

The Pedagogical Practicum Journey Towards Becoming an English Language Teacher

La travesía de la práctica pedagógica para llegar a ser
un profesor de inglés

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This article discusses English language pre-service teachers' pedagogical practicum experiences. We compiled, from their teacher journals and group talks, the lived teaching experiences of a group of 34 pre-service teachers who were majoring in English language education at a private university in Bogotá, Colombia. The analysis of their stories makes us realize that their first practicum experiences are full of feelings and emotions, and that their first teaching practices are based on their mentor teachers' pieces of advice. These first experiences, in turn, develop the foundation upon which they build themselves as English language teachers.

Key words: English language education, emotions, feelings, pedagogical practicum, pre-service teachers.

Este artículo versa sobre las experiencias en práctica pedagógica de los profesores de inglés en formación. Recogimos, desde sus diarios y charlas de grupo, las experiencias de enseñanza vividas por un grupo de 34 profesores en formación, quienes estudiaban una carrera profesional de licenciatura en la enseñanza del inglés en una universidad privada de Bogotá, Colombia. Con estos escritos, nos aventuramos a construir una sola historia que reuniera todas sus experiencias. Las historias de los participantes evidencian que sus primeras experiencias están llenas de sentimientos y emociones y que sus primeras prácticas de enseñanza siguen los consejos de sus profesores tutores. Estas primeras experiencias además les ayudan a construir lo que llegan a ser como profesores de inglés.

Palabras clave: enseñanza del inglés, emociones, práctica pedagógica, profesores en formación, sentimientos.

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Introduction

This article contains reflections on the pedagogical practicum experiences of a group of pre-service teachers who are majoring in English language teaching (ELT). In a previous article (Lucero, 2015), we talked about how English language teachers lived the experience of mentoring pre-service teachers in their pedagogical practicum over five years. Standpoints, definitions, and knowledge of those teachers mediate that mentoring. In this current article of reflection, we want to focus on the pre-service teachers' first experiences of teaching English during their pedagogical practicum. These pre-service teachers were senior students of a BA in foreign languages program at a private university in Bogota, Colombia, and were undergoing their pedagogical practicum during 2015 and 2016.

In BA programs of ELT, a pedagogical practicum is generally about *knowing*, *doing*, and *relating* to the teaching context (De Tezanos, 2007; Kemmis et al., 2014; Lucero, 2015; Malderez & Wedell, 2007; Zuluaga-Garcés, 1999). The *knowing* applies to the convergence of different types of knowledge about ELT that teachers must hold, such as disciplinary, professional, pedagogical, content, and experiential, among others (for more elaboration on this knowledge base, see Cárdenas & Suárez-Osorio, 2009; Castañeda-Londoño,¹ in press; Clarke & Pittaway, 2014; Fandiño-Parra, 2013; Goodyear, 1991; Richards, 2011). *Doing* in a pedagogical practicum applies to the environments and the support that mentor teachers and educational institutions offer to guide pre-service teachers along their path to becoming new professionals (Díaz-Quero, 2006; Goyes-Morán, 2015). In doing so, mentor teachers should co-construct knowledge with pre-service teachers and develop self-regulation and critical reflection in them (De Tezanos, 2007; Malderez

& Wedell, 2007; Moreno, 2015). *Relating* in pedagogical practicum accounts for, "creating and maintaining a functional relationship" (Lucero, 2015, p. 151) with pre-service teachers and the practicum context by communicating and being with them in the moment-to-moment of the practicum (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005; Silva, 2015). Relating potentiates pre-service teachers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes about ELT.

Colombian scholars have steadily talked about pedagogical practicum experiences basically by concentrating on two main premises. The first is that pedagogical practicum must have foundations in research actions (De Tezanos, 2007; Fandiño-Parra, 2013; Lucero, 2015; Muñoz-Barriga, 2015; Páez-Martínez, 2015). This focus is based on the idea that there is a reciprocal relationship between teaching practices and observing, analyzing, and describing why and how they happen in context. The reciprocity between practicum and research has effects on students' learning about how to teach. Research is thought of as contributing to improving teaching practices and vice versa. The second premise, which intrinsically becomes part of any research process, refers to how pedagogical practicum must be accompanied by teaching practices and guidelines about what and how to teach from informed observations and analyses (Fandiño-Parra & Bermúdez-Jiménez, 2015; Samacá-Bohorquez, 2012). In this premise, research on pedagogical practicum may inform what aspects to concentrate on.

In this order of ideas, a pedagogical practicum thus contains a repertoire of knowledge as well as literature about how to teach a second language. With respect to this, Castañeda-Peña, Rodríguez-Uribe, Salazar-Sierra, and Chala-Bejarano (2016) argue that (mentor) teachers need to foster the creation of teaching curricula and methodologies in their pre-service teachers and not simply expecting that so-called experts do it for them. In order to do so, mentor teachers must know their students and how they feel about, perform in, and perceive teaching practices within the context of the

¹ Castañeda-Londoño offers a discussion on in-service teachers' ecology of knowledges, how theory has likely conceived their knowledge in ELT practices and how in-service teachers may have adopted those theoretical premises as the knowledge to have for effective teaching. The discussion tackles a politicized view of teacher knowledge that needs to be revisited from the periphery and in teacher education.

pedagogical practicum. This knowledge helps mentor teachers find and guide pre-service teachers' interests and strengths in teaching practices.

Taking this into consideration, we see that a pedagogical practicum has three main components: mentor teachers, pre-service teachers, and the context in which the pedagogical practicum takes place. The abovementioned authors have discussed the relationship between mentor teachers and pedagogical practicum in context (although, rightly so, the conversation is ongoing as there is always more to be said). However, little has been implied about the relationship between pre-service teachers and their pedagogical practicum context. In this current article of reflection, we would like to talk specifically about pedagogical practicums in ELT contexts and the important relationship this context has with pre-service teachers in it. We focus on the feelings, emotions, and learnings that pre-service teachers experience during their first teaching experiences. By exploring this side of the coin, we also want to talk about how pre-service teachers receive mentor teachers' directions, and how pre-service teachers envision themselves as English language teachers during a pedagogical practicum.

In order to do so, we collected information, both written and oral, from 34 pre-service teachers who did their pedagogical practicum in English during 2015 and 2016. These participants wrote journals during these two years, writing entries of around 70 words for every two lessons taught.² The entries were narrations of their lived teaching experiences, which included teaching at different schools, and being mentored by different teachers of the abovementioned BA program. The schools where they did their pedagogical practicums were mostly public schools with elementary and secondary students. In 2016, group talks of about 12 pre-service teachers were held each semester, one at midpoint, and the other at the culmination of the semester. These talks were about their most relevant lived teaching experiences narrated

in the journals. We used note-taking to document these talks. At the end of their pedagogical practicum, we collected their journals and our notes to find the pre-service teachers' common experiences and the manner in which they had lived them.

With these insights, we ventured to construct one piece of text that compiled all of the participants' experiences. As we were writing the story, we constantly shared it with the pre-service teachers so that they could suggest modifications.³ We then split the final version of the text into several parts so that we were able to talk about pre-service teachers' thoughts and feelings on how they experienced their pedagogical practicums.

In the following pages, we are going to present this whole text, part by part in a sequential way. Each part is accompanied with a discussion about the English language pre-service teachers' lived experiences during their pedagogical practicum. Both the whole text and the discussion unveil the feelings, emotions, and learnings that pre-service teachers experience during their first teaching experiences. In addition, the whole text and the discussion show how pre-service teachers envision themselves as English language teachers during pedagogical practicums. We hope that this proposed organization helps the readers of this article of reflection discern how pre-service teachers may relate to this academic space.

Pre-service Teachers' Baggage on Their First Day of Practicum

Part 1: The time has come! The first bell to get to my practicum

I was already awakened when the alarm clock rang. The chilled wind seemed to slowly slide inside my bedroom as if my angst was not enough to have my body already paralyzed. But that was not what really worried me. I was anxiously packing my bag with some markers, my eraser, pencils, rules, and my class material, everything for a just-in-case situation. "Teachers must be prepared

² These pre-service teachers taught 10-12 lessons every semester.

³ We progressively shared five drafts of the story with them. Although not all of them suggested modifications every time a draft was shared, all 34 participants contributed to it at least once.

for everything”—I remembered my mentor teacher once told me that—meanwhile my bag was getting heavier. I wondered if my future routine would be the same every day and whether I would ever find all the answers about how to teach. Anyway, it was my first class as a teacher after all, being frightened was my pilot feeling. Now that I think about it, we pre-service teachers are always thinking about finding the secret for teaching English, and since I did not have an idea of it on my first day of practicum, I was shocked.

When I took the bus to go to the school where I had to teach in my first semester of practicum, I started to think about how to get into the classroom and open my “teachings”. I also thought about my peers and how they would do so. I could catch a seat on the bus, so, that made me feel a little bit more relieved, it is very unusual to get one in my city, “It will be a good day after all”—I said to myself. Looking through the window, I evoke those years of school and university when I was the student, waiting for my teachers’ job. Judgements can be hard—I thought—being on the other side, now as a teacher, is not as easy as it seemed. How many times have we severely judged teachers? I felt scared thinking about it, I was about to become a teacher. I always wanted to change the world through teaching. That was the moment to prove it. I wondered if all the teachers who I had had so far had gone through that, especially the ones who inspired me, I also thought about how they did it. I even considered the ones who had caused negative feelings on me, how could they have gone through this? In a way, did they also prepare me for this?

Having a quite comfortable commute helped me visualize my main fears: not knowing how to manage the kids or what to say during a class, and ignoring the meaning of a word, or its Spanish equivalent, mostly if a student asks me for it. With all the basics packed on my bag, I was expecting to have at least one chance to prove how much I had learned about being an English language teacher.

This first part displays how a pedagogical practicum begins for the majority of English language pre-service teachers. A high level of anxiety is evident, which can cause blank minds and fears of failure during the initial experiences of teaching. Although this can be a common feeling in pre-service teachers when starting their pedagogical practicum (Childs, 2011; Soloway,

Poulin, & Mackenzie, 2011), a question remains: Why do they feel so? This first part correlates with Soloway et al.’s (2011) findings that anxiety can be the result of a feeling of unpreparedness to lead a class, mostly when pre-service teachers do not know what the students in the class are like or what contents they exactly need to teach. That feeling can also be the result of mentor teachers’ insufficient accompaniment in informing about the course and group, planning the lesson, or the possible lack of preparation and knowledge given to them by their teaching program and classes. Childs (2011) suggests that this feeling is part of psychological aspects when an unknown situation is about to be encountered by an individual.

Although these findings are true in our context too, Part 1 complementarily implies that English language pre-service teachers keep in mind their teachers’ anecdotal discourses when about to face their first pedagogical practicum experiences. The participant pre-service teachers seem to remember discourses about ELT; for instance, “keep everything you may need for class at hand”, “know every single word you are going to use in your teaching”, “rehearse how to explain topics”, “teaching is not easy”, and so on. We then wonder what discourses mentor teachers likely say aloud in order to prepare pre-service teachers for their first teaching experiences. Beyond pedagogical practicum syllabi and tasks, mentor teachers’ discourses seem to have remarkable effects on pre-service teachers.

We also learned that, at the beginning of the pedagogical practicum experiences, pre-service teachers did not seem to focus much on discourses about teaching theories or on what they could do with language teaching models or approaches. Apart from mentor teachers’ discourses, they kept in mind the ones about themselves enacting the teaching. First teaching experiences are also portrayed as a matter of “them” as pre-service teachers; thinking about their performance as new English language teachers. They perform from what they have acquired in previous class activities such as

presentations, micro teachings, debates, or discussions. All of these experiences make them become little by little new teachers of English.

High levels of anxiety, mentor teachers' anecdotal discourses, and starting to teach on their own at the exact moment of starting a pedagogical practicum builds within pre-service teachers a desire to demonstrate their readiness to teach. Although it may sound contradictory with the unpreparedness to lead a class mentioned before, the study of Castañeda-Peña et al. (2016) gives evidence that these new teachers want to demonstrate that what they have learned during their major has enriched them enough to see themselves as prepared English language teachers ready to enact their learning. They want to demonstrate this knowledge primarily to their mentor teachers, eventually to the course's students, and even to themselves. It would, hence, be worthy to ask if the appropriate placement of the pedagogical practicum for pre-service teachers is close to the end of their major, after they have taken classes on didactics and teaching theories, as usually happens in Colombian English language teaching programs. Although some theory must construct this foundation (Naylor, Campbell-Evans, & Maloney, 2015), it has been put forth that offering ongoing accompaniment, knowledge construction, and critical reflection from the beginning of the major may result in more profitable practices.

The dilemma seems then to be which path is better to follow: placing the practicum after having been taught how to teach from theory or combining teaching and practicum. If a pedagogical practicum is a process, then we must ask, at what point should pre-service teachers meet the realities of putting into practice teaching during their major? Even more, at what point of their major should pre-service teachers start recognizing and taking on their roles as English language teachers? In Part 1 of the journal entries, we could infer that they were pushed to start teaching, more than feeling ready to teach. How can the curriculum design help decide when a teacher-student should start practicum exercises? If immersion

in a pedagogical practicum occurs in a non-gradual way, pre-service teachers' exposure to teaching may lead to high levels of anxiety, which in turn may affect their performances, motivation, and attitudes. Therefore, the manner in which this immersion occurs may affect pre-service teachers' performances and knowledge when beginning to teach English.

Pre-service Teachers' First Attempts at Classroom Management

Part 2: The classroom is not what I expected!

Finally, the moment of truth began. I was there in the classroom before my students. Once I started, I felt warm and I knew that it was what I wanted to do in my life although my mind went blank during the first minutes of the lesson. The class structure I had on my mind collapsed. I did not remember how to distribute the board or use the material I had for the lesson. All those methods and procedures studied during the major were mixed in my head, I couldn't see anything clearly. I could see expectation in my students' eyes. I resorted to grammar as the solution for performing a good class, so I took some markers of different colors with me; this way on the board, I could write the grammar formulas and highlight important points on them. Again, I was thinking about formulas. When the class finished, I was still nervous. Some of my students smiled at me. My hands were sweating. That sensation of feeling tensed accompanied me until I got back home.

We usually get a lot of theory in the classroom; however, once we are in the practicum, we are concerned about how our explanations can be effective, we want to show good results in teaching English. We also have the practicum forms to fill out and the lesson plans to do. These assignments in teachers' academic lives can be like social media; instead of living your life, you spend time on other matters. Well, sometimes what we write in those assignments is no more than the illusion of what it could be.

We must confess that the idea of having a mentor teacher sometimes helps us to be relieved, because we think that this person will give us some tricks and things that will make our life easier; consequently, this is what we expect, to be effective because of all those "tricks." I realize I had no "tricks" for others. So, I had to create my own.

Another of my main fears came up, and as if I had not been nervous enough, the mentor teacher's instructions were "no grammar", and "no Spanish" in classes, alarming me more.

If I have to be completely honest, I then say that during my first days of teaching, I did not know what I was doing. Being in front of kids thinking about what their questions and behavior would be, having all my doubts and probably feeling more intimidated than them, made me reconsider my ideas about teaching. I do not know if teachers have felt the same way, all those feelings of having your first class and those scary thoughts of thinking what learners may ask and behave, thinking about pronunciation, formulas, and explanations, besides the fact of having no theoretical grounds in your head due to anxiety. But I can say for sure that many of us, pre-service teachers, have felt it and still feel it sometimes.

This second entry displays three standpoints communicated in the writings of various pre-service teachers. The first is about themselves wondering how to organize their classes. Pre-service teachers seem to be indifferent to following ELT methods and approaches in the practicum context. By analyzing their first teaching experiences, we came to know that this part of disciplinary knowledge is not among their prime sources of reference to plan language teaching. Their first thoughts are more directed toward learned manners of presenting the language, which are usually taken from the way previous English language teachers have taught them. These first thoughts come as well from the shared "tricks" to teach English, also taken from previous teachers or peers who have already had the experience of teaching the language. The participant pre-service teachers initially put these first thoughts and "tricks" into practice in a classroom, then prove them to be "effective" when they see evidence of student learning.

The second standpoint is how new teachers seem to identify ELT as a set of grammatical explanations that guarantee effectiveness in language skills (Brown, 1994, 2007; Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Bringing up what Castañeda-Trujillo and Aguirre-Hernández (2018)

explain about this matter, reproduction of grammatical explanations fuels an effect of undeniable effectiveness, although pre-service teachers may see the practice and result of these explanations as immutable. In agreement with these authors, reproduction of grammatical explanations happens because no mechanisms of reflection on how to teach English in context are provided during the pedagogical practicum, the period when pre-service teachers usually start becoming teachers of this language. As Fandiño-Parra (2011) asserts, reflection on teaching practices is indispensable. However, we usually see that, in the rush for providing enough knowledge for pre-service teachers to be well-equipped to face pedagogical practicum, mentor teachers may fall into just imparting instrumentalized teaching techniques and "survival" practices to cope with this academic space.

The third standpoint that we highlight from Part 2 of the story is how proficient pre-service teachers may feel with English language knowledge and use. The English language proficiency level that they believe to have certainly provides them with high or low self-confidence. According to what students reported in their journals, they feel afraid when covering "difficult" topics and questions about English language use, culture, or vocabulary in class. Not being confident about how to explain a topic, partly also because of their own English language proficiency level, puts at risk their credibility as language teachers. This suggests that the higher the pre-service teachers feel their proficiency level is, the more self-confident they feel about language teaching in general. A point of reflection for future study is on how much the idea of being proficient in English language, according to standardized levels, affects the feeling of security in becoming a teacher of the language. This privileges language proficiency over teaching knowledge and experience.

Our perception about this matter is that pre-service teachers come into the practicum classroom with a structural view of the target language (Kumaravadivelu,

2003), in which “understanding is seen as being composed of a knowledge base in the form of rules, concepts and discriminations” (Duffy & Jonassen, 1991, p. 8). In such an event, undoubtedly, pre-service teachers get this “base” from the discourse of their BA classes: English language proficiency levels work to define people as speakers of this language. With this as the premise, language proficiency levels can make them or break them as teachers. This discourse subconsciously inserts the idea that there is no space for modifications, constructions, or evolution in the teaching of a language; there is always the same content to teach about the language, mainly grammar-based. Our view is that teachers in BA programs of English language education should also focus on how pre-service teachers perceive the language, how those views influence the way the language is taught, and what changes could be made for the future. Starting a practicum without reflection on these ideas embroils the tendency of seeing ELT as an absolutism which should be taught through formulas and structures.

Pre-service Teachers’ Feelings and Emotions in First Teaching Experiences

Part 3: Is my mentor teacher aware of what I am doing?

All those memories about being an English language learner came to my mind: I spent a lot of effort trying to pronounce words, understand how structures work, comprehend what people say in videos and audio tracks, and not using translation for that understanding. After teaching a couple of lessons, I started to learn that teaching a language does not have a formula, and “neither does teaching how to teach it”—I thought. But well, in the next sessions of my practicum, apart from expecting good results in my teaching, I was expecting to teach students something useful for their lives. I wondered if my mentor teacher was aware of what I was doing. Perhaps, one of our fears as pre-service teachers is to receive criticism about our teaching practices; there is no better person to brief us about that than our mentor teacher. We want to know what we are doing well and not just what we are doing wrong. Anyhow, how many times have we been pointed out because of our mistakes

without recognizing our skills, knowledge, and improvements? I wonder about it and I remember myself making those mistakes that great scholars warn novice teachers not to make. But, I didn’t feel I was making mistakes, only that things did not come out as expected. Those moments helped me configure my methodology. The way I reacted in all those situations said to me how I was being constructed as a teacher. Were they mistakes after all? Is it wrong to make them? Isn’t it a way to learn too?

Again, a formula would have perfectly filled these gaps of my first teaching practices, but I never found it, I still haven’t been able to find it, maybe I’ll never find it. Everything is so dependable on so many factors and situations... I remember I got to my classes every day waiting to find it, but it turned out that there was a new story to be told in each class. During practicum tutorials, interaction with teachers was little, if doubts or questions came out, solving them was in our hands, mentors were only assessing and correcting.

We carry upon our shoulders the obligation of being the face of truth, the first profession that students and kids come across with major rigor, so there is plenty of knowledge to be acquired and shared. However, all I could cite in my head was most of my teachers’ comments trying to show me what I was not supposed to do; so, “dazzled and confused”, I noticed that I was so buried in prohibitions; I did not know what was right or even worst. At first sight, this may sound as an excuse, but then I did not know everything that I could do when teaching a lesson. I noticed that it is not just applying studied approaches and methods or implementing my own teaching beliefs. In addition, getting all the practices and believing in errors may work as a cycle. After all, we all began by making mistakes in our lesson teachings. Part of this difficulty in initial teaching is that we struggle to trust in our little teaching experience, or set aside learnings from our studies, we usually feel that knowing nothing is what prevails.

This third part uncovers pre-service teachers’ feelings and emotions about managing their first teaching experiences. They feel worried and responsible for teaching their first classes well. They also feel an interesting mixture of fear, enthusiasm as well as anger for how those classes are developed. In concordance with Lucero (2015) and Avalos (2016), the role of emotions and

knowledge that pre-service teachers hold during their first experiences in teaching situations, contributes to their survival and enduring commitment in a practicum. In this part of the story, the major trigger of those feelings and emotions is definitely the students' reflection on their teaching performance. In agreement with Lingam, Lingam, and Raghuwaiya (2014), pre-service teachers are concerned about having enough knowledge to deal with teaching challenges. The major challenges indicated in the participants' journals are the fact that they are looking for ways to break the paradigm of grammar-based instruction, and facing the critics of their students, peers, and mentor teachers. A closer look into these concerns drives the analysis back to their "acquired language worries": good pronunciation, a perfect understanding of English grammar, full comprehension of video/audio-recorded talks and conversations, a total avoidance of using Spanish to understand or produce English, as well as the literal execution of planned activities. We then can deduce that pre-service teachers' difficulties in learning the target language are directly related to their struggles with teaching it.

Being cornered by these feelings and emotions, pre-service teachers are agonizing for the "magic formula" to teach English while getting a better handle on its oral and written use. In the search for a way out of this conundrum, they may get frustrated with the profession because they learn that *the* magic formula does not exist. Their initial teaching experiences and reflections persistently lead them to discover that teaching English does not necessarily involve following particular methods, approaches, or procedures to the letter. Although pre-service teachers' pedagogical practicum begins with the sensation that they are jumping from theory to practice, they appropriately infer that premises about teaching English develop differently in every context and classroom situation. In agreement with Castañeda-Trujillo and Aguirre-Hernández (2018), pre-service teachers start trying out their knowledge and capabilities, meanwhile adjusting their existing methodologies as well as creating

new methods according to the classroom situations and contexts encountered during their pedagogical practicum. Little by little they become flexible and resourceful, breaking away from remaining static and procedural.

The effect that a mentor teacher's views has in this construction is vital (Avalos, 2016). When educating new teachers, mentor teachers' opinions, assessments, and feedback on pre-service teachers' performances represent one of several chisels that sculpt a new teacher's professional practices. Mentor teachers are the main source from which pre-service teachers discover the manner in which English teaching should happen. In them, pre-service teachers can see models of how to be independent, autonomous, and reflective. As Castañeda-Peña et al. (2016) assert, during a pedagogical practicum, didactic transposition takes place and knowledge is shared, learned, and constructed.

Regrettably, Part 3 of the story shows that mentor teachers mainly highlight pre-service teachers' mistakes and weaknesses rather than strengths and successes. There is a tendency of seeing initial teaching difficulties as mistakes, not as challenging situations. Mentor teachers usually just talk about class situations and rarely show how to do teaching side by side with pre-service teachers, as in co-teaching with them. Eventually, mentor teachers push pre-service teachers for innovation, but they do not show them how to do it. This undoubtedly reinforces pre-service teachers' sensation of being cornered by uncertainties. Are they really teaching with mistakes? If so, when do these mistakes stop happening and everything falls into place? Even more, how can pre-service teachers identify when they are making a mistake in the actual moment of instruction? Shouldn't mistakes be exalted as chances to contribute to the teaching-knowledge arsenal?

We should not believe that when pre-service teachers make mistakes and have weaknesses, they are not following methods, approaches, or procedures correctly. However, if this is the premise, we can sadly see the reinforcement of a categorical belief in mentor teachers

and pre-service teachers: Language education principles are static; methods, approaches, and procedures prevail regardless of the context; directions need to be followed passively; innovation is only for the so-called experts. This belief clashes with pre-service teachers learning that context and classroom situations frame teaching theories. Thus, do mentor teachers indeed intend to change conditions in the field of English language education, or are they unconsciously preserving those conditions with their mentoring?

As a result, teachers' interactional practices with pre-service teachers for sharing teaching experiences and knowledge become relevant. Certainly, perspectives of language and language teaching which are interactionally presented by teachers are the foundation where pre-service teachers first learn about language and how to teach it. Therefore, pre-service teachers take on these first perspectives from what they see within classroom interaction in order to apply them in their own teaching practices. As a result, these interactionally-shared perspectives contribute to the configuration of pre-service teachers' teaching styles and the manner in which they will interact with their students from learned interactional practices during their major. Lucero and Scalante-Morales (2018) talk about this issue from the results of their study about how mentor teachers create and co-construct classroom interaction and teaching styles to promote learning during ELT classes.

When we re-examine these feelings and emotions about managing and developing pre-service teachers' first teaching experiences, we find that those sentiments help them construct what they are becoming as English language teachers. Regardless of how those feelings and emotions come to be present, they configure the new teachers' knowledge and capabilities used to face language classrooms. In this way, mentor teachers' views about the language and its teaching, as well as the how and why they interact with pre-service teachers, constitute a model to follow for the subsequent generations of English language teachers.

Pre-service Teachers' Learnings From the Pedagogical Practicum

Part 4: Now we carry a heavy load upon our shoulders!

However, after doing all the pedagogical practicum in our major, and during conversations with my peers about it, we came to the conclusion that it was the ultimate trial to know if we really wanted to be teachers. We now know that, over there, in the classroom, in front of the board, before students, the moment to know it comes. We, "the new generation" of English language teachers, are constantly collecting experiences, said and lived, to polish our own practices. We want to be better than the teacher educators we admire, those who have inspired us as they struggle day after day against realities, sometimes without recognition. They always give us hope and strength for not losing track, striking the chord of all the knowledges that have been shared with us.

Our teaching experience after practicum has been better and better. However, I need to confess that I am still afraid during lessons; my hands still shake when I see anxious looks in my students' eyes, sometimes nobody smiles at me, but I keep on going. Now I have the strength to work for my ever-evolving ideals in teaching and life. In casual conversations with my peers, I've heard about how much teacher educators pushed us to carry out varied teaching tasks. Either we like it or not, they have had a strong influence in us, they have inspired us not to stop reaching our goals. This is the teacher's job, pushing and inspiring people to be better despite frustration and bothering. I think we carry a heavy load upon our shoulders. The fact of considering the reasons why some students go to school, the contexts where we have to teach, the situations that our students face every day, the fact that we need to push them going, the decisions that we have to take every day, etc. All of this feeds our lives. All this makes us wonder every day if we really want to be or go on being teachers.

Thinking about it keeps making me be the teacher I am now: another teacher, part of the "gang", looking for answers every day, learning from my students, my colleagues, myself, and my educators; dealing with everyday challenges as opportunities, building my own path with an open-mind perspective, involving my best critical perspectives, recalling others' experiences and theories, being wise when teaching.

We believe in changes, and we want to make some little by little. Pedagogical practicum experiences places us in this profession. So... the secret? There is no secret. At the end, being a teacher is not about knowing all the answers but being constantly looking for them. That is why some of us still pack all our things in our bags, because we never know when a just-in-case situation may come up, we teachers need to be prepared for the unknown.

This last part of the narration about how pre-service teachers experienced their pedagogical practicum exalts the contributions of this space and the mentor teachers in their development and evolution as new teachers. Pre-service teachers uphold the idea that their pedagogical practicum is the moment when they have to face ELT realities, most of them for the very first time. There is a combination of varied conditions from classroom to classroom; demands from school staff, their studies, from mentor teachers, peers, and their students as well as regulations from all sides. Little by little, they learn to manage all of these areas and apply their knowledge to their demands without setting aside their academic and professional goals. By considering all of these aspects, we are able to say that the pedagogical practicum is quite a challenging stage in pre-service teachers' lives.

In spite of this fact, pre-service teachers recognize that the pedagogical practicum is rewarding and necessary for their development as teachers.⁴ All of the efforts and sacrifices made during this stage pay off. They have acquired teaching experiences, built the required confidence to teach, formed abilities to manage classroom situations and demands, and can revel in the pride of being a language teacher. All of the theory building, collaborative discussions with their mentor teachers, reflections on their teaching experiences, and the formulation of new ideas have

⁴ Castañeda-Trujillo and Aguirre-Hernández (2018) also account for this fact. The pre-service teachers participating in that study also highlight the importance that pedagogical practicum has in their development as teachers.

created these necessary acquisitions in order to build their foundations as teachers.

As indicated previously, contributions do not only come from the contexts of pedagogical practicums; mentor teachers are also vital to pre-service teachers' development and evolution. Mentor teachers have the arduous task of considering pre-service teachers' performances under the scope of several perspectives, including but not limited to, students' reactions, school demands, curricula, and major requirements, all of which are permeated by theory and policies. Pre-service teachers recognize their mentor teachers' efforts because, in the end, they know that their guidance has helped them evolve into the teacher they have become at the conclusion of their practicum experience. In plain words, as Castañeda-Trujillo and Aguirre-Hernández (2018) put it, pre-service teachers learn from their mentor teachers' experiences. Thus, teachers are, to some extent, the mirror in which pre-service teachers view themselves when teaching in the future.

General Interpretations and Conclusions

Throughout this article, we have presented the reflections and insights of a group of pre-service teachers about how they experienced the stage of their pedagogical practicum for ELT in a private university in Bogotá, Colombia. Their lived experiences displayed what pre-service teachers feel and learn during this period at diverse schools and with different mentor teachers. We have discussed the high levels of anxiety that pre-service teachers feel; the anecdotal discourses of what to do in class, the sensation of being located directly within the practicum context, the difficulty of putting theory into practice, and the manner in which they begin to teach. All these aspects take a serious role when managing and developing pre-service teachers' first teaching experiences. The way pre-service teachers experience and assimilate these aspects constructs them as English language teachers.

Likewise, we have also talked about the role that mentor teachers have in this construction. Their opinions, assessment, feedback, and co-constructed interaction with regard to pre-service teachers' performances seem to have a great effect on their development, although they at times weigh these performances as if pre-service teachers were already knowledgeable about what to do in practicum tasks and situations. We highlight the fact that pre-service teachers indeed acknowledge the efforts that their mentor teachers make so that they, as new teachers, can be more autonomous and capable professionals.

The story and discussions presented throughout this article help make visible how pre-service teachers experience their pedagogical practicum from their own perspective. As Barkhuizen (2013) explains, narrative texts (re)construct participants in the narration of meaningful moments. This is what has briefly happened here, a group of English language pre-service teachers has reconstructed themselves as the "new" teachers in the field through the narration of meaningful moments in their pedagogical practicum experiences. We have then shown, as Hofer (2000) suggests, "how individuals come to know the beliefs they hold about knowing and how these ideas shape practices of knowing and learning" (p. 378). Or as Castañeda-Londoño (in press) implies, the manner in which pre-service teachers cultivate and harvest knowledge. Our interpretations and discussion, which are never closed statements but open to multiple understandings, are derived from what we have seen in their writings. Our focus was to demonstrate a perspective of what pre-service teachers experience when they start their pedagogical practicum, the sort of knowledge that they cultivate, the seeds that they bring into their next stages of development, and what mentor teachers have to offer them in the course of their studies.

With this article, we hope to raise awareness of the aforementioned issues in undergraduate programs of ELT education. More often than expected, BA programs in language teaching seem to concentrate efforts on

providing pre-service teachers with theoretical loads and practicum spaces in which pre-service teachers' emotional dimensions are barely accounted for. The reflections presented in this article compile a taste of this emotional dimension. We are now sure that, if acknowledged and encouraged even more, reflection on teaching experiences can help increase pre-service teachers' ability to cope with all the demands of English language education. We promote the idea of educating more professionals of language teaching, not mere technicians who just do as indicated in language teaching methods, approaches, or curricula (see Kumaravadivelu, 2003, for this idea of teachers as technicians). We suggest not forgetting that a mentor teacher's endeavor is more related with teaching others how to identify, avoid, and learn from difficulties and achievements down the road. It requires not only theoretical and practicum approaches, but emotional strategies as well.

This final claim refers to offering more assistance to pre-service teachers during their classes and pedagogical practicum. These spaces should merge theory with practice, not treating each one as separate; they should connect reciprocally the theory-practice with the context of the practicum as well, keeping research as a remarkable tool to reflect and improve on their practices. In fact, all teachers should underline the connections between the theoretical-practical component of the major and the work expected of pre-service teachers in the contexts of the pedagogical practicum.⁵ Pre-service teachers are not alone in their classrooms; they are always with their students, immersed in an educational institution, in a multi-cultural context, and with a unique set of knowledge, beliefs, emotions, and feelings within themselves.

5 See for example the studies done by Fandiño-Parra (2011), Fajardo-Castañeda (2014), and Rodríguez-Cáceres and Pérez-Gómez (2017). These studies have to some extent demonstrated that connecting theory, practice, and the pedagogical practicum context in the how-to-teach triggers more reflection in pre-service teachers upon their professional practices.

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