English Language Student-Teachers Developing Agency Through Community-Based Pedagogy Projects

Estudiantes de licenciatura desarrollando agencia a través de proyectos de pedagogía basados en la comunidad

Wilson Hernández Varona*
Daniel Felipe Gutiérrez Álvarez**
Universidad Surcolombiana, Neiva, Colombia

This paper presents a narrative inquiry study on agency development in student-teachers of an English language teacher program at a public university in the south of Colombia. Our goal was to understand how student-teachers develop agency when narratively inquiring their community by planning and conducting community-based pedagogy projects on issues they found pertinent to investigate. The data were gathered through semi-structured focus group interviews, individual journal entries, and video-recorded talks about their inquiries. As a conclusion, we acknowledge that certain social and narrative practices such as interacting within their inquiry groups, interacting with their communities, voicing their communities' necessities, and acting upon the inquired necessities facilitated developing agency and contributed to rethinking their roles as transformative members of their communities.

Key words: Agency development, community-based pedagogy, narrative inquiry, pre-service teachers of English.

Este artículo presenta un estudio de investigación narrativa sobre el desarrollo de agencia en estudiantes de un programa de licenciatura en inglés en una universidad pública en Colombia. Nuestro objetivo es comprender cómo los estudiantes de esta licenciatura desarrollan agencia al investigar narrativamente su comunidad, planificando y dirigiendo proyectos de pedagogía basados en la comunidad y sobre temas que ellos decidieron investigar. Los datos se recopilaron a través de entrevistas semiestructuradas con grupos focales, registros individuales en diarios y charlas videograbadas sobre sus investigaciones. Como conclusión, reconocemos que ciertas prácticas sociales y narrativas tales como interactuar en sus grupos de investigación, interactuar con sus comunidades, expresar las necesidades de sus comunidades, y actuar sobre las necesidades investigadas, facilitaron el desarrollo de agencia.

Palabras clave: desarrollo de agencia, estudiantes de licenciatura en inglés, investigación narrativa, pedagogía con base en la comunidad.

---

* E-mail: wilson.hernandez@usco.edu.co
** E-mail: daniel.gutierreza@campusucc.edu.co

Introduction

At the turn of the 21ˢᵗ century, research in the field of English language teaching (ELT) has directed efforts towards the understanding and the implementation of critical pedagogy to raise awareness about the social and cultural implications that permeate all pedagogical practices (Giroux, 1997; Freire & Macedo, 2005; Janks, Dixon, Ferreira, Granville, & Newfield, 2013). It is important to start inquiring about how certain practices have remained unquestioned in ELT—practices which disregard any chance of social and political participation. The necessity to investigate agency development in student-teachers (henceforth STS) lies in the recurrent association of agency development with the teachers' isolation and autonomy embedded in their professional roles in conventional teaching practices and settings (Rodríguez, 2013); instead of illuminating how dialogic practices involving their communities may lead them to a more critical development of agency.

Additionally, bringing and adopting sociocultural resources from inner circle countries which claim ownership of the language (Kachru as cited in González, 2007) have become commonplace for many ELT settings. It is necessary to advocate for a local approach that seizes "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire, 2005, p. 35). Therefore, there is a necessity to look back at our learners and all that makes them who they are, to understand how the interaction with their surrounding sociocultural resources may lead to the understanding of agency development.

Thus, focusing on the learners' experiences when they inquired narratively into their communities may disclose certain social and narrative factors to guide us towards comprehending the development of agency of English language STS in a pre-intermediate English course. Specifically, we explored how English language STS develop agency when narratively inquiring into sociocultural resources of their community.

We also investigated how developing agency influenced STS' perspectives on sociocultural resources of their community. Consequently, we analyzed the STS' stories of narrative inquiries conducted in a south Colombian city to understand how inquiring into their community's local sociocultural resources elicited *agency* in the STS.

Initially, we introduce the concepts of *agency development*, *narrative inquiry*, and *community-based pedagogies* to illustrate our view on understanding the development of agency. Then, we explain the research methodology, the instruments used to collect data, and the data analysis procedure. Later, we briefly describe the participants and their narrative inquiry group projects. Finally, we present the findings of the study and the conclusion.

Theoretical Framework

To properly contextualize this study, there are three constructs that need to be considered first. Initially, we are going to discuss the concept of *agency* and present what is going to serve as a definition to our study's purpose. Secondly, we are going to revise the concept of *narrative inquiry* as a phenomenon and how it may foster the development of agency. Finally, we are going to look at the concept of *community-based pedagogy* to support the STS' narrative inquiry projects.

Agency Development

In his conceptualization of critical pedagogy, Giroux (2004) argues that agency "becomes the site through which power is not transcended but reworked, replayed, and restaged in productive ways" (p. 34); suggesting that power is at the core of the pedagogical practices that may generate action, in a critical sense. Consequently, crucial to our understanding of agency in this study was to know further about the circumstances in which it may be developed. We came to realize that agency does not simply flourish ex nihilo, and that there are certain conditions that facilitate its appearance.

The main condition that may or may not restrict agency development is posed by Freire (1974) when he draws our attention to the traditional education paradigm and how such paradigm threatens the development of popular participation as it is an "educational practice which failed to offer opportunities for the analysis and debate of problems, or for genuine participation" (p. 32). Additionally, we noticed this traditional paradigm perpetuates a conservative educational discourse (Giroux, 1997) that reduces the student's role to following instructions, memorizing facts, taking tests, and displaying neat in-class behavior.

Accordingly, Giroux (2004) asserts that "the fundamental challenge facing educators within the current age of neoliberalism is to provide the conditions for students to address how knowledge is related to the power of both self-definition and social agency" (p. 34). Unfortunately, these conditions are, basically, nonexistent in many educational contexts such as ours, due to neoliberal agenda and the ambition to regulate all social spheres, without excluding, naturally, the educational sphere. Consequently, it is our duty as teachers to expose students to knowledge that may lead them to emancipation, instead of keeping on replicating knowledge whose main aim is to regulate what is learnt (Santos, 2009) and intends to maintain unshakeable the foundations of colonial academicism.

Narrative Inquiry as a Phenomenon

Narrative inquiry is guided by the comprehension of the value of the story told, and the personal experience embedded in the story. In a straightforward attempt to describe it, narrative inquiry is "the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 479). Narrative inquiry may bring educational consequences for English language STs and English teacher educators in relation to experiencing personally their community, which in turn will foster social awareness and the knowledge of their community's realities and needs.

Xu and Connelly (2009) discussed that "teacher knowledge is personal knowledge, and anything taught to teachers as knowledge-for-teachers becomes teacher knowledge and touches the very heart of who teachers are by touching their identity as teachers and as persons" (p. 223). Thus, when considering teacher knowledge as a narrative construct that may contribute to the formation of English language STs, there comes the need to address the narrative interaction with STs and their communities to develop a clear understanding of their local sociocultural resources, primarily during their undergraduate programs.

Then, narrative inquiry acts as a door to access both teacher knowledge and teacher identity, which results in an education for teacher development (Xu & Connelly, 2009). Consequently, it may allow the participating STs to reflect upon their contexts and local knowledge to consequently understand who they are and who they are becoming (Clandinin et al., 2006), and empower them to teach, create, or act aware of the importance of their social context, of the people they are part of and whom they may eventually teach. Drawing upon these factors in the teaching of English could unveil a critical purpose to lead teacher educators and teachers and learners of English away from a pragmatic set of rules on how to use the foreign language and more so towards a local apprehension and use for that language.

Community-Based Pedagogies

Community-based pedagogies (Henceforth, CBPs) are broadly defined as "learning that extends class-based learning beyond the school or which involves children and young people working on community projects" (Johnston & Davis, 2008, p. 353). A more in-depth explanation of CBPs, and more appealing to our liking, is the one found in Sharkey, Clavijo-Olarte, and Ramírez (2016) whereby CBPs are defined as an "asset-based approach that does not ignore the realities of curriculum standards that teachers must address

but emphasizes local knowledge and resources as starting points for teaching and learning" (p. 2). In other words, CBPS are pedagogies that seek to bridge the gap between local knowledge, curriculum, and learners (Sharkey, 2012, p. 10) by encouraging students to reencounter with their communities and the issues that are locally relevant.

CBPS are deeply connected with how students develop agency and the necessity to inquire about their community. Relying on a curricular principle followed by the Department of Education in Victoria, Australia, we can maintain that "learning connects strongly with communities and practice beyond the classroom [by interacting with] local and broader communities and community practices" (Department of Education, Victoria, as cited in Johnston & Davis, 2008, p. 352). Conversely, as it is commonly observed, curricula are detached from local reality and overtly ignore the pressing issues of our context (Freire, 1974, p. 32). CBPS offer the possibility to start from the immediate reality surrounding the community where teaching takes place by advocating for a bottom-up approach that reflects on the local needs.

By inquiring into their communities and local sources, STs are likely to experience a compelling shifting of roles in terms of knowledge learning and production. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) assert that:

> Inquiry-oriented work in which students position themselves as researchers provides an edgy and palpable means for disrupting the current policy/political climate, in which teachers are consistently positioned as the transmitters of others' knowledge and students as the recipients. (pp. 15-16)

Thus, this so-called role shift from passive recipients to active agents of knowledge becomes pivotal. Additionally, as "teaching and learning are social activities" (Lastra, Durán, & Acosta, 2018, p. 212), it is important to facilitate the ambience to strengthen the relationships within the learning community to generate co-constructed forms of knowledge out of solidarity.

The Study

This study followed the main features of a narrative inquiry. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) defined narrative research as "a way of understanding experience [involving] collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus" (p. 20). When conducting this narrative study, we were able to establish a close relationship with participants, allowing us to engage in their lived experiences on the narrative inquiries into their community, and interact with them, collecting significant active data which facilitated a thorough and constant inquiry.

Additionally, narrative inquiry acted as a way to understand the experiences retold by the participating STS as stories and found in such stories a contribution to the analysis of the development of agency. Narrative inquiry as a method acknowledges sociality, temporality, and place as aspects that may serve as a framework for narrative inquiry practices and which differentiate it from other methodologies (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). It is rather considerable to contrast such definition to the one of agency presented by Emirbayer and Mische (1998) in which similar dimensions are to be considered when addressing agency. They suggested agency as:

> The temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments—the temporal-relational contexts of action—which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgement, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations. (p. 970)

Incorporating narrative inquiry's richness of the interviewees' experiences with their community lived through the projects, we could see it as a chance to observe the knowledge and agency developed through narrative inquiry. Although narrative inquiry "leads less to generalizations and certainties and more toward wondering about and imagining alternative possibili-

ties" (Clandinin & Huber, 2010), we think there might be a chance to analyze narratively the participants' development of agency regarding the characteristics of their context.

Participants

All participants were students of an ELT program at a public university in the south of Colombia. The research study motivation took place during a pre-intermediate English lesson, at the beginning of August 2018, in which teacher and students were discussing the possibilities of modifying the dates and topics for an activity that was pre-established in the syllabus. After some important contributions from the students on negotiating the syllabus activity, we decided to invite the 28 students of the class (aged 18 to 22) to participate in the study. They freely formed groups of four to six students but, in the end, eight students refused to participate in the study due to teamwork problems and a strike at the university.

Data Collection Instruments

The study was conducted over a four-month period in which we asked participants to write two journal entries individually in order to recall experiences of their narrative inquiries. We proposed a guideline for each journal entry, the first one on the experiences lived when choosing topics to inquire about and defining their roles in the projects, and the second one on the experiences lived when approaching their sources for the first time. Then, we had separated narrative focus group interviews considering the number of participants, one interview with each project group. The interviews were conducted in Spanish to present participants with a more comfortable environment. We interviewed each group twice. Upon completing their narrative inquiries, we asked participants to give a talk about the experiences lived through the entire inquiries, particularly, how they took action on the inquired community's necessities. At the end of the inquiries, we asked all participating STs to write a personal narrative describing their experience before, while, and after carrying out the narrative inquiries. We collected 10 interviews (lengths 30 to 60 minutes), 23 personal narrative journals, and five video-recorded talks of approximately 40 minutes each.

Data Analysis

It is relevant to mention that narrative inquiries divide into two distinct groups and such division offers two ways to analyze narrative data:

> (a) analysis of narratives, that is, studies whose data consist of narratives or stories, but whose analysis produces paradigmatic typologies or categories; and (b) narrative analysis, that is, studies whose data consist of actions, events, and happenings, but whose analysis produces stories (e.g. biographies, histories, case studies). (Polkinghorne, 1995, pp. 5-6)

As we followed narrative inquiry as a methodology for this study, we focused on the stories as lived and told throughout the inquiry and valued the stories in their individuality, but also we carried out an analysis of narratives to observe common features that could lead us to identify the development of ELT STs' agency. Primarily, the reasons are because the implementation of both types of analyses (analysis of narrative and narrative analysis) would result too extensive to consolidate in one article, and secondarily because we considered that by identifying the common features in the participants' experiences we could contribute to the comprehension of the process of developing agency. Hence, for the analysis of narratives in this study, we organized data by features, subsequently categorizing such features of data into common categories within the chronological order experienced by the participants along the course of their inquiries. The results of the analysis of narrative data revealed that participants' significant inquiry experiences contributed to developing agency in four moments.

The Stages of the Narrative Inquiry Projects

Four stages guided the process to conduct the narrative inquiry projects. The first one was named *planning your inquiry* and consisted of having the participants select an issue in their community and express how they were going to research it. The second stage was *local inquiry*, in which participants approached their source for the first time, getting to know more about the issue from the primary source. In a third stage, *complementary local inquiry*, participants had the opportunity to cover certain doubts brought about in the previous research encounter, and experience inquiring in-depth using their source for more detailed information. In the end, a fourth stage took place, *reflect and share*, where participants were suggested to reflect on the work they had done and take into consideration why and how their voices could be heard through this intervention. Researchers and participants agreed to share such reflection with an audience involving professors of the ELT program and senior STs using different visual aids and presentation styles they considered useful. It is important to state that we never interfered with any group decisions (e.g., project name, inquiry process, presentation). In the following part, we are going to describe the participating five narrative inquiry projects.

Animal shelters (5 STs). Two STs from this team were concerned with animal safety and adoption in our city and proposed that issue for inquiry. The other members were not too familiarized with the topic, but right after their first visit to the only animal shelter in the city, they knew this issue deserved attention. It was also after the first visit to the shelter that they discussed doing something for the animals living there (220 dogs and 180 cats). They decided to have a *donatón* (a fundraising event like a telethon) and reach out to local radio stations, TV programs, and social networks to invite people to participate. They collected enough food to feed all the animals twice a day for two months. For the presentation, they decided to make a 16-minute documentary.

Sociocultural perspectives of children about peace (4 STs). One of the members of this team had been working with a relative on a doctoral project regarding peace imaginaries of children in Colombia. From this, she got the idea and presented it to the other members of the team. They all found it significant and useful due to its relation to education. They decided to visit the municipal department of education to obtain information about the rank of public schools with children from families displaced by violence and who live now in conflicting areas of the city. They chose the school at the top of the rank and interviewed some students, teachers, and family members; however, this resulted very difficult because, as the STs mentioned, "they [displaced families] are fed up with people asking about their pasts and doing nothing for them". This team listened to the experiences of children and teachers in this community, recognizing how these experiences had shaped their understanding of peace. The presentation was a live theatrical performance, displaying elements of war, schools, toys, and families' memoirs; followed by an explanation of their project and findings.

Sensitive side of women: A prostitution story (5 STs). Concerned with social issues present in our community, two members of the team deliberated over the issue of women in prostitution as a one-sided story that always shows a materialistic perspective but does not reflect upon emotions, the reasons to initiate it, and/or messages coming from the women involved. They proposed this concern to the other members and agreed on inquiring about it. They discussed with the group an initial interest as to verifying people's opinions about prostitution, expressed directly by the primary source and not by others. These STs went to two *casas de citas* (brothels), from different social strata, and decided to have conversations with different women about their stories in prostitution. In their presentation, they showed clips of the interviews, of people's opinions about prostitution, advice from the interviewees on life choices, and delivered a well-structured speech at the end of their presentation.

Disability is diversity (4 sts). After taking the university course "Special Needs Education for Cognitive Impairment", the members of this inquiry group decided to investigate more about how disability was seen, experienced, and engaged by our educational system. But, above all, they wanted to know the perspectives of teachers, people with disabilities, and school administrators. They interviewed the professor in charge of the course mentioned previously, a blind student, and a teacher working in a school for people with disabilities. This team decided to present their project using videoclips of children with disabilities interacting in a school and of the interviews conducted. They complemented their presentation addressing the audience with a speech on the importance of being aware of disabilities and the responsibilities they have as prospective teachers.

Drug addiction (5 sts). All members declared interest in this topic and planned to visit strategic places in the university where drug consumers gather. They recorded around 40 short interviews with drug users,

and there was one manuscript that resulted from that. One of the team members decided to present one of the interviews as an essay, describing the experience of a young man that had initiated drug consumption as a result of the lack of family time and dedication to him. They started their presentation with messages about drug addiction, then, they showed information about the data gathered and findings.

Findings

In this section, first we are going to describe how English language sts developed agency through a four-moment process consisting of (a) interacting within inquiry groups, (b) narratively interacting with the community, (c) voicing the untold necessities of the community, and (d) the moment of taking action (see Figure 1). Second, we are going to focus on how the development of agency influenced reconceptualizing participants' perspectives on the local sociocultural resources they inquired.

Figure 1. Agency Development Process
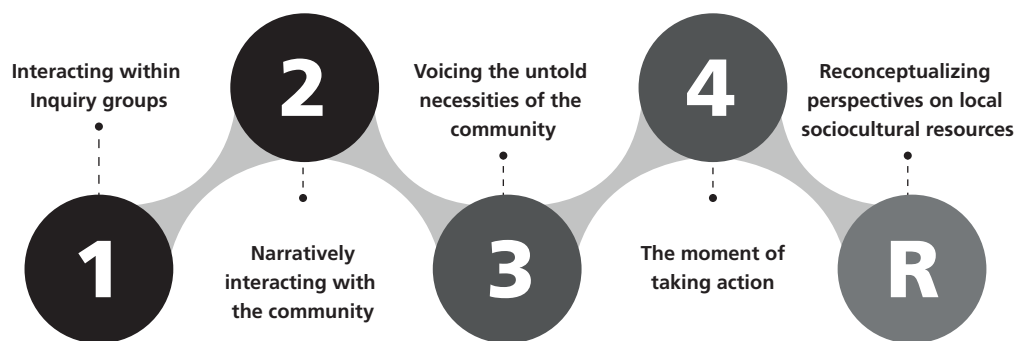
Interacting Within Narrative Inquiry Groups

Agency development in this study is considered to have started when the participants interacted within their narrative inquiry groups. This interaction emerged from defining the topics to inquire, assigning roles and

tasks, to discussing how to engage the inquiry. This category attempts to describe the beginning of the process of agency development as evidenced in this study. In Excerpt 1, a member of the group *sensitive side of women* described how she suggested the topic to other members.

Excerpt 1

That was what I had proposed to my classmates, as some of them were going to inquire about education and children and the like. Then, I told them why not change it and do something more interesting that nobody has done before, something that nobody sees or believes important and we give relevance to that. (Interview 1, Julieta,[1] "Sensitive side of women")

Julieta explained the reasons she had to propose the topic of prostitution, and to encourage her peers to inquire about topics people do not usually acknowledge as important. After this discussion over a topic to inquire about, participants moved up to another relevant moment—assigning roles and tasks. In Excerpt 2, Santiago narrated how he and his peers experienced assigning the roles and tasks of their project.

Excerpt 2

We can take care of the most difficult part. For example, we look for the sources and you make the report. Also, because we talked about it and we said we had to get rid of all kinds of bad thoughts because one of my classmates said that if she went, she could be looking at them [prostitutes] a lot. We said we cannot do that, we have to be very careful. (Interview 1, Santiago, "Sensitive side of women")

Santiago reported in this interview how they had decided, in their group, to assign roles based on the difficulty of the tasks. Similarly, the *animal shelters* group shared with us how they assigned roles based on skills. Dayana, a member of this group, defined the process in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 3

Let's say it was the two of us, the truth is that, we make all the decisions. But, right now Didier is the one in charge of the audio-visual part, he recorded all the notes with his cell phone, everything. On television (marketing) Edwin is helping, you also [pointing at Jairo]. Well, I'm the one with the contacts and those things, and they are more like support [pointing at Alexa and Karla]. (Interview 1, Dayana, "Animal shelters")

---

1 All excerpts were translated from Spanish and pseudonyms are used to refer to the participants.

As evidenced below, the stories reported by the participants unveiled another important moment lived when interacting within their narrative inquiry groups—teacher's and peers' acceptance of topics.

Excerpt 4

Teacher: What if I had said no?

Julieta: Well, if you had said no, the topic is wrong, obviously, and by majority of the group, even if I had wanted . . .

Xiomara: We would not have done it.

T: You were expecting my final call…

J: I had received the first approval from Xiomara, because Xiomara had the other one ready [an interview appointment for another topic], so, I was expecting to obtain you approval [teacher's] and now the other one from my partners.

(Interview 1, "Sensitive side of women")

This group described the power that lies in the teacher's hands, and how if the situation had been different and the teacher had said no to their proposal, they would have had to decide on another topic. We consider that this aspect was fundamental to allow the STS to experience agency. Permitting STS to experience their community, interacting within their narrative inquiry groups, evidenced a first step in the process of developing agency.

On the other hand, the data collected from participants in the *animal shelters* group evidenced that the freedom of choice over the methodology and topic of the inquiry and the involvement of the teacher (i.e., the teacher's over-controlling guidance) could in fact affect the development of their inquiries, as discussed in Excerpt 5.

Excerpt 5

Danielle: Well, I believe that it also has to do with the fact that you like this issue [referring to the situation of animals] even more, and that encouraged us. If it had been another issue, well, I don't know . . .

Edwin: And that there were no steps, as you said. That is why we have come up to this point, because there were no barriers or limits, or the teacher saying "you have to do this and that" and to follow steps, but we did it ourselves, we found the steps, the options . . .

D: The ways.

(Interview 1, "Animal shelters")

These findings show that interacting within narrative inquiry groups and experiencing the different moments of such interaction (e.g., defining the topics to inquire about, assigning roles and tasks, discussing how to engage the inquiry), was a fundamental factor that led (to) the process of agency development. The second moment of the process conveys participants' narrative interaction with the community as another crucial moment that facilitated the development of agency. We are going to discuss it in the upcoming category.

Interacting With the Community

Interacting with the community is understood in this study as the dialogic practice when STs inquired as to the sources in their community. The interaction of the participants with their community allowed them to identify the conditions exhibited in it, to acknowledge how some members of the community were contributing to solving their necessities, and to reflect upon these two factors, guiding themselves towards taking further action. In Excerpt 6, Marcela expressed her concern regarding the conditions of her community.

Excerpt 6

Marcela: I live in Surorientales. It's a marginalized sector and when you pass by any of those narrow streets, you'll see kids in every corner. I think they're, from what I've seen, around 7 to 15 years old. They're not 18 or 20 or whatever, just kids.

Teacher: Doing…?

M: Prostitution, smoking, consuming every kind of drugs. Once, I ran into some girls around 13 or 15 years old . . . Why didn't they keep going to school? What made them drop out of school? What can we do to prevent them from the involvement in these hood conflicts? Because they, let's say, become thugs. So, how can we help students who are studying to hang in there and create peace instead of war?

(Interview 2, "Sociocultural perspectives of children about peace")

The community in which Marcela lives provides her with aspects to ponder regarding the circumstances lived by the inhabitants, particularly kids and, consequently, to attempt to comprehend the life experiences lived there. Foremost, Marcela's reflection pleaded for action on helping those kids to remain in schools and build peace, not war.

Another considerable aspect was the one discussed by Didier from the group inquiring about animal shelters. He stated:

Excerpt 7

That old lady who gets up at 5:00 every morning, every day. She gives them [the pets] their meds, she cleans every cell, she feeds the pets, she gives them water. She's in charge of the dogs, of the place itself. . . . It's clear that she's toiled from all that. But she's still there, I mean, she's persistent in this matter. (Interview 1, Didier, "Animal shelters")

These data indicate that Didier could observe the efforts of a woman for improving the conditions of animals in this shelter despite the lack of support. Similarly, Carlota, from the *disability is diversity* group, described how observing some students with visual impairment encouraged her to inquire into this issue:

Excerpt 8

An experience that captivated me and motivated me to keep on searching about this issue was to observe a couple of students with visual disabilities in the class where we had to carry out the practicum; they were doing some math with big numbers that even for me where hard to solve right away as they did. (Journal 1, Carlota, "Disability is diversity")

It becomes evident that community-STs' interaction is acting as a contributing factor and context that facilitated the group members' access to knowledge and understanding of the reality that surrounds them, and sometimes ignore. Moreover, interacting with their community has led them to reflect on their role involving the necessities of their community, as discussed in Excerpt 9.

Excerpt 9

Sometimes, we're just focused on our own reality, and we don't take the time to know what's going on beyond, what problems are displayed in our community. And, throughout the development of the project and when I observed this problematic closer, I was able to reflect that I want to teach from a more humane perspective, to teach for diversity, to see abilities where others see disabilities. (Journal 2, Carlota, "Disability is diversity")

When STs interacted with the community, they started to observe, from a more critical stand, its current conditions. As supported in these findings, they observed what some people were doing to deal with the problematic prevailing in their community. This interaction offered some STs an initial reflective stage in which they evaluated their roles as members in their community. We are going to describe next how voicing the necessities of the community, a moment that resulted from this interaction, strengthens the development of agency.

Voicing the Untold Necessities of the Community

This moment illustrates the STs' necessity to voice what others simply cannot, as the result of segregation. Inevitably, interaction with the communities led students to question the way different members of their community have been blatantly silenced due to their life conditions. Excerpt 10 illustrates a necessity of voicing the untold. In an interview with the group *sensitive side of women*, Julieta explained why they had selected the issue they inquired into referring to this aspect.

Excerpt 10

I had some doubts, but then I said, "that's great, let's do it, let's show the other side of women", because they have a lot of problems, not only discrimination, they're harmed, hurt, it's awful. (Interview 1, Julieta, "Sensitive side of women")

In this data, Julieta showed her concern for the profound aspects that are not usually considered or

told about women affected by their job as prostitutes. Julieta and her group were aware that prostitution is commonly seen as taboo in our society and that there is a common tendency to discuss the topic mostly to talk ill about it. This is precisely why their common goal consisted of digging up the aspects that have been buried under the debris of prejudice. In the same vein, Nelly described to us her experience when addressing the topic of violence directly from people who have suffered it:

Excerpt 11

But, as the project progressed, I began to experience closeness to this issue of violence, the violence that has been discussed for more than 50 years. . . . The reality of what happened: the crimes, the revenge, the thirst for power, and the innocents who were hurt, were some of the things that happened and that were impressive for them, and for us it was something shocking. It was moving to hear the voices of those who lived the war and those who were victims. (Journal 2, Nelly, "Imaginaries of peace")

Similarly, the *disability is diversity* group sought to give a particular twist to the uncalled-for tendency to think poorly about people with disabilities. This is what Carlota expressed in regard to this matter:

Excerpt 12

With the inclusion for people with disabilities topic, we want to show a reality that is barely discussed, which is the hard time they have to keep on studying at educational institutions, due to several factors such as the lack of training for teachers, lack of materials in the institutions, lack of motivation to teach, among others. (Journal 1, Carlota, "Disability is diversity")

The educational factors mentioned by Carlota are crucial to understand her stand. By emphasizing the unfortunate conditions that people with disabilities have to face on a daily basis, Carlota is trying to turn the gist of this issue upside-down. She argued that people's disabilities have always had a negative connotation because this is the way society and some educational institutions have gotten freed from the responsibility

of providing them with the necessary conditions to integrate them as valuable citizens.

Additionally, the necessity to unveil the untold helped as a voice extension for animal recognition, too. Edwin and the rest of his group were able to notice how little informed people were about the conditions in which these stray pets lived, as Edwin explained (Excerpt 13) when talking about the animal conditions in the local shelter.

Excerpt 13

The fact that they're fed once a day was a factor that shocked everybody, because we told them "there are about 400 animals" and people were like "wow! That's a lot!". The cells were not in the conditions . . . they should be. Okay, there are a lot of sick dogs; sure, well, that's normal. That was a fundamental factor to encourage people and that we used social media a lot to spread the impact. (Interview 2, Edwin, "Animal shelter")

They decided to crunch some numbers and share them with the community, so they could get people's attention and direct it towards the things many people ignored about the local shelter. The group felt compelled to let people know the big effort volunteers make to keep these dogs and cats in decent conditions, and, by doing so, raise their voices on behalf of them. The next category examines the moment of taking action as a determining factor in developing agency.

The Moment of Taking Action

This category illustrates a concluding moment in the process of agency development, as argued in this study. The narratives of STs reported how their experiences when inquiring into the community made them contemplate the possibilities of taking action. In Excerpt 14, Didier noticed the gap between acknowledging necessities in the community and taking action.

Excerpt 14

When I was doing the interviews, I realized something, with the students, there are a lot of students who like animals but nobody

who motivates them, who guides them, and takes them there to help. (Interview 1, Didier, "Animal shelters")

This, interwoven with other aspects they spotted (e.g., lack of food for animals, lack of government support), triggered them to do the *donatón* and act upon the issue found while inquiring. Likewise, Nelly shared with us the importance of finding in the community ideas on how to take action; in Excerpt 15, she addresses how.

Excerpt 15

An elder said that to build peace would be very difficult, but we are not so far away. For that, you need parents, teachers, and anyone who is accompanying them [students] so they do not fall into this kind of thing [problem] then it is very important to listen to them, bring proposals, and raise awareness in the parents or those who are interested in doing something. People do not trouble themselves about something to repair them [students]; then, part of this inquiry is to find proposals that can contribute to that. (Interview 2, Nelly, "Sociocultural perspectives of children about peace")

The data here portray how after STs have passed through the previous three moments of the agency development process assumed in this study, they look for solutions to assist the necessities found in their communities. More importantly, they give a clear purpose to this final moment of taking action, as it is evidenced in Excerpt 16.

Excerpt 16

This project was a motivation for me, because, in it, we were looking for a solution to help the children affected by the violence in different areas, and I'd like to keep these kids from being contaminated by such violence and keep them from becoming part of this violence in the future. I'd like to create an environment of peace around them, . . . having one place, at least, where they can be at peace, is enough to start. (Journal 2, Miriam, "Sociocultural perspectives of children about peace")

The previous category provides important insights into participants' decisions towards taking some steps to tackle issues found as problematic in their inquiries

and through reevaluating their roles, become active members of a community that evidently needs them.

Reconceptualizing Perspectives on Local Sociocultural Resources

A reconceptualization of the STs' perspectives on local sociocultural resources was evidenced as a result of the engagement in the four-moment process of agency development. This reconceptualization comprised the identification of local beliefs STs held that were constantly rethought as they enacted these agentic processes. In this category, we discuss the specific moments in which STs displayed this sort of reconceptualization and the actions which triggered it. In Excerpt 17, Mariana, from the *drug addiction* group, shares how the results of all their inquiry led the group to rethink beliefs about young drug addicts:

> **Excerpt 17**
>
> This [the results of the inquiry] made us realize that not everything is as society says, right? So, we didn't keep the concepts that they daily use to question and judge them [drug consumers] just because they consume drugs. We also observed that no matter the reason that took them to this, they believe to have the total control of their life, and it's not true, they say "I can quit it whenever I want," but it's not true, because in this moment they're like, they don't have enough will to fight this monster that is swallowing them every single day. (Video-recorded talk, Mariana, "Drug addiction")

Here, Mariana's reconceptualization of local beliefs about young drug addicts was generated by unmediated interaction with this community. Consequently, this interaction led Mariana to question the local beliefs she had about drug addiction by contrasting it with what is commonly speculated (what "society says") and what she was able to inquire along with her group. Similarly, we identified an analogous reconceptualization in Santiago, as he evidenced in Excerpt 18, how their inquiry helped him to change his "conception about this job [prostitution]," and to rethink his former judgement of this occupation:

> **Excerpt 18**
>
> [The process of inquiring] made me change my conception about this job, about those girls and our reality, we cannot judge and criticize, we don't know how others are living; there are many things that this could change the expectations of people...if you want to do something, do it and get it; even if we fail, what better way to learn! (Journal 2, Santiago, "Sensitive side of women")

Here, local beliefs are characterized by Santiago as unfounded judgment of prostitution. For Santiago, there is a correlation between *doing* and *learning*. Hence, by doing these inquiries, Santiago learnt more about how "others are living," which, analogously, led him to reconceptualize the way he used to think about prostitutes. In a similar fashion, Catalina, from the *disability is diversity group*, expressed, in Excerpt 19, that her interaction with people with disabilities led her to think how we apathetically reject certain issues that are not directly related to our individual life:

> **Excerpt 19**
>
> All this information makes me think that we are not interested in certain issues because we don't suffer them or we're not affected by them; we live in a bubble where we encapsulate ourselves in our own problems and we don't see beyond to think about others. We have the misconception that people with disabilities are limited, that they will not be able to fulfill their goals. That is where the problem lies, people with disabilities are not limited, society is the one that sets in those people the limits and obstacles. (Journal, Catalina, "Disability is diversity")

Catalina is reflecting here upon the situation of a teenage girl with down syndrome who did not have access to higher education due to her condition. She implies that we are constantly being filled with information and facts about segregated people but little knowledge to approach and reconnect with them.

All of the above-mentioned findings led us to consider some theoretical aspects that need to be considered in the discussion and conclusion below.

Discussion

We consider there are some educational conditions in Colombia that may constrain the development of agency: (a) the countless methods (e.g., grammar translation, natural approach, the communicative language teaching, etc.) (Macías, 2010, p. 188) that do not fit in the characteristics of our context, restraining the possibility of knowing how students learn by using the method as a lens that prevents knowing the student holistically (how they learn, the assets they bring to their learning, their understanding of the learning process, etc.); (b) ELT policies and the colonial discourses (González, 2007, p. 319) that seek to train teachers and students as mere technicians and passive consumers of knowledge produced by "experts" (Cárdenas, González, & Álvarez, 2010, p. 51) to privilege the industry behind ELT; (c) the distorted nature of education in Colombia and the link between this and the economy to meet the needs of a capitalist world (Guerrero, 2010) instead of looking for knowledge that meets the necessities of our community. Consequently, there is a need to further research agency development in the field of ELT in our country.

Conclusions

This research study provided us with valuable insights to begin to understand how STs could develop agency. Through the interaction of the participants with their community, we could observe pertinent aspects that contributed to their building of knowledge from people outside of the classroom, to know their community necessities, and to reflect upon how they and their actions could support improvement or, at least, generate awareness. Most importantly, and as described by some participants, this research study granted the opportunity to experience how STs know and how they can bind their abilities, and their teacher self-realization with the reality of their contexts.

References

Cárdenas, M. L., González, A., & Álvarez, J. A. (2010). El desarrollo profesional de los docentes de inglés en ejercicio: algunas consideraciones conceptuales para Colombia [In service English teachers' professional development: Some conceptual considerations for Colombia]. *Folios, 31*, 49-68. https://doi.org/10.17227/01234870.31folios49.67.

Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco, US: Jossey-Bass.

Clandinin, D. J., & Huber, J. (2010). Narrative inquiry. In P. Peterson, E. Baker, & B. McGaw (Eds), *International encyclopedia of education* (3rd ed., pp. 436-441). New York, US: Elsevier. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-044894-7.01387-7.

Clandinin, D. J., Huber, J., Huber, M., Murphy, M. S., Murray Orr, A., Pearce, M., & Steeves, P. (2006). *Composing diverse identities: Narrative inquiries into the interwoven lives of children and teachers*. London, UK: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203012468.

Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. L. (2009). *Inquiry as stance: Practitioner research for the next generation.* New York, US: Teachers College Press.

Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (2006). Narrative inquiry. In J. L. Green, G. Camilli, & P. B. Elmore (Eds.), *Handbook of complementary methods in education research* (pp. 477-488). Mahwah, US: Erlbaum.

Emirbayer, M., & Mische, A. (1998). What is agency? *American Journal of Sociology, 103*(4), 962-1023. https://doi.org/10.1086/231294.

Freire, P. (1974). *Education for critical consciousness.* London, UK: Continuum.

Freire, P. (2005). *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* New York, US: Continuum.

Freire, P., & Macedo, D. (2005). *Literacy: Reading the word and the world.* London, UK: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203986103.

Giroux, H. A. (1997). *Pedagogy and the politics of hope: Theory, culture and schooling.* Boulder, us: Westview Press.

Giroux, H. A. (2004). Critical pedagogy and the post-modern/modern divide: Towards a pedagogy of democratization. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 31*(1), 31-47.

González, A. (2007). Professional development of efl teachers in Colombia: Between colonial and local practices. *Íkala, Revista de Lenguaje y Cultura, 12*(1), 309-332.

Guerrero, C. H. (2010). Is English the key to access the wonders of the modern world? A critical discourse analysis. *Signo y Pensamiento, 29*(57), 294-313.

Janks, H., Dixon, K., Ferreira, A., Granville, S., & Newfield, D. (2013). *Doing critical literacy: Texts and activities for students and teachers* [Kindle for pc]. London, uk: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203118627.

Johnston, R., & Davis, R. (2008). Negotiating the dilemmas of community-based learning in teacher education. *Teaching Education, 19*(4), 351-360. https://doi.org/10.1080/10476210802436492.

Lastra, S. P., Durán, N. C., & Acosta, D. (2018). Community based pedagogy as an eye-opening for pre-service teachers' initial connections with the school curriculum. *Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal, 20*(2), 209-229. https://doi.org/10.14483/22487085.13047.

Macías, D. F. (2010). Considering new perspectives in elt in Colombia: From efl to elf. *How, 17*(1), 181-194.

Polkinghorne, D. E. (1995). Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 8*(1), 5-23. https://doi.org/10.1080/0951839950080103.

Rodríguez, G. M. (2013). Power and agency in education: Exploring the pedagogical dimensions of funds of knowledge. *Review of Research in Education, 37*(1), 87-120. https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X12462686.

Santos, B. (2009). *Una epistemología del sur: la reinvención del conocimiento y la emancipación social.* Buenos Aires, ar: Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales.

Sharkey, J. (2012). Community-based pedagogies and literacies in language teacher education: Promising beginnings, intriguing challenges [Editorial]. *Íkala, Revista de Lenguaje y Cultura, 17*(1), 9-13.

Sharkey, J., Clavijo-Olarte, A., & Ramírez, L. M. (2016). Developing a deeper understanding of community-based pedagogies with teachers: Learning with and from teachers in Colombia. *Journal of Teacher Education, 67*(4), 1-14. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487116654005.

Xu, S., & Connelly, F. M. (2009). Narrative inquiry for teacher education and development: Focus on English as a foreign language in China. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 25*(2), 219-227. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2008.10.006.

About the Authors

Wilson Hernández Varona is a visiting teacher of English at Universidad Surcolombiana. He is studying for his master's degree in English didactics offered at the same university. His areas of interest are teacher education and development, educational research, critical literacies, and community-based pedagogies.

Daniel Felipe Gutiérrez Álvarez is a teacher of English at Universidad Nacional Abierta y a Distancia (unad) and Universidad Cooperativa (Colombia). He is currently completing his master's degree in English didactics at Universidad Surcolombiana. His research areas of interest are multiliteracies, discourses, and foreign language teaching and learning.