us, guided us, supported us, and taught us, throughout this long and exhausting process.

Silvie, you showed us what it truly means to be a good human being before being a teacher. You taught us that empathy can change a life, even in the most difficult moments, and that a single phrase or question can change and influence someone's path for better or for worse.

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Abstract

This narrative inquiry explores how an English teacher constructed her professional identity while living and working in a public school in Medellín, Colombia. Throughout the study of experience through story, the researchers are able to identify how various experiences, such as her personal history, emotional connections to teaching, decisions made in teaching and contextual variables have collectively had an impact on her identity as a teacher throughout the years. Research methods included four in-depth interviews, informal conversations with the participant and journals kept by the researchers while making the practicum over the course of one and a half years. Thematic organization and theoretical constructs of teacher identity, agency, turning points, professional growth and gamification were used to guide the analysis of the data. Findings indicate that the formation of teacher identity within public education is heavily influenced by and shaped through relationships, emotions, and context. These participant's experiences highlight the idea that becoming a teacher is an ongoing evolution that is shaped by resilience, care towards students, and a preference for critical reflection and leaving a legacy.

Key words: Teacher's identity, Teacher's agency, Professional Development, Gamification, Turning Points

Resumen

Esta investigación narrativa explora cómo una profesora de inglés construyó su identidad profesional mientras vivía y trabajaba en una escuela pública de Medellín, Colombia. A través del estudio de la experiencia mediante el relato, las investigadoras logran identificar cómo diversas vivencias, como su historia personal, las conexiones emocionales con la enseñanza, las decisiones tomadas en su práctica docente y las variables contextuales, han influido de manera conjunta en su identidad como docente a lo largo de los años. Los métodos de investigación incluyeron cuatro entrevistas en profundidad, conversaciones informales con la participante y diarios elaborados por las investigadoras durante el desarrollo de la práctica a lo largo de un año y medio. La organización temática y los constructos teóricos de identidad docente, acción docente, detonantes, desarrollo profesional y gamificación se utilizaron para guiar el análisis de los datos. Los hallazgos indican que la formación de la identidad docente en la educación pública está profundamente influenciada y moldeada por las relaciones, las emociones y el contexto. Las experiencias de la participante resaltan la idea de que convertirse en docente es un proceso de evolución continua, marcado por la resiliencia, el cuidado hacia los estudiantes y una orientación hacia la reflexión crítica y la construcción de un legado.

Palabras clave: identidad docente, agencia docente, desarrollo profesional, gamificación, puntos de quiebre.

Introduction

This narrative project was implemented by two students from the University of Antioquia of the Bachelor of Education in Teaching Foreign Languages Program as their undergraduate degree project. This project aimed to explore how the teacher experienced her development process, including reflections, learning, emotions, critical moments, and her day-to-day contact with students and colleagues. Throughout this process, the long-term growth, emotional attachment, positioning boundaries, and development of social, cultural, and instructional competence, are what define the teacher's development as a professional. The study was developed in a public institution of Medellin Colombia during our practicum cycle for a year and a half (2024-2025). In the following lines, you will find a description of the context and the participant of the study. Then, the second section will present the justification of the study, where we contextualize the decision of making a narrative inquiry about the teacher's identity. The third section shows the research questions and the objectives. Then, in the theoretical framework we present the five main concepts of this study: teacher's identity, teacher's agency, gamification, professional development and turning points. Then, there is another section that presents the method and the data collection instruments. After that, we are going to present our findings and the interpretations 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 neighbourhood of Sevilla. The Javiera Londoño Sevilla Educational Institution was founded in 1939 under the name Javiera Londoño Urban Female School. It began operating in a house in the Prado neighborhood with only three elementary school groups, primarily serving the daughters of sex workers in the area. The school is named after Javiera Londoño, a rich woman who, wishing for a better city, donated her wealth to support women's education, believing that freedom for women could only be achieved through education and awareness in pedagogical processes.

In 1959, it was officially recognized and relocated to its current site in the Sevilla neighborhood. Then, in the 1970s the institution became coeducational or a mixed school, allowing some boys from the area to enroll. The institution operated only as an elementary school until 1997, when secondary education started with two sixth-grade groups. The institution's mission is to provide high-quality, inclusive, and innovative education from preschool through high school as a public institution in Medellín.

The institution strives on education to promote human dignity, encouraging the expression of feelings, representation, and creative thinking, in such a way that it has a human model that respects life and others, as a contribution to peace and coexistence. The institutional values include respect for life and personal integrity, freedom, dignity, justice, equity, and equal opportunities. They also promote human development, reconciliation, and leading by good example.

The participant

In this research project, there is only one participant, who is not comfortable revealing her real name. For this reason, she will be referred to throughout as "Silvie" and "The teacher".

Silvie is a 35-year-old woman originally from the municipality of Medellín. She grew up in the Niquia neighborhood of the municipality of Bello, the only child of a small but loving family. Her parents were her greatest role models.

Counting every work individually, it would be possible to accomplish more than 20 years of experience. Due to the fact that working simultaneously at different works at the time, the experience achieved at the present time is 11 years, between different contexts primarily in the public sector.

Her education includes a Bachelor's degree in foreign languages with an emphasis in English and French from the University of Antioquia and a Master's degree from the University of Santander. She has also supplemented her training through courses, seminars, and certification programs. She is known for having a close, respectful, and inclusive relationship with her students and genuinely cares about them.

Justification

To explore Silvie's teacher identity, including the different aspects that contributed to the kind of teacher she has been able to become. A Narrative Inquiry research approach has been utilized to explore the questions that arose throughout the practicum cycle at the early moments of the experience. Narrative inquiry, understood as the study of experience through story (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008), offers a methodological foundation for examining how teachers make sense of their professional lives.

As we entered the practicum in a real school for the first time, we faced many unexpected challenges, as well as the complexities and demands associated with being a teacher in public education. These experiences raised questions about our perceptions of who we are becoming as teachers, also, about the ways teachers create and maintain a meaningful, supportive, and committed professional identity.

A significant factor during the practicum experience was the mentor teacher assigned to us, Silvie. Silvie's teacher identity exemplified an innate love of teaching and a genuine connection with her students, as well as a remarkable ability to provide her students with opportunities to truly engage in their learning. Observing Silvie's practice prompted questions for us about the personal, professional, and contextual factors that contribute to the development of such a passionate teacher; and, how is it possible to navigate challenging circumstances as a teacher while still remaining present, caring, and committed pedagogically.

As a result, we will use a Narrative Inquiry into her lived experience to develop our graduation project. This methodology will enable us to gain insight into important moments, feelings, challenges, and turning points that led to her teacher identity and how those aspects of her story influenced her development as an educator. This analysis will help us to understand how to aid individuals develop into educators whose teacher identity influences their practice and the people around them; therefore, it will help develop new teachers as they become who they want to be as educators. It will inform future teachers' transition from obtaining their theoretical training to experiencing the actual reality of being a teacher.

The research project is theoretically justified through its examination of the limited amount of research on the lived experiences of public school English teachers in Colombia using narrative inquiry as an approach, as Van Manen (2003, as cited in Correa-Atehortúa & Rojas-Moreno, 2024) explains, transforming lived experience into a textual expression of its

essence produces both a reflexive, reliving and a reflective appropriation of something significant.

Previous research has examined various aspects of teacher identities, professional growth, and issues surrounding pedagogy, but few have focused on the individual, subjective experiences and contextualized, personal experiences of teachers in socio-educational settings like those at the Javiera Londoño Sevilla School. By documenting and analyzing the interviews of an English teacher, the present research contributes to the understanding of how professional identity, belief systems, and pedagogical decision-making are shaped by the sociocultural dynamics of the Colombian public education system. Consequently, the study fills an empirical gap and enriches the theoretical discussions surrounding teacher identity formation, reflective practice, and language teaching in challenging contexts.

From a practical point of view, the results from this study are expected to provide valuable information to educators who support teachers, administrators who manage schools and leaders who influence public policy in order to encourage English language education in public schools. The conclusions of this study illustrate the challenges, needs, and resources that impact the day-to-day classroom experiences for a teacher based on the teacher's lived experiences. These conclusions may provide background information for more contextually relevant professional development for teachers as different practices of methodologies including innovative approaches such as gamification are considered along the way.

Logically, this research gains relevance by applying a narrative inquiry to the common of a teacher's professional life within the Colombian public school system who constantly motivates the learning processes of the students. The study helps to demonstrate the suitability of narrative inquiry for capturing the complex and emotional depth of a teacher experience. Additionally, offers a structured vision that future teachers may compare in their own context. Through the creation, analysis, and interpretation of interviews the research

verifies an interpretative approach that connects with a more holistic understanding of the human dimension of teaching including the turning points or critical incidents that shape teachers' trajectories.

The realities, challenges, and resilience of an English teacher in a public sector makes this research relevant. A group whose voices are often overlooked in academic and policy discussions. By emphasizing the story of a teacher from "Javiera Londoño Sevilla," the socio-emotional labor, commitment, and pedagogical creativity in language education in contexts marked by inequality such as this one and limited resources. The conclusions have the potential to benefit not only teachers but also families, the educational community and specifically novice teachers by promoting greater understanding of the factors that shape teaching conditions and influence students' learning opportunities.

Research Question and Objectives

Research Question

How does a public school English teacher live her professional identity building process?

General Objective

To identify the social, teaching and cultural competences that a public school English teacher lives in her professional identity construction process in the Colombian context.

Specific Objectives

- Reflect on their teaching practice and identify areas for improvement.
- Establish a professional legacy.

- Research effective teaching methodologies.
- Analyze the impact of teaching practice on learning.

Theoretical Framework

Within this section some important concepts will be explained in regards to the main topic of the present research project. The main concepts will include teacher identity, teacher's agency, professional development and turning points.

Teacher's identity

Research indicates that individuals shape their identities based on their lived experiences. For example, a study by Castañeda-Trujillo, Alarcon-Camacho and Jaime-Osorio (2022) revealed that in Colombia, pre-service English teachers shaped their identity from a technical perspective upon entering their practicum. However, upon experiencing the practicum and receiving guidance from their teacher educators, they developed more critical and reflective approaches.

In addition to experience, identity is also impacted by external factors such as institutional constraints, personal matters, and educational policies (Corrales et al., 2025). The example of English Medium Instruction (EMI) in higher education illustrates this, as educational policies led to conflict between the professional identity, personal identity and the institutional identity of EMI teachers.

Furthermore, teacher identity develops through engaging in dynamic development. Initially, during their teacher preparation, Colombian teachers developed their professional identity primarily from technical perspectives; as they began to work in practice, their professional identity evolved into the more reflective and critical concept of identity evolving

through their lived experiences, personal identities and professional development throughout their teacher careers and expanding their knowledge.

Additionally, Corrales, Rey-Paba and Lombana-Coy (2025), also highlights the complexity of teacher identity and demonstrates how teacher identity is shaped by external forces such as the institution's policies. The authors examine how EMI creates conflict between professional, personal, and institutional identities through their research and therefore necessitates the continual re-signification of their 'teaching self'.

Teacher's agency

Teacher's agency can be understood as the capacity of teachers to make decisions and act accordingly in meaningful ways and consequently can influence their professional practice. In the study of EMI, Corrales et al. (2025) showed that agency was exercised when the teachers had to adapt their roles in response to institutional pressures.

However, Dahl (2025) comes up with another view by emphasizing the role of the emotions, values, and life stories in the enactment appearance of agency. Teachers' decisions are not solely institutional responses but also expressions of their personal-professional selves. According to the Brookings Institution (2021), agency involves the ability, willingness, and opportunity for teachers to make meaningful contributions to their profession. It is both individual and collective: teachers act as agents when they collaborate with colleagues, influence curriculum design, or advocate for pedagogical changes. Continuing in that line, Calvert (2016) also emphasizes that teacher agency empowers educators to take ownership of their learning and improvement processes, transforming professional development from a top-down activity into a dynamic, teacher-driven endeavor.

The concept of teacher agency has been theoretically enriched by the ecological model proposed by Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2015) and later expanded by Leijen et

al. (2022). This model conceptualizes agency as an emergent and situated process that results from the interaction between personal capacities and contextual factors. Teacher agency, therefore, is not a stable attribute that teachers “possess,” but rather something they enact depending on how these three dimensions interact within a given environment.

Gamification

Gamification is defined as “the use of game elements and game design techniques in non-game contexts” (Werbach & Hunter, 2012 as cited by Figueroa, 2015). In education, it increases motivation in the learning process, thus raising the level of students’ engagement. According to Figueroa (2015), this strategy can positively influence second language learning because it connects technology, motivation, and participation, helping learners feel more involved and less anxious in the classroom.

As well, gamification inspires both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, encouraging students to learn for fun at the same time achieving visible rewards and improving their performance. As Reiners and Wood (2015) suggest, gamified practices can turn teaching into a collaborative dynamic process that strengthens teachers’ identity and agency.

Professional Development

The literature suggests that professional development (PD) is much more complex than just a structured process with clear outcomes, as demonstrated by Castañeda-Trujillo et al. (2022), who found that, reflective spaces and teaching internships were major influences on the way pre-service teachers developed from a technical understanding of teaching, to a more critical understanding of teaching. In higher education, as shown by Corrales et al. (2025), when teachers began to use English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI), they encountered new challenges and were placed in new roles without the necessary support from institutions to prepare for them. This lack of support caused many teachers tension during

their career paths, indicating that when developing teachers or those who express their desire to be teachers. It is necessary to consider their context and the expectations from their institutions. Dahl (2025) supports this idea of PD being contextualized when she argues that PD cannot be separated from personal development. In other words, teachers do not only develop through formal PD avenues; they also incorporate their own stories of experiences, emotions, and value systems into their practice. The stories shared by teachers from Denmark highlight this notion; as they share how their pasts have influenced their current professional growth, the idea of teaching as a personal journey becomes clearer.

Turning Points

Turning points are critical experiences that significantly reshape teachers' professional trajectories. In "Turning Points: One Teacher's Timeline" (EducationWorld), Haberlin illustrates how key moments; such as mentorship, early classroom challenges, specialization, and leadership opportunities, redefined his identity as a teacher. These biographical reflections show that teacher development is nonlinear and shaped by personal, professional, and contextual shifts.

Research in the Colombian context reinforces this view. Castañeda-Trujillo et al. (2022) identify the teaching practicum as a major turning point for pre-service teachers, as it exposes them to the realities of classroom work and prompts a reconfiguration of their emerging professional identities. Likewise, Corrales et al. (2025) describe English-Medium Instruction (EMI) as a decisive turning point for university instructors, requiring them to renegotiate their professional, personal, and institutional identities. In both cases, moments of tension become opportunities for growth and transformation.

Method and Data Collection Instruments

In this section we will provide a detailed description of the data collection instruments that we implemented during the process of gathering the information required throughout the practicum. This description is essential because it allows us to support the methodological decision we made and elucidated how the information that supports the analysis was obtained. For the research method, we selected Lived Experience Narrative Inquiry as our method because it best aligned with the aims of the study because as Riessman (2008) explains, narrative inquiry emphasizes the stories individuals construct to interpret their experiences and understand the world they live in. Narrative Inquiry places emphasis on personal stories, lived experiences, and the meanings constructed by individuals, which made it particularly suitable for exploring our practicum experiences in depth.

As with any research methodology, narrative inquiry relies on various tools to obtain information from participants. Among the available options, we chose to work with interviews in their rewritten versions, as well as journals composed of remarkable moments that documented our experiences with the teacher in the classroom. Together, these instruments provided a comprehensive, story-based body of data that supported the overall purpose of the research.

Narrative Inquiry

To frame the discussion of data collection instruments, we need to first explain what is meant by "narrative inquiry." Clandinin & Connelly (2000) offer the most thorough description of narrative inquiry. According to Clandinin & Connelly, a researcher or participant creates narratives in collaboration over time as a result of the social relationships that they establish in various settings where they interact with others. Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research method that draws from the belief that people understand their existence

through their lived experiences as told through narratives (stories) and that narratives provide valuable insights into human life. Narrative inquiry consists of gathering and analyzing individual life stories, including personal journals or life stories of other people, to understand an individual's distinct perspective in context. Creswell & Poth (2018) further define narrative inquiry as a method of investigating people's personal stories about themselves, their chronological histories, and the meanings assigned to their life stories.

Data Collection Instruments

The material was collected between July 2024 and November 2025. After having some spontaneous conversations with Silvie in class, during breaks and in her free hours, we decided to begin our data collection at first through short semi-structured, qualitative interviews but due to many factors such as time, noise or people needing the teacher, we decided to conduct interviews outside of the assigned practicum hours. For this reason, we decided that the interviews would take place in a location where the professor would be relaxed and open up, so we chose to do them on the campus of the University of Antioquia, because it is a place that brings her back very good memories and which she feels it like a second home, four large interviews were conducted that lasted between 25 min and 45 min. Interview themes focused on: history and context, professional experience, professional development, impact on students, challenges and conclusions (perceptions in education according to her experiences, philosophies and advice).

Besides the interviews, we considered that in narrative inquiry it is essential to keep journals, as Janesick (1999) puts it, journals support both researchers and participants by capturing written accounts of their thoughts, emotions, and choices, details that might not be expressed otherwise, as they allow us to explore, analyze and reflect on our own experiences. As a result we kept journals that we wrote in every class. These entries included materials

and stories about what we considered the most memorable moments, as well as recurring phrases she often used that we found remarkable. Moreover, they also captured anecdotes that emerged naturally during the practicum, sometimes brief but meaningful incidents that revealed aspects of her teaching identity, decision-making, or interactions with students and according to Van Manen (2003, as cited in Correa-Atehortúa & Rojas-Moreno, 2024), anecdotes highlight special aspects of people's daily lives and help researchers understand a phenomenon through the importance and value participants assign to that experience.

Furthermore, an essential tool for data collection consisted of the informal and spontaneous conversations that arose along the way: specifically during class transitions and planning moments when she felt calm and truly comfortable. Sometimes, these observations emerged immediately following a significant event that occurred in class.

[Click here to access the narrative.](#)

Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim in their entirety, and the content of the transcripts was organized for each of the themes. After that, we looked through all the transcripts for common themes, where similar patterns emerged. In that way, we separated the information into the six main topics that were previously described in the Data Collection section, keeping in mind that the same question could often be approached or used differently for various topics. Once this was separated, it was easier to focus on what information we needed, which topics we should expand upon, or if we required clarification. We used the planning sessions of our practicum sessions for this purpose, while we were creating material together, it was easier for her to answer simple questions.

Considering the sensitive nature of a lived-experience narrative inquiry, it was necessary to prepare questions that addressed a wide range of relevant topics. Additionally, the narrative inquiry looked to explore those aspects of her professional and personal life that represented significant changes, with particular attention to the turning points we identified throughout her narrative. Finally, we decided to create an outline so when we wrote the narrative would have greater coherence and chronology. This process aligns with the systematic six-step thematic analysis described by Naeem et al. (2023), who state that their method “unpacks its six steps: transcript creation and data familiarization; keyword identification; code selection; theme development; conceptualization through the interpretation of keywords, codes, and themes; and, finally, the development of a conceptual model”.

On the other hand, with the journals, the first thing we did was read and reread all the entries we had created. From there, we began to analyze which journals were related to the concepts and the outline we had developed, so we could start linking them. This process also allowed us to connect her narratives with the on-site experiences and reflections we had accumulated during the year and a half of our practicum. In this sense, Janesick (1999) suggests that a journal serves as a space where the researcher can reflect, pose questions, and interpret the research process as it develops, which aligns with the role our journals played throughout the analysis.

Findings and Interpretations

This research project aimed to reflect on different aspects that we discovered that were essential in the creation of her professional identity. This section describes the findings that we discover by the analysis of the narrative of a public school teacher.

How Her Identity Was Built Over Time

The teacher's profession was formed by a group of decisions and moments lived in many educational contexts, from private schools, universities, diverse programs to public schools. Consequently, along every change and context, the analysis suggests that a part of her identity started to build and influence the person itself, as "teachers' identities are shaped in the interplay between personal experiences and professional contexts" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Significant mentors, personal calamities, and personal and meaningful moments and processes with students, which align with Dahl's claim that "teachers' trajectories are often marked by emotionally charged events that reshape their sense of who they are" (Dahl, 2025).

In the narrative inquiry it is evident the process that evidences such changes of a complete identity that plan shape until the end echoing the idea that "identity construction is a dynamic and ongoing process that emerges from the interaction between personal histories and teaching contexts" (Castañeda-Trujillo et al., 2022). And ongoing reconstruction influenced by emotional experiences such as the loss of her beloved family, ethical dilemmas like being pressured by school authorities, and significant pedagogical implementation as critical pedagogy and gamification, instead of defeating her, turn her process into a self rooted in reflection, agency, critical thinking and the continued questioning of her roles in new contexts.

Professional development as a key in her trajectory

The narrative showed the constant investment on growing, formation and improvement including different courses and certifications in diverse institutions such as Cambridge and British Council programs, critical pedagogy courses, photography, neuroeducation, ICT, international seminars, university research groups, and more. This reflects Calvert's assertion that "teacher agency grows when professional learning is

meaningful, sustained, and connected to teachers' own goals and contexts" (Calvert, 2016). It becomes an essential part of the teaching training process and expresses the extensive compromise as expertise to impart in the different contexts consistent with Leijen et al. 's finding that "higher levels of teacher agency predict stronger long-term commitment to teaching" (Leijen et al., 2022).

Her lifelong learning perspective aligns along with her professional developments. Unlike the traditional professional that focuses only on certifications, her growth is principally motivated to help her community, reflecting Dahl's point that "teachers' professional journeys integrate personal interests, formal learning, and classroom experiences" (Dahl, 2025). The seek of knowledge for personal development instead of prestige to consequently improve the pedagogical aspects is a clear characteristic. That focus had positioned her into a reflective, effective teacher who integrates academic, and personal learning to influence and shape her practice, which echoes the idea that "becoming a teacher involves weaving together personal, academic, and contextual knowledge gained through lived experience" (Castañeda-Trujillo et al., 2022). Including the expertise in non-pedagogical related experiences (such as photography, diving, boxing) become tools to refine her focus, attention, emotional balance, sensibility, and concepts in some topics related to learning as key components of the discovering of her identity and agency as a professional who even pass to future professionals.

Turning Points That Changed Her as a Teacher

The data shows that her professional and personal identity were shaped by a series of significant turning points, just as "key turning points in a teacher's life often lead to profound shifts in beliefs, motivations, and professional direction" (Haberlin, n.d.). Beginning with the discovery in her university years, the passion for teaching that established her vocation. Then, the difficulties she experienced when she worked in the nun-run school with the strict and

lacking empathy environment that completely changed her beliefs about education and authority thus the gamification emerged as her response to this rigid environment, which is consistent with the idea that “gamification enhances engagement and becomes a meaningful pedagogical strategy in language learning contexts” (Figueroa Flores, 2015).

Furthermore, becoming the legal guardian of one of her students created a critical incident that made her reconsider where were the boundaries between a teacher and a guardian and where should be her boundaries, resonating with Dahl’s statement that “teachers must negotiate personal-professional boundaries while navigating emotionally complex situations” (Dahl, 2025). In addition, the encounters with an authoritarian principal put her agency through some difficulties and reinforced her need to advocate for herself and her students. Finally, the decision to prioritize her well-being by giving up managing multiple jobs in order to focus and achieve stability along her path.

These turning points work as crucial moments of reflection, moments of crisis and re-orientation, reflecting that “moments of tension or crisis become opportunities for teachers to renegotiate their sense of self” (Castañeda-Trujillo et al., 2022). Showing that identity construction is tightly related to emotional experiences, which aligns with Van Manen’s reminder that “teaching is a profoundly emotional practice rooted in care, sensitivity, and lived experience” (Van Manen, 2003).

Through these events, she was able to redefine the limits between her personal and professional life even though she will always advocate and commit to student protection. These emotionally charged experiences not only reshaped her beliefs but also opened the door for new practices, such as gamification, to become central to her identity, which is supported by Reiners & Wood’s claim that “gamification becomes powerful when it emerges as an intentional response to contextual challenges in education” (Reiners & Wood, 2015).

The Emotional Competences In The Professional Identity

One of the main findings is after all her experiences, she is deeply connected to her students even to the point of crossing personal-professional boundaries in different situations and this emotions permeate her narrative, echoing the idea that “the emotional dimension of teaching is inseparable from professional identity” (Dahl, 2025). However, at some point of her life, she was aware that trespassing different boundaries and lines that were not meant to be crossed, was the starting point to self-regulated in all the scenarios that may encounter in the practice of teaching, which aligns with “sustaining a teacher identity requires balancing personal and professional boundaries while honoring one’s emotional life” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) . Eventually she continued in the process of learning the importance of emotional regulation and self-protection.

Her teacher's identity was constructed by integrating different emotions such as care and compassion, consistent with Van Manen’s statement that “pedagogical relations are grounded in care and responsibility” (Van Manen, 2003). And even if her teacher identity is interlaced with emotions, it is not considered a defect, but instead a part of her teacher's professional identity, which aligns with Dahl’s claim that “emotion is not a weakness but a defining dimension of teaching” (Dahl, 2025). And the fact that she is taking care of herself shows how she matures and establishes healthy professional boundaries

Developed Skills Through Experience

The strong social and cultural competences were evident along her story, the reflection and continuous support for vulnerable students, her ability to navigate diverse socioeconomic contexts, and her commitment to fostering safe and inclusive classroom environments were common points that reinforced the teaching practice, which reflects the claim that “teacher agency empowers educators to act purposefully and constructively for students’ well-being” (Brookings Institution, 2021). She further demonstrates a strong sense of belonging by prioritizing student well-being and actively resisting oppressive forms of

authority within the school setting, consistent with Priestley et al.'s idea that “teachers’ actions are shaped by their values and by the conditions that enable or constrain them” (Priestley et al., 2015). At the same time, the teacher presents solid teaching competences through her methodological flexibility, the reflective evaluation of her pedagogical strategies, and her capacity to adapt instructional approaches across different age groups and institutional contexts. Additionally, she guides practicum students with realistic and contextually grounded advice and integrates interdisciplinary learning experiences into her teaching, further highlighting her professional trajectory and pedagogical adaptability, which echoes Correa-Atehortúa & Rojas-Moreno’s finding that “teaching competences are co-constructed through situated practice and reflective engagement” (Correa-Atehortúa & Rojas-Moreno, 2024).

The competences that formed her as a person are not by chance. All of them were lived and perfected along the way and put into practice, consistent with Dahl’s assertion that “teachers’ personal and professional skills are refined over time through lived experience” (Dahl, 2025). The responses to different contexts evidence a clear sense of cultural and responsive identity with each territory and the community that make part of it. Teaching competence becomes a factor that emerges after different processes of reflection in site and action in the different contexts, allowing evidence that competence was co-constructed through experiences, not only acquired as a university matter, as expressed by “competence is developed relationally in the encounter between teacher, context, and practice” (Correa-Atehortúa & Rojas-Moreno, 2024).

Conclusions

This story describes a narrative inquiry into the ongoing creation of a public school English teacher's professional identity. As shown in the story, the teacher's identity is not developed over a single point in time, nor does the teacher's formal education alone shape the teacher's identity but is instead created through the teacher's lived experiences, emotions, challenges, and relationships from a variety of educational settings. This teacher's journey to becoming a teacher represents a continuous negotiation between her own personal history and integrity, pedagogical decisions, and her experiences within the Colombian public education system as a member of that system.

This teacher's professional growth has taken place over a substantial amount of time and cannot be separated from her practice of continuous self-development through the act of reflection. Throughout the narrative, this teacher's dedication to developing her skills for the purpose of serving her students and the communities around her, without the desire for external validation, is emphasised. Her continual dedication to developing herself through academic, creative, and personal projects is illustrated and highlights the continual learning process that is represented in the person that she has become.

It's clear from the lessons learned in this story that there have been significant life events for the discussed individual, both positive and negative, that serve as critical areas of change in beliefs, agency, and boundary development. She viewed difficult times in strict educational settings and moments of loss as opportunities to recreate herself and grow in agency through the use of innovative methods like gamification. In addition, she utilized her experiences to further her commitment to create a safe and secure environment for her students, and she discovered that becoming an ethical teacher with a deep commitment to student success requires being emotionally connected and yet emotionally balanced. She developed emotional connections through teaching, and these connections have shaped her

growth in finding the balance between deep commitment to the practice of teaching and a professional approach to it.

Finally, the narrative makes evident her desire to leave a lasting legacy. She has provided guidance and compassion, and also established strong working relationships that help others physically and emotionally, as well as academically. She provides much more than just teaching a language; she provides a means of helping create an individual; she teaches values; and she assists in developing the individual for their future. This desire for a legacy provides a purpose and continuity for her teaching and reinforces her identity as a teacher who is committed to helping build a person's future.

The overall theme of this research shows that the professional identity of a public school English teacher is created by a continuous interaction between experience and reflection, an emotional connection, a feeling of personal autonomy, and the search for improved pedagogical techniques. Teaching is not a static position but is seen as a journey through life that is formed by resilience, values, and the continuous search to find better ways to provide support to those being taught. The teacher in the narrative has illustrated that her identity continues to evolve on a daily basis by the people she meets, the context in which she lives and works, and the legacy she desires to leave for the next generation.

Recommendations

Through our research and practices, we recommend that future teachers and researchers be prepared and flexible when working in similar environments. The practicum in a public school (as shown in this study) can involve many surprises, including changing schedules, administrative obstacles and at times students on practicum do not feel fully supported by the school directives. Therefore, we suggest that when doing instructional activities, teachers should always create backup plans, keep clear records and copies of required documentation, and develop strategies to improve their ability to adapt to changing institutional conditions. In addition, if the future practicum teacher has the opportunity to work with a mentor teacher who possesses strong professional qualities, this type of experience should be engaged in fully, as it may positively affect their development. Most importantly, we state that practicum teachers should take their time and continue to remain open-minded during all phases of the practicum while allowing themselves to fully embrace the experiences from this practice as they help develop their own teacher identity.

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Appendix A

Questions Used in the Different Interviews

History and context	-How does your career as a teacher start? -What was your motivation to choose teaching as a professional career? - What can you tell us about Silvie as a person? - Were you ever interested in being a coordinator? - Do you feel like you belong only in the classroom? - Do you ask colleagues or family members what you should do about any student situation?
Experiences	-Which are your favorite methodologies ? -How do you use technology in your classes? -Which strategies do you use to promote participation and engagement in the class? -How do you promote diversity and inclusion in the classroom? -What has been your most notable experience as a teacher? -What achievements are you most proud of in your teaching career? -How have you overcome challenges or obstacles in the classroom?
Professional development	-What courses, workshops, or experiences have helped you improve your teaching skills? -What objectives do you set for your future professional development? - Is there anything you have done that you regret?
Impact on students	-How do you think your methodologies have impacted students' learning? -How do you foster autonomy and responsibility in your students? - How does it make you feel each year to see students' results? And do you see them as different people or not?
Challenges	-What are the main challenges you face in the classroom? - What kind of adaptations or transpositions have you had to implement? -What reflections do you have on current education? -How do you think education can evolve in the future?
Conclusion	-What legacy do you want to leave in education? -What advice would you give to novice teachers? -How do you see yourself in the future? How do you see yourself in the future, as a teacher or someone in the educational field?

	- What is something you want to communicate to others through this narrative?
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Appendix B

A Short Fragment of Silvie's Narrative

She never imagined herself as a teacher, not even in her wildest dreams. Her educational journey began in a modest public school called “Fe y Alegría”. Back then, becoming a teacher was not part of her plans; in fact, she once laughed when her cousin shared that she wanted to teach. Ironically, years later, she would become one of the most influential and charismatic educators, inspiring her students through innovative strategies and a distinctive personal charm.

Like many parents, they dreamed of seeing their daughter grow, succeed, and become someone they could proudly admire. Her mother, a loving housewife and the heart of the home, and her father, a hardworking machine operator who moved from one company to another, always encouraged her to study and make progress. They offered what they never had: opportunities. That was one of their ways of showing love. However, this love also brought pressure, which intensified after she graduated from high school.

Initially, she decided to pursue Social Work at the University of Antioquia. Unfortunately, she did not pass the admission exam on her first attempt. With her free spirit, she enrolled in a sales program at a small institution in the city center. Yet, the expectations of her parents kept weighing on her. Feeling the need to fulfill their dreams, she decided to try again. This time, she was admitted to the University of Antioquia, but what should she study? Social Work was an option, but it didn't fully convince her. Perhaps languages? Learning languages would allow her to explore the world she loved and gain freedom. Translation, however, seemed too mechanical for her taste. That left one last option: a degree in Foreign Languages.

Her choice was not driven by a passion for teaching. In fact, she ignored all the pedagogy courses and only focused on the possibility of learning languages to travel abroad.

After all, what could possibly go wrong? But life had a different plan. Something she never considered, love and passion, would transform everything. Those feelings only emerged after she began her studies: the unexpected passion for teaching that would shape her life forever. They were two pillars, two contrasting influences that shaped the professor we know today. The first was the researcher...

Appendix C

Remarkable Quotes Used by Silvie

- “Póngale sentido a la vida”
- “Ustedes vieran la bobada que vamos a ver hoy”
- “En las clases, siempre busco sembrar semilla. Se trata de sembrarle el gusto, las semillas, la inquietud para que él vaya después y averigue o se interese, o quiera volver...”
- “Yo le pertenezco al público, es que el público tiene mucha gente que no quiere estar y yo si quiero estar, entonces, como yo si quiero estar, que los que no se vayan...”
- “Entonces mi pelea, es como con eso, si yo te pregunto ¿Cómo estás?, yo estoy dispuesta a que tú me digas de verdad como estas, lo bueno, lo malo y lo feo...”
- “Entonces yo pienso que involucrarse es inevitable, pero hay gente que lo evita, o sea que no es tan inevitable...”