

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Stories of professional development in Brazilian Languages Without Borders Program

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ABSTRACT

This research has investigated the stories of professional development of five student teachers who participate in a community of teachers of English as an Additional Language in a large research university in the south of Brazil. This community has emerged from the Languages without Borders Program (LwB) and has as its end goal teaching English to the university's community – faculty, staff and, especially, students. The data was obtained through semistructured interviews with focal participants, who were asked to tell us their story of learning in the community. From the data, it is possible to interpret that participants have developed professionally in their trajectory in the Program through the engagement in a number of practices integral to the community.

KEYWORDS: teacher professional development; narratives; languages without borders; English as an additional language; English as a foreign language.

Histórias de desenvolvimento profissional no Programa Idiomas sem Fronteiras

RESUMO

Esta pesquisa investigou as histórias de desenvolvimento profissional de cinco professores bolsistas que participam de uma comunidade de professores de inglês como língua adicional em uma grande universidade no sul do Brasil. Essa comunidade surgiu do Programa Idiomas sem Fronteiras e tem como objetivo final ensinar inglês à comunidade da universidade – professores, funcionários e, principalmente, estudantes. Os dados foram obtidos através de entrevistas semi-estruturadas com participantes focais, que foram convidados a contar sua história de aprendizagem na comunidade. A partir dos dados, é possível interpretar que os participantes se desenvolveram profissionalmente em sua trajetória na comunidade por meio do engajamento em diversas práticas integrantes da comunidade.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: desenvolvimento profissional de professores; narrativas; idiomas sem fronteiras; inglês como língua adicional; inglês como língua estrangeira.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This research has investigated the professional development of undergraduate student teachers of English as an Additional Language in a community of Practice (Wenger, 1998)¹ generated by the Languages without Borders Program (LwB) at a large university in the south of Brazil². This paper is a part of a larger research project, whose purpose was to observe, describe, analyze and elucidate the practices that cultivate professional development for the student teachers engaged in the community (Kirsch, 2017)³. We affiliate with the paradigm of Practice Theory (Young, 2009; Young & Astarita, 2013; Young, 2010) and rely on qualitative methods for data generation and analysis (Erickson, 1990; Gumperz, 2005; Mason, 2002; Tannen, 2014). For this specific text, we focus on the narratives obtained in interviews with five focal student teachers in which they describe their professional learning experience in the program.

The paper encompasses the following sections: (1) this short introduction; (2) setting & participants; (3) methods of data generation & analysis; (4) narratives; (5) discussion; (6) concluding remarks.

2. FROM SCIENCE WITHOUT BORDERS TO LANGUAGE WITHOUT BORDERS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN COPS

Science without Borders (SwB) was an effort to promote the consolidation, expansion and internationalization of science, technology, innovation and competitiveness in Brazil through international mobility. Between 2011 and 2015, SwB funded over 93,000 grants for exchange in more than 30 countries. At the beginning of the program, very few students applied for universities in English-speaking countries because they did not have the English language proficiency level necessary to get the required scores in the mandatory language tests.

For this reason, in 2012 the Ministry of Education launched LwB to enhance additional language proficiency at Brazilian universities, with an initial focus on English. LwB has three main fronts of action: (1) proctoring English Language Proficiency tests for the university community; (2) providing online English courses for this community; and (3) offering face-to-face English classes at public universities. After the first Call, 43 universities had projects approved for federal funding to open Language Centers (LCs). These Centers are composed⁴ of coordinators,

¹ The idea of communities of practice being places of learning comes from the work of Lave and Wenger (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). CoPs are defined as “groups of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger, n.d.). The three key elements of that definition are: (1) a shared domain of interest; (2) a defined community; (3) a shared repertory of practices and styles. Henceforth we will use the term community to refer to this the group of participants in the LC as a community of practice.

² An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Conference of the International Association of Applied Linguistics (AILA) in July 2017, in Rio de Janeiro Brazil. It is based largely on chapter 4 of the doctoral dissertation written by the first author and advised by the second.

³ I would like to thank Fulbright and CAPES for the visiting researcher scholarship, which contributed a lot to this research.

⁴ The Centers also count on the help of administrative staff, but for the purpose of this paper we will focus only on the personnel related to the teaching part.

student teachers, and, (sometimes⁵) Fulbright English Teaching Assistants (ETAs).

The coordinators (tenured professors or lecturers from the English Departments) are responsible for organizing the LCs administratively and, above all, for pedagogically supervising the student teachers, who are the ones in charge of the face-to-face lessons. The student teachers are undergraduate or graduate students pursuing the teachers track in English as an Additional Language (EAL). They teach 12 hours a week (three classes) on top of the lessons they still have to attend as students. For this demanding schedule, they receive a stipend funded by the federal government⁶, making the selection process highly competitive. The selection criteria include availability to work the long hours the Program demands; willingness to participate in the pedagogical meetings, learn how to teach and how to create classroom material; and at least a B2 level certificate of English language proficiency, being C1 the level to be reached within six months after joining the program. Experience is not a requirement, since student teachers are beginning their careers. The ETAs, who participate in only some LCs, are U.S. citizens who hold a bachelor's degree or equivalent. They spend nine months in the universities providing assistance to the local teachers and serving as a kind of cultural ambassadors.

The size of the LCs is proportional to the magnitude of the university. They range from: (1) one to three coordinators; (2) three to fifteen student teachers (3) and zero to four ETAs. The LCs have autonomy to design their courses, produce syllabi and choose or produce pedagogical materials, as well as to select student teachers.

The LwB was, as mentioned above, conceived to be an accessory to the bigger internationalization effort, the SwB. However, recent research (Sarmiento & Kirsch, 2016; Kirsch & Sarmiento, 2016; Kirsch & Sarmiento, 2017; Augusto-Navarro & Gattolin, 2014; Dellagnelo, 2014; Pinheiro e Finardi, 2014; Nicolaidis, 2014; Sarmiento, Abreu e Lima & Moraes, 2016; Lamberts, 2015; Vial, 2014; among others) suggests that the activities at the LCs, whose end goal is to teach English to the university community, foster the emergence of CoPs which turned out to have important outcomes in terms of teacher development. As student teachers tend to have a young and inexperienced profile they need lots of support from coordination and peers, which promotes and strengthens community bonds, and, thus, instantiate systematic interactions that culminate in student teacher learning about the profession they chose from an insider's perspective (Nóvoa, 2009).

This investigation addresses two different gaps related to teacher professional development. First, although there is solid literature on the relationship between community of practice and teacher professional development, little of this research is empirical (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). Second, it aims at investigating how a community of practice such as the one investigated may respond to calls for a more "clinical" take on teacher education – like in the school hospitals described by Nóvoa (2009).

⁵ The English Teaching Assistants project is parallel to LwB and depends on universities submitting a different (but related) project.

⁶ The same as master's grant. For comparison, about twice the minimum wage when the research was conducted.

In the author's perspective, school-teachers should be educated inside the school, experiencing what it is like to be a teacher from the inside of the profession, in contact with more experienced peers, living the everyday issues that practitioners face in day-to-day work.

3. RESEARCH SETTING, PARTICIPANTS, AND METHODS OF DATA GENERATION & ANALYSIS

The university researched is one of the largest and most well-ranked in Brazil. At this university, the LwB is located at the Institute of Languages – more specifically at the Department of Foreign Languages. The members of the community at the time this study was undertaken were: three Professors from the English Department (Ph.D.); three Fulbright English Teaching Assistants (recently graduated from US universities); 15 undergraduate student teachers (sophomore to senior year); one graduate student teacher; one master researcher who is herself a former student teacher; two former undergraduate student teachers.

Table 1. Participants

Pseudonym	Position	Education
Maria Orlandi	Pedagogical coordinator	Ph.D.
Maria Brum	Pedagogical coordinator*	Ph.D.
Maria Estevam	General coordinator	Ph.D.
Adam	Student teacher	Third year Letras
Adriana	Student teacher	Second year Letras
Ana Ricarda	Student teacher	Second year Letras
Antonia	Student teacher	Fourth year Letras
Antonio	Former student teacher	Third year Letras
Graziela	Student teacher	Senior year Letras
Helena	Student teacher	Senior year Letras
Isabela	Student teacher	Third year Letras
João	Student teacher	Fourth year Letras
Josiana	Student teacher	Senior year Letras
Kelly	Student teacher	Second year Letras
Levi	Former student teacher	Third** year Letras
Lucas	Student teacher	Third year Letras
Luísa	Student teacher	Master's degree in Applied Linguistics
Mariane	Student teacher	Senior year Letras
Nádia	Student teacher	Senior year Letras
Roberta	Student teacher	Senior year Letras
Maria Julia	Former student teacher and researcher	Master's student in Applied Linguistics
Heather	ETA	Bachelor of Arts, International Relations
Marylin	ETA	Degree in Teaching of Spanish
Pedro	ETA	BA Political Science/Latin American Studies
Danilo	Clerical intern	Senior year Letras
Diana Norlin	Clerical intern	Second year Letras
Diana Silveira	Clerical intern	Third year Design
Jennifer	Clerical intern	Senior year Letras
João Paulo	Clerical intern	Not informed

* Her position was also as a pedagogical coordinator although she only did administrative work and did not participate in the teacher development.

** At this program, the English-Portuguese major is nine semesters long (four and a half years) and the English major is eight semesters long (four years).

Field work took place on an average of three times a week, for a three-month period, during four-hour shifts in which all pedagogical meetings, lectures and workshops were observed. In addition to that, dozens of hours were spent at the student teachers' lounge. In this paper, however, we focus solely on the interviews which were carried out with five student teacher participants, broadly allocated in three different categories: (1) two former teachers at the program; (2) one old-timer in the program (with more than a year of participation); and (3) two novices (who had started in the program that semester). After the interviews, all the audio files were transcribed orthographically and focused coding (Saldaña, 2009) was conducted. All the interviews were read multiple times and recurring themes were identified. Then, the interviews were read again in the light of such themes, which were revised multiple times until a point of saturation was reached.

The questions that guided the analysis of the interview were the following:

1. According to interviews, does their participation in the LwB program contribute to their professional development as teachers? In what ways?
2. In participants' stories, what practices contributed to their professional development?

4. NARRATIVES

Although the interviews had a set of questions that represented topics that interested the researchers, these questions were not directly asked, but were a reminder of things we wanted them to talk about. In all cases, the interviews started with a general question: "So, can you tell me⁷ a little bit about your experience in the program?" and evolved as a conversation with an interest, more a friendly talk than a data-gathering interview.

The interviews happened in the following order: (1) Maria Júlia; (2) Adam; (3) Lucas; (4) Kelly; and, finally, (5) Antonio. Below, we provide a general description of the interviews, often referring to their transcripts.

Maria Julia was the first interviewee and a special participant in the program: a former student teacher who was a very active participant in the CoP. Early in the data generation we realized she was still an active member in the community. She had worked at the program for two years in the first cohort and, by the time this investigation was carried out, she was a schoolteacher in the public school system and a master's student at the Language Studies Program at the same university. She had investigated the LwB for her final paper in college and was planning to do the same for her master's thesis. She had quite an impressive CV and was regarded by all academic community as a dedicated and competent individual. She was pretty much the pedagogical coordinator's right-hand woman at the CoP: she helped making notes for student teachers' microteaching report; presented a workshop with one of the current student teachers about how to prepare a lesson plan for a reading class; helped Estevam to give feedback for student teachers after their micro-class; and filled in for Estevam when she could not make it to the feedback meetings.

⁷ Interviews and field work were conducted solely by one of the authors of this paper.

In her interview, Maria Julia talked about her previous and current experiences as a teacher. She started teaching two years before the interview, and her first-ever teaching experience was the LwB program. She was quite emphatic about the role of her experience as a LwB student teacher for her professional development,

the experience I liked the most was the LwB because of the, not only because of the environment, but because I had pedagogical meetings, and my coworkers were really nice, and my students were really motivated, and, well, teaching at the university level is really different from other places. And, of course, I think that in LwB I can use English more, because I have less [fewer] students. But in public schools, in my public school, I have around twenty-five, thirty students in class, and here I used to have ten, fifteen tops.

During her time at the program, she taught IELTS preparatory courses, general English courses using a course book⁸ to A2 students, and a conversation course for B2 levels. Besides, together with her peers she created and delivered workshops to prepare students for the TOEFL ITP. This means that she taught the same course more than once, which she evaluated as something positive,

I could notice what happened in the previous one, what I could have developed more, and then [in] the second edition I was much more prepared. And also there was a semester I taught the same course to three groups. So I had general English intermediate groups A, B and C. So I noticed that in group A the things were always, more strange, stranger, and in the other ones the classes went smoother [sic] than in the first one.

She attributed her improvement from an earlier course to a later one to the experience in class as well as to her participation in pedagogical meetings. For her, the meetings were an opportunity to learn from peers, but also “to share things and to share your agonies and the happiness and the things you feel [...] and also share materials”.

Maria Julia compares the beginning of the program with how things are now. At the beginning, people were more “withholding” with their things (materials and stories of what they did in class) but now they “share more”. According to her,

nowadays there is like a Dropbox account, and people share their things there, and also in the meetings, people are now more, like, showing what they would do in class. And that could bring ideas, these things could bring ideas to our own class.

In addition to that, Maria Julia says that co-teaching⁹ was important for her professional learning. She co-taught a course with an ETA and thought that this experience was important for her professional development, both pedagogically speaking and concerning proficiency,

⁸ Macmillan Global.

⁹ Two teachers jointly delivering instruction to a group of students.

we prepared classes together [...] she didn't know much about English teaching, but she had the cultural background that I didn't have. So that was nice to prepare classes, we prepared the classes here at UFRGS but also in cafeterias, in our houses. So for me this was nice because I could have more integration with one person [...] She is American, if it was with a Brazilian teacher it would also be really nice I think.

Moreover, she co-taught a class with another student teacher because they had the same course at the same time and did not have two classrooms available. This was also a moment when she felt that she was learning,

at the end, because there were no rooms available for everyone at the same time, we had the same group at the same time. So Maria was like, ok maybe you can teach your groups together and you both go to class. And prepared classes in a very light way, it was nice because we understood each other. And, ok, so this class is about introducing yourself, so how can we do it? Ok, there is this website. Ok, we could do this kind of warm-up activity and, ok, we can do this after. How can they group? So I noticed I could plan a class and do it in a more fun way than in a more, like, grammar way.

In fact, Maria Julia's 'golden nugget' of learning in her participation in the program has to do with learning from a peer in a teachers' meeting. Student teachers had to present or microteach¹⁰ a warm-up task, and one of her colleagues' performance called her attention,

there was a meeting, where all teachers were there, and we needed to show some warm up activities, to get to know our students. I remember Amanda, I don't know if you remember her, Amanda Feitosa? [I nod] From that moment on she became my model teacher [...] I don't really remember what activity it was: it was just great. Everyone was really engaged in that getting to know each other activity, and she did that in such a natural way. And from that point on, whenever she presented something I would pay attention because I knew she was a teacher that could bring, ahn, I don't know, another posture to the class [...] Because she was, like, really like, ok people let's do this [...] It was, like, a very natural way to teach. She was, like, she was teaching even grammar but it didn't feel like grammar. It felt, like, ok, we're just playing a game.

Maria Julia then summarized how she perceived the importance of LwB for her early development as a teacher,

I think the LwB was of extreme importance for my teacher development. Even though now I'm more, I'm in a different context now, I think everything you learn here can and will be useful. Especially this thing of being natural, for example, in class. Well, I'm still adapting to this new context, but I think trying to – what's the word for this? – trying to elicit from students and listen to them attentively [...] You know, trying to pay attention and really look at the other person's eye [...] ok, there are the technical things, like, ok, you should teach like this, you could the warm up and a post-production activity, but, I mean, in a more human way. I think the program taught me a lot.

¹⁰Micro teaching is a technique aiming to prepare teacher candidates to the real classroom setting (Brent & Thomson, 1996). It is especially used to train teachers systematically by allowing them to experiment important teacher behaviors

Adam was the second interviewee. During observation, he was one of the most participative student teachers in the group: attended all pedagogical meetings and was constantly at the teachers' room. Besides, peers often requested his help and asked him work-related questions in the teachers' room.

Adam is more experienced and older than most student teachers in the community – in his mid-twenties, whereas most are in their early twenties¹¹. Adam had been an English teacher since he was 17 years old; as he was proficient in English and needed a job when he moved to the city to go to Law School, he started working at a small language school, first as a tutor and, then, as a classroom teacher. After working for Walt Disney World and Dell computers, he got a job as a teacher, dropped out of Law School, and decided to major in language teaching.

When we talked, he was in his third year of college and had been a student teacher at the program for almost a year and a half. Putting all his years of teaching together, he had taught for three and a half years in three private language schools. According to Adam, he felt he was developing professionally in LwB – “In this program, we don't only teach; we learn how to teach”. In this sense, Adam compared his experience in the private language schools with his experience in the program,

in language schools you don't only have students, you have customers, and for me this is the big difference between those schools and LwB project because in LwB you have just students. Period. You don't have to worry about numbers, you don't have to worry about retention. So this for me, this is spectacular. As a teacher, I want to know about my, you know, just about my teaching. I wanna teach. Especially me, as an undergraduate student, I want to learn how to teach. And this is really important. So I think this is the big difference because, once you are teaching in a language school, you have to worry about customers, you have to worry about money, you have to worry about income, you have to worry about taxes.

Like Maria Julia, Adam mentioned that the pedagogical meetings had been important for his development as a teacher in the program,

now we have a program to follow, we have some goals to achieve, and in the beginning it was not like that. It was, like, together as a group, in a group reflection, so let's think how we teach and how we do that. It was like that for 6 months. From a year from now, it became much more structured: very regular meetings, longer hours, with the help of MA students and doctoral students. So it improved. This is my point of view, this is my perspective: it improved a lot. It's more focused now.

Adam also mentioned that he learned about EAP from the program, a point that Kelly and Lucas also brought up, as will be described later. More specifically, the program made him realize he already knew how to teach EAP but was not aware of that,

¹¹In this CoP most student teachers entered college in their late teens – seventeen to nineteen.

in the school I mentioned [...] I had to teach English for Academic Purposes, and I didn't know I was teaching English for Academic Purposes. So, it was something that I did without knowing, and now at LwB I know what is English for Academic Purposes, I learned how to teach English for Academic Purposes. So that was very interesting.

In addition, Adam pointed out that he had learned a lot borrowing pedagogical materials and class plans from peers. He gave an example of such a learning situation; he once entered the teachers' room and saw Kelly preparing a power point presentation,

the way that she prepares, I mean she does her power point presentations, and she has like this very specific way of doing of using the colors. She's a very organized person. This is something I tried a little bit to learn from her, so this one specific moment and I witnessed at our teachers' room. This is one specific moment [...] how do you do that? And she does it for every single class. She told me "oh I speak a lot, I talk a lot all the time, and it saves me time when I have the power point presentation". Yeah that's true, it happens to me.

The segment above describes informal learning by interacting in the teachers' room. Slightly different from that, Adam mentioned that he also learned in a more structured situation – the microteaching lessons:

well, when we have microteachings, this is another situation. I feel I'm learning because sometimes teachers present us a topic we're not so familiar with or that we don't understand so much or we don't know how to work with [...] and then in a microteaching we learn how to do that. I learned to work with writing courses. Isabela presented [...] There was a microteaching about post cards.

Lucas was a sophomore in college and had been a student teacher in the program for nine months when he was interviewed. Previously to teaching in LwB, he had been a tutor and an instructor for a private language school in his hometown – about a half hour off the city where the university is – for a little over a year. Unlike Maria Julia, who finished school and had already had a variety of different experiences in the university, and Adam, who had had a few jobs as a teacher, Lucas had very little teaching experience as he was only 20 years old.

Lucas, like Adam, compared his previous experiences to LwB. His previous job consisted of delivering the course book exactly as the manual suggested. Thus, he did not feel his previous job introduced him to teaching,

you don't really have to prepare classes or anything. You don't really have to be that good at English actually. You just have to follow the patterns of their textbook, which is the audiolingual method. Basically, you have to read the sentences and the students repeat.

When asked how he had learned the name "audiolingual method", he answered that it was in "a pedagogical meeting" when they were discussing "different methods, like the modern ones and the ones we think are not the best anymore. Lucas also mentioned that teaching a course multiple times

was good for him to better learn “what works and what doesn’t work”. He was afraid of teaching a course on “writing abstracts” because he thought it would be difficult to teach it in a fun way. However, after teaching it five times he “felt really professional at it,”

when I taught it for the first time I used some of the previous teachers’ material. Um, I liked it but not very much. Then I saw what worked and what didn’t work with the students and then I started throwing some things of my own and getting students’ feedback. Like what did you like? What would you like to learn? And by the end I thought I came up with really good material for them. And course plans.

When asked what had facilitated this process of “becoming professional” at the course about abstracts, Lucas said, “time and pedagogical meetings did,”

first of all they taught us [...] the steps to construct, to build a course plan, to plan a class. And [...] I think my undergraduate course helped me a little, too. Because you learn how to use a text as a starting point. And, then, they taught me all the steps, like a pre-text¹² activity and these kind of things.

Lucas mentioned that not only did he learn things in the pedagogical meetings, but he also “polished” things he was doing intuitively. In a way, this is comparable to Adam’s feeling about EAP,

I feel like before the pedagogical meeting I was actually doing something similar with the students. Like, intuitively. But pedagogical meetings they polished what I was doing intuitively. Like, telling me when to do what instead of... For example, I would do like a vocabulary exercise after the text instead of before [...]

Next, Lucas made an explicit reference to how studying literature on the field of EAL teaching methodologies had influenced his pedagogical thinking, “I also got really interested in these methods and theories. So Estevam borrowed [sic] me some books. I haven’t read them all yet, but I have started. I think they help me. It was the books she was using as a reference to the pedagogical meetings.” Similarly to the other interviewees, Lucas also mentioned the importance of his peers in his trajectory in the program,

I entered the program in October, it was in the middle of the semester. I don’t know the specifics but I know that Silvana was in the program but then she left. Estevam, who was the pedagogical coordinator, became the administrative one. I don’t know the specifics. So I didn’t start with pedagogical meetings, we didn’t use to have those. They were more administrative. So I felt really lost in the beginning. So my peers really helped me, especially Antonio and Anselmo. They invited me to observe their classes and I did. Antonio was the one who gave me tips and materials. And whenever I had a question I’d go straight to him. He was like my mentor in the program.

¹²Pre-reading.

Like Adam, Lucas observed that in the LwB program you get to learn about EAP and ESP, which is “unique because you don’t get that in other places”. In his view, he never studied any ESP or EAP in his undergraduate classes. Similarly, Lucas revealed he was having a great experience in college to some extent because of his concurrent experience in the program, college “wouldn’t be the same without it,

I think even in my major, it’s just theory. You may learn the modern methods and all the things... But you don’t get the opportunity to use it [sic]. Even in your internships, in your practices you don’t get the opportunity to that because it’s in regular schools, private school or public schools, either way, you are forced to use their method.

Another aspect in which Lucas claimed the program was important was related to improving his English language proficiency because of the presence of the ETAs,

Especially last year, I made really good friends with Nick and Summer, the ETAs [...] I feel like the teachers at LwB, we don’t speak English to each other in our rooms, you know, because we’re friends, we study together, so it doesn’t feel natural to speak English [...] So, I spent a lot of time with Nick and Summer. They were actually my friends. So I’d go to their house at least once a week we’d hang out together. So it was really nice. When the teachers were with Summer and Nick they would speak only English [...] So I feel like their presence at our ELC was very special, because we also had to use English to communicate with each other.

Lucas finished his interview in a rather dramatic manner. He declared, “I pity people who do not have the chance” to have similar experiences to the ones he had in the LwB. Despite dramatic, it is an interesting line to unveil he views the importance of the program to go beyond classroom learning in college, which he terms “theoretical”.

Kelly was a sophomore. She had studied engineering for two and a half years, and had been a teacher for three and a half years previously to starting Letras. Her interest in teaching was the reason why she decided to change career paths. Kelly was a student teacher in the program for one and a half years. She also had an interesting portfolio of experiences. First, she taught at a private language school for three and a half years. Besides, she had taken CELTA in London. After starting the Letras program, she taught English for underprivileged kids in a social project. Before joining LwB, she worked as an intern (helping the teacher with class plans and materials production) in a basic school that is linked to the university, and is considered a model school by the community.

As with the other interviewees, Kelly claimed to have developed professionally by participating in the program, “It [the program] opened my mind, you know, there is so much more I can do now.” When Kelly compared her previous experiences as a teacher – the private language school and the social project –, she concluded that the LwB is “in between the private language school and the social project”. In the social project, for instance, she would have all the freedom to prepare whatever classes, whereas in the

private language school she would have to follow the class plan provided by the school. In the LwB, however, the courses have syllabuses, and oftentimes course books, but student teachers are allowed to make as many modifications as they want – adapt things, omit things and include things,

it's the place in between, you know? Because you can have, OK, because there are some courses that you follow the book. But then you don't have the restriction of having to follow the steps. Because you come up with your own steps, or like having to do all these activities that you have to do, you know [...] So we have the syllabus to follow, but that doesn't say exactly what you have to do [...] So we have a guideline, we know what is the final ideal, what is the general idea of the course, and we can personally do the things [...] That that goes like, that's very different from the private language school for example, that everybody would have to teach the exact same class, the same day, the same exercise.

In addition to that, in the private language school she felt like “all she had to do was to please students” to make sure they continued studying in the school, whereas in the social project this was not an issue at all – “students were pleased with anything you gave them.” In LwB, there was a slight level of concern for student retention – as student teachers' jobs in the program depended on that –, but that was a peripheral concern as it was not emphasized in the everyday life in the community. According to Kelly, pedagogical meetings are a strong element of their professional learning in the program,

I remember last year I attended a meeting [inaudible] and the other one with Estevam. We were sit [sic] at a table me, João, Christian, Lucas, Antonia. I'm trying to recall the names [...] OK, and then Estevam came up with strips of paper, OK, shuffled, and then we had to – we were discussing about methodology and steps – and then we had to separate the strips of papers in two groups: which ones describe a methodology step kind of thing and which ones describe a task. And then that made me realize that, because in Celta I was so focused on the steps of planning the class, that I really didn't realize about the methodology, like, the communicative approach, or the audiolinguistic type of thing [...] I was following the communicative approach, in my planning, because it was the one I knew [...].

Moreover, like Adam and Lucas, Kelly mentioned EAP as one of the things that she learned in the program,

I knew what an article was, but I had never taught, I had never considered those materials as realia to work in class, to bring an article to class and use that material. Like, the original material as an activity, differently from getting something from the internet or using something from the book.

Kelly, like the other interviewees, thought her proficiency in English improved with her participation in the program. She highlighted two points in which this happened: (1) academic English, such as essay writing, improved because she had to study academic writing in order to teach it;

(2) working with the ETAs helped her improve her speaking skills, as “even if you’re not paying attention, you’re picking things up.”

Antonio, Like Maria Julia, was a former student teacher in the program who participated in meetings and interactions in the teachers’ room as if he still were in the program. In other words, he was no longer officially in the program but remained a member of the community. At the time he was interviewed he worked as an undergraduate research assistant in a project related to the production of pedagogical materials for English major students and as a tutor in a large network of language schools. When asked informally if he was still in the program, as he kept coming to the teachers’ room, he answered, “I left the program, but the program didn’t leave me.” Antonio joined LwB only three months after he had started college. He decided to study Letras because he had always liked English and knew a student teacher from the first cohort of LwB who had told him about her experience both in Letras and in LwB. After entering college, he learned about a selection process for student teachers in the program; as he had compatible proficiency level (B2), he decided to try.

Antonio also compared his work in the program to his current job. He felt he learned about teaching at LwB because he had more freedom to prepare and teach classes without having to follow a standard set of procedures,

Because here we have the freedom to create a course, to create, not a text book but to create material to work with. We have certain freedoms that I learned later they’re fundamental for our perception of ourselves as teachers. Like, you understand yourself better if you have the freedom to try, and we were always given this freedom to try. You know, we were always guided at the program, and say what could work, what was convenient, what was not convenient. [inaudible] getting those people stopping us from doing something. If you wanted to try, you could just talk to one of the Marias [the coordinators] and do and then do the things and try it out. They were always supporting us for that was fundamental, to have those freedoms, and see, OK, today I couldn’t prepare the best lesson I could, so I’ll go to the book and that’s OK. And they would understand, and the following day I would try to make a very nice class. And then I could talk to the coordinators again, and, yeah, that was a nice class. We had the microteachings and we had the pedagogical meetings, that’s a huge start.

Thus, in Antonio’s perspective, there was a dialog between individual experience – the freedom to try – and group experience – interactions with the pedagogical coordinators and peers – that were essential to his perception of development in the program. Like Lucas, Antonio mentioned the role that repetition – teaching the same course many times – played in his professional development, this helped him feel more confident,

You know, students come up with similar questions sometimes. So, I knew how to answer them. Because the first student asked me I was like “ok, I’m going to look for this and then later I could answer’, but there was always the feeling that we are taught we should know everything. But then [inaudible] we’re just people. We don’t need to know everything. But in the beginning I had that feeling. Oh my God, I’m not allowed not to know something. But then through theory, and

LwB and then life taught me that it's OK not to know. So as I became more and more prepared (inaudible) more confident. And I was like 'Ah, I know the class'.

Interestingly, Antonio used "journey" as a metaphor for his experience in the program. He narrated his self-perception of how he was different at the end of his trajectory in the program,

I always felt that I knew what I wanted to do. I felt confident. Like, "hey, let's go again". At the beginning of my journey as a LwB teacher I would follow the book a lot. At the beginning it was convenient, because I saw everything that was working, what was worth to spend ten minutes explaining and what wasn't worth much. Because, guys... It's like, you know, dictionaries, we kind of don't use them anymore, but this is how it works. I really need to bring dictionaries and try, like, oh, to read with dictionaries. You know, that wasn't important anymore because I thought they wouldn't need it. Because we have tools and everything. My personal perspective is like, I didn't need, we didn't know, we didn't need to know how dictionaries work as completely as the book was suggesting. Like, I'm not working with this anymore, this is irrelevant, this is not relevant. And every time I taught the course I could do better [...] But, then, yes, I could see better what was important talking about and what was not important talking about. What I knew they could figure or by themselves, what I knew I had to help.

Like the previous interviewees, Antonio perceived the pedagogical meetings and the help he received from his peers and coordinators as an important source of learning,

I was always looking for Maria Julia and Clarissa, they were always helping me. Maria is still helping me with everything. It was amazing! I was always learning from them because, you know, the coordinators were always there to help us. I mean especially through Facebook¹³, they were always there, but, then, seeing them was kinda hard, you know, they're busy.

Furthermore, Antonio perceived his English proficiency to have improved during his time in the program mainly because of his interactions with the ETAs,

Mostly I think being around the North American who come. You know, teaching, with them was an amazing experience. Teaching was, like, kinda bonus because we were, like, going to parties, going to restaurants, planning the classes, watching movies, going to the movie theaters, those things, you know. This is [...] a benefit of the program because we can be, like, living with them, like talking to them and interacting and, you know.

¹³There is a Facebook group only for members of the community. In addition to that, they often use Facebook's messenger to communicate with coordinators.

5. DISCUSSION

When the interviews were conducted, all interviewees had already had some teaching experience either before (Adam, Kelly and Lucas) or after (Maria Julia and Antonio) participating in LwB, chiefly in private language schools. This means that they had points of reference to which they could compare their experience. We consider this comparison essential to help establish their understanding of their own professional development in the program.

In the interviews, all participants stated that the program was or had been important to their development as EAL teachers. In different ways, the five student teachers stated their trajectories in the community culminated in professional take-aways. The pedagogical meetings are tailored to cater for their needs in this very specific program, i.e., useful for their work within the program, with all its idiosyncrasies. However, the two participants who had already left LwB – Maria Julia and Antonio – also mentioned that they have been able to benefit from what they had learned at LwB in other teaching jobs. Maria Julia, for instance, explains that the context of her current job as a public-school teacher is quite different from her work at LwB; nevertheless, she can still port things she learned in the program to her current job. Young (2009) argues that the concept of “porting” knowledge (which he favors over “transferring” knowledge) works fine in a cognitive light, such as that of Second Language Acquisition, as knowledge is something abstract and not context-dependent. However, according to the author,

Life is not full of surprises and, in fact, the essence of learning is being prepared to deal with new contexts that we encounter tomorrow. If learning occurs in a participation framework, then that framework has a structure, and elements of structure can be found, albeit in different configurations, in different context (p. 168).

Thus, Maria Julia’s perception that the knowledge she gained from participating in the community is now useful in a new context supports Young’s understanding that “porting” knowledge from one practice to another is an important part of learning how to participate. In other words, participants are often in the process of comparing past engagement to present needs when navigating new practices. Obviously, it is not a matter of repeating performance, but of creating an appropriate alignment to a current situation. It is also related to creating repertoires of skills and practices.

In a way, the fact that former student teachers still participate in the community is an evidence that this is indeed a community of practice; participants are not there only because they have to, there are other things, such as professional development, that binds them together.

As we can see, all interviewees maintain LwB has been an important influence in their professional development. They illustrate the important influence of the program in their professional development in different ways: (1) comparing their professional experiences at LwB with professional experiences in other teaching-related positions; (2) explaining how their current teaching practice has been affected by their experience in the program; (3) describing practices that contributed to their development; (4) referring to

learning topics that they found valuable; and (5) describing specific episodes which they feel helped them develop professionally.

The Figure 1 summarizes the themes that emerged in the analysis of the interviews. In the figure, we can see the five most recurrent themes that interviewees associated with professional development in the community.

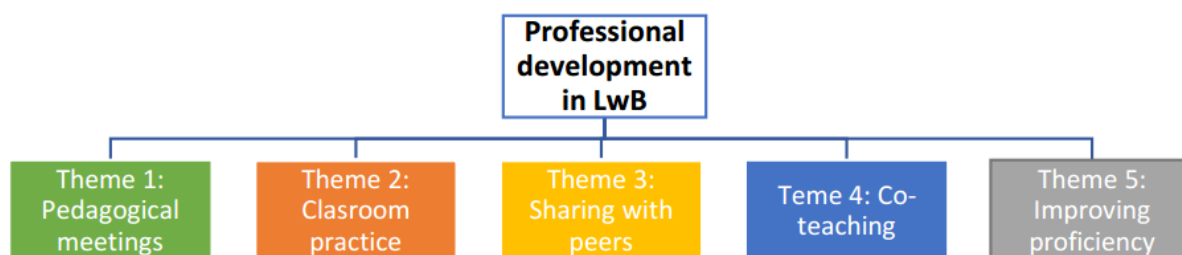


Figure 1. Summary of practices which foster teacher development as mentioned in the interviews

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The community investigated seems to positively influence the initial development of English teachers, since student teachers can engage in practices that are central to their professional development. In addition, this community responds to calls for change that claim for a more “clinical” education and supervision of novice teachers, that is, an initial education (or supervision) committed to providing student teachers with opportunities to experience their profession from within (Novoa, 2009).

Data suggest that both the existence of institutional spaces, moments and practices of professional development, and private spaces that allow for emergent and auto-regulated practices is beneficial to promoting opportunities for engagement in practices that matter to professional learning. The description of the interactional architecture of these practices are enlightening to understand the ways in which novice teachers are socialized into the unknown terrain of the new profession.

Finally, programs that foster development in communities whose end goal is teaching, such as the LwB, can surely contribute to teacher initial education of foreign language teachers, but they could also contribute to the initial education of teachers of other fields.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

GENERAL QUESTION: In what ways does their current teaching practice reflect their histories as LwB student teachers?

1. For how long have you been a teacher at the LwB? How long have you been systematically teaching English?
 2. What classes have you taught at LwB?
 3. What's the difference between LwB and your previous teaching experiences?
 4. Can you think about specific moments (during pedagogical meetings, in the interaction with your colleagues or actually teaching) during your time as a LwB teacher in which you felt you were learning something important about being a teacher? Could you describe one or two of these moments in detail?
 5. Can you remember a class in which you did something that you "took" from the pedagogical meetings or from an interaction with your colleague?
 6. Do you think the program has impacted your English language proficiency? In what ways?
 7. What do you think has been the importance of the program in your professional development as an English teacher? What has been the most important for you?
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