

English Language Teachers' Voices: A Narrative Study Related to Teachers Experiences with Inclusive Education¹

Voces de los profesores de idiomas: Un estudio narrativo relacionado con la experiencia de los profesores con educación inclusiva

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Abstract

This qualitative narrative study intends to characterize the teachers' voices, which reveal the conceptions about Inclusion Education and how they are assembled in their teaching experience. In order to collect the information, a narrative approach was used. Semi-structured interviews based on the seven steps of telling stories was applied. Teachers were involved in an introspective practice, where they talked about their experiences with inclusive education. The results of the study showed the following three main topics: 1) Inclusion is not something that you learn, it is something that makes you more sensible: The human dimension of the inclusion, 2) Meaningful memories with inclusion: The affective dimension of teaching, and 3) What I learnt about inclusion: What will last forever. As a result of the conversation, the teachers unconsciously reconstructed their learning experiences to modify their practices with inclusion.

Key words: inclusion, introspective practice, inner voice, experiences, narratives

¹ Research Report

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Resumen

Este estudio narrativo se propone caracterizar las voces acerca de las concepciones de la educación inclusiva y cómo estas se ensamblan en la experiencia de enseñanza. Para recolectar la información se utilizó una entrevista semi estructurada con base en siete pasos para conducir un análisis narrativo. Como consecuencia de esto, las profesoras se involucraron en una práctica introspectiva donde podían hablar acerca de sus experiencias de enseñanza con educación inclusiva.

Los resultados del estudio demostraron tres principales temas que se llamaron: 1) Inclusión no es algo que se aprende, es algo que te hace más sensible: La dimensión humana de la Inclusión, 2) Recuerdos significativos con la inclusión: La dimensión afectiva de la enseñanza y por último 3) Lo que aprendí acerca de la inclusión: Lo que estará para siempre. Los anteriores temas fueron resultado de conversaciones de manera inconsciente. Ellas reconstruyeron sus experiencias de aprendizaje para modificar ciertas prácticas con esta población.

Palabras clave: inclusión, introspectiva, practica, experiencias, narrativas, voz interior

Introduction

This qualitative study focuses on the voices of language teachers regarding their teaching practices with students under the umbrella of inclusive education at a private school in Tunja. Considering that one of main actors of any learning process are the teachers, it is important to listen to them and see the way they handle experiences inside and outside of the classroom. Also, it is relevant to understand how teachers face the issue of having students with mental differential conditions inside the English as a Foreign Language (henceforth EFL) classroom setting.

Inclusive education arises from the necessity to give or provide quality education to students who do not have the chance to attend, or are not easily accepted, in a regular school due to their personal or cultural conditions. In this sense, the National Inclusion Policy is directed under the premise “Everybody can learn” (MEN³, 2009). Because of this, language teachers are required to teach students with mental differential conditions. Therefore, language teachers end up facing a variety of situations inside the classroom. Consequently, when a teacher deals with students who have mental differential conditions, the teacher must have the expertise to provide an adequate learning environment that supports the student’s learning process in the same way as he or she supports regular students’ learning.

³ Ministerio de Educación Nacional, or MEN due to its acronym in Spanish.

According to Riessman (1993), a qualitative narrative study attempts to analyze a current phenomenon that represents a social issue. For this study, I analyzed two teachers’ voices and what they revealed about inclusive education using a narrative approach. The narratives took place in three different moments supported by semi-structured interviews that were guided by three themed questions. When the teachers revealed their stories through narratives, the experiences that they shared were highly meaningful and reflective. This document reveals, from an inner narrative perspective, the different teaching experiences language teachers shared and how they fostered their mental differential students’ abilities in the EFL process.

Literature Review

For this study, four main concepts were considered: mental differential condition, inclusion, teacher voice, and inner voice.

Mental Differentiation Condition

In a pedagogical context, it is necessary to keep in mind the theory of multiple intelligences by Gardner, Lohrenz, and Schoen (1968), which states that each human being has a different way of developing their capacities, attitudes, and learning process considering their interests and skills. Consequently, differential condition refers to the characteristic that everybody has in facilitating their own learning process. A mental differential condition, from a psychological perspective, is not an

illness; rather it is our right to be different as human beings. The challenge for teachers in the classroom is to provide a teaching environment that facilitates each student's learning process. Of course, this also includes providing an adequate learning environment for students with inclusive backgrounds.

Consequently, this view means transforming the way we think about the curriculum and how we assess our students. This practice fits this study because we are asked to provide statistics on progress, even though we are dealing with human beings. Each student has his or her own way of understanding the world and comprehending human and academic processes. The task of being responsible for the teaching and learning process is demanding, which is why teachers should be supported by their educational community.

Inclusion

The purpose of inclusion is to provide quality, a sense of belonging, and equity based on the specific necessities students with mental differential conditions possess (MEN, 2009). In this sense, inclusion is an opportunity to support and assist students with mental differential conditions. In order to carry out these opportunities for learning, a support team like teachers and staff, must be trained to handle these situations. In addition, the support team must also be equipped with professionals capable of handling any issues that might arise. For this reason, it is important to promote a space to listen to language teachers, which can help generate a positive impact. Furthermore, ideas can be consolidated as a means to solve day to day challenges.

As a complement to the definition of inclusion, it is relevant to mention

Useda (2009), who claimed that inclusion deals with adaptability. Adaptability is the capability of the educational system to adapt its teaching methods to the student's real needs, rather than changing the curriculum. She supported this idea based on Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. Craven (1995) stressed that "every single person has the right to education, but this education must be accessible, acceptable, available, and adaptable." Considering what Article 13 states, teachers play a key role in what inclusive education implies.

According to Robayo Acuña and Cárdenas (2017), the educative field must provide the right for education and equality for all. This right is explicitly stated by the MEN, and it demonstrates a concern for providing quality education to Colombian citizens of all ages, which includes anyone with a special condition. This is a good intention which requires the participation of teachers, parents, and students. Educational participants must analyze their reality according to their context and propose strategies to handle ethical inclusion issues. This also includes proposing tools to help address students with inclusive backgrounds, as well as engaging in academic reflections to provide flexibility in current school curriculums. Consequently, the MEN has designed and promoted the Inclusive Policy, which is a document that states the obligations necessary in preventing discrimination of any kind. The MEN established Decree 36, a set of policies that regulate pedagogical support given to students with disabilities, exceptional aptitudes, or talents.

For our private school in Tunja, it is relevant to keep in mind the inclusion theory based on The International Baccalaureate Program, recognized as the

IB program. This program prepares students and schools to be international academic and human partners. As the institution is applying to get this distinction, the curriculum must fulfill both national and international requirements. For that reason, it is relevant to view inclusion from an IB context as well.

Inclusion in an IB context. The International Baccalaureate program (2010) complements national policies with a set of principles or parameters, where students must be world citizen under the inclusion educative system. Inclusion is a process for all, where the academic community (teachers, administrative staff, and parents) must participate. An adequate environment for participation needs to be provided, one which promotes tolerance and collaboration on issues that are core to this matter. The challenge with inclusion is having the capacity to strengthen our students' abilities and help them achieve their best in everything they do. Inclusion is not about regret; inclusion is a condition that teaches us how to create a better place for others.

Teacher Voice

The responsibility of a teacher inside the context of the classroom goes beyond teaching content. Teachers must face daily challenges and responsibilities. Consequently, it is difficult to hear their voices. Additionally, spaces are limited to share experiences or listen about what is happening in their educational situations. Regarding McLaren, Head, and Yuan (2002), the teacher's voice "reflects the values, ideologies, and structuring principles that teachers use to understand and mediate the histories cultures, and subjectivities of their students" (p. 246).

Because of this, institutions must promote moments where teachers can

interact amongst themselves since teaching practices can be adapted and adopted thanks to experiences and feelings shared. Knowledge and expertise are built through the cooperative principle carried out by interactions and discourses between teachers. As inclusion is something that you live depending on the condition of your students, it is worth hearing teachers' stories. In this way, social realities like the issue of inclusion can be carried out by the support of teachers' inner voices.

The Inner Voice

The inner voice is present every time a teacher decides to implement a specific curriculum, use certain materials, or include specific topics. Most of the time, we, as teachers, do not recognize the implications these decisions carry. Sometimes, we tend to pursue "our" own interests, rather than our students' needs and expectations.

In respect to this, Freire and Shor (1987) referred to the inner voice as everything that we do around the teaching and learning process because of our preferences, convictions, and beliefs. Our discourse inside the classroom context is based on our realities and experiences, so the motor of teaching practices is our inner voice. This inner voice is usually not witnessed. The practice of listening to ourselves must be a routine in order to improve our teaching practice. Pennycook (2001) discussed this from a cultural perspective, which he referred to as a political view or understanding of a political issue as a concern for everything that we do. In other words, our inner voice possesses ideologies, choices, and practices.

Letting teachers express their inner voice and letting those voices be heard is an interesting and meaningful academic practice that nurtures the teaching practice

and allows us to be better human beings. Besides, redefining knowledge based on our voice is an unforgettable experience which can strengthen teaching and learning processes.

Methodology

This study follows a qualitative approach because it studies and analyzes human behavior within a context. According to Merriam (2010, n.p.), “the researcher is interested in studying, listening and understanding a social issue”. For this study, the topic of inclusion was a social concern, which yielded different perceptions about the role EFL teachers play on teaching students with learning difficulties under the inclusion program established by the MEN.

Additionally, qualitative research allows the researcher to be involved in the inner experience of participants, and some of the questions posted by researchers can only be answered through qualitative research (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). By allowing teachers to reflect on their experiences within their real context, I was able to listen to their inner voice.

Type of Study

A narrative study allowed me the opportunity to listen to the English teachers’ feelings, reflections, and understandings. I obtained a deeper understanding of how they deal with inclusive education from their perspective as language teachers. To complement this perspective on narratives, Czarniawska (2004) argued that a narrative is understood as “a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected” (p. 17). Consequently, the

participants’ spoken stories were the essence of analyzing events or actions based around inclusion, inclusion backgrounds, and the different reactions or actions that English teachers have had.

Ricoeur (1995) stated that a narrative “is a particular reconstruction of the experience, by which through a reflective process, meaning is given to what happened or was lived by an individual”. Hence, each English teacher can reconstruct their teaching experience when their inner voice is revealed through life lessons. One way of revealing these inner voices is through a semi-structured interview. This reflective process was meaningful for the teachers because they learned from their individual practices on how to act depending on the student’s inclusive background.

According to Colorado State University (n.d.), there are seven basic steps to consider in regard to narrative studies. The names of the steps were explicitly used during the systematic process of this study.

The seven steps are as follows:

Step 1: Identify a problem or phenomenon to explore. I identified that there was a problem with inclusion at the private school where I work. During academic meetings, English teachers expressed their concern about this topic. In fact, I realized that my teachers did not have a space in which to make their voices heard in regard to this weakness. Thus, it was my initiative to promote a space where they could talk with other teachers and vocalize their inner voices by recalling experiences with inclusive teaching and learning practices.

Step 2: Select one or more participants to study. I selected two English language teachers because of their

profiles. Julieta and Nancy are young teachers, and they had been with the school for a year. The levels they taught were elementary and middle school, and they each had inclusive situations in their classroom. Other relevant aspects were that their personalities were very different, which was revealed during the dialogical process in the interviews. This allowed for an enriching perspective in the analysis.

Step 3: Collect the story from that participant. For this study, the participants verbalized their stories through a semi-structured interview. The purpose of using a semi-structured interview was to mention specific questions regarding three different moments. In order to collect the stories, three separate appointments were made, each in relation to the three different theme questions. The environment for the interview was comfortable, and we took our time considering the importance of the topic. This practice was developed through interactions between the researcher and the participant. Each participant had a different appointment on a different day.

Step 4: Recounting or retelling the individual's story. The raw data emerged from the tape recording that I did with the participants' consent when they were telling their experiences in regard to inclusive education memories.

Step 5: Collaborate with the participant/storyteller. The way I addressed the semi-structured interview is a key point in the narrative process for the participants. The conversation was guided in a friendly manner during the meetings. Nonetheless, I had to maintain the focus of the conversation. Because of this, topic questions were asked at the beginning of the semi-structured interview. In that sense, I obtained the most relevant

information regarding the issue of inclusion in their lives.

Step 6: Write a story about the participant's experiences. Dealing with narratives can encounter ethical issues since the researcher must analyze the story with sensitivity in revealing personal information. Additionally, the researcher must transcribe main topics in the stories with names in order to compile the information given. In this sense, special consideration was taken to avoid ethical issues regarding narratives.

Step 7: Validate the report's accuracy. When the researcher retells the story, he or she must be careful with details and in transcribing the story with a dialogic order. In this case, I had to remember to provide the reader with the setting of the story, thereby, adding the description of the experiences lived by the participants according to the topic addressed in the study. This includes memories with students in the inclusive program. The tape recording and transcription of the data validate the story.

The Setting

The setting of this research project was carried out at a private school in Tunja. The institution offers education from nursery age (preschool) up to eleventh grade. The mission of the school is to offer quality education to the different grade levels (preschool, elementary, middle, and high school). The school consists of about 615 students, 10 of which have mental differential conditions. It also has five English language teachers, which means that class sizes are about 32 students per grade. Ten hours of English language instruction are given per week. This private school is an applicant for the IB program. Consequently, our curriculum

is based on national and international requirements.

Participants. The participants of this study are two language teachers who teach students in middle and high school. Although they are current teachers at the school, they have had six to eight years of experience teaching in Tunja. They are both women, and their ages were 25 and 32. The two participants for this project were chosen amongst five female English teachers.

In Julieta's case, she has had about three years of teaching experience, and in our educative context, she has had about two months of experience. Julieta has faced inclusive education situations in both public and private schools. She has also had experience in teaching languages to elementary school children, as well as middle school children.

Nancy has been a teacher for five years. Her professional degree is in Modern Language Teaching (Spanish-English). Her experience is only with private institutions. She also has a professional degree in *Especialista en Necesidades de Aprendizaje en Lectura, Escritura y Matemática* [Specialist in Learning Needs for Literature, Writing, and Mathematics]. She currently works with elementary school children.

The commonality between these participants is that they are learning about inclusion. Both of them have sweet and open personalities, and they do their best to accommodate their students with their best disposition. Their sensitivity allows them to establish a human connection with their students. It is an advantage for inclusion processes since empathy has been discovered to be constructive in supporting these students.

Data Analysis

Apart from the seven steps of narrative studies, I also considered the "Introspective Practice in Three Steps" proposed by Quintero (2016). Introspection is closely related to human self-reflection and is contrasted with external observation (Quintero, 2016). I followed these steps in order to analyze the intrinsic dialogic process that occurs during mentally unconscious or conscious moments when the participants recall memories and reflections. The three steps are explained below:

The **Retrospection Step** refers to the mental ability of a human being to look back and contemplate the past and remember events, situations, places, etc. It is the conscious ability that individuals have to move back in time. This practice was lived by the two teachers when they brought up memories of working with inclusion students. This is the first step in carrying out a conversation based on experiences (meaningful memories). The language teachers' willingness is a key in applying this psychological practice to keep a conversation and gather data.

The **Interpretation Step** provided me with the opportunity to listen to the language teachers talk about certain situations surrounded by places, feelings, and senses about different characters and students in their teaching practices. Due to this step, the teachers remembered a specific situation where they realized that a student had a condition which limited their learning processes in some cases. An example of this stage was when Nancy figured out that a student was not a socially shy person, but rather needed a cochlear implant to listen to her classes and

participate. Within this practice, feelings like frustrations, annoyance, serenity, confidence, and others emerged.

The third step, **Prospection**, goes beyond understanding this stage like the mental ability of going forward cognitively. This study applied the principle of awareness from previous experiences. This suggested that it was necessary to be more sensitive to others, and thus, promote or suggest different behaviors to address similar experiences of working with inclusive education scenarios. Thus, prospection supported self-reflection, and it helped the teachers become better human beings. Consequently, from this practice, suggestions, comments, and commitments in facing possible future experiences in this field also emerged.

Data was collected through interactional moments, which in this case was the semi-structured interview. Three thematic content questions at different moments of the dialogue were addressed. In addition to the three practices explained above, it was important to label the main topics within the interaction.

Findings

In the pages that follow, I will tell the stories of two women who are language teachers within the inclusive education context. It is a compilation of human experiences lived throughout their teaching process. For this study, I had the opportunity to listen to them through a semi-structured interview, in which their insights, fears, feelings, and joyful moments were expressed in different dialogues.

The insights provided by the two women addressed situations related to

inclusive education and the impact that some of these situations have had in their professional and personal lives. I begin by sharing a sensible quote stated by Julieta after listening to her own experiences with inclusive education. This quote emerged after Julieta guided a boy who had some limitations in his learning process, and he did not look for any support. The boy was so rude with his classmates, and he was in trouble because of his behavior. In fact, the action of being recognized was considered a human achievement.

“When a student recognizes a mistake, it is because the teacher is doing something well...Then, I am doing something well.”

This quote is significant because it reveals the impact that Julieta’s experiences have had on her as a professional and human being. Her reflection required her to have a sense of commitment, as well as an open mind. These kinds of reflections allowed me to focus on oral narratives based on personal experiences with inclusive education told by Julieta and Nancy.

Inclusion is not Something That You Learn, It is Something That Makes You More Sensible: The Human Dimension of Inclusion

The name of this theme arises from a point that nowadays, language teachers work with students under an umbrella named inclusive education. Nobody at the school is specifically trained to work under inclusive education. As the situations that arose were not as visible or easily understood, their real-life experiences allowed the teachers to become more sensible and aware about the topic. Although both language teachers have an impeccable academic resume, they had not received proper preparation that highlights

the need to learn how to teach students with mental differential conditions (Nieto, Kukuljan, & Silva, 2013). Consequently, their narratives provided a profound sense of reflection regarding the situations they had lived with inclusive education. Furthermore, the dialogues shed some light on useful tools and support that contributed to the learning process of students with mental differential conditions.

Julieta and Nancy, although different by age, years in the profession, and geographical context, each told stories and held life lessons that deserved to be heard and shared. They reflected upon their memories and relived their experiences from the very beginning of their professional lives in relation to inclusive education. In this case, both language teachers had the opportunity to remember whether they had had the experience of working with students under the umbrella of inclusive education. In Julieta's case, her story was the following:

Claro, cada año o en cualquier momento que he trabajado he tenido que enfrentar este contexto, es algo que tú no aprendes o yo no aprendí nada acerca de esto. La inclusión no solo es leer sobre una teoría específica y tú lo aprendes, tú solo escuchas sobre inclusión y eso es todo; pero cuando tu experiencia enseñando inicia tú debes lidiar con esta situación.

[Of course, each year or in whichever situation I have worked, I have had to face this context. It is something that one learns, or I didn't learn anything about it. Inclusion isn't just reading about specific theory and having learnt it, you just hear about inclusion and that's it. But, when you experience teaching, you initiate, you deal with this situation.]

(Julieta, Interview)

In Julieta's discourse, she openly recognized her real experience with teaching students covered by inclusive

education. Her main concern was that she did not have a clear idea about what inclusive education meant, or if the right way to learn about it was by studying the theory behind it. Deborah Ball and Francesa Forzani (2010) asserted that "The fact is that we do not know the best way to train people to do this work skillfully. This is a serious collective issue." This "collective issue" must be guided by the different experiences lived in our professional lives, thus, building collaborative spaces where teachers can feel supported.

When Julieta used the word *deal*, it referred to the situation as something that was a "problem" for her. Her story reveals that she did not have another option in terms of what happened at the school. Therefore, it was something that she had to work out on her own since she felt that she did not have enough support at work. It is pertinent to point out that Julieta is a committed teacher, who is willing to face these situations despite not having a clear concept about what to do. Her good will permitted her to feel concern about this issue. As Julieta mentioned,

Yo tuve una profesora asistente en el salón de clase de grado octavo; pero yo no sabía que ella era una co-profesora (docente sombra), luego pensé en el estudiante equivocado, y como no pude identificar al estudiante que necesitaba ese apoyo estaba confundida y cometí un error con el otro estudiante; pienso que eso pasó porque nadie me explicó que tenía un estudiante con una condición diferente en grado octavo y su nombre.

[I had an assistant teacher in the eighth-grade classroom, but I didn't know she was a co-teacher (shadow teacher). Then, I thought it was another student, and since I could not identify the student that needed that help, I was confused, and I made a mistake with the other student. I believe this happened because no one explained that I had a differential student in the eighth grade or even their name.]

(Julieta, Interview)

This is yet another situation in which Julieta recalls that theory and reading about inclusion do not prepare you for real life situations. In her case, she mentioned that she did not know her assistant teacher was a co-teacher. Julieta had to learn from this real experience what the function of the co-teacher was in terms of inclusion. It was a meaningful learning experience (Ausubel, Novak, & Hanesian, 1968) because she lived the experience in a real context. Over time, Julieta realized that the co-teacher's role was to provide assistance with a specific student's learning process. Through her real-life experiences, Julieta was able to build her own theories on co-teaching based on her reality.

Meaningful Memories with Inclusion: The Affective Dimension of Teaching

Teaching involves a variety of roles. In many ways, it also implies that when you are working with human beings, some feelings go beyond your "teacher job". The spirit and interest shown by Nancy and Julieta during the interviews were proof of their lifelong commitment to the teaching and learning process.

Both language teachers identified inclusive cases by themselves, as analyzed through their narrative experiences. Their experiences showed a "human connection" with the realities that their students' lived. During the interview, they talked about *unforgettable stories or experiences working with inclusive education*. They addressed situations that revealed their feelings about the students, administrative staff, context, and themselves.

Julieta discussed the background of two students in her class. They came from

a difficult context, in which they did not have biological parents. Andrés and Felipe's adopted father had an important job in the city. Therefore, the teacher talked about what she had heard about their father, in particular, what his temperament was like. With this in mind, the following excerpt reads:

Cuando conocí dos hermanos que estudian en diferentes grados, Andrés en quinto grado y Felipe que está en sexto grado. Yo había escuchado algo sobre ellos, entre comentarios de colegas; por ende, estaba intrigada por conocerlos. Eso sí, estaba muy pensativa si yo iba a hacer capaz de guiar el proceso de aprendizaje con ellos en un idioma diferente. No estaba segura con mi labor docente. Además, escucho hablar sobre el padre de familia y su mal temperamento, cuando tú como profesor tienes que reportar situaciones académicas o convivenciales; situaciones donde los estudiantes estuviesen en problemas. Esto no es sólo guiar estudiantes en este contexto, tú tienes que educar padres de familia y es una tarea muy exigente para docentes de idiomas.

[When I met two brothers that studied in different grades, Andres in fifth grade and Felipe in sixth grade. I had heard something about them, among comments from my colleagues. Therefore, I was intrigued to meet them. However, I was very thoughtful whether I would be able to guide their learning process in a different language. I wasn't sure about my job as a teacher. Also, I had heard about the father and his bad mood. When you as a teacher have to report academic or living situations, situations where students have been in trouble. This isn't just guiding student in this context, you have to teach parents, and it is a very demanding job for language teachers.]

(Julieta, Interview)

Julieta, being reflective and critical in her profession, mentioned external issues that she has had to handle. First, she dealt with comments that some of her colleagues had said about the students and their father. Her story reveals that Julieta had a good disposition in meeting the two

students. Her reaction showed that she felt curious to meet them, and she never expressed inconformity about the situation. It seemed that the teacher was open to living this experience, even if she had heard good or bad comments regarding their father.

In this respect, Julieta had heard other comments in relation to the boy's father, and they were: "*escucho hablar sobre el padre de familia y su mal temperamento*" [I heard about the father and his bad mood]. Consequently, this shows an external tension since Julieta developed a predisposition after being eager to collaborate with the boys' learning. These comments generated a lack of confidence and frustration. Finally, she stated that, "*tú tienes que educar padres de familia y es una tarea muy exigente para docentes de idiomas*" [you have to teach parents, and it is a very demanding job for language teachers].

Unfortunately, the labor of teaching has not been appreciated enough by society. The quote above reinforced the reality that some teachers deal with. The teacher had the opportunity to sensitize this idea when she emphasized, "*tú tienes que educar padres de familia y es una tarea muy exigente para docentes de idiomas*". This assertion was stated because I mentioned the role of the father and how he hardly let himself be guided by the school staff. Because of this, the father is well-known within our school context because of his limited receptiveness to his children's learning processes. In most of the cases where he was called by the school to talk about different issues regarding his son, the reactions were rude. In inclusive situations, every single thing is important and can facilitate or limit progress.

To summarize the experience stated above, external issues related to her colleagues and the father of the two boys were exposed. Before she met Andrés and Felipe, her colleagues had already described them and their father. Julieta was predisposed because of the discourse her colleagues had shared. We can observe that this was not an adequate way of presenting an inclusive case. Indeed, I have to recognize that Julieta had an additional tension, which was their father's temperament since he rarely accepts teacher's reports. Thus, inclusive education requires an extra effort and sense of communication between the school, teachers, and family in order to facilitate the learning and teaching process. Both contexts must be articulated to overcome difficulties.

What I Learnt About Inclusion: What Will Last Forever

The following theme comes from favorable or difficult experiences lived by Julieta and Nancy with students covered by inclusive education. The prospection process refers to the ability that human beings have of being conscious about positive or negative experiences (Macleod, 2017). In this respect, the question that guided this theme was ***Did you remember a specific favorable or difficult experience with students covered by inclusive education?***

Forming close relationships with students helped Julieta and Nancy connect with them academically since they were able to develop trust with their students (Nieto, Kukuljan, & Silva, 2013). Their teaching identity was consolidated by the experiences that they had with this particularly diverse background of students. Looking back, Julieta and Nancy

talked about outstanding experiences that they had.

When I interviewed Nancy, she remembered a favorable experience related to David, her student which she had catalogued at the beginning as being a distracted boy:

Otra experiencia fue con un chico de séptimo grado, su nombre es David. Él era un estudiante muy distraído y también introvertido, la última característica era la misma de Paula. Yo estaba preocupada por esa situación y tomé la decisión de buscar ayuda extra y entonces hablé con una amiga mía que había estado tratando a estudiantes con necesidades especiales y le describí las actitudes de David y su personalidad; además de la forma en que escribía en su cuaderno y ella me guió en cómo podía trabajar con él; además, tengo que decir que un mes después tuve un diagnóstico con sugerencias para aplicar, luego aprendí con David y pude adaptar o ajustar algunas actividades para que fueran más comprensibles para mis alumnos, pude identificar que a él le gustaba mucho la música, entonces fue una excusa para aprender sobre cantantes, tipos de música, letras, países de donde vienen las bandas, etc. Con el consentimiento de los padres vinculé la relación entre compañeros de clase. ¡Fue increíble! Y David estaba comodo en mi clase.

[Another experience was with a young boy in seventh grade, his name is David. He was a very distracted student and also introverted, the last characteristic was similar to Paula. I was worried about this situation, and I took the decision to look for extra help. So, I talked to my friend who had dealt with special needs students, and I described David's attitudes and personality. I also told my friend about the way he wrote in his notebook, and she guided me on how I could work with him. Also, I have to say that a month later I had a diagnosis with suggestions that I could apply. Later, I learned with David, and I could adapt and adjust some activities so that they could be more understandable for my students. I could identify that he liked

music a lot, so it was an excuse to learn about artists, types of music, lyrics, countries where the bands were from, etc. With the parent's consent, I introduced the other students' participation. It was incredible! And David was comfortable in my class.]

(Nancy, Interview)

Nancy went forward in her teaching process; she clarified that this experience had occurred after having more than three years of teaching experience. Not only did she manage inclusive education, she also started to propose strategies, like flexibility in the curriculum and adaptations that could achieve greater outcomes in comprehension, teaching, and learning. As her intervention shows, “*luego aprendí con David y pude adaptar o ajustar algunas actividades para que fueran más comprensibles para mis alumnos, pude identificar que a él le gustaba mucho la música, entonces fue una excusa para aprender*”. Also, Nancy declared that she learned from her student, and she felt humbled in her profession. She expressed that she could identify the student's likes and needs, which allowed her to go beyond her duties. Instead of sticking to the stereotypes, Nancy established a connection with a past situation in which two students had similar behaviors. Thus, she analyzed the situation and looked for external support to guide her teaching practices.

She understood her student's background, and she could identify his likes. She used that information as a tool to facilitate the learning process with David. Also, she got David's classmates to participate, because as human beings we are sociable individuals. When the student was recognized in a social group, his interaction was modified. This story was a lesson on overcoming a difficulty.

Language teachers have different human characteristics, and in the case of Nancy and Julieta, their introspection and prospective processes demonstrated a sense of awareness about this sensitive issue. It lay out the following reflection as questions:

“How we are teaching them? Are we adapting them to our world? Are we contributing to transform our teaching practices?” Nancy said. “By the way, currently, I would like to know what is said about inclusion, because is a sensible topic which is changing or evolving with the time” Julieta stated.

(Researcher, Retelling the story)

Julieta and Nancy’s inclusive education experiences led them to grow as language teachers, as well as human beings with emotions, feeling and rationalities. These aspects were the motor behind each interview. The language teacher’s voice “reflects the values, ideologies, and structuring principles that teachers used to understand and mediate the stories, histories, cultures, and subjectivities of their students” (McLaren, 2002).

Besides, the language teachers’ inner voices show that they are still rethinking their role in education, pedagogy, and didactic fields, as some activities cannot be one directional or mandatory. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985) rely on the teaching environment, and it was a relevant aspect in the different experiences shared. As human beings, Julieta and Nancy became aware of the situations presented in the classroom, and they demonstrated the purpose of being committed to supporting their students. Paraphrasing Quintero and Nieto (2013), the human potential of teachers is an

alternative to value the sensitivity and sensibleness of being a language educator.

Conclusions

Considering Julieta and Nancy’s voices, the concept or guidelines needed to face inclusive education did not exist. Their voices reveal a human dimension in regard to inclusive education. Inclusion was not something that you teach; it was an issue that you learned along with the students through the experiences that presented themselves daily.

Relationships are essential in the teaching process with students of inclusive backgrounds. The *who of teaching* is a key concept in these experiences, since language teachers had a human connection with their student’s realities. As seen in the excerpts, the teachers modified and adapted their practice in order to provide their students with the best learning process. With this in mind, a teacher’s labor is more than just a job; it must be a passionate activity where you are open to learn every day. Furthermore, the teacher must be willing to change and improve his/her methods to help students learn.

A need to develop deep observation skills was required by the language teachers in order to face inclusive contexts. In doing so, they could modify and avoid stereotypes, such as outgoing, extroverted, disruptive, introverted, and shy. The case is often more complicated than a student disliking English. More often than not, the situation had to do with the complex background that the student had, which made it necessary to seek extra support by talking to parents and asking for information from coordinators and psychologists.

Being a teacher with students of inclusive educational backgrounds is an ethical issue. Teachers must be aware that their attitudes, actions, reactions, behaviors, and practices are easily read by their students. In fact, it is the first connection between students and teachers. Language teachers at this school are exemplary educators who respect their students, and by narrating their experiences, they were able to support their students in a complex process of learning another language.

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