

EFL Teachers' Professional Development. A Narrative Inquiry into Lesson Planning During the Pandemic Desarrollo profesional docente ILE. Indagación narrativa sobre planificación de clases durante la pandemia

* Original Research Article


Miriam Eucevia Troya-Sánchez *
Carmen Delia Benítez-Correa **


Submission: October 02, 2023


Accepted: November 02, 2023

Published: November 05, 2023

How to cite this article:

Troya-Sánchez, M.E., & Benítez-Correa, C., (2023). EFL Teachers' Professional Development. A Narrative Inquiry into Lesson Planning During the Pandemic. *ENLETAWA Journal*, 16(2), 1-32. e16478.  <https://doi.org/10.19053/2011835X.16478>

*Master of Teaching English as a Foreign Language. She currently works as an English teacher at Universidad Nacional de Loja. Her present research centers on the in-service English teachers' professional development from the public sector of Ecuador: miriam.troya@unl.edu.ec
 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7798-8684>

** Ph.D. in English Philology in UNED Madrid, Spain. Degree in Educational Sciences: Educational Planning and Research from Universidad Tecnica Particular de Loja (UTPL).
cdbenitez@utpl.edu.ec  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9745-4938>.



Abstract

This narrative inquiry explored how an EFL teacher's lived experiences during the pandemic helped her to reconstruct her lesson plans as a manifestation of professionalism. Her students were adults with unfinished schooling from the prioritized curriculum. Data was collected through interviews, lesson plans, a reflective journal, and WhatsApp screenshots. Results showed that her classes were limited to brief text, voice, and video messages. There was no individual or immediate feedback. The dialogic interaction during the narrative inquiry was a mediational tool that activated the teacher's reflections on her past lessons, which guided her to adjust her present and future pedagogical practices.

Keywords: ethical commitment, learning objectives, practice activities, remote learning, teacher training, prioritized curriculum

Resumen

Esta investigación narrativa exploró las experiencias vividas por una maestra de ILE durante la pandemia y cómo éstas la ayudaron a reconstruir sus planes de clase como una manifestación de profesionalismo. Sus alumnos eran adultos con escolaridad inconclusa del currículo priorizado. Los datos se recopilaron a través de entrevistas, planes de clase, un diario reflexivo y capturas de pantalla de WhatsApp. Los resultados mostraron que sus clases se limitaban a mensajes breves de texto, voz y video. No existía retroalimentación individual o inmediata. La interacción dialógica durante la indagación narrativa fue una herramienta de mediación que activó las reflexiones de la profesora sobre sus lecciones pasadas, lo que la orientó realizar ajustes en sus prácticas pedagógicas presentes y futuras.

Palabras clave: actividades de práctica, aprendizaje remoto, capacitación docente, compromiso ético, currículo priorizado, objetivos de aprendizaje

Introduction

The pandemic COVID-19 abruptly transformed classroom learning into emergency remote learning all around the world. The global community allowed free access to many technological and educational tools to help teachers cope with this unexpected situation. Nevertheless, this health crisis sharpened the prevailing technological issues, inequalities, and deprived educational systems that could not support the minimum requirements to meet the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized students (UNICEF, 2020).

In Ecuador, like many other countries around the world, it was more urgent than ever to evidence teachers' professionalism and ethical commitment as one of the compulsory teaching standards for English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers (Ministry of Education, 2012). This standard demands Ecuadorian EFL teachers' reflection and collaboration among peers in order to grow professionally in order to guarantee students' successful learning. This being the case, this investigation inquiries into how an Ecuadorian EFL teacher demonstrated her professionalism during and after the pandemic by reflecting on her successes and failures during her online lessons. Her students belonged to a prioritized curriculum addressed to young adults and adults with unfinished schooling from the public sector of education.

Traditionally, teachers' professional development (TPD) has been provided through training courses, seminars, and conferences mainly sponsored by the educational industry and stakeholders (Cardinal, et al., 2021). These knowledge-

oriented theories derived from this type of training are a good source for teachers to clarify their beliefs and assumptions. However, if teachers do not reflect on their own practices, they will not be able to identify their weaknesses or strengths unless a process of inquiry into their lived experiences in the classroom makes them more mindful and thoughtful to reconstruct their own classroom-oriented theories of practice to become effective teachers (Kumaravadivelu, 1994).

Several studies have been carried out to highlight the relevance of hearing teachers' voices when they describe their teaching experiences (Cardinal et al. 202; Ubaque & Pinilla, 2018), and to examine how they constructed their lesson plans to meet the emergent online learning requirements during the pandemic COVID-19 (Mas et al., 2021). However, little is known about how EFL teachers could design and deliver their online lessons addressed to students of prioritized curriculums, who did not have the minimum requirements of connectivity or technological devices to meet their teachers in video conferencing classes during the pandemic. This indicates a need to conduct this research, which has been rooted in the principle that EFL teachers are able to reflect on their own practices with the aim of growing professionally, which subsequently will generate effective teaching and learning.

This study offers the professional community some important insights to promote narrative inquiry as a high-quality approach to EFL teachers' professional development. This approach highly values teachers' lived experiences on designing and implementing their lesson plans as well as their formal and informal conversations and interactions to support each other under unforeseen

circumstances. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore how an EFL teacher's experiences during the pandemic helped her to reconstruct her lessons as a manifestation of professionalism and ethical commitment.

Literature Review

This section describes the theoretical foundations of this investigation. First of all, it presents the general conceptualization of teachers' professional development (TPD) from a sociocultural perspective in which reflection and collaboration among peers are the main sources for professional growth. Then, a brief contextualization shows one of the Ecuadorian teaching standards, Professionalism and Ethical Commitment, which engages teachers to conduct research on their own experiences, and in collaboration with their peers. Moreover, it shows the prioritized curriculum as one of the most vulnerable sectors in the national system of education which was probably the most affected one during the pandemic of Covid-19.

Turning now to the theories that support this research, this section demonstrates how narrative inquiry, proposed by Clandinin (2019) as an effective method for professional development, is reframed by Golombek and Johnson (2017) as an approach tailored specifically for EFL teachers' professional development. Furthermore, Dewey's theory of inquiry confirms that reflecting on past and present experiences or narratives allows professionals to enhance their practices. Finally, this section discusses the elements of a lesson plan, emphasizing the importance of expanding upon them through a reflective process. This process should include an awareness of the teacher's specific circumstances, with the goal of ensuring both

their students' educational success and their own personal and professional fulfillment.

Teachers' Professional Development (TPD)

Guskey (2002) states that TPD is a process of change that emerges from teachers' attitudes and reflections on their students' learning outcomes. Teachers themselves, not others, should carry out TPD. Many educational policies that promote professional development programs attempt to force teachers to apply teaching methodologies that do not fit in their contexts. TPD is an internal motivational process of change, which shows teachers' commitment and endeavors to improve the educational system by performing their profession with excellence (Guskey, 2002; Kumaravadivelu, 1994).

Professionalism and Ethical Commitment

The national curriculum is aligned to the TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) standards, and "Professionalism and Ethical Commitment" is one of their domains, which requires teachers to form professional communities to work collaboratively and to conduct research as a path for their professional development (Ministry of Education, 2012). In fact, collaboration overcomes teachers' isolation, which lessens their possibilities for professional growth (Giles & Yazan, 2020). Teachers need to conduct research to potentialize their professional knowledge, which eventually will improve their students' learning (Gindin et al., 2021; Richards & Farrel, 2005; Thomas & Vavrus, 2021).

The prioritized curriculum during the pandemic

The Ecuadorian government established the prioritized curriculum for the emergency called “Juntos aprendemos en casa” (We learn together at home) throughout the years 2020 and 2021. This curriculum reduced the contents and the time of the regular curriculum and attempted to promote autonomous learning because of the lockdown and the low level of connectivity among the students from the public sector of education (Currículo Priorizado para la Emergencia, 2020). In addition, educational institutions and teachers had to be flexible enough to meet their students' needs and allow them to progress at their own pace. Before the pandemic, there was already an intensive curriculum for students with unfinished schooling. This curriculum comprised a regular nine-month school year into 5 weeks which was challenging for teachers to cover all the proposed contents. Therefore, the prioritized curriculum affected even more to the intensive education.

Narrative Inquiry as an Approach for Teachers' Professional Development

Golombek and Johnson (2017) describe narrative inquiry as an approach for teachers' professional development because it is a "systematic exploration that is conducted by teachers and for teachers through their own stories and language" (p. 6). The same authors state that during the narratives, an externalization process occurs in which teachers can transform their thoughts into words to describe their present, past, and even future experiences. It is a self-recognition phase that boosts teachers' cognition with the purpose of making a change in their pedagogical practices. As far as narratives are concerned as verbalization, they imply the acknowledgement of teachers' academic prior knowledge coming from

their formal education, which makes them more aware and mindful at the moment of taking actions in their teaching activities.

Externalization and verbalization have to coexist in teachers' narratives to make sense of their storied experiences with the support of academic concepts that ultimately make up their professional knowledge (Golombek & Johnson, 2017). Finally, narratives as a systematic examination consists of inquiries into teachers' lived experiences combined with their pedagogical knowledge, which determine their way of thinking and their change (Clandinin, 2019).

Clandinin (2019) states that a narrative inquiry has three dimensions: the personal and the social; the temporal; and the places where the experiences occur. These experiences can be registered as field texts for their further analysis (Sari, 2020; Ubaque-Casallas and Aguirre-Garzón, 2020). Other researchers add other sources such as reflective journals, stimulated recall sessions, memory box artifacts, photographs, portfolios, journal entries, video recordings, and lesson plans (Cardinal et al., 2021; Fathil et al., 2021; Golombek and Johnson, 2017; Sarasa, 2016).

The Notion of Inquiry from John Dewey's Perspective

Narrative inquiry as a systematic exploration is supported by Dewey's theory of inquiry. Dewey (1939) affirms that inquiry into experience results in a cognitive process of trying to reveal the reasons why a determined action was done and how a given action gave place to another one. In short, experiences are a chain of

events that help the inquirers to uncover even those hidden events that would have never been discovered without introspection and retrospection of events.

According to Dewey (1939), inquiry into experience means that people's previous experiences help them to create innovative present experiences, and thus their future experiences will be even better than the previous ones. If this were not the case, past, present, and future experiences would be mere repetitions of the same event. Experiences are a habit of humans but not a form of inquiry because humans do not reflect on their actions; they do whatever they have to do due to a mechanical but not thoughtful process.

On the other hand, Dewey (1939) remarks that inquiry requires humans' senses to allow them to feel, observe, hear, and account for their experiences. It also requires the recognition of the context. This context affects our ways of thinking and our beliefs. The cultural aspects of a context make social beings interact with each other by means of language. Therefore, inquiry requires spoken interaction between the inquirer and the inquired to make sense of the narrated lived experiences.

Lesson Planning

Teachers have internal and external reasons for planning their daily lessons. On the one hand, they need to feel competent to run their classes in a safe environment. They need to foresee some possible conflicts and plan how to manage them properly. Therefore, they plan to guarantee their students' learning as well as their wellbeing as part of their personal and professional commitment.

On the other hand, they plan to meet the institutional policies and to have evidence of their job position (Farrel, 2002; Fathil et al., 2021).

A lesson plan should be clear, concise, flexible, and accessible where the students' learning outcomes will be evidenced at the end of its execution by means of several practice activities that satisfy learners' interests (Rao and Meo, 2016 as cited in Cuñado & Abocejo, 2018). Likewise, Chizhik and Chizhik (2018) state that an effective lesson plan has a logical and strong relationship among objectives, instructional activities, and assessment.

Learning Objectives

Mager (1968) presents the behavioral objectives to mark the beginning of a successful lesson plan. He states that their role is to demonstrate what students are going to be able to do at the end of the lesson. Therefore, these objectives have to be explicit and specific to guide teachers in preparing the process of the lesson with the most suitable tasks and activities to provide students with memorable learning experiences.

Practice Activities

From Scrivener's (2011) point of view, practice activities can turn into restricted or authentic exposure to the language. The restricted exposure concerns those tasks that contain specific language items according to the learners' level. Thus, the practice activities highly focus on language elements in which learners are engaged in drills and solving comprehension exercises. On the other hand, authentic exposure promotes practice activities that give students the opportunity

to be in contact with English in real-life situations, such as watching the news, films, reading newspapers, magazines, and manuals; listening to the radio; listening to music; and real conversations. Therefore, these types of activities do not focus on specific language items. They rather foster discussions, write authentic texts, chat in class, etc. (Scrivener, 2011).

Instructional Resources

Richards & Farrel (2005) maintain that instructional resources are crucial for the execution of the class since they function as the main means to perform the planned practice activities. They refer to authentic and created materials. The first ones are those that were not created for pedagogical purposes; for instance, news, social media, songs, movies, and photographs. Teachers use them to provide learners with a natural exposure to the language from which they can be in contact with cultural and social matters of the real world. The second ones are the textbooks, graded readers, and worksheets that come from the educational industry or are created by teachers.

During the pandemic, educational resources available on the internet became the main ones for remote learning. Traditional digital tools such as YouTube videos or social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp or Twitter have become the most accessible and versatile means to keep the educational process active (Cerra, 2021). Navarrete et al. (2020) presented an important compilation of Web 2.0 for instructional processes such as: Moodle Online training platform, Google Classroom, Edmodo, Google Suite, Mindmeister,

Padlet, Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams. These tools allow students and teachers to meet each other through synchronous and asynchronous classes as well as present content.

Assessment

The role of assessment in the learning and teaching process is to get evidence of the effectiveness of students' learning as well as of teachers' performance. Formative assessment accounts for the permanent monitoring of students' performance during the lessons, which allows teachers to make precise adjustments during the process to achieve the students' learning outcomes. Summative assessment is an accumulative and formal process of evaluation through tests, quizzes, lessons, homework, projects, portfolios, and all types of student performance with the purpose of giving and receiving a score, which allows students to pass or fail the course. Formative assessment is process-oriented, whereas summative assessment is product-oriented; both of them are done to reveal students' knowledge and achievements during the course (Brown, 2018).

Methodology

Settings and Participants

A volunteer sample was used for this study. The researcher posted on a forum of EFL teachers that she was going to conduct a narrative inquiry into EFL teachers' professional development in lesson planning in Ecuador during the pandemic. As a result, a teacher from a school in the city of Machala during the 2021–2022 school year responded that she was very interested in being part of

this research. The participant used to teach English to students with unfinished schooling from the prioritized curriculum, which compiles three ordinary school years into a module of 20 weeks (MinEduc, 2017).

Data Collection Procedure

This narrative inquiry captures the detailed stories or lived experiences of a single life of an EFL teacher. A narrative inquiry as a research method offers equal participation for both the researcher and the research participants. Research participants feel engaged in this type of investigation because their stories are heard, and they will make sense of them with the support of the researcher and the research process itself. This is a qualitative research because the participant's narratives become field texts for further analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Prior to undertaking the investigation, ethical clearance was obtained from the research participant through a signed informed consent. This document clearly described the objectives of the research and the procedures of the investigation. It also informed the participant that the interviews would be video recorded and that all the information provided would be subject to analysis. She was informed that she could dismiss the process whenever she wanted to. For protecting the research participant's privacy, a pseudonym was used; hence, her name is Lucy.

The participant's stories were obtained through stimulated recall sessions about her lesson plans during the pandemic. In addition, during the interviews, it was possible to gather some lesson plans and instructional resources that the participant wanted to share. Moreover, she was very willing to show some

WhatsApp screenshots from her online sessions. Likewise, the participant wrote a two-page reflective journal in which she reflected on her successes and failures during the pandemic. The researcher became a participant observer since she used to motivate the participant to reflect upon her experiences and reconsider some aspects of them that she could have done better.

Four online interviews were conducted in a three-week period. Both the researcher and the research participant actively got involved in a collaborative relationship that equally benefited both of them. Firstly, it was beneficial for the participant because she was a volunteer who was eager to participate in the investigation with the aim of gaining investigative skills as well as gaining a deep insight into their past-lived experiences as sources to improve her future lesson plans. In other words, it was a signal of her commitment to her continuous professional development. Secondly, it was beneficial for the researcher because she could try out new approaches for EFL teachers' professional development. The researcher took the role of a mediator who encouraged the participant to externalize and verbalize her experiences in lesson planning during the pandemic.

In the first interview, the participant could narrate her teaching initial formation and her perceptions about teachers' professional development. In the second interview, the questions endeavored to grasp information about the participant's first past experiences in lesson planning when she started her teaching career. In the third interview, the participant could talk about her experiences in lesson planning during the pandemic. The questions were raised based on some lesson plans and WhatsApp screenshots that Lucy shared with the

researcher. In the fourth and final session, the focus was on the organization of the class for practice activities, assessment, and the use of instructional resources. Furthermore, the participant wrote a reflective journal about her future hopes for lesson planning.

Data Analysis

First, I transcribed the data from the interviews. Then a thematic analysis helped to focus and distinguish key elements of lesson plans, which became the categories under analysis. Likewise, the narrative presented the following broad themes in a chronological order.

- Lucy's initial formation and teaching background
- Lucy's perception of professional development
- Lucy's first past experiences in lesson planning
- Lesson planning during the pandemic: instructional materials and online platforms
- Lucy's perceptions on designing learning objectives, practice and assessment activities
- Lucy's current and future reflections on her past lesson plans during the pandemic

Results

The narrative starts with Lucy's teaching background and her perception of professional development. Then it is presented in a chronological order, from her

first past experiences in lesson planning to the present and future experiences that Lucy has passed through during the pandemic between the years 2020 and 2022.

In addition, the narrative shows the components of a lesson plan as well as the participant's reflections on her beliefs and assumptions about how to deliver her classes during the pandemic. As stated by Golombek and Johnson (2017), the potential of narratives sparks a process of explaining, analyzing, and interpreting the narrator's own lived experiences, which makes him or her understand the causes and effects of his or her actions.

Lucy's Initial Formation and Teaching Background

Lucy is a young Ecuadorian EFL in-service teacher who began her professional career six years ago. She got her bachelor's degree as an EFL teacher at a public university. Since then, she has been teaching in the Ecuadorian public and private sectors of education, at schools and English language institutes. She has taught children, adolescents, adults, and English for professionals. Currently (and during the pandemic), she works for a public high school in the city of Machala. Her students belong to the prioritized curriculum. They are adults with unfinished schooling who attend classes in the evening session. So far, she has taken 6 international examinations on English language proficiency and is a master candidate in EFL pedagogy.

Lucy's perception of professional development

When the researcher asked Lucy what professional development was, she explained as follows:

Excerpt 1

All right, in my case, is to keep studying, keep working, and do what you do, not just sit and wait. So, for example, right now I am working on my thesis project and I decided to go for my master's degree. I think that's professional development for me. So continue investigating, researching and doing something for better.

Interestingly, by analyzing this fragment, Lucy believes that professional development comes from external sources such as a master's program, which pushes her to conduct research with the aim of growing professionally. Based on her perspective, the researcher tried to find out whether she knew that one of the in-service Ecuadorian teaching standards demands teachers to conduct research on their own practices for their professional development. She said that most of the teachers in the public sector do not have the investigative skills to do research, mainly because their training was not appropriate.

She considers herself very fortunate to have been well trained in educational research during her university studies, and that is why she is always trying to learn more about it. Therefore, she found it a great opportunity to be part of this investigation as a research participant, especially because she considered she could learn from the researcher, who is also an EFL teacher with many years of experience. As a matter of fact, teachers conducting research potentialize their professional knowledge, which, in the course of time, will improve their students' learning (Gindin et al., 2021, Richards & Farrel, 2005; Thomas & Vavrus, 2021).

Lucy considers the Ministry of Education to be a helpful entity because it offers training through seminars and webinars, which have assisted her in resolving some issues with the five-month intensive courses of the prioritized curriculum. She even had to visit some of her students who did not attend classes on a regular basis.

Excerpt 2

For example, in the last one that we had, as I mentioned to you, we work with intensive students, so in five months they cover the whole school year. The students didn't show up, the whole process and the whole school year in some cases. We were super worried about what to do with these people because we could not say simple things like they disappeared. So, they gave us some guidelines in order to do something. So, we went to their houses and we interviewed these people, took some photos, and we made them fill out and sign some forms in which they promised to do something in order to stop there. And this is what we had to present and show to our authorities and supervisor. And in that way, they make sure students will continue their education, and we also make sure they are not only a ghost in the list, but they appear in the educational system.

It is evident that Lucy's commitment to her profession goes beyond the classroom. That is why the researcher asked her why she became an English teacher. She said that her mom, who is also an English teacher, was and is her main inspiration. In addition, she has always interacted with foreigners who have helped her to learn not only English but also German and French. Those opportunities had made her love learning foreign languages. And a third reason "is because I have always seen people facing and having difficulties learning English and I want to be like the one who makes it easier for them to learn. Yeah, that's it! "

To follow Lucy's thread, the researcher asked what type of knowledge teachers

need to have for their professional practice. She stated that teachers should know very well about classroom management with the aim of solving possible behavioral conflicts. Teachers need to know how to plan their lessons.

She also believes that a teacher needs to know how to motivate students and how to create a positive classroom environment for working collaboratively in groups or in pairs. Lucy's verbalization during her narrative reveals her prior knowledge coming from her formal education, which makes her more aware and mindful at the moment of taking actions in their teaching activities (Golombek & Johnson, 2017).

Lucy's First Past Experiences in Lesson Planning

Lucy started designing her first lesson plans during her initial formation at the university, where she was required to use a given format. Therefore, at that time, she thought it was not a big deal to plan a lesson since she had to use the topics and exercises proposed in the textbook. However, upon her graduation, and when she started her professional career, she realized that planning a lesson was more complex than she used to think. She became aware that each institution had their own policies, which she had to adopt and adjust to her previous experiences. Dewey (1939) remarks that inquiry requires humans' senses to allow them to feel, observe, hear, and account for their experiences. It also requires the recognition of the context because that affects our ways of thinking and our beliefs.

She was in charge of the intensive system, which is aimed at students who have not completed their education and are unable to attend regular classes It is a

type of inclusive education for the most vulnerable. Her students were older than Lucy, and they were busy people, whether they were working for a living or taking care of their children. She explained that an intensive course covers the contents of three school years in a five-month period. Thus, planning is very different from ordinary lesson plans.

Excerpt 3

We have to teach, for example: eight, ninth, and tenth-graders in only five months. So, we have a prioritized curriculum. We also have to follow some guidelines, and even if you know or you see this topic is important, if it is not on the list of the things you have to plan, you cannot do it, and you cannot teach it. And yeah, this is kind of my experience in planning different things in different institutions as well.

She expressed overtly that at the beginning of her career, in 2016, she was totally lost because there were too many curriculum guidelines to follow, such as the success indicators, the skills, the study units, and the topics. For that reason, she always had to ask her colleagues what to do or how to fill in the formats provided by the Ministry of Education. As stated by Golombek and Johnson (2017), collaboration among colleagues creates mediational spaces, dialogic interactions, and pedagogical tools that originate teachers' narrative inquiry as an approach for professional development.

Nowadays, she is more aware of how to follow the curriculum because she learned by trial and error and got help from her colleagues, too. Once she could manage how the curriculum and planning worked, the pandemic abruptly interrupted the educational process all around the world. She, like every teacher around the globe, had to switch from conventional classroom learning to remote

learning. In Ecuador, schools closed in March 2020 because of the mortality of COVID-19. Schools have been reopened progressively since 2021 and early 2022. At the beginning of the lockdown, classroom learning was totally replaced by remote learning, and teachers had to make their adjustments on their own with the tools provided by the educational institutions and the online global community. It was an emergent decision in order to keep the ongoing process of education active (Kadir et al., 2021).

Lesson Planning during the Pandemic: Instructional Materials and Online Platforms

At the beginning of the pandemic, she started planning her lessons to be delivered in 45 minutes on Zoom, but she noticed that only 10 or 15 out of 50 students used to join the videoconferencing classes. Therefore, the school authorities decided to use WhatsApp instead of Zoom because it was the most accessible means of communication that the majority of students had. In addition, the classes were reduced from 45 minutes to 25 minutes per week. Lucy felt disappointed because the way she had to plan her lessons was too limited to send links to YouTube videos and worksheets that contained the instructions in English and Spanish.

She could see that their students were not learning anything. She realized her students did not like to participate. "It was like a ghost class. Because we entered, we sent the first message and nobody answered, so that was kind of super frustrating". Thus, she decided to prepare her own videos with explanations

in English and Spanish. She stopped sending homework because students were not able to do it on their own.

Her own experience made her change her mind. She took advantage of the 25 minutes on WhatsApp to interact with her students by sending and receiving brief text, voice, and video messages. She decided to create WhatsApp subgroups that had to solve some comprehension exercises together. She realized that her students started to feel more confident because they knew their teacher was there to help them. Even though the pandemic caused too much suffering, it also opened the doors for new opportunities.

For Lucy, it was time to trigger her creativity to tailor their lessons according to the circumstances, which shows her professionalism and ethical commitment as one of the compulsory teaching standards demanded for Ecuadorian English teachers (Ministry of Education, 2012).

It was very noticeable how frustrated Lucy was while working during the pandemic. Her teaching performance was carried out on WhatsApp, which she considered too limited for her students to learn. The pandemic revealed to her that social and economic factors affect students' learning. As a result, she decided to reinvent and reconstruct her WhatsApp classes.

Lucy's Perceptions on Designing learning Objectives and Practice Activities

The researcher asked Lucy about her criteria for designing a lesson plan. Lucy answered effusively that her plans had an objective, which had to include an activity that would motivate her students. She believes that motivation leads

students to learn with more enthusiasm. In addition, she mentioned that she tried to activate students' prior knowledge by presenting some visual artifacts such as images, videos, and stories that can capture students' attention. Her teaching experiences let her understand that when students associate their prior knowledge with the new content, they are more willing to learn.

Talking about these lesson plan components, Mager (1968) explains that the objective of a lesson plan should include the conditions that learners are going to have in order to achieve the desired performance. Consequently, Lucy was aware that the new input had to be appealing enough to gain students' attention, which simultaneously provided a path to achieve the objectives of the lesson. Certainly, one of the instructional events that teachers have to carry out is to gain students' attention to motivate them to stay engaged during the lesson (Gagné et al., 1992).

After the first interview, Lucy shared some of her lesson plans, and the researcher noticed that some of them did not contain any objectives. At this event, Lucy went on to explain that she had to complete the format provided by the Ministry of Education. She also mentioned that there were two types of lesson plans: the normal ones that contain all the elements of a lesson and the ones addressed to the intensive courses of the prioritized curriculum. These last ones contained the instructions and activities and the internet links to watch some YouTube videos that helped students be able to solve the comprehension exercises provided on the worksheets. Lucy used to design those lessons with a

colleague who created a webpage that contained the same activities as the worksheet, so that students would work on them.

With respect to Lucy's tasks proposed in her lesson plan, it is worth mentioning what Scrivener (2011) points out about them. This author states that tasks can turn out to be restricted or authentic exposure to the language. The restricted exposure concerns those tasks that contain specific language items according to the learners' level. Thus, the practice activities highly focus on language elements in which learners are engaged in drills and solving comprehension exercises. Undeniably, Lucy could realize that the tasks for the prioritized curriculum were only restricted because it was impossible to get authentic exposures to the language due to the limited time during the WhatsApp sessions and the students' low level of English proficiency. Even so, she realized that she could have made a change, as explained in the following fragment:

Excerpt 4

The first thing I did after having bad outcomes was to shift the way I gave them instructions. I recorded my own classes, telling them exactly what to do, introducing them to the vocabulary in an illustrative way, having them participate in class, sending audio, matching pictures, using word searches, YouTube videos, and jeopardy games. I also created another group for them to work with me in a more personalized way, even out of schedule, and when they had group tasks, I divided them into groups of three and created new WhatsApp groups in which I was added to help them when necessary or in case they had a doubt about how to do the task. Finally, when any student did not attend or register their participation for more than three classes, I reported it to the authorities, and with another teacher, I used to go to and look for the place where they lived to see what was going on and provide them with the pedagogical record cards to catch up on the activities.

At this point, Lucy could reconstruct her remote classes via WhatsApp by breaking up the main group into small groups. She started to regulate her teaching practice by doing what she could do with what she knew was feasible during those conditions. She was providing learning guidance, which, according to Gagné et al. (1992), during this event of a lesson plan, teachers have to provide as many cues as possible through examples, prompts, and questions that direct learners to find out the new knowledge.

Lucy's Perceptions of Assessment during Her Online Lessons

Lucy used to assess students' knowledge by giving them some patterns to follow. Students had to report their answers by sending them through a very short voice or video message on WhatsApp, and sometimes by using Google Docs. After marking these tasks, Lucy used to evaluate the class achievement by identifying the most common mistakes. At that point, Lucy informed us that she did not give any immediate or individual feedback because she had too many students with whom she had to meet for 25 minutes once a week. As a result, she devoted the first five minutes of her weekly lesson to communicate her students what they had to improve.

Excerpt 5

We had fifty per class. It was kind of difficult to give instant feedback because in twenty-five minutes, we only had a chance to enter, like present the information, tell them what they needed to do, explain the instructions, explain the homework, and say goodbye... but individual feedback was impossible.

As stated by Brown (2018), assessment should be a permanent process that provides some clues for teachers to make readjustments to their teaching

practice. Lucy's short online lessons and the large number of students hindered her ability to provide ongoing feedback. This resulted in a teacher-centered class.

Nevertheless, while Lucy was narrating her story, she could recognize where and when she failed to give enough support. Definitely, this scenario coincides with Clandinin (2019), who asserts that a systematic examination consists of inquiries into teachers' lived experiences combined with their pedagogical knowledge, which determine their way of thinking, their change, and consequently their professional development.

Lucy's Current and Future Reflections on her Past Lesson Plans during the Pandemic

"I know I have to improve and reflect on all the things that were and went wrong with education during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to be better each day." During the stimulated recall sessions on Lucy's lesson plans, she could observe that she should have done it better, as explained in the following fragment.

Excerpt 6

There are a lot of activities for only 25 minutes, and the idea is that we used to send them a lot because, as I mentioned, they have to cover 3 years in one school year. We used to send them four tasks, but only one is considered homework, but of course we can improve and do it better. First of all, without using lots of words, because that is kind of confusing, because if you only open the first picture and you look at this kind of maze, I can say, personally, I get confused, and I know a way to improve. It is to avoid writing a lot of sentences for the homework because they had like ten. I would just write like 3 or 4. If they demonstrate that they can write 3 or 4 correct sentences, it is because they can write even more, so , ten was a lot. Yeah, in this part, instead of sending the pictures and the words to make a matching, I would send pictures through WhatsApp, and it would tell me through an audio what type of picture it is.

When analyzing the above fragment, which portrays Lucy's reflection on her previous experiences on designing her lesson plans, Dewey (1939) explains that inquiry into experience means that people's experiences help them to create new and innovative present experiences, and then their future experiences will be even better than the previous ones. If this is not the case, all experiences will be mere repetitions of the same event. While Lucy was analyzing her lesson plans, she thought she should have taken better advantage of the time by just making some modifications. Now she realizes that some visuals and homework assignments provided during the pandemic were not appropriate.

She could detect that the tasks were oriented only to the selection of responses, but she did not design any tasks for students' performance. That is why, she said, while evaluating her past lesson plans. "And here in the listening comprehension activities or reading activities, I would see if they understood through audio well, like asking them questions like, what did you learn from them? Where are they? What is that about? etc. Definitely, Lucy knows very well that she missed the opportunities to provide opportune informal feedback and assessment. She regrets not doing that. She now knows that even though the constraints during the WhatsApp lessons, she could have given timely feedback to her students. "I tried my absolute best even when people say Teachers are not working. I can say that we were and keep working harder than ever, and I know I have to improve and reflect on all the things that were and went wrong with education during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to be better each day."

Conclusions and Implications

First of all, lesson planning during the pandemic boosted Lucy's creativity to unexpectedly switch from classroom learning to remote learning by using text, voice, and video messages via WhatsApp. The dialogic interaction during Lucy's narrative inquiry was a social artifact and a mediational tool that activated Lucy's reflections on the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the components of her lesson plans. She realized that her plans for the prioritized curriculum did not contain any learning objectives. There were only restricted practice activities and homework as an assessment task. She did not give immediate or individual feedback because she had too many students and too little time to interact with everyone. At the beginning of the Whatsapp classes, no one used to reply or comment on her instructions. As a result, she decided to create subgroups where she assigned some comprehension exercises to be solved during the twenty-five minute period of the class. After self-examination of her past lesson plans, she thought that the practice activities were too confusing and too large. At the same time, she assumed that she should have done it better by reducing the images and exercises. Even though there were time constraints and frustrations during the pandemic, Lucy's professional commitment helped her to tailor her lessons properly to meet their students' expectations. To sum up, narrative inquiry led her to develop professionally and to enhance her ethical commitment since the externalization of her lived experiences made her become aware of her weaknesses and consequently adjust her present and future pedagogical practices.

This study shows some implications. First, teachers should explore narrative inquiry based on their lived experiences to gain investigative skills on and during their teaching performance. Second, there is a definite need for collaboration among EFL teachers to create mediational spaces, dialogic interactions, and pedagogical tools that can support teachers' narrative inquiry as an approach for professional development. Lastly, continued efforts are needed for EFL teachers to inquire into their own lived experiences in order to design effective lesson plans supported by their pedagogical knowledge and framed by their context.

As a final point, several limitations of this study need to be acknowledged. First, since this is a narrative inquiry, a quite small sample was examined. Thus, findings cannot drive to make any generalizations. In addition, the data from the interviews, reflective journal and lesson plans were self-reported. Therefore, further research is required to add classroom observations and more participants to form focus groups to engage them in small professional communities to collaborate and share experiences for their professional growth.

References

- Brown, H. D. (2018). *Language assessment: Principles and classroom practices* (3rd ed.). Pearson Education.
- Cardinal, T., Kim, M., Pegg, J., & Branch-Mueller, J. (2021). Being and becoming online teachers: A collaborative autobiographical narrative inquiry. *Brock Education*, 30, 30 -50. <https://journals.library.brocku.ca/brocked>
- Cerra, D. C. (2021). En tiempos de pandemia: La enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras en la educación remota. *Revista Boletín Redipe*, 10(8), 192 - 212. <https://revista.redipe.org/index.php/1/article/view/1399/1314>
- Chizhik, E. W., & Williams Chizhik, A. W. (2018). Using Activity Theory to Examine How Teachers' Lesson Plans Meet Students' Learning Needs. *The Teacher Educator*, 53(1), 67-85. 10.1080/08878730.2017.1296913
- Clandinin, J. D. (2019). Teacher education as narrative inquiry. In *Journeys in Narrative Inquiry: The Selected Works of D. Jean Clandinin* (1st ed., p. 12). Taylor & Francis Group.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (C. N. Poth, Ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Cuñado, A. G., & Abocejo, F. T. (2018). Lesson planning competency of English Major university sophomore students. *European Journal of Education Studies*, 5(8), 395 - 409. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.2538422>
- Currículo Priorizado para la Emergencia. (2020). Ministerio de Educación. <https://educacion.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2020/08/Curriculo-Priorizado-para-la-Emergencia-2020-2021.pdf>
- Dewey, J. (1939). *Logic. The theory of inquiry*. Henry Holt and Company, Inc.
- Farrel, T. (2002). Lesson planning. In *Methodology in language teaching* (First ed., pp. 30-39). Cambridge University Press.
- Fathil, F. M., Ziden, A. A., & Osman, S. z. (2021). Lesson planning practices and lesson planning system design preferences among novice ESL teachers. *Journal of Educational Research and Indigenous Studies*, 3(1), 174 - 184. https://static.s123-cdn.com/uploads/1759562/normal_6065238305ffc.pdf.

- Gagné, R. M., Briggs, L. G., Briggs, L. J., & Wager, W. W. (1992). Principles of Instructional Design. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers.
- Giles, A., & Yazan, B. (2020). You're not an island": A middle grades language arts teacher's changed perceptions in ESL and content teachers' collaboration. *Rmle Online*, 43(3), 1 - 15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19404476.2020.1724045>
- Gindin, E., Steenbergen, V., & Gleddie, D. L. (2021). Strangers No More: Collaborative inquiry through narrative as teacher reflective practice. *Learning Landscapes*, 14(1), 83 -95. <https://doi.org/10.36510/learnland.v14i1.1044>
- Golombek, P. R., & Johnson, K. E. (2017). Re-conceptualizing teachers' narrative inquiry as professional development. *Profile*, 19, 15 - 28. 15 PROFILE Vol. 19, No. 2, July-December 2017. ISSN 1657-0790 (printed) 2256-5760 (online). Bogotá, Colombia. Pages 15-28 <http://dx.doi.org/10.15446/profile.v19n2.65692>
- Guskey, T. R. (2002). Professional development and teacher change. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 8(3). 10.1080/13540600210000051 2
- Kadir, F. A., Balachandran, S., & Yunus, M. M. (2021). The impact of Covid-19 on English language teaching and learning Process: A review. *International journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 10(2), 300-30. <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v10-i2/9741>
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (1994). The postmethod condition: (E)merging strategies for second/foreign language teaching. *Tesol quarterly*. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3587197>
- Mager, R. F. (1968). Developing attitude toward learning. Fearon Publishers. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015020958941&view=1up&seq=6>
- MinEduc. (2017). Acuerdo Nro. Mineduc-Mineduc-2017-00040-A. <https://educacion.gob.ec/curriculo-educacion-extraordinaria/>
- Ministry of Education. (2012). Ecuadorian in-service English Teacher Standards. In *Estándares de Calidad Educativa*.

- Navarrete, Y., San Andrés, E., Bolívar, O., & Hernández, R. (2020). Las herramientas digitales como la principal alternativa en la Educación Superior Ecuatoriana en tiempos de pandemia. *Estudios del Desarrollo Social: Cuba y América Latina*, 8. *Estudios del Desarrollo Social: Cuba y América Latina*
- Richards, J. C., & Farrel, T. (2005). *Development for teachers* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Sarasa, M. C. (2016). A Narrative Inquiry into Preservice English Teachers' Imagined Identities. *Gist Education and Learning Research Journal.*, 16, 96 - 114.
- Sari, M. I. (2020). The narrative inquiry of a pre-service teacher in developing lesson plan with experienced teacher. *English Ideas: Journal of English Language Education*, 1, 55 - 67.
<https://journal.unsika.ac.id/index.php/IDEAS/article/view/4192>
- Scrivener, J. (2011). *Learning teaching. The essential guide to English language teaching* (Third ed.). Macmillan Books for Teachers.
- Thomas, M. A. M., & Vavrus, F. K. (2021). The Pluto problem: Reflexivities of discomfort in teacher professional development. *Critical Studies in Education*, 62(4), 486-501. 10.1080/17508487.2019.1587782
- Ubaque-Casallas, D. F., & Aguirre-Garzón, E. (2020). Re-Signifying teacher epistemologies through lesson planning: A study on language student teachers. *Profile. Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 22, 131 - 144. <https://doi.org/10.15446/profile.v22n2.80687>
- Ubaque, D. F., & Pinilla, F. (2018). Exploring two EFL teachers' narrative events regarding vocabulary teaching and learning. *HOW*, 25(2), 129 - 147.
<https://doi.org/10.19183/how.25.2.400>
- UNICEF. (2020). Teachers: Leading in crisis, reimagining the future. UNICEF for every child. <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/teachers-leading-crisis-reimagining-future>