



Oficio no: SAD/0194/2023

Asunto: Oficio de modalidad de titulación
Guanajuato, Gto. 15 de febrero de 2022.

Lic. Juan Bardo Rodríguez de la Vega
Coordinador de Asuntos Escolares del Campus Guanajuato
Presente

El que suscribe, Dr. Miguel Ángel Hernández Fuentes, Director de la División de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades del Campus Guanajuato, le informo que la egresada Daniela Irazú Guerrero Olvera de la Licenciatura en la Enseñanza del Inglés ha cumplido íntegramente con los requisitos académico-administrativos [INCLUYENDO LOS REQUERIMIENTOS DEL IDIOMA EXTRANJERO] necesarios para que le sea autorizada la sustentación de su examen para la obtención del grado de Licenciada en la Enseñanza del Inglés.

En virtud de lo anterior me permito solicitarle tenga a bien autorizar la realización de dicho examen. Los datos completos son los siguientes:

- Nombre de la aspirante
- NUA:
- Sexo
- Programa educativo
- Modalidad de titulación
- Título del trabajo
- Daniela Irazú Guerrero Olvera
- 228875
- Hombre ___ Mujer _x_ Otro ___
- Prefiere no decir ___
- Licenciatura en la Enseñanza del Inglés
- Trabajo de Ejercicio Profesional
- "How I became a teacher: Three issues that helped defined my practice"

Gracias por la atención prestada y por la realización de los trámites correspondientes.

Atentamente

"La Verdad Os Hará Libres"



**División de
Ciencias Sociales y
Humanidades
Campus Guanajuato**

Dr. Miguel Ángel Hernández Fuentes

**Director de la División de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades
Campus Guanajuato**

Ccp. Coordinación del programa

Nota: FT08A: Para su aplicación para estudiantes de posgrado y aquellos y aquellas estudiantes de licenciatura cuya trayectoria se rige por la normatividad del 2008 y los planes de estudios anteriores al Modelo Educativo del 2016.

División Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades Campus Guanajuato
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Universidad de Guanajuato

División de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades

Departamento de Lenguas

Licenciatura en la Enseñanza del Inglés

“How I became a teacher: Three issues that helped defined my practice”

EJERCICIO PROFESIONAL

Que Para Obtener el Grado de

Licenciada en la Enseñanza del Inglés

PRESENTA

DANIELA IRAZU GUERRERO OLVERA

GUANAJUATO, GTO. 2022

Director de Ejercicio Profesional

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Dedicación

Este trabajo profesional, se lo dedico a muchas personas, las cuales me apoyaron durante mis estudios, a lo largo de casi cinco años.

En especial, se lo dedico primero a Dios, por guiarme en el camino correcto, para ser una persona de bien.

A mis hijas Isabella y Miranda por ser el motor en mi vida, porque para ellas hago y doy lo mejor de mi para que vean el ejemplo a seguir.

A mi esposo Toño, por motivarme a salir adelante, y acompañarme en este camino.

A mi mamá Gloria, por apoyarme siempre con mis hijas para que yo pudiera estudiar. Mi hermana Karina y mi hermano Arturo, por siempre estar ahí para cuando los necesito.

Y a todas las personas que creyeron en mí.

Acknowledgments

Agradezco profundamente a todos los profesores de la Licenciatura, por compartir sus conocimientos y experiencias en el área de la enseñanza de un segundo idioma. En especial a mi director de trabajo profesional, el Doctor Kenneth Geoffrey Richter, por haberme dado la oportunidad de trabajar con él y de proporcionarme todo el apoyo para este proyecto de forma rápida y segura y estar sobre de mi para realizar mi trabajo en tiempo y forma.

Mis hijas por ser tan comprensivas durante mis ausencias en fines de semana por estar estudiando. Les agradezco también que hayan tenido toda la paciencia, durante las muchas horas de clase, que pasaban conmigo en la escuela. Por ser bien portadas durante las clases a las cuales asistieron conmigo. Las amo con todo mi corazón.

De igual forma agradezco la paciencia a mi esposo Toño Pichardo durante mis estudios y después de ellos para realizar este proyecto y siempre dándome los ánimos para seguir adelante en todo lo que me he propuesto realizar.

Resumen

Este ejercicio profesional, es una narrativa de mi reflexión como maestra de inglés. En este trabajo, he identificado tres de los problemas con los que me he encontrado desde los inicios de mi práctica docente. Dichos problemas me han ayudado a profesionalizarme en el área de enseñanza de un segundo idioma.

No solo los problemas que se encuentran en el aula o las instituciones para las que he trabajado y trabajo me han ayudado a lidiar con ellos, sí no también el estudiar la carrera de la enseñanza del inglés, me ha ayudado a realizar mi trabajo con paciencia y mucha vocación y a su vez me ha ayudado a comprender que dichos problemas se encuentran todo el tiempo ya que como docentes, estamos expuestos a diferentes contextos y una diversidad de factores de los estudiantes, incluidos sus estilos de aprendizaje, edades, personalidades, vidas familiares, experiencias educativas previas.

Los tres problemas que he identificado y han sido más concurrentes durante mi práctica docente, son los siguientes: primero fue el hecho de no contar con material disponible para dar mis clases en mis inicios como docente. El segundo problema ha sido el seguir un currículo que en mi percepción y reflexión no es adecuado para los objetivos que la institución nos pide alcanzar. El tercer problema es el límite de tiempo que se tiene en las clases para hacer efectiva la enseñanza.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 My teaching background

I began working as an English teacher in 2012. I had no professional experience, nor had I studied to become a teacher. Instead, I fell into the profession by accident, just like many English teachers. I moved to Texas when I was 19 years old. After 11 years of living in the United States, I had to move back to Mexico in 2011. Once I settled in Dolores Hidalgo, my hometown, I found myself a thirty-year-old woman with two small children trying to make ends meet. Being bilingual, the first employment I found was as an English teacher.

I worked in a language school in Dolores, which gave me the opportunity to learn from my mistakes and gain experience in different levels of teaching a language. Since that first job and throughout my teaching career, I have taken part of many contexts. I have taught many students with diverse backgrounds. For instance, through the *Programa Nacional de Inglés* (PRONI) program (a federal program from the *Secretaría de Educación Pública*), I worked in elementary schools with underclass children. I was only for a few months since it was a short-term contract. Although the employment had a lot of disadvantages - so many, in fact, it made me think twice about staying in teaching - after my experiences with PRONI/with these children/teaching, I realized that I really wanted to continue working as a language teacher. The reason was, because I noticed the necessity of language teachers in these public schools for children of low resources and access to education.

After my first couple of years of teaching, I felt I had the preparation to look for better paying jobs. Fortunately, I was able to find better work. I obtained a position at a private school, for children who come from well-off families. I also found a part-time teaching position

underprivileged children since they did not have access to high school level education in a small community. There was no high school there, and even once it was opened, most students had to walk for about an hour to get there. I found these two positions very challenging. For instance, the part-time contract was rewarding since my students learned a lot from my classes. The students at the private school did not need to learn the basics of the language since they were already bilingual. In the other hand, the students in the community did need to learn the basics since they had no previous knowledge of the second language. The work at the private school made me realize that I had to work harder on my teaching skills, because my students were already bilingual. Having bilingual students meant that I was not going to be an ESL teacher, instead an English teacher which I had not done before. I began by getting used to speaking English 100 percent of the time, during my classes. I also had to follow a book where I had to teach them spelling, grammar, reading comprehension and a bit of science topics, all in English.

Nowadays, I work in San Miguel de Allende, a city full of diverse cultures. I continue to work in two different institutions. The first one is at *Centro Educativo Naciones Unidas*, a private institution. The levels offered are for elementary, middle, and high school students. I joined the school in 2015 and since that time, I have taught most of the grades in elementary and all the ones in high school. This year is the first one in which I am teaching in middle school, where I teach seventh, eighth and ninth grades. The classrooms are small, compared to the ones in the public system. There are about twenty students or fewer in each grade. This institution is a bilingual school, where most of the students are fluent in the second language, English. The program I follow is designed for high-level students. Since the beginning of the pandemic, I sometimes find it difficult to adjust the readings to my students' needs as many seem to have lost their interest in reading. Nowadays, students are more attracted to playing games or using social media to mingle

with their friends, so when it comes to reading, they are not interested. The book that I use, contains very good readings related to history and culture; however, many of them do not care about learning history, such as ‘The Civil Rights Movement’ or ‘The Holocaust’, which I find odd since it is part of general knowledge of history.

The students at the private institution are from a high social class. Most parents are very involved in their children’s education and in the school itself. If there are any issues regarding teaching practices, parents are quick to complain, and they tend to complain a lot. This is the major problem at these types of schools: at some point, it seems like teachers are not only teaching but also providing customer service to the parents.

Besides working at the *Centro Educativo Naciones Unidas*, my second job is at the *Universidad Tecnológica del Norte de Guanajuato*, a state university in Dolores Hidalgo, where I have been working for the last six years. The students there are from different backgrounds, most of them come from small communities around the state of Guanajuato. Their level of English usually is very deficient.

The university offers nine levels of English. The first five levels are designed for students enrolled in the *Técnico Superior Universitario*, which is similar to an associate’s degree basically a two-year college. Once students finish that degree, they go into an internship for about six months. They then return to school and finish the final four levels. At his point in their education, they are classified as *Ingenierías*. That is a four-year college degree. Since students have returned from doing internships, in different companies within and out of the state, they are expected to have a better level of English when they get to study the engineering level. Given the fact that most of the companies where they go to internships, require some level of English communication. The school offers the TSU program in the mornings so, the afternoon can be used to offer the *Ingeniería*

and on weekends. Those are the hours that I usually teach. However, their level tends to be lower than what is expected, which means to have a higher level of the language, since that had gone out to their internship, where they usually practice it. Moreover, students tend not to view English as an educational priority: they generally pay more attention to their other classes, which they feel are more germane to their professional development. As an English teacher, this is challenging. They have only four hours of language class each week, which I think is not enough. They do not practice outside of the classroom. Very few have an interest in learning the language.

I have been teaching for about 10 years, and I feel that need to challenge myself to do something new. Currently, I am considering opportunities related to translation, online teaching, and work in the United States. In terms of translation, I earned a *Diplomado en Traducción* last year, since it was offered online, and I had the time to do it. In the future, I would like to work in a job related to translation, but as a freelancer. In terms of working online, the pandemic has had a profound effect on how teaching is conducted. There are now more opportunities to work from home, which is something that I enjoy.

Finally, although I had never thought about the possibility of teaching in the United States, I recently found a job posting on Facebook about Milwaukee Public Schools looking for international teachers. That was two years ago, right before the pandemic. Since then, I have felt the desire to move beyond Mexico. I would like to work in the USA as a bilingual teacher. Fortunately, there is a big demand in the state of Texas for such teachers. Indeed, at the end of last year, I found a job opening in the Dallas Independent School District. Their requirements are easy, and they are even willing to sponsor a work visa. This is where I am right now, trying to get a job as a bilingual teacher in the United States.

I am a passionate teacher who enjoys working with students of all ages. I try to make sure that I understand and answer my student's concerns about their learning. I respect my students, and, in return, I expect them to respect me. I can say that, in some ways, I am a strict teacher. I do not allow my students time to play in class or let them talk to each other about things unrelated to our lessons. In class, I do not act as a friend to any of my students, even if they are my age (outside of class, I am always welcome to find new friends). At the same time, I am nice and caring, especially with my younger students. I follow the school plan set by the school, but I also take advantage of the freedom the institution offers me to adapt to students' needs. I make my students feel comfortable in class and make sure that they do not leave the classroom with unanswered questions. I am an honest person and if I do not have an answer a question from the students, I tell them the truth: "I do not know the answer, but I will find it." And I do so.

The job of a teacher is not an easy one. One must deal with different situations depending on the context. A teacher faces many challenges such as dealing with students' personalities and discipline. Problems they may have at home show up in the classroom. Also, there are always issues with fulfilling the school's requirements, such as following a specific curriculum.

My beliefs have changed dramatically over the course of my career as a teacher. At the beginning, I thought that being a teacher meant going to class, teaching a topic, answering questions and then leaving. However, this set of beliefs changed once I got to know my students. Many of them - especially those living in small communities - have problems at home that are reflected in the classroom. Even at the private school where I teach, I quickly realized that many students also have issues at home. My beliefs changed: a teacher is not simply someone who goes to school and teaches a class and then goes home. Being a teacher is a full-time career. When I am not physically with students, I am often thinking about them. I must listen to the students and make

sure they leave the classroom without any concerns about their homework assignments or what they had seen in class. More than that, I must listen to students when they seem to be lost, not only academically but sometimes also personally.

At the university level, my beliefs also changed. I thought that at this level, the students would not have any issues, but they also have some. For instance, as I came to know them better, I discovered that some have to work and study at the same time. They have problems getting to school on time because they come from faraway places. I understood my students and their problems even more when I joined the BA at the University of Guanajuato: suddenly, I found myself in the same situation, working and studying.

Chapter 1.2 My three biggest challenges

As I mentioned in my introductory paragraph, I fell into my current career by accident. My first job as a language teacher was at a school called *Ingles Vivencial*. I applied for the position without having had any previous training in teaching. I was hired because I am bilingual. The school offered classes to true beginners up to advance levels, to children and adults. Being a new teacher with no experience, I found it effortful to adapt to the school's teaching methods. They had created a curriculum for each level that they offered. The curriculum for each level contained a list of topics that had to be taught. I was told to just focus on teaching the topics. However, the school did not provide me with any materials to use to teach. In the classroom, there was only a television and a whiteboard.

Given this situation, the first problem I will discuss in this reflection has to do with the need to create my own materials. Material design has always been an issue in my classes, both at public schools and at the university. We are not given any books and must design our own

materials. For instance, at *Vivencial*, I had to find my own worksheets and handouts in order to teach the topics that were set for each level.

The second matter I will discuss has to do with the curriculums set by the schools I work at. For instance, at the university, there are nine levels of English. The topics for each level are in accordance with the program set by the *Universidades Politécnicas* in the country. The goal of the program is to help students achieve at least a B1 level according to the Common European Framework. Sadly, many of the students do not achieve that level. The main issue is that the program does not present enough topics or push the students hard enough. For instance, in English VII, here are only two units: one focuses on reported speech and the second one focuses on the past simple and past perfect. The fact that students need to graduate with a high level made me realize that I had to include more topics in each of the levels that I teach in order to help them achieve a B1, even though these topics are not part of the official curriculum.

I believe that to learn a new language, one must practice it as often as possible in meaningful contexts. Here is where I have faced a third problem in my teaching career. There is not enough time for me to teach and for my students to learn. Each language group only meets for four hours a week. In fact, students generally have less than these four hours to learn in the classroom, since students often arrive late, or teachers leave a little late from one before they go to the next. If a teacher needs to check out a projector and set it up, this can also reduce the actual amount of teaching and learning. These four hours, then, are not sufficient for students to achieve the required, B1 level. Once again, I reflected on how important it is to make the best out of the short time that I have to teach and try to do the best I can under the circumstances.

Chapter 2: Lack of Materials

2.1 Past Practices – how I used to teach

The first challenge I identified above was a lack of materials. Since I started to teach in Mexico, I have never yet worked in an educational institution that supplied me with the tools and didactic resources I need to be an effective teacher. For instance, in my first job, one of the requirements was to have a laptop. The way of teaching there was to use a laptop and connect it to a big TV or monitor to present the exercises to the students. I did not have a laptop, since I had just moved back from Texas. I quickly realized that as an English teacher, I would basically be on my own.

Not having a laptop was an inconvenience, but I solved it by saving up and buying one. The real problem was coming up with activities to implement in each class. We did not have any printed worksheets; everything was shown on the TV. The school did not provide any sort of English teaching books for us to use. At first, I thought that this lack of materials was not going to be that bad. I assumed that I could easily find everything I needed on the internet. But I quickly discovered that while the internet has everything, it has too *much* of everything. It was very laborious to find useful resources, since I had to wade through a sea of activities, some of them good, some of them terrible, some of them focused on the tasks I was interested in, some of them with no connection to what I had to teach. It was too much to go through. I had to look for exercises and go over them carefully, in order to know if they were worth using. Sometimes, at first glance they looked like easy activities, but nonetheless I had to answer each question and complete each task in each activity to ensure there would be no problems when I provided them to my students. Sometimes, when doing so, I would find grammatical or vocabulary errors, or find instructions

that were hard to understand. Finishing all these English activities, I sometimes felt as if I was a beginning student, learning English all over again.

The most challenging part for me was my lessons with the children's groups. There was a group of four to five 10-year-old students. They did not have a book and it was hard to find activities that were fun for them. The classes were one-hour long, but to me, they felt like two hours. Hashemi and Azizinezhad (2011) note that children generally have shorter attention spans than adults as well as lots of physical energy. In my teaching it was certainly true with that group of students; I felt like I needed to have an endless supply of fun activities to get and maintain their attention. Sometimes, I would find good online games for these children, but at times those games were too easy for them. At the same time, I had to work with the four skills. There are, of course, four basic English language abilities: listening, reading, speaking, and writing (Harmer, 2007, p. 265). My school demanded that we work with our students on each of these. I would speak English most of the time, and they were good listeners. But it was hard to work on writing and reading. Although the school told us to cover these abilities, in fact, the school promoted itself as a place to learn to speak English and thus, there was no real support for literacy education, since we did not cover it that much. According to Martina et al. (2020) "students face difficulties in understanding the text because of lack of vocabulary, less grammatical understanding, and inadequate background knowledge" (p. 323). This is what usually happened in my classroom. The students did not possess the required vocabulary at their level to be able to comprehend the reading comprehension activities. In the end, the focus was mostly on speaking because of the way the school promoted itself.

Because of this situation, I reflected on how I learned English when I moved to Texas. I remember quite often thinking about my best ESL teachers, asking myself, "How did they do it?"

That was when I began reflecting on my own practices in the classroom. According to Slade et al. (2019), “Reflective practice facilitates the development of new knowledge, skills and dispositions in teachers by fostering critical contemplation of actions in a real-world environment” (p. 1). Since I was totally new to teaching, I would reflect back on how I learned the language in order to try use those techniques in my own practice. I would also reflect on what had taken place in my current classroom and tried to think critically about my ups and downs during my lessons.

At the university level, I have encountered a similar problem. To begin with, the students are not required to have a book. Once, the administration decided to use books linked to each level in the program, but it did not work since many students, particularly the poorer students from rural communities, did not want to spend money on materials. I found this odd, because most of these students had scholarships that helped them with their school expenses. But for some reason, they just did not want to spend money. The books that the English department chose for the students bring to mind what Aladini and Farahbod (2020) discuss in their study of EFL textbooks, namely that textbooks contain mostly controlled activities and imposed unreal linguistic contexts. The authors suggest that by introducing authentic materials, the teaching environment can be closer to the real world. I agree that most books tend to be designed with activities that are not generally encountered in the real world by students. So, at the university level, I once again found myself looking for materials.

Creating materials on my own was demanding for at least two reasons. First, the university asks that students turn in a portfolio that includes all the activities that we do. This portfolio needs to have a section for each skill (speaking, listening, reading, and writing). Therefore, I had to work on creating material for each of these areas. Second, I needed to find materials not only for the English topics we were asked to cover each quarter, and not only for each of the four skills, but I

also had to find materials that related to the individual degrees the students were pursuing. In the beginning, it was very hard to find reading comprehension activities related to mechatronics, for instance.

Part of this challenge had to do with specialized vocabulary. Vocabulary knowledge is a vital language learning component that must be considered in enhancing reading comprehension, in addition to knowledge of English grammar and background knowledge (Ibrahim, Sarudin & Muhamad, 2016). The fact that the students' English level was deficient made it even harder to find engaging activities for them, especially in terms of acquiring vocabulary that was related to their profession. Not having that background knowledge in their area of expertise made it to work on reading comprehension. I would look on the internet, and I would print them and review English language activities myself. As I mentioned before, talking about their careers with the associated technical vocabulary was something new for me. I am not familiar with the vocabulary related to mechatronics or programming. I felt overwhelmed at the beginning since each quarter we are moved from one academic area to another. For instance, one quarter I may be asked to teach in the mechatronics area; the following quarter, I will find myself teaching in the accounting area. Each quarter I had to look for activities and learn from them.

the above did have one silver lining. The lack of material eventually forced me to begin creating material on my own. This was huge challenge since I was still a beginning teacher and had no idea what teaching a second language really meant. But I believe the struggle helped make me a better teacher. Authentic materials have been defined as “materials produced to fulfill some social purpose in the language community” (Peacock, 1997, p. 146). In other words, they are materials that are not designed specifically for language teaching purposes. I began to be interested in adapting materials that were not for pedagogical purposes but for students to learn from real

world situations. According to Aladini and Farahbod (2020), authentic materials bring the fun to the classroom because they make the learning process more pleasing and encouraging. When I used simple activities that involved situations on the real work with my older students, it seemed that they learned from them and learned from them. Reflecting on those lessons, I realized that such materials were enjoyable exactly because they offered language that could be used in real life.

That was when I began to get ideas about how to create material for my lessons. Ignatius (2016) states that material production is both an artistic and a rational process. I had never been an artistic person. I knew nothing about producing materials that might grab the attention of my students, especially the young ones. But going through the available materials on the internet, I found myself inspired to create my own material for my lessons. Of course, I realized that I had to concentrate not only on the artistic part, but also on how the material might help my students to learn. Material production is defined as “anything which is done by writers, teachers or learners to provide sources of language input and to exploit those sources in ways which maximize the likelihood of intake” (Tomlinson, 1998, as cited in Ignatius, 2016, p. 1). Creating material was an important part for me to provide my students with meaningful input to learn the language and practice it too.

2.2 Reflection on past practices

When I began teaching, I had no experience at all. I had never imagined that I could be a teacher. When I was hired at *Inglés Vivencial*, I thought that I was going to be trained for the job, but there was no training at all. On my first day, I observed a class given by an experienced teacher and that was all the training I received. I began working the next day, all on my own.

Henrichsen, (2010) claims that novice teachers without adequate preparation naturally rely on their own instincts and their previous experiences teaching or learning languages. I was definitely a novice teacher; I had no previous training and so I often relied on my experiences learning the language. First, I thought about how I learned on my own. I talked to native speakers, I watched movies, I listened to music and read some books. But using these same methods as a basis for teaching my students was problematic. What worked for me probably would not work for someone else, since we all have different ways of learning.

Second, I thought about how my own language teachers taught me in the past. I hoped to emulate some of them and avoid the mistakes of others. In this way, I became what Dennen and Burner (2008) call a “cognitive apprentice.” The authors define cognitive apprenticeship “as a process, by which learners learn from a more experienced person by way of cognitive and metacognitive skills” (p. 426). Thinking back on my own past teachers was useful because it gave me the opportunity to experiment with their strategies and activities.

Unfortunately, as I affirmed, I had no such apprenticeship opportunities at my new school. The authors claim that one type of cognitive apprenticeship is simply the situation in which a more experienced person supports a less experienced person, offering help and models so the less experienced person can gain new knowledge and skills. Reflecting back on those days, I never received any sort of support, examples or help from the other teachers at the school. There was no interaction between us. I was truly on my own.

As hard as the situation was, thinking about it now, I never once considered about quitting. I saw my situation as a challenge that I had to overcome. Ghanbari and Eslami (2012) mention that “novice teachers are faced with a complex network of issues and it is the teacher’s job to find the right path of professionalization through a long process of actual practice” (p. 112). I did not realize

it at the time, but I believe that is how I came to be a teacher: mostly through my own practice. Actual teaching mostly has to do with the practice that takes us to professionalization. Ghnabari and Eslami (2012) are correct in saying that it is the teacher's job to find the right path, because we as teachers are the ones in front of the class trying to teach, the ones facing so many issues. These issues might not be the same for all teachers, but in the end we all share the same objective of seeing successful outcomes from our lessons.

remember one critical incident from my teaching that helped me find my unique path as an instructor. In one of my own EFL classes, back when I was first beginning to study English, there was a teacher that would slowly dictate a short paragraph. Then, he would dictate the same paragraph a second time, but at a normal speed, to make sure we had written all the words. The third time it was dictated, it was just to make sure we had all the words written with the correct punctuation. Then, he would write the paragraph on the whiteboard and our job was to check every single word. I really liked that activity because when I was learning the language, it helped me to improve my listening skills. This is one of the activities that I tried with my students. I had high hopes for it but they never got the point. They would interrupt my dictation and did not pay attention. That was an unsuccessful practice that I had to stop doing since it did not work in my own classroom. However, this incident helped me become a better teacher. It underlined for me that my own learning style was not necessarily the same as my students' learning styles. It showed me that mimicking my past language teachers was not always an effective strategy. And it helped me understand the value of learning not just from my successes, but also from my mistakes.

At the university, when I was first hired, one of the steps to get a job offer is to teach a 20-minute class to the English teachers there. The teachers pretended that they were students and acted disruptive and unpleasant. They tried to make my 20-minute class as demanding as possible. I was

nervous because I had no experience as a teacher at the university level. I taught my class the way I taught at the language school where I already worked. I was given a topic to teach and brought my own material, which was a worksheet with only the structure of the topic. The given topic was the present perfect. I used the whiteboard to explain the grammatical concept and then gave out the worksheets for the “students” to work on. Then, I asked the students to give some examples of the grammatical point. Fortunately, it worked, and I felt more secure once I saw that they responded positively. I remembered to “keep it cool” and maintained my self-confidence.

2.3 Change in Practices

Inglés Vivencial was run by two people that were not teachers at all. They were not even bilingual. I am not sure how the school was set up in Dolores. What I knew was that it was created by some people from Monterrey and that one day, they left. Since the school still had students, before leaving, they left two people in charge. One of them hired me. I was honest in telling him that I had no experience at all, but I could learn.

After a month of classes, he told me that one student complained about me. He told me that he preferred to be in class with a different teacher, since my classes were boring. In my mind, I thought, how can I make a class fun? When I learned the language, my classes never included games or fun things to do to learn. At first, I was a bit frustrated, because I had thought that I was doing the right thing, but unfortunately, not for some. I realized that students learn in different ways, I also had to get to know the students a bit more. Then, I had a student who was of a high level, and there were no more topics to teach her according to the syllabus that we followed. She was good at speaking and once I told her that I would focus on her writing, which is a challenging skill. I began by working with her by asking her about her likes and dislikes, it was a way of

engaging in a conversation and work on her speaking skills. Once I knew what her likes were, I picked up a topic and asked her to write about it. At first, she did not say anything but then she complained that I was pushing her to do activities that did not interest her. This another complaint that I did not expect.

Facing these problems forced me to reflect on what I was doing in my classes and about my teaching practices. Korthagen (1993) says that “Reflection in teaching refers generally to teachers learning to subject their own beliefs of teaching and learning to a critical analysis and taking more responsibility for their actions” (p. 2 as cited in Farrell, 1998). At first, I did not know how to reflect on my classes and students critically. I believed that I could teach the language not because I am bilingual but because I truly wanted to see my students produce what they had learned from my classes. I felt that my desire for them to learn would, by itself, translate into their success as learners. But I recognized that I had to analyze what I had done in class so that I could improve my future lessons and student outcomes. I began to take responsibility for the problems I was facing in the classroom by analyzing my actions and thinking about them for my students’ perspectives. I knew that teaching was something that I could do, but I also realized that if I wanted to keep teaching, I would need to improve. Pennington (1992) suggests a reflective orientation “as a means for improving classroom processes and outcomes, and developing confident, self-motivated teachers and learners” (p. 3, as cited in Farrell, 1998). There were many things that I had to learn and improve about myself as a teacher. This process of reflection was not always comfortable. I was not very confident since I would often question myself about my decisions made in the classroom, particularly when an activity was not going well. Furthermore, Pennington (1995) states that for a teacher to change and develop requires a conscious desire for change. It was not an easy task to recognize that I had to change what I had been doing, but I could not

complain much since I was a novice teacher, and I had to admit that there was a lot of room for improvement. I became motivated to learn more about teaching a second language and understood that it was a career that I and wanted to continue working.

These two complaints made me go back to square one and reconsider the whole issue of being a teacher. Richards (1990), claims that “self-inquiry and critical thinking can help teachers move from a level where they may be guided largely by impulse, intuition, or routine, to a level where their actions are guided by reflection and critical thinking” (p. 5). I began to reflect on the particular complaints and analyzed which specific activities the students seemed to like and not like. When I planned a new activity, I began to also consider a “Plan B” that I could use if my initial idea did not work. Sometimes, I would repeat something that I had already done, but look for different ways to execute it. I thought quite often about how to improve lessons that included practice in the four skills. I learned that sometimes it is simply better to drop an activity that does not seem to work. I analyzed what were the successful activities that I had and began working around those by creating my own material for my lessons. And, perhaps most importantly, I began to accept and reflect on negative feedback without letting it bother me. I was able to be more objective about my teaching. This helped me make significant improvements in my short career.

That was when I decided to study to become a teacher. Soon, I was I enrolled in the BA in Teaching English in Guanajuato. When I joined the *Licenciatura en la Enseñanza del Inglés* (LEI) program, I thought that I was going to learn how to give lessons. But the program was not like that. Instead, I began learning about different topics related to the teaching and it also helped me to reflect more on what I was doing in my classes.

2.4 Current Practices

Now that I have more experience in teaching, my work is much easier. I have learned to get to know my students, better prepare activities that involve all of them. Having new technology available makes it easier to find and create activities. My work is also easier to manage because the program at the university has not changed since I began working there; this means that I already know what kind of activities I can use for each of the levels.

Something that I learned in the LEI was how to create my own library on my computer with all the material for my classes. It turns out that it really does help. At the end of every quarter, we give a report on the things that we did with our students. In this reflective narrative we make a list of all the activities that we used. I have created my own folders with the activities that I use. This system has helped me to have material ready all the time. It is like having a library for each different level that I teach. Even better, there is a folder in Google Drive for all the English teachers where we upload this information. We all have access to it, so we can see material from other teachers.

Now, I talk to other teachers and we share materials that have worked for them or for me and we discuss our experiences. Basically, all the teachers in the English Department are part of a “community of practice”. “A community of practice is a group of professionals who work together and regularly communicate with each other in order to share learning resources and accomplish tasks so they can continuously improve themselves and gradually influence and help each other” (Kong, 2018, p 2). This example of community practice is exactly what I am part of in the university. All the teachers are still learners of our own practice, which is continuously changing. We share resources and talk about our issues with the students. It really helps sharing our knowledge to do a better job for our students.

I have also focused more on the speaking skill with my students. Nowadays, being able to communicate in English is more important than ever. I feel more confident in pushing my university students to practice the language during the short time that we have in class. Many of them are shy or afraid that other students might make fun of themselves. I have found that group and pair work helps a great deal with these problems. Ignatius (2016) suggests that when a teacher designs an activity, he or she should also keep in mind the benefits of pair and group learning activities. During my classes, I sometimes use a board game which is all about speaking. I put my students to work in teams; meanwhile, I monitor them and help them with their pronunciation. In this type of activity, they forget about who hears them speaking in English, because they are so engaged in the game. Every time I do this activity with different groups, it works out very well, proving Ignatius' (2016) assertion that games can naturally motivate students in a "convenient, warm-hearted and challenging learning atmosphere" (p. 2).

Another way that I deal with shy or uncomfortable students is by giving them privacy. For instance, when it is time for them to take the speaking exam, I ask the whole group to leave the classroom. I stay and ask the student whose turn it is to take the exam to come inside; that way, there are only the two of us. There is no room for the student to feel shy because no one else is there to criticize them. I even did the same thing when we had online classes. I was using Google Meet, and only the person taking the exam could join the meeting.

In sum, I feel I am a much better material designer than before. I take time to know my students' personalities, needs and learning styles and this knowledge informs my material design. I make use of technology. I recycle materials effectively and keep a database of successful activities. I communicate with other teachers and we all share our materials. And when I create materials, I think about their design in terms of how I might use them in group and pair work.

However, challenges remain. Nuñez and Tellez (2009) state that every ESL classroom has its own type of diversity. The term “diversity” doesn’t refer to having students come from different places or cultures; it means the way in which students learn is different for everyone. Furthermore, the authors suggest that the teacher who designs the materials should consider this diversity “keep a balance among students’ language learning needs, preferences, motivations and expectations, their affective needs, and the institutional policies” (p. 2). This is what I have to consider when I create my own materials. Moreover, I contemplate all my students’ levels and their specific needs for learning the language. On top of this, I must juggle these needs with the need to follow institutional policies, particularly in terms of focusing on the four skills and following the school curriculum.

2.5 Reflection on Current Practices and Looking Ahead

Ignatius (2016) states that “Taking material production as a challenge will always nourish a professional growth and accomplishment in the long term of teaching career” (p. 5). For me, it has been a huge challenge, but now that I reflect on what I experienced regarding creating material for my classes, I can say that it has been very rewarding, because I learned a lot from the process and improved my teaching.

There are a few times when we get to have the same group of students for two consecutive quarters, and that makes it easy. I say this because that way, I already know my students and who needs to make an effort on a given skill. In this way, I focus more on things that I feel I might not have done enough in the previous quarter. I also pay more attention to the speaking part because the students also feel that they need more of that practice.

I have also been involved in reading articles that relate to my students’ particular fields of study. This has helped me to get my students involved. Ignatius (2016) states that with well-

designed materials, an English teacher can always appeal to the learners, and that is the main reason for me to read articles that deal with their areas of interest and that are related to their studies. Such readings provide me with the vocabulary I need to teach so that my students can communicate in real situations in their specific areas of expertise. Since students take four hours of English per week, I focus one day a week on classroom discussions. Once I have read articles associated to their career, I give them a copy and ask them to read it at home. The next day, we discuss what they have read. We make a circle and discuss what they have read by asking them simple questions and then following up with more questions. This way, I get them all involved in answering the questions and giving their opinion.

Chapter 3: Curriculum Restraints

3.1 Past Practice

The second challenge that I identified is curriculum restraints. According to Amuseghan (2007), in ideal situations “there would be a perfect match between what is prescribed, what is practiced, and consequently what is achieved” (p. 317). He refers to the given curriculum as to ‘what is prescribed’, and in the case of the university, the prescription was not what I had expected. I began working at university level having worked as a teacher for about two years in a language school (see above p 24). There, I had a curriculum to follow according to the students’ level. In the university, I found myself following a curriculum set by the *Universidades Politécnicas* in the country. Now that I have acquired more experience in the language teaching field, I have come to realize that that curriculum was not designed well. Aurbach and Burges (1985) explain that “Curricula, teaching methods and techniques, test materials, and assessment instruments have been developed to bring both the students and the classroom closer to the language needs of the real world” (p. 54). A strong curriculum can help guide both teachers and students, increasing their chances of success. However, this cannot happen if the curriculum is fundamentally flawed. One of the objectives in the coordination of languages at the school is to have students graduate with at least a B1, according to the CEFR. In my university, the curriculum did not guide students toward achieving this goal. In fact, it did not help them to communicate effectively in English in the real world.

In my first experience working at the university, I was assigned to a couple of groups of English level III. Each quarter, all the groups take sixty hours of English lessons, and they are given four hours per week over a period of fifteen weeks. English level III has only two units. The first unit is for thirty hours, and the topic is ‘past simple vs past continuous’, the second unit is all

about ‘modal verbs’. Teaching these topics is sort of grammar based only, and it has nothing to do with competence-based program, which should be the aim. Once we have taught the unit and finish the thirty hours, students are given a test on each skill. There is a test for speaking which is worth 4 points, one for writing which is worth 2 points, and ones for listening, grammar and reading, each of which is worth one. Finally, one point is given for turning in a portfolio that contains all the activities completed during the unit. After, level five the points for the speaking test change to 3 points and the writing is worth 3 points, as well. To my surprise, the exams in listening, grammar and reading have already been designed and are used over and over for some years now. Each exam only has 10 items, and they are multiple choice. The writing and speaking exams are also already designed. For each level there is a specific prompt to use to test the students’ level.

As I finished the first quarter teaching there, I realized that students do not have enough topics to learn at any given level. It seemed to me that students were only receiving the survival skills that Auerbach and Burgess, (1985) define as “the minimum functioning in the specific community in which the student is settled” (p. 476). The curriculum includes very simple topics that do not really help them to survive in the real world. They need to be able to survive since once they graduate, they apply their English skills to function in society, especially the careers that involve programming software, e-commerce, and others.

For instance, I had to teach and practice past simple and continuous for seven weeks, which I did since I was following the curriculum the way it was designed. Then, the second unit dealt with modal verbs – both I and the students agreed that it was boring, tiresome, and not very useful. Even though the students have just left high school and come from rural communities where they do not have that much knowledge of English, they knew enough about English to be annoyed by the unit. After a couple of quarters following the curriculum exactly as it is, I realized that I had to

make changes, although this would mean diverging from the university's policies. Amuseghan (2007) states that there are some perspectives from which curriculum could be looked at: prescription (intended curriculum) and practice (implemented curriculum). I was using the university's prescriptive model, and it was not working for me; I had to implement my own curriculum to see better results.

3.2 Reflection on past practices

Once I had more confidence teaching university students and began studying in the BA at the same time, I decided that I could make some changes on my own. At first, I noticed that the English teachers were not being observed during classes by the coordinator. I also learned that each quarter students must complete a teacher evaluation that contains lots of questions about their teacher. The evaluation focuses on different aspects of teacher performance. My evaluations had been good, but I knew I still had some room to improve.

I had followed the given curriculum exactly as it had been given to me. I thought that it was just the way every teacher should do. However, having at that point studied for some time in the BA, I noticed that I could do my own internal changes in my classes. I understood that students needed to learn more things about the language and needed to practice a lot. "Learners' needs are theoretically of great importance in current learner-centered approaches in teaching generally and language teaching in particular" (Amuseghan, 2007, p. 321). This was the case with my students. I wanted to refocus my classes on their needs. I wanted to give them the tools that they needed to learn more than what the curricula prescribed.

Auerbach and Burgess (1985) claim that the choices that instructors make reveal their views of the learning process, the social context for learning, and the students' place in society. I

reflected on my students' needs and thought about the kinds of language they would need to produce in the real world. I began to the curriculum to fulfill not only the students' needs but also my own needs: i.e., to see positive outcomes from my students. At the end of each unit, I began thinking about how I could fit more topics into it. I noticed that some students were wanting to learn more. Since I did not need to turn in lesson plans to the coordination, I began writing new plans for each level, reflecting on what I wanted to accomplish. I analyzed how I was approaching the topics that I was teaching and realized that I could make room for more topics.

My students were basically new to the English language, and that was one of the main reasons for this specific level to give them more knowledge and practice on different topics. At first, I went back to analyze the curriculum at the language school that I had worked at, to get ideas on what to include for the first unit. What I tried to do was to break down Unit 1 into two units. I first focused on the actual curriculum for three weeks and the other four weeks, I taught other topics. It was kind of confusing for students to learn some other topics in the second part of unit 1 and be tested only in the first part.

3.3 Change in practices

At the beginning of my career, I had thought that being a teacher just meant giving a class and then leaving. But as I began getting more experience, my beliefs changed. Once I had been working with older students while being enrolled in the BA, I began to realize that being a teacher takes a lot of effort. As I got to know my students at the university, I knew I had to give them more than what I could do with a simple curriculum. Besides the problems with the curriculum, I knew that my students were probably not receiving any significant exposure to English outside my classroom, and that I had to try in some way to make up for that lack (Krieger, 2012). The fact is

that we live in a small town where their exposure to English is very limited. As a result, the students only get to learn and practice English during the lesson at the university. I also knew that I had to push them harder to take English classes more seriously, since I had noticed that they would care more about the “important classes” related to their career.

As I mentioned before, the evaluations of my teaching performance had been good up until this point. But since they are done during the first half of the quarter, we do not get the results until the end of the quarter. Since I did not want to wait for the results, I had to ask my students about their own thoughts. I had learned in the BA to be open to student’s feedback, improve.

I asked my students to tell me whether they wanted to see more things or to “keep it simple.” I told them some of my own good experiences learning the language and how it facilitated me to get jobs in the US, and then back in Mexico. Once I got their attention about why English could benefit them, most of them agreed to include more language topics during the whole quarter. Once I heard from them that they did want more, I continued to improve my lesson plans, reflecting on what topics I could include. At first, I did not push them that hard; I only included a few more topics that were kind of going hand in hand with the unit. It worked: my students were not as bored as they previously had been. They were more interested in class and paid more attention to the class, since they were learning new things.

3.4 Current Practices

I have worked at the university for several years now, and my practices have improved. I now know what works and what does not. In the last few years, I have been working in the late afternoons and weekends at the university, and those schedules are for the engineering students.

As a result, I teach more at the higher levels, such as English VII or IX. In these stages, the curriculum is still inadequate, but now I mostly ignore it and “do my own thing.”

Throughout these years, I have learned that the students work better in a class where they feel they can trust their teacher. “Novice teachers, are faced with a complex network of issues and it is the teacher’s job to find the right path of professionalization through a long process of actual practice” (Ghanbari & Eslami, 2012, p. 112). Through my actual practice, I have learned to make sure my students feel comfortable. I use activities in which we can get to know each other. Once I know we are good on both sides, I explain how I work with the curriculum. I tell them my thoughts about it and how it is better to include more things to work on, rather than just the simple topics. I include more topics for each grade that I teach. I also get them involved in more activities that are related to their careers.

In English IX, there are only two units, and both are too simple. However, in this one, they have to take a TOEIC exam to measure their English, since they will soon be graduating and going on to internships. The exam must be taken in the middle of the quarter, so what I do is I teach the unit topics for two weeks and then I focus on practicing for the exam. I cover different areas related to what the exam tests such as listening since is the most difficult skill for students and reading comprehension. We do a lot of practice and I make sure that I answer all the students’ doubts. At this level, they are more confident expressing themselves in English. That is the main reason why I like to teach the higher levels. Once they take the exam, I go back to work on the following unit, which is about giving opinions. I still make some room to include other topics here, especially trending topics, so that they will be able to give their opinions and do lot of speaking practice.

3.5 Reflection on Current Practices and Looking Ahead

My changes to the curriculum have been mostly successful. Of course, there are still times when I have students that have trouble learning. It still takes a lot of effort to make many of my students aware of the value of English. And it is challenging to get them to devote enough time to study. I often think about how I can improve my classes. Each quarter I get beginning students. I constantly have to adapt the materials and topics to help them advance. After a couple of weeks of getting to know them better, I reflect on what things I can give them to practice on more and then adapt my lesson plan just for those students.

At the beginning of each quarter, students must take a diagnostic test to know what their level is. The results of the test also help us to know their level better. Once I get the results, I go back to the curriculum of the quarter and adjust the topics. I think about what topics I can include and what to work on more, to help them be more proficient in the language.

To sum up, I used to believe that I needed to follow a set curriculum. I believed it was my professional duty to adhere to the program. Now, I am much more flexible and much more focused on the needs of my students. I do not worry anymore about leaving the curriculum behind (or at least, to the side) and designing classes that better meet the specific needs of my students. I now work to find tasks and activities that allow my students to reach their language goals. This sense of professional autonomy has been one of the aspects of my teaching practice that has changed the most.

Chapter 4: Time restraints

4.1 Past Practice

The third challenge that I have encountered in my job at the *Universidad Tecnológica del Norte de Guanajuato* has been time. As I discussed earlier, each group of students gets 60 hours of English class each quarter. The classes are given four hours each week. When I began, I did realize how tough it would be to juggle these hours. But I quickly learned that one of my biggest challenges would be simply finding the time to accomplish all the things I am responsible for.

First, I have to organize my classes so that my students get enough time to study and practice. For instance, in the last few years, I have been given higher levels in the program. This puts more time pressure on myself because I need to help my students graduate with a B1 level (at least). There is pressure on all of us to bring up their language level in a very short amount of time.

Second, there are practical tasks that take up my time. For instance, at the beginning of my career at the UTNG, I would usually ask for a projector to use in class so that I could better explain my topics. Between me checking out the projector, running to the classroom (which sometimes meant moving from one building to another), and setting everything up, I often found myself behind schedule. By the time I was ready to start my class, I had wasted about ten minutes.

Third, my student commitments often overlapped. For instance, there were times when students from one class would not let me leave on time, making me late for another class. That is, at the end of a lesson, my students would invariably have questions about their grades, or the homework, on the topic we had seen. I felt I need to stay and answer these questions. But at the same time, I needed to run to my next class.

Another case of overlapping commitments had to do with my tutoring obligations. Besides the hours we are hired to teach, we are required to give tutoring to our students. The tutoring hours

depend on the groups we have. If I have 4 groups, I must give 3 hours per week, which we do not get paid for. I am obliged to give my students these tutoring hours, because at the end of the quarter, I have to give the signed tutoring papers to my coordinator as evidence of having done so. I set up specific times to give these sessions, but students never show up at the designated hour. Instead, they often come up to me at the end of my classes. This also throws my schedule off.

Fourth, class management is often hard. For example, students often work at a slower pace than I anticipated. In the past, when I showed slides, students would often take a longtime writing notes. I told them that I was happy to share my slides, but they always wanted to write the information down at the moment. Another management issue had to do with getting all my students to work in unison. Smaglik (2011) writes that “part of being an effective teacher involves being able to grab students’ attention” (p. 2). But it is tough to get everyone’s attention. This is particularly true in large groups: it is almost impossible to get the attention of the whole class. This last quarter, I was given a group of 36 students. Getting them all on “the same page” takes time.

4.2 Reflection on past Practices

The university where I work for is run by the state of Guanajuato. All of the people that work there become what is called *servidores públicos* which means that technically we work for the government of the state of Guanajuato. At first, that ‘title’ put some weight on me. I felt that as a public servant working for the government, I had to somehow be perfect in what I was doing in my classes. I felt it was my duty to society. So, that put stress on me to get everything done. I have also discussed the importance of my teacher evaluations, if it is not good, I am not given sufficient groups the following semester. The assessments put pressure on me. Moreover, I often put undue stress on myself. Reflecting on the teacher that I used to be, when I first started teaching

at UTNG, I realize now that I used to be a very regimented teacher. That is, I followed a certain pattern when teaching a class, whether the class seemed to be working or not. I felt stressed out for not being able to accomplish the objectives of my lesson plan. I knew I could do something about it, but I also felt that I had gone from step 1 to step 5 without skipping a step in between.

In short, I felt a great deal of heaviness to excel. And yet I often felt there was not enough time to do everything I needed to do. We teachers are responsible for preparing our students for important exams. We have to provide tutoring. We need to talk to our students after our classes, to make sure they understand things like the course content and homework assignments. We check out, set up, and return equipment. We need to work with individual students who may be experiencing difficulties. We need to guide and monitor our students' graduation portfolios. We need to run from one building to the next. We plan classes and create new materials. We have to do administrative work. And, of course, we need to teach. It was too much to handle.

On top of all that, I was also going to Guanajuato to study the BA. Fortunately, being there helped make me a bit more open in terms of changing the way I was working. I realized that there is no reason why a teacher should be stressed out. We are not paid enough! I remember asking myself if it was worth it to be that crazy about following certain ways of teaching. Realizing that it was better to take it easy and not be so worried all the time. I began to make small changes. I began working on not wasting my time, stressing over small things.

4.2 Change in practices

As I realized that I was not getting enough done in each class, I had to reconsider the way I taught. I thought about the extra topics I was assigning and analyzed how I could make the best

use out of the short time that I had. There was no way that I was going to eliminate my own ‘personal curriculum’. So, I would ponder over and over about how I could improve my teaching.

During the January-April quarter, our time seems to be even shorter than usual. This is because we take one week off for Holy Week. They do not call it vacations; instead, it is called “recess time.” Holy Week comes at different times every year, but one year it came right before unit exams. When it came the time for week’s recess, I realized that I had not finished covering all the topics that I had planned. That meant that the students were not going to be prepared for the unit’s exam when they returned. In the end, I did my best to get everyone involved in class, but my efforts were not completely successful. In general, we were all very concerned with COVID since it was back in February of 2022 when the infections were very high. At the beginning of the quarter, we began the year at school. But then the administration sent us back home and we worked online for four weeks. Then, the administration informed us that we had to return to school again. It was tiring with those changes to keep students engaged. I tried to engage all by using simple activities, since most of them possessed a deficient level of English. But that did not always work. There was a female pupil who was very demanding. I had empathy for her attitude, because I could tell that she wanted to learn, but it took a lot of my attention to fulfill her needs in the class. Some other students were just listeners. The ones with high English levels did not show up that much, and I assumed that it was because I was focusing on my low-level students so that they would not fall behind during the pandemic. It was just too demanding to accomplish my goals that quarter.

I had to go home during that time and reflect on everything I had done during the quarter. I thought about my classes and reflected on why I had taken up so much time on teaching a unit. Even with the excessive time I devoted to each unit, I was not able to cover everything that I had planned. I concluded that I was wasting too much time on small, trivial things. As I explained

before, I spent a lot of time doing things like setting up projectors and talking to students after class. I thought about how I could deal with students wanting to have a quick, impromptu tutoring session after class, since I never said “no” to them. These things made me realize that I was so focused on my students’ needs that I was not thinking about my own needs as a teacher. Frankly, I was too nice to them. I realized I had to organize my time better and that I would have to begin instituting a policy of “tough love.”

4.3 Current Practices

Once I went back to school for on-site classes, it became clear that I could do a much better job with my time. I was one of those teachers who often complained about online classes during the pandemic, but after we were done with them, I realized the benefits for both teachers and students. We all learned a lot about technology and how we could use it for our own benefit. Now, I make the best out of the technology that is available.

My classes are not online anymore, but I still use Google Classroom and other online tools. Google Classroom, in particular, has been very useful. All the buildings have open Wi-Fi, and now almost every single student has a laptop or a smartphone on which they can easily access Google Classroom. When the quarter starts, I set up classes on my Google account. I upload all the material that we will be using each week during the quarter. On the first day of class, I spend time explaining to my students how the work is going to be done throughout the quarter and how we will work together in the classroom. Another thing that I changed is that I now make it clear to my students that I am happy to give them tutoring sessions any time I am free, but it must be after I am done teaching all my classes. Now that Google Meet is available, I set up the tutoring at a time when both my students and I are free, and we meet online.

The way I organize time has changed a lot. I now ask my students to go online and review the class materials for the week before we meet in person. That way, I save time by not having to get the projector to show them the topics.

The kinds of work I assign and when I expect students to do it has also changed. For example, in Google Classroom, I share some websites where students can practice the four skills. For instance, on ‘lyricstraining’, they can listen to music, read the subtitles of popular songs, and input missing lyrics. It is excellent practice and saves valuable class time because this is something that they can do outside of class. Some researchers have argued that activities that only focus on a single skill are not the best use of time. For instance, Krieger (2012) argues that “Although music can generate interest in the language and provide useful input, it does not provide the negotiation that two-way communication entails” (para. 8). I disagree with this perspective. It is essential to do these practices with music because it helps students to train their ears to listen to the language. Using this practice, they get to the point where they can sing their favorite songs with the correct pronunciation. It does not require a lot of effort to do the practice and it is something that most students like, because they can choose which song they want to work with and there is a wide range of songs they can use. In terms of their portfolios, they can now use all these extra activities as evidence of their work.

I make clear to my students that learning a second language not only involves the time spent in school, but also the time they practice outside. As Smaglik (2011) writes, students are often told to spend an hour studying outside the classroom for every hour they spend inside. But we teachers are never told the best way to ensure that students this. Websites that the students’ interest are one way to make sure that they engage with the language when they are not in class.

4.4 Reflection on Current Practices and Looking Ahead

Thinking about all those small changes that I have made, I can say that they have worked out very well. I get more things done during an hour of class. I do not run to check out a projector or get copies for students. I now get the students more involved in my classes. The best part is that we get to do more speaking practice in class, which is something that students feel is very rewarding.

These types of small changes (e.g., using technology to share planning information with students, conducting tutoring online, having students work on projects outside of class, making students more responsible for their own learning) have been of a lot of help. Now I have more time in class for activities that require my presence. We minimize the amount of time wasted in each class.

I have also learned a lot from coworkers and my own students, that since I do the reflection on my teaching practices I get to improve. The evaluations that students do on teachers, have also given me feedback on the things that I still have to work on. As I said before, the teaching profession is a never stopping learning process.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this memoir, I discussed my reflections on three specific, critical issues that I faced in my teaching career. The first issue I discussed was the need to create my own material for my classes. When I first encountered the issue of having to create my own material, it made me re-think my career. Teaching, I realized, requires many responsibilities and areas of knowledge that I was unfamiliar with. Creating material compels an understanding of curriculum goals, student's needs, and student's interests.

The second issue I looked at had to do with the curriculum that I must follow at the institution where I work. I have learned that institutional curriculums are not always designed by people with expertise in their creation. They are not always designed to fulfill the needs of students, and they often do not consider the different levels of English of the students. Consequently, I have learned to make my own way around a given curriculum. I have learned that it is fine to change them a bit in order to achieve better student outcomes. I recognize now that I am the person who is teaching the class, not the person who designed the class curriculum. I am autonomous and I am free to make my own pedagogical decisions, focusing on what my students .

The third issue had to do with time restraints. There is never enough time to teach a second language class. It demands a lot of time to teach, answer student questions, and have students practice. But I am getting better and better at using all the time available and not wasting time on things that can be avoided.

Of course, these three issues are interrelated and often overlap. For instance, throughout my career, I have learned to create materials that fit my classes. I have also learned to adapt online materials, repurpose old materials, and share my colleagues' materials. But creating materials is not a stand-alone issue. It is also an issue of curricular restraints and time. While I do not follow

the curriculum as closely as I used to, I still need to prepare my students for tests and help them create portfolios. I have to think about these things when I create materials. And, of course, creating activities and then analyzing what works and what does not take time.

I truly believe that a teacher never stops learning. There is always something new that I must learn in my classes because I have new students all the time, as well as different levels to teach. I still have to learn new ways to engage all the students at once, since they all have different personalities and ways of learning. Teaching can be learned from books and mentors, but a lot of learning also takes place in the classroom.

There are a few things that I have to change since I am not the best teacher, but I know I can reflect on my teaching practices and improve. For instance, I want to be better at adapting video material of speeches or similar topics for my classes since I like to use videos to elicit opinions from students. I would also like to improve my lesson plans to create more fun classes for students but without missing the point of learning a certain topic.

In the near future, I will move on to get a job in Texas as a bilingual teacher. It is a huge challenge, but I am looking forward to taking it on. I believe the move will help me to grow as a professional and as a person. I will certainly learn new things by working in a new context. At the same time, I feel that my experiences teaching in Mexico will give me a solid foundation for success.

I would also like to go back to school. I plan to study a master's degree in Education or Applied Linguistics, perhaps in the United States or somewhere else abroad. I believe that by studying an MA in a different country, I will be able to learn more about teaching to a broader range of students.

In sum, this paper has given me the opportunity to reflect on how I have evolved as a teacher. The lessons I have learned are an excellent basis for further development and will serve me well in my future jobs and studies.

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