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Licenciatura en la Enseñanza del Inglés

**Reflection on professional growth: three issues that shaped me and helped
me define my practice**

TRABAJO DE EJERCICIO PROFESIONAL

**Que para obtener el grado de
Licenciatura en la Enseñanza del Inglés**

PRESENTA

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DEDICATION

This achievement is not only mine, but also my parents' because without their help I would not have been able to finish my degree. My parents have been my motivation to never give up and never leave anything incomplete. They have come very far based on work and effort, and I want to follow in their footsteps. With this achievement, I feel ready to continue succeeding and preparing myself in this wonderful field that is teaching. I love you mom and dad.

Este logro no es solo mío, pero también de mis padres ya que sin su ayuda no habría logrado terminar la licenciatura. Mis padres han sido mi motivación para nunca rendirme y nunca dejar nada incompleto. Ellos han llegado muy lejos a base de trabajo y esfuerzo, y quiero seguir sus pasos. Con este logro, me siento listo para seguir triunfando y seguir preparándome en este maravilloso campo que es la docencia. Te amo mamá y te amo papá.

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Chapter 1

Born to be a teacher

1.1 Introduction

My name is Luis Adrian. I am 31 years old and I was born and raised in Irapuato, Guanajuato. My story with teaching began when I was a child. I remember that I always wanted to be a teacher, although I never knew that I would ultimately end up as an English teacher. Perhaps this inclination came from my grandfather, who was a university professor and who has always been one of my greatest inspirations.

During high school, I used to teach private English lessons at home. I speak English since I was in Elementary school, I always studied in private and bilingual schools so I have spoken English since then. I used to charge \$25 pesos per hour back in 2010, it probably was very cheap. In addition, I helped my classmates to study for the exams and academic projects. When I finished high school, I was not sure what major I wanted to study in university. I really liked architecture; I am fascinated by scale models and buildings and in my free time, I used to build scale models of New York landmarks, such as the Twin Towers, the Empire State, etc. I realized that architecture or making models was just a hobby since I only did them in my free time. I had no passion; it was just a hobby, so I discarded it from my list of professions.

Apart from my love for the architecture and buildings and scale models, I still had a great interest in teaching English. I decided to look for a job as an English teacher at an elementary school near my house. I created a syllabus and made an appointment to speak with the principal. I asked her to give me the opportunity to teach English to children at the school. I told her I would do it for free because I wanted to know if this was really my

vocation or not. I worked there for four months. The job was so satisfying that I realized that I really wanted to spend the rest of my life teaching this beautiful language. Seeing the faces of my students while they were learning a new language gave me great satisfaction. When they told me ‘Teacher, at home my parents ask me things in English or my siblings ask me to help them with their English homework’ that is something that makes me feel very happy and proud. I really love being in front of a classroom, no matter if it is early in the morning or late at night, I am always with a smile on my face and ready to teach.

1.2 Critical incidents to become an EFL teacher.

I decided to enroll in the Licenciatura en la Enseñanza del Inglés (LEI) at the Universidad de Guanajuato. I took my first class in the BA in 2012. I remember the first day of classes, my professors showed up for the first time and I knew that the majority of them were foreigners, specifically from United States, Canada, United Kingdom and of course Mexico. This caught my attention. In fact, I can say that each of the subjects I studied has helped me become a better English teacher. However, what I learned from taking classes in this program is that theory without putting it on practice is useless. Working as a teacher, I have been able to see how my LEI subjects make sense. This B.A program has helped me to see my work from a different perspective and putting all that knowledge in practice has helped me understand my classes.

1.3 Current Professional Context: Three jobs

I currently work in three different schools. They are all completely different and each one has its unique charm.

These three jobs are: 1.- High school / 2.- My own school / 3.- University.

1.- High school.

My first job is at a private High School, which is one of the best ones in my city. I started working there in 2019. I teach Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 10:45 a.m. to 1:20 p.m. Currently, I teach three groups: second, fourth and sixth semester of high school in advanced level. These three groups are advanced because students are separated by levels and my groups are advanced, so I have to repeat the same class to three groups. I do not have to plan a different class or topic for each group since they are all placed in advanced level. At this high school, they have students placed by levels, however, these three groups work differently, and I will explain this.

The second-semester group has an impressive level of English. Most of them come from previous bilingual or private schools, which is the reason their level of English is very good. They work quickly and I need to apply extra activities to fill in the hour class.

Teaching this group has been a challenge for me because the exercises in the book are often too simple and boring for them. Nonetheless, they are enthusiastic and work hard and participate. When I teach a unit of the book, I first need to create extra activities because they generally finish book activities before the class time is over. I always work to include dynamic activities in order to challenge them.

When my class with the second graders ends, I then teach my fourth-semester students. With this group, the context is totally different than my second-semester group. These students are less participatory and they pay less attention. They are not enthusiastic at all. The class hour is barely enough to meet my lesson plans, because these students spend so much time talking and going in and out of the classroom. There is never any need to create extra activities since I barely finish on time.

Finally, my students from sixth grade tend to be indolent and uninterested. They do not pay attention and are often rebellious. All the six-semester teachers, regardless of subject, agree that these students are not participative. They complain that classes are often tedious and challenging to carry out. One management strategy that I use a lot with this group has to do with the distribution of the students around the classroom. When I enter the room, I separate the students who are busy talking, joking or laughing. In addition, another one of the strategies that I use so that they work in a timely manner is that they must collect all possible signings, seals or marks from the teacher. I sign up them for each activity carried out in class. If they work, they get my mark or signature, if they do not finish their work on time or simply do not work, they do not receive my signing and at the end of the unit or course they will not be able to obtain those points for working in class and for participation which can affect their final grade. In a certain way, consciously or unconsciously, they feel motivated to work in order to get those points for working in class.

Perhaps the reason for my problems with the fourth and six-semester students has to do with their age. They are of course older than the second-semester students: the age they are going through is a complicated stage. They have other interests besides studying. In fact, many only think about passing the subject because it is a requirement, but they do not have any intrinsic desire to learn the language. It is a difficult situation, but we teachers should take their lack of motivation into account and devise a plan to avoid losing them during class.

2.- My own school.

My second workplace is my own school. A year ago, I founded an English school. This is my third year with this project, a project that started in the hallway of my apartment.

Now with an investment of almost \$50,000 pesos and with the help of my parents, I opened my school in a building downtown Irapuato. It has a bathroom, a reception area, and a big classroom. I currently have 32 students enrolled. In my adult's course, the students' ages go from 15 to 65 years old; in the children's course, I have students from 9 to 12 years old. I start at 4:00 p.m. until 9:00 p.m. from Monday to Thursday. The five groups that I currently have are divided by level of English. The first group, which takes place from 5:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. is for beginners. The second group, which runs from 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. is for intermediate level. The third group, from 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. is for advanced level. And the fourth group, from 8:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. is for beginner level. Each student who enrolls is asked to do the placement test in order to situate him or her in the right class. There are students who ask not to take the placement exam; these learners simply start at the beginner level.

I really like going to my school. The space I rented is amazing and comfortable. The facilities and furniture are completely new. The students are very committed to learning the language. I am currently looking for a teacher who can work in the mornings. For this, I would need to conduct a job interview to learn about their strategies and their ways of teaching and preparation. I want this to be a great company in the future and to be able to give many jobs to first-time teachers who are looking for employment opportunities while they are studying for their BA. degree.

3.- University

My third workplace is at the University of Guanajuato Subcampus Irapuato. I have been working there for 9 years. I started working there when I was in the fourth semester of the LEI program. The job was one of my first formal jobs as a teacher.

I remember the first time I asked for an opportunity to work at the UG. They told me that I needed more preparation, but that there would be opportunities for me as soon as I gained more experience, knowledge and maturity. One day, my mom received a phone call and it was the current coordinator of the English area of the university Subcampus Irapuato. My mom was so happy because it was the first time that anyone had ever addressed me as a teacher. He asked me to show up for an interview and I got the job. I currently work on Fridays from 4:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. and Saturdays from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Every Friday and Saturday, I teach 5 hours with a 30 minutes break to take lunch and breakfast. My students are amazing. What I like most about the work is the commitment of my students. I teach 22 beginner students, from 15 to 28 years old. They are all enrolled because they really want to learn the language. Their high level of motivation makes my job easier: they participate when I ask them to; they ask many questions, they help each other; and they do homework. They are always open and enthusiastic. In that sense, my private school and my class at the University of Guanajuato are very similar: students are there to learn and are fully committed to the course. This, of course, is very different from my high school students where English is only another mandatory subject.

1.4 Skills that I have developed in each of my three jobs.

Working at the high school, my own school and the university is not an easy thing. Each workplace has its complications, its rules, its norms and its ways of working, but all three share my passion for teaching. I have learned over a long time that if I want to stand out and be someone important and recognized in this environment, I need to prepare myself and I need to continue learning so as not to stagnate. All three of my workplaces are great.

In high school, which we will call it “Workplace 1,” It is a place where I learn more about how to improve my communication skills in front of the group or individually with the students. These young people are students who are adapting to a different way of working. Very different from secondary school. Here I have learned to develop myself more, to be more patient, more accessible and much more dynamic. It is clear that these young people are in their rebellious stage and that they have too much energy, so they do not want to sit all day listening to their different teachers. Therefore, I have learned to be more dynamic and fun in my classes. I agree that fun is not at odds with teaching. So, I try to be too dynamic in my classes, when the topics are complicated or tedious, I need to plan activities they feel attracted to and where they are learning at the same time.

We will call my second job “My own School”. I have applied everything that I have learned throughout my preparation as a teacher in this project that is “My own school”. I have learned to manage myself, manage my time, my money and my classes. In this place, I am in charge of everything, I direct finances, registrations, interviews, everything administrative and at the same time, I am the teacher. I love my school; I love knowing that I can manage a school by myself, and also be a great teacher. My school has taught me to manage my time as I need to spend time on my three jobs. I am clear that none of my three jobs is more important than another. All three are very important and deserve all my effort and dedication. I had to create a course for my own school where the student starts in beginner level and ends in advanced level. For this, I described each topic that must be seen in each unit, assigned times to see each topic, and assigned the number of days or months each level takes. I have learned a lot from my school, and I am thrilled with my school.

My third job is “The University” and I love it. Working with college students is great. They are very spontaneous and relaxed but also very smart. At university, I have learned that any activity that I present at that moment without being planned beforehand, will be noticed by the students. It has happened to me on several occasions that I am teaching a topic and it occurs to me to do an activity that I did not plan in advance. In the end it goes wrong or my students do not like it. I learned never to do this again. My college students are very smart and they know how to treat you to get what they want. I have also learned to know each personality, each modus operandi since they are very astute and are capable of anything to pass the subject. I have learned to be strict but at the same time accessible. They are students who teach me a lot in every session. I love learning from them and I really enjoy working there at the University.

1.5 Reflection on Practice and Professional Growth Competence

Every teacher has a story to tell. Stories full of nice and unpleasant experiences, experiences full of learning and teaching. No teacher is born knowing how to teach. We never finish learning. There will always be areas of opportunity and there will always be a way to be better every day. According to Korthagen et al. (2001), “Growth competence is the ability to continue to develop professionally on the basis of internally directed learning” (p. 47). Throughout my work experience in the English teaching field, I have come across different problems such as giving instructions, discipline and lesson planning. By finding ways to deal with these problems, I believe I have improved as a teacher.

In my practice as a teacher, I have identified three main issues that made me learn more about how to be a better teacher. In this professional paper, the first issue that I want

to discuss is the use of instructions within the classroom. One of my own problems that I faced as a foreign language student was that many times when my teacher gave us instructions, I did not understand what my teacher wanted me to do. Now, as a teacher, I know how complex it is to give instructions to a group of students. As Cohen and Manion (1995) explain, “the manner in which we deliver instructions is important” (p. 228). Since I started working as a teacher, this topic has been one of the most complicated for me. I continue to work on my strategies for giving level-appropriate instructions that my students can understand.

The second issue has to do with discipline. According to Lewis (1997), “discipline is generally represented as what teachers do in response to students’ misbehavior” (p. 99). I believe that all teachers have had bad experiences with discipline, from elementary students to high school or university students. This is a topic I have to deal with every day, in any group, at any level. If a teacher does not know how to exercise discipline within a classroom, it becomes challenging to achieve pedagogical objectives.

Finally, I will discuss lesson planning as a challenge in my teaching practice. According to Harmer (1991), “during the planning phase, the teacher makes decisions about goals, activities, resources, timing, grouping, and other aspects of the lesson” (p. 28). For me, it has been a bit complicated to develop an effective lesson plan for each group. Since the beginning of my career as a teacher, it has always been a subject that caused me a lot of stress. I never knew how important a lesson plan was to a teacher. Many times, I have had time left over because I did not use to plan the activities well. When this occurs, I had to invent an activity to fill the time I have left over.

Having described the main three challenges I have faced as a teacher; I will now describe and discuss them using bibliographical and academic references for a better understanding to support what I am explaining.

Chapter 2

Challenge: Giving Instructions

2.1 My past practices on giving instructions

According to Sowell (2017), “Instruction-giving has a direct effect on learning; a lesson or activity becomes chaotic and fails when students do not understand what they are supposed to do” (p. 10). When I was a student of English and French, understanding teacher’s instructions was always a significant problem for me. For example, my French instructor was French and spoke very little Spanish; therefore, the class was conducted completely in the L2. As a complete beginner, it was very challenging for me to understand the explanation of any specific topic or the instructions about any activity. I always had to ask other students what the teacher had said or what we had to do. This situation made me feel timid and less participative and undermined my motivation to learn.

Despite my own experiences, when I became a teacher, I essentially followed the same teaching model as my French teacher. I gave my instructions in English and simply assumed that my students would understand. I used to give instructions without thinking about the individuality of my students and their differing comprehension abilities. Instead, I gave everyone the same set of instructions. When I set my students a task, I would then walk around the classroom to check their progress and to see if they needed help. I found that many of my students got stuck because they had not understood what I had explained.

Even when we were working on the book, many of my students could not even find the required page.

I finally realized that providing instructions in the L2 was not working. My solution was to switch some words to Spanish. For me, it was much simpler. Eventually, I found using Spanish sometimes is convenient. As Ur (1996) mentioned, “some use of the mother tongue might be necessary even when a topic was not particularly difficult” (p.43). Similarly, Atkinson (1987) writes, “instruction-giving is an occasion that warrants the use of the L1 in the L2 classroom” (p.62). The three authors agreed that instruction-giving is a permissible use of the first language (L1) in an (L2) classroom. This is undoubtedly true. But in my case, I did not know how to balance the use of English and Spanish. I clearly overused Spanish. I fell into the bad habit of explaining instructions in Spanish to save time and because it was easier for me and my students. This situation got worse and worse, until it came a point when the entire class was in Spanish and not in English which of course, was not the vision, mission or objective of the course.

Another problem I had with giving instructions was that I often overcomplicated them. I tried to explain every detail of a given task instead of simplifying my instructions for clarity. I would do this in both English and Spanish. According to Harmer (1996), “while the teacher should add why she wants her students to do a certain thing, she should at the same time keep her instructions concise and to the point” (p. 46). I did not seem to be able to do this. I was always worried that if I did not explain everything with absolute precision, my students would not be able to complete the tasks I gave them. However, by providing too much information, I simply confused my students. This had the opposite effect to what I tried to achieve.

2.2 Reflection on past practices when giving instructions

From the moment I began teaching, my instructions were always confusing and less professional. I was a novice teacher, just beginning to work in the EFL field, and I did not give much thought to how instructions should be given. I believed that being a teacher simply meant standing in front of a group and explaining a topic that I, as an English speaker, already knew. Of course, being a teacher requires much more than that.

Reflecting on it now, I can see that I was not doing a very professional work so I had to commit myself and pay attention to what my co-workers told me. First, in the beginning, I never received professional feedback from anyone, and so I did not even notice that something was wrong. Second, even when I realized that my instructions were not working, I did not know who to approach for advice. So, instead, I imitated the teachers who taught me in high school and university and applied their “techniques” to my own work. Unfortunately, these past teachers were not effective role models and I took away the wrong lessons. Teachers also need role models, advice, tips, constructive criticism, and helpful comments.

2.3 Changes in the practice of giving instructions

As I taught, I was mostly unaware of the deficiency that I had as a teacher in the area of giving instructions. Everything began to change when I found a new job in Irapuato at the age of 20. By then, I had already been studying in the LEI program for two years. It was at this new job that my thinking about teaching took a radical turn. I had students who ranged in age from 17 to 19. Unlike my younger students, who uncritically accepted my style of teaching, these older pupils immediately perceived my deficiencies as a teacher.

When I gave the instructions for an activity, they would immediately tell me they did not understand. As always, I would switch to Spanish and explain the instruction again so that everyone understood. However, these new university students complained about me in their teacher's evaluations.

According to Salaberri (1995) and Gardner (2000), "Students should be introduced to the use of English from the first class; doing so helps students understand that foreign languages are not just subjects to be studied but are also, and more importantly, a means of communication" (p. 2). My students seemed to be more aware of the importance of using the L2 in class than I was. In their quarterly evaluations, the students wrote that I spoke a lot of Spanish and gave instructions in Spanish. They also mentioned that it was not always clear what I expected from them and suggested that I had to be more concise when I give instructions. In subsequent meetings with my coordinator, I realized that my students had some constructive points.

I have always been a person open to criticism in order to improve. I like to learn from my mistakes and I am always willing to listen to others, take their advice and improve. After these evaluations and feedback from my coordinator, I began to think much more deeply about my teaching because I wanted to excel and be a better teacher. I started avoiding the use of Spanish when giving instructions. As I mentioned, it had always been a bad habit, but I never recognized it until I was evaluated. I tried to be more concise and direct when giving instructions, explaining task goals in a clear, logical way. Scrivener (2011) explains that teachers listen to themselves and get feedback from others. I began to work on being more self-reflective and more aware of how my students responded to my work.

2.4 Current practices on giving instructions

Everyone makes mistakes. That it is unavoidable. I consider that it is our responsibility to examine our negative experiences and improve them. This is certainly true when it comes to teaching. Thanks to my coordinator and some students who were really committed to learning the language, I was able to notice my areas of opportunity and make some changes. One of those pointed areas according to my supervisor and colleagues was to be concise with what I was explaining. Currently, I have changed my strategies when giving instructions in class. Nowadays, when I give an instruction, I use my hands and make body movements to simulate what I am talking about. I take into account the levels of my students. According to the level I am teaching, I may exaggerate the movements of my hands so that my students understand me. Prodromou (1992) writes, “we should make sure that our gestures are clear and we should make them confidently” (p. 58). Our gestures must be able to communicate a message without the need to speak. There are many commands within the classroom, and many phrases and instructions that can be explained with just gestures. The firmness of the gestures can vary according to the level of English of the group or even according to the word or phrase that is being sought to be understood.

For example, with my beginner level students, when asking them to open their books, I use my hands to simulate a book opening. Willis (1993) suggests, “when the teacher wants her students to open or close their books, she may take a book in her hand and open/close it to physically demonstrate what she wants her students to do” (p. 1). At the same time, when I tell them to open to a certain page of the textbook, I repeat the page number several times. I completely avoid using Spanish. I explain everything in English and I make sure that everyone has heard and understood. I regularly make sure to use

comprehension checks. Furthermore, I will not begin a new topic or activity until we are all on the same page and looking at the same exercise.

Another example, when my students ask me for the meaning of a verb. Instead of responding in Spanish as I used to do, I instead use the verb in a sentence, or sometimes I interpret it with my hands. For example, if my student does not know how to say the verb “ir” in English, with my fingers, I simulate a person walking; at the same time, I say a sentence, for example, “I am going to the park.” Verbs such as fly, cook, drive, take a shower, and buy can be explained through body language without the need to speak Spanish. In the same way, class commands can be explained by using hand and body movements. I use such physical language mostly with my beginner level students, as they do not understand a lot of things.

In addition to movements, tone of voice, projection and vocabulary play a very important role when giving instructions. When I explain something, I make sure that my tone of voice is consistent with the size of the room and the outside noise. When I have many students in a classroom, I try to walk between their desks while I explain so that they can hear me well and so that I can monitor their understanding in real-time. When my students speak Spanish, I always ask them to use English. If they cannot express themselves in English, I help them to say what they want.

When I give instructions to my intermediate or advanced students, it is not as common that I use hand or body movements to explain something. However, if it turns out that my students do not understand something, then I will resort to body language or visuals to make my them understand. For example, when I explain a task or a project that they have to turn in in a few days, I always use a sheet of paper and point out what the document should include. I also moderate the speed and the rhythm of my language. I make sure that

all my students are paying attention and at the end of the explanation, I ask two or three students to explain in their own words what I just said. This way, students have another opportunity to understand what is being asked. Ur (1996) suggested, “good instruction-giving begins in the preparation stage. Although teachers may feel they can easily improvise, instructions “are often not as clear to their students as they are to themselves” (p. 16).

2.5 Reflection on current practices and looking ahead on giving instructions.

Although I have improved and learned a lot to when I started teaching, there are still areas of opportunity that I have to attend to in order to keep improving as a teacher. For example, one of the areas would be to extend my vocabulary in order to provide better instructions. Sometimes, I feel limited when explaining since I cannot find or have no synonyms of words or proper words according to their level that I can use to explain. According to Krashen and Terrell (1983), “not only should the teacher be aware of the specific vocabulary needs of her students, but also, she should be aware of her students’ vocabulary knowledge. That is important so that she knows how to modify the vocabulary she wants to use. In other words, the teacher should pay attention to the difficulty of the chosen items of lexis and find the right expressions the students will understand” (p. 180). Also, to include more visual material, pictures and gestures when I have to explain something to my students. Harmer (1996) expresses, “teachers tend to use oral instructions and gestures simultaneously, there are moments in which just using a gesture is sufficient enough” (p. 53).

Despite the changes I have made to my teaching, I still have students who have a hard time understanding class instructions. With these types of students, I prefer

approaching them personally and use a language and rhythm of speaking that they can understand. However, they sometimes did not understand, and this is something I am thinking a lot about these days: how can I help them? Listening comprehension is, of course, one of the more complicated skills to teach. To improve and to understand better, it requires that students do a lot of work on their own, using their free time to keep practicing. They need to watch movies on TV and listen to English language music. It bothers me and worries me that I cannot do more for them, but most of the work has also to be on their own.

I keep looking for ways to improve my teaching skills. For instance, I continue to count on student evaluations. In my own school, I periodically ask my students to describe their experiences taking classes with me. One of the specific points that I touch on in this evaluation is how they perceive my instructions. What would they change or add and how could I improve when giving instructions to their class? Talking with colleagues, I have received a lot of excellent advice from others who went through the same thing or who are going through a situation like mine. We share ideas, advice, tips on the subject, and I take what I think is best for me.

Chapter 3

Challenge 2: Discipline

3.1 My past practices in exercising of discipline

Nakpodia (2010) defines discipline as “methods of modeling character and of teaching self-control and acceptable behavior. It implies self-control, restraint, and respect for self and for others” (p. 1). One problem that some teachers deal with is misbehaviors. In our work, teachers always encounter students with different personalities, behaviors and beliefs. Teachers must work to be one step ahead of the students in order to know how to deal responsibly and professionally with inevitable behavioral problems. Jones (1979) writes that “discipline, most simply stated, is the business of enforcing simple classroom rules that facilitate learning and minimize disruption” (p. 26). Since I began to work as a teacher, I have always had to deal with undisciplined students in different grades, from elementary school students to university students. In particular, I struggled with primary school students. When I tried to assert my authority as a teacher, some would go home and complain to their parents that I had yelled at them or disciplined them too harshly. The next day their parents would want to talk to me about what had happened. I once reprimanded a 4th grader because he had not done his homework, he was not paying attention and he was misbehaving in class. I called him to my desk and scolded him. Unfortunately, this student told his parents about the situation, and his parents asked to have an appointment with me to defend their son. At that time, I felt that the students have the power and that they cannot really be scolded by the teachers. This type of situation is very discouraging, since it robs teachers of their authority and takes away their voices. Working with adults and adolescents is also challenging.

Students at the age of 17 and up are often rebellious, most of them reticent and many times, I have had to deal with arrogant, mocking, rude students. Even students whom I would characterize as being completely out of their minds. However, even in the worst situations, I have never lost my temper. I have worked to remain professional and respectful and I am always conscious of avoiding confrontations that could get out of hand.

3.2 Reflection on past practices in the exercising of discipline.

Thornberg (2008) explains that “indiscipline is misbehavior in any or all of the following areas: respect for school authority, obedience to rules and regulations, and maintenance of established standards of behavior. School discipline can be described as all the strategies that can be used to coordinate, regulate and organize individuals and their activities in the school” (p. 37). Over the years, I have tried many class management methods. What I have learned is that there are no single techniques that allows one to deal with every situation that arises in the classroom. Knowledge to deal with discipline problems is a long process of trial and error. One absorbs more from experience than from what someone can tell you. Some techniques that work with some students do not work with other ones. Each student is different and in a moment of “crisis,” the teacher has to make his or her best guess about the best way to resolve the situation.

Just starting out in the teaching field, I did not know how to handle undisciplined students. What I used to do was to raise my voice at them, which did not really solve the problem. Students stayed calm for a moment, but the next day they continued to misbehave. Many colleagues gave me advice on what to do when facing disciplinary problems in class, but many times the advice they gave me was of no use. To be honest, I was scared when I had to ask a student to be quiet, to move them to another desk, or ask them to leave the

room: I did not want to start a confrontation with my students. I never felt prepared to face disciplinary problems. I always pretended that I was doing it right and that my method was correct, all the while secretly hoping that the problems would somehow resolve themselves.

3.3 Change in practice in the exercising of discipline.

Eventually, as I continued to ineffectively control my classes, my students realized that they had free rein to make fun of me, cheat or be rude. Many stopped showing up to class altogether. I tried to threaten them with calling their parents or sending them to the principal's office or giving them extra homework. But they knew I was bluffing and I would not follow through with my threats. My students felt they had the upper hand since I did not know how to execute the rules and norms of discipline within the classroom.

When disciplinary problems started to grow beyond my control, I finally approached my coordinators to request some assistance. I began to feel that I needed advice from the school authorities, since I had to act according to the rules of the institution. I did not want to have problems with the parents or with the school administration. Fortunately, my coordinators were supportive. They gave me useful advice about how to act in situations of indiscipline or rebellion in my classroom. Once my coordinator told me to keep quiet until everyone saw that the class had stopped. When all the students were finally silent, I could give a message asking them to stop talking and to pay attention.

I also looked for help from other teachers. Many times, at meetings outside of school, I talked with my colleagues about the discipline problems in my classroom. The talks were extensive and intense since discipline problems are subjects that most teachers can identify with. Other teachers told me that I should continue with the class, explain instructions and that the students would later ask what the activity was. I was told never to

remove students from the classroom. Perhaps a note or a report sent to their parents would work.

As Tarman (2016) explains, in general, there are two models for dealing with classroom discipline. One of them is student behavior modification, which focuses on the “procedures for general classroom discipline problems and individual deviant behavior” (p. 38). The second model has to do with the teacher’s own psychological attitudes towards the problem. In my case, these two models reinforced each other. That is, as I started to experiment with different procedures and disciplinary approaches, I found that success leads to small changes in my personality. Before, I had lack confidence and without the power to punish students. I slowly began to realize that inside the classroom, I am the one who has the power to teach and guide, and that mine was the last word. This shift in psychological perspective gave me the confidence to try new disciplinary approaches.

3.4 Current practices in the exercising of discipline.

On the one hand, some teachers view discipline in terms of “punishment, such as isolation, removal, denial of privileges, or corporal punishment” (Dreikurs et al., 1971, p. 38). Dreikurs et al. (1971), claim that on the one hand, some teachers view discipline in terms of “punishment, such as isolation, removal, denial of privileges, or corporal punishment” (p. 38). However, according to the authors, “teachers must understand that a child’s behavior is purposive. That is, all behavior is goal directed and indicates the ways in which the child has adapted to his environment” (p. 38).

This is valuable insight. Instead of becoming frustrated by *what* a student does, I personally should try to understand *why* the student is behaving the way they are. For

example, I had a high school student who was very talkative, indolent, and rude. He thought he knew everything; he did not need me or any other teacher. He was haughty and angry. Instead of punishing the student, I tried to pay more attention to him. I struggled a lot to make him understand that his behavior was not appropriate for a young high school student. When I explained an activity or an instruction, I would ask him to move to a place closer to me so that he would understand the task. When my other students had to work in the book or on some activity, I made sure he had extra support. I wanted him to feel that I was concerned about him and that I was attentive to his work. I talked to him many times at the end of each class. He had to understand that it was his responsibility to come to school and to respect and listen to his teachers. This extra attention paid off. Little by little, he began to improve. He began to hand in homework. He began to pay more attention in class, to participate more, and to respect the class environment.

Giving students individualized attention is one way that I have improved discipline in my classes. I have discovered several techniques that have helped to maintain order.

1. Something that I often do when I experience situation of indiscipline is to ignore my students until they themselves feel that they should calm down. This technique is so effective that sometimes individual students approach me and apologize for their behavior.
2. When students are restless, I move them to different places in the classroom. I spread them around the room. I separate groups of students who talk a lot, who are just laughing and who are not paying attention.
3. When discipline problems become too much for me to handle on my own, I summon parents to the school and explain the situation to them. I am proactive in

this respect. As opposed to punishing a student and then worrying whether a parent will come to the school and complain, I reach out to the parents first and involve them.

4. According to Brophy (1986), “the use of structures in which rewards and punishments are meted out to groups based on the behavior of individuals within those groups have been found effective in remediating misbehavior” (p. 194).

I have found this to be true. Instead of trying to be the only person who controls the behavior of individual students, I try to create rewards for the behavior of the class as a whole. If everyone works diligently, for example, I may let the class leave a few minutes early or give them an extra, positive grade for good behavior. In this way, the entire class works to monitor and promote good conduct. Peer pressure is generally more effective than me, alone, trying to control a class.

Coe et al. (2014) proposed four main methods to evaluate teacher effectiveness: value-added attainment measures, classroom observation, teacher surveys and student feedback, all of which have specific advantages and disadvantages, with observation seen as particularly useful as it allows detailed data on teacher behaviors to be collected.

I have implemented these four strategies through time and my experience as a teacher. Since no group is the same, not all strategies work in all groups. I make a point of observing the classes of other teachers and pay special attention the methods and techniques they use in order to maintain discipline. As a teacher, I must instrument the necessary strategies to reduce indiscipline occurrences. These four strategies that I use to combat indiscipline in class do not always work, I have to be devising and creating new strategies as I advance in my career and in this field of work, but these four strategies mentioned above are the ones that work the most for me and the which I still use today. As

I have mentioned, I have learned many useful teaching techniques during my professional practice. I feel more prepared. I feel more confident that I can face disciplinary problems in my classroom. I have learned to trust myself.

3.5 Reflection on current practices and looking forward in the exercising of discipline

Professor Tarman (2016) proposed that “Understanding students’ basic psychological needs, establishing positive teacher student relationship, creating positive peer relationships, working with parents, and enhancing students’ motivation and learning are... important factors to create successful classroom management” (p. 37-42).

I still have troublesome students but I feel like I can usually handle them. The most significant changes in my professional practice are thanks to the change I made in terms of strategies and mindset. I am not afraid to face my students, weather they are the same age as me or close to my age. Now, I feel I am able to control any situation related to indiscipline. I consider that the changes in my practice are related to the change in my personality and procedures since I had to implement techniques that I had not used and that professors or coordinators helped me to identify. Another procedure that I had to achieve in order to be able to deal with different situations of indiscipline was to go several times to different classes given by different teachers to observe their classes and methods and techniques of teaching and discipline. This procedure assisted me a lot to learn and also understand the possible factors that involve indiscipline in students.

Chapter 4: Issue 3 - Lesson planning

4.1 My past practices regarding lesson planning.

Richards (1998) proposed that “lesson plans help the teacher think about the lesson in advance to resolve problems and difficulties, to provide a structure for a lesson, to provide a ‘map’ for the teacher to follow, and to provide a record of what has been taught” (p. 103). I still remember the first time I entered a classroom. I had just gotten my first job in a public school in the center of Irapuato. I entered the classroom to teach a sixth-grade group of beginning English students. I felt embarrassed, my voice trembled. I did not have any experience in the teaching field. I did not have a lesson plan or even a marker to write with. A great deal of my insecurity stemmed from the fact that I comprehended I was unprepared. Until I actually walked into my first classroom, I thought that lesson plans were a waste of time. I assumed all a teacher needed was a textbook and that we teachers could just move through it, page by page, activity by activity, without a lesson plan.

As an English student, I do not remember my teachers ever using a lesson plan during classes and so, I assumed that I did not need a plan either; I would simply follow their example and teach as they had taught me. Of course, now, reflecting back, I appreciate that my English classes had no order and the activities had no relation to each other. My teachers just taught the class and invented or recycled activities randomly. More than anything, they just wanted to complete the class hour and go home. I am afraid to say that when I began teaching, I followed that model. When I got to class, I first did a little review of the topics from the last class. Sometimes we would do an activity on the board or play a game. I created all the activities on the spur of the moment. Although I would like to think I was prepared and very dynamic, I know that my classes were never good enough.

I now know that one of my biggest problems had to do with time. I almost always had time to spare. I would teach the points I felt I needed to teach. Once I finished them, I had nothing left over. I never prepared extra activities for my students. I would generally try to improvise in order to prevent my students from noticing that I had run out of ideas. I did not know how to structure a lesson plan, how to divide and combine activities to give my classes a sense of order. I did not know how to manage class time, nor did I take into account unforeseen events. I simply “winged it” ... with less than satisfactory results.

4.2 Reflection on past practices regarding my lesson planning.

As Richards (1998) stresses the importance of lesson planning for English language teachers by suggesting that “the success with which a teacher conducts a lesson is often thought to depend on the effectiveness with which the lesson was planned” (p. 103). I never understood the importance of the lesson plan in the field of teaching until I realized that I was not achieving the required objectives in the course. My classes were monotonous, boring and there was no follow-up or established order. When I started teaching eight years ago, I never used a lesson plan. My only guide was the SEP textbook and as we advanced in the book, those were the topics that I was teaching. I got used to working without a lesson plan, I just did what my instinct was telling me in each class. In primary school, there was not much of a problem since the students do not comprehend when the class is planned or not. As a teacher, you can manipulate a class with children, adding fun activities that occur to you in the moment. The problems with not having a lesson plan started in high school. I used to work in a private school, and I started teaching there without a lesson plan. Soon after, I began to notice that the objectives of the course were not being achieved, the

students were getting bored. My class was tedious and it was always the same dynamic, day after day it was the same. There was no different class. Since I did not plan my classes, we finished the book pages very quickly, the topics went by quickly and sometimes they were not understood by the students. I appreciated how important it was to have a lesson plan as well as a course plan, to check the distribution of topics, units, etc.

Time was a factor that I began to notice as my classes went by way too fast because I did not have a lesson plan. Many times, I did not know what to do with the time that was left over and that began to embarrass me. Nowadays, I do not work if I do not have my lesson plan. I have become very strict with my lesson plans for several years now.

Shrum and Glisan, (1994) pointed out that “effective objectives describe what students will be able to do in terms of observable behavior and when using the foreign language” (p. 48).

The way I plan is as follows:

- 1.- I check my semester plan; I review what topics I have to achieve in this unit and I plan the distribution of sessions so that time is enough for me.
- 2.- Every minute is important to me, so my classes take time, each activity within the class has a time limit and so I can achieve several activities in one day.
- 3.- I write a key word that help me when teaching my class. I write down the pages that will be seen that day and also add extra activities that I call “bonus”. These activities serve to fill spaces in case it is required. As we know, not every day is the same and you as teacher always have to be prepared.

As I mentioned before, I do not work if I do not have my lesson plan done in advance. I can forget my phone, my marker, my charger but I can never forget my lesson plan. As a teacher, we must have our classes prepared in advance, and if an incident occurs, we must

be prepared to improvise as best as possible. I have received many good comments regarding this topic. Many students have written or evaluated me in relation to my lesson plan. They like that I always have a different class, a prepared class and different daily activities, and this makes me feel proud and happy. My lesson plan is part of my life as a teacher.

4.3 Change in practice regarding my lesson planning

When I appreciated that my classes were not being effective and that I had time left over every single class, I decided to make a change in my professional practice. My students always realized that the class did not follow a rhythm or a pattern but they never said anything. My students always knew that timing was an area of opportunity that I had to attack but no one made me see it. When we finished the activities and there was time left over, I would tell my students to do homework from other subjects to fill in the extra time. Today, everything is different. I changed the way I teach by using a lesson plan each day and for each group. My classes today are effective, fun, easy to understand and students follow an order so that the topics and objectives of the course are easy to understand and achieve. As Allen (1995) reported, “students value fun as an important component of an ideal school” (p. 10). This way of teaching is what I was really looking for. Organization in my classes, an objective, diversity of activities, games, performs, etc. Having changed that bad habit assisted my students achieve the objectives of the course. Timing is well defined, I have assigned a number of days to each topic so that each unit is finished on time, the students’ progress at a pace that supports them understand the topics taught by the teacher. Planning my classes gives me security and confidence to enter to any classroom. Always

being prepared with my lesson plan is part of my work routine and I do not leave home without my lesson plan either written down or digital.

4.4 Reflection on current practices and looking ahead regarding my lesson planning

I currently have areas of opportunity regarding my lesson plans that my coordinator has made me aware of. At the school where I work, the coordinators supervise us. They enter the classroom to evaluate our class and then give us feedback on the aspects that need to be improved or to highlight good aspects of the class. One of the aspects that have been mentioned to me is the organization in my lesson plan. Thanks to that feedback, every day, I try harder to make an effective lesson plan. Wood (2000) stated that “the teachers and learners should work together to create a learning model in which feedback will be effective” (p. 788). Personally, now I feel safer. I feel more confident when entering the classroom because I know that if something unexpected happens, I am prepared to face that situation. I always try to follow what my lesson plan says, although sometimes it is not constantly possible. Sometimes, despite having a well-prepared lesson plan, the pace of the class or the environment in the classroom makes me make small changes in order to continue with the class. However, there are very few occasions when I have to modify my lesson plan.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

During all this time working in the teaching field, my learning has been valuable and great. Everything I have seen, what I have learned and what I have experienced has been enlightening. There have been ups and downs in my career but I have certainly learned from my mistakes. Along this path, I have met very successful, experienced and kind teachers, since they have supported me a lot, they have advised me and they have motivated me to be better every time. I have heard countless tips, recommendations and advice that have helped me grow as a teacher. Nobody is born knowing, the successful person had to have failures before being successful. I know that I have a lot to learn and a lot to improve and that is why I try to be better every day. I always pay attention to my areas of opportunity and I confront them. I am passionate about what I do, I am passionate about teaching, I am passionate about being in front of my students and teaching them things that I know. I want to be the best teacher in the world and that is why I will continue to prepare myself academically.

This BA program and my profession itself have helped me relate better to people. My character has been strengthened and my personality is more open. This career is about connecting with people. Along this path, I will meet challenging students, with different personalities, some will be easy going and others will not. I have the responsibility to mediate and deal with all kinds of people. Patience is essential in this field. I never had a class on “patience”, in college we never got a class on “discipline” or a class on “reticent students”. The experience in this field is the one in charge of teaching us all that. We, as teachers, must be open-minded and willing to make changes in order to improve. We

teachers always have to be learning, we always have to improve ourselves, learning new things and always seeking to be the best.

As a general conclusion of the three challenges mentioned in this professional paper which I faced during my career as a teacher, I want to say that I have learned and improve very much. No teacher is born knowing how to be a teacher. The most appropriate thing is to learn from our mistakes, put them into practice, look for solutions, as well as strategies and focus on always being better every day. Students will be grateful and as a teacher I will be satisfied with the good work I have done. Today, many teachers need to have passion for teaching. As teachers, we always seek to improve and assistance the student who is struggling with a subject. These three challenges have helped me improve and implement strategies day by day.

Writing this paper has helped me out to reflect on my past practices to become a better teacher. Remembering my past practices makes me feel proud of myself since I have improved a lot and now, I consider myself a great teacher. You do not always learn from mistakes, but in this very personal case, I did learn from my mistakes and now I try to be even better every day. Without the BA program and my teachers, I would not be the teacher that I am now, apart from my experience in the labor field. Today I am the owner and director of an English school in my city. I want to tell everyone who reads me that everything is possible and that it is a matter of hard work, effort, commitment and passion.

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