

My learning as a novice teacher: an auto ethnography

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### ABSTRACT

The main objective of this research was to raise awareness of teacher learning influenced by a new teaching context. In order to do so, I conducted an auto ethnography in order to identify the features that could be considered new learning during the first month in the new institution. Teacher journals were kept throughout the same period, including post lessons reflections; document analysis of lesson plans related to a week period was also conducted. Then, data was compared according to the day (lesson plan, observation and reflection of the day). Results showed emerging awareness on topics such as flexibility, teachers' cooperative work and decision making.

*Key words: teacher learning, new context, influence, reflection,*

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

Colombia has been under a state of change for a few years in terms of education policies especially bilingualism and the latest governmental bilingual project Colombia Very Well (Ministerio de Educacion Nacional, 2015). The need to improve Colombians' English proficiency level for economic reasons has encouraged the government to invest resources in English teachers from the public education system. Although I do not serve as a public education teacher I do share the need to constantly improve myself at many levels including the professional level. As stated by Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943), satisfaction of needs drives motivation of human beings which is what keeps us moving at different stages of our lives.

Gonzalez, Montoya and Sierra (2002) affirm in their research that teachers who attend development programs are usually motivated by the self-actualization need since these programs represent opportunities to expand their academic growth as many other advantages. In my case, attending an English teaching diploma course opened my eyes on how little I knew about teaching and the great opportunities affordable to my students if I improve as a teacher. Also, the great satisfaction of being recognized as a professional holding a post graduate degree among my family and colleagues made an impact on my personal identity.

By attending to the diploma course I could realize my own conception of my role as a teacher (Alvarez, Cardenas & Gonzalez, 2010) which was at first that of a passive consumer of knowledge; within time, it became a more action research oriented perspective which improved my teaching experience.

The need for self-actualization has been my main source of motivation so far. However, for many Colombian teachers the professional reality is quite different. First of all, it is important to notice the three cornerstones for teachers' development programs which are actualization, innovation and research (Secretaria de Educacion de Bogota D.C., 2006). Colombian teachers who attend teacher development programs, also referred as TDP, usually are looking to upgrade their welfare at three different levels: as workers, as instructors and as learners (Gonzalez, 2003). Nevertheless, as expressed by a diagnostic study implemented with several institutions in Colombia (Asocopi, 2009), many universities failed to cover teacher participants needs in all the three levels mentioned before, focusing mainly on the instructional level. Also, Colombian universities which offered TDP informed that some of the problems found are participants' workload, financial and motivational issues. This means that English teachers willing to participate in TDP are not able to do so because of constraints regarding time availability, money of lack of motivation to pursue a postgraduate study since this does not represent recognition ( in terms of a better salary) in their work environment.

The diagnostic study (Asocopi, 2009) also showed the major tendencies found in the TDP offered in Colombia. It seems that many programs still opted for an instrumentalist vision of teacher development which is called in the literature as teacher training. In this vision, participants' role is purely as a passive knowledge consumer of pedagogical recipes (Aparicio et al., 1995) that consist of techniques, methodologies and/or concrete skills to be applied in all educational levels showing little concern of teachers' current practice, teachers' role in their own context and teachers' autonomy to defend their own ideas about teaching and practice (Crookes, 2009).

On the other hand, universities with a research trajectory seemed to fulfill the requirements for adequate teachers development programs (TDP) since, for example, actions research allows participants to reflect on their context and roles as teachers. Besides, it is important to mention that reflection on research comes along with data systematization, theorization and sharing findings with the academic world. In this way, it is reflection that will transform one's teaching practice effectively.

For this research study, reflection becomes a substantial part since it will be means and ends to obtain findings that may indicate the features of my own learning as a teacher in a new context. Schön (2009) praises the importance of reflection in action for professionals since it allows practitioners to think what they do while they are doing it. In other terms, we are able to analyze the course of actions that we take and the possible effects and consequences without having field knowledge on how to explain this phenomenon. In his book *Educating the reflective practitioner*, Schön (1987) also exemplifies how a reflective practicum could be added to teaching professional schools granting teachers the opportunity to observe and experiment in their own context after they have reflected on what the TDP offers. It mentions the importance of research and theorization of what is being developed along with highly qualified teacher educators.



## 1.2 Rationale

The following chapter will present a review of the concepts related to Teacher's Professional Development that are taken into account for this research. Also, the analysis of the literature may guide the understanding of the correlation between TDP and the context to analyze which will be characterized in a further chapter.

Becoming a teacher represents a lifelong process where one never stops learning: to think, to know, to feel or to act as a teacher (Feiman-Nemser, 2008) or in other words, aspects of the teaching practice named differently by many authors: theories of practice (Burns, 1996), personal practical knowledge (Golombek, 1998), maxims (Richards, 1996) among others. Teaching a class demands preparation, time and class management, knowledge about the target students, institutional or context demands as well as pedagogical and subject knowledge (Meijer et al., 1999). Millions of teachers make efforts to improve their efficiency as professionals, helping people to learn and hopefully to become better human beings. Practice makes part of learning in the teaching endeavor or what is called teaching experience (Breen et al., 2001). Acquiring experience may take several years as the teaching practice develops through stages according to Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) who explain the process using stages such as novice level (student teachers and first year teachers), advanced beginner level (second and third years teachers), competent level (third and four year), proficient level (fifth year) and, expert level.

Although, educational systems and institutional policies support teachers' professional growth by implementing teachers' professional development programs or

models that may vary according to the purpose, nature, time constraints, and other factors, according to Richards and Farrell (2005), strategies for teachers' development may include but are not limited to workshops, self-monitoring, teacher support groups, teaching journals, peer observations, teaching portfolios, case analysis study, peer coaching, team teaching and action research. Richards and Farrell (2005) go on to explain the teacher development concept as a long term process that helps teachers examine the different dimensions of their practice looking for a self-reflective view rather than one of transmission of knowledge. This term seeks for macro growth unlike the term teacher training which usually refers to short term goals learning of discrete teaching skills e.g. how to use class management strategies.

Teachers' development strategies aim at self-reflection to gain a richer understanding of the teaching practice. Reflective practice (Schon, 2009) provides affordances for professionals who engage in a continuous learning process through experience and reflection. Also, reflection encourages teachers to think beyond the classroom as it accounts for the learners' perspective during the teaching practice. Matoba and Sarkar Arani (2006) conducted a research in a Japanese school where teachers used a strategy called *jogyo kenkyu* in order to understand their learners' talents and abilities. The school promoted a teachers' reflection vision on learners through journals and ethnographic field notes towards well informed and more appropriate class decision making. Collaboration is another remarkable aspect of *jogyo kenkyu* as it requires teachers to meet, plan, implement and evaluate ideas as a team looking for creating advantageous learning situations in their classrooms. Teachers also share the responsibility to design lesson plans, learning materials and assess students' work. As Matoba and Sarkar Arani (2005) explained

“This approach (questioning, planning, acting, observing, reflecting and re-planning) enables teachers to learn from each other and to improve their teaching experience” (pp. 118). Reflective practice may be involved in different strategies that could be chosen according to the context needs. Self-monitoring or collaborative decision making serve a common goal that is to raise teachers’ awareness on their own practice.

A case study conducted in Iran with Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers showed their perception towards Continued Professional Development (CPD) activities (Alibakshi & Dehviri, 2015). Most teachers argue that CPD last throughout the teaching career as it involves constant updates and observation of the context. CPD also seeks to improve teaching practices and to act as a way to revitalize teachers.

Teacher learning is another characteristic to take into account from teachers’ development theory. It refers to the new knowledge and theory learned through participation in contexts activities and processes (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Additionally, Freeman (2006) provided a framework for teacher learning and development. In his paper, the author affirms the importance of taking in mind:

1. Teachers’ learning processes
2. Teachers’ situations of practice
3. Teachers’ and students’ experiences in the classroom
4. Teachers actions influence but do not cause learning
5. Teacher training and development are means for teacher learning

In sum, it seems that teachers’ professional development strategies trigger teacher learning. There are several models for sustaining teachers’ development individually

and collaboratively. Raising awareness on teachers' own learning should be addressed actively as it provides opportunities to improve the teaching practice and both parties, teachers and students, may benefit from it. For that reason, I decided to take the opportunity for myself and seek self-development in a new context that may represent challenges and new learning. This new learning should be represented in categories during my teaching practice within time and being aware of such changes could shed light on my own learning features as a teacher. To be able to find out about myself I decided to work in my new job as a Language Arts teacher in an elementary school. This new context could provide different characteristics than the previous institutions I have worked for; I was the homeroom teacher of 13 students whose individual characteristics varied from one another. I had two students with Asperger syndrome diagnosed, one student with autism and two more that appear to need extra support to learn. It was a bilingual inclusive school and because of this particular nature, it should represent a challenge to overcome in terms of effective teaching to all my students.

### 1.3 Research Question

To raise awareness on my teaching practice changes the following question was asked: In what ways is my learning as a teacher influenced by the teaching context?

## CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

It was important to have clarity on the many terms related to teachers' development and for that reason I decided to review the literature to clarify and extend my understanding on umbrella terms such as teacher education views around the world and specific topics about TDP such as reflective practice to illustrate how this feature of teachers' development has been treated in previous researches.

### 2.1 Teacher Education

As explained by Villegas-Reimers (2003) teacher education have a tendency to vary among countries. It is necessary to make a distinction between the studies needed to "become a teacher" and the further studies that teachers take along their career. The former may be called "pre-service" and the latter "in-service". The author goes on to explain the differences encountered within teaching programs expressed by models about how to teach:

- a. The enculturation model, place emphasis on how teachers may adapt their practice according to the institutional demands.
- b. The technical model, emphasizing on the pedagogical content knowledge, and
- c. The teaching as a moral endeavor model (pp. 44-45).

Villegas- Reimers (2003) also reported that most of teacher preparation is offered by universities, colleges and special institutions that require a bachelor's degree for entry into programs as a minimum.

Richards (2008) established a distinction in the nature of the further studies taken by teachers along their careers: teacher training and teacher development. As stated by this

author, teacher training consists of specific skills needed to teach within a context taught through short programs that provided certifications. On the other hand, teacher development referred to the individual growth a teacher may live through further studies and experiences. During the 1990's this division was also understood as the practice vs. theory distinction and the mastery of a set of teaching skills vs. mastering the discipline of applied linguistics (Richards, 2008).

## 2.2 Teacher Professional Development

As mentioned before, the concept of career development denotes a long-term general progress on a specific job. In terms of teaching, the understanding of the teaching areas and the role of the participants in the process is meaningfully discovered by teachers since it usually involves the internal examination of teachers' beliefs and practice which, as explained by Richards and Farrell (2005), can be considered a reflective view of teaching or "bottom up" approach.

Certainly, there is a difference between training and development in terms of teaching profession. According to Richards and Farrell (2005) both training and development refer to learning but they differ on time spent and topics addressed. Some examples of topics covered from the teacher training perspective are:

- Effective strategies to start a lesson
- Adequate use of a textbook according to the context
- Using group work
- Using materials and resources to enrich a lesson

- Knowing how to give feedback to learners

On the other hand, the author adds some examples of goals for teacher development:

- Awareness of the learning processes
- Capacity to adapt teaching roles depending on the learners
- Awareness of decision making
- Awareness of different teaching styles
- Outlining learner's views of classroom activities.

Casteel and Ballantyne (2010) mention some core principles for teacher professional development as teachers are usually adults who already possess strengths in their teaching practice and wish to improve their students' achievement and success. According to the authors a professional development program or model should:

1. Take into account teachers' knowledge, skills and expertise
2. Suit teachers learning styles as they participate as learners
3. Provide time for practice, adequate feedback and follow-up when necessary to apply new teaching techniques or strategies
4. Account for change in teacher knowledge or skills
5. Account to students' improvement on performance

Along the same lines, Villegas-Reimers (2003) also defined teacher professional development as a process that provides planned opportunities fostering growth in a profession. The author mentions the features of a new perspective towards professional development:

- a) Teachers are active learners,
- b) In a long-term process that need follow-up support,
- c) situated within a specific context,
- d) Teacher development is linked to school reform when needed,
- e) Teachers are seen as reflective practitioners,
- f) Using collaborative strategies and
- g) Teacher Professional Development programs may look diverse in each setting.

Conforming to what Diaz-Maggioli (2004) reports, traditional and even current professional development nowadays is associated with the term workshop. Some of the constraints of such perspective are:

- Teacher professional development is arranged by administrators without consulting the teachers (top-down approach).
- The idea of fixing teachers so that students learn better.
- Lack of ownership of the professional development
- Standardized methods that do not take into account context
- Lack of variety in the delivery modes
- Few professional development opportunities that are accessible to teachers
- Little or no support when putting into practice new teaching strategies in the classroom



- Lack of systematic evaluation of professional development

Teachers' perception towards development practices may vary. For example, in a study conducted in Iranian high schools, teachers expressed their views of teachers' development as: skills development, continuous learning, keeping up-to-date activities, learning for pleasure and teachers' professional revitalization (Alibakhsi & Dehvari (2015). The information was gathered using a phenomenological research design with semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions to 20 EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers. The authors inform the nature of teachers' development in Iranian high schools as continuous and situated teacher learning that valued the importance of teaching as the source of learning opportunities.

### 2.3 Reflective Teaching

The trend of Reflective teaching sees teachers' development as a lifelong process and involves the development of one's theories and knowledge about teaching which can be considered a fundamental term for this particular paper. As expressed by Nunan and Lamb (1996):

“Reflective teachers are ones who are capable of monitoring, critiquing and defending their actions in planning, implementing and evaluating language programs” (pp. 120). Being a language teacher does not mean teaching students the linguistic features of a language system, it also entails the responsibility to acquire ways of thinking (problem solving, critical thinking), ways of working (know how to communicate and collaborate), tools for working (information and communication technologies) and life skills such as citizenship, personal and social responsibility (European Commission, 2013). It is

necessary to raise awareness of our teaching practices so that we are able to gain more insights in what we do that have positive impacts on our students and understand the nature of those actions so that we could keep practicing them and reflect on what difficulties we encounter in the classroom that prevent students from learning.

In regards to reflective teaching a series of studies with different scopes have been conducted in several parts of the world. Masami and Sarkar Arani (2006) informed about an ethnographic research in an elementary school in Japan regarding teachers' professional development activities that included reflective practice and action research. Japanese teachers gathered to plan, design, implement and evaluate class projects in collaborative teams; not only they had to take into account students' interests and level but also data gathered through previous observations. In this specific context (Masami and Sarkar Arani, 2006) teachers engage in action research as a development strategy that target both critical awareness of teaching practices and collegiality.

In a closer context, a qualitative action research study was conducted in a private university in Colombia (Núñez & Tellez, 2015). Through a Materials development seminar for postgraduate students, the researchers analyzed surveys and written reflection concerning teachers' development. The results showed the teachers' perceptions towards their own development and reflected on its causes such as the learning environment, the raising awareness of teaching practices and students' needs.

#### 2.4 Areas of Professional Development

Diaz-Maggioli (2004) differentiates among different types of knowledge as factors affecting teaching styles: content knowledge (knowledge of structures or subject-matter

knowledge), general pedagogical knowledge (instructional strategies, classroom management), contextual knowledge (and disposition to understand students' context and families), and pedagogical content knowledge (instructional and learning strategies in a specific subject). Villegas-Reimers (2003) also mentioned that effective teaching usually consider features as: external evaluation of learning, knowledge and skills for multicultural classrooms, knowledge and attitudes that support social, economic, political changes for equality in society, knowledge and skills on implementing and integrating information and communication technologies (ICT) in a classroom.

Professional development may be approached from institutional and individual perspectives as teachers work within a context where there are plenty of areas of development regarding these two types of growth. In Richards and Farrell (2005) words, the individual perspective in areas of professional development particularly point at:

- Subject-matter knowledge
- Pedagogical expertise
- Self-awareness
- Understanding of learners
- Understanding of curriculum and materials
- Career advancement

Additionally, the institutional perspective sometimes in terms of staff development of in-service training should seek for:

- Institutional development

- Career development
- Enhanced levels of students' learning

Another way to frame areas of professional development is held by the European Commission for Education and Training (2013) where the term teaching competences is used to name skills related to the “craft” of teaching inside the classroom and teacher competences as “the systemic view of teacher professionalism at multiple levels” (pp. 10) individual, school, specific community, professional networks. Competence is understood as a mixture of knowledge, values, skills, attitudes leading human action (European Commission, 2013).

## 2.5 Professional Development Strategies

As previously mentioned, teacher professional development may be directed towards an individual perspective, meaning the teacher interested in personal goals and towards an institutional perspective referring to any formal training, course, or developmental activities intended to improve the performance of the institution (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Depending on the perspective, there are several strategies for teachers' professional development that may also consider two types of learning: collaborative learning and self-directed learning. As explained by Richards and Farrell (2005) collaborative learning brings advantages as the institution becomes a learning community pursuing a common goal. It gives room for new roles, new tasks and responsibilities that when planned carefully can offer opportunities for individual and community development. On the other hand, self-directed learning moves the attention to the teachers' beliefs and understanding of teaching to construct knowledge about the teaching practice. According to

Richards and Farrell (2005), processes as inquiry, self-appraisal or self-assessment, personal experience, personal construction of meaning, contextualized or situated learning, planning and managing of strategies are central to self-directed learning.

Villegas-Reimers (2003) provides a table including models for teachers' development from an institutional perspective and small scale strategies that can account for the individual perspective. It is important to consider that effective teacher development programs provide a combination of these models or techniques according to the context needs.

<b>Organizational partnership models</b>	<b>Small groups or individual models</b>
Professional development schools	Supervision: traditional and clinical
Other-university school partnerships	Students performance assessment
Other inter-institutional collaborations	Workshops, seminars, courses,
Schools networks	Case-based study
Teachers networks	Self-directed development
Distance education	Cooperative development
	Observation of excellent praise
	Teachers participation in new roles
	Skills-development models
	Reflective models
	Project-based models
	Portfolios

	Action research
	Use of teachers' narratives
	Coaching/mentoring

From International Review of Literature, UNESCO, p. 70

Castro and Martinez (2016) state a case of individual models or small groups at a state university in Colombia. With the participation of a university homeroom teacher, a pre-service teacher and the researchers, a class project was created targeting first semester students. The goal was to promote collaborative work and autonomy in learning. By using note-taking from meetings, surveys, and journals from the four participants it was established that through challenging collaborative work, despite the differences in expertise level, participants achieved awareness of teaching practices as well as better understanding of collaboration that was also reflected in the students' performance. Reflective practice had a predominant place in the study as expressed by Castro and Martinez (2016): "the word reflection was commonplace throughout the study as teachers became more aware of the need to analyze their own teaching practices" (p.50).

## 2.6 Teacher Learning

Richards (2008) makes an important emphasis on the difference between teaching as a transmission process vs. teaching as construction of knowledge. While the former focused on the effectiveness of the delivery methods to achieve students' learning, the latter

is more concerned with examining mental processes given through interaction among participants in a specific context. Moreover, Freeman (2006) explained five key aspects related to teacher learning and development:

- a. The learning process of teachers, which is situated and contingent depending on background, life experience, or subject matter.
- b. Teachers learning experiences from situations
- c. Teachers and students share learning experiences from different perspectives
- d. Teaching does not cause students' learning, it would rather provide opportunities for students' learning
- e. Teachers' training and development mediate teachers' learning

Additionally, Richards and Farrell (2005) differentiate three approaches to teacher learning although they may sometimes overlap. First, teacher learning as skill learning which consists of mastering a set of skills or strategies for effective teaching. Second, teacher learning as a cognitive process, identifying the role of teachers as decision makers in the classroom and examining the thinking processes and personal beliefs supporting those decisions. Finally, Richards and Farrell (2005) mention teacher learning as personal construction which emphasizes on the active role of learning construction from teacher and learners to develop teacher self-awareness and critique.

Richards (2008) also draws on concepts such as teacher cognition referring to awareness on the teachers' mental lives and the beliefs and thinking processes that shape their teaching practice. Then, teaching goes beyond knowledge and effective application of strategies in a classroom; it is a process affected very much by the context, learners' motivations and reactions reflecting teachers' beliefs.





### CHAPTER 3: SETTING

The context for this research was a private, bilingual, inclusion school named Colegio David located in Barranquilla. I was in charge of teaching Language Arts in fourth and fifth grade, and also Science for the latter group. Working in a bilingual inclusion school was a new experience as I was informed of the students' variety at the beginning of the school year: regular, high achievement, low achievement, learning difficulties, autism, Down syndrome, Asperger syndrome. The school Inclusion Department worked together with the Bilingual Department to ensure learning at all levels by checking the lesson plan documents on a weekly basis which meant a lot of effort by teachers, especially primary, as we were required to present lesson plans for each subject plus the activities for inclusion students. By inclusion students I mean the students who needed a different version of the activity, whether lower or advanced level according to the students' capabilities.

At the beginning of the year, we received the teachers' guide for almost all subjects and were told to select the topics that would be covered throughout the year. Basically, we were asked to plan the curriculum for elementary grades. In that matter, the school somehow gave us freedom to choose what was relevant but did give specific instructions on methodology since it was one of the aspects that most favor the students. Given the needs of each grade and the amount of students there was a teacher and one assistant; in my case, even though I had three inclusion students, my classroom did not require an assistant as fourth grade consisted of 13 students.

During the first two weeks of August, teachers (new and re-hired) received a training about school methodology, functions, students' types, chain of command, the work

of the inclusion department among other characteristics of the school. This experience gave me the opportunity to reflect on past experiences on previous schools and I started building an awareness of the importance of feeling connected to the context needs.

Another important school feature was Christianity. The school held daily activities that support the Christian faith (devotionals), the subjects and lessons needed to have a verse from the Bible, extracurricular activities (still in project) that helped maintain the Christian identity such as Gospel talent pageant, Bible day (instead of Halloween celebration), visits from missionaries among others. Additionally, the school focused on theatre, for that reason, on December 2016 students presented a musical play called Matilda. So, school changed schedules to privilege the rehearsals when needed.

In terms of bilingualism, Colegio David as many other bilingual schools in Barranquilla, chose to use the Journeys series to work in elementary school. This series is designed for native speakers and, although it provides material for low-level, language learner, advanced level, it needed to be constantly adapted to the context needs.

#### CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

Since the pursuit of this document is to get a deeper understanding of teacher learning and how it is related to teacher development a qualitative research approach fits these needs. According to Creswell (2009), qualitative research provides tools to explore the meaning and interpretation individuals or groups give to a human situation. Qualitative research allows the researcher to construct the interpretation of the world as the participants provide records. Also, the fact that knowledge and interpretation come from practices and context has to do with the inductive character of the approach (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research will allow me as a researcher to construct knowledge about my learning by using data collection instruments and interpreting the results from internal and external sources.

Darlington and Scott (2002) provide a description of the qualitative approach core characteristics:

- a. voicing of individuals and small groups
- b. behavior observed systematically
- c. analysis of data

The aforementioned features may play an important role in determining teaching learning as it takes account of the participant, behavior and data. These three aspects are present in a teacher's daily life as we are always interacting with students even though this interaction may vary according to the context; the kinds of behavior or actions taken from participants which may have influence on each side and the tremendous amount of information that we can get from a teaching-learning situation not only from the immediate context but also from previous encounters.

#### 4.1 Research Question

At the beginning of the year, I had the chance to start working in a school that was looking for teachers with some characteristics. At this point of my teaching career, I decided to raise awareness of my own efforts to become a better teacher. Being aware of my learning as a teacher became of great interest since a new context with specific demands required me to adapt my teaching to the students' needs. In what ways is my learning as a teacher influenced by the teaching context?

#### 4.2 Objectives

The objective of this research will be to raise awareness of my learning in my teaching practice. This research offered me great understanding on my teacher learning cycle and how it is influenced by a teaching context. It was necessary to map the route using specific objectives as:

1. Characterize aspects of my learning as a teacher.
2. Characterize the features of the teaching context.
3. Analyze aspects of my teacher learning influenced by the context demands.

#### 4.3 Type of Study: Auto ethnography

The importance of reflection on my learning and how it connected to teachers' development strategies triggered the idea that my thoughts and beliefs may have an important role on the research. Such thoughts and beliefs are responses to a context and through interactions with others (family, students, peers) I could be able to construct my own view of teaching. From that perspective auto ethnography would appear as an

appropriate method to conduct this research as it is concerned with the cultural connection between the self and others (Chang, 2008). These connections may become more realistic through constant self-examination or, in other words, self-reflection on the subject of teaching practice. Moreover, Chang (2008) states some of the benefits of using auto ethnography as it has a friendly approach to researchers and readers in general, provides a better understanding among participants that may lead to transformation. As educators we try to aim for students' learning and development regardless of the subject-area taught. I may have a better understanding on the impact of teachers' development strategies if the interactions with my students nourish my teaching learning cycle as well as reflective practice.

## Participants

Using auto ethnography meant that the researcher, myself, became the first participant to consider. I am a Colombian female English teacher with six years of experience at the moment of conducting this research. I hold a Foreign Languages degree from Universidad del Atlántico and a Teaching English diploma from Universidad Del Norte. In my family there has been a teaching tradition with my grandmother, father and aunts working in the education field. Therefore, I grew up surrounded by books and stories about teaching. I had worked in several private schools in Barranquilla teaching English in different levels, from preschool to high school students. To me the idea of teaching came as natural as breathing. It was somehow expected yet embraced fully to follow my father's steps as we are alike in terms of personality traits.

I consider myself as a teacher that tries to build an affective connection with the students but at the same time showing respect towards personal space. For me, it is important that students know what is expected from them in a subject matter as well as the expected behavior in a classroom. Also, I usually try to create a routine according to the students' stage of development, in this case children, since it is my opinion that establishing a routine gives a sense of safety without falling into monotony. Additionally, I try to engage emotions in the classroom because it is easier to retain some data when connected to a specific feeling or at least that is what I have found during my previous years of work.

#### Data collection procedures

As Chang (2008) explained auto ethnographers may use techniques to help recall memories and writing field notes as data. For this study, I used techniques such as: observation, narratives and document analysis so that data could be triangulated at the end of data collection. The data collection was conducted for 4 weeks and consisted of daily narratives in a journal following guiding questions, self-observation through video during five lessons and finally post videos reflections that let me express my first impressions on the videos about myself. It was important for me to check my own practice using different methods to have reliable and valid data.

#### Techniques and Instruments

### *Observation*

“The observer is, however, limited to observable social phenomena. Internal processes of cognition and emotion cannot be observed, even if non-verbal indicators of what these may be are evident” (Darlington and Scott, 2002. p, 75).

Using a technique as Observation may provide opportunities to see myself from another perspective; knowing what I wanted to do or say at a precise moment and how I acted towards a situation in the job seemed extremely important. Also, I could notice behaviors, comments, attitudes from the students or even myself that I may have not noticed. Then, it was necessary to collect data from the context while I was a participant in it. For that reason, I decided to record myself while teaching Language Arts in fourth grade for a week. I used a tablet camera with a micro memory card to enlarge the tablet memory capacity. I located the tablet carefully before lessons started using different angles each time. After school time, I watched the recordings looking for emerging patterns in my teaching, attitude, methodology that could reflect a change taking into account the context. In this research study, observation was enriched by the possibility to relive the situation without merely recalling memories due to the use of videos.

In order to have appropriate categories to organize the data collected from the video I decided to use a self-observation checklist. There are other cases where self- observation has been used for teacher development purposes as it is reported by Mercado and Baeher (2014). The Instituto Cultural Peruano Norteamericano (ICPNA) encourages novice teachers and teachers in general to use self-observation video-based as a formative tool to pursue professional development and to enhance students’ learning.

ICPNA additionally advises teachers to monitor themselves using a self-assessment checklist with four sections: institutional practices, critical incidents, key decisions and the action plan. These criteria are related to the teaching practice that could be improved according to the teacher's need.

ICPNA				
ICPNA: Self-Assessment Checklist				
Teaching Practice		Strong	Satisfactory	Needs Improvement
1	Classroom Management (i.e. grouping, pacing, etc.)			
2	Promotes Student Language Production			
3	Praise and Positive Reinforcement			
4	Use of the Board for Examples & Explanations			
5	Student Talk Time vs. Teacher Talk Time			
6	T's Level of English			
7	Explanations: Clear, Supported & Participatory (S's)			
8	Error correction Techniques			
9	Instructions: Verbal • Modeling • Comprehension Check			
10	Student Engagement: Voluntary Participation / On-Task Time			
*	OPEN ITEM			
*	OPEN ITEM			
Critical Incidents		Why was it important?		
1				
2				
Key Decisions		How did it have an impact on the outcome of the lesson?		
1				
2				
3				
Action Plan:				

From Video-Based Self-Observation as a Component of Developmental Teacher Evaluation, 2014, pp. 67.

Moreover, at ICPNA (Mercado & Baecher, 2014) teachers could choose to share their videos whether for peer observation or for receiving the feedback of a mentor supervisor. According to the authors, the use of video-based self-observation allows teachers to be active agents in their learning process as they become aware of the multiple aspects that they cannot perceive while teaching. It creates opportunities for self-assessment and reflective practice. In my opinion, the categories provided by the self-observation



checklist were applicable to my research since it contained specific teaching traits that I was not aware whether if I was applying them correctly or not such as promoting oral production and types of explanations. These topics were of a huge importance due to my new teaching context and my students' characteristics.

### *Narratives*

Also, narratives assisted me as a researcher in organizing thoughts and ideas that were present whilst teaching. Narratives can be a tool to pursue ongoing teacher development. In a case study conducted in India (Lakshmi, 2014) the researcher followed the path of two English teachers in a language institution while they decided to participate in the study to gain a reflective insight of their practice by means of journal writing and peer observation. Teachers were able to make adjustments to their teaching practice while being aware of what was effective and ineffective towards their students' learning in their classes. One of the teachers chose journal writing while the second teacher preferred peer observation which was supported by the researcher herself. Both teachers had periodical meetings with the researcher to discuss findings that may improve their teaching practice with the adequate adjustments. At the end of the case study (Lakshmi, 2014) the author reported how decisions were well informed based on classroom inquiry and reflective practice as well as the educational value appreciated by the teacher participants since adjustments were not a result of a set of prescriptive methods but a product of their own reflection and growth.

As Richards and Farrell (2005) report: “a teaching journal is an ongoing written account of observations, reflections, and other thoughts about teaching” (pp. 68). I kept a teaching journal during a month where I wrote my thoughts and feelings about the day in the teaching context. To guide my writing I focused on the following questions:

- What was the most remarkable teaching-learning situation during the day?
- How did my students respond to the planning and materials presented?
- What new situation did I encounter in the new context?

Additionally, reflection upon self- observation may provide greater understanding of my teacher learning. Consequently, I also wrote post-videos reflections that enlightened how I perceived myself as a teacher in a new context. A post-video reflection was written per recording.

#### *Document analysis*

The third instrument to use was my lesson plan. Lesson planning is definitely a helpful technique when organizing teaching. The school required all teachers to present their plans according to subjects, grades and levels on a weekly basis. The bilingual teachers had to send the weekly planning to the inclusion department to be revised as well. In consequence, lesson plans became a specially detailed requirement that allow monitoring by the school to keep students’ English proficiency despite their heterogeneity (see Appendix. During the first month the school provided a lesson plan format that was changed afterwards for a new one created by a teacher since it allowed a better reading of the activities and the dates. In order to raise awareness of my learning in this new context, I

compared my lesson plans (expectations) to my writing in the teaching journal (experiences) and the insights gained by the self-observation recordings.

With the purpose of organizing items drawn from the three instruments I decided to use teachers' beliefs TALIS (Teaching and Learning International Survey) questionnaire (2009), an international survey created to know the teachers' and the teaching conditions among several countries such as Australia, Austria, Denmark, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Korea, Mexico, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Spain, Turkey which are part of OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) and other partner countries as Brazil, Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania, Malaysia, Malta and Slovenia. The survey's focus was secondary education teachers and principals with the purpose of looking relevant information regarding:

- “• The role and functioning of school leadership;
- how teachers' work is appraised and the feedback they receive;
- teachers' professional development; and
- teachers' beliefs and attitudes about teaching and their pedagogical practices” (OECD, 2009, p. 18).

The TALIS questionnaire (2009) contained a series of questions about the teachers' beliefs regarding the nature of teaching and learning, classroom teaching practices, classroom environment, school climate, teachers' professional activities, and job related attitudes; self-efficacy and job satisfaction. For the sake of this study I will be using items from the first four aspects mentioned as time was not enough to have data to analyze the rest all the items. I contrast my findings vs. questionnaire items, to find emerging patterns

in my teaching practice that may have been produced by the teaching context and what learning could have produced for me. (See questionnaire items in Appendices).

## CHAPTER 5: RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This section shows the data obtained from the three different techniques, each analyzed day per day during a week lesson in order to gain a complete interpretation of the scene. Comments about general goals were made at the beginning of each day analysis along with the planning of the day; then, how the day actually elapsed to be contrasted with what was found in the post reflection video of the day.

### 5.1 Day 1

Although teachers were called to work since August 1<sup>st</sup>, I had my first teaching experience with this group by August 11<sup>th</sup>. I started my journal since the first day on the job, so at the moment of meeting my new students I had collected information about the school culture in general terms. In my first teaching day I wanted to explain to my students how we could work together in order to keep learning English. I emphasized on the types of activities they would be engaged on and what was the main focus of the subject they would take during the fourth grade. Also, I wanted them to feel confident that their teacher knew “what she was doing” in the sense of my teaching practice regardless of the fact that it was going to be my first experience in primary school.

#### *Lesson Plan*

The lesson plan design that was given by the school did not look like an organized tool so I decided to keep on using my own format for my own good. I tend to write in a

notebook my ideas about teaching: texts to copy on board, instructions for activities, vocabulary lists, grades and so forth (Appendix 5). In an earlier entry of my journal (when the students were still on vacation) I also detailed what would be the approach to use in my teaching this year which I wanted to share with my students.

“On the other hand, I made decisions on the topics I want to work on with my students. I read the English standards and concluded that probably having a variety of activities could be the answer for interesting classes. Most of the teachers here say that they do not have traditional methodology –that is not entirely wrong, though- so I do not want to be the exception in terms of teaching methodology. My plan for LA activities will be:

1. Vocabulary (from the lesson’s tory)
2. Spelling words
3. Reading comprehension (reading strategies)
4. Grammar topic
5. Listening activities (but I have not seen any CD player around)
6. Speaking activities
7. Weekly quizzes” (Excerpt entry 8, Appendix 2)

*Journal Entry*

August 16th, 2016

“One of my students asked me about my birthday that is in two days. I did not plan on telling them but they were very surprised to know. The decision by the bilingual department was that each lesson should last two weeks. Twenty hours each lesson as they

have two hours of English every day. So, the first week would be about vocabulary and spelling, to get them to know and master the words along with the reading comprehension activities. The second week would be about grammar topics and exercises. Other teachers were saying that it was too much time for one lesson but I already know Journeys books. They are planned for native speakers that have a different school system. Most of them spend more time at school than we do so the books have to offer lots of activities to be done during that time. And the coordinator said that she wanted to use the whole book which is pointless to me if someone asks me. The students enjoyed my first activities regarding vocabulary: lots of student-student interaction bearing in mind that these students already know some English. I had the chance to hear them speaking and notice the range of proficiency: who needed more/less help, who was reluctant/enthusiast with the activity, etc. The academic coordinator will give us a schedule daily. Let's see what happens tomorrow.

PD: I forgot to say that I don't like the format for lesson planner. It makes no sense."

*Post reflection video #1*

"First, comparing the lesson plan to what happened in the class, I noticed that the structure of the plan is not as specific as it should be. Since the format is a requirement I did not emphasize on the structure of the activity although I had a clear idea of what to do. The first thing that called my attention was the use of body language to catch students' attention and to explain meanings or examples. Also, the use of class routines from previous schools (classroom rules, attention getters, class management) which tells me that I already went through the survival of my first years- novice teacher. By using these routines I try to build a sense of community (rights and responsibilities) within the classroom as I am the homeroom teacher.

Second, it seems I have a very structured sense of class as beforehand decided on what will be the focus of each lesson with specific activities. It was deliberately a very traditional class, basically because I wanted to try with what is known and accepted in the school to make decisions on change. From the interaction time perspective, I did most of the talking since I had to explain the meanings of the words, some of them were kind of difficult but others not complex and relied too much of my assumed students' previous knowledge of the language. I was told that they had a very good language level.

Third, I definitely need to improve in interaction tasks. Students did their best while explaining but it could have been better if they had known the words beforehand. Also, they use too much Spanish during the activity. I will work to move from teacher-centered to learner-centered next time. But again, it was premeditated.

I identified some habits from previous groups that I usually rely on as walking around the classroom to check students' progress, listening to their comments, try to establish and affective bond with them”.

First of all, although I am an advocate of the constructivist view of learning in which students should be active learners I definitely see what TALIS document (2009) presented as structuring practices which are part of the teaching practices as well as student oriented practices and enhanced activities. To me, it was important to explicitly state the structure of the subject, ask questions and make sure that students followed my discourse through questioning. Also, I am aware of the importance of an adequate learning environment so that students feel comfortable talking in a place where respect is expected. Finally, at the end of the post reflection video I expressed my need to improve interaction activities design which is a need prompted by the new context: new level and students with

different language proficiency level than my previous experiences. The first learning that comes with this analysis is my own awareness to change and adapt to what is needed. I had spent years in other institutions that shaped my teaching philosophy and style. Now, these particular students needed me to plan according to them specifically. Also, by having to examine myself in my teaching practice I started to examine myself in other aspects of my life: I had come to realize that I had to improve not only my practice but my persona.

### 5.2 Day 2

During the second day I would be still exploring my students' background knowledge of English. As promised in the first class I did not prepare many written activities but mostly oral in order to give them opportunities to use the language meaningfully. In my notebook I had some ideas on speaking activities and vocabulary teaching.

#### *Lesson Plan*

- Students participate in the spelling practice activity to review the vocabulary regarding the lesson.
- Spelling and vocabulary competition on a daily basis

As shown in the lesson plan (Appendix 2) the first activities were mainly oral. It was my belief that building a solid word bank was the first brick in order to promote fluency and confidence when teaching speaking. Also, while using games my students were having fun which diminished the negative pressure of making mistakes. Finally, with the classroom rules I wanted to make sure that all my students would be respected



even if someone makes mistakes while speaking (no bullying allowed, everyone can make mistakes, it's ok).

### *Journal Entry*

August 17th, 2016

“I had to make my own model of planning a notebook as I did not understand the school format. Anyway I sent both lesson plans and diagnostic tests last week. I have not received any feedback so far. I remember the coordinator designed the fifth grade test but she is waiting for the other teachers. I understand now Stella's insistence (principal) on the gossiping. Most of the teachers are very friendly and talkative, sometimes they speak their minds and that gets them into trouble. You can notice how they talk and stop when some other teacher arrives to the circle. That happened to me today once. That is why I prefer to work with children rather than adults. We are so complicated; I am quickly adjusting to this school. I know my limits when it comes to discipline and how close you should be to your students: enough to make them feel comfortable but not too relax during classes. It is so different than my former school. I spent four months there and never felt part of anything. Sometimes I think this is my prize for holding on there. No intentions to be mean; just telling the truth.”

### *Post reflection video #2*

“The first noticeable thing was the arrangement of the classroom as it was changed according to school policy. Now, it is easier to have group work without causing too much interruption. From the video I start to make considerations towards the nature of the

activities that I proposed. The first activity was kind of superficial and I could have made it more challenging and attractive. But I did not want another unpleasant surprise with the students' level so I am still on my way to discover their current English level. The first and second activities took about 10 minutes each and both were related to vocabulary and spelling words. Then I wonder: are these kinds of activities the best ones to improve speaking skills? I decided to use them as they were easy and students quickly understood and participated. Probably, I do need to design other activities that serve the purpose and offer more opportunities to the students. About class management, I use the rules to explain my viewpoint about their behavior and attitudes as it was shown with the teacher who came in to give some information. I used Spanish twice during the recording: to make one of the students apologize for misbehaving and the second to call the students' attention on the way they speak to other teachers. They seem to enjoy the class and all of them participate. However, I will have to make a strong emphasis on using English to communicate ideas in the classroom.”

Even though I did have guiding questions when writing my journal, this particular day showed me different features of belonging to a teaching community besides the teaching practice itself. It could be considered a type of learning since I had always known about the importance of working cooperatively but being aware of my own constraints is a first step to start working towards that type of teaching. I tend to do none or little effort to make connections with other people at work; while reading this I realized the amount of experiences and wisdom I may be losing. Talking to colleagues could be a way of teachers' development itself since it allows professionals to see others' practice and learn from them.

Working with colleagues was also a questionnaire item in the TALIS document with items such as (2009).

- “Exchange teaching materials with colleagues.
- Engage in discussion about the learning development of specific students”(p. 270)

Although during my data collection procedures I did not have intention or opportunity to work cooperatively with colleagues, being aware of this issue in terms of practice prepared me for further experiences when I could get into a bilingual team to work cooperatively in a different institution.

### 5.3 Day 3

For this day I wanted to keep working on vocabulary and spelling words as well as to start differentiating on fragment and complete sentences using the Lesson 1 story. After the initial practice my students would be, first, selecting sentences and then creating their own according to the structure presented.

#### *Lesson Plan*

- Students practice differentiating between fragment sentences and complete sentences with examples from the teacher and classmates.
- Spelling and vocabulary competition on a daily basis

#### *Journal Entry*

August 18th, 2016

“Wow; Such a terrific day; today is my birthday and I never expected a surprise party at the school. It seems that my students told their parents about my birthday and during the morning recess they hid in a classroom where they had decoration, food, cakes, beverage and a birthday hat for me. It was so nice and kind from them. Although my students did not have the chance to play in the recess. But we spent a nice day and I felt so good, so welcomed. Many teachers approached to wish me a happy birthday. They knew because probably my friend (the second grade teacher) told them through what Sapp group that I don’t intend to be in. About that, fourth grade parents have tried to convince me to be in their group but I don’t want to. I know so many situations when parents call teachers during odd moments and I really want to keep my distance. I set a new email for the school to give them another way to contact me besides the agenda. I hope they don’t feel rejected. I just want to keep a balance between being approachable and respect others space.

I think this surprise made my day. I feel happy.”

*Post reflection video #3*

“From the video I noticed a couple of situations worthy to mention.

1. I still need to improve on class activities designed as they seem kind of superficial despite of how attractive they are at this age. Also, inclusion students need a lot of extra effort for them to participate without neglecting regular students.
2. I tend to read students’ emotions and preferences during a class since they will tell me what the class’ pace would be. For me it’s important to engage emotionally students and give them opportunities to succeed or at least to try. In that way,

learning comes easier. However, I do need to include more cognitive activities along the class.

3. I realized how important the assistance of therapists for inclusion classrooms is. Argenida did not come on time and I had to devote time just for Alejandro who is autistic. Fortunately, students were focused in what they needed to work on.
4. At this point, students' workbooks have not arrived yet and I tried to give them enough exercises to practice spelling words. *I should have asked them to look for the meanings at home. Again I misread their language level as I thought the words were easy enough.* Bringing a dictionary for class may work as well.”

In terms of teaching beliefs, according to the TALIS items:

- “How much students learn depends on how much background knowledge they have – that is why teaching facts is so necessary” (p. 269) which is mainly direct transmission of beliefs. Nevertheless, because of the nature of the school being inclusive I, then, am in need to “give different work to the students that have difficulties learning and/or to those who can advance faster” (p. 270) which is part of student oriented practices. Because of the context now I am in need to identify my students' level and prepare tasks that could lead them to learning despite of their condition. Also, I was learning from my mistakes at the instructional level and constantly verifying my reading on their language proficiency level to upgrade my interactive activities.

#### 5.4 Day 4

Lessons will take up to 2 weeks to be fully covered. This take will be enough to work on speaking, reading and writing as well as grammar topics and phonological awareness. It seems a lot but with adequate organization it could be possible. This particular day would be somehow more grammar focused since my students need to deal with different types of texts and be able to create their own sentences.

#### *Lesson Plan*

- Students read the text out loud during class to check on pronunciation

Note taking: A sentence is a group of words that tells a complete thought. Every sentence has a subject and a predicate. A group of words that does not tell a complete thought is called a fragment sentence.

- Students practice identifying parts of a story using simple texts as examples.
- Identification of story structure through a chart provided by the teacher.

#### *Journal Entry*

August 19th, 2016

“I noticed that I have not taught Science during this week. So I am a week behind on my planning. I finished Science lesson plan 1 as soon as I could and sent it to the bilingual coordinator. So next week I will have full schedule. On Fridays students leave at 1pm and teachers have meetings until 3 pm. The bilingual coordinator explained her lesson plan format and still seems weird to me. She wants to have every activity but it is not

organized by days. Some teachers were reluctant but still we managed to prepare the next lesson. She also wanted to have all diagnostic tests. I already sent mine. As I thought, the teachers don't have a clear idea on how to design a diagnostic test where the 90% of us is new. We are still checking the material and standards. Creating a test implies that we already know what should be tested. Anyway, I believe that having the students to leave early gives an opportunity to teachers to talk among them and not just to them as happened to me before in different schools. I see many positive things here that made me think that teachers are valued.”

*Post reflection video #4*

1. “Watching this video, I discovered that for the first time in my teaching practice I really wanted to focus mainly on speaking skills. I said for the first time because on other occasions I had also implemented speaking activities but not frequently or showing a range of varied tasks. While days passed by, I found myself thinking about what I could do to promote English as means of communication so I came up with tongue twisters, oral presentation every 2 weeks that had a specific rubric, vocabulary and spelling words activities in a daily basis.
2. It was my belief that a speaking focus could integrate inclusion students as their level was close to the regular students along with the implementation of TPR activities. The school paradigm of speaking comes from preschool as children are taught in English.
3. One of things that I have wondered for the past days and comes to my mind now is how is this school different to other bilingual schools to be successful at having

children with a good English level. Usually students struggle when I bring activities related to grammar or literature which tells me that these are their weaknesses.

4. One more time, I wish we had a better lesson planner to show specifications of what to do. For my own organization, I tend to write the steps in the class in a personal notebook including the students' note-taking".

Analyzing and making decisions about my teaching practice have become one of my daily core activities. Seeing everything in retrospective with the help of the instruments gave me light on what I could do to promote learning and enhance my teaching practice. As Freeman (1989) states:

“The decisions themselves clearly vary in magnitude, complexity, and the degree of self-consciousness and preplanning. They range from the micro decisions of whether to sit or stand at a particular juncture in the lesson or whether to use script or print when writing on the blackboard, to the macro decisions about content, methodology, or classroom dynamics. Yet the decision as a unit of teaching remains constant, even though its content is continually shifting” (p. 37). Being aware of the importance and the impact of my own decisions at school, helped me realize I had more freedom in my practice than before (in other institutions) and how empowered I felt as a teacher at that moment.

## 5.5 Day 5



During the week my fourth grade students have worked on spelling, grammar, reading and speaking on a daily basis. To finish the first week I decided to provide practice for listening and recognizing short o vs. long o sounds. Next week they will have their first spelling list quiz and I wanted them to feel confident that they had enough practice at the school so that they could review at home easily and work on their weaknesses.

#### *Lesson Plan*

- Tongue twisters for pronunciation
- Identification on words with long and short o during a listening activity
- Students listen to words containing short o vs. long o to differentiate them.

#### *Journal Entry*

August 22nd, 2016

“My classroom went bigger today: Camila just arrived. Camila is a new student who comes from a bilingual school in Bogota. She speaks and understands English as well as the others. She is also very formal and kind and does not belong to the inclusion program. I have now four girls and nine boys in my classroom. There is something that worries me. I noticed that all the classrooms have a closet and a big teacher’s desk. I don’t have any of those. When students started the brought their materials bags with them and supposedly each teacher could keep half of the students’ material while the other half was to be stored at the school by Miriam. I already made a check list of what the students had but I don’t have a safe place to store it. Or time to take the material to Miriam. For that reason, my classroom seems messy with all the plastic bags. I already made the request to have a closet and a bigger desk as the other teachers. Now I need to concentrate and read about TPD

(Teachers Professional Development). I am still trying to decide if my current development is faster than before or if I am just aware of it.”

*Post reflection video #5*

“This video shows how I acted at the end of a stressful day. Elementary school teachers were in a meeting with the bilingual coordinator and arrived late to class. I did not look at the planning at all and decided to take an excerpt from the lesson reading to ask students to practice oral fluency. Again speaking is my main concern.

Unfortunately, I had more interruptions as the bilingual coordinator came in to give some other information which took more time from the class.

At some point I used the tongue twisters as an attention getter since they seem to be accepted by the students. When I worked in preschool I used to do that with my younger students using the nursery rhymes.

After the second interruption, I was already tired and wanted the day to be over. Cleaning the classroom gave some time to think while students finished writing and at the end corrected an attitude from a student.

It was kind of discouraging to see that time devoted to the planning was basically thrown to the garbage with a pointless meeting that could have been done at other time. The rest of the teachers did not have class, the only one sacrificing the group was me. That really upsets me.”

Definitely the context may also bring limitations of the teachers’ beliefs as explained by Moini (2008). He states that there are institutional variables that may prevent teachers do what they believe they should do in the classroom. Moini (2008) also mentions

that teaching environment and constraints brought by different school actors (school board, students, parents, colleagues, and administrators) may influence teachers' beliefs.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

This research contributed to identify and analyze the emergent learning from a new teaching context in which I was participating. Being in a new context brought along new challenges that I had to overcome.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, I could find patterns of learning when crossing the information obtained from lesson plans (documents), self- observation (experiences) and post video reflections.

During the first week of classes I became aware of:

- The importance of being in constant change and continuously adapt to the teaching circumstances as influenced by the success or failure of my proposed activities.
- Regardless of my own personality traits, enriching my experiences with colleagues practice was of great importance, especially in a school with such a heterogeneous group. Teachers who share ideas, strategies, and comments on how to be effective are more likely to provide more efficient learning opportunities to students.

- The importance of decision making and the great impact that well informed decisions may have in my students' experiences. Also, the fact that I was more empowered as a teacher than in previous institutions in terms of decision making. Also, I had the support of the inclusion department to make sure that activities and strategies were adequate for specific cases.

To start, I had the chance to contrast my view of teaching with what I actually promoted in the classroom. Speaking about a constructivist view of learning is easy in terms of theory since it seems the "right way" to teach taking into account learners as active participants. However, adapting the teaching practice and even noticing the characteristics from the direct transmission of beliefs view is not that simple. Being aware of this situation drove me to look for other characteristics in my practice that may not be coherent with my view as I put an effort in changing them for improving my efficacy as teacher.

Second, it was crucial to notice how I felt and work with colleagues to start making adjustments as working cooperatively is an enriching experience at all levels. Even though I read numerous articles about teachers' development theory and research and I know how important it is to work in teams in education it was quite challenging to leave behind this feature of myself as it was pushing back my development as teacher.

Furthermore, being able to identify, diagnose, and constantly verify my students proficiency level in an inclusive school was a new item learned in this particular context since I was expected to deliver teaching instruction to all students according to their abilities. This task allowed me to evaluate my teaching practice in terms of efficacy so that the school could guarantee positive learning to all students no matter their condition. Having to improve in this trait meant that I could use more than one way and allotted time

to properly diagnose students which was something I have not done before since in previous schools students were expected to come with some gained knowledge and I could work in my syllabus whether they had the skills or not. It was mainly students' responsibility to catch. This institution was not the case.

While conducting this study I learned that my feelings of frustration towards some institutional policies were present in my mind, although I did not inform them, taking into account that these policies sometimes prevented me to do what I believed was correct in the classroom. This alleviated my feelings of job dissatisfaction because it is a situation commonly faced by teachers regardless of their location

There is plenty of room for improvement in my teaching practice that I want to start. For instance, my creativity in designing tasks, reading and innovating speaking activities, adding higher thinking activities for my students may be the next goals to reach in my subsequent teaching future. Reflecting on my practice and making improvements about it definitely made an impact in my self-image and self-efficacy since now I am more aware of the challenges of new contexts and how I respond to them. Learning does not stop.

#### 6.1 Limitations of the study

I decided to do research about myself as I saw a great opportunity to commit in a new context. It appeared as a way of enriching opportunity to expand the vision of my persona as a professional. Nevertheless, having another set of eyes or perspectives could have been of great help to broaden my learning and could have been successful as well. It

was my intention to reflect on my practice and learn from it; I also learned how to improve this experience if I want to keep using it as a development technique.

Nevertheless, there is the case of validity as it is mainly my own perception as researcher and participant at the same time. Even though, different instruments were used and data was analyzed using categories from checklists, there may be a case for biased data. Auto ethnography itself contains this limitation.

Another limitation considered was time. In order to adequately analyze data and present the research on time I had to choose a brief period of teaching. Although I kept a journal for a month, my analysis of lesson plan and videos focused only on a week. There is so much more that can be drawn from this type of research in a more extended period of time but this definitely needs extra effort of the teacher researcher.

## 6.2 Impact of the study

Conducting this research made me realize of how each new context brings up new teaching practices. I had to adapt in order to be successful in a new teaching environment, learn to open up to new situations where I could use previous knowledge from other institutions to add and improve current circumstances.

I became aware of the features of my persona that were delaying my own development as a teacher and what teaching features I keep on using regardless of my current job. It was important to understand the concept of reflection on one's practice and lose the fear to see yourself with colleague's eyes since one can learn a lot from others' people experiences.

Thus, being part of a research gave me more than one reason to keep on reading about new methods and strategies to promote learning. I needed to learn about my students which were not the typical students found in an average school. My understanding of how the brain and mind works was enlarged and constantly revised by the inclusion department of the school. I did not stop learning at all and that was the most satisfying feeling.

To sum up I would like to remark the importance of having sustained teachers' development activities in all teaching locations if we are to improve Colombian education. It took me almost seven years to get to a point in which I see myself as teacher, researcher, community collaborator and more which has enriched my identity. This sense of belonging is not so strong in all sectors of the educational field in Colombia. We can gain a lot from research like this, which allows teachers to think by themselves and positively analyze their practice.

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## APPENDICES

### Annex 1: My Journal Guiding Questions

1. What was the most remarkable teaching-learning situation during the day?
2. How did my students respond to the planning and materials presented?
3. What different situation did I encounter in the new context?

## Annex 2: My Journal Entries

### My first day at David School

#### Entry 1. August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016

Today I went to the school I'd be working at this year. I met really nice people that cared about others. They were very clear about school's expectations and teacher's methodologies. They decided to give me 4<sup>th</sup> graders class. It will be my first experience with children of this age. I am very excited. As soon as I got home I started checking a folder with many documents of the school and also checked several webpages about 4<sup>th</sup> graders milestones.

#### Entry 2. August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2016

During our second day I got to know the school mission, vision and philosophy. They took time to explain what the school goals are in terms of learning and students goals. Also, they prepared some ice-breaker activities and I got the chance some other new people like me also very excited to start working there. It seems it will be a very nice school year;

Induction starts from 7:15 to 12:00 so there is not much to say.

#### Entry 3. August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016

Well, today was quite different. The academic coordinator introduced herself officially and made a presentation about curriculum, standards and subject plans. I knew what she talked about but I liked that they bothered to explain it in terms of the school making more realistic using their own context. I was worried since I rejected the job with the public school in which she is also the coordinator but it seems that it is ok. Now I feel more confident to explain national standards and how to use them in a bilingual school. I got this feeling of satisfaction when you understand something completely, maybe I knew the theory but could not use it in real life. The second part of the day was dedicated to the school's methodology: EpC. Enseñanza para la Comprension. The coordinator also told us strategies, techniques and ways to put this methodology into practice which made me feel

even more confident since now I know what kind of activities I can prepare for my future class. I also noticed that what they expected from students is similar to what I asked them to do. Finally, they told the new teachers to prepare a short mini lesson to teach tomorrow. I'm not nervous at all. Let's see what happens.

#### Entry 4. August 4th, 2016

The day started as the others, with a presentation of school policies and state. They talked about their category in Pruebas Saber and the principal Ms. Stella spoke to all of us. As the school offers an inclusion program whose students take those tests maybe their scores are not going to be the best as other schools. NEVER. That's what she said. The school has students with Down syndrome, Asperger, Autism, Learning difficulties and even behavior issues among others but they have set their goals in helping their students to grow and achieve for their lives rather than getting high scores in a test. That impacted me a lot in a very positive way. The principal stated: big schools keep high achievement students, of course why would not have high stats? But what happen to those who need more help. Here we are for them. Maybe I did not need extra help when I was a student because learning was easy but I saw my friends and classmates struggled with subjects that now I consider not so hard to understand with the adequate assistance: like English;

After the break, the English department coordinators, the pastors and new teachers got into a room to start the mini teaching demonstrations. Also, we received an evaluation form to fill with the feedback for the teachers. I was in an English teacher demonstration, a man about his 50's that prepared interesting material. Next, a biology teacher who did a very nice presentation using visual aids and finally a philosophy teacher who was so passionate about the topic that could not control the volume of his voice. It seemed that the session was going to finish when the psychologist asked the elementary teachers to present a mini lesson too. The third grade teacher volunteered and then me. They did not expect the demonstration I gave today though... I used whole brain teaching techniques, explained shortly present progressive using the video beam. Their faces showing surprise instead of satisfying me, made me worry. Should I change the first impression people usually have from me? The most shocking thing was that just when I was leaving some teachers who weren't in the demonstration, approached to me and said I did a very good job. So, information flies? The English coordinator told me to prepare a 10<sup>o</sup> class for tomorrow. I don't want to teach high school right now. That's why I reject the other job;

#### Entry 5. August 5th, 2016

Thanks God they did not ask me present the mini lesson. The academic coordinator asked me if I would be willing to teach 10<sup>o</sup> and 11<sup>o</sup> and I said no. I still want to work with

elementary school. They offered me Language Arts from 4<sup>o</sup> and 5<sup>o</sup> and Science 5<sup>o</sup> which means 24 hours of teaching. That sounds good to me;

The rest of the day was not as interesting. The pastor spent the day explaining the school manual and the procedures of how to handle situations with the students. There are a lot of forms to know; Next week, we will work from 7 to 3pm. Next Tuesday new parents are going to come to school; I hope to have my classroom ready by then. It does not have any furniture, poster or decoration; I will have to make it all;

Entry 6. August 8th, 2016

Today we worked from 7 to 3pm as informed last week. Nevertheless, most of the day I found myself wondering what to do as the bilingual coordinator asked elementary teachers to develop diagnostic tests for English language. These tests should be administered within two weeks. My one and only interaction with diagnostic test as a student was almost three years ago at the Colombo Americano where I took an advanced course. It was a long test from simple to complex topics in grammar and vocabulary. I also had a speaking test, an interview with a teacher. In my previous job, the English teachers administered a diagnostic test but it was not created for us. The language institution got the test from a well-known publishing house. Now, creating a test for students whose English level was not clear to me implied many questions related to curriculum. Then, I discovered that there was not such a thing. I would have to develop a new curriculum since the school had decided to change bilingual books. Anyway, the elementary teachers had a meeting with the coordinator who tried to guide us using Colombian standards but I think she was lost as well. I'll try my best to design a test following these instructions but I don't see the point in giving more importance to some tests than the preparation of the programs for example. Tomorrow the new parents will come to school and I have not decorated my classroom. Class environment is really important for my students and myself in my opinion as you can impact students learning and attitudes with appropriate surroundings so that they feel comfortable, motivated, and willing to work.

Entry 7. August 9th, 2016

Well, today was simpler than expected. I had the idea that parents were going to meet the teachers today and get to know the school better. Instead we had a very short and ceremonial opening of the school year in the auditorium. The principal, coordinators and psychologist gave a short speech about the school. One interesting feature that I had not seen before is that they distributed folders with the school information to parents: mission, vision, philosophy, pedagogical approach, academic and administrative staff hierarchy among other things. Most of parents seemed interested in what was explained during more or less two hours. After that, each teacher could go to the classroom and arrange what needed for tomorrow. There are so many things that I want to do! They gave us a plastic bag with some school supplies last week so I used most of them. In my opinion, having the rules classroom poster in a strategic position is a way to ensure permanent acknowledgement of the rules. That's why it was the first poster done! Also: schedule, birthday, vocabulary and spelling poster. I tried to clean up the whiteboard with a product



the second grade teacher gave me. It is a large whiteboard that I could use for many things. But before making any decision I want to wait until tomorrow to meet my new students. I have been hearing many positive things from them so far.

## Entry 8

August 10th, 2016

Students will start the school year tomorrow morning from 7:30am to 12m these Thursday and Friday. Teachers spent half of the day in a presentation about inclusion system by the school psychologist. She gave some important ideas about justice vs. equality and how students could overcome difficulties with the appropriate assistance. To me, that sounded a lot like Vygotsky's theory, well-adjusted to the school. After lunch, teachers had some time to prepare first lesson. I just had to prepare fourth grade Language Arts class because the bilingual coordinator prepared fifth grade during holidays. It seems that she was in charge of 5<sup>th</sup> L.A. at first. The good thing is that 4<sup>th</sup> grade does not need any adapted activity for the inclusion students. All of them work with the rest of the class apparently. The psychologist showed some samples of adapted activities which do not seem difficult but they do seem somehow time-consuming. The file that coordinator sent to my email contains more than 10 pages just in adapted activities. And still you need to think of the regular students when designing a lesson.

On the other hand, I decided the topics I want to work on with my students. I read the English standards and concluded that probably having a variety of activities could be the answer for interesting classes. Most of the teachers here say that they do not have traditional methodology –that is not entirely wrong, though- so I do not want to be the exception in terms of teaching methodology. My plan for LA activities will be:

8. Vocabulary (from the lesson's tory)
9. Spelling words
10. Reading comprehension (reading strategies)
11. Grammar topic
12. Listening activities (but I have not seen any CD player around)
13. Speaking activities
14. Weekly quizzes

However, I still do not know how to teach Science for elementary school. When I was teaching Transition it was kind of easy as most of the activities were hands-on: posters, worksheet videos, walking around the nature. Now, I am supposed to teach theory, vocabulary and processes within two hours a week and also making the adapted activities. I guess I'll figure it out soon.

## Entry 9

August 11th, 2016

Today the big day for me; all teachers share the same excitement when beginning a new year or just the innocent ones?

I met eight of my students but others teachers said that my group has more students. The first one was Alejandro. His mother was waiting to meet me early in the morning. Alejandro has an autistic condition. But he is very functional. He seemed a very loving boy who speaks English too; Sometimes I cannot understand what he says due to phonological problems. He does not know how to make some sounds in Spanish or English but you can understand what he means. His mother was very worried and told me that last year they had a homeroom teacher who did not take care of Alejandro. She said that his former teacher usually ignored him. Second, I met the psychologist's daughter and the pastor's daughter: Estefania and Valentina, the two comadres. They are everything people said: kind and intelligent. They also have a good English level. Afterwards, I met the boys. I don't know why my classrooms are filled with boys. Other teachers have more girls or same amount in genders but in my case I usually have more boys than girls in a classroom. After the first part of the day that consisted of a devotional in a room (the pastor and teachers welcomed the students, prayed, sang to God, etc.), students spent the whole day with their homeroom teacher. I got to know my eight students' names and some of their personalities. Indeed, they seem to be a very nice group. I also met Alejandro's therapist: Argenida who is in charge to help him focus on the activities. She seems a very nice person, too. Other teachers mention that I have two more inclusion students: Jaime and Nicolas, both with Asperger Syndrome that is the Autism spectrum.

An old habit from preschool is to teach the classroom rules. When I was working with younger children it usually took two weeks or more to have the rules clear and followed. I think in this case today and tomorrow would be enough for UNDERSTANDING the rules. Let's see how much time they need to actually follow them. But I have the feeling that they wanted the rules, that they felt good knowing my expectations and how I was planning to teach. I made some questions about the methodology they are used to and the classmates that were not there. I did not have the chance to meet fifth grade but they are a big group; more than fifteen students when third grade had only 7 students. Tomorrow I will be repeating the same speech about the rules and some games with them. I want to know how they handle their emotions.

## Entry 10

August 12th, 2016

Today was a lot like yesterday. The only difference is that I met Jaime, a true character in my classroom. He reminds me of other students in my life: those with a strong personality that have problems with other teachers. Usually I know how to handle them. Because of his

Asperger condition he does not measure what he says: sometimes hurting people. That is my first impression about him. Also, I noticed that some of the students do not like precisely because of his “honesty”. Having almost two months vacations did not help me at all today. I was totally crushed. After students left, all teachers had a meeting with the disciplinary coordinator. I still do not know what my opinion about him is. He is a well-educated person with a lot of experience in the education field. He asked us about the students, parents, materials, how we felt, etc. The bilingual coordinator gave us the books to each elementary teacher of L.A. We are going to work with Journeys books. They are familiar to me because I used them when I taught Transition students. Many well-known bilingual schools use them for their complexity and variety of activities. Each book had a workbook for students. However, I do not want to think more about lesson plans. I already prepared mine and know the book structure by heart. I want to gain strength and energy for next week which will be tougher with the 7 to 3 schedule, full classes. Still do not have the schedule, though.

#### Entry 11

August 15th, 2016

I had four hours of classes today. I met fifth grade, two hours of L.A. They were interested in what I wanted to say and my election of activities. Also, I think they liked the way I talked. I devoted half of the class “playing” while I got to know their names and explained the types of activities and how they worked. I did the same with fourth grade. I could advance more with them, though. About my students, today I met two more. Now I have ten children in my classroom. One of the things the other teachers told me about, was their eating habits. They did not have lunch in third grade because the teacher did not check on them. So, it was shocking for them when I said that no one was leaving the room until everybody ate. They were reluctant at first but everybody did it. Afterwards, they could go outside and play a little. I noticed that only fourth and fifth graders went outside after lunch. Probably because the amount of energy at these ages. I tried to check on my students during other classes to appreciate teacher’s methodology better. Honestly, I did not perceive main differences...

#### Entry 12

August 16th, 2016

One of my students asked me about my birthday that is in two days. I did not plan on telling them but they were very surprised to know. I decided that each lesson should last two weeks. Twenty hours per lesson as they have two hours of English every day. So, the first week would be about vocabulary and spelling, to get them to know and master the words along with the reading comprehension activities. The second week would be about grammar topics and exercises. Other teachers were saying that it was too much time for one lesson but I already know Journeys books. They are planned for native speakers that have a different school system. Most of them spend more time at school than we do so the books have to offer lots of activities to be done during that time. And the coordinator said that she

wanted to use the whole book which is pointless to me if someone asks me. The students enjoyed my first activities regarding vocabulary: lots of student-student interaction bearing in mind that these students already know some English. I had the chance to hear them speaking and notice the range of proficiency: who needed more/less help, who was reluctant/enthusiast with the activity, etc.

The academic coordinator will give us a schedule daily. Let's see what happens tomorrow.

PD: I forgot to say that I don't like the format for lesson planner. It makes no sense.

### Entry 13

August 17th, 2016

I had to make my own model of planning a notebook as I did not understand the school format. Anyway I sent both lesson plans and diagnostic tests last week. I have not received any feedback so far. I remember the coordinator designed the fifth grade test but she is waiting for the other teachers. I understand now Stella's insistence (principal) on the gossiping. Most of the teachers are very friendly and talkative, sometimes they speak their minds and that gets them into trouble. You can notice how they talk and stop when some other teacher arrives to the circle. That happened to me today once. That is why I prefer to work with children rather than adults. We are so complicated; I am quickly adjusting to this school. I know my limits when it comes to discipline and how close you should be to your students: enough to make them feel comfortable but not too relax during classes. It is so different than my former school. I spent four months there and never felt part of anything. Sometimes I think this is my prize for holding on there. No intentions to be mean; just telling the truth.

### Entry 14

August 18th, 2016

Wow; Such a terrific day;

Today is my birthday and I never expected a surprise party at the school. It seems that my students told their parents about my birthday and during the morning recess they hid in a classroom where they had decoration, food, cakes, beverage and a birthday hat for me. It was so nice and kind from them. Although my students did not have the chance to play in the recess. But we spent a nice day and I felt so good, so welcomed. Many teachers approached to wish me a happy birthday. They knew because probably my friend (the second grade teacher) told them through the what Sapp group that I don't intend to be in. About that, fourth grade parents have tried to convince me to be in their group but I don't want to. I know so many situations when parents call teachers during odd moments and I really want to keep my distance. I set a new email for the school to give them another way to contact me besides the agenda. I hope they don't feel rejected. I just want to keep a balance between being approachable and respect others space.

I think this surprise made my day. I feel happy.

## Entry 15

August 19th, 2016

I noticed that I have not taught Science during this week. So I am a week behind on my planning. I finished Science lesson plan 1 as soon as I could and sent it to the bilingual coordinator. So next week I will have full schedule. On Fridays students leave at 1pm and teachers have meetings until 3pm. The bilingual coordinator explained her lesson plan format and still seems weird to me. She wants to have every activity but it is not organized by days. Some teachers were reluctant but still we managed to prepare the next lesson. She also wanted to have all diagnostic tests. I already sent mine. As I thought, the teachers don't have a clear idea on how to design a diagnostic test where the 90% of us is new. We are still checking the material and standards. Creating a test implies that we already know what should be tested. Anyway, I believe that having the students to leave early gives an opportunity to teachers to talk among them and not just to them as happened to me before in a different schools. I see many positive things here that made me think that teachers are valued.

## Entry 16

August 22nd, 2016

My classroom went bigger today: Camila just arrived. Camila is a new student who comes from a bilingual school in Bogota. She speaks and understands English as well as the others. She is also very formal and kind and does not belong to the inclusion program. I have now four girls and nine boys in my classroom. There is something that worries me. I noticed that all the classrooms have a closet and a big teacher's desk. I don't have any of those. When students started the brought their materials bags with them and supposedly each teacher could keep half of the students' material while the other half was to be stored at the school by Miriam. I already made a check list of what the students had but I don't have a safe place to store it. Or time to take the material to Miriam. For that reason, my classroom seems messy with all the plastic bags. I already made the request to have a closet and a bigger desk as the other teachers. Now I need to concentrate and read about TDP. I am still trying to decide if my current development is faster than before or if I am just aware of it.

## Entry 17

August 23rd, 2016

I am supposed to send the lesson plan 2 for L.A 4° and 5° along with Science 5°... It is just too much to do;

I already finished L.A for both groups but Science will have to wait at least two days while I study the topics and do some research on how to teach them. I heard some comments about a mother in 5° whose son has Down syndrome. They told me she can be very

“passionate” and that she is always checking her son’s adapted activities to compare them to the regular students. I understand that she wants to make sure her son learns but does she respect teacher’s limits? Mondays and Tuesdays are so tiring... Fifth graders are so hard after lunch. I understand now why L.A is during the early hours for them. I was so excited about my first Science class but that excitement passed quickly. And for a good reason: fifth grade had Arts, Music and Physical Education class and I was not prepared for that. Even though I brought videos and interactive activities they were not interested. I have to think of more strategies for them. On the other hand, I was wondering how they behave with other teachers. They are more difficult to handle than fourth grade because they are more students and the specific cases found there could be considered more complex. How do other teachers cope with them?

#### Entry 18

August 24th, 2016

Today I met Edinson’s mother (my fifth grader with Down syndrome). On Wednesdays, I am free after lunch and I had decided to take that time for preparing Science but the psychologist called me to go to the meeting in her office. I met the lady who seemed to be an educated person, worried with her son’s learning. She showed me previous material and how they had worked with the boy before. They had the lesson plan that I prepared and we were supposed to check it together to improve it and clarify doubts. She said she thought I was older. It is not the first time that someone says that.

I have some habits when meeting new people: I usually don’t talk about me or my ideas until I know who I am talking to. This was not the exception and when the lady started to ask me personal questions she found a wall. I did not mean to be rude or impolite. I hope she understands it. The difficult part was her request for a meeting every 2 weeks. To me, the teacher who does not like parents’ whatsapp groups or school whatsapp groups, or giving cellphone numbers to parents, etc. I said no immediately and it was shocking for her. Probably because the school has never said no to her. The psychologist was also surprised of my refusal regarding how well the meeting was going. But there were little things that I did not like about the lady in terms of a person’s attitude. I gave a little speech about how little I saw my own students (4<sup>o</sup>) and they were of high importance to me, etc.

#### Entry 19

August 25th, 2016

The day went by without new surprises. The psychologist told me that the meeting with Edinson’s mother was going to be mandatory every two weeks. I already knew that. Also the English coordinator called me and said that I was not supposed to say my students were more important than 5<sup>o</sup>. I did not say a thing because I may waste my time and energy trying to explain myself.

They pay a lot of attention to 5<sup>th</sup> grade: the psychologist, the English coordinator, they even have a co-teacher always in their room. But I am the only responsible for fourth grade. If

something happens I am the one to solve situations and check students learning. I think that is somehow unfair taking into account that I also have inclusion students but they do not need adapted activities. They do need attention and special strategies. How come for the school some are more important than others but I am not allowed than my students are more important to me?

From Wednesday to Friday I have less hours which gives me time to plan ahead and keep decorating my classroom. Every day I have to make sure my own students write their agenda and put my signature on it. I also have to take them out to wait for the transport cars and they don't leave anything behind. I missed all this. It feels so good to be a homeroom teacher. It comes easy to me.

Entry 20

August 26th, 2016

As every Friday I feel destroyed. After students left teachers had a meeting about the inclusion department. The psychologist told us about every case in the school grade by grade. She also gave us some material to read about autism, Asperger, Down syndrome, TDH among others. A few years ago I took a diploma course about ABA technique where I had the chance to read and learn about strategies to handle these students. It may be one of the reasons why I do not feel distress about inclusion. I already knew about some and learned about others. For example, one of my students in fifth grade has a psychiatric treatment with drugs since he was very aggressive towards others. He seemed totally normal to me so far and with a positive attitude towards my class. He said that he likes my teaching a lot. I tried to read what I could but the letters were all over the place. Better read tomorrow.

Entry 21. August 29th, 2016

Today I welcomed a new student. His name is Nicholas and comes from the US apparently. He was homeschooled along with his brother and sister. He is not part from the inclusion program. Also, today I started lesson 2 with 4<sup>o</sup> and 5<sup>o</sup> trying to recall what went right from lesson 1 to repeat it and what went not so well to adapt it. Now that the students got used to my methodology classes go smoother. They know I tried to prepare interesting activities to get them engaged during classes. I would like to have more technological resources as in previous schools because the students may benefit even more: regular and inclusion. The school gave us a set of t-shirts with different colors to wear every day. I won't have to wear my own clothes anymore. For some reason, I'm getting kind of defensive at school which did not happen to me before. I try to be polite but not close to anyone as I discovered people like to talk too much about others. That I dislike it a lot.

Entry 22. August 30th, 2016

Today started kind of rough. I was with the students in the devotional as usual. Still don't understand why the other home room teachers participate as well. They prefer to stay outside and let the bible teacher and the teacher assistants to be with the students. My day began with my fourth graders. For some reason, Alejandro was somehow distracted, playing a lot with his hands making noise until his therapist came. Language Arts class went really well. I feel that my students get the meanings of the new words and I try to incorporate them in our daily vocabulary as much as possible. Most of them finished their writing on time. Next, Language Arts with 5<sup>th</sup> grade was more demanding in terms of class management. They participated in an acting out activity, hot potato game and a word hunt which did not come out as well as I imagined. Somehow they got confused with the instructions even though I repeat the same information three times;

I had lunch with my fourth graders and finished the schedule poster on my classroom to head back to fifth grade. Oh boy; it was even harder to get them to concentrate. They presented some posters they did the previous class, watched a couple of videos about cells and a ppt for clarification. Class management from 1:30 to 3:00 is like organizing monkeys for a picture... I got my voice hoarse after that class and told their homeroom teacher because it is more an attitude thing. Next class, I'll prepare something different for them.

There are many things that I still need to know about the school itself but so far so good. I have good communication with parents and my students. Also, try to keep my distance from people that talk a lot—gossiping people. That I don't like but they're in any institution. On Thursday we'll have simulacro pruebas saber 3<sup>o</sup>-11<sup>o</sup> which is a new experience for me. Let's see how it goes.

Entry 23. August 31st, 2016

It's getting really hard to be on time at the school since the traffic jams in 51B is getting worse. Besides, I prefer to take the bridge rather than crossing the street because of safety. Today I had to be before 7 and got to the school around 7:05am. Not particularly late but they said I had to be at 7am to welcome the children that were dropped at the school. There is a new schedule with the elementary school teachers to do this job. I decided not to complicate my life anymore with 5<sup>th</sup> grade and got a small poster that said: Please, be quiet. I waited for them to sit down and get ready for the class. It took a while but I explained my reasons. I prepared my computer to show them the reading using audio from the web link on the internet. Maybe they got used to games and other activities with me as I noticed them bored yet trying to comply with the activity. At the end, I asked a student to read aloud and also read myself. It seems to me that they understood the text and the genre which was my main concern although the class was not as interactive as usual. To conclude, the students practiced vocabulary meanings with hot potato and spelling words list with broken telephone. I cannot believe that these kinds of activities still work with them after 2 weeks. Next, with my fourth graders, I spent a really fun time teaching Language Arts. Yes, I have them to do the same activities but the scaffolding provided, their production, their affection to me and among them is different. And I don't have a teacher assistant as fifth grade; fourth graders also advanced in their reading which was a



biography about Martin Luther King, spelling words and vocabulary. However, life is not perfect... when my students were taking some rest when while playing one pushed another one who fell and got a bruised. So, first accident of the school year. The one who pushed felt so guilty that did not want to enter the classroom even though it was unintentional; it took like thirty minutes to convince him but I did it. By that moment, I had almost no voice to speak. At the end of the day the psychologist said that I had handled the situation very well. She also talked about another student (Asperger syndrome) and his behavior that needed to be corrected. It is curious that I had just 4 hours of teaching but actually did a lot more than other days. Definitely being an elementary teacher takes the best/worst out a person. Fortunately, I can make a positive and meaningful impact on others regardless of teaching English, science or any other subject.

One last thing, I recorded myself today again and when checking this week's videos, it seems the files are corrupted.... I'm the worst researcher ever;

Entry 24 September 1st, 2016

Today was the first simulacro pruebas saber at David School. Students from 3° to 11° took the test during the day. At the beginning they were nervous and without confidence to take the test. I talked to them (fourth graders) trying to cheer them up and convincing them that probably many topics were too easy for them if they read carefully. As far as I could check, the students completed the whole test (about 90 questions, multiple choice), some faster than the others but with equal comprehension of problems and contexts. It was a very tiring day as I had to cover the Sociales teacher who had a mismatch in her schedule and had another class at 11am. However, it was not as exhausting as classes with 5<sup>th</sup> grade tend to be. Today I had the chance to see Alejandro who is Asperger in action. During the first part of test I stood with him while his therapist arrived. He could answer all the questions by himself without extra support. It is very interesting to see how people do unexpected things. On the other hand, during Sociales class Jaime was very rude to another student. We were talking about racism and how people like Abraham Lincoln and Nelson Mandela have fought for black people rights. He then made some racist comments about a student whose skin color is darker- as mine. I explained that those kinds of comments get people in trouble not only at the school but around the world as they are considered attacks to people's human rights. It is very sad to hear those kinds of comments and especially so intentionally made. At least Jaime sees me as an authority figure and lately he is listening more to my instructions. My freedom week is almost over. Again the psychologist is going to be hunting me for inclusion lesson planning. It is the only mole on my job. I don't like to be persecuted by any reason. I wish I could do something about it...

Entry 25

September 2nd, 2016

Today both grades 4 and 5° took their second spelling quiz. They are very used to it. Both grades prepared at home and took it seriously as the first one. I tried to break the stress with an activity. I threw a paper ball to them while saying a word from the spelling list and they

had to do the same throwing it to a different student. They were having so much fun with that simple activity and I could check which words they recall the most. I did that with both grades almost getting the same results. Fourth graders needed more direction to stay on task.

I got some suggestions from the psychologist about Jaime. Last year he had trouble with L. A. class and at the end they had to make adapted activities for him. In my opinion, he does not need it. What I do in class is to devote some time just for him to make sure he understands as I do with Alejandro. While doing the quiz I was close to him pronouncing carefully every word. I could see that he studied, he was really listening and writing the sounds he heard. He made some mistakes as far as I could see but nothing horrible. I decided to have more tongue twisters in my classes to give them a chance to talk. Tongue twisters will give them a reason to practice fluency and some special sounds in English. Let's see how that goes.

Entry 26

September 5th, 2016

Another killer Monday. Having 4 hours with fifth grade is too much. I asked the co teacher if they were like that just with me and she said they behaved like that with every teacher. I need to think of a way to keep them in task other than yelling and writing on the observer. There was a problem with Journeys books and the principal decided to keep using Trophies. I do not like those books at all. They are so old and outdated. They do not have good activities and the workbook is so simple. I already prepared my lesson plan with Journeys so I said that I would start using Trophies on the next lesson.

I don't know about Science anymore. I have been struggling to deliver good classes but sometimes I think everything is against me. When I want to show them videos, the video beam is already taken. I asked for it on time; I had to call the psychologist who is in charge of the inclusion program to help me out. I don't know what she said but they gave me auditorium and I was teaching with the video beam projecting on a big wall. However, I did not choose the appropriate material apparently. Although they have a good English level, they did not understand what was explained on the video. So I had to explain it slowly. They did not pay attention to my explanation. It was frustrating. I was tired. They were tired. So I told them to draw what they recall from the video (it was about mitosis). I like reading and studying Science but teaching it at the end of a school day is not one of my skills definitely.

### Annex 3: Post Video Reflections

#### Post video reflection #1 August 16<sup>th</sup>, 2016

First, comparing the lesson plan to what happened in the class, I noticed that the structure of the plan is not as specific as it should be. Since the format is a requirement I did not emphasize on the structure of the activity although I had a clear idea of what to do. The first thing that called my attention was the use of body language to catch students' attention and to explain meanings or examples. Also, the use of class routines from previous schools (classroom rules, attention getters, class management) which tells me that I already went through the survival years- novice teacher. By using these routines I try to build a sense of community (rights and responsibilities) within the classroom as I am the homeroom teacher.

Second, it seems I have a very structured sense of class as beforehand decided on what will be the focus of each lesson with specific activities. It was deliberately a very traditional class, basically because I wanted to try with what is known and accepted in the school to make decisions on change. From the interaction time perspective, I did most of the talking since I had to explain the meanings of the words, some of them were kind of difficult but others not complex and relied too much of my assumed students' previous knowledge of the language. I was told that they had a very good language level.

Third, I definitely need to improve in interaction tasks. Students did their best while explaining but it could have been better if they had known the words beforehand. Also, they use too much Spanish during the activity. I will work to move from teacher-centered to learner-centered next time. But again, it was premeditated.

I did identified some habits from previous groups that I usually rely on as walking around the classroom to check students' progress, listening to their comments, try to establish and affective bond with them.

#### Post video reflection #2 August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016

The first noticeable thing was the arrangement of the classroom as it was changed according to school policy. Now, it is easier to have group work without causing too much interruption. From the video I start to make considerations towards the nature of the

activities that I proposed. The first activity was kind of superficial and I could have made it more challenging and attractive. But I did not want another unpleasant surprise with the students' level so I am still on my way to discover their current English level. The first and second activities took about 10 minutes each and both were related to vocabulary and spelling words. Then I wonder: are these kinds of activities the best ones to improve speaking skills? I decided to use them as they were easy and students quickly understood and participated. Probably, I do need to design other activities that serve the purpose and offer more opportunities to the students. About class management, I use the rules to explain my viewpoint about their behavior and attitudes as it was shown with the teacher who came in to give some information. I used Spanish twice during the recording: to make one of the students apologize for misbehaving and the second to call the students' attention on the way they speak to other teachers. They seem to enjoy the class and all of them participate. However, I will have to make a strong emphasis on using English to communicate ideas in the classroom.

Post video reflection #3 August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2016

From the video I noticed a couple of situations worthy to mention.

1. I still need to improve on class activities designed as they seem kind of superficial despite of how attractive they are at this age. Also, inclusion students need a lot of extra effort for them to participate without neglecting regular students.
2. I tend to read students' emotions and preferences during a class since they will tell me what the class' pace would be. For me it's important to engage emotionally students and give them opportunities to succeed or at least to try. In that way, learning comes easier. However, I do need to include more cognitive activities along the class.
3. I realized how important the assistance of therapists for inclusion classrooms is. Argenida did not come on time and I had to devote time just for Alejandro who is autistic. Fortunately, students were focused in what they needed to work on.
4. At this point, students' workbooks have not arrived yet and I tried to give them enough exercises to practice spelling words. *I should have asked them to look for the meanings at home. Again I misread their language level as I thought the words were easy enough.* Bringing a dictionary for class may work as well.

Post video reflection #4 August 19<sup>th</sup>, 2016

1. Watching this video, I discovered that for the first time in my teaching practice I really wanted to focus mainly on speaking skills. I said for the first time because on other occasions I had also implemented speaking activities but not frequently or showing a range of varied tasks. While days passed by, I found myself thinking about what I could do to promote English as means of communication so I came up with tongue twisters, oral presentation every 2 weeks that had a specific rubric, vocabulary and spelling words activities in a daily basis.
2. It was my belief that a speaking focus could integrate inclusion students as their level was close to the regular students along with the implementation of TPR

activities. The school paradigm of speaking comes from preschool as children are taught in English.

3. One of things that I have wondered for the past days and comes to my mind now is how is this school different to other bilingual schools to be successful at having children with a good English level. Usually students struggle when I bring activities related to grammar or literature which tells me that these are their weaknesses.
4. One more time, I wish we had a better lesson planner to show specifications of what to do. For my own organization, I tend to write the steps in the class in a personal notebook including the students' note-taking.

Post video reflection #5 August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2016

1. This video shows how I acted at the end of a stressful day. Elementary school teachers were in a meeting with the bilingual coordinator and arrived late to class. I did not look at the planning at all and decided to take an excerpt from the lesson reading to ask students to practice oral fluency. Again speaking is my main concern.
2. Unfortunately, I had more interruptions as the bilingual coordinator came in to give some other information which took more time from the class.
3. At some point I used the tongue twisters as an attention getter since they seem to be accepted by the students. When I worked in preschool I used to do that with my younger students using the nursery rhymes.
4. After the second interruption, I was already tired and wanted the day to be over. Cleaning the classroom gave some time to think while students finished writing and at the end corrected an attitude from a student.
5. It was kind of discouraging to see that time devoted to the planning was basically thrown to the garbage with a pointless meeting that could have been done at other time. The rest of the teachers did not have class, the only one sacrificing the group was me. That really upsets me.

## Annex 4: Lesson Plan

**Subject: Language Arts**

Teacher: Mayra Salas

Hours: 10

Period: I

Book Unit(s): Journeys 4, Unit 1

Date: August 16<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup>

Topic(s): Lesson 1

Grade: 4<sup>o</sup>

Prepared by: Mayra Salas

**Competency/Skill:****Lingüistic/Reading Comprehension****Objective:**

- Students will be able to identify the structure of a story in narrative genre.
- Students will be able to describe parts of a sentence.

**Biblical Integration: God is Love:**

**Analyze the following sentence:** Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?” (Jhon 11, 25-26)



**Warm-Up Activity:**

Students participate in the spelling practice activity to review the vocabulary regarding the lesson.

**Enunciation**

- Present story structure
- Parts of a sentence
- Spelling: Long O- Short O

**Modelling**

Note taking: A sentence is a group of words that tells a complete thought. Every sentence has a subject and a predicate. A group of words that does not tell a complete thought is called a fragment sentence.

Parts of a story: Main characters, actions that take place in a story, setting and events, plot of the story.

**SIMULATION**

- Students practice differentiating between fragment sentences and complete sentences with examples from the teacher and classmates.
- Students practice identifying parts of a story using simple texts as examples.
- Students listen to words containing short o vs. long o to differentiate them.

**Exercising**

Students read the text out loud during class to check on pronunciation

Spelling and vocabulary competition on a daily basis

Identification of story structure through a chart provided by the teacher

Identification on words with long and short o during a listening activity



Worksheet about sentences, nouns and predicates	
CLASS ACTIVITIES	
Regular students: Practice book: Pages 3-12 within two weeks Story structure chart Tongue twisters for pronunciation Reading text out loud	Inclusion Students: Teacher will provide further assistance to the inclusion students, adaptations not needed so far.
Materials and Resources: Students' book, photocopies, video bean, worksheets Web pages: <a href="http://www.k12reader.com/subject/grammar/parts-of-a-sentence/">http://www.k12reader.com/subject/grammar/parts-of-a-sentence/</a> <a href="http://www.really-learn-english.com/parts-of-a-sentence-worksheets.html">http://www.really-learn-english.com/parts-of-a-sentence-worksheets.html</a> <a href="http://www.english-grammar-revolution.com/parts-of-a-sentence.html">http://www.english-grammar-revolution.com/parts-of-a-sentence.html</a>	
Take-Home Tasks:	
Additional Notes:	

## Annex 5: Index of TALIS Questionnaire

- Teachers' beliefs

### *Index of direct transmission beliefs about teaching*

- Effective/good teachers demonstrate the correct way to solve a problem.
- Instruction should be built around problems with clear, correct answers, and around ideas that most students can grasp quickly.
- How much students learn depends on how much background knowledge they have – that is why teaching facts is so necessary.
- A quiet classroom is generally needed for effective learning.

### *Index of constructivist beliefs about teaching*

- My role as a teacher is to facilitate students' own inquiry.
- Students learn best by finding solutions to problems on their own.
- Students should be allowed to think of solutions to practical problems themselves before the teacher shows them how they are solved.
- Thinking and reasoning processes are more important than specific curriculum content.

- Teacher practice

### *Index of structuring practices*

- I explicitly state learning goals.
- I review with the students the homework they have prepared.



- At the beginning of the lesson I present a short summary of the previous lesson.
- I check my students' exercise books.
- I check, by asking questions, whether or not the subject matter has been understood.

***Index of student oriented practices***

- Students work in small groups to come up with a joint solution to a problem or task.
- I give different work to the students that have difficulties learning and/or to those who can advance faster.
- I ask my students to suggest or to help plan classroom activities or topics.
- Students work in groups based upon their abilities.

***Index of enhanced activities***

- Students work on projects that require at least one week to complete.
- Students make a product that will be used by someone else.
- I ask my students to write an essay in which they are expected to explain their thinking or reasoning at some length.
- Students hold a debate and argue for a particular point of view which may not be their own.

- Teachers collaborative work

***Index of exchange and co-ordination for teaching***

- Discuss and decide on the selection of instructional media (e.g. textbooks, exercise books).
- Exchange teaching materials with colleagues.
- Attend team conferences for the age group I teach.
- Ensure common standards in evaluations for assessing student progress.
- Engage in discussion about the learning development of specific students.

***Index of professional collaboration***

- Teach jointly as a team in the same class.
- Take part in professional learning activities (e.g. team supervision).
- Observe other teachers' classes and provide feedback.
- Engage in joint activities across different classes and age groups (e.g. projects).
- Discuss and co-ordinate homework practice across subjects.
- Teachers' self-efficacy
  - I feel that I am making a significant educational difference in the lives of my students.
  - If I try really hard, I can make progress with even the most difficult and unmotivated students.
  - I am successful with the students in my class.
  - I usually know how to get through to students.

- Classroom climate

*Index of classroom disciplinary climate*

- When the lesson begins, I have to wait quite a long time for students to <quieten down>.
- Students in this class take care to create a pleasant learning atmosphere.
- I lose quite a lot of time because of students interrupting the lesson.
- There is much noise in this classroom.

## Annex 6: My planning strategy









