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Language Socialization: Recounting an English Language Teacher's Professional Identity Construction via Narrative Accounts

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Abstract

In this research, the teacher-researcher (henceforth, I) presents a chronological report over some life-long educational experiences in an EFL setting and during a long period—twenty-five years aimed at verifying/authenticating role conflicts. In so doing, I decided to carve my earlier educational paths to describe my diverse roles/realities. To this end, I recounted my past and presented experiences, including my three roles as (A) Language learner, (B) Language teacher, and (C) Language researcher. Using life-history narrative research designs and in line with auto-ethnography approaches, I initially embarked on critically describing my English language educational experiences from a recollection of past events in my memory through my first two roles—language learner and teacher—and mapped them onto my recently assigned role as a language researcher. The findings were self-revealing to me in that while recounting my experiences, I found out how specific intuited conflicts involving 'impotency in using the English language for non-educational aims', 'the gap between theories and practice', 'the influence of essential others on my future decisions', 'the duality of exposures with people having more vs. fewer authorities' among others had inflicted me to a great extent. Then and there, during such a long period for demonstrating my professional identity construction, I summarized my intuited conflicts. This was to designate how the unpredictability of affairs in ELT and maintaining intricate interactions with people in the community of practice, which resulted from numerous aims and led to unpredictable directions, might have influenced me as a language practitioner in my future attempts to experience a new being. The findings may promise implications for professional identity construction as mapped on recent narrative accounts for English language teachers.

Keywords: Identity, Language Socialization, Narrative Inquiry, Professional Identity Role Conflicts.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Professional identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Chien, 2018; Olsen, 2011; Tsui, 2007; Varghese, et al., 2005) of a teacher is among those critical issues, which should be closely taken into consideration by researchers, especially among in-service teachers (Bilgen & Richards, 2014) as the majority of the recent studies have focused on student teachers (Abednia, 2012). Quite recently, however, we see this trend is also extending to in-service teachers. Issues such as social, cultural, and political contexts should be fully described and verbalized by mid-career teachers through professional identity construction as a changeable and recursive occurrence (Song, 2015). Within English Language Teaching (ELT) and English language learning domains, some scholars believe that identity in a language teacher is a contested practice with a changing nature mediated with diverse myriads of factors at the workplace (Cheung, Said & Park, 2014). This means that during the processes of identifying themselves with different practices at workplaces, teachers are required to get to understand their intellectual and emotional 'selves' that can inspire them in the process of professional identity construction.

After a comprehensive search in the existing data sources on teacher identity, Hanna et al. (2019) itemized six main components, including self-image, motivation for teaching, commitment towards workplaces, self-efficacy, task perception, and job satisfaction. Such identification can hardly help teachers in this process unless they embark on some meta-cognitive courses of action such as reflection and strategizing about their efforts at work during a long period to search for the roots of tensions they experience (Olsen, 2011). As Craib (1998) puts it, the self embodies a lifetime project where "[w]e are constantly constructing and revising our personal stories and reconstructing ourselves."(p. 2). This can happen when teachers embark on their teacher training courses and continue up until their real-time teaching careers. Such reflections can bring about valuable insights into the complex processes of teaching not just in language but any other subjects, especially during conflicting situations (Kim & Asbury, 2020).

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Understanding teachers' professional identity as such has recently turned into a crucial issue since it aids standardization of their occupational quality or the same professionalization (Day et al, 2006). A closely related term to teacher identity which makes this matter more predisposed to teachers as critical missions in their job is that of socialization—a term used in Human Resources (HR) management domains (Batistic, 2018), by which members of a system as newcomers and prospective employees try to gain the essential skills and knowledge to become efficient in the whole system. It is technically termed 'organizational socialization'. The theory of language socialization as used in this study has arisen out of anthropological principles that signify how 'language' is an essential medium for social and cultural knowledge and sensibilities that children need. Based on recent accounts of language socialization theory, in addition to children, adults can also continually encounter novel situations, and challenges that call for the intervened involvement of more knowledgeable people (here, language teachers, mentors, supervisors, etc.) (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2011). In SLA studies, this term has been established and validated within Socio-Cultural Theory (SCT) in Lantolf's views (Duff, 2007) on identity construction processes (Ortaçtepe, 2015; Ou & Gu, 2018).

Here, one key element seems to be curiosity on the part of committed teachers based on Hanna, et al.'s (2019) definition of teacher identity to initiate a reflection on their practice through narrative inquiries. Curiosity in exploring the learning/teaching domains/realms has always been one common attribute among all educationalists to eradicate passivity in its territories. As Dewey (1958) once asserted, "Education through occupations calls instincts and habits into play, and it is a foe to passive receptivity" (p.333). Nevertheless, this process might be endowed with obstacles for any teacher in general and language teachers in particular. Equally, as Dewey continued, "since the movement of activity must be progressive, leading from one stage to another, observation and ingenuity are required at each stage to overcome obstacles and to discover and readapt means of execution" (p.333). In so doing, learning/teaching, as it might appear, might be endowed with unknown stresses and conflicts (Berlyne, 1960) when teachers are involved in knowing their desires for finding better ways in learning/teaching to fit within ever-changing situations.

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In educational contexts, current scholars habitually base their professional identity into their professional world on specific aspects of the situation where they are teaching. During such a process, as Hodges and Cady (2012) noted, identity construction can suggest how people come to understand participation in a community in combination with how they talk and how they make sense of such participation. From the standpoint of identity theory as a framework in sociological, social psychology (Stets & Serpe, 2013), a teacher improves during one's job through understanding role identities (Brenner, Serpe, & Stryker, 2018; as cited in Kim & Asbury, 2020) as many simultaneous roles exist for an individual person in his/her integration with the other members of the community. Here, Stets and Serpe (2013) assert that "Specifically, identity theorists focus on how identities relate to one another (given their likelihood of being brought into situations and how central or important they are to individuals), as well as how identities relate to role performance (or behavior), affect (feelings), physical and mental health (such as stress, anxiety, and depression), the self-concept (such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-authenticity), and social structure" (p. 31). In complex systems such as language learning and teaching, this process of advancement can turn into a critical domain for research since if the innovations made by the members are not revealed by the more experienced members, attainment of a balanced human capital can be far-reaching. This may be accomplished sooner through coordination and interaction. As some scholars such as Fagan and Ployhart (2015) assert, employees in a complex system can enhance their capital in this way to be able to confront existing challenges in the job.

In complex subjects such as language teaching missions (Sade, 2011), one key issue can conceivably be the role conflict faced with newcomers to shape their identities in the context. In the same line, merging professional identity to motivation for being emergent in the social discourses, Murray (2011) alluded to language learning and teaching as a non-linear dynamic system consisting of diverse interconnected biological, cognitive, social, socio-cultural, historical as well as political elements, which facilitate thinking more vividly in the context.

Then and there, I intended to locate my ways of becoming a new person in three time periods—my past role as a language learner, present role as an English language teacher, and possible future role as a researcher in my field of study, i.e., English language teaching and learning. I

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subsequently embarked on a survey of my situation when I started learning the English language as a nine-year-old girl up to the present time in my forties. Within ELT, a dearth of such reflections on the past-present courses of action could be detected in the existing literature. This article might then somehow fill in such a gap.

1.2 Identity Construction

Beijaard et al. (2004) defined identity construction as a recursive occurrence that could be shaped over time through communication with others. This was also noted in the comprehensive list of researchers whom they had studied in their article. They claimed professional identity was "an ongoing process of integration of the 'personal' and the 'professional' sides of becoming and being a teacher" (p.113). Hence, teachers are supposed to take diverse roles. Brown and Heck (2018) found multiple roles for a teacher, including teacher, co-learner, and a principal for a teacher. Tensions among teachers were seen as promoting factors behind such diversity. Gee (1999), as one prominent figure within the professional identity field, once acknowledged the process of socialization as 'identity kits' (p, 526), when teachers use their discourse to take on different roles in social contexts. This representation on the part of teachers through different means such as teachers' activities, their interactions with others, and their writing represents their self/identity.

Identity construction in the existing literature was thought to be re/formed through factors such as teachers' competence in their specialty (Lee, 2013), job satisfaction, and their expectations for their future career (Czerniawski, 2011), among others. In ELT, identity construction for a language teacher has also been discussed concerning other factors such as cultural aspects of language teaching. Sercu (2006), as one instance, had collected some evidence and facts in this regard from among international teachers who were to teach communicative competence (Byram, 1997) in exchange for outstanding culture teaching. The results that were brought from qualitative research were unsatisfactory in that the detected patterns among teachers did not meet the expectations for an ideal language teacher. This could turn into possible conflicts in a teacher.

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Concerning role conflicts in the process of identity construction, diverse scholars have long mentioned other aspects such as burnouts, which can be considered as a possible consequence of such a condition (Birch, 1986), role encounters for language translators (Kaufert & Koolage, 1984), language issues for curriculum designing (Edgerton, 1977), and recursive nature of identity constructions with role downsides (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004), etc.

According to the role theory verified by Yu, et al. (2017), some levels can be defined for the conflicts that a teacher may experience in a situation like his/her own family. The first level can be an intra-role conflict, in which one feels a gap between his/her potentialities and self-concept. In the next level, the tension between one's expectations and the requirements by the society in which s/he is living might cause role conflicts too. In general, the shared beliefs and appreciating members' roles might lead to a feeling of disorder in one's mind, which is termed by some scholars as 'identity conflict' (Hirsh & Kang 2016; Song, 2016).

1.3 A Way out of Conflicts for a Language Teacher

Regarding eradicating identity conflicts, some researchers believed that to control such conflicts within a teacher, the realizations have to be brought to their consciousness by vocalizing clearly how s/he is to become a certified language teacher who wants to teach different aspects of a language. Based on an extensive review of literature, Larrivee (2008) elaborated on four stages within reflective practices for any thoughtful teacher: A. Pre-reflective stage in which a hasty account of the current teaching practices is noted by the teacher, including functions, actions, and skills, which are generally considered as teaching isolated episodes; B. Surface stage where a more progressive and advanced consideration of the theories and rationales for current practice in the previous stage is deliberated by the reflective teacher; C. Pedagogical stage in which higher-order thinking skills plus focused deliberations on ethical, social and political issues are brought to the forefront and examined very carefully and finally, D. Critical reflection where personal and pedagogical belief systems are compared with the outer social contexts, which had given rise to the situation at hand. Such awareness on the part of a language teacher is highly critical in bringing his/her case to a judgmental practice to share with her colleagues the class events that have been critical in her view.

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On the other hand, some other scholars saw collaboration as a liberatory framework for the teachers who are full of tensions. Sarani and Najjar (2013) saw Wenger's 'Community of practice' (CoP) as a helpful framework for exerting proper identity formation by English language teachers. They brought Clarke's (2008) dimensions of CoP such as "mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire" (p. 169) to create an ultimate link between and among language teachers by being engaged in reflective practices.

1.4 Possible Causes of Conflicts

In the existing literature on this topic within ELT domains, conflict indicators were mixed with confounding results. Abednia (2012) presented the apparent marginalization about critical reflective practices, in a broad sense, using varied research schemes, including interviews, discussions, and journals. He claimed how touching on reflective accounts of a language teacher could contribute to a proper identity formation scale from conformity to romanticization of dominant ideologies and finally to critical autonomy.

Other scholars saw such a scarcity of reflective teacher involvement within an Iranian situation, such as Baniasad Azad, Tavakoli, and Ketabi (2016). In the same vein, through comprehensive interviews, Rashidi and Javidanmehr (2012; cited in Tajik & Ranjbar, 2018) associated this problem within Iranian educational settings to the Ministry of Education, which does not foster reflective practices. They signified teachers' lack of time and interest due to their restrained access to databases to get acquainted with recent theories in reflective practices. The teachers' so-called self-directional problems such as impotence in developing characteristics such as responsiveness, open-mindedness, and wholeheartedness were conspicuous in this regard as Dewey (1958) also had mentioned for promoting reflective mind among teachers:

> "Education through occupations calls instincts and habits into play and it is a foe to passive receptivity". (P. 333)

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Atai, et al. (2017) called this reflection 'adaptive expertise' signifying reflection on practice that helps language teachers to follow innovatory means by incessantly assessing their job and thus avoid "the unpredictability of classroom life besides a degree of routinization" (p. 39). Such exploration might conveniently lead to a proper identity construction process, which leads to widening a language teacher's perspective over approbations, or on the other hand, criticisms of school events and the whole curriculum by expanding his/her narrative knowledge (Barkhuizen, 2013; as cited in Atai et al., 2017).

Jungen's study (2016) was interesting regarding how he had made gradual transitions between past and present ways of knowing in two different cultures through using narratives. He explicated how a change in the curriculum itself had not helped him revolutionize things in his learning context, but his active agency was enhanced by self-examination of the learning context.

Other researchers had made recourse to such narrative designs for identity construction through collaboration within the same educational contexts through creating platforms that make auto-ethnography more widespread (Davies, Hausel, & Stevens, 2018). In their research, Davies et al. had generated a toolkit that supported Do-It-Yourself practices for facilitating learning.

Heath and Street (2007) alleged that being indulged in language teaching experiences through reading ethnographic works having narrative accounts can add to teacher's engagement in the profession in terms of social development to develop a stronger character.

Within local research databases, a dearth of research was found on narrating teachers' own stories through auto-biographical research frames. Modirkhameneh (2015) was a case in point in which she had followed six non-native, English-speaking teachers' life and career in Iran in order to depict their negative perceptions over their learning and teaching experiences/practices.

Outside local contexts, Tsui (2007) remarked on the complexities in identity construction/formation for a language learner who was also a language teacher in China for six years through narrative accounts. Atay and Ece (2009) referred to the lack of research data within EFL settings in this regard.

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To fill in the gap, and in line with reflective approaches, through exploring my educational world as mapped on my professional practices, I took account of three assigned roles of mine to know more about my language socialization in an Asian country where English is of use only at schools, universities, and institutes. In line with this aim, I reflected on my life-long career in English language learning, teaching, and researching to approach the following guiding question:

1. What conflicts caused the present teacher-researcher to assume her roles as a language learner, language teacher, and finally, a language researcher?

2.Method

2.1 Research Routes in this Study

In this study, I recounted my professional world via a research design platform called 'Life-history narrative' (Higgins & Sandhu, 2014) in English education/socialization through three roles/realities (Moret, et al., 2007) as A. a Learner, B. a Teacher, and C. a Researcher to verify how my lived experiences might support broader considerations of a socio-cultural situation or a social practice but in the context of Iran (Ferguson, 2009).

Life-history narrative as a subdivision of auto-ethnography research could provide an ideal situation for me to use my "stories to craft coherent visions of the past and present" (p. 55). As explicated in the previous section, life histories are not only a good description of an individual's life, but they also provide a suitable framework for depicting how and why we have lived our lives through having recourse to auto-ethnographical designs.

The so-called one-size-fits-all outlook has at times discouraged some scholars in ELT, especially teacher education fields from producing detailed accounts of their practices and long-lasting events to designate their worries and adaptations to complex settings in their job (Atai, Babaii, & Zolghadri, 2017). As Braun and Clarke (2020)—among well-known task reviewers and editors in quantitative research—remarked, elements of time and place that qualitative researchers bring to their reflections in narrative inquiries, generate nuanced analyses that cannot be

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determined and anticipated through predefined frameworks. They cited varied criteria for data engagement in qualitative research that shows inflexibility and rigidity in the procedures we follow in such practices can hardly be flourishing if we want to write over our memoirs discursively. Following artistic inquires against this trend as "*one size fits all"* such as narrative accounts in Humanities should be among the focal points, which is rather not satisfactory right now (Vosughi & Nafissi, 2020). Through auto-ethnographical designs, the connection between narrative accounts as a research design is well-established as stories told by language teachers unfold linearly, an array of complex narrations containing valid notifications of their past and present is depicted for other teachers (Mann, 2011). This is widespread and based on various existing universal standards/benchmarks such as in the Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (MATESOL), European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Language (EPOSTL), Evaluation and Accreditation of Quality Language Service (EAQUALS), etc. These are mainly used for appraising language teachers' jobs by taking into account some key indicators. As Maggioli (2012) declared, such indicators might include teachers' self-awareness, response to unexpected occurrences, use of alternative supports for teaching and learning, use of reflection, and being engaged in learning.

Within language learning domains, social practices such as narrative inquiries have recently been among the foci of language scholars. In research, this includes narrative accounts by teachers. For that reason, using first-person pronouns as "authorial stance" (Gheidari, et al., 2019; Hyland & Jiang, 2018) gained prominence. Narrative accounts for cultivating learning experiences have been in recent times more in vogue compared with teaching experiences as such. Teachers' accounts by themselves have been mainly used for promoting reflective practices that have led to professional reports largely framed and termed as 'action research' accounts (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Crookes, 1993).

1.2 Participants

The narrator in this research is the main participant (I) with an agency and 'intentional being' (Varghese et. al, 2005) to recount critical incidents to construct particular types of "becoming within a specific context, time, and place, and negotiate this identity within multiple learning spaces" (Danielewicz, 2001; cited in Cheung et al., 2014, p, 13). Clarke (2009) focused on identity

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work for teachers to help them get involved in the professional agency, in which case having agency on the part of teachers, is an effect after being involved in identity seeking research. In this present research, this was also contested as identity practice for the narrator.

At this point, two contrasting concepts as prospective vs. retrospective reflexivity can be an urgent issue to be clarified here. Edge (2011) juxtaposed the two terms above to denote how being involved in identity studies is the effect of a person on the work (prospective reflexivity) while in the latter, the person is influenced by the work. Hitherto, numerous issues related to the roles I had played during a long period (approximately twenty-five years), such as being a language learner, a language teacher, a language tester, a curriculum designer, a discourse analyst, and now a language researcher have always been in my mind in my English education (prospective reflexivity). Within all these roles, the three roles as mentioned above came with some senses of revelations in me while writing (retrospective reflexivity) to explore my courses of action in my profession in an Iranian community of learning. Within each stage of my life with a new role, I saw new opportunities for further knowledge, though conflicts between my roles and due responsibilities bothered me to a certain extent. The primary datasets for this article were provided from the field notes I had taken in my career lifetime, especially during the time I was a student-teacher. In this role, I had to take both retrospective and prospective reflectivity. I believed that vivid conceptualization of talk in non-linear systems such as language learning can best be reached via life-history or auto-biographical research domains or as Segal (2006) termed, 'anticipated life histories' to initiate talks on new roles in the process of socialization in the system. In many cases, special references to critical moments, examples, case students, and past and present events in my ESP classes were made as flashbacks to the past to (re)collect praises and concerns discursively.

In this study, I have elucidated such moments of revelation through role encounters/clashes between and among the diverse roles I have played in my profession. The responsibilities, which I had to take on, were so much personal/individual and the nature of practices was in much contrast. This brought me into different clashes, which I am going to scrutinize in this paper.

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3. Results and Discussion

In response to the proposed research question, recalled moments that had irritated me in my three roles as a language learner, a language teacher, and a language researcher are first brought as evidence for critical incidences I have described in my career to depict how I behaved to fight against diverse clashes in my profession—language learning, teaching, and researching.

In a partial response to the proposed research question, sources of clashes/conflicts, which banned me from establishing a sense of professional selfhood as an ELT practitioner in the end, are recounted for further analysis. I have given significant themes as role encounters and related subthemes to verify principal codes in Table 1.

Table 1. *Themes and Subthemes as to Role Conflicts in Three Diverse Phases of being a Student, a Teacher, and a Researcher*

Role encounters	Major themes: Sources of Conflicts	Related sub Codes: Case events
Language learner	Total passivity as a person	*I was treading on empty valleys.*
	Difficulty in finding the truth of matters	*I Felt Only More Potent at my Knowledge of English Language.*
	The incompatibility of my learning at higher levels with my previous status as a younger learner	*The Courses I Passed were not Art-like.*
Language teacher	So many' theory to action' gaps	*Reopening My language institute years; A gap to find my true spirits in relearning.*

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	Unfair judgments by others	*a) They judged me with my little experience.* *b) My role had changed from periphery to the core!*
Language researcher	Finding strange ways for exploring my world	*a) Now it came true!* *b) A new look at my professional life via searching selfhood; ESP courses revisited* *c) They are human beings, not mechanical carpet weavers!* *d) They seemed to be neutral beings without any novelty!*

3.1. My Role as a Language Learner; Treading onto Empty Valleys

Once as a language learner, I remember my growing desire at a time was to get to know everything about the English language and English people. In summer times, my mother sent me to a language school in my town. Being surrounded by so many Islamic emblems, already a curious girl of about ten, I was sometimes imparted with conflicting knowledge I once gained through the language classes, which I attended with my classmates. At that time, I did not think otherwise when the teacher arrived and asked my classmates and me to recite an already assigned song related to previous lessons (i.e., I did not have any possibility of escape, as you might imagine). I did not even dare to ask him why we should recite so many English songs with strange names and nicknames such as "*Jessie and Paul are friends*" in the delivered pamphlets by the institute.

I was to memorize countless English conversations, along with other language data of various forms which were senseless to me at a time. I had to follow my English teachers and their working models anyway. My classmates and I did our best to please them; everything they required as essential for our language courses was ready for the next time we met. During hot summer days in

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1990 or so, along the way to that institute, I remember I just recited the lines I was to retell to my teacher in front of others.

3.1.1. I Felt Only More Capable at my Knowledge of English Language

At that time, I did not care how the English language should have been molded and where I was heading for or for what specific reasons I was reciting those English songs and lines. The only thing I thought over was to gain more and more knowledge about the English language. When I saw my knowledge related to English words was more than that of my classmates the following year at my junior high school, I felt more capable. This illusion was with me in my proceeding years up to college. Finally, it left me with no other choice to make for my remaining knowledge exploration route at the tertiary level. The first conflict in my life: I did not know what to do with the English language apart from teaching it to others.

3.1.2. The Courses I Passed were not in Line with Art

When I entered college with English as my major, I already had a good stock of the English language with me; I had entered a new zone for knowledge exploration. It seemed that my main job had shifted towards knowing the roots of the thousand known routes I had taken before in the quest for learning about language secrets. In four years, I passed the required credits on Methodology of Language Teaching, Language Testing, Materials Designing, Islamic Translation 1 & 2, Literature, etc. Discussions on how to teach the language at times created diverse conflicting thoughts inside my mind since they were more tandem with proven science, not art routes of inquiry (Vosughi & Nafissi, 2020). The conflicts sometimes provoked in me this clash about how theories were far from actions I had taken before in my language institute and schooldays. My professors talked about how language could also be taught in still other possible ways without recourse to outside supports like actual language classrooms. During my language school interval, I had worked on just how language worked for me, not what it consisted of, not even how it should be possibly gained otherwise. The courses I had passed were not like art. This was so since I had learned to be a slave to my books and my professors' words.

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I shadowed their routes of teaching the language for nearly four years until I was given a BA degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). As a graduate, I had no other choices for my professional life apart from teaching a language that I knew was not communicated in language classes as I had been taught in college. Theories had nearly no place in my language classes. I had decided to do my best to change that situation since then I had more voice than the time I was a girl of ten or a young student at college! The second growing conflict in my life to resolve had come of age: I did not know how to bridge the gap between theory and action.

3.2. Heading for the Next Stage: My Roles as a Language Teacher

Now, presumably, I was eligible to teach the language I had been exploring for a decade or so. Initially, I was employed in the Ministry of Education. Meanwhile, I was continuing my studies in an MA program in Teaching as a Foreign Language (TEFL). In my free time during afternoons, I remember I returned to the same language school from which I had started my journey of English language learning. As a student-teacher, I remember I did not have enough time to ponder over issues. My role as a language teacher was more conspicuous to me at that time.

3.2.1. Reopening My Language Institute Years: A Gap to Find My True Spirits in Relearning

Initially, during my free time in the afternoons, I decided to accept a suggested position as a language teacher in the first language institute I had started my English lessons. I attended a session with Mr. Saieedi[1]—the institute manager—for an interview. Since he knew me as one of his diligent students during the previous years, he soon introduced me to the course objectives very briefly.

Below, I will retell one of my experiences at this institute to show how my first roles as a language teacher were still inflicting me to find genuine selfhood.

[1] Pseudonyms are used for ethical reasons.

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The first language course I was offered was for a target group of young children with an age range of 4 to 8 years approximately. There was no predefined syllabus to follow but the books and materials, which had been assigned by the institute for that level and already full of language elements to cover in a twenty-session semester. I did not see any other goals at that time apart from incorporating those contents in my syllabus to retell to my students. Apprehended both with a mixed feeling of fear and courage, I gradually applied my syllabus in class for two weeks when the first objection came to me by one of my students' parents at about session four or five. She called me in the middle of my class time, and we talked for ten minutes. She complained and said Sahar (her daughter, a pseudonym) was pleased at home doing her English assignments. She continued, "*I feel like she is having fun in class without having anything to memorize. She feels relaxed when I ask her about her English class"* (My teaching diary, 2002). At first, I was puzzled by her objection since it was not clear how I could interpret her claims. I asked her what was wrong then when she saw her daughter was satisfied with her class. She answered:

> *"In her previous course with Mr. Kiani, she was busy all the time with her language lessons. However, this semester, she is all the time wandering around and doing what she wants with her language lessons".* (My teaching diary, Summer, *2002:1380)*

I told her to what extent she believed in my self/sufficiency in teaching if she had any trust in my work! She suddenly asked:

> *"How many years have you been teaching English?"... I just said it is my first year after graduation. She was silent for a moment and did not ask anything else."* (My teaching diary, Summer, 2002:1380)

3.2.2. They Judged Me by My Little Experience

I reassured her that everything would be all right if she waited and let me do my job. After a while, she called again and asked if it was possible to change Sahar's course to a higher level since everything in 'Let's go 5' was seemingly easy for her. I could not explain more to a worried parent

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that all her worries were untrue, but I just said in a simple language that implied she could not judge her daughter's level by the book contents.

At this time, I talked to the institute manager and demanded to have a meeting with parents to talk about their children's achievements. He said we have such gatherings once a year with all the language instructors present in that session. In the annual meeting, everything was discussed except parents as pertinent stakeholders in language learning.

3.2.3. I was about to Bring a Change

I decided to initiate talks with my students' parents myself. I thought I was the leader of my class and could establish a change even on a small scale. I decided to add one more activity to my routine class practices. I then reported the class syllabus to parents and said in clear terms what was required of students in my class. Since my audience was a group of young students, I could not explain more about the nuts and bolts of my teaching strategies. After a while, I was admired by the manager in one of those annual sessions with my colleagues.

This was also a surprise to me since I had not told him—the institute manager—of my new strategy for informing parents in that manner. I could not imagine first how I was under control by still a more powerful authority; nevertheless, this had led to good fortune, this time.

3.2.4. Some Saw My Strategies as Workable, and Some Saw It Not that Helpful!

Leading students and their parents to appropriate channels for knowing different phenomena might be one main responsibility that a teacher could take on in all his/her professional life, which I think I could do since I felt satisfaction in my students' eyes. Nevertheless, this could not be extended to all moments of my professional life. My experience with young learners, in this case, was reassuring, though at other levels, I was to discuss the included things in my syllabus with students and satisfy them with my utmost attempts that they can turn to good outcomes if they grasp them. In some moments of my teaching time, I was discouraged by their reluctance to do more work

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outside the book requirements. This added more concern to my inner conflicts in how I could accomplish my expected desires in teaching.

My didactic soul recurrently warned me that I had just been transferring knowledge to my students, the same role I had a decade before. Now, on the face of it, it had then shifted from receiving to sending knowledge. In my professional life, I was faced with a similar condition in college. This led me, in some cases, to frown upon the nature of my corroborated lessons, as you may imagine in the subsequent evidence below.

3.2.5. Another Long-Running Feud with My Soul: The Nature of my Teaching

After I graduated from my MA programs, I was offered a three-credit General English course for some students majoring in Geography. In my first encounter, I reassured students of how reflective the course could be if they contributed something of their own choices about any texts that suited their interests in that class. Since I received nothing from my students, I started teaching a text from a famous local sourcebook for university students—Humanity (I) (Nowrouzi & Birjandi, 2000) from SAMT publications—the center for studying and compiling university books in Humanities. The text was about 'Compasses'. When we discussed the content in English together, I remember a student asked me, "*what is the use of reading a text on a simple compass like that, since we have worked on many more complex structures of electronic devices as such which were more technologically advanced than the one depicted in that text*!" (My teaching diary, 2003). It was an excellent question to me since I also had the same feeling when I was explaining the structure of that compass.

I decided to respond in a way that I did not like myself. I said, "*All the things you learn here in your language lesson are not toward expanding your scientific knowledge on different topics but all this is a means to another end*" (My teaching diary, 2003). He asked me what the end was. I said "*learning another language*". He was satisfied with my comment. I was dissatisfied with my prompt response though. Nonetheless, I could not open my heart at that moment to explain how we were sacrificing language by knowing about the English language, and not learning the language itself for other purposes. But for no good reasons, I felt no other way was open for me to

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tread my feet on. This experience gave me the same feeling I had with those children I was teaching before this course with college students. If I were to explain and talk about my pains with the books, they might be discouraged from further learning. Furthermore, if I were to change the existing books, which the university had recommended at a time, I was again in vain since higher-status colleagues might frown upon my work.

I thought over this question for a long time when I saw myself teaching in another English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course among a group of Food Science students some years later in another university, in which, later on, I was employed as a full-time professor. In that course, I could still remember that same question by my previous Geography student five years before and reviewed my mind if I could now make any changes to the course contents apart from routine assigned technical readings in the previous context, for which I had no agency.

3.2.6. My Role had changed from Periphery to the Core!

I was a newcomer to ESP courses in my affiliated university since all those courses were run by subject matter professors. I tried to make connections with my colleagues of other ESP courses but I failed. It seemed that they did not want to let loose what was happening in their language classes. They were seemingly generations of routine ESP leaders without any heed toward what theories say for collaboration in teaching such courses.

Another theory to action gap which perpetrated me in my professional life several times due to the interventions by other people around came to mind; this caused me not to find my genuine role in my educational context.

Although I was the head of the English department at a time, when language courses were sent to me to arrange the programs for the next term, I could barely see any volunteering departments leave their ESP courses to the English department. I was so eager to follow this problem from a higher educational organization in my affiliated workplace but each time I failed since this had been institutionalized not just in my workplace but in other university settings as well. In nearly all the universities I inquired about in my country, I found that ESP courses were run by our

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colleagues in other majors. This had turned to the nagging pain in my mind which I could not escape precisely like the one I felt when I was a kid who had to recite those senseless songs without feeling any need to do so since the teacher did not explain to me why I had to remember all those long lines. Maybe there was more guilt with me since I did not ask for reasonable justification due to my childish shyness!

That sense of curiosity had disappeared in me, but this time already at my thirty-five or more, I could not tolerate that feeling anymore since then I had more voice than the past. Now I felt more potent to bring in changes to my professional life. At this time, I had started the next level of education for my Ph.D. programs in one of the state universities in Tehran. In the university, my role was two-sided. I was supposed to act as a researcher too.

3.3. My Research Selfhood: My New Role as a Researcher

It began with my first encounter with a course called 'Qualitative Research Methodology' when I was continuing my studies as a Ph.D. student at a state university. At that time, my three roles had been merged. I was a Ph.D. student, a teacher, and a would-be researcher. That session was formally initiated with a brief introduction to the whole course. With her words, the professor reassured us that nothing was going to change if *'we don't go through the crux of any matter'* (Personal Communication, 2015). I could feel true wisdom in her voice; seemingly, she was honestly letting her nice words of true heart at every moment of her talk. Essentially, she started to talk about the first primary lines of qualitative studies. I don't know why, but I was already changing my attitudes to worldly matters. At first, I was to turn into a nihilist for whom nothing was worth sifting since through my previous knowledge with objective perspectives via numbers and significant checking of all kinds, and then I felt my established knowledge with big words and terminologies was melting one by one.

Since I was sure about this feeling in my mind, soon, I put my thinking lines over changing my selfhood/identity without any worries. This created a sense of confidence that only an authority (my research professor) could create in me as a student. This subsequent following on my part

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took place much sooner than the time I heard others' feelings over the courses I led—that caring mother and my Geography student's worries. This might be corroborated as not having an agency on my part, this time. But then again, I could only think over this issue as something that was self/revealing. An inner awareness about the issues discussed in that research course was quite relevant to what was occurring in my profession since I could tangibly feel the communicated arguments.

3.3.1. Now It Came True!

Sometimes, the heart sees what is invisible to the eye. For some unknown reasons, I took a great deal of interest in qualitative accounts of research and inquiry in my major. I knew this might be a reflection of both class and the teacher accountability and even the course, but the core of the conception was that I might be able to look at my educational problems at the workplace from a new perspective; I now looked at myself as a person with stacks of the agency to bring in significant changes in my educational settings by my words. This being so, I changed my way in research explorations. The change was being incorporated into my mind at every moment of other sessions in my qualitative research class.

3.3.2. A New Look at My Professional Life via Searching Selfhood: ESP Courses Revisited

I was now equipped with such instructions from the course I had passed on qualitative research at my Ph.D. level, which was all about the crux of matters in research on serving others with a sense of belonging to a specific community: Iranian learners. I thought I might change some of my ESP courses in my affiliated university by bringing some deeper insights into the work. At that time, I decided to introduce some elements of un/learning through my ESP language classes via research lenses. In my quest for language learning zones, for example, I had long learned that '*Writing'* is a skill that should be explored at the final stages of learning another language. This false illusion seemed to have been more emanated from those emergent models of language learning and teaching which were associated with successive, predictable stages and thought to be at work for all learners reminiscent of those positivistic modes of education which neglected man as an intellectual creature.

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At first sight, such thinking might signpost to a teacher-researcher like me the seeds of following the same rates and routes for all that signified one-size-fits-all trends and/or reminded me more of those queer traditional lines of research undertakings that measured teaching memos tailored for all.

From a creativity stance, as a matter of fact, investigating *Research Writing* from a qualitative stance called for a deep understanding of the nuts and bolts of (re)writing as the manifestation of literacy, whether first or other languages under the study. This long process of thinking about people who were involved in my job and their affairs are still replete with unknown mysteries, over which I have to contemplate with an inquisitive mind.

Drawing on an excellent metaphor of learning a language as carpet weaving, which I learned in my qualitative research course at college during my Ph.D. programs, such lines of thinking reminded me of one of the automatic carpet weaving machines that produce carpets with already predetermined designs that might or might not be liked by all at all. At face value, they might be appealing, but their quality was far from the manually produced carpets, which could signify local arts, collaborative activities, long-lasting materials, challenging but enjoyable to their weavers, and appealing to more heartfelt souls that were to seek eternity.

For my Ph.D. dissertation, I worked on a related subject to show my competency in teaching ESP courses. In the collaborative work of writing in the research genre with which I had introduced a tripartite framework, the new courses I led with my students were manifested with me as the leader of the course; my students as the partners/mediators, and their subject matter teachers as counselors in the courses in which I had found my role. The final picture which was the same content or the themes of their research were already inspired by my students with their teachers' supervision in various specialties. I gave the structure of the knots; they chose their intended color which was that curious soul as easily felt in their works. All three of us were working together to design the whole frame on the loom which was our new class. All micro and macro levels of writing involving the framing stage (students' research outlines), blending the colors with pictures (students' research proposals), knitting and weaving (drafting writing rules and grammar

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manifestations), and final carpet trimming (revising and editing) were controlled by three of us with close measures which no machine could recreate with a similar strategy. No art, no heart, and no soul was involved in that mass production with commercial carpeting machines; the things which were long nagging in my mind in how and why I had to accept as true everything made by others during my life-long career in ELT. The same liberatory feeling I had for myself in my new role as a researcher could also be spotted by my students.

3.3.3. They Are Human Beings, Not Mechanical Carpet Weavers!

In the same lines, tying the knots of writing if effectively done by the learners themselves under their own control rather than seeing it from above as general rules for all as to how they must be taught could not be managed with already designed rules incorporated into their minds. The rate of learning might be controlled but not the route of their learning. If such an undertaking was employed, I had deprived them of their own nature as intelligent creative creatures who could explore the world around them with thousands of ways ahead and many others still unexplored. They are human beings, not mechanical carpet weavers!

Having had such feelings in mind, I courageously started to teach some conceptual tools to my students which were needed for the opening stages of their writing. Some of my students soon asked in the first moments "*How many grades does it have*"? Some others asked, *"Is writing research for this course compulsory or optional?".* Again, it seemed that I had a hard job to manage. This led me to think more and just let them think about some subjects on their own to discuss in the next session together.

In the next session, we started the session with ideas that the students had been involved in for a week. I started calling them by their names (names are imaginary for privacy aims). Below, I bring some episodes of the second session.

Maryam said, "*I need more time to think of a subject. I personally like to search about the harms of consuming Jelly Beans (a kind of sticky candy for the kids) among kids. I think I need to check first to see if enough data exists for that subject or not. If not, I prefer to choose something*

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that enough has been said about it by experienced scholars in the literature." (My personal communication with my students, Mehr, 1393).

I asked her the reasons why she thought there should be enough data about it before delving into that subject. She answered: "*I'm not an expert in that subject. I must first see what others have found about it before it is "my turn"*. I asked again if you did not find enough data about Jelly beans, you would simply abandon the subject even though it is one of your favorites? She said: "*I think so*." The criterion for choosing a good subject for her was then "availability of rich data in the literature". This meant a lot to me. It had lots of meaning in my new role as a researcher, but I thought they had to be given more time to find their own role.

From the teaching and learning perspectives that I had in mind, this could first signify to me a lack of confidence, and not dexterity/skill in initiating talk over diverse issues. She said she was not an expert in that subject and waited for others to look at the issue from other more knowledgeable people's stance; such an attitude could be thought of as a hurdle that might impede them from displaying their own role in the world of research. Their being as an initiator of a piece of writing which signified their role in a subject of their interest; this was what I was looking for.

3.3.4. They Seemed To Be Neutral Beings Without Any Novelty!

I wrote all the other subjects on the board. The subjects were diverse, but it seemed that they all suffered from something familiar. It seemed that they were going to do something which went on without thinking deeply on the subject. Even I, as an outsider not in their field of study, could easily feel such neutrality might at first signify a sense of doing a job that a teacher had assigned just for the sake of doing a project anyway without being fully involved in the subject. The example titles are listed here for further analysis:

Students A: the harms of Jelly Beans
Students B: Smart Packaging
Student C: Mold in bread

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Student D: Antioxidants in Doogh (A kind of Iranian cold drink from yogurt)
Student E: The harms by the soft drinks
Student F: Pickle products
Student G: The effect of Aflatoxin on the nerve cells.

At this moment, I felt I must introduce the first principle in starting the journey towards writing an academic paper. I wrote on the board the following statements by R. R. Jordan (2003) in his book "Academic Writing Course":

> *"The selection of topics in academia could come from A) Self-interest, B) Wonder coming from others, and C) Appraisal by society".*

These three sources could ignite one's mind in selecting a good topic for a start. At least twenty students were present in class. After explicating the above issues in rigor, I asked them to think more about their selected topics and tell me why they had chosen those topics above. The selected topics with reasons why they had chosen them could be a revelation why they were going to be involved in my project from then on. As Cameron (2005) rightly asserted when she talked about positive prescriptivism in her book titled 'verbal hygiene', she meant that separating writing from writers is a dismal practice since knowledge is socially constructed. However, the important thing to bear in mind at those initial phases of the study was that my students usually complained about the fact they were unable to approach the research practice itself let alone writing about it. In so doing, I screened the whole practices closely to see the issue from a qualitative standpoint and resolved the issue through more in-depth cooperative frameworks, including me as a language teacher and my colleagues as experts in the subject.

To cut a long story short, in the next section, I have transferred my thinking lines above on three roles (language learner, language teacher, and language researcher) which I played during my socialization into a language teaching practitioner to pursuit conceivable ways for finding possible responses to the proposed research question in this study.

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4. Conclusion

In this narrative, I recounted my engagements in three diverse situations briefly, including A) Total passivity as a person when learning, B) Difficulty in finding the truth of matters, C) Setting unfitting learning at higher levels, which did not match with my previous status as a young learner, during the first stage as a language learner, D) So many theory to action gaps, and E) Receiving unfair judgments on the parts of others, and F) Finding strange ways for exploring my world as a language researcher.

Based on the designated conflicts as cited earlier, two research frames/schemes, including 1) Unpredictability of the outcomes in ELT (Alemi, Daftarifard, & Patrut, 2011; Larsen Freeman, 1997; Tamjid, 2007), and 2) Maintaining complex interactions with diverse people could be introduced to show how reflective criticality on my part, in this research, entered this scene. For the sake of authenticating the two given frames/schemes, since I reported my story through having access to my three roles having diverse appreciations during a relatively long time, I could be ensured that I myself had the main role in reaching this decision. Existing theories in this regard such as self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987) denoted how three selves, including the *actual self*, a representation of the attributes that we (or another) believe ourselves to possess, the *ideal self*, which echoes the qualities we or another would preferably like to possess, and the *ought self*, which relate to the qualities we ought to possess, are in action. The redundant events during my learning stage (actual self) and partly replicated through my teaching role (ideal self) brought me into a critical being (ought to self) in order to be able to narrate my educational, life-history accounts.

In this framework of mine, this unpredictability has also been discussed in the existing literature as the effect of first experiences on prospective teachers as they might not prefer to change their momentum into new policies in teaching (Ria, et al., 2003). Another hurdle that annoyed me as described above, within three roles, might be interpreted as contrived interactions I had with different people, including colleagues and students' parents, and I did not find myself at liberty with them to bring in changes for the better goals in my instructions. All this created a sense of uneasiness—perceived clashes—when I was to fight with my situation. Regarding our relationship with others, Bakhtin (1990) mentioned such a rapport as the link between *self* and *other* via a

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dialogical-rhetoric outlook that could turn into shaper of teacher identity exhibiting a many-voicedness incidence for a language teacher. This was also true of me with certainty as I was moving forward in my career. Criticality being developed on my part was one such realization.

All the same, in some cases, I craved to see the consequences of my actions as a language teacher almost immediately, but I failed. For example, to see if I could change bad habits among my students, which they had cultivated over the years, I felt I needed more time and resources. I also could not change them overnight as I could not see profound changes when I returned to my first language institute after graduation. All this created a sense of uneasiness when I was to fight with the state of affairs; apprehensions such as what roles I could play to return countless others to their roots before they embarked on their exploration in English as an Additional Language (EAL). During my exposure with Sahar's mother, this worry was always with me to make sure if it was enough to get her just informed of any procedures or not.

This unpredictability on my part was in some cases the typical outcome of my situation such as the language institute with which I had started my work. Regarding other occasions such as my writing classes among some ESP students, in my view, this could be due to working on writing performance, which was indulged with "thinking" processes in the learners. Diverse routes towards thinking, as I had experienced among the students and my colleagues, took me to a myriad of still possible other ways to explore how literacy routes in them were taking shape without a writing teacher. This reopening of new horizons happened to me, and became a source of re/learning due to the complexities I came across during the various stages of doing my research for the Ph.D. dissertation. In some cases, I found myself in the middle of some strange practices for which I could only blame the system not to let me be more indulged in some courses; in some other cases, through arguments I held with my younger learners' parents, the nature of my talk was only reassuring/supportive to show my care about their concerns. Or, whether I could be sure that involving my ESP students in research writing processes could lead to good results over succeeding years or not. We lost contact in the majority of cases. Maybe a more dynamic community of practice was needed to check the continuation of our practices. This seems to be a great missing link in our ELT domains.

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In a nutshell, the teaching scenes during my twenty-five years' teaching at various educational centers are still in my immediate background since they irritated me to a great extent. Praises and sorrows in my learners, their complaints, their weaknesses, their strength, their visions, their senses of being in classes, along with my colleagues' expectations, had an inordinate effect on my awareness as such.

In the end, I intend to reveal the fact that such awareness on my part might solve some problems related to proper identity formation routes among those teachers who are involved in the thought-provoking, mysterious, and snooping roads of literacy if they start assessing their roles in education then consider the countless others. Such criticality over one's own situation might be better recognized via narrative accounts when one takes the role of a researcher/scholar. I realized this when I found myself in a situation to talk about my life-long pains freely and not within research jargon.

In a partial response to providing a critical account within reflective teaching research lines (Akbari, 2007), this study might, in one way or another, fill in the gap in reflective lines of inquiry though due to context-sensitive conditions of narrative studies within ELT, the findings should be treated with care. The explanations mainly were self-concepts but due to diverse critical moments, which occurred both during and before I was aware of their criticality moments on my shoulders, this led me to recollect those moments to expose for re/analysis in the eyes of other similar case events that might have also been occurring to my colleagues as prospective readers of this paper.

Due to lack of reflective research in TESOL/TEFL fields of study and in response to diverse invitations/calls for extending auto-ethnographical studies (Mirhosseini, 2018), this article was inscribed to extend talk over how scholastic roles could be crucial in the processes of improving language education in the light of such research routes as life-history accounts under auto-ethnography research designs. This being so, identity formation/construction as a multiple, diverse, contradictory and changing (Weedon, 1997; cited in Yoshihara, 2018) phenomenon during time intervals and diverse social places gave me so many instances for ponderance that shaped my identity as a critical teacher/researcher in order to embark on contemplative practices as such.

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It is hoped that future research really detects other obstacles that might hinder criticality on the part of teachers and journal occasions practically promote teachers' engagement by giving them room in telling their stories. Such measures can reduce stress among teachers in that by recounting their problems in their own words during a life-long period might someway bring in more job satisfaction due to the lack of psychological problems that might occur to them in fulfilling the expectations of parents, principals and the educational system at large (Abdollahpoor, Sadeghi, & Ghaderi, 2017). Then and there, the theoretical research can initiate spotting the problems in diverse realms of language teaching as a wholly discursive, highly contextual and socio-sensitive context. Following common, similar cases might help involved teachers to eradicate the potential hitches (Said, 2014) since emotions can be involved in this process. In the long run, spotting teaching as a social occupation can help advance celebrating proper identities among teachers who intend to enjoy the sense of fulfilling duties.

The wide horizon along my vision that might also be admired among possible readers can give me more rigor in making an attempt to take proper measures for my future problems at work as Mirhosseini (2018) also remarked:

> "More specifically, I would argue that one important contribution to the field may be provided by a research approach with the capacity to help with blurring the sometimes-too-solid dichotomies of theoretician–practitioner, researcher–teacher, community–individual, and even teacher-learner." (p.3)

On my way towards becoming a full-fledged language teacher, as I explained and narrated my cases with other people around me, mainly my colleagues and my students, so many contrary to fact events occurred that made me think and rethink at times and be quite unpredictable in order to open new routes to fit my situation. This short closing might open pathways for second thinking on the part of language teachers to embark on recollecting their memories within their profession with the aim of discovering their concerns in teaching and trying to eradicate possible obstacles for their future career success.

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