



**ESOL TEACHING PRACTICES AND THE INFLUENCE OF THE SOCIAL
CONTEXT**

MASTERS' REPORT

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**ICESI UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION SCIENCES
MASTER IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is a presentation of my original research work and effort and that it has not been submitted to apply for another academic degree or award. Where other sources of information have been used, every effort is made to indicate it clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions.

Oscar Javier López

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DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation work to my family. A special feeling of gratitude to my late grandfather, Jorge Enrique Garzón, whose words of encouragement still ring in my ears. I also dedicate this dissertation to my grandmother, Escilda Nanez and my mother, Luz Dary Garzón, who have never left my side. I also dedicate this dissertation to my aunt, Consuelo Garzón, who showed me her passion towards teaching. Finally, I dedicate this work to my wife, Claudia Johanna Grijalba and my son, Oscar David López. Both of you have been the best fellow-travelers.

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1. Introduction

Teachers in their teaching practice live different tensions related to political, social, economic and cultural demands. Teachers' decisions within the classroom are likely to have consequences beyond any academic scenario. Those decisions have an impact on students' perception of society and culture. On the one hand, teachers have some influence upon some of these sociocultural and self-concept related issues that shape students' upbringing. On the other hand, aspects such as family revenues, social dynamics, location and strata, role models, parents' literacy level, etc. exceed their means as they are part of a system concerning the social, political and economic establishment of the government.

In public education, EFL teachers cannot afford to approach English as a mere subject to be taught. In fact, the great majority of them are homeroom teachers too. This means, they have to deal with students' behavior, attitudes and all sort of obstacles that may be negatively affecting their performance and the classroom social atmosphere. Consequently, teachers do not only deal with cognitive processes but with social and personal issues as well. Hence, this research has taken place in a public elementary-secondary school in Cali, Colombia. We analyze the importance of observing how underprivileged social contexts have an incidence on ESOL teaching practices. Furthermore, we emphasize on the relationships between teachers' life stories and social environments within their practices.

Teachers are able to decide whether to adapt the curricular contents to students' personal social issues and also to reflect on their own preconceived notions of education and culture helping students become aware of the influence of social contexts.

With the impact of the social context in mind, Osborn¹ writes about “frames of reference” to refer to teachers’ beliefs and their influence in their teaching practice. The author widens the narrow view of a teacher whose work is confined to the classroom to explain ESOL teaching practice in relation to official pedagogical and curricular demands which are the framework of teaching.

Based on this view, in this research report we addressed the question, *how do ESOL teachers’ learning experiences influence their practices, their ideas and beliefs about the teaching-learning process?*

2. Research problem

The role of ESOL teachers goes beyond the consideration that they develop their knowledge for ESOL teaching only within the parameters of their undergraduate preparation programs. Indeed, the global socioeconomic context imposes an influence to language teaching practice in a way students’ first language seems to be obsolete before the strong influence of the teaching tradition of a worldwide spoken language such as English. To illustrate this, the use of L1 tends to be indirectly prohibited and purposefully casted aside to help students to be immerse in a short-lived learning space. In the same way, students’ background and identity itself are so. This is why the purpose of this work is to observe the impact that underprivileged social contexts have on ESOL teaching practices focusing on the relationships among teachers’ experiences, concepts, ideas and the social environment they work in.

¹T. Osborn, *Teaching world languages for social justice, a sourcebook of principles and practices*, Laurence Erlbaum associates, New Jersey, 2006, p. 19, Available from GooglePlayBooks, (accessed 10 March 2015)

Following this line of work, we try to discuss the importance for the teacher to reflect on students' worldview using L2 as a different channel to expand their knowledge and life experiences.

Osborn explains, how teachers knowing learner's' L1 enriches their practice,

[T]he fact that words embody concepts and culture in a way that does not always include a one-to-one correspondence with words in other languages is a lesson learned only in the study of a second language. If the worldviews of residents of our global village are embodied, at least in part, in their languages, then the study of foreign languages is central to an education program among people committed to democracy.²

For this inquiry, it is important to observe the way teachers address English contents as they deal with societal issues related to everyday contextual problems that students tackle in their daily lives. On the other hand, teachers' experiences, beliefs and ideas about the social context and language teaching as a source of research, opens up the possibility to understand how socialization and communication take place in the learning process. Likewise, it is important to understand that language education can highly differ in both contexts, private and public institutions, even though both sides of the educational follow standardized patterns of general contents imposed by the Ministry of Education.

2.1 General objective

To discuss a social pedagogical perspective to L2 teaching practices from four ESOL teachers' experiences, ideas and beliefs about the influence of the social context in their daily practices.

² T. Osborn, op.cit., p. 19.

2.2 Specific objectives

- To identify the role of early learning experiences from teachers during the process of learning to teach.
- To report how teachers use their linguistic knowledge-base from a socially situated perspective for teaching ESOL.
- To describe teaching practices and the challenges that it purports provided a social justice perspective.

3. Literature Review

In order to conduct this research, we have taken into consideration the theoretical contribution of certain authors such as Reeves, Johnsons and Freeman who help language teachers to understand the process of learning a language from a humanistic perspective.

It is relevant to understand that most of the approaches to ESOL teaching aim for depicting teachers' practices and students' performance from a set of focus-on-form tenets. In this way, language teaching has surreptitiously been taken as "knowledge transmission".³ On the other hand, a sociocultural perspective of the teaching praxis has drawn researchers' attention. Research about how teachers learn to teach had been documented since early 80's.⁴ For data collection, it was necessary to take a look at the problem-centered interview method we quote to Scheibelhofer, chosen as a support for analyzing information from

³ K.E. Johnson and D. Freeman, 'Teacher learning in second language teacher education: A socially-situated perspective', *Revista Brasileira de Linguística Aplicada*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2001, p. 53-59, http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?pid=S198463982001000100004&script=sci_arttext, (accessed 10 June 2015)

⁴ K.E. Johnson and D. Freeman, op,cit, p. 56

teachers' experiences. Following this research line, Aronstamm⁵, also contributes in our work to understand how the teacher is brought under the scope in an attempt to explore a specific issue in the area of social research. In the same way, for the matter of this work, the context, the relation between the social context and the teaching practice are important to consider.

Likewise, Reeves⁶ gives us a hand to examine teachers' linguistic knowledge for teaching from a biographic approach considering their experiences as language learners. She reconstructs teachers' experiences and highlights the importance of considering the sociocultural framework inherent to any teaching practice from the perspective of social justice. This mentioned concept will be reviewed in the pages to come as an important element of the teaching social context. As a result, Reeves deals with the role of preparation programs forging those teachers' ideas and beliefs that support their practice. Indeed, Freeman and Johnson carry on a diachronic study of the behavioral research approach to language teaching. Their work questions the process-product research that narrows the learning of a new language to the technical knowledge of some sort of communicative ability. Consequently, they move to a constructivist view where teachers' learning experiences, students' social context, parents and school administrators acknowledge language learning as a social-related process.

⁵ B. Aronstamm et al., "The social context of education", *U.S Department of Education*, National Center For Education Statistics, 1997, vol. 10, pp. 3-6, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs97/97981.pdf>, (accessed 5 March 2016).

⁶ J. Reeves, 'A sociocultural perspective on ESOL teachers' linguistic knowledge for teaching', *Linguistics and Education*, vol. 20, 2009, p. 109–125, Available from sciencedirect, (accessed 24 February 2015).

4. Context of research

The public educational institution where the research takes place is located in a low social economic area of Cali. It holds about 1000 students belonging to strata 1, 2 and 3. With characteristics that are prevalent in high schools located in disadvantaged places, there is a representative amount of students above age, undergoing domestic violence or/and involved in drug use and trade related violence, organized and petty crime and other factors. This socio-economical issue causes drawbacks that may outweigh benefits not only for the ESOL learning process but on their whole academic performance. For instance, this is reflected in a high drop-out rate in which disciplinary issues such as bullying and a hostile learning classroom climate are heavily impacting the ESOL learning process.

5. Methodology

A (self) biographical reconstruction through teachers' experiences narrative as language learners is cornerstone in this research as the main expected outcome. The technique privileged is the problem-centered interview.⁷ Using this technique, the interviewer resorts to elements from other kind of interviews such as the structured interview, the in-depth interview or the narrative interview. Four teachers participated during this research. They were personally interviewed and three of them are foreign teachers working as co-teachers in public schools for the Colombian Ministry of Education as part of the bilingualism program. This program aims to improve students' historic low-performance reflected on the

⁷ E. Scheibelhofer, 'A Reflection Upon Interpretive Research Techniques: The Problem-Centred Interview as a Method for Biographic Research', *Memory & Everyday Life*, Huddersfield, 2000, <http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/4923/> (accessed 20 February 2015)

national standardized high school test known as *pruebas SABER*.⁸ The fourth interviewee is a Colombian former teacher that recently moved to Europe to study a different subject. The interview was divided into three blocks of questions each one of which is introduced by an open question or an imperative statement.

The way teachers perceive their work, report their theoretical background and the way it all boils down to teaching practice and interpersonal relationships were matters of examination.

5.1 Defining variables

The variables that guided the construction of the instruments for data collection were: teachers' learning anecdotes during childhood, their experience as learners of English, their experiences as learners of languages other than English. We analyze their experiences as ESOL teachers and their beliefs about learning a second language. Finally, we take a look at their experiences teaching English, their lived challenges and their understanding about social justice in educational contexts.

At the same time, they are aimed at accounting for the sociocultural framework of the teaching practice based on Reeves theoretical support. To report a knowledge-base for teaching ESOL from a socially situated perspective will be an objective underlying the interviews.

⁸ Colombian students present this test in their senior year of high-school as a requisite to graduate and be admitted to the university.

5.2 Data collection

Data were collected through personal interviews with high-school teachers and through class observation. Interviews happened in places different than schools. Four teachers took participation in this research. Three of them are native assistant teachers, a man from New York, USA, two women from Kingston-Jamaica and a Colombian teacher. All interviews were recorded with consent. Observations were guided by a class observation template. Students' and English instructors' identities will remain anonymous.

6. The influence of Social contexts in teaching processes

Undoubtedly, teachers' practice is framed by culture and by the specific socioeconomic dynamics it in turn reflects. Yet, at the same time, it is intimately related to the community context from which their principles and beliefs derive.

Then, it is important to recognize that the process of learning how to teach begins before and continues after preparation programs.⁹ All the same, this learning how to teach is mediated by experience and socialization not only in terms of effectiveness but in terms of the formative process of socially situated individuals.¹⁰ Furthermore, their experience are subordinated to contextual sociopolitical variables such as governmental educational policies or educational investment. For instance, these variables interfere on curriculum design affecting English educational programs as in the case of public education. Likewise, it would be pertinent to understand the concept of social justice related to personal desires

⁹ K.E. Johnson and D. Freeman, op,cit, p. 402

¹⁰ D. Freeman and K.E. Johnson, "Teacher learning in second language teacher education: A socially-situated perspective", *Revista Brasileira de Linguística Aplicada*, vol. 1, no,1, 2001, p.239
http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?pid=S198463982001000100004&script=sci_arttext (accessed 20 January 2015)

and humanistic expectations from education. According to Osborn, students hopes, dreams, passions, commitments, abilities, capacities in relation to concentric circles of context-historical flows, cultural surroundings and economic reality, come down to social justice as obstacles to stop or to move against.¹¹

This view expands former approaches to teachers' knowledge to teaching beyond subject matter competence to include knowledge of pedagogy, learners, educational context, and a multidisciplinary knowledge out of the target language. Along this line, Busch, Jardine and Tjoutuku, give a special place to a biographic research approach to language teaching from a written reconstruction perspective here. They explored teachers' notions about English as a second language in connection to a multilingual culture. It revealed particular social dimensions underlying teachers' attitudes facing their profession in Southern Africa such as prejudice and stereotyping.¹² In this way, the authors take back the concept of memory to socially frame the context of the teaching practice and reference actual sociocultural conditions and discourses under the concept of an individual memory socially constituted. From this perspective, a biographic approach seeks not only to depict a language teacher's practice but to relate those experiences and insights to the societal configuration. To better clarify the biographic research approach Busch et al state,

The aim of memory work is not to gather information about 'what happened' but rather about which subject positions were taken within the social settings in which language practices are enacted, as well as to ask the question about possible alternative ways of acting in similar situations.¹³

¹¹ T. Osborn, op.cit., p. 44.

¹² B. Busch, A. Jardine and A. Tjoutuku, "Language biographies for multilingual learning", *PRAESA-occasional papers*, 2006 <http://paulroos.co.za/wp-content/blogs.dir/22/files/2012/07/Paper24.pdf> (accessed 4 August 2015)

¹³ B. Busch, A. Jardine and A. Tjoutuku, op.cit., p. 13.

Teachers' verbal report about their practice is not only a reflection of their knowledge-base to teach but it also entails a culturally programmed predisposition to act. In this way, as well as individuals' discourse is socially shaped so it is behavior.

6.1 External factors affecting teaching processes

Indeed, factors beyond the competence-standard discourse related to more intimate aspects such as families being in troubled economic situations, parents and relatives having a poor education level and overcrowding in the home, have a strong impact on student's daily speech and communication. In addition, it is necessary to highlight the absence of educational programs for public teachers to enrich their knowledge and also their knowledge addressing socialization issues within the classroom.¹⁴

The few and expensive opportunities for teachers to access further education, strongly affects and narrows their own possibilities of broadening their understanding about their subject matter or about the learner. Namely, it diminishes the possibilities to tailor their lessons to the characteristics of the EFL learner at certain stages and contexts. The characteristics of these situations generally come into play as determinants, limits and obstacles in students' everydayness for whom education takes little value as a possibility of personal development. Accordingly, the underlying political attitude negligent towards offering training programs reinforcing the theoretical and social research knowledge of public school teachers, can easily alienate the teaching practice from the tensions under which it happens. Actually, it puts aside a marginalizing context mainly characterized by a

¹⁴ B. Aronstamm et al., op.cit., p. 4.

socioeconomic situation of scarcity, social stigma and stratification. It is indeed, part of the everyday life of public schools in these areas.

It would be valid then to consider if most Colombian ESOL teaching preparation programs, contents and parameters prepare teachers for taking a theoretical educational position from academic research, project work, theoretical analysis and production.

English as an academic subject matter attends curriculum demands but those demands are more technical than formative in nature. They tend to be detached from students' background as standardization cast aside those particular circumstances claiming and justifying their tenets on a search for results. So, it is up to each institution to assume this humanistic part of the learners through a missionary and visionary approach to the learner as an active participant of the community.

The circumstances depicted above deal with realms such as sociology, anthropology, history, etc. Nevertheless, the majority of schools are not prepared for responsibly and professionally intervene in this kind of cases and the vast majority of public schools even lack of a psychologist or social worker. So, it would be up to the teachers to autonomously prepare themselves to face some of those aspects in the classroom and to seize the space that the curriculum provides to shift the focus of contents, methodologies and the like towards a social awareness and skills perspective.

6.2 Language teaching impact beyond the classroom

Fundamental to this work, is the notion that the teachers' L2 acquisition process can only be fully understood if the sociocultural contexts in which it takes place are explicitly examined as part of the process of learning how to teach viz. the teaching practice.

An interesting work conducted by Osler, led participant teachers to reconstruct parts of their career development and life histories through interviews and questionnaires giving us a clear start point to think about teacher's role not only inside but also outside the classroom.¹⁵ The study was carried on in Kenya and examined teachers' understanding about gender issues, which was a sensitive social issue at the research time. Findings included that despite teachers' professional experience and background, factors such as cultural beliefs and parental practices regarding gender equity mediated in the way they built working relationships. In a later stage of her research, the author observes a gender gap between a recently women rights process of democratic vindication and the cultural and formerly politically male chauvinist paradigm of the women's role in society. Accordingly, Durham-Barnes researches on the influence of teachers' professional lives on their personal ones. The author depicts the socio-political scenario of urban schools to contextualize research participants' arguments and concerns with remaining or not as urban school teachers. Through interviews the author establishes a set of relationships between professional and personal life and the details of perceiving the teaching labor as difficult and challenging.¹⁶ The fact of identifying and becoming knowledgeable about a social

¹⁵ A. Osler, "Teachers' biographies and educational development: A Kenyan case study", *International Journal of Educational Development*, 1997, vol. 17, no. 4, pp. 361-371, Available from sciencedirect.

¹⁶ J. Durham-Barnes, "The balancing act: the personal and professional challenges of urban teachers", *PennGSE Perspectives on Urban Education*, 2011, vol. 9, no.1, <http://www.urbanedjournal.org/archive/volume-9-issue-1-fall-2011/balancing-act-personal-and-professional-challenges-urban-teachers>, (accessed 6 July 2015)

scenario that was poorly considered in order to conduct language teaching was equally a research objective. In this point, it is necessary to draw attention to the articulation of curriculum and students' formation in TESOL teaching preparation programs and to wonder how significant that knowledge can be for the teacher and the student.

To give a couple of examples, some data show high rates of teenage pregnancy in Colombian public schools. In 2015, 19.5 % of women aged from 15 to 19 had been or were pregnant.¹⁷ Information evidences an alcohol consumption of a 19.3 % in 2013 among teens aged from 12 to 18.¹⁸ Some other teens were subjected to confront domestic violence according to statistics.

This information reveals us important data about what teachers must expect in public schools' classrooms. The fact that students are daily exposed to a big asset of social situations such as family issues, alcohol and drugs use can alter completely their normal life development and their personal state of mind. Consequently, student's academic performance will take a downfall since they are not motivated, have no interest in learning and will find hard to focus during the short-lived space where English teaching and learning processes take place. In the same way, this situation has a direct impact on teachers' performances since the L2 instructors will not only have to meet the school pressure attempting to get high academic results but also deal with students' personal issues.

¹⁷ El país, Colprensa., "Preocupan alarmantes cifras de embarazo adolescente en Colombia" Miércoles, Abril 15, 2015 <http://www.elpais.com.co/elpais/colombia/noticias/preocupan-alarmanentes-cifras-embarazo-adolescente-colombia> (accessed 9 November 2015)

¹⁸ D. Hernandez, "Estudio nacional de consumo de sustancias psicoactivas en colombia", consumo – sustancias-psicoactivas, Colombia, 2013, p.12, http://www.odc.gov.co/Portals/1/dialogo_nacional/docs/consumo-sustancias-psicoactivas-colombia-delia-hernandez.pdf (accessed 7 January 2016).

6.3 Teacher's beliefs and advocacy

Teacher's beliefs and advocacy are interrelated concepts reflected on their practice. Actually, their ideas can reach students' lives engaging parents and school staff in the process. Haneda and Alexander expand on teachers' intercultural competence in relation to their advocacy in the process of teaching to ESL immigrant elementary-school learners. They state that the intercultural competence characterizes advocate teachers. The authors point out the importance for ESL teachers to actively engage parents in learners' schooling process and the way this engagement relates to academic achievement improvement in language learning. Using the interviewing as data source, the authors conceptualize and illustrate the construct of "advocacy" through teachers' experiences in and beyond the classroom.¹⁹

On a similar note, Phipps and Borg explore teachers' beliefs and ideas underlying grammar teaching and learning through systematic interviews and class observations. The authors found clear evidence supporting the thesis that grammar teaching and its verbal report do not necessarily coincide. These discrepancies proved through a poor performance and traditionally pushed to the background, are the main source for their conceptualization about the teaching process. At the same time, it is argued that facing these issues is the cornerstone for the professional development of the teacher. Then, it is necessary to review core concepts and research on L2 teaching education focusing on the teacher and the context where pedagogy takes place as mentioned before. On the other hand, it is important to review teachers' knowledge about the language system and the way it is put in action in

¹⁹ M. Haneda and M. Alexander. 'ESL advocacy beyond the classroom', *Teaching and teacher education*, 2015, vol. 49, pp. 149-158. Available from sciencedirect, (accessed 5 December 2015).

the classroom. Also, the mentioned authors above state how consistent and deep linguistic knowledge to teach should be in order to be presented in multifarious ways to the learner.²⁰

In this point, it is necessary to review the cognitive model in language acquisition as it underlies most teaching practices. This model is discussed by Larsen-Freeman in her article “Reflecting on the Cognitive–Social Debate in Second Language Acquisition”²¹. To expand on this model, it is necessary to review the foundations of current research in the SLA research field. The view of behaviorist psychology and structural linguistics as language and learning theories respectively in this field, finds its origins in the texts of authors such as Fries²², Lado²³ and Skinner²⁴. Subsequently, Chomsky²⁵ introduces the notion of a universal grammar system, a part of the human genetic endowment that allows children developing language. All these SLA notions share a language-target centered approach. Despite the work of different authors who followed a socially-oriented research perspective, it is Firth and Wagner in 1997²⁶ who respond to the first theoretically eclectic group of researchers calling for a theoretically balanced approach to social and cognitive processes where both have to receive attention.

²⁰ S. Phipps and S. Borg, ‘Exploring tensions between teachers’ grammar teaching beliefs and practices’, *Elsevier*, 2009, vol. 37, Available from sciencedirect, (accessed 4 January 2015).

²¹ D. Larsen-Freeman, ‘Reflecting on the Cognitive–Social Debate in Second Language Acquisition’, *The Modern Language Journal*, 2007 vol. 91, pp.773-778, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/262887772_Reflecting_on_the_Cognitive-Social_Debate_in_Second_Language_Acquisition

²² C.C. Fries., *Teaching and learning English as a foreign language*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1945.

²³ R. Lado., *Linguistics across cultures*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1957.

²⁴ B. F. Skinner., *Verbal behavior*, New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1957.

²⁵ N. Chomsky., *A review of B. F. Skinner’s Verbal behavior*, *Language*, vol. 35, pp. 26–58, 1967 https://chomsky.info/1967____/ (accessed 14 April 2014)

²⁶ A. Firth and J. Wagner J., “SLA property: No trespassing”, *Modern Language Journal*, vol. 82, pp. 91–94, 1998 <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1998.tb02598.x/abstract> (accessed 5 July 2015)

6.4 Teacher cases experiences. The purpose of teaching

In this part, it is important to review one of the participant teachers' perspective. She is a Jamaican teacher who wants to establish a humanistic language approach through teaching ESOL. So, for her it is important to build a connection with her students and that they can remember this experience as an enriching opportunity to broaden their worldview from a different teaching perspective. In this way, her idea of teachers rethinking themselves so they become able to reconstruct social concepts goes along with Osler's idea of a language teacher that broadens students' worldviews.

Likewise, Haneda and Alexander highlight the importance of expanding on teachers' intercultural competence as it is a characteristic of advocate teachers. To the interviewee, the idea about connecting with the learner lies on intercultural differences as she attempts to establish a humanistic relation with her students. She conceives the language class not only as teaching contents and addressing communication but mainly as part of a closer and experimental interaction in class. With this in place, taking a look at her answer concerning the contribution she could make, the concepts mentioned above can be illustrated:

I want to leave the students with a good feeling, with a connection. That years from now, when they've finished school, they'll remember that in two thousand and fifteen four people came from different countries and talked in English for a while. They won't remember what we taught them but they'll remember the connection. They'll remember that we came and they'll remember it with good feelings and they can tell their friends "oh with my... you know? there were some people that came a couple years ago it was a good experience", etcetera.

Taking the reins of education and the will to educate people are approaches demanding to articulate that require a lot of commitment and a strong feeling of advocacy. In general terms, the language teacher contributes to a social system aiming at guiding students to acquire a linguistic specific knowledge consisting in developing different levels of skills in

a target language. Nevertheless, teachers must face all sort of obstacles related to different macro situations such as multiculturalism, social, economic and political issues which affect directly or indirectly educational processes. Moreover, they must confront realities happening in the immediate context they work in such as violence in school, aggression, an unsupportive school staff and so on.

Teachers must be willing to challenge their beliefs while their teaching goes on. Restructure teaching strategies and methodologies researching on the social context beyond what they are supposed to teach as a part of a curriculum. The relation between teaching and the social context where the students come from determines the way the teaching process takes place. The line between success and failure is very thin and can be determined depending on teachers' understanding of the social scenarios in which they interact with the educational community.

Foreign language educators need to examine the frames of reference within which we have constructed our professional activities.” (...) “In the pursuit of education, teachers and students have an ethical responsibility related to the production and expansion of human knowledge that can be addressed through a thoughtful approach to world language education fully considering the context in which we operate. ²⁷

6.4.1 Teachers' stories: learning experiences and teaching background

The cases presented below offer different perspectives about public education. The participants, as mentioned before, are three first year native assistant teachers coming from English speaking countries who work in the same public school and a Colombian teacher with seven-years of experience in private high schools teaching ESOL who is currently working overseas.

²⁷ T. Osborn, op.cit., p. 19.

First interviewee

Our first participant is a native English speaker and also a Spanish bilingual. She is one of the co-teachers working at the school in hand. She is from Jamaica and she has previously worked as an English teacher in higher education. This is her first experience teaching ESOL in a disadvantaged school. However, she had previously taught English in the country to undergraduate courses at a private institution. We will present right away some extracts of her interview in order to have an idea of the interviewee's perception about teaching.

How do you handle disciplinary issues within the classroom?

I make a mean face, no, but students know what's wrong and what's right. I speak with body language. So, if somebody's on the cell phone and I told them slide or put your cellphone away and if there're still students on their cellphones, I will stop and I will stand up there and I'll look at them until lean." ...it doesn't work with everybody but it works with some people, you have to be able to read people."

How do you decide what to teach?

Well, I basically read the personalities of my students. So, you have to learn how to read your class. You are to warrant that the group of students, the advanced students, when they are looking bored and when you ask them a question, they're able to answer and also if they are grouped up together they can do the activities, in five minutes they are done. But then the group of students over here, they're hiding, they're on the phone, if you ask them a question then, "oh I don't want to answer", you have to understand that there are different levels in your class and you have to know how to work the energy in the room. So, for example, with university students, I taught with university students before, they want to learn because they... they pay, how many millions de pesos every semester to come to class so they are serious they want to learn. So, with those kinds of students you know you can do things like debates, you can talk about the government you can talk about religion, serious things because they will actually learn the vocabulary and they will participate but with high school students that really don't want to learn and there're different levels... you have to know what to do so, lots of times I try to get my students up on their feet because I want them to move etcetera but it's very hard, it's very, very hard.

What do you think about bringing into the classroom actual cases portraying sensitive political worldwide issues like migration? and what do you think of this kind of approach in language teaching?

“I love it, I love it because for me, for my personality, I picked that. From a young age you're supposed to be able to know what you think and how you feel and how to express yourself. So, by reading, I mean, giving them different topics, hard topics, we can form a connection with people and we can find solutions but also develop managing learning new vocabulary. For example, issues such as racial barriers or religion or racism or migration as you said, that can help students to know. One knows how they feel and what they think because if you don't teach children to think for themselves and just say ‘OK, this is what you think this is what you do’, then, as they get older they won't know what they think and they won't know how to respond, it's just going to be a bunch of robots, just following what somebody else told them. And it's a very good because a part of being an adult is knowing how to make decisions and decisions means that you weigh the options that are there. So, if you are in high school and you're growing up as a soon as you turn eighteen you know it's not automatic for you to know how to make decisions but that's basically what happens in high-school. You learn math, you learn physics, you learn chemistry, somebody else has been telling you all of your life what to think, by the time you're eighteen you don't know what you feel, you don't know what decisions to make because you haven't had any practice in making decisions. So, I think that, that approach is very good in school to help students know how they feel, know how they think and know how to express themselves.

What excites you the most about your work and the contribution you can make?

I want to leave the students with a good feeling, with a connection, that years from now when they've finished school they'll remember that in two thousand and fifteen four people came from different countries and talked in English for a while. They won't remember what we taught them but they'll remember the connection, they'll remember that we came and they'll remember it with good feelings and they can tell their friends ‘there were some people that came a couple years ago it was a good experience’, etcetera.

Second interviewee

The second interviewee has an experience of seven years teaching in private high schools in Colombia. He studied at a Colombian private high school and the foreign language he learned was English.

How do you handle disciplinary issues within the classroom?

“I always worked in private Institutions. Discipline matters are less complicated than in public schools for sure. In my case I immediately stop these situations occurring by warning the student first. If the situation continues with the same student or another one, then I ask him/her to leave the class on the spot. One radical action is a good example for the rest. This convey to respect from both sides without being disrespectful or intransigent. However, it is important to take have a talk with the troubling student after the incident finishes and encourage him/her to work, end of the story. But as I said, this in private institutions. Somehow these students have less family background situations, issues or less

difficult social environment interfering within their daily lives, so teachers, can handle better their behavior in class. I have shared talks with Colleagues working in public schools in difficult environments and teaching and discipline matters are really in another level. Working in these schools really demands experienced teachers willing to work beyond the simplicity of teaching a subject. Be ethical with your profession and be willing to get an understanding of sociocultural, economical even psychological issues of these students must be a relevant aspect. In my opinion, only this way a teacher can cope to transmit knowledge not ephemeral information that students retain for a short period of time. This fits for whatever subject to teach in private or public schools”

Do you use a curriculum guide, a set of standards or a particular text?

Honestly, I see what it contains but I don't follow completely those guides. I take and respect what is proposed by the school. In that way, I reorganized my activities and lessons and find a way my students learn what is really important, investing time on activities so they can have a proper practice. I follow as well what is proposed in the English guide book because of the standards. I got to say that I have a lot of problems with this term. I rather prefer to achieve objectives with my students.

What do you think about bringing into the classroom actual cases portraying sensitive political worldwide issues like migration? and what do you think of this kind of approach in language teaching?

This is a very difficult subject to talk about. I would say that you can help to sensitize or make people aware through languages of these subjects. Maybe in a high school context, teachers and students may achieve some interesting outcomes out of students' speeches depending on their foreign language level. In elementary schools I rather dare to say that is possible to promote some values through language activities to get students involved in such topics. But as I said, the level of difficulty involving such topics in schools contains a hard and heavy charge of socio-educational work concerning, politics, economy, culture and religion which is even the most crucial aspect when talking about sensitive political issues such migration. This conveys not only students but social groups in general to think about, acceptance, tolerance, respect of values and cultural customs, integration and a very high capacity of adaptability from both sides, local residents and immigrants.

What excites you the most about your work and the contribution you can make?

“well, I consider that I have a good connection with students so I can motivate them to learn through interesting activities. I think this one of my best qualities and skills while teaching. During my years as a L2 teacher I could develop a strong organization in my lesson plans so neither I wasted time nor killed time during my classes. I always tried to get involved students to participate during this short learning time. Of course, not every day is a good day. Sometimes you get an excellent learning and teaching dynamic in class, sometimes you feel things just do not work well. This certainly has to do with students' mood. Either they can be tired, bored, they had a bad day in another class etc. Then is difficult to bring them back to a good working attitude. Concerning to my contribution, I would say that I try to teach English or French convincing my students that

languages can take them positively far away when they start to think seriously about their life projects. I also take some time to speak in Spanish from time to time to tell my personal life story as a person, as the student I was and how bad I was at learning languages. But my biggest contribution could be that I transmit my motivation and passion of teaching through activities adapted to the context they live in. That is why I believe that before beginning to teach it is worth to check on what kind of students we have in front of us. That's why during my first class I always ask them to write in a piece of paper in their mother tongue in a short sentence an answer to the question seriously, '¿qué es lo que más te gusta hacer?' This exercise can reveal many things about the group of people you will work with"

Third interviewee

He is also a co-teacher. He is from the United States and has been teaching at the high-school during the past 14 months. He is 31 years old. He studied political sciences in the period between 2002 and 2006. He is an advanced-beginner Spanish learner, having studied the language at college for 1 year and now immersed in a Spanish speaking culture. He has been teaching ESOL during over three years and his last job, before coming to Colombia, took place at a high-school in Thailand located in a low- income area.

What excites you the most about your work and the contribution you can make?

I am not really that interested in teaching ESL. I would prefer to teach social science, history political science. I like the freedom that teaching gives me, how I control the class and the content. How I can express my personal view to an impressionable audience. My biggest contribution is my unique personality and views. I notice that people start talking and thinking like me when they spend enough time around me.

How do you handle disciplinary issues within the classroom?

I make the students feel bad with guilt and disappointment. I would only get crazy if the students were really bad like fighting.

How do you decide what to teach?

In Colombia I have taught mostly basic ESL. I usually follow the material given to me by the school.

What do you think about bringing into the classroom actual cases portraying sensitive political worldwide issues like migration? And what do you think of this kind of approach in language teaching?

I think too much western education is about reform, revolution, social progress and a bunch of other left wing commie stuff. When I taught in the East (Thailand), there was never talk of reform, change, revolution etc. Thais were more interested in their culture, their history, their past, how they are one people working together. In the west, there is always this effort toward revolution and equality. I oppose most of these efforts. My criticism of social justice education, as it is being taught in Colombia, is that I find it bigoted against boys and men. Recently my school received our English education text books English Please. I knew it would be typical politically correct garbage because all education books are. The books didn't let me down, they reversed all of the traditional gender roles, men do all the typical feminine work while women are shown in tough leadership roles doing traditional manly work. On page 90 of English Please grade 11 book you see many images of men and women in the household and workplace. The chapter is about careers and professions and is supposed to give the students an opportunity to think about their future. Image 4 on page 90 shows a strong black man. What is his job? A nurse of course, a traditional female job. The other images on the page show men doing traditional female work of cleaning the house and cooking for the family. The page tries to reverse traditional gender roles to make women men and men women. No mention of women being a traditional housewife which many of our students are going to become. The book also shows biased by showing women in leadership roles and in highly advanced careers while the men are seen as dreamers, artist and athletes. On Page 15, there are two pictures, one of a young girl and the other of a young boy. Each image has a little text explaining their career dreams and ambition for the future. The girl dream is to become a doctor and the boys dream is to be a professional soccer player. This bias is further sign on page 35, where there is an image of a girl with a text about becoming lawyer. Compare that to page 78 which has an image of Budi whose ambition in life it to be a surf instructor who lives on the beach. What exactly are we telling the children of Colombia? That women will be the doctors, scientist and inventors while boys will be the surfer teacher and soccer players? It is typical feminist sexism against boys and men in general. Boys are the ones who are struggling in modern education, not girls. We need to be encouraging boys more, show positive images of boys and girls. But that will not happen. I think those topics are more for a current events course than a language course. For me personally, I think the topic would be more interesting, but I doubt the average student would care, also I would skeptical of the political slant of the material. But any new ideas in ESL education are

Fourth interviewee

She is a Jamaican co-teacher working at the school since middle 2015. She is 30 years old.

She studied an International Relations Bachelor in the time between 2004 and 2007 and worked as research analyst during 6 years. She has worked as an assistant teacher for over

two years. The first year she volunteered to teach English to dialect speaking adult learners in Jamaica.

What do you think about bringing into the classroom actual cases portraying sensitive political worldwide issues like migration? and what do you think of this kind of approach in language teaching?

I think that it's important too because the true is that you need to build the awareness. The students need to know what is going on within the wider society, even though we are teaching maybe Spanish or maybe English, they need to know what is going on. It is not like after they graduate they won't be blind to what is going on. They need to know how to function and what is happening in our world. In Jamaica there is something going on, the highly intelligent people are leaving the country, and so like the doctors the lawyers everyone is just leaving the country and then who are you leaving to run the country? The least educated ones are left behind but the students need to know what is happening on in the wider world as I was saying. Teaching them about it would prepare them for the work force too and also I think teaching them about different cultures is important because everybody thinks yours is the best, what is not so. They need to know what the pros are if moving there. They need to know why it is the best and why it is not the best. So, letting them know about this will let them make decisions more effectively. I think it's not about just saying present continuous today so fill in the blanks. They need to be taught these things, I mean, other factors happening around the world.

How do you decide what to teach?

It depends on the curriculum of the school. So, what I do is, I get the curriculum from the school. Let's say this term they are focusing on maybe grammar or tenses or daily routines or whatever. I follow whatever they planned and then I would make my lesson plan based on that. So, let me use this as an example, I got the curriculum from my mentor teacher, first it was personal information that the school wanted to focus on. Then, moving on to likes and dislikes using the simple present tense. So, focusing on weather, focusing on sports, focusing on music and then we move on to family and now we are on daily routines. So, based on the curriculum, on its organization, that's what I decide to teach. I just cannot decide my own thing.

How do you handle disciplinary issues within the classroom?

Here I can tell you it's a bit challenging with discipline but it's not something I cannot handle. Before the start of the semester we introduce the rules and consequences. So, first one is no cellphone in the class. They love their cellphones and they will tell you 'oh I use for translation' but they are supposed to have a dictionary. I will only allow their cellphone if they are using it for translation. It cannot be that they are on WhatsApp or Facebook or then the consequences, if you are using your cellphone and you are using WhatsApp or Facebook then I'll take away that cell phone and you'll get it at the end of the class. I strongly believe that at the beginning of each semester and through the semester, you should reinforce the discipline problems that they have. So, we have classroom management. So, we

have the classroom rules, no cell phone in class and then the consequence. What else do I do to reinforce discipline in class? Let's say that I see, going back to the cellphone issue, let's say that I see a student using her cellphone. I identify the student right the way, I write on the board 'remember no cellphones in the class' and then, all the students will see what I'm writing on the board and they will understand it. Let's say that it's an issue that is way over my head. Well, the good thing is that the teacher I co-teach with is very strict when it comes to those things, so, she has that under control. Let me move on to when I was teaching in Jamaica, the adults are really different from the students here, they know they have an obligation to learn it's like you don't have to force them or anything.

What excites you the most about your work and the contribution you can make?

Teaching them English, so I impart my language to them and also my culture. Teaching them about Jamaica, so they know that not only black people live in Jamaica. Of course they knew about Bob Marley and other artists, they know about Usain Bolt. So, imparting my cultural knowledge to them and also imparting my language to them and also how to behave properly in class. It's not about screaming, they need to raise their hands, not all the time they do this but we have to reinforce it until they get used to it. The discipline is a challenge still, it means, it can be improved. I find that the most challenging part. Students need to learn that they need to respect teachers when they're teaching and respect I mean the attitude they have. They can't be on their cellphones all the time, they cannot be working on math when it's English time, they need to raise their hands when they need to do something. They can't be just shouting. So, those are the challenges that I've been faced with but is not anything that I can't overcome with guiding them each day I sure they can be better.

7. Data analysis

*"This learning how to teach is mediated by experience and socialization not only in terms of effectiveness but in terms of the formative process of socially situated individuals"*²⁸

The cases presented below offer different perspectives about public education. The participants, as mentioned before, are three first year native assistant teachers coming from English speaking countries who work in the same public school, and a Colombian teacher with seven-year experience in private high schools teaching ESOL currently working overseas.

²⁸ K. E. Johnson, "The Sociocultural Turn and Its Challenges for Second Language Teacher Education", *TESOL Quarterly*, vol. 40, pp.235-257, 2006, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.2307/40264518/abstract> (accessed 5 March 2014)

The present research is not intended to criticize negatively the way public education is being carried on according to the participants' perspectives. Instead, we want to go beyond the generalized perception of preparing students to achieve certain results in national tests such as SABER and SABER pro and to get the proposed standards for accountability matters. All the same, the socio-cultural and economic national gap among the social strata eclipse most attempts to create a sense of equity at school such as reinforcing ESOL learning through the bilingualism program that brought the native speakers to assist English teachers. Nevertheless, most measures are not equally reflected on most public educational institutions. Furthermore, there is not serious research in applied linguistics in Colombia concerning foreign language learning styles, learning strategies, cognition, pragmatics and so on.²⁹

The voices of these teachers present a close perspective about the daily challenges and achievements teachers become aware about and how they take action. In the case of the co-teachers, they are engaged in an intended cultural exchange process. On the other hand, we have a contrasting perspective, which is that of private schools, through the second participant's interview. The following section, presents the analysis of the interviews of the four participants chosen to contribute with the development of this research.

First interviewee experiences

To continue with the data analysis of the participants we will proceed case by case selecting the most important questions targeting our research problem and objectives in order to find

²⁹ S. Torres-Martínez, "Cultural understanding in foreign language teaching in Colombia: Reflections from the Expanding Circle", *Unpublished manuscript DOI*, No,10.13140/RG.2.1.2665.1368, 2016, p.8, <http://bibliotecadigital.udea.edu.co/handle/10495/3552> (accessed 6 May 2016)

an answer to our research question. In this way, we start checking her answer to the question, ***‘how did you feel about working here (at the school)?’***

“I felt here surprised because in my high-school, I went to a catholic high-school, and in terms of discipline, we were very disciplined, there were students giving trouble but we were disciplined. We would’ve never dream of throwing paper in front of the teachers. We would’ve never dream of shouting to somebody else in front of the teacher but here is normal, students coming impolite, they don’t even say good morning, they just walk to their seat, check out their cellphone, have their earphones in, it’s very different, very different.”

In terms of her view of students’ attitudes towards the teacher during high school, respect and responsibility were part of the daily routine. For this reason, she seems to have set herself very high expectations about the learners’ attitudes towards teachers and their role in classroom management. As a matter of fact, this is a very common scenario for the teacher to daily deal with in these mainstream classrooms at this kind of institutions. In this point, we can identify her understanding about both of the cultures. On the one hand, we have the kind of schools she has in mind according to her background, where students are naturally polite, respectful and very receptive, which reflects a strong social structure. On the other hand, we have the classroom depicted above by her, where students are emotionally charged and each class represents a challenge for the teacher to struggle bridging communication.

To further this scenario, it is necessary to understand her perception of students’ reluctant behavior from one of her answers to the question, ***‘how do you handle disciplinary issues within the classroom?’***

“I make a mean face, no, but students know what’s wrong and what’s right. I speak with body language so, if somebody’s on the cell phone and I told them slide or put your cellphone away and if there’re students on their cellphones, I will stop and I will stand up there and I’ll look at them until lean.”

So, it is possible to conclude: first, students were expected to have already developed the skills of effectively relating to other people. Second, she focused on trying to get the situation under control. In turn, speaking about the reasons for disciplinary issues, she refers to a “block” in the path to a meaningful and experimental English learning. Indeed, not being able to have a significant impact on this side of the students’ personality represents a very hard challenge for her. She argues:

“The hardest part that I’ve had of the teaching English as a second language to high school students right now is that a lot of them don’t understand the need for learning a second language. They don’t have the motivation to learn and because of that there’s a block hard to get through.”

On a similar issue, groups with a heterogeneous language level also represent an issue for the her as for most English teachers. Then, there are not only the struggles of dealing with students’ behavior but with the frustration of having an unachievable initial plan. She expressed:

So, no matter what I try to do, games or breaking down the structure of the grammar etcetera, showing them that English is very important, there’s always that block. So, maybe there may be an improvement in terms of maybe they may say things, basic phrases, ‘Hi, How are you?’, but there is no real understanding of English because we’ve been here for about three months and every day I start my classes with, “hello, how are you?”, if it’s on Monday, “how was your weekend, what did you do?” basic, basic, basic, and I usually have an eleventh grade on Mondays and last week Monday I came into the class and I walked around to the students ‘hi, how are you?’ students don’t even know what how are you means and a student, to their friend would say: ‘say “fine, fine say fine thank you”’ and they all repeat, ‘fine thank you’ but they don’t really understand why they’re saying fine thank you, they just repeat what their friends told them to say, and that’s very basic.

Despite the demanding context, this experience also represents professional growth for her. She is aware about the importance for teachers to read their students to tailor their lessons and that their personality is directly related to the ways in which they learned. To the

question, *in what ways have these challenges motivated professional and personal change?* She answers,

I see it as a challenge because it makes me want to try harder, to find different activities because when I see somebody in my class that acts laid back, it makes me feel like I want to know more about them, so I can plan an activity that will suit their personality that will make them participate.

Nevertheless, she recognizes other factors that affect ESOL teaching and learning in this specific scenario. Many students' knowledge background is weak and they are lagged behind. Not having developed learning strategies whatsoever, these students are at risk of dropping out. From her perspective, only a few of them are willing to engage into the class. Also, two periods of 45 to 50 minutes per week for grades 10 and 11 is very limited time viz. for students whose autonomy has not been challenged. She was asked, '*how confident are you as a language teacher?*' and she said,

"... sometimes you have to improvise because things that you've planned never work out the way you planned it. There are ten students in the class, each student has to do this, but then you come to class and they're not at the same level. You are going to have to improvise, you are going to have to do those students to do something else while the others are going to do the activity. It's very hard, and then the time... time is... time is crazy."

So, she was asked, '*how do you decide what to teach?*', she recalls a former experience in higher education, she states:

"...for example, I taught with university students before, they want to learn, they are serious. So, with those kinds of students you can do things like debates, you can talk about the government you can talk about religion, serious things because they will actually learn the vocabulary and they will participate but with high school students that really don't want to learn and there are at different levels... you have to know what to do, so, lots of times I try to get my students up on their feet because I want them to move, etcetera but it's very hard, it's very hard."

In this part we can observe another challenge to her. It would be how to convey her experience leading college students to reflect about sociocultural and economic aspects into an also meaningful and reflective experience for high schoolers. However, students' lack of motivation and mixed language level groups, have become an obstacle. To go deep into her idea about social justice, in the last part of the interview, she was openly asked about her insights on an ESOL teaching approach from a sociocultural-reflection perspective. She says:

“You can help students to know how they feel and what they think because if you don't teach children to think for themselves and just say ‘OK this is what you think, this is what you do’. Then, as they get older, they won't know what they think and they won't know how to respond. It's just going to be a bunch of robots, just following what somebody else told them. And it's very good because a part of being an adult is to know how to make decisions and decisions means that you weigh the options that are there. So, if you are in high school and you're growing up you know it's not automatic for you to know how to make decisions but that's basically what happens in high-school.”

Here, these words on making decisions mean a path and an objective to help students to reflect on the options that the context purports in terms of role models, behavior, and ideas beyond the academic setting to enter their personal lives. As a matter of fact, this valuable reflection she makes, contrasts with the way in which she has been depicting her practice and illustrates the challenges for teachers in a disadvantaged school.

To conclude, the interviewee implies that the teacher is inclined towards a humanistic perspective of teaching and of interaction. She believes in the importance of establishing a connection with students as a priority rather than focusing on academic achievement. In this order of ideas, when I asked her, about the contribution she could make, she answered:

“I want to leave the students with a good feeling, with a connection, that years from now when they've finished school they'll remember that in two thousand and fifteen

four people came from different countries and talked in English for a while, they won't remember what we taught them but they'll remember the connection, they'll remember that we came and they'll remember it with good feelings and they can tell their friends "oh with my... you know there were some people that came a couple years ago it was a good experience"

However, despite the experience she has gained, she assesses students' language learning process improvement only considering their ability to communicate, she states,

"I come into the class and I walk around the students "hi, how are you?" students don't even know what how are you means and a student, to their friend would say: say "fine, fine say fine thank you" and they all repeat fine thank you but they don't really understand why they're saying fine thank you, they just, just repeat what their friends told them to say, and that's very basic but there is no real understanding of English"

Reading the statements of this participant we can clearly see that there is not an objective articulation between what she wants to leave to her students, announcing a more humanistic approach, and her classroom teaching practices. However, she is focused on developing linguistic skills in students highlighting the fact that only those capable to communicate in L2 are the ones showing improvement. It results a contradiction to evoke such an argument when the teacher is apparently more up to a humanistic approach.

Second interviewee experiences

Cristian has an experience of seven years teaching in private high schools in Colombia. As a participant in this research, his contribution enriches the view of the teaching and learning ESOL scenario in these institutions. He studied at a Colombian private high school and the foreign language he learned was English. His teachers' approach to teaching was the grammar-translation method. According to his experience, this approach besides the

strictness of the teacher, led him to feel flustered and stymied, so, he used to get bad results.

Concerning to the question, '**how easy/difficult did you find language study?**', He states,

"...At the time, my English teacher was a 100% focused on grammar structures. He taught the foreign language like mathematics. Everything was about structures, verb plus subject plus complement, just to mention a simple example. Everything was based on grammar-translations, structures, really long lists of vocabulary to learn, verbs etc. But the main problem was that you couldn't try to speak or construct phrases of your own out of this work line imposed by the teacher. Then, everything was more complicated since I was always thinking in structures before daring to say something in English. Trying to follow all these grammar structures, everything became chaos to me..."

In another learning experience due to the bad results at high school, he studied English at an institute. Actually, it was an institution pioneering the use of the communicative approach. From this experience he starts building his later approach to ESOL teaching,

"...Speaking exercises based on repetitions to indirectly learn vocabulary or common expressions in English gave me the confidence and the motivation to continue to learn. As a teacher, I understand, it exists such structures or tenses in a language and students need to know them. They are equally important to learn a FL but that's just a part of the learning and teaching process. Years later as a teacher, I found myself using the communicative approach methodology and also combining some good elements of the Meyer's experience. I firmly believe they work great in a high school classroom these days as part of my teaching strategy..."

To the question, '**what have you found to be unexpected and/or surprising about teaching ESOL so far?**' He answered,

Surprising? Students with a very good communicative English level gained through internet sources or T.V series. Unexpected, how far you can go in many fields of life or work through learning or teaching a language.

His experience as a teacher happens in a scenario with more stable socioeconomic circumstances where the educational community expects the school to have an academic-complementary role. As a matter of fact, in private schools a supportive home environment is a requirement and to attend periodic meetings and follow-up processes is a must. So,

schools establish communication channels among administrators, teachers, students, parents and counselors. And according to the school status, they count on professional advisers such as social workers, psychologists and guidance counselors. When he was asked, ‘*how do you handle disciplinary issues within the classroom?*’, he reflects,

“I always worked in private Institutions. Discipline matters are less complicated than in public schools for sure. In my case I immediately stop these situations occurring by warning the student first. If the situation continues with the same student or another one, then I ask him or her to leave the class on the spot. One action is a good example for the rest. This conveys to respect from both sides without being disrespectful or intransigent. However, it is important to have a talk with the troubling student after the incident finishes and encourage him/her to work, end of the story. But as I said, this in private institutions. Somehow these students have less family background situations, issues or less difficult social environment interfering within their daily lives, so teachers, can handle better their behavior in class...”

Also, in general terms, private school students live in neighborhoods of social strata higher than the ones in which most public schools’ students do, which provides a scenario alienated from certain parts of the reality of our country as that of public schools ‘socioeconomic conditions. Nevertheless, the relationship between school dropouts and the high rate of youth violence and crime are not only an issue affecting certain part of the social pyramid, it actually involves everyone. Some data reveal that an average of 70 underage have been arrested per day in the period between 2011 and 2015.³⁰ Furthermore, there is not a systematic and long term governmental educational plan involving the whole community viz. getting the families assisting children at risk of dropout, consuming drugs or potentially joining criminal bands.

³⁰ El tiempo., “¿Qué está pasando con los jóvenes, que hacen parte del 9,8% de delitos cometidos en el país?”, *EDITORIAL La delincuencia crece*, 13, abril, 2015 retrieved from <http://www.eltiempo.com/opinion/editorial/la-delincuencia-crece-editorial-el-tiempo/15559356>

Third interviewee experiences

Mathew is also a co-teacher. He is from the United States and has been teaching at the high-school during the past 14 months. He is 31 years old. He studied political sciences in the period between 2002 and 2006. He is an advanced-beginner Spanish learner, having studied the language at college for 1 year and now immersed in a Spanish speaking culture. He has been teaching ESOL during over three years as he last job before coming to Colombia took place at a high-school in Thailand located in a low- income area. He was asked about his experience working at disadvantaged schools, and answered,

“I have worked in disadvantaged schools. Both in Thailand and Colombia. I enjoyed working in these types of school because everyone likes me and the expectations are very low. The students are generally not motivated and are more interested in their cell phones.”

In Mathew’s case, we can see that he is aware about students’ expectations regarding English learning and it actually motivates him. All the same, his knowledge of pedagogy is narrowed to a TESOL certification training program he took before going to Thailand. Also, to teach abroad was more an incidental matter than anything. He talks about the way he gets to teaching ESOL,

“My friend recommended teaching ESL overseas in Thailand. I didn’t like my old job working in art framing. So I quit my job, got my TESOL certificate, and started teaching in Thailand. Teaching was a challenge at first but I always did well talking in groups”

In terms of his approach to teaching, he is more prone to follow the book and the context of knowledge representation it sets. He, however, considers that it is important to include some history facts and pop culture tendencies. He was asked, ‘*how do you decide what to teach?*’ and he stated,

“In Colombia I have taught mostly basic ESL. I usually follow the material given to me by the school. I follow the basic TESOL training I was taught. I try to teach stuff that is interesting to me. Stuff related to history or pop culture”

Despite the fact that he is more into topics of his personal interest using them as a vehicle to teach, he is very judgmental about the pertinence of English textbooks' contents in terms of roles and genders. He commented about the English textbook 'English please'³¹ he was given as a source of ideas for co-teaching in Colombia, answering to the question, ***‘Some authors consider language teaching as a propitious moment to address elements related to the structural barriers to equity that are prevalent in our educational settings. What do you think of this approach to language teaching?’***

“My criticism of a social turn in education, as it is being taught in Colombia, is that I find it bigoted against boys and men. Recently my school received our English education text books English Please. On page 90 of English Please grade 11 book you see many images of men and women in the household and workplace. The chapter is about careers and professions and is supposed to give the students an opportunity to think about their future. Image 4 on page 90 shows a strong black man. What is his job? A nurse of course, a traditional female job. The other images on the page show men doing traditional female work of cleaning the house and cooking for the family. The page tries to reverse traditional gender roles to make women men and men women. No mention of women being a traditional housewife which many of our students are going to become. The book also shows biased by showing women in leadership roles and in highly advanced careers while the men are seen as dreamers, artist and athletes...”

This teacher expresses a conflicted personal opinion about matters of gender from his own perception related to the issue. He presents a very critical point of view towards TESOL, related to English textbooks and the sociocultural pertinence of its contents in Colombian

³¹ “English, please!” is a series of textbooks aiming to support the English learning process in students of grades 9°, 10° y 11°. Currently, it is a resource only available online although a printed version was given to the co-teachers by the Colombian Ministry of Education.

teaching contexts. Concerning the same question, he reflects in parallel on US educational system affirming,

“I think too much western education is about reform, revolution, social progress and a bunch of other left wing commie stuff. When I taught in the East (Thailand), there was never talk of reform, change, revolution etc.”

In his answer above, he contrasts the current western approach to education, which is that of political correctness. After his experience teaching overseas he finds out that public education is not intimately related to aspects that are usually banners of these countries such as a prevailing search for social justice and a constant fight for equity.

This participant, actually does not see a need to address social related issues in his co-teaching despite his critical position to TESOL textbook contents but he highlights the fact that there is actually room for critical reflection in the English class. English teaching is strongly related to the western thought and that in turn, it is framed by political correctness.

In fact, he relates a social turn in ESOL teaching to a specific material that should be provided by the government although he remains skeptical about the way this kind of subjects could be approached. He adds in the same answer,

“I think those topics are more for a current events course than a language course. For me personally, I think the topic would be more interesting, but I doubt the average student would care, also I would be skeptical of the political slant of the material. But any new ideas in ESL education are good.”

Forth interviewee experiences

As a teenager she went to a private institution where she could take extra classes, it was an all-girls preparatory. She took Spanish and has mixed feelings about the learning process she faced. The language approach of her teachers was vocabulary-based, relying on

memorization and putting aside conversation. After her ninth grade, she attended public school and her experience there was quite different, her learning process took a sharp turn in terms of her rapport with the teacher. She reflects about the effects of this approach attributing her speaking flaws in Spanish to the lack of interaction activities. She recognizes the importance that her teachers had for her in her path learning Spanish relating her performance and attitude to her rapport with those teachers. Talking about her experience learning Spanish she says,

“I was exposed to Spanish at the tender age of six years old Because I went to a private school. I did extracurricular activities and I was able to take Spanish classes. I loved it. I excelled. I loved my teacher. I think he was a great teacher but he only focused on vocabulary not really conversation. So he would, OK, what's that? ventana. What's that?. puerta. But in terms of doing conversation that was difficult, well, he didn't do that so I guess that's the reason I'm having difficulty having conversation while living in Colombia. In Prep school, when I entered to the private school, Spanish was very easy because I think I had a great teacher and he did the class fun but when I went to high school after grade nine then the teacher I had was... I didn't like my teacher so it went downhill from there. So, when I was supposed to continue improving in Spanish it just took a downfall so I lost interest in it and then I went to the university I was supposed to do another language. I did Spanish but I didn't have the interest anymore.”

Besides Spanish she took Japanese classes after university as she wanted to travel there. In her answer she assesses her experience based on the methodologies her teacher followed. Actually, her experience shows the importance, on the teacher's' side of addressing the language class towards bridging communication with the students. Here, it is equally important to understand the teacher as a possible provider of a goal for his students. That is to say, to set a purpose for what they learn and developing a class in which students can use that language in real situations. Of course, learning vocabulary is a point to consider while learning L2 and it is equally a valuable activity during the learning process but the goal of teaching must be getting students to communicate their ideas, feelings, and needs and so

on. She was also asked about her experience learning other languages different than Spanish and she expanded on her view,

“Then, after university, two years later I took Japanese and that was a bit challenging but I loved it, and what I would do is I would listen to like dramas in Japanese because I really want to go to Japan. So, what I was doing was taking extra classes there. Comparing Spanish to Japanese classes I found that my teachers were different and within Japanese classes they would use everyday usage in class and make it applicable to everyday, so everyday instruction. So with Spanish, when I was doing it at prep school, it was just vocabulary, no conversational. When I was doing Japanese then we had conversation classes.”

Reflecting on her experience as a learner, she analyzes what worked better for her and discusses about the importance of a monolingual classroom in order to become a fluent speaker. Her experiences as a learner during prep provide bases for her notion of foreign language teaching or instruction as she says below. So, she sets the main goal of learning a new language is communication, paying special attention to interaction and language use. She discusses foreign language learning when asked about the differences between Spanish and English learning as a native speaker,

“The difference is how they instructed us in those two different languages. I would strongly believe that when you are teaching a language you have to speak that language that you are teaching. Let's say that you are teaching Spanish, the class must be in Spanish, right?, and through all my years it wasn't in Spanish, it was mainly in English, the Spanish class was mainly in English and when they wanted to talk about like the vocabulary, it would be in Spanish. So, switching from English to Spanish English to Spanish it confused me and I don't think I grasped the language effectively, whilst English was totally different I was learning English they were teaching in English. So, that was easy to grasp. So, I regularly routined English because that was the language they used to teach me”.

Consequently, she answers to the question, **how do you decide what to teach?** She focuses on language-use following the curriculum presented by the school.

It depends on the curriculum of the school, so what I do is. I get the curriculum from the school so let's say this term they are focusing on maybe grammar or tenses or daily routines or whatever I follow whatever the plan is and then I would make my lesson plan based on that. I just cannot decide my own thing.

When she was asked about what she thinks of an approach to language teaching where discussions are held about culture and identity and justice and politics. She agreed about its importance in the identity process of a teenager and that the role of education itself should lead students to reflect on those topics. In fact, she brings an example of a social phenomenon happening in their country consisting of people with academic achievements leaving the country and she expresses her concerns about the political future of her country. Indeed, in the fragment below she relates education, sociopolitical awareness and social change. Also she highlights the importance of reflecting on one's own culture from the view of understanding a different one,

“I think that it's important too because the truth is that you need to build the awareness. The students need to know what is going on within the wider society, even though, we are teaching maybe Spanish or maybe English they need to know what is going on, it is not like after they graduate they won't be blind to what is going on. They need to know how to function and what is happening in our world. In Jamaica there is something going on, the highly intelligent people are leaving the country, and so like the doctors the lawyers everyone is just leaving the country and then, who are you leaving to run the country? The least educated ones are left behind, but the students need to know what is happening on in the wider world as I was saying and teaching them about it, would prepare them for the work force too. And also I think teaching them about different cultures is important because everybody thinks his is the best, what is not so. They need to know what are the positives and that if moving there they would need to know why it is the best and why it is not the best, right? So, letting them know about this will let them make decisions more effectively. I think it's not about just saying, 'present continuous today, so fill in the blanks', they need to be taught these things, I mean, other factors happening around the world”

This case is important because it clearly illustrates how the teaching of a foreign language needs to be contextually grounded. She links the social political scenario to the

development of an identity sense of belonging while in a learning process. However, in her teaching practices there is a contradiction. She teaches by the book aiming to achieve the proposed standard. As a consequence, it could be argued that her teaching practices leave little room for discussions about current social issues, global news, topics of interest and the like.

8. Conclusions

The equality or inequality either of economic resources or administrative management in the context of public and private education, have important consequences in the teaching process. As much as teachers, students also need adequate elements, resources and awareness of community belonging encouraged through language education from a social perspective about L1 and the target language.

Bilingualism is introduced and assumed as a synonym of personal success, associated to English for academic purposes programs in which a native-like proficient learner is the main objective according to Torres-Martinez³². Osborn on his side states, thus, teaching language by presenting it devoid of the social constellations that birthed it, including differential power relationships, is both inaccurate and a reflection of the culture of ‘positivism’ within our own domain. It seems that a social justice approach to language teaching entails developing a personal and a professional identity in which the teacher tries to get his critical ideas about education, society and politics reflected on a part of the local

³² S. Torres-Martínez, “Cultural understanding in foreign language teaching in Colombia: Reflections from the Expanding Circle”, *Unpublished manuscript: DOI, 2016* 10.13140/RG.2.1.2665.1368, 2016, http://tesis.udel.edu.co/dspace/bitstream/10495/3552/1/TorresMart%C3%ADnezS_2016_CulturalUnderstandingForeign.pdf, (accessed 15 May 2016)

educational community. Nevertheless, it is also part of a system politically self-regulated and embedded in our language itself.

This research also concludes that foreign language teaching practice, although filtered by teachers' frames of reference, ideas and beliefs about critical reflection on social issues, responds to the sociocultural and political scenario conditions. In the case of the co-teachers that signed up for teaching in Colombia, the objective of the program is "to raise students' English levels and proficiency" as it reads on Greenheart website³³, one the program involved in the recruitment process. So, the program gets articulated to one of the current linguistic policies, the national program of bilingualism 2004 – 2016 emerging as a response to the global demands for the labor force as they claim on the Ministry of Education website.³⁴

Finally, we consider that it is important to observe that there are several factors to take into account when reflecting on public education dynamics. These are not only related to academic knowledge and the roles of parents and school staff, but also to the sociocultural and political scenarios. As a matter of fact, teachers must articulate their knowledge to a system, to a communities' conditions and to the governmental purpose of public education. Nevertheless, provided that there is a high percentage of the Colombian society perceiving the political structure of the country as corrupt, an issue comes up. It is difficult for teachers as much as for student to trust that the educational system is willing to lead not only public schools' students but also those in higher education to reflect on the political and economic issues that structure the educational system of our society.

³³ <http://greenhearttravel.org/program/adult/teach/teach-in-colombia#overview>

³⁴ A. González, "Bilingüismo en Colombia perspectivas locales y globales", 2008, <http://www.mineducacion.gov.co/observatorio/1722/article-170864.html> (accessed 25 November 2015)

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10. Annexes

ANNEX 1. INTERVIEW

First part: childhood

Tell me about your childhood

1. When and where were you born?
2. Where did you grow up? / Why aren't you there now?
3. Tell me about your parents or your family background
4. What did your parents do for a living?
5. How many children were in the family, and where were you in the line-up?

6. What were your duties around the house as a child? What were the other children's duties? How did duties break down by gender?

7. What were your family's economic circumstances? Do you remember any times when money was tight? Do you remember having to do without things you wanted or needed?

Second part: the learner

Tell me about your experience as a language learner.

8. What was your first approach to a FL.?

9. How easy/difficult did you find language study?

10. What challenges did you face?

11. How is that language different from your native language?

12. What languages have you studied other than English? How long did you study?

13. Describe your proficiency in each language.

Third part: the teacher and the challenges

Tell me about your experience teaching English as a second language.

14. How did you arrive at teaching ESOL? How did you start out as a teacher? What brought you here?

15. How long have you been teaching?

16. How confident are you as a teacher of ELLs?

17. How do you decide what to teach in your classes?

18. How do you decide how to teach it?

19. Do you use a curriculum guide, a set of standards or a particular text? Why?

20. How do you handle students' language errors?

21. How do you handle disciplinary issues within the classroom?

22. What have you found to be unexpected and/or surprising about teaching ESOL so far?
23. Have you worked in disadvantaged schools? How did you feel about working there?
24. What are you most passionate about teaching? What excites you the most about your work and the contribution you can make?
25. Describe any challenges you have faced in your path as a teacher. In what ways have these challenges motivated professional and personal change?
26. What do you think of English as a foreign language being part of the Colombian official curriculum?
27. What do you think about bringing into the classroom actual cases portraying sensitive political worldwide issues like migration? and what do you think of this kind of approach in language teaching?

ANNEX 2. CLASSROOM OBSERVATION FORM

Instructor: _____ Course _____

Peer/Observer: _____ Date and Time _____

Use criteria that apply to format of course observed.

Review Section	Description/Comments
1. SUBJECT MATTER CONTENT (shows good command and knowledge of subject matter;	

demonstrates breadth and depth of mastery)	
<p>2. ORGANIZATION</p> <p>(organizes subject matter; evidences preparation; is thorough; states clear objectives; emphasizes and summarizes main points, meets class at scheduled time, regularly monitors on-line course)</p>	
<p>3. RAPPORT</p> <p>(holds interest of students; is respectful, fair, and impartial; provides feedback, encourages participation; interacts with students, shows enthusiasm)</p>	
<p>4. TEACHING METHODS</p> <p>(uses relevant teaching methods, aids, materials, techniques, and technology; includes variety, balance, imagination, group involvement; uses examples that are simple, clear, precise, and appropriate; stays focused on and meets stated objectives)</p>	
<p>5. PRESENTATION</p> <p>(establishes online course or classroom environment conducive to learning; maintains eye contact; uses a clear voice, strong projection, proper enunciation, and standard English)</p>	

6. MANAGEMENT (uses time wisely; attends to course interaction; demonstrates leadership ability; maintains discipline and control; maintains effective e-platform management)	
7. SENSITIVITY (exhibits sensitivity to students' personal culture, gender differences and disabilities, responds appropriately in a non-threatening, pro-active learning environment)	
8. ASSISTANCE TO STUDENTS (assists students with academic problems)	
9. PERSONAL (evidences self-confidence; maintains professional comportment and appearance)	
10. PHYSICAL ASPECTS OF CLASSROOM (optional) (state location and physical attributes of classroom, number of students in attendance, layout of room, distractions if any; list any observations of how physical aspects affected content delivery)	

Strengths observed:

Suggestions for improvement:

Overall impression of teaching: