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**REFLECTIONS ABOUT TEACHING ENGLISH IN A BILINGUAL SCHOOL AND
IN A REGULAR BASIC SCHOOL: DEVELOPING TEACHING IDENTIFICATION**

FORTALEZA

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Língua Inglesa e suas Literaturas do Centro de
Humanidades da Universidade Federal do
Ceará, como requisito parcial para a obtenção
do título de Licenciatura em Letras-Ingês.

Orientadora: Profa. Dra. Andreia Turolo da
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
UFC	Universidade Federal do Ceará
TCC	Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso
USA	United States of America

REFLECTIONS ABOUT TEACHING ENGLISH IN A BILINGUAL SCHOOL AND IN A REGULAR BASIC SCHOOL: DEVELOPING TEACHING IDENTIFICATION

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ABSTRACT

Finding and developing your own identity can be a difficult lifelong process for teachers. For that reason, this study aims to reflect about the differences and similarities found when teaching English in different contexts, considering the experiences of being a teacher in a bilingual and a non-bilingual school in Fortaleza, Ceará, and analyzing how such situations could impact the teaching identity of a student-teacher during the undergraduate course. Besides, this paper focuses on reflecting about the struggles and specificities of the two experiences mentioned above, examining how the principles of the Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLT) were applied in each. Moreover, it will try to showcase the importance of self-reflection in a teacher's journey, especially when you are still starting to teach and develop your own teaching identities. The data used to base the research were lesson plans collected from the experiences in the two schools, and, most importantly, reflective diaries about the classes, gathered along the process.

KEYWORDS: Teaching identity. Self-reflection. Communicative Language Teaching. Bilingual education. Immersion. Reflective diaries.

RESUMO

Encontrar e desenvolver sua própria identidade pode ser um processo árduo que segue por toda a vida dos professores. Por essa razão, este estudo tem como objetivo refletir sobre as diferenças e semelhanças encontradas ao ensinar inglês em contextos diferentes, considerando as experiências de ser professor em uma escola bilíngue e uma escola não bilíngue em Fortaleza, Ceará, e analisando como tais situações podem impactar a identidade de ensino de um aluno-professor durante a sua formação no curso de graduação. Além disso, este artigo foca em refletir sobre as dificuldades e especificidades das duas experiências mencionadas acima, examinando como os princípios da Abordagem Comunicativa no Ensino de Línguas (CLT) foram aplicados em cada uma. Ademais, o artigo tenta destacar a importância da autorreflexão na jornada de um professor, especialmente quando se está começando a ensinar e a desenvolver sua própria identidade. Os dados usados para fundamentar a pesquisa foram planos de aula coletados das experiências nas duas escolas e, mais importante, diários reflexivos sobre as aulas, reunidos ao longo do processo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Identidade Docente. Autorreflexão. Abordagem Comunicativa no Ensino de Línguas. Educação Bilíngue. Imersão. Diários Reflexivos.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	7
2	THEORETICAL-METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATION	9
2.1	The Communicative Language Teaching Approach	9
2.2	Learning to Become a Second Language Teacher: Identities-in-Practice...	10
2.3	Methodology	12
3	REFLEXIVITY: REFLECTING ON EXPERIENCES OF TEACHING AND OF REFLECTING	14
4	CONCLUSIONS	22
	REFERENCES	23
	APPENDIX - REFLECTIVE DIARIES	24

1 INTRODUCTION

The main objective of this study was to reflect upon the differences, similarities, and effectiveness of teaching English using the communicative approach in different environments, taking mainly in consideration two personal experiences: one as an elementary English teacher at a bilingual Canadian school; and a second experience as an elementary English teacher in a regular basic school, both in Fortaleza, Brazil. Besides that, I also analyzed how my experience as a “teacher-student” has impacted the way I learned to teach, how it has affected the way I build connections with my students, and how my identity as a teacher has been impacted by such experiences.

Over the years, many different approaches to language teaching were considered the best and most effective in literature (BROWN, 2015), and for that they seemed to have dominated the language classrooms around the world. Based on the society in which they were conceived, some of these approaches would be traditional and grammar focused, whereas others would be more modern, with the focus placed on fluency and communication. According to Brown (2015), nowadays, the most accepted approach to language teaching is the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which although may be seen as a general term by some researchers, still comprehends most concepts adopted and defended by English schools around the globe. The CLT approach has the intention of teaching language as a way of communicating meaning in the first place, with grammar and structural concepts being integrated to the learning process but not being the main goal. That approach defends that all aspects of language must be interconnected with the sociocultural characteristics of the learners, so that they can effectively acquire it.

My first experience as a teacher took place at a private bilingual school in Fortaleza, Brazil. I was initially hired as a teacher assistant in the third semester of my undergraduate course in Arts and English Teacher Education, in the Federal University of Ceara. I had never experienced teaching before, which made me insecure and afraid of not being able to manage a classroom on my own. The school adopted a teaching methodology inspired by Canada’s educational system, which has the goal of creating students with critical thinking, putting them as the center of the learning process, and allowing them to become self-reflective autonomous learners, which is a concept very similar with the theories we learn in college about the “ideal” educational process. Besides that, the flagship of the school was bilingualism by immersion, which caught my attention right in the first moment, since I had

not experienced a bilingual environment when I was learning English as a kid, it made me wonder how different it would be to be teaching in such a different way than how I learned.

My second experience as a teacher happened in a regular basic school, also private and placed in Fortaleza. Besides the fact that the students had English classes everyday, which seemed to give a good reputation to the school, the role that the English subject played there was undoubtedly different when compared to the Canadian one. There was only one English teacher per department, so I was the only teacher of all Elementary grades, which was sort of overwhelming. The fact that my students did not have a high level of proficiency in the language and the lack of help from the coordination, made me unable to teach my classes completely in English, which was a struggle that followed me for a long period.

In such a challenging context I face in the beginning of my professional career, I propose this study, characterized as practitioner research in the form of an experience report. I will compare the experiences of teaching English in a Canadian bilingual school and in a regular basic school, both private and Elementary, analyzing how the schools' views on teaching English impacted my own. Besides that, I will present the impact of my learning style as a student on my teaching style, and also how being a "teacher-student" has affected the way I understand my classroom, positively and negatively, and how it has impacted the way I connect to my students.

Given the goals that are guiding this paper, one of the hypotheses I raise is that applying the theories learned at the university to real classrooms can be difficult when the teacher-student does not have previous practice, which leads me to believe that the Arts and English Teacher Education undergraduate course at the Federal University of Ceará should consider adapting its curriculum, distributing the practicum disciplines along the whole course, and not gathering them only in the final semesters.

2 THEORETICAL-METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

2.1. The Communicative Language Teaching Approach

For this paper, I will use the notion of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) written by H. Douglas Brown (2015) in his book *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*.

According to Brown (2015), mostly for its different definitions, approaches and classroom applications, CLT is currently the most accepted take on language teaching, especially English. He explains that this method started to be conceived in the late 1970s and early 1980s, after the experimental and innovative techniques of language teaching that appeared in the early 1970s. However, it was only in the late 1980s and 1990s that classrooms started to have more tasks focused on real life situations, originality, and on actual communication among students. That period was the kick start of what we perceive nowadays as the CLT, which is widely spread and accepted in the language teaching field.

The author states that the communicative approach has the objective of developing not only grammatical abilities with students, but rather interconnect grammar, fluency and accuracy with the sociolinguistic aspects of a language. In that approach, the main goal is to develop skills that will help learners in real life contexts, emphasizing the use of language as a way of communicating meaning, not perceiving it as just a set of rigid grammar rules. Therefore, students can be said to have truly acquired a language if they are able to establish a real communication with another speaker of the language that was learned, with the attention, at times, being more placed on fluency rather than accuracy.

Further on his text, Brown says that, although it is hard to give a direct definition to CLT, it is possible to summarize it in some characteristics that make up the concept. Such characteristics encompass the relationship between form and function, the complementary nature of fluency and accuracy, the focus on real-world contexts, and the autonomy and awareness of students about their own learning process. The author says that “such awareness and action will help to develop autonomous learners capable of continuing to learn the language beyond the classroom and the course” (BROWN, 2015, p. 32). These characteristics are a product of all the changes that have been happening to the approaches of teaching language, some being gradual and others quite radical. They state ideas that are, nowadays, seen in almost every language school and textbook. Despite the discussion about its broadness and sometimes confusion, Brown says that “as long as you are aware of the many possible

versions of CLT, it remains as a term that can continue to capture current language-teaching approaches.” (BROWN, 2015, p. 46).

Regarding the themes of immersion and bilingual education, Brown (2015) writes that these approaches have been around for several decades, and explains that because of the many variations that have been clustered within the theme, it is necessary to make some clarifications to define them as approaches of their own. He says that immersion models of language teaching started in Canada and the USA in the last century, and defines them as models that “typically provide the majority of subject-matter content through the medium of the L2” (BROWN, 2015, p. 58). Whereas for bilingual education, he quotes McGroarty and Fitzsimmons-Doolan (2014) to showcase its definition:

Two languages are used as media of classroom instruction for the same group of students so that students receive some of their instruction in one language and some in the other, with the proportion of each language varying according to program type, instructional goals, and various contextual influences. (MCGROARTY and FITZSIMMONS-DOOLAN, 2014, p. 503 apud BROWN, 2015, p. 59).

In short, in his study, Brown (2015) explains about the broadness of the term CLT and reminds the reader that these approaches he brings up are “well-researched, time-tested, globally relevant methodological practices” (BROWN, 2015, p. 64). Teaching according to the characteristics of CLT has been proven to be effective in many different social and political contexts around the world.

2.2 Learning to Become a Second Language Teacher: Identities-in-Practice

In my state, in Brazil, most undergraduate students in Teacher Education have their first experience as teachers before getting their degrees, either during the supervised internship, which is mandatory in the curriculum, or, as I did, in actual full-time jobs, which can be challenging to the non-experient student-teacher. All the experience of teaching while learning how to teach affects directly the identity of student-teachers, who are still developing methods and strategies of how to deal with their students, and deciding the best way to teach and manage a classroom. For that reason, as Yasuko Kanno and Christian Stuart (2011) have decided to investigate the construction of L2 novice teachers’ identities, other researchers have devoted increasing attention to this issue.

Kanno and Stuart (2011) followed the classes of Amy and John, two graduate students in a Master of Arts for Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages program at a U.S. university, for one academic year. The goal was to understand how they built their

identities as teachers being a part of this learning-in-practice situation, and how they learned how to teach along the process. In their research, Kanno and Stuart compared how the two student-teachers felt in the beginning of the program with the way they felt at the end, since, according to them, more important than acquiring knowledge and methods to teach, is identifying yourself as a teacher, which means stop seeing yourself as just a student practicing how to teach and actually building the identity of a professional teacher.

Along the article, the authors criticize the lack of studies regarding the construction of novice L2 teachers' identities. They explain that, although the field of teacher learning and teacher cognition has created a big amount of research since the 1990's, it is still necessary to continue analyzing that process, especially the notion of teacher identity, since most of those studies fail in following the development of novice teachers over time, which is what they aim to do with their investigation.

Amy, one of the two selected student-teachers for the research, was a 28-year-old, white, native-English-speaker, American female who was born and raised in the US. She began the program feeling like she was doing very well, however, she still saw herself as a student and her students noticed it. By the end of the program, she felt more confident and could finally see herself as a professional teacher. John, the other student-teacher, was a 33-year-old, white, native-English-speaking, American male born and raised in Japan. In his first classes, he consulted his students for every detail of the class, which for him was a way of trying to meet the student's individual needs, however, it was often perceived as a lack of authority by them.

In short, the research conducted by Kanno and Stuart was important to start a debate on how practice shapes the identity of novice teachers, and how later their identities can shape their classroom practice. Analyzing the data collected in the study, we are able to see that both Amy and John felt like they were role playing as teachers in the beginning of the program, which means that they were not able to see themselves as actual teachers. As they were giving the classes, understanding how their students worked and applying their knowledge, they were able to see how different real life classes were from the theories they had learned in college, which, at first, can scare inexperienced teachers.

What we see during the program is a shift between them feeling like student-teachers to feeling like professional teachers, which could only happen through daily practice, experience and inner reflection. The following excerpt is a short and direct explanation of Kanno and Stuart's views on teacher identities:

Implicitly or explicitly, we define our teacher identities in terms of what is important in our teaching. For novices, then, becoming a teacher is very much a process of learning, through their engagement in teaching practices, what aspects of teaching matters to them, and striving to become more skilled in those areas. (KANNO and STUART, 2011, p. 240).

Kanno and Stuart's (2011) research was conducted by means of analyzing participants' life stories and autobiographies constructed both as personal written diaries and recorded interviews. The researchers believe that identities are a discursive construct phenomenon, therefore it is important to assess what and how the study participants say about themselves and how they position themselves in the world, as a dynamic process. This explains why we prefer to say "identities" instead of on unique "identity". This is coherent to the most contemporary cultural studies which take narratives as research data in a qualitative interpretive research approach, therefore, narrative inquiry is the methodological approach I adopt for this study, which I will explain later.

2.3 Methodology

The methodological approach chosen for this study was narrative inquiry, based on the paper *Autobiographic Narratives as Data in Applied Linguistics* by Aneta Pavlenko (2007). Pavlenko's work explains how to use and analyze autobiographies, journals, diaries and other types of self-reflective texts as data, which is exactly what I will do in this report.

Luckily, I have been able to gather reports, lesson plans and reflective diaries along the periods I worked in both schools, the Canadian and the regular basic one, which allows me to analyze them and compare how I performed in the beginning, when I had no experience at all as a teacher, and how my performance was later, after practicing my skills in a classroom. I will also investigate my perceptions about differences and similarities I have found between the two environments, and also how my students dealt with English being inserted in an immersive environment, such as the Canadian school, having classes of English, Science and Mathematics fully in the language. Besides that, I will try to contrast my students' experiences with how I dealt with the language myself, as a self-taught learner who experienced traditional language teaching methods as a kid.

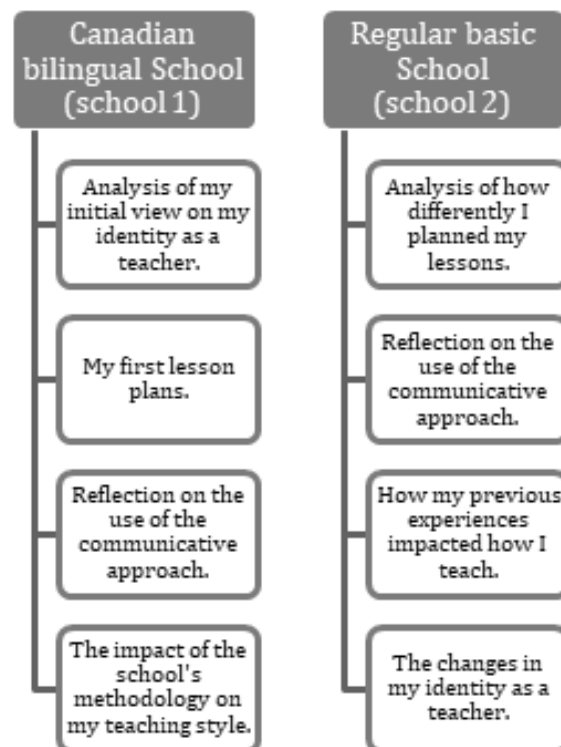
The materials that I will use for the analysis will consist of some of my oldest and newest lesson plans, of the two schools, and autobiographic texts about my experiences in the classroom, both as a teacher assistant and as a head-teacher. I will aim to investigate the

effectiveness of the communicative approach I have adopted in my classes and the changes in my identity over time. Besides, I will analyze my confidence as a teacher, and the way I have used the teaching theories in my classes, focusing on how I have improved as I got more experience, and on how my own learning style has affected the way I teach.

Since the first experience reported in this study was my first time in a classroom as a teacher, even before the curriculum mandatory internship, my perspective on how to give a class was very idealized, completely guided by the theories I had learned in college so far. It was frustrating not being able to fully apply all the knowledge I thought I had with my students, because theory and practice proved to be highly different.

In sum, the analysis will display how I have gone from being a student-teacher, to becoming a teacher-student, as I like to call myself. That shift takes place when I am finally able to recognize myself as a teacher, even though I am still taking my undergraduate course. In addition, I will also be contrasting my experience as an English learner with my students' experiences, inspecting how the former has influenced the latter.

To illustrate, I summarize my methodology in the following chart:



3 REFLEXIVITY: REFLECTING ON EXPERIENCES OF TEACHING AND OF REFLECTING

As previously outlined in the chart above, I will use my collection of lesson plans and reflective autobiographic writings to base my analysis.

To start, the first experience that I am analyzing took place in a Canadian school in Fortaleza, Ceará, which I will call school 1. It was my first time teaching in a real classroom, so my views on education were remarkably idealized. In one of my first reflective diaries, which dates back to the 10th of February, 2021, during my fourth week at the school, I mentioned how “excited and nervous” I was, and praised the experience I was having:

I'm helping out in a 3rd-grade class, and what really stands out to me is how easily the kids and the teachers use English all the time. It's amazing and exciting. It's a Canadian school, and they label themselves as bilingual, so half of the curriculum is taught in Portuguese, and the other half in English. I'm nervous. I feel like I'm living in a dream. (Reflective Diary 10/02/2021)

As I look back to it, the use of words such as “amazing” and “dream” to describe the experience illustrates how biased and idealized my vision was at the moment. I remember thinking how lucky I was to be given the opportunity of working in a school with a “perfect methodology”. Since I had not had any previous experiences with the struggles and reality of a classroom, I thought that a good teaching method would be enough for me to become a successful teacher.

I was initially hired to be a teacher-assistant for the 3rd grade, and I spent the first six months in that position. The head teacher of that class was a big inspiration to me, as I was starting to develop my identity as a teacher. A special memory that I hold to this day is a moment in which she showed me how to plan a class following the school's guidelines. I remember being impressed on how detailed it had to be, and wondering If I was ever going to be able to do it so perfectly. She also taught me how to plan a class that actually worked in real life, how to manage the students, and made me understand that every teacher, even after years of teaching, still feels insecure and doubts themselves: Here is an example of a lesson plan I wrote for a class taught in 27 of September, 2021, in my first month as a head teacher.:

Unit: 7 - Inspired By Nature 27/09/2021	Day: 16 - Monday	Date:
Subject: English Language and Arts (ELA)	Class: Year 3 A/B	
Content and Development:		
Morning Message (5 minutes)		
Write down today's morning message on the board with some spelling errors, then invite students to correct the mistakes. Ask them to identify words related to nature as well.		
<u>Morning message:</u>		
Good morning, my <u>deer</u> (dear) students! How's it going? <u>Do</u> (Did) you have a good night of sleep? Today I woke up and admired the clear blue sky from my window. I love <u>look</u> (looking) at the trees and feeling the wind on my face to start my day. I <u>hop</u> (hope) we can have an excellent day together. Let's go!		
Love, Mr. Gustavo		
Sharing (10 minutes)		
ASK students to share his or her imaginary plant from last class (day 15). They are to show the plant and read the information written about it.		
Introduce learning centres: (10 minutes)		
Explain what students are to do in each centre. Tell them that this week, because of the AC2 tests, they will do the learning centres collectively, one activity per day, and today it is going to be the blue centre.		
Learning centres (25 minutes)		
<u>Blue Centre:</u> Classroom Garden - Creating an imaginary garden		
Students are to create flowers, plants people might eat, butterflies or other animals that might come to the garden. Provide the students with materials such as coloured paper, coloured glue, glitter, markers and pencils for the activity.		
They are also to write a sentence for their plant or animal. Students should attach the sentence to the object they created. Example: The butterfly comes to the garden to collect nectar from the flowers.		
<u>Green Centre:</u> Parts of Speech - Finding and using verbs		

Students are to complete the practice sheet ([BLM 27](#)) on verbs. The BLM activity asks them to identify verbs among other types of words and complete sentences with them. If students finish early they can illustrate some of the songs or poems in the poetry duotang.







Red Centre: Word Wall Activity - Alphabetical order

Students are to complete the practice sheet ([BLM 28](#)). The BLM activity asks them to organize words in alphabetical order and then write phrases with some of them.

Purple Centre: Using Your Senses

Write down on the board vocabulary that can be used to describe a rock (regarding its looks, smell, shape, surface). They are to write on the practice sheet ([BLM 18](#)) about their rock. Explain that they will write down what they listen, see, smell, feel and think when they have the rock on their hands. In the last space, with the star, they are supposed to write down things they can do with the rocks.

My Rock response sheet sample:

 silence quiet peace	 Bumpy oval Pink speckles small dip light gray dull cracks boat cliff face
 fresh air dirt sand	 smooth and bumpy flat edge cold hard heavy one sharp point
 garden hiking walking swimming at the lake	 throwing skipping digging in the sand balancing climbing

Read Aloud and Class Discussion (20 minutes)

Introduce the title, author, and illustrator of *A Quiet Place*. Explain that it talks about the quiet places we find to get away from the noise and busyness of our lives.

Afterwards, tell them about your own quiet place.

Ask students to share about a connection they have to one of the quiet places mentioned in the story, asking what they would do in that place. Ask volunteers to help you with the reading.

Ask them if they have a different quiet place that was not mentioned in the story. Give them a few minutes to talk and present their own quiet places.

Ask: How would you feel if someone left his or her candy wrappers or pop cans in your quiet place? Why is it important to use the garbage cans or recycling bins rather than dropping your garbage on the ground? Remind them that this month's value is respect.

Independent Seatwork - My quiet place (15 minutes)

Hand them the worksheet My Quiet Place ([BLM 29](#)). Explain that in the activity they will write about a connection that they have made to the book story.

<p>Goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To describe personal observations, experiences, predictions and feelings. ● To recognize and continue to build a high-frequency sight word vocabulary. ● To write to express personal experiences, ideas and respond to new understanding of the topic. ● To use appropriate punctuation when writing (period, question mark, exclamation mark, apostrophe and quotation marks). ● To ask questions to satisfy personal curiosity and information needs. ● To read independently; using reading strategies appropriate for this grade level; ● To record connections to prior knowledge and experiences. ● To understand that poetry has many forms and structures. ● To understand the importance of language and word choice to convey ideas. ● To connect personal thoughts, feelings and experiences with the meaning in poems.
<p>Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pencils and erasers; ● Glue; ● Coloured paper; ● Options: sequins, beads, glitter; ● BLMS ● Book: My Quiet Place
<p>Activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● BLM: My Quiet Place

Looking back to this lesson plan, I can remember the frustration that came after not being able to do everything I had planned during the class itself. Although the classes were sometimes longer than one hour and a half, the number of group activities and the multiple exercises they had to do each day, made it difficult for me to stick to the time I had set for each moment, which ended up becoming a problem. In this lesson, for example, I was not able to conduct the reading moment in twenty minutes, as I had planned, which disorganized the rest of the class.

Nowadays I understand that feeling insecure is not something inherently bad. I can see that questioning and analyzing your own practice is, in fact, the key to keep evolving as a professional, especially in the educational field.

After experiencing the position of teacher assistant for some months, I was promoted to head-teacher in the beginning of the second semester of 2021, in September to be more specific. It was a moment we were still having online classes due to covid, and since the teaching program adopted by the school prioritized group tasks, the online format compromised my plannings directly. However, once I had already watched and given many online classes as a substitute, I was able to create good strategies to deal with the format, as I wrote in a reflective diary back on the 2nd of September, 2021:

I have already substituted the head teachers of year 3 and 4 many times, but having my own class and students is totally different. I hope I can handle everything on my own. Since we have been having online classes for quite some time now, at this point I think I have mastered the teaching techniques of this format. But of course I'm looking forward to the kids coming back to the building so I can actually fully apply the school methodology with them. (Reflective Diary 02/09/2021).

In regards to the way they dealt with the communicative approach, I can say that school 1 provided me my first time experiencing a totally language immersive environment. The classroom chairs were organized in small groups, called learning centers, and the students of those groups were changed every few weeks. The classes had a limited number of students, which allowed the teachers to have a more personalized interaction with them, and to develop more strategies to help communication to flourish in the environment. The way the teachers conducted the classes and the activities in English, and how well the students responded to that, made me realize the impact that well-planned immersive classes can have on the acquisition process of a student, and my amazement about it can be seen in many of my reflective diaries. However, such well-planned classes took much time to be elaborated, and at the moment I realized I would not be given that time, I started to get frustrated, as I stated in one of my written reflections presented below:

My biggest struggle and frustration so far has been to keep up with the demands of the coordination. The planning of the classes takes too much of my time, since they ask for it to be very detailed and well written. The program is awesome, but the pressure by the administration to do everything it asks us to do has been driving me crazy. (Reflexive Diary 16/11/2021)

At this point, I was still feeling like a student-teacher, learning my way of conducting my classes. I was creating my lesson plans strictly following every rule the former head teacher had taught me, which made me spend too much time planning, and as I could not

do it at school, I did it at home, on my weekends. Planning my classes had become a burden, and it was the only thing I allowed myself to think about, in and out of the school.

In a reflective diary from the 1st of August, 2022, I wrote the following excerpt: *“Planning my classes has become such a stressful job, that the magic of believing in the school's methodology has not been enough to make me want to stay”*. That was the day I decided I was going to quit that job. Analyzing this quote makes me understand that being a teacher, at the end of the day, is a job like any other. I was going to leave the school mesmerized by the teaching techniques I could learn along the way, having experienced teaching English by immersion, and actually seeing how effective it was on the language acquisition process of my students. However, I was also frustrated with the lack of understanding of the teacher's job by the administration of the school. At that moment, I could see myself as a teacher, experiencing the struggles of the occupation, and understanding that I was just starting to build my identity, and that all the techniques and methods I had gathered so far were going to continue to impact my teaching.

The second experience to be considered for this study took place in a regular basic school, also located in Fortaleza, Ceará, which I will call school 2. That school had been in the market for more than forty years, which made it, in theory, more experienced and well established than the first one I mentioned. However, I could notice that, because of all of those years in the field, school 2 was less eager to promote changes and reflections about their practice. They dealt with English in a very traditional way, considering it as an “extra” subject, and not fully understanding what bilingual education was.

The first big difference I noticed when compared to school 1 was the lack of pressure about planning my classes. Now, in contrast with my first experience as a teacher, I did not have to detail everything I would do in my classes to anybody. As I wrote in a reflective diary, on the 19th of August, 2022, *“I don't have to send my lesson plans to anyone, I am only asked to send the book pages I will use in each class, and the homeworks I will assign”*. This instantly made me less stressed about my lessons, but also made me pay less attention to the details that involved it. The process of planning my classes was basically reading the lesson on the teacher's guide, crossing-out the parts I knew I would not have enough time to carry out, and making sure everything would fit in 40 minutes. I saw myself not thinking about the student's assessment, or planning many dynamic activities. I was told by the administration to focus on the textbook, otherwise I would not be able to finish it by the end of the year.

Concerning the communicative approach, school 2 was eons behind school 1. There was an attempt to encourage teachers to have student-centered classes and to involve students in group tasks, however, they did not give me any support or tools to do so. Besides, they still prioritized textbooks and traditional forms of teaching. The classrooms were mostly crowded, with an average of 25 students each, some having more than 30, which made it difficult for the teacher to bond with students individually, and specially to assess their knowledge and proficiency. Moreover, students only had contact with English during their 40-minute-classes, which decelerated their language acquisition process and limited their communicative abilities.

In one of my reflective diaries, from the October of 2023, I wrote the following passage:

It was impossible to organize them [students]. I think it was the day I spoke Portuguese the most in class. I could not make them sit down or pay attention when speaking in English. I had to speak Portuguese many times. It's a little frustrating not having any help in those moments (Reflective Diary 14/10/2023)

When I reflect about this excerpt, I can see how much importance a real bilingual and immersive environment can have on the acquisition process of a student. Not having a bilingual assistant or any other professional who spoke English to help me create an immersive environment at the school, made my effort lose part of its meaning. I did not have time nor energy to do everything on my own. There was no encouragement or planning about the bilingual sector whatsoever, and the administration did not have knowledge about bilingual education. It seemed like I was the only one who cared about making those students learn English. Besides, because of the large number of students per class, it was hard for me, as a teacher, to conduct, manage, and assess group activities, which made me, at times, opt for having individual tasks rather than group ones, compromising the use of CLT.

Of course having the experience of being a teacher in a Canadian bilingual school had shaped the way I taught, so, besides the lack of resources, I was able to arouse in the students a certain understanding about the importance of learning English. I tried my best to continue using the strategies I had learned in school 1, such as creating a routine for the English classes, trying to place focus on reading activities, and bringing different types of media to assist the classroom environment to be the most welcoming possible during those 40 minutes they would spend with me. The following excerpt from one of my reflective diary illustrates some of these strategies I uses, and represents well what my beliefs and intentions at the school were:

Here at this school, English is definitely not the main focus. Luckily, I am able to use some of the teaching techniques I learned in the other school to help, such as the use of the “morning message”, the classroom calendar, and the frequency of reading activities I bring. I can even see a good engagement and evolution of my students, however, continuing to do all this with little to no assistance is not possible. (Reflective Diary 14/10/2023)

By the end of this experience in school 2, I can say that my identity as a teacher has shifted and evolved many times. Besides the struggles and lack of assistance I found there, I was able to overcome the challenges with the experience I gathered along my journey, and to create my own style of teaching, inspired by the bilingual experience I had in school 1, but adapted to the reality of my new students. In the end, I think that a good teacher needs to have a self-reflective fluid identity, and needs to be able to shape it according to the students' needs and their social environment.

4 CONCLUSIONS

In sum, the journey I outlined in this study reveals how transformative and fluid the identity of a teacher can be. My first experience at school 1, even though I saw it through an idealized perspective about education at the time, proved to me the power of well-planned immersive classes to the language acquisition process of students. However, nowadays I can see that for the effectiveness of the communicative approach to take place, it is necessary more than just the teacher's willingness and desire. The school, as a whole, needs to understand the specificities of bilingual education, support the teachers with tools and assistance to create a truly immersive environment, and provide enough time for the planning of classes.

Teaching in a bilingual environment such as school 1 showed me it was possible to teach kids English in a fun, immersive, and effective way, and I will always carry the knowledge and strategies I learned there with me. I believe that understanding that I could create my own style of teaching and develop my own identity based on what worked for my students was the key for me to finally see myself as a successful teacher.

This study emphasizes the importance of self-reflectiveness in a teacher's journey. If it was not for the habit of writing and reflecting about my own practice, I would not have been able to write this paper. The analysis of my own autobiographic diaries allowed me to follow the changes in my identity, and to track the development of my teaching style. Comparing my first lesson plans to the newest ones showed me how experiencing different educational situations changed my view of teaching and learning, and also made me understand that each class is unique, which leads me to conclude that a good lesson plan is one that is adapted to the reality of the students who will experience the class.

Despite the frustrations and constraints, I have learned much from both contexts I experienced. The situations I have faced made me able to craft a unique teaching style, with many references, but adaptable to the needs of my students. I finish this paper saying that experience is truly essential for growth as a teacher in the educational field, but it is the self-reflection moments about your own practice that allows you to perceive your strengths and weaknesses, and keep evolving as a teacher and as a person. In other words, as said by H. Douglas Brown, "Every effective teacher knows that the pursuit of excellence is a lifelong journey" (BROWN, 2015, p. 53).

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APPENDIX – REFLECTIVE DIARIES

REFLECTIVE DIARY - 10/02/2021

This first month as a teacher assistant has been challenging and awesome at the same time. At the beginning, I was feeling excited and nervous, but every day has been full of new things to learn. I had two weeks to prepare the classroom, and to plan the year with the head teacher, but nothing gets you ready for the classes like the practice itself. I'm helping out in a 3rd-grade class, and what really stands out to me is how easily the kids and the teachers use English all the time. It's amazing and exciting. It's a Canadian school, and they label themselves as bilingual, so half of the curriculum is taught in Portuguese, and the other half in English. I'm nervous. I feel like I'm living in a dream

Some students are resistant to speaking English, but everyone understands and responds really well to the teachers' messages. It has been nice to have the experience of speaking English all the time, and it's funny because they never hear me speaking Portuguese, so they think I don't know how to. Every now and then they ask me if I'm Brazilian or Canadian. I feel flattered.

This whole experience has been great. The kids are so good at English, the teachers are great, and the school feels friendly. I can't wait to see what happens for the rest of the school year and how my relationship with these kids will be.

REFLECTIVE DIARY - 02/09/2021

I am sure that the following months will be of much learning to me as a person and as a teacher. I am extremely happy. The former teacher of year 3 quit, and I was asked to take over as head teacher of the class. I am going to miss the former teacher because she was of much importance to me when I started my experience here at the school.

I'm overwhelmed, but couldn't be happier. I am now wondering: at what point did the administration start to believe I was ready to be a head teacher? I am not sure, but I feel like I have been doing a good job and they noticed it. I hope I do not let them down. I have already substituted the head teachers of year 3 and 4 many times, but having my own class and students is totally different. I hope I can handle everything on my own.

Since we have been having online classes for quite some time now, at this point I think I have mastered the teaching techniques of this format. But of course I am looking

forward to the kids coming back to the building so I can actually fully apply the school methodology with them. I think maybe, by the end of this month, they will be here already. No one can take online classes anymore. We want to be together.

REFLECTIVE DIARY - 16/11/2021

Being a head teacher in this school has been a rollercoaster of emotions. I was extremely excited and anxious when I was invited to take over this class, maybe a little too much. It truly has been a great experience to speak English with the kids full-time, to see their evolution as I use my strategies, and even to simply contemplate how lucky they are to have this opportunity to learn English by immersion, which is way more effective and easier than the way I learned it.

However, my biggest struggle and frustration so far has been to keep up with the demands of the coordination. The planning of the classes takes too much of my time, since they ask for it to be very detailed and well written. The program is awesome, but the pressure by the administration to do everything it asks us to do has been driving me crazy.

Moreover, the program was not written taking in consideration the pandemic status that we are in right now, so the frustration of trying to do some strategies and not being able to see student's engagement and improvement has been destroying my mind.

Sometimes I take more than 5 hours to plan the week, and as I do not have this time here at the school, I have to do everything at home, making my weekends stressful and striking my anxiety. Sometimes I think that this only happens because I'm not organizing my things the way I should, but then I talk to other teachers and they are all in the same boat as me, so I do not know. This has been affecting my performance in the classroom with the students more than I'd like to.

REFLECTIVE DIARY - 01/08/2022

Today I have decided to quit my job here at the school. I cannot take the mental instability that this place has been causing me. All I think about when I'm in my house is this school. Planning the classes has become such a stressful job, that the magic of believing in the school's methodology has not been enough to make me want to stay. I know that I will probably not find another school that gives that much importance to the English language as this one does, but at this point I think that I need to experience other ways of teaching as well.

Of course I know that immersion and having people speaking to you in English the whole day is way more effective to your learning process than having 50 minute classes once in a week, but I also know that the experience I'm having here is completely different than the one most students have in other regular schools.

So, because of that, I have decided to resign my position of bilingual teacher at the school, and I will try to find a job at a “regular” school. It's been a rough decision, and I will take everything I learned here everywhere I go.

The Canadian methodology is truly inspiring and has shaped the way I teach forever, but maybe it's time to bring that to places and kids that would not have the opportunity to experience that in a Canadian school. I also have to remember that, besides being a teacher, I am a person. I am afraid, but also hopeful for this new chapter of my life.

REFLECTIVE DIARY - 19/08/2022

Today I finished my second week teaching in this new school. I am mostly feeling two very specific emotions: relief, because I am finally free from all the pressure to teach perfectly using the perfect program that I felt in the other school; and fear, because I am afraid of not having made the right decision to leave a Canadian school.

The things are very different here. To start, I teach 5 grades, 10 classes and 200 students daily. I teach English from year 1 to year 5. Besides, I am the only English teacher of the Elementary sector, so I am basically the beholder of English, since nobody else speaks or understands English. There are not many people to discuss about my practice or my classes in general. The school is not labeled as “bilingual”, but it adopts a bilingual program, which means they offer English classes everyday, and these classes are supposed to be conducted in English.

On one hand, I have way less pressure to plan my classes, since the coordinator is also a teacher from another sector, so she doesn't have much time to be on track with my activities. I don't have to send my lesson plans to anyone, I am only asked to send the book pages I will use in each class, and the homeworks I will assign

On the other hand, I feel like the English subject doesn't have much prestige for the rest of the school. I have to teach my classes, send the book pages on the agendas, and that's it. Completely different from the other school. I am happy that I can finally breathe a little, but let's see how it goes.

REFLECTIVE DIARY - 14/10/2023

Today was a rough day. It was really difficult to manage the classes. I felt like they were completely energized, but not in a good way. It was impossible to organize them. I think it was the day I spoke Portuguese the most with students. I could not make them sit down or pay attention when speaking English. I had to speak Portuguese many times. It's a little frustrating not having any help in these moments. I do not have an assistant or anyone who speaks English to help in the classes, and they are mostly crowded. I have a year 5 group with 33 students, so it's impossible to conduct the classes in English, since most of them simply do not understand.

I think that the students' English proficiency has been a big struggle for me to deal with. Having 40-minute-classes, sometimes with more than 30 students, half of them not understanding English at all, is definitely not easy.

When I stop to analyze the whole picture, I think that having my first teaching experience in a Canadian bilingual school, completely atypical, was both a blessing and a curse. I was able to learn with people that really understood how English acquisition worked, and that really believed in their teaching program. Besides all the pressure and struggles with strictly following the teaching program, and delivering the lesson plans in advance, they truly cared about teaching English in the best way possible.

Here at this school, English is definitely not the main focus. Luckily, I am able to use some of the teaching techniques I learned in the other school to help, such as the use of the "morning message", the classroom calendar, and the frequency of reading activities I bring. I can even see a good engagement and evolution of my students, however, continuing to do all this with little to no assistance is not possible.