

## EVERYDAY AND SCIENTIFIC CONCEPTS IN THE INITIAL EDUCATION OF A FUTURE EFL TEACHER: THE THEORY/PRACTICE GAP

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- **ABSTRACT:** The article analyzes the narratives of a future English as a Foreign Language teacher during her college internship, who has already started teaching outside the academic setting. Through narrative inquiry, a Brazilian undergraduate named Julia described her experiences during three focus group sessions and written reports. The results indicate that the relationship between everyday and scientific concepts is built upon the theory and practice gap, owing to three aspects: first, that concrete teaching experiences outside of college, provided closer contact with the challenges of a classroom; second, due to these previous events, the internship had a different meaning and resulted in a mismatch between the future teacher's expectations towards what her teacher education program could offer her professional development; third, a cultural tool such as an internship report was also affected by the gap, showing a utilitarian function which hindered its potential to mediate her classroom observations. The theoretical framework draws from cultural-historical psychology notions of mediated activity and the role of concept formation, as well as perspectives in Applied Linguistics regarding teacher development in initial years of education. This study wishes to contribute to contemporary cultural-historical research on teaching and learning as social endeavors embedded in culture.
- **KEYWORDS:** Professional development; Teacher Education. Supervised internship; Vygotsky; Applied Linguistics.

### Introduction

This article discusses from a cultural-historical perspective the process of becoming an English language teacher during the stage of internship in college, while starting to teach professionally at the same time. The analysis dwells on oral narratives of a participant and how she experiences both the practical and theoretical dimensions of teacher development. Thus, the study is based on a) the experiencing of theory and practice in the participant's professional development and b) the relationship with the institutional tools provided.

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It begins with a discussion about the contributions of a cultural-historical perspective for research on teacher education. The discussion also articulates how a cultural-historical perspective relates to challenges reported in recent studies about teacher development worldwide, with issues such as the theory/practice gap (Korthagen, 2010, Bedran, 2020; Lima, 2017; Cassemiro, 2018), the expectations and first concrete experiences (Consuegra; Engels; Struyven, 2014; Gelfuso; Dennis, 2014, Sannino, 2010, Senefonte, 2023), as well as the impact of internship activities (Almeida; Brayner; Moraes, 2021; Brito, 2022; Lima, 2020a, 2020b; Salerni; Sposetti; Szpunar, 2014, Solomon; Croft; Duah; Lawson, 2014; Van Huizen; Van Oers; Wubbels, 2008).

The next section provides details on the methodology. A participant named Julia is introduced as the narrative focus with an introduction of her personal background leading up to her going to college. The teacher education program (*Letras*) is described as the cultural environment with its specific set of rules and goals (Leontiev, 1994) that determine what kind of tasks she is supposed to fulfill in order to become a certified teacher. Details on how the narratives were generated through focus groups are also provided, as well as the internship reports that were made available throughout the research.

Followed by that is the analysis section. Based on elementary categories in narrative inquiry (Clandinin; Connely, 1990, Webster; Mertova, 2007), the two aims presented above (a-b) are addressed in a three-section analysis considering: i) the impact of concrete experiences outside the teacher education program as a temporary/substitute teacher; ii) the role of the supervised internship while working as a substitute teacher and iii) the impact of a tool (internship report) and the struggles to appropriate it as part of the activity. The final section looks back on the results and concludes with implications for future research concerning language teacher development.

## **Longstanding challenges in teacher education: a cultural-historical perspective**

Cultural-historical psychology in the Soviet tradition, notably known in the seminal works of Vygotsky (1987, 1994, 2012), Luria (1994) and Leontiev (1994) has been a new contribution to the existent debates in the field of education and language studies. Owing to the fact that their work emerged among contemporary readers interested in the study of culture, language and interaction (Cole, 1996; Kozulin, 2015), scholars often referred to such ideas in the west as sociocultural (Wertsch, 1991) or cultural-historical (Cole, 1996). Inspired by these contemporary readers, both Education and Applied Linguistics have considered sociocultural and cultural-historical perspectives as an alternative to think of the challenges of becoming a teacher (Solomon; Croft, Duah; Lawson, 2014, Van Huizen; Van Oers; Wubbels, 2005), which is evident also in contemporary Brazilian studies (Bedran, 2020; Cassemiro, 2018; Lima, 2017, 2020a, 2020b). A cornerstone of the Vygotskian work that is present in contemporary studies refers to the notion of language, which is conceived as an important qualitative trait

of the human species. Language for Vygotsky (1987, 1994, 2012) is constituted by the relationship between the subject and social life, through the interaction with others (interpersonal) and their own culture (Cole, 1996; Kozulin, 2015). Likewise, as an initially social construction, it restructures the individual's thought and becomes part of the constitution of their subjectivity, in other words, the way they feel, perceive and make sense about the world in an intrapersonal relationship.

Besides language, another prominent aspect of Vygotskian theory is the role of culture in social development (Kozulin, 2015) and how it transforms human cognition. Instead of a direct relationship with the world, Vygotsky conceived that psychological activity should be studied as a mediated process. In his words, instead of a direct connection, "an intermediate member intervenes and plays a completely special role clearly different from anything that we could see in elementary forms of behavior" (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 47). Soviet psychologists originally defined this member or mediator that transforms human behavior as a tool<sup>1</sup>, to emphasize its action upon the world. These "cultural inventions" (Luria, 1994, p. 47) in mediated activity can be physical (books) or psychological (concepts, words, theories). In addition, other people also act as mediators in human activity, such as a teacher in the students' learning process. Mediated activity plays an essential role in the way one structures their own cognitive activity.

Cultural tools are part of the historical process of human development (ontogeny), they represent the legacy of prior generations who not only refined such devices but also made them available for other people as part of the same social group. As a result, by mastering different tools, people also acquire "habits and forms of cultural behaviour, the cultural methods of reasoning" (Vygotsky, 1994, p. 57), which involves the social conventions and rules (Leontiev, 1994) that organize the activity and the functionality of the tool (mediation). These notions have brought important implications for educational theories, especially the ones concerned with teacher development and the use of different educational resources conceived as tools for learning and teaching (Bedran, 2020; Brito, 2022).

According to Max (2010), the role of tools and artifacts in teacher-mediated activities have been particularly studied by cultural-historical traditions because it is connected to the process of change that occurs with humans in socially situated contexts. Teachers internalize<sup>2</sup> and appropriate all sorts of tools that are able to foster their practices in their classrooms (i.e., a book, a computer and other types of devices). However, tools are not to be understood solely as the physical items that surround us. Words (as concepts) can also be understood as tools that mediate our learning experiences. Teachers study different theories and elaborate their own comprehension about them in a way they can reshape their own practices by adapting, making changes

<sup>1</sup> This notion also relates to the Soviet psychologists' readings of *Dialectics of Nature* by Friedrich Engels and the discussion on the role of labor that transforms both nature and societal life conditions.

<sup>2</sup> In Vygotskian theory, internalization refers to mental operations that were once external and then reconstructed as part of psychological activity. Learning how to count, for example, starts by concrete actions of isolating the quantity of things (i.e., counting with your fingers), but once numbers are learned, they become tools of mental activity.

and trying out new methods or attempting specific classroom activities. Vygotsky's work on concept formation (2012) derived from his interest to understand the complexities of how consciousness is formed, as well as the role of thinking and speech (words and thoughts) and the cultural core of the educational process.

In addition, Vygotsky's work on concept formation is another stream of research that relates to a longstanding challenge in teacher education, the conflictive relationship between the theoretical knowledge that future teachers are exposed to and its connection, or lack thereof, to the practical dimension of the profession. At the core of his discussion, Vygotsky (1987) argued that everyday (or spontaneous) concepts are formed through concrete experience, whereas in a different direction, scientific concepts derive from formal instruction (education). Thus, the psychologist claimed that scientific concepts provided important implications for how researchers should consider the relationship between language and instruction. These concepts were not isolated abstractions to be transferred from a teaching experience to a person's mind. Rather than that, "these concepts are not absorbed ready-made, and instruction and learning play a leading role in their acquisition" (Vygotsky, 2012, p. 167), suggesting the impact of schooling in human development (mediated activity).

A central concern in international research on teacher education is the relationship between professional development and the quality of teaching (Consuegra; Engels; Struyven, 2014), and even with a historic transformation since the 20<sup>th</sup> century in terms of balancing the academic education and the professional experience (Gelfuso; Dennis, 2014), the theory/practice gap remains as a contemporary challenge, despite further advances in the field that recognize there is no universal method as ultimate solution (Korthagen, 2010). In the study of everyday and scientific concepts, instead of treating them as isolated entities, cultural-historical psychology proposed a dialectic view which inspires studies in Applied Linguistics (AL) to understand how both types of concepts (as types of knowledge) intertwine, instead of excluding each other in different stages of development.

Despite having different origins and moving in different directions, these two types of knowledge are connected and as Vygotsky (2012, p. 205) exemplifies, "the development of a spontaneous concept must have reached a certain level for the child<sup>3</sup> to be able to absorb a related scientific concept". This suggests not only the importance of directing teaching towards the acknowledgment of students' spontaneous (and everyday) knowledge acquired in the cultural interchanges, but also aims at the development of scientific concepts that allow subjects to go "far beyond the immediate experience" (p. 170). Moreover, the formation of scientific concepts changes how subjects interpret their own reality and their everyday experience because of their dialectical relationship.

In Applied Linguistics, the cultural-historical perspective grew strong in the past few years (Bedran, 2020; Cassemiro, 2018; Lima, 2020a, 2020b), reflecting similar

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<sup>3</sup> Even though his initial inquiries have focused on child development, the study of concept formation and language acquisition includes other stages such as adult life.

tendencies of what is observed worldwide (Van Huizen; Van Oers; Wubbels, 2005), of going back to the works of Vygotsky as a path to come up with alternatives for their local contemporary challenges. Among a few examples, we could highlight studies about the professional pathway forged since the choice of becoming a teacher until the challenges to stay in college and enter the job market (Lima, 2017), the collaborative work as a drive for formative experiences mediated through technology (Bedran, 2020) and the importance of developing specific knowledge about teaching while still in initial education (Cassemiro, 2018).

In another study, Lima (2020b) studied the narratives of a novice teacher named Alyssa in South America. In her learning trajectory, teaching (as a cultural trait) firstly emerged in the form of play in her childhood and her relationship with the English language derived from affective memories of listening to the songs her father used to love (eighties Rock). Later in her adolescence, teaching experiences emerged again as an informal job opportunity for her as an advanced language learner, which later culminated in the choice to become an EFL teacher by studying *Letras*<sup>4</sup>. By studying the relationship of everyday and scientific concepts in her learning experiences, the author argued it is important to comprehend, in a cultural-historical perspective, that teaching is not constructed only during the formative years of college.

Examples of scientific concepts included critical thinking (Freire, 2004), as well as the distinction between approach, method and technique (Anthony, 1963). Alyssa's everyday concepts of how to teach and how to learn (derived from previous life events) already informed her approach, in other words, the way she experienced new things in college (the different courses, methods and theories she got to learn). Fostering the formation of scientific concepts by future teachers is a way to integrate and elaborate deeper understandings of how to teach a new language, for example. The understanding of this phenomenon goes beyond the subject's direct experience and encompasses a dimension of knowledge culturally produced. In a way, integrating everyday and scientific concepts in teacher education programs, as corroborated by previous studies (Cassemiro, 2018), also emerges as an alternative to deal with the longstanding theory/practice gap.

In a similar manner, one possibility of finding a context-specific alternative for the theory versus practice gap in teacher education programs is the articulation of students' practical experience and theoretical knowledge introduced. By being too focused on exposing students, as much as possible, to the body of theoretical knowledge produced in the field, teacher education programs have often been criticized by future teachers for its idealistic views (Korthagen, 2010) or for not providing the practical tools and methods for dealing with challenges they will face next (Lima, 2017).

Korthagen (2010), for instance, pointed four causes for the theory/practice divide that could be briefly mentioned as: 1) *socialization* (from a sociological perspective it

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<sup>4</sup> In Brazil, *Letras* could be translated as Language and Literature, which can be either a bachelor's or a teaching degree. In this study, for example, the participants who will be introduced later pursued *Letras* as the latter, in order to become EFL teachers.

considers institutional patterns of schools) 2) the *complexity of teaching* (other factors are involved in how teaching happens), 3) the *teacher's background or perceptive knowledge* and 4) the *feed-forward problem*. This fourth aspect entails students' resistance towards theories presented in the education program followed by criticisms that insufficient preparation was (and will keep on being) provided by their supervisors/teacher educators. Even though resistance is not always seen as something useful, it may also be an indication of agency and desire for change (Sannino, 2010).

The conflicts that student teachers experience between theoretical and practical knowledge occur when they fail to see a connection in which the theory is able to provide a collection of ways to understand a given challenge that the student teacher might encounter. Additionally, these types of knowledge are informed through practice (previous research about what happens in class), which reinforces the dialectical nature (formed by opposition, conflict and change). The failed articulation of theory and practice becomes a reality when the student teacher finds "no opportunity to acquire the relevant theoretical insights" (Korthagen, 2010, p. 671) during a challenging experience, which will lead them to the sensation that they were not well prepared (Lima, 2017), for not knowing how to respond to a given challenge.

Meanwhile, student teachers' voices emphasize that as their education programs contemplate mainly the theoretical aspect of teaching, the practical aspect is what actually prepares them for the job (Almeida; Brayner; Moraes, 2021; Consuegra; Engels; Struyven, 2014). Even though different education programs worldwide have required more time for teacher preparation (Brasil, 2002; Gelfuso; Dennis, 2014; Senefonte, 2023), there has been a significant increase of student teachers starting in the profession prior to their certification, both as temporary teachers or through faster and alternative certification processes. According to Consuegra, Engels and Struyven (2014, p. 79) these contemporary changes comprise "early entry teacher education programs that allow student teachers to take on full responsibility for a classroom after no, or hardly any, pre-service preparation at all".

In Brazil, for example, EFL teachers start working informally at private language courses as soon as they become proficient speakers. Moreover, when they pursue a teaching degree, they are able to engage in teaching paid projects or extension programs. Meanwhile, by the end of their second year (fourth semester) they become eligible to apply for a position as substitute teachers. In order to do so, they need to be over eighteen years of age, currently study in a teacher education program and provide college records that attest they have completed courses related to the subjects they intend on teaching. Positions are hired through a simplified process by the State Education Department.

These new profiles of "teachers in the making" create a new challenge or intensify the already existing ones. They struggle with the theory/practice gap in their education programs and to supply the imbalance, they enter the field as soon as possible, believing this early exposure will provide what the teacher education program fails to do. Nevertheless, different studies have reported that drawing heavily on concrete experiences has not solved the imbalance, but augmented it (Almeida; Brayner; Moraes,

2021; Brito, 2022; Cassemiro, 2018; Lima, 2017, 2020a, 2020b; Van Huizen; Van Oers; Wubbles, 2005).

As the initial years of teaching are commonly described in terms of survival strategies prior to actually “learning from experiences” (Korthagen, 2010, p. 670), beginner teachers are expected to respond to these challenges in many different ways. Consuegra, Engels and Struyven (2014), in a study with beginner teachers in Belgium, mapped out at least six strategies mainly based on 1) intuition or trial-and-error, 2) trying and making mistakes, 3) asking for advice, 4) overlooking the problem, 5) ascribing responsibility to others or in more serious cases 6) relying on staff intervention. From a cultural-historical standpoint, it is possible to interpret these strategies related to the participants’ everyday concepts of teaching, mainly because they all confide in how these beginners filter their experiences based on prior personal knowledge. Strategies 1 and 2 (and 4, to some extent), stem from a direct reaction to the problem at stake. Strategies 3, 5 and 6 rely on social cues and everyday interactions with others who show signs of classroom management expertise. However, none of these strategies seemed to be informed by scientific knowledge, such as trying a specific teaching strategy, a widely popular method or a specific set of theories. These opportunities to articulate concepts are enabled chiefly through the supervised internship, the moment to observe, create, evaluate and experiment with stages of teaching.

Internships are known as “a form of experiential learning that integrates knowledge and theory learned in college with practical application and skills developed in a professional setting” (Salerni; Sposetti; Szpunar, 2014, p. 133-134). It is positioned strategically toward the end of the course representing the final step before entering the classroom as a certified teacher, and it is supposed to provide a small-scale sample of the reality of school environments. Internships usually consist of a series of tasks that may involve classroom observation or even teaching, depending on each term. Teacher education programs select different tools to be used during these tasks, but the most frequent ones are internship reports (Almeida; Brayner; Moraes, 2021; Brito, 2022; Cassemiro, 2018) and their relevance is not only “for evaluating the internship of a single student” (p. 134), but also providing descriptive evidence that each student teacher completed the given task.

Considering this new profile of early entry teachers, regardless if they are or feel prepared for it, another challenge is how they perceive the internship, which loses to some extent, its leading role in mediating how future teachers experience the work setting. In order to understand the teacher education program as the cultural environment (Luria, 1994), it is also necessary to conceive student teacher as agents of their own development who interact with others, or as Leontiev (1994, p. 296) describes it as “the general process of the socialization of man”.

The different tools and tasks assigned during internship are context-specific and goal-oriented. Therefore, in order to understand their impact on teacher development, it becomes necessary to establish the relationship the student teacher (agent) develops with other people (i.e., the teacher educator, the internship supervisor) in other contexts

(i.e., the teacher education program, the school where the internship is held). In order to illustrate this contextual specificity, this study will focus on a qualitative analysis of an EFL teacher in Brazil and the experiences she had during her supervised internship. The next sections will present the specific conditions of the context for this research, as well as the participant and the sociocultural activities.

## Methodology

Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory (1987, 1994, 2012) is not only influential for theoretical background, but especially in methodology, considering the complexities involved in the study of language and culture. In Vygotskian teacher education research, Max (2010) emphasizes the importance of various qualitative sources to study teacher development. According to him, an inquiry must include "active participation of researchers who gather ethnographic data of the current practices and collect the multiple voices, points of view, traditions and interests of the different participants about educating teachers with respect to their specific roles and personal histories" (Max, 2010, p. 214). In order to reach out to these different voices, points of view and personal histories, this section describes the methodological trajectory that culminated in the study presented here. First, we introduce the context and the activities the participant engaged in. Second, we introduce our participant. Finally, we provide an outline of data collection, focusing on the narratives we analyzed in the three sections ahead.

## Context

This paper draws from a major research project designed to study the process of teacher development through the narratives of three undergraduates as they obtain a double major in Portuguese and English as a foreign language (EFL), which in Brazil is called *Curso de Letras*. This college degree comprises four years as the undergraduates take courses in the field of Applied Linguistics, education, psychology, among others. As part of a national guideline (Brasil, 2002) applied to all educational courses, they are supposed to take on internship activities that add up to a minimum of 400 hours of curricular tasks fulfilled in regular schools (i.e., conducting classroom observation, writing reports, among others). In this university, the course divides 200 hours for the third and fourth years as practical activities to be carried out during the courses of English Language Internship 1 (ELI-1) and English Language Internship 2 (ELI-2). This paper is based on the former.

The course provides both theoretical and practical activities to engage future teachers in different tasks to acquaint them with school settings. A professor with a doctorate in Applied Linguistics conducts it and activities include theoretical readings, classroom discussions, essays and practical tasks. These tasks are organized in a

four-phase set of activities that require the undergraduates to visit a school and gather information about its institutional functioning. They take notes throughout the entire time, which are later turned into internship reports that attest the fulfillment of each task. A four-phase task is outlined in the table below:

**Table 1** – Internship activities and reports

Report Number	Practical task description
1	Interview the school staff to get a glimpse into their work as part of an educational institution. Read the official documents of the school. Map out the physical structure conditions (number of rooms and laboratories) and the tools available for the EFL teachers (electronic devices).
2	Choose an EFL teacher to fill in an open-ended questionnaire. Interview this teacher about the contextual reality of EFL teaching. Follow his or her routine for one day. Choose one of his or her classes and outline a chronology of each event that occurs during a 50-minute class.
3	Choose a classroom from the teacher interviewed in the previous task and ask students to fill in a semi-structured questionnaire about their experiences as EFL learners in a public school.
4	Choose three parents of the students from the previous task and ask them to fill in a questionnaire about the role of learning EFL in public school.

**Source:** provided by the author

Later, the results are shared with a group in a classroom debate and at the end of the academic year the students are approved if all tasks were completed successfully in time and by the quality of the reports (i.e., providing thorough descriptions of environments and activities, articulating the theory that is studied in the course critically).

## Participant

There were three participants in the original study: Julia, Sarah and Amanda<sup>5</sup>. The analysis in this paper, however, is focused on Julia's narratives while she attended the English Language Internship (ELI-1)<sup>6</sup>. Julia was 19 years old when she joined our study. She was born in a small town in the south region of Brazil where she lived most of her life. When she was 15, instead of applying to a regular high school, as most Brazilian teenagers do, she applied for teaching school (*magistério*). A teaching school is a four-year

<sup>5</sup> Pseudonyms for ethical reasons. The study (CAAE: 21460613.1.0000.5466) was approved by the research ethics committee of the São Paulo State University (UNESP). The pseudonyms are written as suggested by the participants themselves.

<sup>6</sup> Amanda's and Sarah's voices will also eventually appear in the analysis as the participants were involved in collective activities, however they will be considered in relation to Julia's narrative.

professional certification offered by public institutions to prepare educators to work as homeroom teachers. It also includes most of the subjects from a regular high school curriculum. However, students have more educational subjects and internship activities throughout the course. After being certified to work as a homeroom teacher, Julia applied to a public university in Brazil. She was then accepted to pursue a double major in Portuguese (L1) and EFL. At the same time, owing to her prior certification, Julia worked both as a temporary and substitute teacher<sup>7</sup> to pay her costs in college.

## Instruments

The main project has a longitudinal design and the participants' narratives were collected for three years as they attended classes at the teacher education program (*Letras*). The design considers three basic elements in narrative inquiry as suggested by Webster and Mertova (2007) which are the tools (methodology and instruments), criteria (principles of authenticity when presenting the narratives) and structure (the basic elements of a narrative such as subjects, time and events). For these authors, narrative inquiry studies human experience from the standpoint of critical events, the most notable among a myriad of lived moments (Webster; Mertova, 2007). Beyond the idea of mere representation or translation of experiences through words, in this study we propose that narrative entails a process of action through language, thus, when participants share their stories they perform, or in other words, they elaborate ways of positioning themselves in social life and unveil their subjectivities.

In order to keep record of the narratives, two major instruments were selected: individual interviews and focus groups. They were all recorded in Portuguese and later translated for this article. In the first year, the three participants were involved in two focus group sessions. In the second, three focus group sessions were conducted. In the third year, we interviewed each participant three times. Besides these accounts, the internship reports were also provided by the participants. The focus groups were initially considered because they promote a more comfortable situation in which participants are invited to discuss similar stories related to a topic (Barbour; Schostak, 2009). In this paper, we consider Julia's narratives that emerged during the three focus group sessions carried out during the second year.

These instruments were carefully used during different longitudinal waves (Taris, 2000) throughout each year to capture different transitions. Narrative inquiry was chosen for the methodology for its potential to capture events in a holistic perspective that aims at understanding how the subjects' interpretation of a given phenomenon plays an important role in comprehending the phenomenon itself. Given the fact that words and concepts not only represent experience, but are also a way to act upon the world

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<sup>7</sup> A temporary teacher is someone under a contract who works with a classroom for a predefined period (weeks or months) whereas a substitute teacher replaces someone in the staff for a more limited time (one day or just one class). In this paper, the distinction matters because the participant will experience both.

(Vygotsky, 1987, 2012), narrative inquiry revealed itself as the appropriate choice for data gathering.

A digital recorder was used to register the oral narratives, which were later fully transcribed. The ethical procedures included the change of people's names for aliases and the attribution of fictitious names for places. The narratives were analyzed in terms of events that emerged as Julia moved through the internship course. Categories such as script, scene, characters<sup>8</sup> and events (Clandinin; Connelly, 1990) were helpful to outline different episodes once they respectively stand for time, space, subject and happenings. Due to the extensive amount of data, the narratives will be presented as excerpts to illustrate Julia's views on teacher learning from her participation in focus groups with the other two participants, her college mates.

## **Data Analysis**

For the purposes of this paper, three events that emerged in her narratives regarding her experiences in college are analyzed: (a) the impact of professional experiences outside the university environment, (b) the stories behind the tasks throughout the course and (c) her relationship with the internship reports, the pedagogical tool that was provided to mediate her reflections.

### **The concrete experience of being a substitute teacher**

In spite of still being in pursuit of her college degree, Julia was always interested to start teaching as soon as she could, a recurrent tendency reported in other studies (Consuegra, Engels; Struyven, 2014; Senefonte, 2023). She first started teaching during her second year in college after signing a temporary contract. As a temporary teacher, she worked for six months with the same group of students. These months provided the opportunity to experience what it was like to be in charge of preparing lesson plans and teaching EFL classes. Aside from working for a semester the previous year, Julia's professional experiences were very limited during the third year, especially because she was not hired back as a temporary teacher. She explains the reason in excerpt 1.

#### **Excerpt 1**

*Julia:* Last year, I was hired as a temporary teacher in the beginning of the [academic] year. Then, I terminated my contract, the worst thing I've ever done, because I didn't know they would extend [previous contracts instead of creating new ones]. But how would I know that, right?

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<sup>8</sup> Even though we acknowledge these authors' discussion on the influence of literary studies in narrative inquiry for education, which remained in the terminology we cited, we prefer the term subjects instead of characters, which we believe is more in line with a socio-historical perspective that describes human subjectivity that is constituted in particular social settings (Wertsch, 1991).

As she felt her new job was consuming most of her time, back then she decided to stop working to focus on college. In the following year, Julia felt she could handle both, but she was not selected again for a temporary teaching position because the educational hiring office decided to extend the contracts of the staff who worked until the end of the previous academic year. Despite her interest to work and support herself, she decided to focus on her studies and fill in for teachers sporadically. Julia believed it was important to keep in touch with the classroom environment and obtain more experience in the field while pursuing her degree. She would not be involved with the same students for longer periods like before, but she still had the opportunity to teach. Next, she describes the common procedures she experienced as a novice substitute teacher.

### Excerpt 2

*Researcher:* And when you substitute a teacher, do they give you the topic or an assignment to propose in the class or ask you to prepare it yourself?

*Julia:* They do both. For example, in my field, either English or Portuguese, there are teachers who give me the materials. However, some of them say: "Look, I can't go to work today. Can you fill in for me?". Moreover, let's suppose she's going to start working with fables. If I don't know [the topic] I have to get by myself.

*Sarah:* You gotta find a way.

*Julia:* Whether you want it or not, some teachers provide the textbook with activities and such. Or the example of a fable in a textbook that you can follow. But I can't go to a classroom and be like: "Guys, get your books, today we're gonna study fables, so let's start reading...". I have to explain what a fable is.

*Amanda:* And then there's someone who doesn't know what that is, and says it right away.

*Julia:* But when it comes to other subjects outside my expertise, if it's Biology or something I know, I can even offer some help. But outside of my field I say: "Look, I haven't had time to check the material, I had access today, we're gonna work with it and any questions we'll try to answer them, But that's not my expertise or my field". And I make that crystal clear.

*Researcher:* And what subjects have you taught?

*Julia:* I have substituted teachers for Biology [classes]. I have substituted History and Philosophy [teachers]. [Amanda and Sarah laugh. Julia laughs with them].

*Sarah:* One of these days I filled in for a math class! [laughs].

*Julia:* In Physics [class] I almost had a panic attack.

The passage provides an overview of Julia's work. Once job opportunities were not frequent and enough, she made the decision to substitute not only language classes but also other subjects. In this scenario, she experiences two kinds of classes, the ones she prepared herself and others – outside her area of expertise – where she handed out activities and kept students working. Still, she was honest to tell students that some of those activities were unfamiliar to her. Even though the episode of filling in for a

physics teacher was emotionally disturbing due to the lack of experience, as the excerpt showed, she still took the job. This was the alternative she found to remain in control and survive the challenges of a novice teacher (Korthagen, 2010), while still getting more experienced.

One of the good aspects of the sporadic classes was the chance to be in contact with different age groups and classrooms, in a way anticipating her future job. After being away from teaching young learners, Julia had the chance to experience teaching English in a primary school once again.

#### Excerpt 3

*Julia:* There were these classes I worked temporarily in an elementary school. It was hell! Look, most times I worked as a substitute teacher in that school, it wasn't during the afternoon. Because in the morning you wake up and go to school, quietly, you know? [referring to the young learners]. You haven't studied anything previously. Then, I think they pay a little more attention. But in the afternoon, they don't pay attention to anything. All they wanna do is play [games] and talk. Some younger kids leave the classroom without asking and come back whenever they want. Then you have to manage another group [of students].

This classroom experience challenged her previous impressions of teaching young learners. They seemed to have more energy and were interested in other things. Moreover, it is important to highlight the use of the word "hell" to portray the affective complexity experienced when teaching those children. The students' behavior somehow questioned her classroom management skills, as evidenced in the way she describes the struggle to keep them well-behaved. Even with an important opportunity to learn about classroom routines at hand, she was more concerned with the survival of this initial experience as previous studies showed (see Korthagen, 2010; Consuegra, Engels and Struyven, 2014). Another important consideration emerged as she commented on her classroom procedures.

#### Excerpt 4

*Researcher:* And you Julia, in terms of procedures, what do you take into account?

*Julia:* With the classroom observations [in the internship], I didn't see a lot of that. I relate it more to how I used to work. But now I'm not teaching, because when I substitute a teacher, I don't have...[autonomy]. That's not my classroom, it belongs to another teacher, therefore, it has to be his or her way.

*Researcher:* The teacher provides the activity or test for you.

*Julia:* All set... the teacher leaves the book for me, most of them leave the book for me to follow.

Julia relied on the knowledge formed through everyday experience (Cassemiro, 2018; Bedran, 2020; Vygotsky, 2012), especially from the year before, to make her

decisions. However, the experiences now do not seem to favor her creative freedom, because she feels she does not have the necessary autonomy as a substitute teacher (i.e selecting materials, making decisions). Even though she relies on her concrete experience and seems to have developed her own version of survival strategies mentioned earlier (Consuegra; Engels; Struyven, 2014) as a future teacher, her procedural experience is either limited to reproducing an activity that she did not choose or follow contents of the textbook. Still, she believes this opportunity provides experience that is more practical than what the teacher education program would offer. Working as a substitute teacher also prompted her to think about the problems of her future profession.

#### Excerpt 5

*Julia: [...]. In terms of salary<sup>9</sup>, that's not the problem. The problem is the professional depreciation. For example, if the teacher were indeed the authority in the classroom, the student would actually fail because he or she did not obtain the minimum score and not because of the teacher, it's the student's fault. The problem is that teachers are supposed to cover up the problems, you know? If we had education as a priority and not only numbers. This is what I think is wrong. This is why I believe teachers vindicate so much.*

At this current state, she does not see the salary as a concern because she is able to support her college expenses while still living with her parents. However, her perspective here is detached from the fact that as previous studies have shown (Almeida; Brayner; Moraes, 2021; Lima, 2017, 2020a, 2020b; Senefonte, 2023), underpayment and non-appreciation deeply affect how teachers esteem their own profession. Additionally, when it comes to autonomy, her example in excerpt 5 refers to being under pressure to show results (numbers to her mean statistics), in the assessments they are required to take on a regular basis that do not necessarily measure everything they learned. During the focus group, she described her concern of having to teach them to perform well on tests rather than actually teach the subjects critically. The “professional depreciation” is something she has been able to experience prior to actually graduating as a language teacher, as in the example with dealing with the disruptive younger learners (excerpt 3). The lack of autonomy she feels as a substitute teacher is just a sample of what lies ahead in her future profession: not all teachers get to participate in the selection of textbooks and lesson plans. In addition, she mentions the depreciation of the profession and her concerns regarding the lack of investment and how it affects the entire educational system. While still in college, these outside experiences show a different dimension on the reality of classrooms. This is something that will clash with her experiences during the supervised internship, which we discuss next.

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<sup>9</sup> During data collection, political unrest was intense in Brazil. Public school teachers were involved in protests to engage in a dialogue with the government for better working conditions. The unsuccessful dialogue ended up in a major strike in 2014, when Julia started her second internship (ELI-2) for high school.

## The practical aspect of the teacher education program: the internship

Julia attended the English Language Internship (ELI-1) classes expecting it would focus on experiential learning (Brito, 2022; Salerni; Sposetti; Szpunar, 2014), that is, teaching methodologies and classroom activities. Most of her professional development in the course so far was theoretically oriented, and her narratives portrayed the distance between what the idealistic courses offered in college (Almeida; Brayner; Moraes, 2021; Korthagen, 2010) and the reality (what she perceived as a novice teacher). One of the novelties of this new course was the way her professor conducted it, making a new impact on Julia.

### Excerpt 6

[Julia talks about the professor who teaches the course *English Language Internship I*]  
*Julia*: And she is quite impulsive, you know? She takes on a specific topic.... And she goes for it.

*Researcher*: If the discussion comes up... let's talk about it.

*Amanda*: Yeah, and even if she had prepared something [for that class].

*Julia*: But even when you don't have a lot to discuss, you know? A student says like: "Uhm, professor, you know what happened to me this week [in one of my classrooms]?"  
*Amanda*: And then she spaces out.

*Researcher*: This is a methodology some professors have in teacher education programs. It's a discussion based on themes that emerge during the class. If I want to discuss indiscipline, [for instance], I will depart from my undergraduates' experiences to discuss a topic.

As a student who was familiar with traditional teacher-centered classes, Julia portrayed her professor's methodology as impulsive, owing to the fact that she preferred to elaborate on students' classroom experience instead of sticking to the original plan. However, once Julia was unfamiliar with a methodology that acknowledged what the students brought to the classroom and tended to move towards the construction of scientific concepts (Vygotsky, 2012), she believed what her friends had to share was not necessarily as relevant as the possible topic they would be working on. She was yet unable to make the connection that her peers' everyday knowledge would start a conversation related to the theory presented in the course. Julia provides more details on these classes:

### Excerpt 7

*Julia*: In the beginning of the [academic] year, we had a few classes about what was 'learning', 'teaching', these theoretical things. In the other classes we had more analysis. We took some English textbooks [EFL] from grade and high school, the ones that are being used right now. We used them to analyze the [language teaching] approach and methodology. All these kinds of stuff, you know? Totally opposite from the Portuguese language internship. We didn't do any of that.

The participant recalls the introduction of pedagogical theoretical concepts followed by activities to analyze teaching tools. The professor asked students to bring copies of textbooks that were currently being used in public schools. She proposed a task in which they were supposed to go through the contents and analyze them. For example, based on the kind of activities a book could be interpreted as having a communicative or an audio-lingual background. It combined both a regular activity Julia knew from working as temporary teacher, but a new dimension was added, she was supposed to analyze a book through the lens of a theory she was studying, something she had not done in other contexts. For her, such activity was different from what they had done so far. In excerpt 8, another participant questioned the requirement of attending these internship classes while considering she was already working as a substitute teacher and those activities were already part of her daily life, while Julia demonstrates to see a beneficial aspect of some activities, as regular as they seemed to be.

#### Excerpt 8

*Researcher:* In response to Sarah, I think the internship sort of provides an overview, once it does not prepare you fully for your professional life. Maybe like a med student that will develop his specialty during the residency. These proposals to analyze textbooks are interesting. But timing an entire class can become unnecessary for you because you're both feet in right now, in the actual school environment. I think that maybe most people in their third year in college may not have this background.

*Julia:* I still think it is interesting, because when you're hired to teach [temporarily]... in the beginning of the year, Sarah went through that, it's part of the pedagogical aspect to pick up a textbook [from a selection available]. Thus, you learn to analyze the approach within each book, the methodology... what is gonna help you and what isn't. It helps you willy-nilly. We don't become experts, but...

The researcher replies to Sarah<sup>10</sup> that not just as an institutional requirement for all teacher education programs (Bedran, 2020; Brasil, 2002; Brito, 2022), the internship is also the chance to balance the amount of practice that students expect during college, in relation to their theoretical studies. Nevertheless, for undergraduates like Julia and Sarah who were already trying to work while getting a degree, the sense was that those institutional activities seemed unnecessary because they had been experienced elsewhere. A gap becomes apparent between her understanding that her everyday experience was already enough and the opportunity to think more systematically (develop scientific concepts) about the different stages of a class (something not always possible in the hustle and bustle of a teacher's daily life). Julia then adds that even

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<sup>10</sup> It is important to highlight that the researcher's comments during the interaction with the participants aimed at exploring further details regarding what was initially pointed out by Sarah, the fact that internship activities seemed repetitive. Even though the comment might have the potential to influence a participants' answer, it is worth mentioning that Julia then disagrees with her peers and exposes her own point of view. Such happenings point towards a perspective in AL that takes on participants' subjectivities considering you are not only talking about them, but to them.

thinking this way, she still saw other activities such as analyzing a textbook as relevant. Next, it is possible to observe a glimpse of how she fulfilled the internship task by observing the timed stages of a class and writing down on her report.

#### Excerpt 9

“By timing this [English] class I was able to conclude that the teacher used 34 minutes out of 45 she had, the remaining 11 minutes were spent with interruptions of students knocking on the door and to call out some disruptive students. She taught for 34 [full] minutes (18 minutes to explain the topic and 16 for the activity). 11 minutes wasted with interruption.”

Despite her reports being more descriptive rather than providing her interpretation of events, she was able to outline chronologically how much time is wasted from an already insufficient number of classes available in the curriculum<sup>11</sup>. In a way, her classes corroborated what she experienced earlier as a substitute teacher. Rather than relying solely on what she noticed as the teacher (her everyday knowledge), as an intern she had to map out the structure of a class and understand the intricacies of classroom management, later assembling theories and pedagogical knowledge to elaborate her internship reports. In other words, an opportunity to articulate scientific concepts (in this case how a class is structured). Regarding the textbook task, it is part of the job to be able to look through pedagogical materials and understand what methods structure and inform the kind of exercises presented. After fulfilling each of the practical tasks (table 1), the undergraduates were expected to report what they observed, send the data through email to the professor and bring the final version of the written report on the following class.

#### Excerpt 10

*Researcher:* Did you have your data at hand? Did you compare schools?

*Julia:* In a way, we didn't have that. There was a debate like, for example, [where she asked] how many English textbooks they had, English literature books, language teacher education [for the teachers], pedagogical books, you know?

*Researcher:* Uhuh.

*Julia:* All of it, and then we just said: “in my school there were no pedagogical books”. And the other would say: “Well, in my school there are twenty”. So, it was like this... this comparison.

The debate consisted of listing the results each student found, but to her it felt more like comparing than discussing. The gap, according to her, was what these results would lead to, rather than just the evaluative part of writing the reports and accomplishing the task, something characteristic of internships as shown in previous studies (Almeida; Bayner; Moraes, 2021; Senefonte, 2023).

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<sup>11</sup> In Julia's first report, she explains that EFL classes usually happen twice a week, 45-50 minutes each.

### Excerpt 11

*Julia:* And what are we gonna do from it? So, we got it, we would go [to the school] and gather data, see the results but there was no continuance. And I think the Portuguese professor did not even do that. The access was during the debate, when we formed a circle. That was the access we had to other people's results. But it was basically the same. One or the other differed, you know?

Julia questions the follow-up purpose after having collected all that information. By comparing her EFL with her Portuguese internship, she realizes that in the latter the students did not even have the same opportunities to get together and list results like they did in the former. However, considering the undergraduates' results resembled a lot, despite creating circles to share them, it seemed like she was expecting something else from the activity. She then reveals her expectations.

### Excerpt 12

*Julia:* If we went there, observed and came back to our [university] classroom and had a debate with everybody saying what happened. Shared their experience and, I don't know, tried to find a purpose for doing that.

[...]

*Julia:* In the issue of [classroom] observation, if you go [to the school], you go and observe a teacher and see that he or she works in this way or that way. But [the idea would be to] go there and see that he or she could work in another way, or that the better or more appropriate way would be so and so.

She wanted to bring her reports to the classroom and discuss them. Julia craved for an outcome of having that information at hand and knowing what to do with it, instead of just becoming more familiar with problems she already knew were there, as she has been working in the field as a substitute teacher. Then, she exemplifies with the observation task. Rather than just taking notes on what the teacher did in the classroom, she was hoping to analyze actions and come up with alternatives for the problems she experienced. For instance, in situations she noticed something went wrong, she would like to learn how to do things another way. She yearned for a more practical dimension of the course, one that would match her actual concerns. Once Julia had already been in contact with different educational environments, she fulfilled the tasks even though they appeared to be a repetition of things she knew. Her narrative shows a mismatch between her expectations and the tasks provided to engage in her professional development. She was not able to voice her concerns and desires (neither during classes nor through the reports), while the course possibly failed to connect its contents with future teachers' everyday experiences, something also pointed out by Bedran (2020) and Senefonte (2023) as a frequent challenge in teacher education programs. In the next section we will further this perspective by focusing on the experiences through the instrument expected to mediate this attempt to integrate everyday and scientific concepts while pondering and writing reports.

## **Another tool, another task: the case of the internship reports**

Unlike other pedagogical tools introduced to the undergraduates at the teacher education program, reports are already established tools in academia, as pointed out in several studies in AL focused on supervised internship (Bedran, 2020; Brito, 2022; Cassemiro, 2018; Lima, 2017; Senefonte, 2023). Thus, our participant was very familiar with the procedures of the reports and its institutional demands; however, it became important to understand how this relationship would be constructed under more specific conditions, bearing in mind that cultural artifacts are never isolated from the social environment (Cole, 1996). In other words, we aimed at understanding how Julia oriented her actions and made use of this tool to fulfill the internship tasks and report the results.

### **Excerpt 13**

*Sarah:* They weren't something new. I had written before during teaching school, so I sort of knew what it would turn out to be.

*Julia:* But during teaching school the reports were based on what we saw, period.

*Amanda:* Things were rawer, you know?

*Julia:* And another thing, in teaching school you could not badmouth the teacher, but you could tell what you saw.

She anticipated a common thread in her narratives by comparing the reports she used to do in teaching school and the ones she is required to do now by mentioning the freedom to report everything she saw. Back in teaching school, she felt more freedom to write about what she saw, whilst in the ELI-1, her reports felt more constrained. She also provides more insight on how she describes her experience with the tool.

### **Excerpt 14**

*Researcher:* And how was the experience of writing these reports?

*Julia:* They weren't pleasant. In fact, they involved a lot of extra work.

Writing these reports was initially unpleasant due to the labor involved (i.e., visiting a school, talking to the staff, taking notes, among others). Her words present an unbearable or pointless dimension of tool mediation. In other words, she made a utilitarian use of the tool rather than incorporating those actions into her thinking process. In her explanation of a purpose behind using this tool during the internship course, Julia focuses once again on its utilitarian aspect.

### **Excerpt 15**

*Julia:* I believe [the report] is a way to prove that you went to the school, it proves what happened. But I think she exaggerates. It's like a document that registers things.

The reports provided evidence for the accomplishment of the internship tasks, a common feature of the tool (Salerni; Sposetti; Szpunar, 2014). However, the mediating potential of the tool was understood only in a utilitarian way, in other words, focused on fulfilling a task among many others related to the internship (observe classes, take notes and hand in the report). Yet, the mediating potential to articulate the everyday knowledge, brought up during the internship, with the scientific knowledge introduced during the course (confronting theories, comparing and contrasting ideas) became evident on a smaller scale, once the report prioritized a description of events and, to a lesser degree, her perceptions about these events. Though she understands the tool as “a document that registers things”, Julia also supports the claim that one single report involved too many tasks, which to her felt exhausting. She elaborates on this in the next excerpt, when it involved asking a teacher to fill in an extensive questionnaire about her working conditions.

#### Excerpt 16

*Researcher:* The issue with the questionnaire is...

*Julia:* In the teacher's case, I don't think we had to ask all that, because the teacher is usually busy, taking care of many things. They had a questionnaire to take home and fill in. After that, we had an interview [with the teacher]. Then there was the classroom observation and sometimes what we observed we couldn't show, because depending on what you wrote, if the teacher read it you would have to give further explanation. And I don't think we needed all of that.

In this portion of the focus group, the participants were discussing the tasks that involved the schoolteacher (Table 1 – Report no 2). Julia mentions that the tasks were time-consuming and required too much from the schoolteacher who was already busy with her work. She did not want to bother anybody at the school, but she knew those steps were required to succeed in the internship.

She makes an important consideration regarding the phase when the course required her to observe regular classes in a school for a brief period (as outlined in Table 1). Julia had to be careful with the notes she took, once the teacher she observed would eventually ask to see what she had written. On the one hand, she already felt restrained to report what she actually saw, like she once did during teaching school (excerpt 13), and on the other hand she had to be careful because she did not want to create any trouble with the teacher, she was observing by being misinterpreted for her notes. Julia felt pressured by contextual conditions both in the school and in her teacher education program. She had a tool at hand that she appropriated and could make successful use, but her options were limited to writing a report that was not uncomfortable for the people involved, except it was for her.

#### Excerpt 17

*Sarah:* And then you say: “Good Lord! How will I put that in the report?”. Because I know that if I don't write something down my grade will be undervalued.

*Researcher:* So you end up more concerned about your score.

*Sarah:* You end up doing that for the score. You talk about things you didn't [necessarily] see and things that did not happen.

*Julia:* It's unauthentic, you know?

*Researcher:* In what way? Fake?

*Sarah:* It's not [authentic].

*Researcher:* You added things up? I don't get it. Could you please elaborate?

*Julia:* For example, [one of the tasks] there, was to analyze the educational guidelines and school policy, to look for convergence and divergence between the school documents. And there are things there that you just got nothing to say. And the professor says: "No, but there must be [something to say about it]". Therefore, you make things up.

This is an example of the concrete and psychological aspects of tools in human development (Vygotsky, 1987). In addition, it shows how the relationship changes under context-specific conditions. In this goal-oriented activity (Leontiev, 1994), Julia not only had to adapt her actions towards the tool, but she also had to consider the people surrounding her as part of the adaptation. The reports would not only mediate her impressions as an intern observing an English teacher, but they would also regulate the interaction both with the teacher in school and her professor in college, considering both people would (for different reasons) evaluate the outcome of the tool.

The situation established a hierarchical relationship that affected Julia's use of the tool. Her concern was reporting the event in a way she would not be interpreted as making bad judgments about the teacher/school, thus avoiding the chance to have her grade in the course being undervalued. The strategy she came up with was to embellish what was inconclusive or insufficient. In a way, Julia and her peers agreed the reports did not reflect what they wanted to say, and they had to play by these rules. Next excerpt represents her careful use of the tool as she writes in her second report about the classes she observed.

#### Excerpt 18

"In this way, I can conclude through my observation that the teacher uses the textbook to teach her classes, and that at least in this class, she was teaching through genres, in this case the [fairy] tales".

(Internship Report No.2 - 2013)

Julia offers a plain description rather than providing more details on how the reading activity was conducted, avoiding possible problems with the people who would read it (the schoolteacher or the internship professor). She was playing safe, but the strategy interfered with what she believed made the tool authentic. The artifact did not reflect what she saw or what she actually wanted to say and she elaborates on the "unauthentic aspect" of the activity once again. She struggled to find a common ground between being an observer (as an ethnographer) and a judge. Thus, her reflections were not totally

there. In the next excerpt, she talks about what her teacher wrote in the questionnaire and how she dealt with the answers (a task for Report no 2).

#### Excerpt 19

*Julia:* My teacher writes too little.

*Sarah:* My teacher writes an essay.

*Julia:* So, if I say that the teacher said “yeah” [an example of a brief answer] I think the professor will not even consider. There were some questions there that the teacher didn’t know how to answer. I will have to complement from the answer what I think she meant. Thus, it’s not going to end up as something authentic. That was the unauthentic aspect I wanted to mention earlier.

In this passage, Julia and Sarah are comparing the length of answers that their schoolteachers wrote. Considering that, according to her, the teacher educator would interpret the short answers as a downfall of her task, Julia confesses that she wrote her report trying to figure out what the schoolteacher meant by making additional conjectures.

#### Excerpt 20

*Sarah:* And then there are things you mention and you gotta make arrangements. You may not say that [what she originally wrote].

*Julia:* She [referring to the ELI-1 professor] asks for her own sake that you don’t say unnecessary things.

*Researcher:* In this case, you’re talking about making arrangements on what you wrote prior to handing in the report?

*Amanda:* Yeah.

*Sarah:* That’s it.

Julia discusses with Amanda and Sarah the process of making arrangements in the information they want to convey in the report. She explains the professor’s remarks not to say “unnecessary things” meant mocking or making poor judgments. The strategies Julia had to develop to come up with an artifact that pleased everyone around her are cited next.

#### Excerpt 21

*Researcher:* So, did you have a strategy about being careful with what you said [in your reports]?

*Julia:* Yeah. We tried not to complicate. We tried to make our lives easier.

*Researcher:* But why make your lives easier? What do you think could have happened?

*Julia:* Because you could not contradict yourself. And there are teachers that contradict themselves [during an interview or when answering a questionnaire]. If I noticed that the teacher taught a class in a group in a certain way, and in the next class in another

way. How do I put that on my report? Do I say she is traditional today, but tomorrow she is no longer that way? Thus, we say she is just one way.

Her main strategy was to avoid conflict, as the several tasks of the internship were intricate and demanded “extra work”, in her own terms. Afraid to contradict herself, she tried to make things one-dimensional by homogenizing the different ways the schoolteacher taught in the classes she observed. Even though teachers present traits of various approaches in how they teach (Anthony, 1963), Julia did not seem to be aware that she could use that argument in case she wanted to report different ways the schoolteacher worked with different groups, yet she preferred a brief description. Once again, she struggled to report her views on what she saw fearing she would cross the line and disrespect or bother somebody.

Given the characteristics of the mediated action established between Julia, the tool (ELI-1 report) and the activity she was engaged in, despite solving the problem provided by the internship course successfully, she still experienced a gap between the practical tasks observing the school environment and how this concrete experience was articulated with the theoretical classes of the internship. The opportunity for professional development resembled an ordinary task to be fulfilled. Rather than a mediated use of the tool to voice her perspective and elaborate on what she learned as an observer, the tool was apparently more useful for writing a brief report. In this way, her everyday and scientific concepts (i.e., on how to teach and learn EFL) remained disconnected by a gap, and still, she was able to complete the course successfully (from a limited and utilitarian standpoint). Therefore, even though the supervised internship has its outstanding potential to create dialogues and impacts on the construction a language teacher’s professional identity (Almeida; Moraes; Brayner, 2022), the gaps which were observed in Julia’s experiences reiterate previous studies regarding the struggles to articulate theory and practice (Cassemiro, 2018; Lima, 2017), as well as the use of several pedagogical tools (Bedran, 2020; Brito, 2022).

## Final remarks

The discussions in the previous sections contribute to the outline of a narrative in Julia’s development as a future EFL teacher from a cultural-historical perspective. In her third year in college, Julia attended EFL internship classes at the teacher education undergraduate program (*Letras*). This course provided both theoretical classes and practical activities that introduced future teachers to uncover the specificities of EFL teaching in regular school as well as the functioning of its surroundings. However, she had been familiar with the reality of schools since the previous year, when she started working as a temporary teacher.

Despite both environments providing opportunities for concrete experience, Julia perceived a gap between her everyday knowledge as a substitute teacher and the

university classes that introduced scientific concepts in the internship. At the same time, she enjoyed adding a theoretical dimension to a conventional activity (i.e., the event of analyzing textbooks), she struggled using a tool (internship reports) mastered in a way she had not planned (i.e., adapting what she wanted to say because of others). From these narratives, three important implications for language teacher education arise to conclude this paper.

*The limitations of relying solely on concrete experiences.* As portrayed in the narratives, Julia relied too much on her prior experience as a temporary teacher when discussing the internship as a practical opportunity in college. In addition, it seemed evident that despite enriching, these everyday experiences (and knowledge) were not enough to foreground her teaching expertise. In fact, as a novice teacher, she is still learning how to analyze textbooks, design classes, as well as find proper ways to interpret how other teachers teach. As other studies have shown (Brito, 2022; Gelfuso; Dennis, 2014), while teachers are required to spend more time in academic courses before starting the profession, many professionals are already *in loco* for several reasons, even without the necessary preparation. From a cultural-historical perspective, these opportunities contribute mainly to the everyday knowledge teachers develop by being in contact with different classrooms, but remain on the spontaneous level. In other words, a type of knowledge formed mainly through her daily and direct classroom experiences, something that restricts her possibilities. Equally important is the development of scientific concepts, which occurs in culturally organized environments such as the teacher education programs, also contributing to the way these teachers see their everyday labor and make decisions. Besides, these abstract types of knowledge bring along the scientific legacy of one's cultural context (from education, Applied Linguistics, psychology, among others), whose collective history is now part of their own history (ontogeny).

*The importance of bridging the theory versus practice gap.* Vygotsky's dialectical perspective on *everyday and scientific concepts* contributes to the theory/practice debate, as pointed out in previous studies (Bedran, 2020; Cassemiro, 2018; Lima, 2020a, 2020b; Senefonte, 2023). Julia narrated the experience of analyzing the language teaching approaches in a textbook. The novelty of the activity was bringing a new dimension to an everyday habit of teachers having to go through different textbooks and choosing the most appropriate tool for the job. By incorporating theories of learning and teaching she was studying with the teacher educator, she was able to see this regular activity in a different way, even though, for space matters, no further analysis on the impact of this specific event could be discussed. Hence, we see another suggestion for future research. We need to develop and study other forms of activities that engage students to articulate what they already know with what they are expected to learn in these courses. As the study showed, there was an apparent mismatch between what the future teacher expected and the opportunities for learning provided at the education program. On the one hand, these programs need to rethink how their future teachers engage with internship tasks, not only in terms of accomplishing the objectives, but also incorporating

their subjective experiences. Research on language learning cognition and beliefs has contributed at length on this topic. On the other hand, future teachers need to find their own way to make their struggles more noticeable. Taking into account that internship activities tend to last for weeks (or even semesters, in Brazil), if these issues become apparent earlier, teacher educators could be able to make changes in the task or even the tool (other tools could be provided, such as portfolios, diaries and journal entries), or even provide other alternatives on how to deal with conflicting views on how to report classroom events without censorship. Bridging the gap occurs not only in terms of finding the best tool, especially at the interpersonal level, as future teachers learn from other teachers and their college professors.

*The need to rethink the impact of cultural tools.* Despite showing no struggle with the properties of the tool, Julia was conflicted by having to use it as an “unauthentic” mediator. Even with the institutional aspect of these tools, in terms of scores and evaluative instruments, another equally important dimension to be taken into account is their relevance to bring access to future teacher’s thinking. As Cole (1996) stated, through writing, different cultural groups find new forms of interaction that reorganize their thinking at the same time. As pedagogical tools, the reports provide this opportunity; however, it becomes important to change the imbalance that usually occurs between describing/reporting facts and interpreting/explaining them. Aside from a descriptive tool that reports the fulfilling of institutional requirements, the reports promote evidence for the students to organize their own ideas.

The yearning for practical applications of doing all these tasks in Julia’s narratives also makes an important contribution. As our future teachers are starting to teach aforesight and their concrete experiences show them the problems ahead, as an environment that promotes reflection and change, teacher education programs can also be a place to think and develop alternatives, which is also another way to bridge the gap between theory and practice that haunts teacher education.

## Acknowledgements

The author wishes to express his gratitude to The São Paulo Research Agency (FAPESP) for the grants (2013/04431-6 and 2015-01495-9), as well as the three EFL teachers who took part in this study.

LIMA, Fernando Silvério de. Conceitos cotidianos e científicos na formação inicial de uma futura professora de inglês como LE: a lacuna da teoria/prática. **Alfa**, São Paulo, v. 68, 2024.

- *RESUMO: O artigo analisa as narrativas de uma futura professora de Inglês como Língua Estrangeira durante seu estágio e que já começou a lecionar fora do ambiente acadêmico. Por meio de pesquisa narrativa, uma estudante universitária brasileira chamada Julia descreveu*

*suas experiências durante grupos focais e em relatórios de estágio. Os resultados indicam que a relação entre conceitos cotidianos e científicos é construída sob a lacuna da teoria/prática, devido a três aspectos: primeiro, que as experiências concretas fora da universidade ofereceram maior contato com os desafios da sala de aula; segundo, que devido a esses eventos anteriores, o estágio adquiriu um significado diferente, resultando em um desencontro entre as expectativas da futura professora em relação ao que seu curso poderia oferecer ao seu desenvolvimento profissional; terceiro, que uma ferramenta cultural como o relatório de estágio também foi afetada pela lacuna, mostrando uma função utilitarista que atrapalha o potencial de mediar suas observações de aula. O arcabouço teórico se baseia em conceitos de atividade mediada e o papel da formação de conceitos na psicologia histórico-cultural, assim como perspectivas em Linguística Aplicada sobre formação inicial de professores. O estudo busca contribuir com as pesquisas histórico-culturais contemporâneas sobre ensino e aprendizagem como práticas assentadas na cultura.*

- **PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Formação de professores; Desenvolvimento profissional do professor de inglês; Estágio supervisionado; Psicologia histórico-cultural; Linguística Aplicada.*

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Received on June 28, 2024

Approved on September 16, 2024