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Contextualised professional development from a timeline reflection:

A professional development initiative in Mexico

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Foreword

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Contextualised professional development from a timeline reflection: A decentred professional development initiative in Mexico is a collection of stories that showcase collaboration and agency, in which top-down approaches are replaced by giving a voice to local experts. It is a composition of unique tiles that help us better understand the mosaic of language teaching in one Mexican context.

I recently came across a thought-provoking foreword of a locally edited collection of short stories from the Arequipa region of Peru (Ramos Velázquez et al., 2010). The author argued that every region in the world should take responsibility for their own intellectual production - as this is what defines their identities. Locally-produced literature like these are testaments to the importance of documenting local narratives and experiences. The present work shares this underlying philosophy.

In the Mexican context where teacher "training" usually comes either from publishers with sales interests at heart, or highly charged political components, organic approaches that highlight teachers' genuine needs are much more meaningful. Of course, it must be recognised that such initiatives are not necessarily free from tensions and resistance. Obstacles to sustained teacher development actions might stem from deeply-rooted paradigms on teacher "training", bureaucratic structures, and teachers' busy schedules, to name just three examples.

This is where the concept promoted by the Hornby Educational Trust of "decentring" English language teaching proves more complex than just a simple, fixed definition. Moving away from the "centre" might imply moving away from internal, local, or institutional hierarchies of the status quo. In higher education contexts, it may mean departing from long-lasting routines and comfort zones, resisting the temptation to reply on externally prescribed materials and syllabi, and ultimately considering what teachers have to say about their own classes. Above all, moving away from the centre requires a rejection of the idea of "best

practices" and "one-size-fits-all", and instead embraces how -individually and collectively- teachers might make language teaching "work" in their own contexts.

In this book, you will encounter various forms of collaboration between local and outsider stakeholders. To some, this might be seen to contradict the idea of "decentring". However, it is down to the reader to reach their own conclusions on the potential similarities, dissonance, challenges, and opportunities, and ultimately, how to act upon them. In my view, the efforts captured in this book represent an attempt to create a community of practice in which teachers -with contextualised, local needs- are supported and challenged with a little push from the outsider perspective and vice versa. I see this as a win-win situation where teaching, research, and the documenting of practices work together to enhance language education. Most importantly, the intention is not to impose external solutions to "deficient" practices, but rather to highlight the richness of local expertise and how this might be meaningfully influenced by external inputs.

A recurrent challenge in Mexico is that promising projects tend to lack continuity. Once the incentive is removed, the newly proposed initiatives often disappear. Therefore, the need for sustainability and ongoing support remains. In the conclusion of this book, the editors remind us of the enduring effect of contextualised initiatives based on teachers' needs, dialogue, and co-construction. Although initially local, these initiatives have the potential to forge stronger, longer-term communities of practice. Let us hope that these experiences go some way in contributing to long-lasting change in the English language teaching field in Mexico.

Reference:

Ramos Velázquez, M., Chanove Zavala, O., Diaz Cobarrubias, W., Quiroz Paz Soldán, E., & Ruiz Rosas Cateriano, A. (Eds.). (2010). *Cuentos arequipeños: Antología básica*. Gobierno Regional de Arequipa.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

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Purpose of the book

This book documents the process of designing and implementing a series of professional development initiatives with university-level English language teachers in Mexico. Supported by the A.S. Hornby Educational Trust's Teacher Association Awards, this initiative consisted of a series of activities that not only fostered deep and meaningful individual self-reflection, but also facilitated collaboration and the sharing of ideas, thus contributing towards the creation of longer-term professional learning communities.

The project was designed with the core principles of "*Decentring*" ELT firmly in mind. Originally proposed by the Hornby Trust in 2018, decentring seeks to counteract the dominance of externally produced ELT approaches and materials, instead prioritising locally relevant content, shaped by the people who actually use it. In this Mexican project, we aimed to develop genuinely meaningful professional development experiences by listening to the real needs of the participants and creating content that would be relevant to their contexts.

A core element of this professional development initiative was the emphasis on *teacher reflective practice*. In recent years, reflective teaching has gained prominence as a powerful tool for professional growth. The challenges of modern classrooms, the demands of diverse student populations, and the rapid evolution of educational technology require teachers to continuously assess and adapt their pedagogical approaches. Reflective practices, particularly those grounded in self-awareness and critical reflection, provide teachers with valuable opportunities for growth and improvement.

A particularly distinctive feature of the reflective practice in this initiative was the use of *timelines as a tool for professional development*. By visually mapping their professional journeys, teachers reflected on key milestones, challenges, and aspirations for the future. This process helped them identify patterns in their teaching experiences and critically assess their own development, thus equipping them with the tools to navigate current and future challenges.

In Mexico, English teachers often face systemic barriers that limit their opportunities for professional development. Many teachers work in isolated rural areas or under-resourced urban schools, where they rarely have spaces to exchange ideas or reflect on their practices. This project provided a much-needed opportunity for these teachers to share their stories, articulate their challenges, and recognise the significance of their work. Through the sessions, we sought to create a safe, supportive environment where teachers could engage in open dialogue, collaborate with peers, and explore their professional identities. By validating their experiences and fostering reflective practice, we aimed to empower them, demonstrating that their voices matter in shaping the future of English education in Mexico.

Structure of the book

This book is divided into three main parts. *Part 1* (Foundations) lays the foundation for the discussion on decentring, reflective practice and the use of timelines in teacher professional development:

- *Chapter 1* is written by the Editors, Lilia Sulema Bórquez-Morales (Lilia), Posdoctoral researcher at the research centre El Colegio de Michoacán, Mexico, and Nicholas Bremner (Nicky), Senior Lecturer in Language Education at the University of Exeter, UK. This chapter introduces the project, its purpose, and the broader context in which the initiative was developed.

- *Chapter 2* is written by Mingyu Li, Lecturer in Education at Buckinghamshire New University, UK. The chapter provides a theoretical overview of the use of timelines in reflective practice, demonstrating how they have been used in education and in personal development more broadly.

- *Chapter 3* is written by Nicky and offers a practical guide of how to use timelines in order to support teacher reflection, including insights from Nicky's own journey and his particular role in this initiative.

- *Chapter 4* is written by Lilia. It illustrates how Lilia and her colleagues adapted Nicky's initial idea to fit it to their Mexican teaching context. The

chapter contains a detailed description of the professional development initiative, from start to finish.

- *Chapter 5* is written by Martha Guadalupe Hernández Alvarado (Martha) and Hilda Hidalgo Avilés (Hilda), both Lecturers at the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo. In this chapter, Martha and Hilda share their experiences, first as participants using timelines for their own professional reflection, and later as part of the research team that helped develop and facilitate the project. The authors conclude the chapter by briefly analysing interview data, summarising some of the main themes emerging from the project.

- *Chapter 6* is written by Milton R. Licona Luna (Milton), Lecturer at Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo. In this chapter, Milton also shares his experiences both as a participant and facilitator of the initiative. He places particular emphasis on the potential role of AI in teacher professional development, which emerged as an important need for teachers in this Mexican context.

Part 2 (Teachers' Stories) adds further detail to the experiences presented by Nicky, Lilia, Martha, Hilda and Milton in the previous chapters, by presenting the individual stories of the teachers who participated in the project. Each chapter shares a unique story, offering insights into how the professional development activities stimulated their reflection, growth, and certain changes to their teaching practices.

- *Chapter 7* introduces Elizabeth Cruz Bautista (Elizabeth) and Liliana Cruz Bautista (Liliana), two teachers from the most remote location among all participants. Their stories exemplify the important influence the timeline project had on their professional development.

- *Chapter 8* shifts to Olga Estefania Islas Santos (Olga), whose experience in a town closer to the state capital allowed her to attend the course in person. Olga's reflections reveal how her physical proximity and access to resources shaped her engagement and learning.

- *Chapter 9* highlights the journey of Guadalupe Tenorio Sánchez (Guadalupe), showing how attending the sessions online had influenced her work with in-service teachers. The fact that Guadalupe has continued

to apply this timeline activity in her own teacher education practice highlights the more long-lasting impact of this project.

- *Chapter 10* presents the story of Yaxinia Maribel Castro Madrid (Maribel). Despite initial reservations, Maribel's participation in the programme had a significant impact on her teaching practices, showcasing the power of reflection even for seasoned professionals.

- Last but not least, *Chapter 11* focuses on María Isabel Cervantes Martínez (Isabel), a long-time colleague who teaches pre-service teachers. She reflects on the importance of continuous learning and adaptation in her teaching, emphasising how these qualities benefit both her and her students.

Finally, *Part 3* (*Conclusions*) revisits the project's broader implications. In *Chapter 12*, Lilia and Nicky reflect on the overall impact of the initiative, discussing key takeaways and offering suggestions for future projects. This concluding chapter ties together the experiences shared throughout the book.

Together, these chapters weave a rich tapestry of growth, reflection, and transformation, showcasing the potential of the timeline technique in fostering meaningful teacher development. Ultimately, this book aims to contribute to ongoing discussions in teacher education, inspiring educators to embrace reflective practices such as timelines in order to help them explore their professional journeys. By documenting this initiative, we hope to encourage further exploration of context-sensitive, "decentred" approaches to English language teacher professional development.

Part 1: FOUNDATIONS

Chapter 2: The theories behind timelines as a form of reflective practice

Mingyu Li, Buckinghamshire New University, UK

Introduction

This book explores how a professional development initiative was implemented, and adapted, within a Mexican university context. As mentioned in the Introduction, the "timeline" tool was an important component of this initiative. In this chapter, I outline the key theoretical underpinnings of timelines as a tool for reflective practice (RP). In this chapter, I do not seek to overwhelm the reader with theories that are disconnected with practice. However, explaining some of the academic reasons behind the use of timelines may provide future users with more confidence if they decide to experiment with timelines in their own contexts.

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first sets the groundwork by defining what timelines are and showcasing their diversity and adaptability in different settings. The second then illustrates how timelines have been used in various domains of social sciences to facilitate reflection and deeper understanding of events, highlighting their role in capturing life histories and complex events, and uncovering patterns that prompt reflective engagement. Finally, the third part discusses two key theoretical foundations that support the use of timelines in RP: *reflection-in/on-action* (Schön, 1983) and *critical incident* theory (Tripp, 2011).

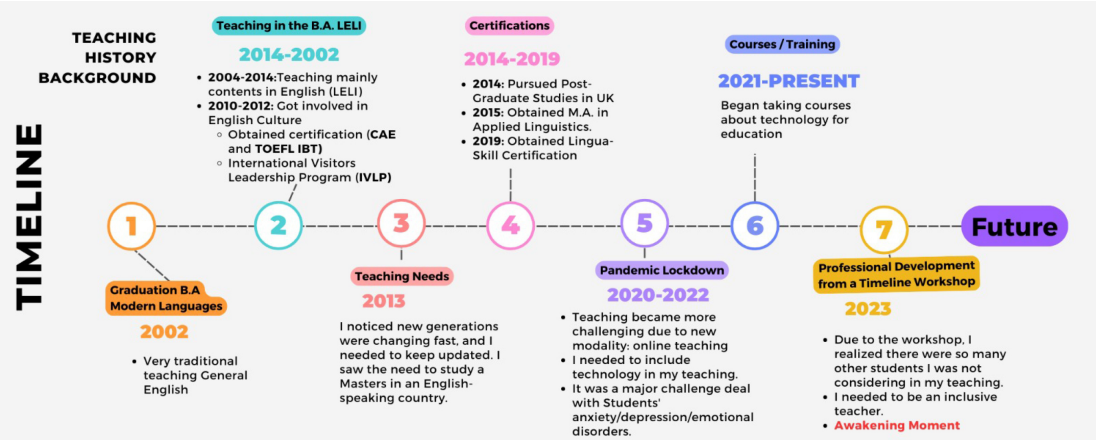
What is a timeline?

A timeline, also sometimes referred to as a "life diagram" (Soderstrom, 2019) or a "lifeline" (Gramling & Carr, 2004), is a visual representation that organises events, usually in a chronological order, allowing for a clear and structured depiction of sequences and relationships over time. This tool is used to map out significant occurrences, offering an intuitive way to see the progression and interconnection of events. Timelines can encompass a wide range of applications, from historical records and project management to personal and professional development, providing a comprehensive overview of the events they depict.

Timelines come in various forms, each designed to suit different purposes and contexts. The most common form is the linear timeline, which places events along a straight line, either horizontally (see Fig. 2.1) or vertically (see Fig. 2.2). This

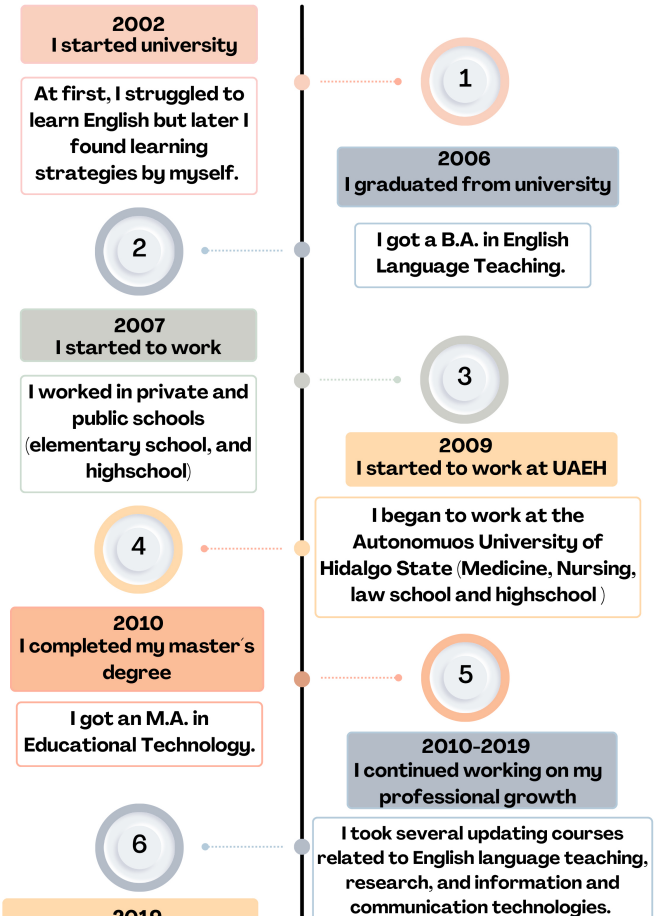
format is particularly effective for illustrating a sequence of events over a continuous period, making it easy to track changes and developments.

Figure 2.1. Example of chronological timelines (1)



Note. This example of timelines was provided by the author in Chapter 10. Castro, M. (2026).

Figure 2.2. Example of chronological timelines (2)



Note. This example of timelines was provided by the author in Chapter 7. Cruz, E. (2026).

You can also draw your timeline in a cyclical form by arranging events in a circular pattern, or in a thematic style which groups events based on specific themes or thematic categories. A cyclical timeline is useful for representing recurring events or processes that repeat over time, such as annual cycles, seasons, or ongoing projects. By highlighting the cyclical nature of these events, this format helps to emphasise patterns and trends that might be less apparent in a linear layout. On the other hand, a thematic timeline allows for a more focused analysis of particular aspects or topics within a broader context. For instance, a thematic timeline might highlight key milestones in a project's development, significant achievements in a person's career, or major advancements in a particular field of study.

Lastly, digital timelines, often interactive, offer dynamic ways to explore and manipulate data. These timelines can incorporate multimedia elements such as images, videos, and hyperlinks, providing a richer and more engaging experience. For example, teachers can embed relevant video clips that illustrate key historical events or scientific processes, making the timeline not just a static display of information but an interactive learning tool. Hyperlinks can lead to external resources, allowing users to delve deeper into specific topics or view additional content related to a particular event on the timeline. Furthermore, audio recordings can be included to provide firsthand accounts or enhance the narrative with sound effects, creating a multi-sensory learning experience. Digital timelines are especially useful in educational settings and professional presentations, where they can enhance understanding and retention of complex information by engaging multiple senses and offering interactive features that cater to diverse learning styles.

In addition to the presentation of timelines, the method of their creation also plays a crucial role in their effectiveness and applicability. Two primary approaches -the "take-home" and "there-and-then"- cater to different needs and contexts. The "take-home" approach allows teachers, who are often buried in a busy schedule of teaching, research, and administration, to create timelines at their own convenience. This flexibility is particularly beneficial in contexts where participants may need to fit reflection into irregular schedules, offering them the opportunity to engage deeply with the timeline process on their own terms (Bremner & Li, 2024). This method supports RP by allowing for extended contemplation and the integration of insights over time, which can lead to a richer and more personalised reflective experience. On the other hand, the "there-and-then" approach can vary in its execution, ranging from researcher-guided to co-

constructed timelines. In researcher-guided sessions, the teacher draws their timelines while the researcher provides prompts and questions to help clarify and deepen the reflection process.

This guidance ensures that significant experiences and reflections are accurately captured and understood. Alternatively, in co-constructed timelines, both the researcher and the teacher actively contribute to the creation of the timeline. This collaborative process allows for immediate exchange of ideas and adjustments, enhancing the depth and breadth of the narrative by integrating multiple perspectives. Both methods enhance engagement and can provide immediate contextual insights, but the co-construction method might further enrich the data quality through its interactive and dynamic nature (Oncevska Ager, 2022).

The use of timelines as a tool for reflection

Timelines have proven to be effective tools for facilitating reflection across various domains in social sciences research, especially life history research. Life history research is a qualitative research approach that focuses on understanding individuals' lives within their broader social, cultural, and historical contexts. This type of research is grounded in the belief that personal stories can provide deep insights into social phenomena, offering a rich, detailed understanding of human behaviour and development (Cole & Knowles, 2001). It aims to construct comprehensive narratives that reveal how personal experiences intersect with larger societal structures. In this respect, timelines are particularly well-suited to life history research as they provide a visual representation of people's life events, facilitating the organisation and analysis of these experiences chronologically.

The theoretical dynamic between timelines and life history is rooted in the narrative construction of identity or self. According to narrative identity theory, individuals form their identities by integrating their life experiences into a coherent story (McAdams, 1993). Timelines support this process by providing a clear, visual framework for individuals to reflect on their past, understand their present, and envision their future. By organising life events visually, timelines help individuals to see the progression of their personal narratives, thereby enhancing their own understandings of their identity development.

In life history research, timelines have been employed to capture and analyse the complex narratives of individuals' lives within their broader social, cultural, and historical contexts. Adriansen (2012) utilised timeline interviews with Fulani nomads and university students and found that the visual representation of life events helped participants actively engage in the storytelling process. This method not only helped link personal stories to broader social and environmental contexts but also facilitated a co-constructed narrative between interviewer and interviewee, leading to new insights and reflections during the interview process. Similarly, Bagnoli (2009) explored the use of graphic elicitation methods, including timelines, in qualitative research with young people. The study demonstrated that visual tools facilitated a more holistic and reflective engagement from participants, allowing them to express complex layers of their experiences that might be difficult to articulate verbally. The use of timelines in this context enabled participants to map out important life events and future aspirations, revealing patterns and connections in their narratives that they had not previously considered.

In the field of physical and mental healthcare research, Berends (2011) integrated timelines with in-depth interviews to explore the trajectories of substance use and treatment pathways. The visual timelines provided a holistic depiction of participants' substance use histories, highlighting the chronic nature of addiction and identifying key points for potential intervention. This approach enriched the understanding of participants' life stories by visually representing the progression and impact of substance use over time, thereby facilitating a more comprehensive analysis of their experiences. In the same vein, Chen (2018) utilised timeline drawing and the online scrapbook as visual elicitation techniques to explore illness journeys. The timelines offered a broad, holistic view of participants' lives and helped participants to reflect on their illness experiences and the role of social media in their health journeys, providing valuable insights into how their engagement with digital platforms evolved over time. Also, Gramling and Carr (2004) employed lifelines to document the psychosocial development and coping strategies of young women. The visual representation of significant life events facilitated the recall and sequencing of personal experiences, making the interview process more interactive and reflective.

In the specific domain of teacher education, timelines have been emerging as a novel tool for RP, helping teachers to document and analyse their professional journeys. Studies by Bremner (2020), Bremner and Li (2024), and Li and Shen

(2024) demonstrate the value of timelines in this context. Bremner (2020) explored the use of timelines to capture and represent complex life histories in qualitative research. In his study, participants created visual timelines of their professional experiences, which facilitated recall and organisation of significant events. The visual representation helped participants to reflect on their teaching careers, identify key milestones, and understand the progression of their professional development. This method enabled teachers to engage more deeply with their professional narratives, uncovering insights that might not have been evident through traditional RP.

Building on this work, Bremner and Li (2024) and Li and Shen (2024) investigated the use of take-home timelines as a RP tool among English language teachers across various educational contexts. The findings revealed that the timeline activity was well-received by participants, who appreciated the opportunity to reflect on their professional journeys in a structured and visual manner. Participants reported that the timelines facilitated deep reflection on personal teaching experiences, helping teachers to identify critical incidents, successes, and challenges. This reflective process not only enhanced their understanding of their professional growth but also provided therapeutic benefits, as participants found value in acknowledging their achievements and setting future goals.

These studies underscore the potential of timelines as powerful tools for RP in teacher education. By enabling teachers to visually map out their professional experiences, timelines foster a deeper engagement with their teaching narratives, promoting continuous professional growth and development. The visual and chronological structure of timelines complements traditional RP, offering a dynamic and interactive way for teachers to document, analyse, and learn from their experiences.

Theories behind timelines

Timelines as a tool for (RP) are underpinned by various theoretical underpinnings that justify and enhance their utility in professional development. This section introduces two of these theories: *reflection-on/in-action* (Schön, 1983) and *critical incidents* (Tripp, 2011).

Reflection on/in-action

Reflective practice (RP) is a deliberate and structured approach to learning from

one's experiences, central to continuous professional development and improvement (Schön, 1983). For teachers, RP is particularly vital as it fosters an environment of self-awareness and adaptability, crucial for responding effectively to the dynamic nature of teaching (Farrell, 2024). By engaging in RP, teachers critically analyse their teaching methods, interactions with students, and classroom management strategies. This introspection helps them identify areas of strength and opportunities for improvement, enabling them to adjust their teaching practices to better meet the needs of their students (Bremner & Li, 2024). Through this process, teachers can maintain a high standard of teaching and continuously evolve their pedagogical skills, making it an indispensable element of their professional lives.

Donald Schön, in his seminal work *The reflective practitioner* (1983), emphasises the importance of RP in professional practice. Schön identifies two types of reflection: *reflection-IN-action* and *reflection-ON-action*. *Reflection-IN-action* refers to the process of "thinking on your feet" and making decisions in real-time during an activity. Conversely, *reflection-ON-action* involves looking back on an activity after it has occurred to evaluate and learn from the experience. This theory underscores the continuous cycle of reflection as essential for professional growth and improvement.

Timelines can serve as effective tools to facilitate both forms of reflection described by Schön. By visually mapping out experiences and events, timelines provide a structured method for practitioners to document and analyse their professional journeys. This process aligns closely with Schön's concept of reflection-on-action, as it encourages teachers to systematically review past experiences, identify patterns, and derive lessons from their professional history (Bremner & Li, 2024). For example, by creating a timeline of their teaching career, teachers can pinpoint key events (or "critical incidents" which will be discussed shortly), successes, and challenges, fostering a deeper understanding of their development over time. Moreover, while timelines are primarily used for post-event analysis, they can also indirectly support reflection-in-action. Regular use of timelines may enhance a teacher's ability to recall past experiences quickly, enabling them to make more informed decisions during teaching activities. This mental referencing can aid real-time adjustments, reinforcing teachers' capabilities of reflection-in-action. The habitual practice of updating and reflecting on timelines cultivates a reflective mindset, which becomes second nature in the classroom.

Critical incidents and timelines

The concept of *critical incidents*, as introduced by Tripp (2011), focuses on the identification and analysis of significant events that have a profound impact on professional practice. Critical incidents are not necessarily dramatic or unusual events; rather, they are moments that reveal deeper insights into professional practices, beliefs, and values. Tripp's approach encourages practitioners to reflect on these incidents to uncover underlying patterns and issues that influence their professional behaviour and development.

Timelines provide a practical tool for mapping and analysing critical incidents within a professional context. By visually representing significant events in chronological order, timelines help practitioners identify and reflect on critical incidents more systematically. This visual format facilitates a structured approach to the identification and analysis of key moments that shape professional practice (Tripp, 2011). In addition, timelines and critical incident analysis both emphasise reflection and analysis. Timelines enable practitioners to document and review their experiences, making it easier to pinpoint critical incidents and assess their impact. This process of visual mapping of critical incidents can reveal underlying patterns and themes, providing deeper insights into professional practice. For example, a teacher might use a timeline to track significant classroom events, identifying moments that led to changes in teaching strategies or student outcomes. Furthermore, timelines facilitate the exploration of the context surrounding critical incidents. According to Tripp, understanding the context in which an incident occurs is crucial for meaningful reflection and learning. Timelines help to situate critical incidents within the broader scope of a practitioner's professional journey, highlighting the interplay between individual events and larger trends. This contextual analysis enhances the practitioner's ability to derive meaningful insights and apply them to future practice (Tripp, 2011).

Timelines also support the iterative nature of reflecting on critical incidents. Tripp (2011) emphasises that reflection should be an ongoing process, with practitioners continually revisiting and re-evaluating their experiences. By regularly updating timelines with new experiences and reflections, practitioners can maintain an evolving record of their professional development. This ongoing documentation helps to capture the dynamic nature of professional practice and supports continuous improvement.

Concluding remarks

Throughout this chapter, we have explored the multifaceted role of timelines as an essential tool for RP, particularly within the field of teacher education. As we have seen, timelines are not merely tools for recording events but are pivotal in facilitating a deeper understanding of educational processes and professional development. They serve as dynamic instruments that can transform the abstract and often chaotic elements of teaching experiences into structured, comprehensible narratives that are easy to analyse and reflect upon.

Timelines empower teachers to systematically document and scrutinise their teaching journeys, helping them to identify critical incidents, track changes, and evaluate outcomes over time. By providing a clear framework to visualise their professional growth, timelines aid teachers in recognising patterns and milestones that are crucial for their ongoing professional development and pedagogical effectiveness. Moreover, the integration of timelines into RP supports teachers in cultivating a reflective mindset, crucial for continuous improvement. This practice not only reinforces their immediate teaching strategies but also contributes to their long-term professional narratives, enabling them to construct a cohesive identity as reflective practitioners. In essence, timelines offer a unique blend of visual clarity and analytical depth, which can significantly enrich RP of teachers.

In conclusion, the potential of timelines extends beyond simple archival functions, towards potentially transformative tools for teacher education. By enabling a structured and deep engagement with personal and professional experiences, timelines foster a reflective culture that is conducive to educational excellence and innovation. As this chapter has shown, when used effectively, timelines are more than just educational tools; they are catalysts for profound professional growth and introspective insights, making them invaluable in the domain of teacher education.

I hope that this exploration of the practical application and the theoretical underpinnings of timelines as a tool for RP not only enhances your understanding but also supports you if you consider adapting it to your own context, empowering yourself to leverage their full potential for personal and professional development.

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Chapter 3: How to timeline: practical considerations when designing and implementing timeline activities

Nicholas Bremner, University of Exeter, UK

Introduction

In the previous chapter, Mingyu Li outlined what timelines are and some of the underlying theoretical reasons for considering timelines as part of reflective practice. In this chapter, I explore how practitioners might design and implement timeline activities with teachers in their contexts.

Key characteristics and principles of timeline activities

Timeline activities, and of course the individual timelines themselves, will all be slightly different. Indeed, I strongly encourage anyone interested in developing a timeline activity to "make it their own", as Lilia and her colleagues have done in this project. Having said that, there are some overall characteristics or principles which will prove useful to those getting started. These are as follows:

- *Timelines should facilitate exploration of beliefs and practices (in this case, about education) over time.* From my perspective, the most intuitive and meaningful use of a timeline activity for teachers is to ask them to map their beliefs and practices, how these have changed over time, and what might have been the reasons for any changes. As long as the topics broadly stay within the realm of education, teaching, learning, and so on, the specific areas of focus can be very flexible. The guiding questions can be quite broad and open (e.g. "*think about how you have taught over time*") or conversely quite narrow and specific (e.g. "*think about your views towards educational technology over time*"). As designers of a timeline activity, you can choose the topics that participants may wish to explore, ideally in consultation with the participants themselves.

- *Timelines should serve as a stimulus to reflection*. When planning a process to support others to produce timelines, it is important to remember what a timeline is for. The purpose of a timeline is to organise people's ideas in chronological form, with the ultimate aim of stimulating reflection, which typically takes place through some sort of discussion after participants produce their timelines. As such, the specific contents and details of the timeline are *not* important. It is, however, essential that timelines contain sufficient information in order to "prompt" the discussion of emerging points.

- *Timelines should not all look the same*. No timelines will look identical; this is perfectly fine and is actually part of the enjoyment of taking part in the timeline activity. Timelines can be neat or messy; they can be black-and-white or colourful; they can be creative or "boring". To reiterate the previous point, as long as they provide the springboard to discussion, they have done their job. In Fig. 3.1 and Fig. 3.2) I have provided two timelines from my PhD which show very contrasting styles – both were equally effective in eliciting meaningful reflection.

- *Timelines don't need to be exact, or "correct"*. Because of the retrospective nature of timelines (looking back into one's past), there will inevitably be elements that we do not remember, and even areas we misrepresent. A lot of academic literature has been written on memory, but in very basic terms, I would argue that in the context of a timeline activity, the specific details are unimportant. When one thinks in the present about their past, in order to (re)frame their future, they do so from the frame of reference they currently have. While it is possible to investigate one's past in meticulous detail and to strive for a timeline that is "historically accurate", I would argue that what participants consider important or memorable in their present is what should be focused on.

- *Timelines are not "data" to be analysed, and do not need to be compared directly.* Linked to the previous points, remember that timelines are unique to the individual. Their purpose is to stimulate (individual, unique, personalised) reflections, and therefore (in most cases) are not supposed to be compared directly to others. Of course, participants may share and compare their timelines with others, but not with the aim of standardising or seeking universal answers.

- *Timelines are for the participants' themselves.* Although participants might compare or share ideas emerging from their timelines, the timeline in itself, is a personal, introspective endeavour. Even if others do end up gleaning benefits from a timeline, the principal benefactor of producing the timeline, must be the participant themselves, in the sense that it should help stimulate reflection on their beliefs and practices and thus facilitate a positive vision for their future.

- *Timelines are not for everybody.* A final key point is that timelines may not work for everybody. Some people may simply not find it meaningful to organise their lives in a visual form, and this is fine. In such cases, I would not recommend pushing it but rather considering other ways of exploring teachers' beliefs and practices. Indeed, some people may simply like to have a chat about their lives and skip the timeline part. In my experience, in most cases the discussions without timelines are less focused and rich, but they are most likely more fruitful than no discussion at all.

Figure 3.1. Example timeline (1) (Bremner, 2020)

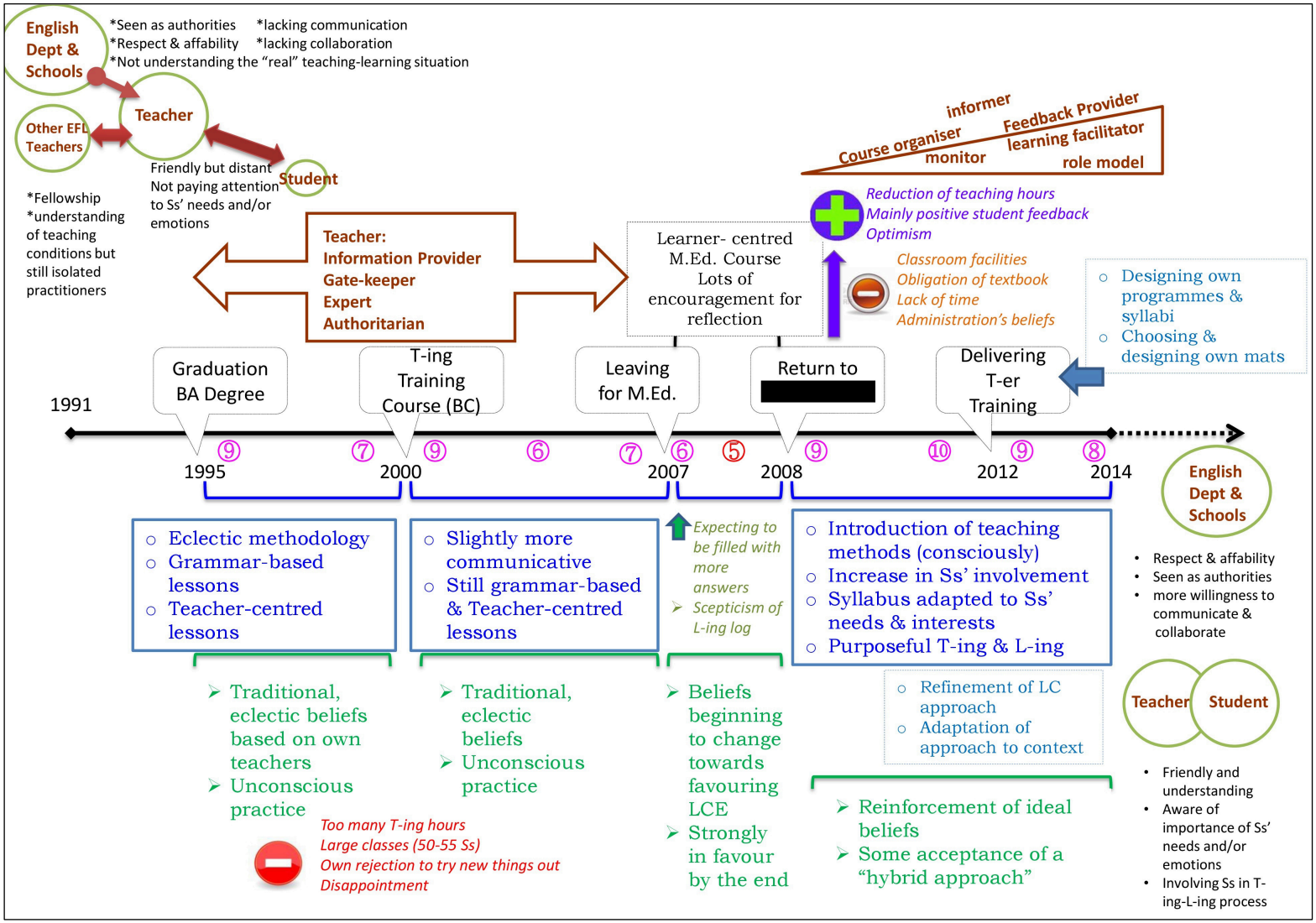
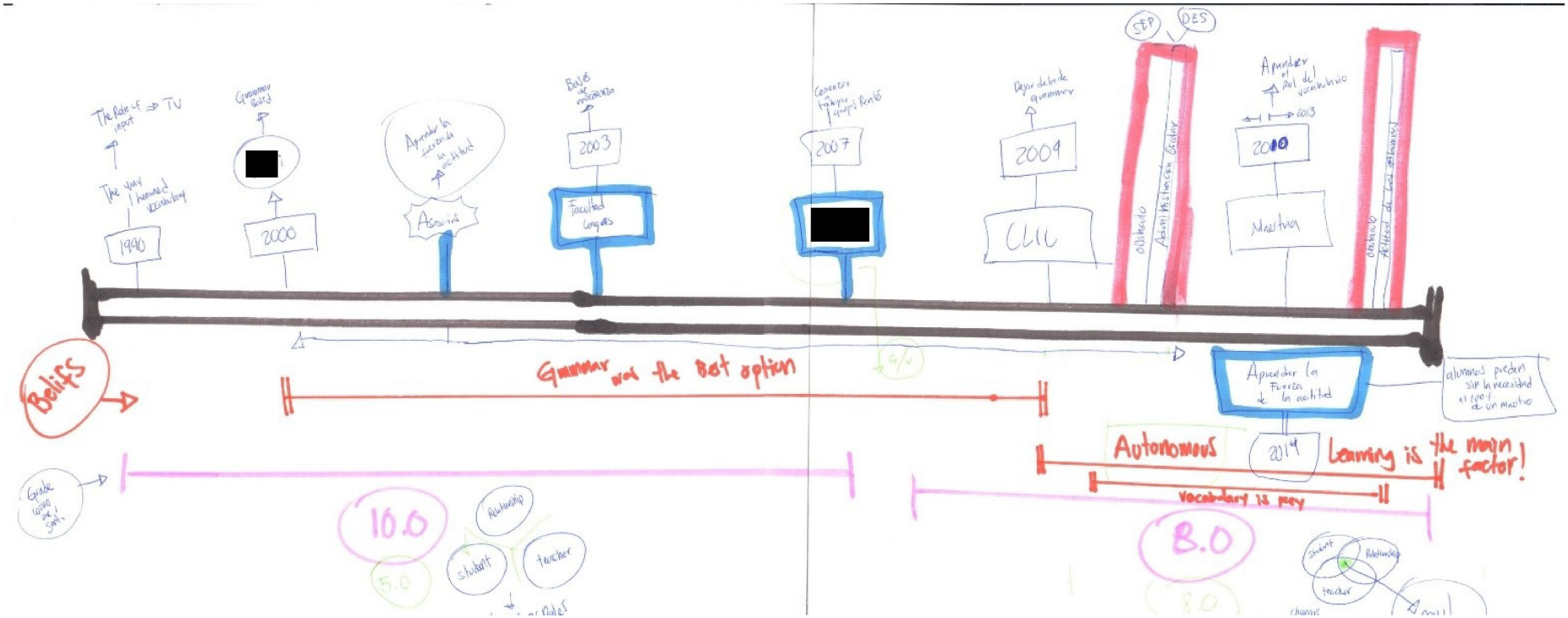


Figure 3.2. Example timeline (2) (Bremner, 2020)



"There and then" or "take-home"?

As outlined by Mingyu in the previous chapter, there are two main types of timeline activity, which I have described as the "there and then" timeline activity and the "take-home" timeline activity (Bremner, 2020). Both approaches have their respective merits, so if considering a timeline activity, it may be worth carefully considering which one best fits your context.

The "there and then" timeline happens in real-time, sometimes even in the presence of the facilitator. This is more likely to happen with large pieces of paper and pens and usually has quite a short time limit. The benefits of this are its speed and practicality, especially when working with teachers with very busy workloads. The drawbacks, however, are that sometimes it can be quite difficult for participants to remember certain details; the process can become rushed, leading to less rich and "deep" reflections.

The "take-home" timeline, on the other hand, allows participants to complete the timeline in their own time, often over a period of several days or weeks. The benefits of this are that it allows participants to spend more time making connections between important events in their past. The drawback, inevitably, is that this process typically takes time; teachers may not end up completing the activity due to their busy schedules, and it may be difficult to then find a time to engage in the post-timeline reflection, which is the ultimate purpose of producing the timeline.

In my professional experience, the "take-home" timeline has led to much richer, meaningful reflections than the "there and then" timeline, but it may not always be possible due to practical constraints in the context. Indeed, in the next chapter, Lilia outlines how she decided to opt for a "there and then" approach due to time constraints in the Mexican context.

Designing the timeline activity

If designing a timeline activity, you will need to provide clear written and/or oral instructions. Ideally, there would be a space and time for participants to ask questions if they are unclear. Here, a balance needs to be reached here between *under-prescriptiveness* (i.e. giving too few instructions, which may lead participants to be

unclear or overwhelmed with the open nature of the task) and *over-prescriptiveness* (i.e. giving too many instructions, which may limit the participants' creativity). Some questions that you *might* want to consider when designing the timeline activity are:

- What specific elements, if any, are you asking teachers to think about? (e.g. AI? Teaching lexis? Communicative Language Teaching? Learner-centred vs. teacher-centred? Inclusive learning practices? Giving feedback? Etc.)
- Will the timeline be "there and then" or "take-home" (see above)?
- How long will teachers need to complete the activity?
- Will teachers be supported during the activity? If so, how?
- Do you have a preference for timelines being produced by hand or using a computer (or either)?
- Any other preferences?

The answers will be what works best for you, and I am reluctant to tell you exactly how to do it, because this will depend on your context. However, to show an example of the timeline instructions (Fig. 3.3), below is an example of a summarised version of the written instructions I gave to participants in a recent project (Bremner & Li, 2024). Please note that this project aimed to explore elements such as *constraints to practice* and *teacher self-efficacy*: these were specific elements that we wanted teachers to reflect about in this particular project but certainly do not need to be in any project. Please note also, that this was a "take-home" timeline activity, not a "there and then" activity. The instructions here are <u>not</u> supposed to be the "best" way, or the "only" way to do it: it is down to you to decide how this might best work for you or for teachers in your context.

Figure 3.3. Example of instructions for a timeline activity (Bremner & Li, 2024)

We invite you to explore how your beliefs and practices about English language teaching have changed over time, and what might be the reasons for any changes.

It's totally up to you how you produce the timeline and what to include in your timeline. We will use it as a stimulus for a discussion about your professional journey, so as long as <u>you</u> understand what is on it, that will be enough detail in order for us to have a discussion. You might want to start by drawing a line in the middle of the page (horizontally or

vertically). On this line, you could begin by putting some of the key events that you feel have had an impact on your beliefs and practices (about English language teaching). We don't need every detail – only those you feel are important.

It is not obligatory, but if you feel it is useful, at certain points on your timeline you could write:

- *In **GREEN** – how your beliefs changed at that point;*
- *In **BLUE** – how your practices changed at that point;*
- *In **RED** – any obstacles to putting your beliefs into practice at that point.*

Finally, at certain points on your timeline you may find it interesting to score your "self-efficacy" out of 10 – this means "how good a teacher you felt you were" (1 = worst teacher ever, 10 = best teacher ever). This could be seen from two different perspectives:

- *At the time – how you felt at the time – e.g. "at the time, I felt like an x".*
- *Retrospectively – what score you'd give your past self now – e.g. "looking back, I'd rate myself as a y".*

If you do decide to include these numbers, don't worry about the exact number as we will not be comparing these numbers with any other participant - the interesting part will be the discussions that ensue from them.

At the end of the timeline, you may wish to provide a future timeline. Given all of your past experiences, where do you see yourself going in the short and medium term?

Don't worry if you can't remember, and please don't feel pressured to include any aspect of your past that you don't feel comfortable discussing. We would normally expect this activity to take between 2 and 4 weeks but do let us know if you need extra time.

Additional considerations that you might bear in mind include the following:

- *Avoid completely unrelated topics.* Although it is difficult to detach people's professional lives from their lives as a whole, it is worth reminding participants to focus on their professional (educational) lives, and, if applicable, the specific foci that you are intending to explore.

- *Avoid sensitive topics*. Teachers may be willing to discuss sensitive topics, but I would recommend making it clear that teachers do not need to mention them. The risk of including such topics is quite high for relatively limited reward.
- *Don't worry if a teacher doesn't follow the instructions completely*. I don't think I have ever had a teacher "fully" follow my instructions for a timeline activity, and that is fine. remember that the timeline is, essentially, for them and to stimulate reflection, so I tend to assume that what they *have* included on the timeline is meaningful for them.
- *Don't worry about "neatness" or linearity*. The nature of one's professional lives is that experiences, jobs, etc. often overlap with each other. This is absolutely fine: remember that accuracy is not the main aim of this activity.
- *Try to include some "future" element*. This is not compulsory, but in my experience, it is useful for teachers to try and draw together some of the key themes in order to plan some element(s) of their future. These can be further explored in the post-timeline discussion, examined below.

Post-timeline discussion

In virtually all iterations of the timeline activity, it is essential to have some sort of activity in which the contents of the timeline are discussed. From experience, this is where the real "magic" of the timeline activity starts to come to life, as teachers are able to make more meaningful connections to various experiences in their lives. Here, the timelines serve as a useful starting point, but the discussion allows them to *go beyond* what is on the timeline and to achieve a much deeper, richer level of reflection and analysis.

The post-timeline discussion can take many forms. In my experience, it has been a few weeks after giving the instructions through one-to-one discussions with a facilitator; however, this could also take place in a group setting. Facilitators do not necessarily have to be "teacher trainers" or "mentors", and do not need to have more experience than the timeline creator. The facilitator's purpose is to help structure the conversation; to listen, engage, and ask questions as they emerge. Listening to other people's stories, in my experience, has *never* been boring (and I have done it *many* times!). The reasons for this, I think, is that stories are authentic, meaningful, and unique to the individual, which tends to be intrinsically meaningful to the listener. Indeed, the very nature of exploring people's teaching careers (especially in the international sphere of English

language teaching) is that there are often non-linear routes to their current professional role, sometimes involving travel to exotic places around the globe!

Such discussions typically last between 45 minutes and 90 minutes, depending on how much experience the teachers have and how much there is to talk about. When facilitating, it is recommended to begin at point furthest in the past and move step-by-step towards the present day. This might sound simple and obvious, but the timeline itself helps provide the structure, so you will never get lost. Tangents are absolutely fine and to be encouraged; the benefit of the timeline is that it always provides a concrete anchor point to come back to after these diversions. Chronology, then, becomes the focus and not so much "themes" or "patterns", per se, but these can of course be explored if they emerge. What I feel is most important is that participants leave the exchange with some sort of "finality" in the sense of what they would take from the exchange. You do not have to force this, and for many participants, simply taking part in the activity from start to finish provides therapeutic catharsis and a powerful motivational or emotional boost. For others, it may be that, through the timeline creation and post-timeline discussion, certain priorities and aims for the future may become apparent. Admittedly, many teachers may need a bit more time for the reflections to sink in, and as such, it may be worth following up with teachers to help summarise their thinking regarding how the activity might influence their futures.

Potential challenges

Although timeline activities have generally been received very positively by participants (Bremner, 2020; Bremner & Li, 2024; Li & Shen, 2024), there are, of course, some possible challenges when designing and implementing such activities. By far the most common challenge is a lack of time. Regrettably, teachers around the world tend to teach long days, often teaching numerous hours with relatively little time or space to engage in professional development activities. When designing such an activity, it is essential to consider how much time teachers will have to do such an activity; indeed, it may be that a shorter variation of the activity (see the "there and then" approach mentioned above) may be more realistic that expecting teachers to create timelines over a longer period. A further consideration is that time may be set aside for work on the activity. Unfortunately, it can be difficult to convince educational decision-makers to set aside extra time for teachers' professional development, especially when they may not see an immediate "tangible" benefit from the activity.

There may also be a lack of motivation and enthusiasm for teachers to take part in the activity. The first point to be made in this regard is that, in my view, it is counter-productive to make reflective practice activities such as the timeline activity mandatory. Simply put, if teachers' hearts are not fully in it, there is little point in insisting that they take part. The second point is that even teachers who are interested in the activity should ideally be incentivised in some way. Participants need to be told what the potential benefits of the activity are, for example by showing "success stories" such as some of those included in this book. Moreover, ideally, they need some official recognition that actually counts towards something in terms of their professional progression (what this looks like in practice will vary from context-to-context).

A final important consideration to mention is that timelines do not always lead to positive emotions. For example, in Bremner & Li (2024), Mingyu Li and I encountered two teachers who, although finding the timeline activity useful overall, unearthed some negative experiences which needed to be manoeuvred with caution. Moreover, by analysing their lives through the timeline activity, participants may realise that their current working situation is less than satisfactory, thus potentially leading them to consider moving workplaces or even the education profession itself. This is a rare, but nonetheless possible, outcome of such a deep, intrinsically meaningful reflective practice activity.

Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have examined some of the most important practical considerations when planning and implementing a timeline activity. I hope that such guidance provides the springboard for any practitioners considering trialling such an activity in their own contexts. It is important to highlight that each context will require a slightly different approach. It is therefore essential that the individuals reading this chapter mould the general principles of the timeline activity to their own contexts.

The overall spirit of "adapting to context" is demonstrated in the way Lilia and her colleagues took the more general ideas expressed in this chapter and adapted it to a specific Mexican university context. In the next chapter Lilia exemplifies how this adaptation can take place.

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Chapter 4. The reflective path in Mexico: designing a timeline-based professional development programme

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Introduction

The previous two chapters focused on the theoretical underpinnings of timelines as a tool for reflective practice (Chapter 2) and practical considerations of how to set up a timeline-based activity (Chapter 3). One of the key considerations highlighted in Chapter 3 was that timeline activities will look differently based on the needs of stakeholders in different contexts. It is from this important starting point that we now turn to the main focus of the book: how the general aims of the timeline activity were taken forward with English language teachers within a specific Mexican context. In this chapter, I explain the process of designing and implementing the professional development activity, from inception to implementation.

The creation of a meaningful professional development project requires careful consideration of both the theoretical underpinnings and the practical needs of the participants. In the context of this project, I aimed to design a project that not only introduced reflective practices but also empowered teachers to engage deeply with their professional journeys. The concept of using timelines as a central tool for reflection emerged from the need to provide teachers with a structured yet flexible way to examine their career paths, identify key moments of growth, and confront challenges. In designing this project, we collaborated with educators, researchers, and practitioners to ensure it was relevant to the specific challenges faced by English teachers in one specific region in Mexico. This process involved adapting existing models of reflective practice to fit the local context, integrating innovative teaching strategies, and fostering a supportive environment where teachers could share and learn from each other.

My background

I was born in the State of Mexico and, throughout my childhood, lived in various cities across the north and centre of the country. My journey into English language teaching (ELT) began more than 30 years ago, somewhat by chance. Over the years, I gained

experience teaching students at all levels in different cities and educational institutions. About 15 years into my career, I transitioned from teaching languages to training teachers, which deepened my interest in teacher professional development. My focus has since evolved towards an integrative pedagogy that promotes social justice and inclusion.

Pursuing a master's degree in Mexico opened the door to research, leading me to explore new dimensions of teaching and learning. As part of this academic and professional development journey, I later pursued my PhD at the University of Southampton, where I met Nicky. This experience further shaped my commitment to fostering meaningful, context-sensitive teacher education.

The initial idea of timelines

This professional development initiative was designed and implemented by me (Lilia), in consultation with teachers at a Mexican university. However, the initial idea originated from Nicky, given his academic explorations into timelines as a tool for professional development. In the first part of this chapter, Nicky has contributed a vignette in which he introduces his background, how he made connections with me, and what role he played in the project's creation.

“

NICKY

I am a UK national, originally from the city of Newcastle in the North-East of England. However, when I was a young adult, I ended up living in Mexico, for a total of about six years. During this time, I developed my career as an English language teacher, and, later, became involved in teacher training. I fell in love with Mexico and its people and still consider it my second home. Indeed, despite moving back to the UK where I now work as a university lecturer, I have maintained my links with Mexico, personally and professionally.

I "fell into" an interest in timelines while studying my PhD, which explored the way Mexican teachers' beliefs and practices developed over time. As part of a life history approach (see Chapter 2), I experimented with using a written timeline, without there being (or me being aware of) a great body of literature on timelines. I found using timelines to be effective during my PhD and subsequently decided to explore them more extensively. I began to understand why timelines were particularly effective; what they offered that other forms of reflective practice, like interviews, did not. I

subsequently wrote a journal article making this case and specially making the case for the "take-home" variation of the timeline (Bremner, 2020).

Up to this point, I had envisioned timelines as being useful for *research* purposes, given that they had helped me explore participants' life histories, which had facilitated a more detailed exploration into complex phenomena. However, it soon became clear to me that the timelines had done more than just supported my research: they had benefited the participants themselves. After the timeline activity, participants were saying things to me like "*I've never thought that way about my practice*", and many expressed that the timeline had simply made them feel good about their teaching and what they had achieved up to now. It struck me that the timelines could have additional benefits which might even become more important than the purpose that they were designed for: that is, they could thus be used as a tool for teacher professional development. With one of the chapter authors of this book, Mingyu Li, we trialled the timeline activity with 25 additional English language teachers, who expressed largely positive views of the activity (Bremner & Li, 2024). I wondered about the extent to which the activity might therefore be useful more broadly.

This coincided with me encountering a call for small-scale funding (the Hornby Trust's Teaching Association Awards). I initially thought that it would be interesting to see if the timeline activity could be trialled out with a larger number of participants, but also to see if the initial way in which I had designed it could be adapted to be more meaningful within a specific context.

This is where my connections with Lilia came in. I had met Lilia when she was completing her doctorate at the University of Southampton in the UK; I was a Teaching Fellow in ELT TESOL at the time. We quickly developed both an intellectual appreciation for each other's work and a friendship. I therefore suggested that Lilia might want to take the timeline activity and adapt it to the context in which she was working, a supervisory position in which she was involved in designing the professional development of many university teachers in Mexico.

Lilia enthusiastically agreed and I began by asking her, and one of her colleagues Milton (who has also contributed a chapter of this book), to produce their own timelines and carry out the activity themselves. As expected, it was fascinating to hear about Lilia and Milton's stories, and they expressed that the process had been insightful for their own development. From this, Lilia, in collaboration with Milton and others, designed a project to adapt such an activity to the needs of their own context. She applied to the Hornby Trust Teaching Association Awards and was successful in acquiring small-scale funding, which facilitated the project. I did not participate in any of the activities after this point, and I made it very clear that I was happy for Lilia to make any changes that she felt made sense. Lilia took a proactive role to develop what was clearly a very meaningful series of activities for the teachers. I will now pass you over to Lilia to explain how she did so!

Having provided a description of Nicky's initial role in the professional development initiative, I now expand in much more detail about how the project came to fruition.

Experiencing timelines first-hand

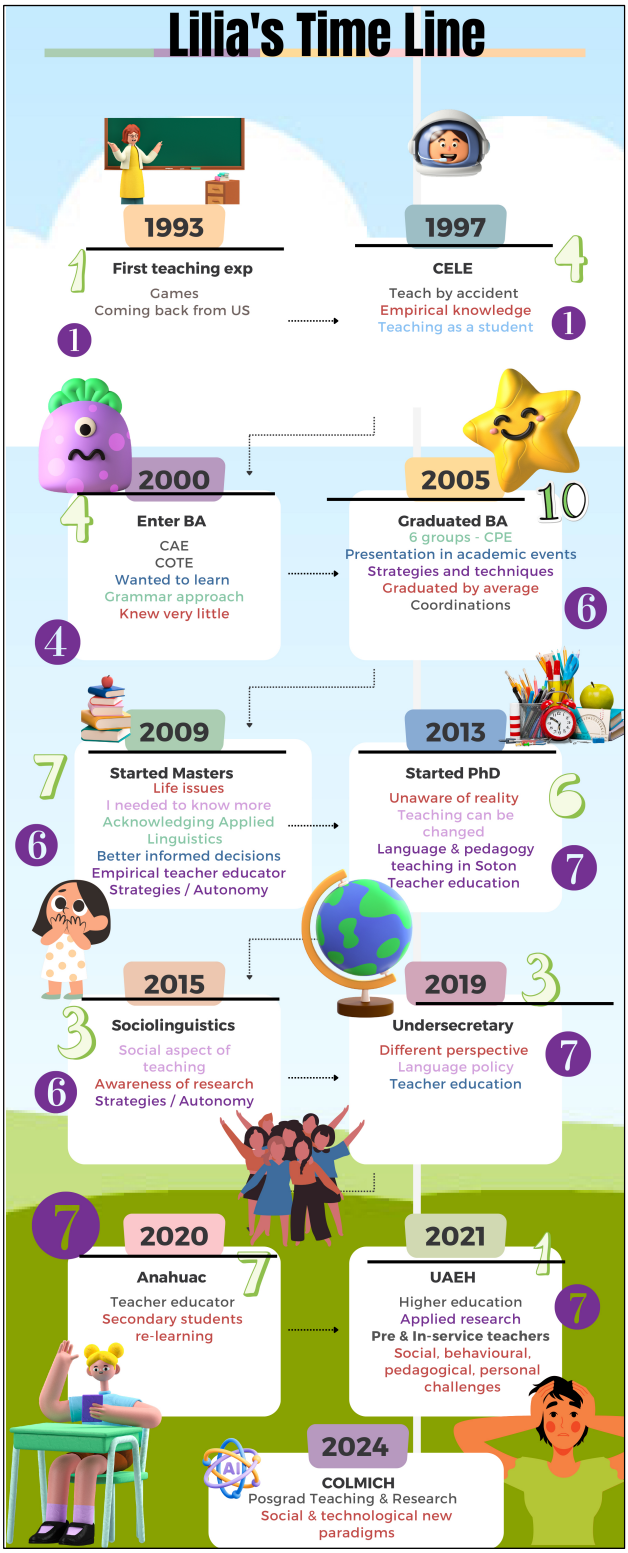
One of the key experiences which motivated me to pursue the timeline activity further was actually taking part in the timeline activity myself. As Nicky narrated in the vignette above, in the summer of 2022, he wrote and invited me to participate in a project about using timelines for professional reflection. Nicky had been exploring how timelines could serve as a reflective tool for teachers, allowing them to document and analyse their professional development. The project's aim was to help educators gain deeper insights into their careers and identify significant milestones. Intrigued by the idea, I accepted the invitation, recognising that this reflective practice might offer me an opportunity to reconsider my own teaching journey. Nicky asked me if I knew of some other teachers who would be interested in participating in the project, so I invited some of my department colleagues at the university and Milton was one who initially came on board.

The first stage of the project required us to create our own professional timeline. Nicky encouraged us to reflect on key moments in our teaching careers: times of change, learning, or significant challenges. During this process, I talked to Milton about creating our timelines, and it was him who told me about an IT tool to create professional looking materials: Canva. I took his advice, researched how to use it and created my own timeline (Fig. 4.1) before the next meeting with Nicky.

I started reflecting on my teaching path, which led me to recall not only the achievements but also the struggles I had faced in balancing the demands of teaching with my own professional growth. As I worked on my timeline, it became clear how much I had developed over the years and how different my perspective of what I have lived as a teacher is nowadays.

Almost a month after we had met for the first time, Milton and I met with Nicky individually to discuss our timeline and the impact this reflection may have on our teaching practice and in that conversation, it became clearer to me the usefulness of the timeline as a reflection tool.

Figure 4.1. Lilia's timeline



Early design of the programme

Sometime later, Nicky contacted me with an exciting proposition. He had come across a call for projects from the Hornby Educational Trust and suggested that I submitted a project proposal that centred on professional development for teachers. The idea was to use the timeline technique as a foundation for this initiative. He explained that the emphasis of the project should be on "decentring": a concept that resonated with me, especially considering the diverse contexts teachers in Mexico face. This notion of decentring (Banegas et al., 2022; Padwad & Smith, 2023) particularly caught my attention because it aligned with my belief that meaningful educational change must come from within the context it is carried out in (Bórquez-Morales et al., 2023). Too often, professional development initiatives in Mexico are based on imported methodologies or frameworks that do not fully account for the unique realities of our classrooms. While such ideas can be inspiring, they are not always practical or effective when applied without adaptation. During my PhD studies, I had the opportunity to talk to several Mexican teachers, and they entrusted me with their lived experience and deep understanding of their students' needs, that's why I really believe they are best positioned to decide how to adapt their teaching practices. Our educational context is shaped by cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic factors that cannot simply be considered as equal to those in other parts of the world. This project, therefore, was an opportunity to observe local expertise and empower teachers to craft solutions tailored to the realities and needs of their learners.

The more we discussed it, the more I saw this as an opportunity to create something that could genuinely help teachers at the institution where I worked. One observation that struck me during my time in this institution was how teachers from rural or distant campuses of the university where I worked were only offered professional development opportunities that were not actually tailored to their particular context. They were not always asked about their specific needs or the challenges they encountered in their unique contexts. I wanted to design a project that addressed these gaps and provided teachers with the tools to reflect on their practice, improve their skills, and ultimately benefit their students. I wanted to design a project that prioritised context-specific reflection, empowering teachers to critically examine their practices in light of their local realities.

However, I quickly realised that implementing the timeline technique in its original form would not work in my environment. Nicky had used it as a "take-home" activity, but I knew that in my institution, teachers were overwhelmed with workload and often lacked the time for extended reflection. In our initial discussions, teachers expressed that while they valued professional development, they found it difficult to engage in reflective practice due to time constraints. It was clear that I needed to adapt the methodology.

The solution came after much thought; I decided that structured, guided workshops would provide the best format for teachers at my institution. This approach would ensure that participants could dedicate time specifically to reflect on their practice, guided by the timeline activity, while still considering their limited schedules. Moreover, to meet institutional requirements, I needed to design the course in a way that was both innovative and aligned with the certification guidelines of the institution. The sessions had to be divided in two separate actions. The first encounter where teachers could work on their timelines had to be two hours long or less, so that teachers could take them without disrupting their planning. The second encounter had to be designed so as to align it with the certification guidelines of the institution: this meant the proposal had to include a minimum of 20 hours of engagement for the participants. Additionally, teachers needed to produce some form of objective and observable work that could be assessed. Balancing these institutional demands with the innovative and reflective aims of the overall initiative was a challenge, but it also provided a framework within which the project could operate effectively.

I spent considerable time reviewing previous projects supported by the Hornby Educational Trust to ensure that our proposal would align with their priorities. The emphasis was on creating a programme that would not only help teachers reflect on their professional paths but also equip them with practical skills to improve their teaching.

Implementing the initiative: Phase 1

The project unfolded in a series of carefully structured phases. During the first phase, I visited different academic units that are part of the university where I worked, but that are located in regions as far as 6-hour drive away from the state capital. This phase involved a two-hour workshop in May-June 2023, during which teachers explored the role of reflection in teaching and created personal timelines (Fig. 4.2). During these

visits, we presented the concept of the timeline technique, explaining not only how to create one but also its broader significance as a tool for professional reflection. We discussed the importance of reflective practice and highlighted the tangible benefits it could bring to their teaching, such as increased self-awareness, improved decision-making, and enhanced classroom strategies. Indeed, I emphasised the importance of reflective teaching, not just as a surface-level thought process, but as a deeper cycle of reflection, inspired by models like Gibbs' reflective cycle (Gibbs, 1988; Podder & Mizan, 2021).

Figure 4.2. Image of the facilitator introducing the timeline project with teachers



We also talked about how beliefs shape teaching practices, distinguishing between "core" and "peripheral" beliefs (Phipps & Borg, 2009) and how these are not static but can evolve over time. I introduced the steps for creating a timeline, offering practical examples, and addressed their concerns about how much detail to include the format to use, and how to handle sensitive events. Throughout these discussions, I highlighted the potential of timelines to uncover insights, foster self-awareness, and improve teaching practices by helping teachers reflect on their unique contexts. Ultimately, I wanted to create a space where they felt empowered to share their experiences and recognised the value of reflecting on their professional growth.

In addition to sharing the methodology, we made it a priority to open a communication channel with the teachers, making it clear that this project was as much

about listening to their needs as it was about offering tools. We invited them to share their thoughts, challenges, and aspirations, emphasising that their insights would shape how we could support their continued professional growth. These conversations laid the groundwork for collaboration, ensuring the project was responsive to the realities and contexts of the teachers involved. This was followed by a series of online interviews in June and July 2023, where participants had the opportunity to discuss their timelines in detail and share their professional needs.

Implementing the initiative: Phase 2

The second major phase took place between July and August 2023, with a 20-hour course focused on contextualised professional development, designed to equip teachers with practical tools and strategies tailored to their unique teaching environments (Fig. 4.3).

Figure 4.3. Image of the facilitator leading the course with teachers



Finally, follow-up interviews were conducted in July 2024 to assess the effectiveness of the timeline-based approach and the initiative as a whole, gathering feedback on their usefulness and impact on the teachers' ongoing professional growth. In the following part of this chapter, I will explain in detail the whole process of the training.

Data gathering to inform the design process

As explained earlier; after visiting teachers on various campuses, we conducted interviews to gather insights that would inform the creation of the sessions. In this part of the process, more colleagues came on board; Milton, Martha, and Hilda (who have contributed chapters to this book) conducted interviews. To ensure consistency in the data collection process, all the interviews conducted with the teachers followed the same structured format. I created an interview guide with clear instructions for the team members, ensuring a standardised approach while allowing for flexibility. The guide included sections to thank participants, remind them of the value of their experiences, and assure them of anonymity, even offering options to adjust their displayed names for privacy during recording.

The interview itself was divided into three main parts:

- *Introduction*: Participants were asked how they felt about their teaching practice and invited to share their timeline.
- *Core questions*: These focused on key moments in their teaching careers, highlighting positive experiences, contextual constraints, coping strategies, and lessons learned from challenges. Teachers also reflected on their growth and perspective when looking back at their journeys.
- *Wrap-up*: The final section encouraged teachers to evaluate the usefulness of the timeline activity, share how they felt about the experience, and suggest areas they wished to work on or include in the course I was designing for them.

Additional suggestions encouraged interviewers to explore participants' academic backgrounds if they arose organically, and avoiding leading or negative questions to minimise bias. The guide also stressed the importance of notetaking and maintaining a focus on the interviewers' own experiences.

After we asked teachers what they hoped the course would include, we transcribed all their responses and summarised teachers' requests. Their responses highlighted a range of professional needs and aspirations. For instance, one teacher expressed a strong desire for access to resources and materials related to teaching and research in language education. They envisioned the ideal opportunity as a PhD programme combining English language teaching, technology, and innovative methods, and suggested including discussions with experts in researching language teaching. Another teacher emphasised the importance of exploring techniques, resources, and apps to improve their own English proficiency, enabling them to provide better classes for their students. A third teacher focused on creating a learning environment that fosters student comfort and empathy, particularly when navigating the use of technological tools. They also expressed interest in strategies for organising content and managing student expectations, especially when preparing for tests, without compromising the quality of the content delivered. These conversations were essential in ensuring that the course would be tailored to the actual needs of the teachers rather than imposing a generic training programme on them.

While researching for the project, I came across a position paper by the University of Oxford on self-directed professional development in ELT (Mercer et al., 2022). Reading it led me to reflect on an important point: professional development is not just about addressing areas of weakness; it is also about building on strengths and exploring new teaching methods out of curiosity. This perspective encourages teachers to take ownership of their learning journey, fostering a more personalised and meaningful professional growth experience. The introduction of new ideas is presented as a means to empower educators, equipping them to create and pursue their own professional development opportunities. This empowerment, in turn, leads to more effective teaching practices and better student outcomes. Inspired by this perspective, I sought to combine the specific requests teachers shared during our interviews with the tools and resources I had encountered throughout my professional career, aiming to design a course that was both relevant and empowering.

Content of the course

The content of the final course, informed by the previously described data gathering, included several key components:

Reflection. During the interviews, teachers were asked to revisit their timelines and consider whether they were on track to becoming the educators they aspired to be. This exercise allowed them to pinpoint areas of strength and areas for improvement. By listening to the teachers and recognising the immense value they placed on reflection, I drew upon reflective techniques to design activities that would encourage teachers to examine whether what they believed they were implementing in their teaching practices was truly occurring in their classrooms. Additionally, I aimed to help them reflect on the contextual factors (Borquez-Morales & Carretero-Hernandez, 2023) they perceived as hindering the effectiveness of their teaching techniques. To achieve this, one of our first sessions included an activity called A *Planfible Mape*, in which I guided teachers through learning a "non-existent" language. This exercise allowed them to experience the learning process from their students' perspective, fostering empathy and encouraging reflection on their teaching practices. By stepping into the learners' shoes, teachers were able to critically assess how the materials and activities they use in their own classrooms genuinely support their students' learning.

Inclusive education. We introduced sessions on teaching students with diverse needs, including those with neurological and physiological differences such as Asperger's Syndrome, colour blindness, and hearing impairments. The decision to introduce these elements was driven by a combination of participant feedback and my own observations. During the interviews, teachers expressed having diverse needs in their classrooms, particularly as their students required different types of support. However, they were not specific about how these needs manifested in practice. This lack of clarity, coupled with a broader desire to support teachers in meeting varied student needs, led me to introduce a focus on neuronal diversity. I wanted to raise awareness about how we perceive our students and encourage teachers to consider the diverse cognitive and developmental needs that may affect their learning experiences.

Technology. Given the increasing role of technology in education, we included sessions on the use of AI tools like ChatGPT and Twee, as well as strategies for teaching in classrooms with limited access to technology. The push for incorporating this focus came from both the participants and me. The teachers expressed a need for additional resources to support their teaching practices, particularly in addressing the challenges they faced in the classroom. At the same time, ChatGPT was made more widely available, schools and universities started adopting it for various purposes, including

assistance in writing, tutoring, and as an interactive learning tool (du Boulay, 2022). As I had attended a couple of conferences where AI's potential in language teaching was being discussed, I believed it would offer something new and engaging for the teachers. By bringing this emerging topic into the discussion, I hoped to motivate and inspire them with fresh, relevant tools for their teaching.

Flipped learning. We explored flipped learning models and the importance of adapting teaching to local contexts, focusing on how teachers could balance global and local perspectives in their teaching. When teachers shared the challenges they had faced, many mentioned the difficulties brought on by the pandemic, particularly in terms of helping students learn effectively. In response, I thought it would be valuable to introduce flipped learning as a reflective approach. Although this methodology has been around for a long time, it is not widely used by many teachers, especially in the institution where the project was conducted (Perez-Castilla et al., 2022). I believed that by exploring this model, teachers could discover new strategies to better engage their students and overcome some of the challenges posed by the different learning models emerging gaining traction during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Contextualised teaching. The most important aspect that emerged in discussions with the teachers was their recognition that, while they attended professional training courses and had access to resources and materials, these were often not suitable for their specific contexts. For instance, teaching in Huejutla, located in the Huasteca region, presented unique challenges. Many of the residents are Nahuatl speakers and the town is quite distant from the state capital. This made the teaching experience very different from that in Pachuca, the state capital, which has a larger population, greater access to resources, and a more diverse range of academic offerings. Furthermore, in Pachuca, students can pursue a wide array of majors such as architecture, computer science, robotics, applied mathematics, telecommunications, language teaching, social work, sociology, and history. In contrast, the Huejutla campus offers a more limited selection, including law, computer science, administration, nursing, and general surgery, with no options for postgraduate studies. Similarly, in Tulancingo, students can study engineering related to food production, veterinary sciences, forest management, and biotechnology at the undergraduate level. Recognising that understanding the specific contexts in which education takes place is essential for developing effective pedagogical approaches, and that different educational environments require tailored responses to meet students' needs (Bórquez-Morales et

al., 2023), the course was designed to encourage collaboration. Teachers worked in teams based on their specific teaching contexts, allowing them to apply what they were learning in a practical and meaningful way. This approach ensured that they could develop concrete "takeaways," such as materials, activities, and lesson plans, which they could implement with their students at the start of the new school term.

My personal takeaway

Reflecting on this journey, I am struck by how much I have learned - not just from the process of designing and implementing this initiative, but from the teachers themselves. The timeline technique, while simple, proved to be a powerful tool for professional reflection and growth. It allowed teachers to step back and critically evaluate their careers, making space for meaningful change at the same time that it helped teachers identify where they wanted to get and the kind of support they needed to reach their goals.

Through this project, I had the privilege of contributing to the professional development of teachers who had often been overlooked in traditional training programmes. By creating a course that was tailored to their needs and rooted in reflective practice, we were able to make a real difference in their teaching and, ultimately, in the learning experiences of their students. As I continue to work with Nicky, I can't help but notice that by taking the time to reflect on our own journeys, we can better support the growth of others, fostering a community of learners and educators who are committed to continuous improvement and whose stories in this book show the experience from a different perspective.

Exploring the experiences of the participants

The following chapters provide a deep dive into the diverse experiences of the teachers who participated in the timeline project, highlighting its impact across various contexts and professional journeys. Chapters 5 and 6 are pivotal in understanding the broader impact of the timeline project, not only on the individual participants but also on those who took on more active roles in the research process and course delivery. Martha, Hilda, and Milton, who initially engaged in the timeline activity as participants and later became integral members of the research team. Their journey exemplifies the transformative power of reflective practice, as they transitioned from reflecting on their own teaching journeys to supporting others in doing the same.

Chapters 5 and 6 highlight how the timeline activity initially served as a reflective tool for Martha, Hilda, and Milton, all of whom work with pre-service and in-service teachers. Martha and Hilda used the activity to examine their professional journeys before joining the research team, where they documented their colleagues' experiences and later became facilitators in the course sessions. Similarly, Milton, one of the first participants in the project, transitioned from engaging in personal reflection to actively supporting others through the same process. Their experiences demonstrate how the timeline evolved from an individual exercise into a collaborative approach for professional development, fostering meaningful dialogue and growth within the teaching community.

Similarly, in Part 2 of this book, Chapters 7 to 11 highlight the diverse and meaningful contributions of five dedicated teachers whose experiences enriched the project. Elizabeth and Liliana, from the most remote region, shared powerful insights into how the timeline activity supported their professional growth despite living quite far from the capital. Olga, whose closer proximity allowed her to participate in person, contributed reflections shaped by greater access and engagement, showing how context influences learning. Guadalupe's sustained use of the timeline tool in her own teacher education work illustrates the long-term impact and potential for replication. Maribel, an experienced educator, demonstrated that reflective practice can be transformative even when one has extensive experience. Finally, Isabel, a pre-service teacher educator, offered a valuable perspective on the importance of continuous adaptation.

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Chapter 5: From foundations to practice: Contextualising reflective teacher development through timelines

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Introduction

This chapter discusses the role of timelines in professional development programmes, describing the process we went through to provide contextualised learning opportunities for the participants, from experiencing sessions as attendees to participating in delivery of the sessions. As explained in Chapter 4, for the design and implementation of the course, Lilia, the project leader, considered our teaching and learning context as pivotal to offer a decentred professional development initiative with the aim of having a meaningful impact on teachers' practices. Our intention as teacher trainers was aligned with that goal so that we could meet the teachers' personal and institutional needs and empower them to continue developing professionally.

The chapter provides an account of how teachers' experiences in this course were perceived to have impacted their professional practices, and how timelines can be used to facilitate continuous professional development. Extracts from participants' experiences are shared, highlighting the different moments in their careers where they have grown as ELT professionals and the role of timelines as eye-openers to self-initiate professional growth.

Our involvement in the project

As teacher trainers who had been involved in teacher training programmes at the institution before, when we were invited by Lilia to participate in the delivery of some of the sessions, we were interested in providing a new learning experience for teachers. Sadly, we had realised that in previous professional development courses offered to teachers by the university, there had not been a great deal of impact on teachers' practices.

This situation led us to investigate the issue more deeply, and we found out that although professional development is often viewed positively in many educational

settings, it is frequently based on the assumption that there are issues in *teachers'* practices that need to be addressed. As a result, educational policies are developed at national, local, or school levels to identify these problems, leading to the creation of programmes and activities intended to fix them (Freeman, 2024). This top-down approach to teacher training operates under the assumption that there is a gap between current practices and ideal practices, as perceived by individuals not directly involved in daily teaching. However, this approach often fails to produce lasting positive effects because it overlooks the agency of teachers in their own learning processes.

According to Giraldo (2013), for professional development programmes to be successful, programme developers should not only consider the suggestions provided by scholars in the field, but also consider teachers' needs, knowledge, skills, and experiences. One way to explore teachers' professional lives is by conducting a need analysis to find out what teachers do, what they know, what they would like to know, and what their experiences and beliefs for language teaching and learning are. From such needs analyses, then professional development programmes can be created, which might include:

a) theoretical input that responds to the needs and wants identified in the needs analysis.
b) explicit activities for teachers to discuss issues around theoretical underpinnings.
c) opportunities to put theory in practice.
d) opportunities for teachers to reflect on their practice.

In this project, the process of visiting teachers in their teaching contexts and asking them to do their timelines and then interviewing them to better understand their successes, challenges, and concerns allowed Lilia to design a course that considered their needs and guided them to take their professional development in their own hands. As part of the team of teacher trainers, we also participated by interviewing teachers, which helped inform our decision-making for the design and implementation of the course.

From our perspective, this is what adds value to the course: the fact that it was tailored to teachers based on their stories, the challenges they face in their contexts, and their professional development interests. Acknowledging teachers' milestones and successes as well as listening to their experiences explaining the timelines also

transmits the idea that this course did not necessarily respond to something that needed to be "changed", "repaired" or "improved". Instead, it intended to use teachers' previous knowledge and experiences as the basis for identifying learning needs, and empowering teachers to self-initiate professional development in the future. This different approach to teacher training therefore contributed to creating a different atmosphere for participants which we believe resulted in more effective teacher learning.

In the following paragraphs, we explain our roles as participants in this project. We first experienced timelines as language teachers and then transitioned to using timelines as tools for planning and within teacher training sessions.

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MARTHA

My role in the project was primarily training based, but I also completed the timeline activity in order to better place myself to facilitate the course as a trainer. When I participated in the timeline activity, I found the exercise thought-provoking and challenging at the same time. The exercise of reflecting on my practice and identifying milestones in my professional career not only allowed me to become more aware of my achievements, but also to identify key events that consciously or unconsciously have made me change my practice. One of the parts of the activity that I found particularly enriching was the interview I had with Lilia to explore what areas I still need to strengthen and could come next in terms of professional development.

My role at the University's Linguistics Department involves teacher training and conducting research projects, so I helped conduct the interviews with teachers. Listening to their responses gave me a more in-depth understanding of their careers and inspired me to deliver a session full of knowledge and experiences that teachers could find relevant and practical and could impact their teaching practices.

It is important to mention that before this project, I had participated with staff from the department in charge of administering the language teaching and learning at the university, in the design and delivery of the courses named "*Building Effective Teaching 1 and 2*", which were created to introduce the textbooks and teaching methodology used at the institution. Even though those courses were carefully planned with the hope that teachers would benefit from them, the interviews with the teachers made it clear that the decisions on content had come from the authorities, instead of the teachers themselves. Consequently, some teachers commented they had been reluctant to participate in the activities and only took the courses because they were compulsory.

With this in mind, I wanted to provide a different experience for teachers. I was interested in learning different paths towards training which could have an impact on participants, encouraging them to develop their autonomy in their teaching practices. Therefore, I used all these insights to design and deliver one of the online sessions.

HILDA

I was part of the project because as the Head of the Linguistics Department, I helped to contact the administrators in charge of the teaching of English at the different schools of our university. I was part of the timeline workshop as a participant myself, to live the actual experience of reflecting on my teaching career. I also conducted interviews with two participants during the first stage of the project.

When I learned we were going to be working with a timeline as a tool to reflect on my teaching practice, I asked the main researcher of the project to share some readings with me because I was not familiar with the topic. When creating my timeline, I went back in time and wrote the most important events in my career so far. I started by writing down the years and then I wrote keywords linked to specific events that were meaningful for me throughout my career. I decided to focus on three main episodes of my career because they have shaped and informed my teaching practice in various ways: as a teaching assistant in the United States, as a language teacher educator, but also as an international student in the United Kingdom.

This experience of working on the timeline allowed me to reflect on my own teaching practice and it helped me identify my weaknesses and strengths as an English language teacher. Being part of this activity made me realise that it is important to be aware that the experiences and decisions I have taken have shaped my teaching style. This enriching experience also helped me as a teacher educator because it made me identify some areas I need to work on. Some other areas I identified as a result of listening to others sharing their timelines. Finally, the initiative made me reflect about the importance of designing professional development programmes based on their participants' needs instead of imposing them.

Participants' perceptions on the impact of the timeline activity on their professional development

Having now explained our own experiences of participating in, and contributing to, the professional development initiative, we now turn to the experiences of the teachers. Approximately one year after the delivery of the course, we conducted semi-structured interviews to explore teachers' perceptions on the impact of the initiative on their practice and professional development. An email was sent to all participants who had taken the course, face-to-face and online; and four teachers agreed to be interviewed to whom we assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities. Please note that the interviewees referred to in this chapter are different from the teachers who shared their stories in Chapters 7 to 11 of this book.

As teacher educators at the institution, we brought a dual perspective to this stage of the project, both as participants who had engaged with the timeline activity to reflect on their own teaching, and as facilitators committed to supporting the professional growth of others. Analysing the interviews gave us a unique opportunity to deepen our understandings of the diverse ways teachers experienced the course, the value they found in reflective tools like timelines, and the areas of their professional lives that were most impacted. This process not only reinforced the importance of context-sensitive reflection but also allowed us to connect more meaningfully with the realities and aspirations of our peers, further informing our own practices as teacher trainers and collaborators in professional development.

Participants' responses to the interviews were transcribed verbatim by Lilia and then we conducted a thematic analysis to identify key themes. We began the analysis by reading all the transcripts, we then highlighted salient phrases or words in the light of the literature review. The next step was to write these initial words and phrases and look for commonalities and differences until a final list emerged. We classified teachers' experiences into four main themes: "*Increased self-awareness*", "*Meaningful reflection*", "*Impact on teaching practices*", and "*Motivation to pursue future professional development*". In the space that follows; to share the most relevant experiences, we briefly present a series of extracts from participants' responses.

Increased self-awareness

Participants agreed that creating the timeline about relevant aspects of their learning and teaching experience allowed them to reflect and identify positive and negative practices throughout their careers as English teachers, as stated by Moly below:

> *I think making the timeline was a way of becoming aware—we often don't know what we're doing—but doing it helped me reflect on my good and bad practices.* (Moly)

Vianey stated that the timeline took her back to her early days as an English teacher, allowing her to reflect on what she had achieved as a teacher. Creating the timeline was very useful for her because she reflected about her career so far:

> *So, I think when I did it the first time, it made me think of the different things I've done as a teacher, because I started with primary school and then I've been doing different things. So, I think it's a useful activity, just to reflect on how we have been doing things*. (Vianey)

Laura, on the other hand, reflected on the effect of sharing the timeline with other people. She stated that hearing other colleagues share their timelines made her become aware of her own teaching practices:

> *When the reflection takes place with other people you can see yourselves from different points of view, from different perspectives. And value what you have done and what is next.* (Laura)

From teachers comments we can see that these participants agreed that the timeline was a useful tool to reflect and become aware of their own teaching practices to identify successful and unsuccessful practices and how these have shaped their careers as English teachers.

Meaningful reflection

Similarly, all participants in the interviews concurred that being participating in a course that was tailored to their needs was conducive to reflection. They expressed that part of the reason for their successful engagement was because the contents were relevant to their needs. The fact that the content was connected to their realities gave them the starting point to keep them motivated, as stated by Moly and Laura:

> *It motivated me to do more. I'm aware that there is always something to learn, but it motivated me to keep doing that.* (Laura)

> *Making a timeline and reflecting on what I'm doing. If you don't reflect and aren't aware, you might attend thousands of courses, but if you don't find them useful because you don't think and react to what you're doing things not quite right, no matter how many courses you take, you won't change, no matter how many more years you have*. (Moly)

We could perceive a consonant idea when Vianey shared that she found the course useful because it made her reflect on her teaching practices:

> *It was like a different view, and it had a purpose to teach something or to make us reflect on our teaching practice. So, I think that's …Well, I felt that it wasn't a waste of time, so I learned.* (Vianey)

Similarly, Tania commented that the course also allowed her to reflect and become aware of the aspects she still needs to work on:

> *I know that I had my lack of plenty of things and now I'm trying to fulfil all those spaces in between.* (Tania)

These statements reflect that when teachers participate in courses that have been designed based on their needs, they are likely to be more motivated to continue working on their professional development.

Impact on teaching practices

Regarding the implementation of participants' learning in their teaching practice, participants shared concrete examples of how they integrated what they learned during the course into their own teaching practices, demonstrating the relevance and adaptability of the course content to their specific classroom contexts.

For instance, Moly stated that she has incorporated the new contents in her classes:

> *I've been trying to use more of these activities in my practice. For example, in addition to the artificial intelligence that I already told you about, I've also tried to take advantage of action plans and sentences.* (Moly)

Resembling this impact, Laura shared that she puts into practice the contents of the course because they were relevant to her own context and teaching practice:

> *To enrich my teaching practice. As I was mentioning at the beginning, the content is applicable. The content is relevant to our current teaching situation, so it has helped me. It has enriched my activities as a teacher.* (Laura)

Vianey also provided a clear example of one of the tools she learnt on the course and that proved to be effective for her class as shown below:

> *I did something with the tangram, I have a class in Spanish, we were reviewing something about a theory to learn so I used this activity, I just adapted the activity and then at the end of the semester I just finished with that group and I asked them to fill in a questionnaire to give me feedback about the course and one thing that I asked was "what was the activity that they remembered the most, that they liked the most?" and most of them mentioned the tangram activity.* (Vianey)

In summary, participants agreed that putting into practice what they learnt on the course was useful because they were able to relate to the contents of the course and thus consider making adaptations or additions to their teaching practices.

Motivation to pursue future professional development

The reflections shared by participants suggest that the workshop not only encouraged immediate changes in their teaching practices but also inspired a renewed commitment to long-term professional growth. Several teachers expressed a clear intention to pursue further studies and continue learning as a way to strengthen their teaching and respond to new challenges in their careers. Laura, for example, stated that she was keen to continue to learn new things:

> *It* [the course] *motivated me to do more. I'm aware that there is always something to learn, but it motivated me to keep doing that.* (Laura)

When asked in the interview "How did the experience of taking the workshop impact your professional development?" Moly and Tania stated that they plan to start a master's degree and take updating courses that help her design and deliver innovative classes:

> *I told you one of my goals is to continue studying, to take more courses, to have more innovative ideas to implement in my classes.* (Moly)

> *I would like to take a master's degree to learn more about teaching about learning about methods that I can use in my in my classroom. I think that I'm in my comfort zone, and I just do things that I consider relevant for* [my students]*, I mean I'm trying to implement new things that having worked well for me. I continue doing them, but I think that if I study more, I mean if I do the master's, I can learn more things about everything and I can feel better with my students.* (Tania)

In a similar vein, Vianey expressed that she wanted to study a PhD because she enjoyed learning new things and she thinks she is ready for another challenge in her career:

> *After the reflecting, I think my next step is a PhD. I think I have to do it, but it's like my personality. I really like learning, I like reading, and I don't mind because I get bored. If not, I have to look for something more challenging.* (Vianey)

In summary, participants had become increasingly motivated and aware of the need for further professional development opportunities, in order to further improve their teaching practices.

Our overall reflections

Looking back at the experience of facilitating and later analysing the impact of the workshop, we found it deeply meaningful to observe how teachers who we have known for years responded to this professional development initiative. Having first engaged with the timeline activity ourselves, we were in a position to better understand the transformative potential it offered. Although we were only able to interview four teachers, hearing them speak candidly about their renewed motivation, their reflections on past successes and challenges, and their concrete actions to improve their teaching reminded us of the importance of fostering spaces for self-reflection and contextually relevant dialogue in teacher education.

What stood out to us was not only how much the teachers valued the course content, but also how the process allowed them to regain a sense of agency over their development. As we listened to their stories -many of which we had not heard before- it became clear that engaging meaningfully with their professional journeys gave them the clarity to reassess their goals and the confidence to pursue new ones. This dual perspective -in which we both lived the experience and later researched its effects- enriched our understanding of how reflective tools like timelines, when introduced in an environment of trust and relevance, can have a lasting impact on teaching practices and professional aspirations.

On the one hand, as suggested in the experiences shared by some of the participants, the professional development initiative had an impact on teachers' willingness to make changes in their teaching practice and motivation to develop further. They expressed how timelines had made them more aware of their previous achievements and teaching practices. Sharing their experiences with other colleagues also allowed them to reflect on their stories from different perspectives. Participants also provided specific examples of how they had incorporated what they had learnt on the course into their teaching practices, highlighting that their decision to apply those ideas and activities was due to their usefulness in their contexts. The fact that teachers' needs were considered *before* determining the contents of the course was valued by participants, as they perceived that they were gaining something relevant and effective.

On the other hand, teachers shared that the experience had motivated them to continue developing professionally in different ways, from learning things on their own to

doing postgraduate studies. Whether this awareness had been present before or was awakened for the first time during the workshop, it became evident that the participating teachers recognised the importance of continuous learning to enhance their development as English language teaching professionals. Their reflections revealed a growing willingness to keep learning, not only for their own growth but also because they understood that improving their teaching practice could directly impact their students' English learning outcomes.

With regard to the use of timelines as tools for designing and delivering training programmes for teachers, as teacher educators we can share that aligned with what Giraldo (2013) states, taking teachers' needs, knowledge, skills, and experiences into account to develop the course showed to have a positive impact, especially, in participants' attitudes and willingness to keep learning on their own. Moreover, this project has reiterated the notion that it is it is vital to consider participants' views. Training programmes planned on the premise that something needs to be repaired or improved does not only fail to generate long-lasting positive effects (Freeman, 2024) but also takes away participants' responsibility and involvement in their own learning, which often results in demotivation or resistance towards professional development.

Concluding remarks

To conclude, this project showed us that meaningful professional development can have a positive impact when it is context-sensitive and takes into consideration the lived experiences of teachers themselves. For us, engaging in this initiative was both a personal and professional journey. Creating our own timelines allowed us to pause and reflect on our individual trajectories as English language teachers and teacher educators, helping us to identify pivotal moments that have shaped our beliefs and practices. At the same time, contributing to a larger project where a reflective tool like the timeline was adapted to the Mexican context reinforced our belief in the value of localising methodologies. The process of tailoring the timeline activity -originally developed in a different cultural and institutional setting- helped us see how responsive professional development can enhance engagement, build trust, and generate deep reflection among participants. Seeing familiar colleagues respond so positively to the activities we helped deliver and observing their increased awareness of their professional growth and renewed motivation to continue learning, was thought provoking and highly satisfying.

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Chapter 6: Technology and AI: The narrative of experiences and insights through a timeline reflection

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Introduction

Chapter 6 builds on the discussion of professional development introduced in Chapter 5, shifting the focus to my journey with the timeline project. As one of the initial participants, I engaged with the timeline both as a tool for personal reflection and as a means of supporting other educators in professional growth. My experience highlights the transformative potential of reflective practice, illustrating how the timeline methodology not only shaped my own teaching but also equipped me to contribute meaningfully to the training of in-service teachers. This chapter explores how my evolving role -from participant to facilitator-demonstrates the lasting impact of reflective techniques in teacher education.

To transition from the account of my journey with the timeline project to a broader reflection on professional growth in changing educational landscapes, it is important to consider how personal and collective experiences intersect. While this chapter focuses on the development of my role as a facilitator and the transformative potential of reflective practice, it also builds on that foundation by exploring how my teaching has evolved in response to technological and contextual shifts over time. Framed by my timeline, this narrative also connects with the experiences of fellow teachers in the project, offering a comparative perspective on how reflective tools have influenced our teaching practices and professional trajectories, which face significant challenges and changes.

Over the years, our world and societies have undergone significant transformations due to rapid technological advancements. These changes have profoundly influenced our everyday contexts and the interactions within. Education, as a crucial setting, has been subject to this transformation. This chapter examines my narrative on integrating technology in different academic settings, from when I was a student teacher until recently as a university teacher, where I have worked with pre-service and in-service teachers. Such a narrative is the result of making a timeline, which displays my professional growth and facilitates analysis and reflection. Additionally, it is important to include in this chapter how my experience relates to that of other teachers

who have been part of this project to observe and compare the impact of the timeline reflection on them and their teaching practice or professional development.

Reflective practice in the ELT field: An exploration of technological integration through timelines

The ever-changing professional practice of ELT teachers often reflects a journey of changes, and one of the aspects in which this can be observed is the integration of technology within pedagogical practices. As an ELT teacher and lecturer at a public university in Mexico, my career, like many other teachers, has been marked by a gradual, yet significant shift from an environment with little use of technology to one that actively embraces digital tools. Such transformation has been profoundly shaped by different reflective practices that have triggered analysis and self-reflection in technology, among others.

Recently, one of these activities that led me toward the analysis of professional practice and professional development took place with the guidance of Dr Nicholas Bremner. He presented the take-home timeline activity, which, from my point of view, is an invaluable instrument for self-reflection and professional development since such a visual device allows teachers to identify strengths and areas for improvement, shifts, and pivotal moments in their careers. This thoughtful process of reflection provides a holistic view and understanding of one's professional development, making it easier to recognize how past experiences have shaped current practices and how current practices can be modified to continue professionally growing.

While working on the timeline, it became evident how, in the early stages of my teaching career (as early as being a pre-service teacher doing practicum and having a teaching job on a side), technology played a minimal role in the classroom. Teaching methods as well as ways of teaching were predominantly traditional, relying mostly -if not entirely- on textbooks and the use of the board without the aid of digital resources. On the one hand, this was due to the school's facilities and its lack of any technological resources in its classrooms other than old portable CD player stereos. On the other hand, as an early career teacher, I felt comfortable and safe following the book, leaving aside other types of activities, including those related to the use of technology. Completing all the exercises from the book was of utmost importance. The absence of technology extended to lesson planning and administrative tasks, where paper-based and handwritten work were the norm because that was part of the school

guidelines, in addition to the fear of the (mis)use of technology and the possible issues that may have arisen along with it. It was not only until later in my career that the potential benefits of technological tools began to be considered and explored to widen the available resources and abilities.

As mentioned previously, the reflection commences with a procedure that requires educators to construct a chronological timeline where they highlight significant events and milestones in their careers, which serves as a captivating tool for introspection and analysis. However, this exercise is not only a visual activity but a methodological approach that offers a structured way to reflect on past experiences, current practices, and future aspirations. The timeline reflection activity is a multifaceted process developed throughout several stages. Initially, teachers must recall and document significant events, such as adopting new teaching methods, introducing technology, or notable achievements and challenges. These experiences are arranged chronologically, creating a visual representation of their professional journey. The resulting timeline serves as a comprehensive overview of their career, providing a basis for deeper reflection and analysis.

By visually mapping out their key career points, teachers can gain insights into how their practices have evolved. For instance, in my experience, creating the timeline allowed me to identify crucial moments, professionally speaking, analysing, and assessing my teaching practices. Moreover, this visual instrument helped me to clarify my evolution and growth as an English language teacher, implementing increasingly diverse activities, strategies, and pedagogical methods. This was also true for other participants, for instance, Moly, who stated that:

> *Making the timeline was a way of becoming aware—we often don't know what we're doing—but doing it helped me reflect on my good and bad practices.* (Moly)

It is remarkable to observe how Moly was able to notice her progress by recognising both the good practices and the room for improvement.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Bremner & Li (2024) point out that the timeline activity offers a space for teachers to reflect on the challenges they have faced and the solutions they have developed. This aspect of the timeline activity is particularly valuable, as it allows teachers to critically examine their responses to various challenges and identify areas for further improvement. Moly emphasised this when she mentioned that:

> *…doing the timeline and participating in the sessions helped me to be more aware of what I'm not doing well and how I can change them. I've been changing a lot of my lesson plans. You know, you have the same class for ages, and then you end up doing things the same way. But I've been trying to redesign my lesson plans, to implement things.* (Moly)

It is clear to see how the timeline serves as a means of self-reflection on the teaching practice, and it has an impact on the willingness to go further and improve what one has been doing for a while repeatedly.

Fortunately, the project also allowed us to give recognition to those teachers who shared they engage in a constant reflection cycle, whether consciously or not, always trying to adapt their teaching methods, materials, and so on. Irma, another project participant, expressed that:

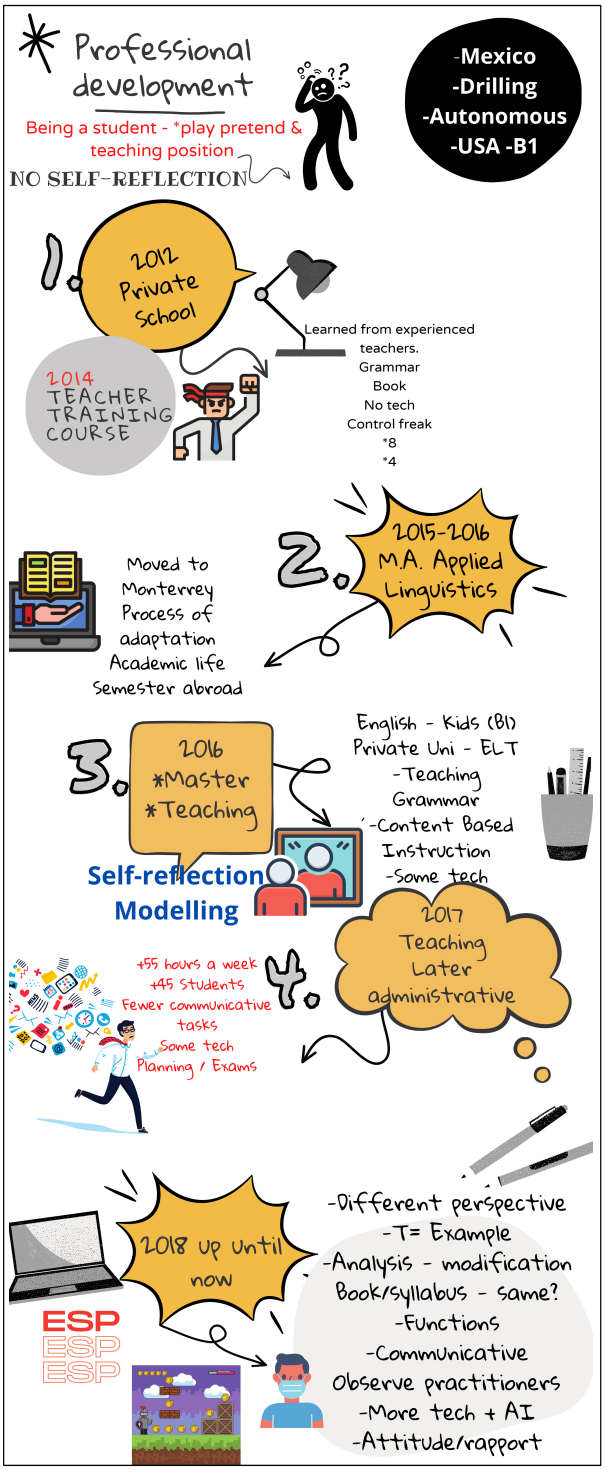
> *The timeline allows you to reflect on what you've been doing. But to be honest, I always look back and see where I started and where I am now and the things I have and haven't done.* (Irma)

The project led me to realise that perhaps teachers like Irma and I engage in some form of reflection regularly, which is useful, though it is not carried out as systematically as with the timeline. Moreover, without a doubt, the timeline reflection revealed a more technology-integrated approach; for example, my timeline (Fig. 6.1) illustrates how there was a complete lack of technological resources at the beginning of my teaching career.

As the time passes, I could see the discovery and incorporation of more advanced technology and AI within my current teaching practice; so much so, that the timeline was designed with the use of Canva, one of the most innovative educational and technological tools currently available at the time of writing.

The timeline thus becomes a tool not only for reflecting on past practices but also for envisioning future developments and innovations. In my case, such a procedure, guided by Nicky, proved to be a transformative experience. The process of reflecting on my career path through the creation of the timeline provided significant insights into how my teaching ways and approach to technology have been evolving, and this, in turn, allowed me to identify key moments of technological adoption and their impact on my teaching practices.

Figure 6.1. Milton's timeline



This reflection was further followed and enriched by an online interview with Nicky, where his questions triggered and facilitated a deeper analysis of my experiences and development, becoming aware of aspects such as:

- the integration of technology in diverse ways.
- transitioning from traditional teaching with little to no use of technological tools or resources, to state-of-the-art software.
- websites and artificial intelligence (AI) as a support to my teaching inside and outside the classroom.

The interview played a crucial role in enhancing self-reflection and allowed me to examine how technological advancements impacted my teaching methods

The reflective insight that was gained from this process was fundamental in my participation in a subsequent course designed for other ELT teachers. As one of the course leaders, the experience of using the timeline activities was shared with fellow educators, including Dr Lilia Bórquez and Dr Martha Hernández. Together, we guided participants through the process of creating their timelines, helping them to reflect on their teaching practices and the use of technology within. Some of these teacher participants were encouraged to be part of an interview to go more in-depth with their timelines and also to know more about their contexts and needs. This way, it was decided which topics to include in the course to assist teachers in their professional practice. The course encouraged a more deliberate and innovative approach to integrating technology into the classroom, among other topics.

The impact of AI tools on teaching practice

As stated earlier, by the time I was guided through the reflection on my teaching practice, I had already discovered AI, and the supportive impact it had been having on the various tasks I carry out in the teaching profession. However, it was not until I engaged in reflective practices such as the making of the timeline and the subsequent interview that it became more apparent how, over the years, I incorporated different technological elements in the classroom to make it engaging for students, eventually finding AI tools for my benefits.

Integrating AI tools into my teaching practice represents my career's most recent technological evolution phase. These tools have been adopted to support and enhance different activities that revolve around the actual task of teaching, among others, but

never before had I considered using technology as a tool to alleviate the burden of lesson planning and material design and become more efficient timewise.

While the transition to AI tools did not have to do with the reflective practices I engaged in -including the creation of the timeline and the thought-provoking questions asked throughout the interview- the whole process throughout the reflection did allow me to have a wider perspective of the advancements in my professional practice and the gradual increasing of technology in it, as well as how much it had contributed to improving my professional -and personal- life. Additionally, this provided the necessary knowledge to share with fellow teachers in the subsequent series of activities related to the course, from its design to its actual implementation.

The insights gained from the aforementioned process have contributed to a subtle yet complex understanding of how technology can be harnessed to improve teaching practices. This understanding was then shared with other educators during the sessions, where they were walked through the setup and use of a couple of AI-powered sites, ChatGPT and Twee (the latter has been especially created for language teachers), encouraging them to implement their use as a means to enhance teaching efficiency, since such tools reduce workload and increase competence and productivity, characteristics that are vital to keeping a balance between both our professional and personal lives.

As explained in Chapter 5, we conducted interviews after the course to gather the experiences of the project participants. Some of them shared that they have made use of AI for different purposes and with interesting outcomes. To illustrate that, Moly indicated:

> *I've used it to create more material because there isn't much material available. That's very useful because sometimes, I used to spend a lot of time looking for a text that could be adapted to my context, but it wasn't easy. With this technology, it's faster and more useful.* (Moly)

In this way, Moly has made use of AI to save time by creating material that is suitable for her classes. In the same line of thought, Vianey stated:

> *I use Twee, which is artificial intelligence, to modify or to adapt materials because we have to use the book because students have the book, so I try to use them, but in a different way.* (Vianey)

In this case, the utilisation of AI for material is to modify content and exercises from the book in order to present such content differently. This is important since there are times in which students already have the answers because either they are re-taking the course or because classmates who have already taken the course let them have the answers.

ChatGPT and Twee offer plenty of more than just material design. You can obtain lead-in ideas or activities to start a class, get transcripts or summaries from YouTube videos, and create whole lessons or even syllabi that are personalised for your student's needs, just to mention a few. Although these teachers have only used AI for very specific purposes so far, it is significant that they have already taken the first step towards using and implementing technology and AI in their professional lives, opening the doors to new experiences and going beyond.

Concluding remarks

It is unquestionable how advantageous technology, in particular AI, can be for teachers. Technology, in its different ways and expressions, has always been part of the teaching field, including the ELT field. This has been a dynamic and evolving process, marked by incremental changes, reflective practices, and education policies. The use of the timeline activity, as guided by Nicky and replicated by us in our Mexican university context, has established a valuable framework for reflection along this journey, offering perceptions into the impact of technological tools and professional development as well. This, in turn, has not only facilitated a deeper appreciation of the role of technology in education but has also contributed to the professional growth of educators.

By sharing these reflective practices with other fellow teachers, the potential for enhanced teaching practices and more effective use of the technology is significantly increased. Particularly from my experience, the journey from an almost-technology-free classroom to one enriched with digital tools is a testament to the power of reflective practice in shaping and advancing pedagogical approaches. Since we teachers are overloaded with activities at all times to such an extent that we do not have time to stop and reflect on what we are doing or what we have achieved, participating in the timeline reflection activity and then being part of the team that replicated such valuable procedure has helped me to engage in more critical and

constant self-reflection of my teaching practice in a methodical way, which is vital to take further action to continue improving my professional path.

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Part 2: TEACHERS' STORIES

Chapter 7: Elizabeth and Liliana's experiences

Elizabeth Cruz Bautista, Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo, Mexico
Liliana Cruz Bautista, Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo, Mexico

Introduction

We are Elizabeth and Liliana Cruz Bautista, and we come from a small town called Huejutla de Reyes, located in the state of Hidalgo in Central Mexico. We both hold a BA in English Language Teaching from the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo where we now work, as well as a "*especialización*" (Postgraduate Diploma) in ELT from the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional. We have worked as English instructors in public and private schools with students of different ages and English levels, for more than 11 years.

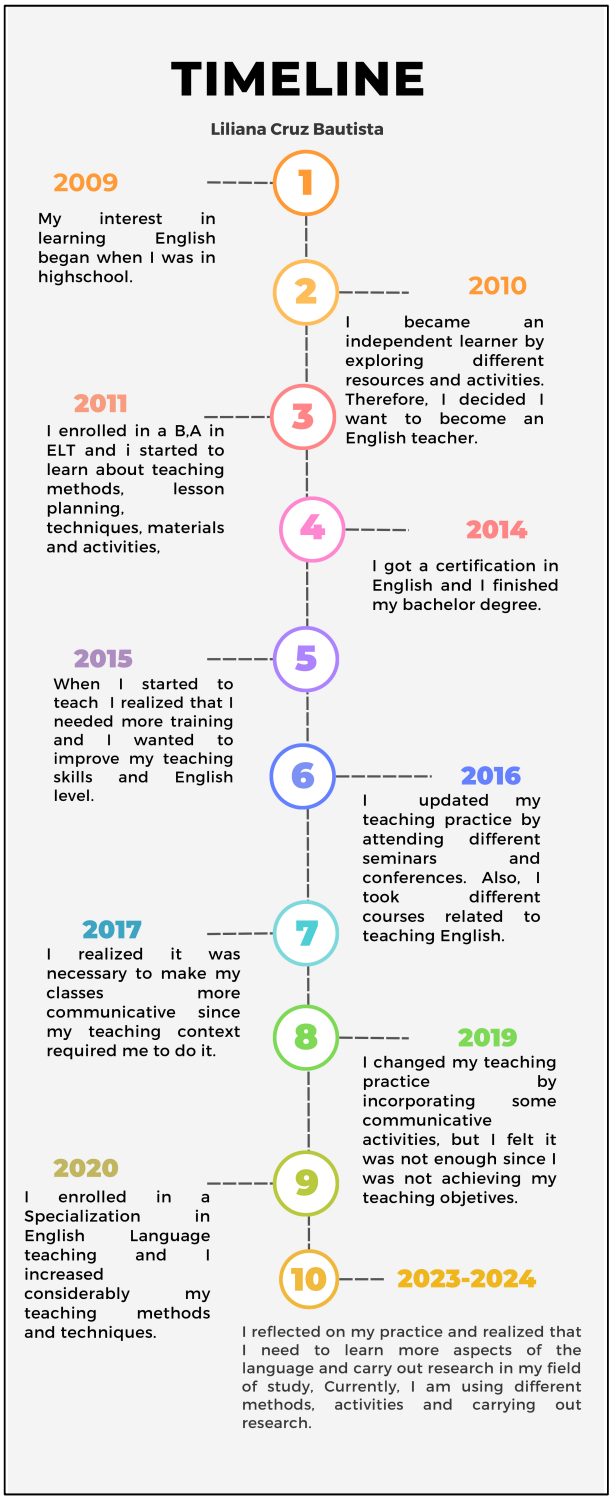
Currently, we are working at the Escuela Superior de Huejutla, which is one of many campuses that belong to the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo. We teach high school and university students from various majors such as Medicine, Law, Nursing, and Management. In this context, most university students start their degrees with little or no knowledge of English, which represents a significant challenge for English teachers.

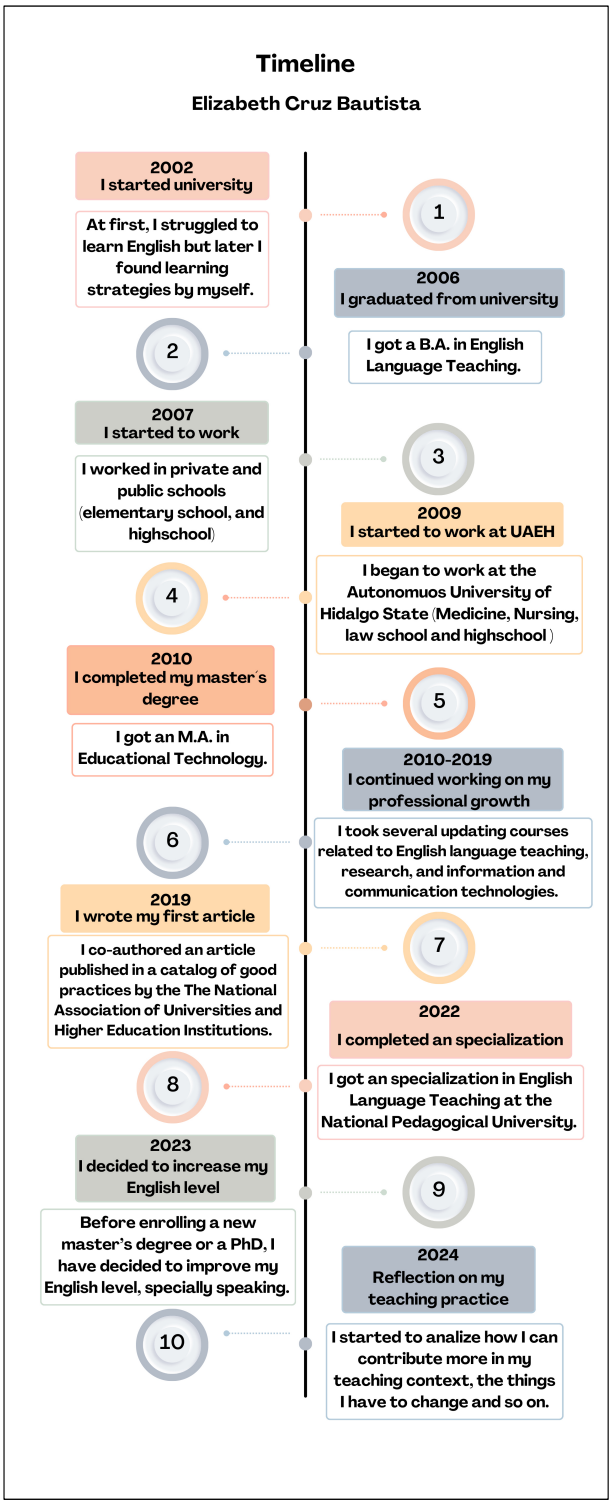
The course entitled "*Contextualised professional development from a timeline reflection*" supported by the Hornby trust helped us to develop new perspectives on language teaching. In the following pages, we explain our experiences in more detail.

Exploring our personal learnings journey through timelines

In figure 7.1 we have shared our reflective timelines, which summarise the key events in our professional lives. As shown on the timelines, we received our basic education in public schools in the town of Huejutla where we currently work. We started learning English in secondary school. Our English teachers at that time focused on using the grammar translation method which gave us some knowledge about the language, but we still needed help to communicate or maintain a simple conversation. At that point, we believed English was difficult to learn, but later, we enrolled in some English courses where we were taught more communicatively. In this way, we learned more effectively, and we discovered that learning a language was not impossible.

Figure 7.1. Liliana and Elizabeth's timelines





Later, we decided to enrol in a BA in English language teaching. The BA helped us learn about teaching methods and techniques, develop our teaching skills, and improve our English level. Moreover, we experienced, firsthand, the process of learning a language at a university level. This experience helped us understand our students' learning process, since we can put ourselves in their shoes.

From the timeline, we realised all the work we have done up to now, and it helped us to value our efforts as language teachers. We also identified that it has not been an easy journey: there have been moments where we stayed in our comfort zone. For instance, we used some old teaching practices for a long time, and even though we identified that they were not yielding positive results, we continued using them.

"From the timeline, we realised all the work we have done up to now, and it helped us to value our efforts as language teachers."

The timeline activity reminded us that we need to continue improving our English level. It encouraged us to explore different areas that are essential in language teaching and that is often given little attention by teachers. In addition, the activity motivated us to continue studying and discover how to overcome challenges in our teaching context.

Impact on teaching practices and professional growth

Before taking the course, we thought it would be like previous courses where we are usually provided with a lot of information. On the contrary, we were explained and *shown* how to carry out different activities and we learned about several meaningful topics, which helped us reflect on our specific contexts.

"we thought it would be like previous courses where we are usually provided with a lot of information."

The sessions encouraged us to identify some of our previous practices that were not working properly and think of possible adjustments. Most importantly, we realised that it is worth exploring teaching methods that might work better for *our* students' needs, according to *our* context."

"we realised that it is worth exploring teaching methods that might work better for *our* students' needs, according to *our* context."

During the course, the instructors started every topic with an activity, and we put ourselves in the shoes of the students doing the activity. After that, we reflected on our experiences of the activity. The instructors considered our opinions and asked us to link them with our teaching experiences. Then, we discussed the importance of the topics we had covered, and how we could implement them. The workshop allowed us to share our current teaching practices, experiences, doubts, and concerns. We were listened to and supported.

One of the greatest impacts on our teaching practice was the use of Twee, an artificial intelligence tool for English teachers. When it was shown to us, we could not believe all the things that we could do with it. By using Twee, we were able to quickly create interesting materials and activities according to specific topics and our students' English levels. It allowed us to expose students to various authentic language samples. We have also used it to generate listening comprehension activities. As a result, we have observed that students are more engaged in the classes and feel increasingly motivated to learn.

"we have observed that students are more engaged in the classes and feel increasingly motivated to learn."

In addition, this tool has facilitated the teaching of interactional strategies, since it can create dialogues and transcripts from everyday conversations. This allows us to provide students with conversational models where they can identify, analyse, and later use some of the conversational patterns when speaking in English. Consequently, students have increased their speaking skills and participation. They have gained confidence in speaking and have felt more motivated to learn the language.

Another aspect of the course that impacted our teaching practices was a demonstration lesson in which there were many words in a text that we could not understand. It was

difficult to understand what the text was about, but the instructor continued with the lesson assuming that we had understood the text. Then, at the end of the lesson, the instructor told us that the words were invented on purpose and that they did not have a meaning. The idea was for us to realise how our students feel and struggle when they have a spoken or written text and they do not have enough vocabulary to understand it.

The activity was very insightful. Before the course, we sometimes took for granted that after reading a text most of our students had understood the majority of it. This activity made us realise the importance of teaching and incorporating vocabulary into our classes. We have observed that when we provide our students with vocabulary before reading or listening to information, they can comprehend better, retain the words, and use them to produce language.

"We identified with one another, which led to a sense of fellowship and collegiality."

Teacher collaboration and development of a community

In the workshop sessions, we met English teachers from different campuses that belong to the same university. After discussing and sharing points of view, we found that there were similarities in terms of our students' needs and teaching practices. We identified with one another, which led to a sense of fellowship and collegiality.

Subsequently, as co-workers here at the Escuela Superior de Huejutla, we have decided to work together and share what is working in the classroom or how we can improve our teaching practices. Based on these group discussions, we have started to implement new strategies to improve our teaching practices, such as collaborative lesson planning sessions, recording our classes and providing feedback to each other, searching for and designing relevant materials, reading and learning more about new teaching trends, and trying to connect with other professionals in our area to know more about what is happening in our specific context.

In addition, we have proposed that our language department carries out additional sessions for teachers at our institution, where we can support each other and share good practices as well as inviting other experts in the area to give lectures or workshops. Moreover, we have proposed some activities inside our institutions such as the reading of novels according to the student's level to promote learning

vocabulary and overall development of English. This idea originated from the timeline activity, where we realised that it is essential to continue learning, updating, and trying new things to support our students' learning process.

"After the course, we felt the necessity to share what we have learned with our colleagues; to work together and think of better strategies that might better fit our particular teaching context."

In addition, thanks to these recently created networks, we have been invited to attend national and international conferences and seminars online where we have been provided with new ideas for teaching practices that have permitted us to be more up to date in our area. As such, we have felt supported and more confident to implement new methodologies and make additional classroom interventions to become better teachers. After the course, we felt the necessity to share what we have learned with our colleagues; to work together and think of better strategies that might better fit our particular teaching context. As a result, we have established some teaching and learning objectives, proposed activities, and projects, but most importantly, we have set our minds to working harder every semester to improve our teaching practices.

Self-initiated development and future goals

This project has made us explore new perspectives towards language teaching and learning. Before taking the course, we were aware that some of our teaching practices were not working, but we did not know how to change them, or we were afraid to. After the course, we realised that teaching a language requires updating our teaching approaches, since new generations of students demand different ways of learning English. Because of this, we would like to continue improving our English level and enhancing our understanding of different methodologies.

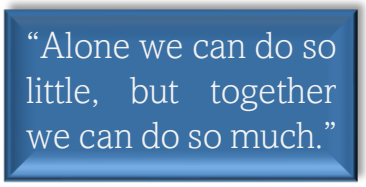
For example, we have enrolled on several additional courses at our institution on topics such as materials design and lesson planning. In addition, we have attended workshops and conferences from other universities on topics such as assessment, the use of technology, gamification, skills and grammar teaching.

One of us has enrolled on a master's degree in ELT. The knowledge developed on this degree may help develop new pedagogical interventions that can have a positive

impact on our institution. Finally, we are taking part in a range of activities to continue to develop our English, with the ultimate goal of achieving a higher-level certification. We expect these actions and meaningful learning, originating from this timeline-based project, will have a great impact on our students; in fact, we have already seen some very positive results.

Concluding remarks

This professional development initiative gave us a great opportunity to improve many aspects of our teaching practice. Opportunities like this help teachers who work in remote areas to be updated and know more about new trends in ELT, as well as how we might adapt these trends to our teaching contexts, taking into account practical limitations. The timeline and the course as a whole made us reflect and see how we have progressed as teachers over time, and what we still need to do in order to continue growing professionally. In addition, we have begun to implement the strategies that we learned in our institution.



We are aware that committed English teachers are always looking for the most effective activities, techniques, and methods to best support their students. We also know that each context is different, and students' backgrounds are different too. That is why it is important to explore and reflect on what is working or not, and to continuously try new things to refine our teaching practices. We are delighted to have been part of this experience, and we greatly appreciate being invited to participate in this project. Alone we can do so little, but together we can do so much.

Chapter 8: Olga's experiences

Olga Estefanía Islas Santos, Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo, Mexico

Introduction

My name is Olga Estefania Islas Santos. I have a BA in English Language Teaching from the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo. Even though I am still in my late twenties, my journey as a teacher has been going on for more than six years. My experience comes from different teaching contexts; from teaching in my hometown, to being a teacher in rural areas, to now being a teacher at the same university where I studied my undergraduate degree. The majority of my students belong to the undergraduate degree in Biotechnology Engineering.

In this chapter, I will talk about my experiences on the "*Contextualised professional development from a timeline reflection*" course within the Hornby project. I would say the greatest gain from this experience has been acknowledging what I can do for my students with my own unique teaching practices, the skills that I already have and the wide variety of methods and techniques that are out there. It has helped me realise that the more I develop as a teacher, the more I can do for my students. It has brought a whole different meaning to the complex experience that is teaching.

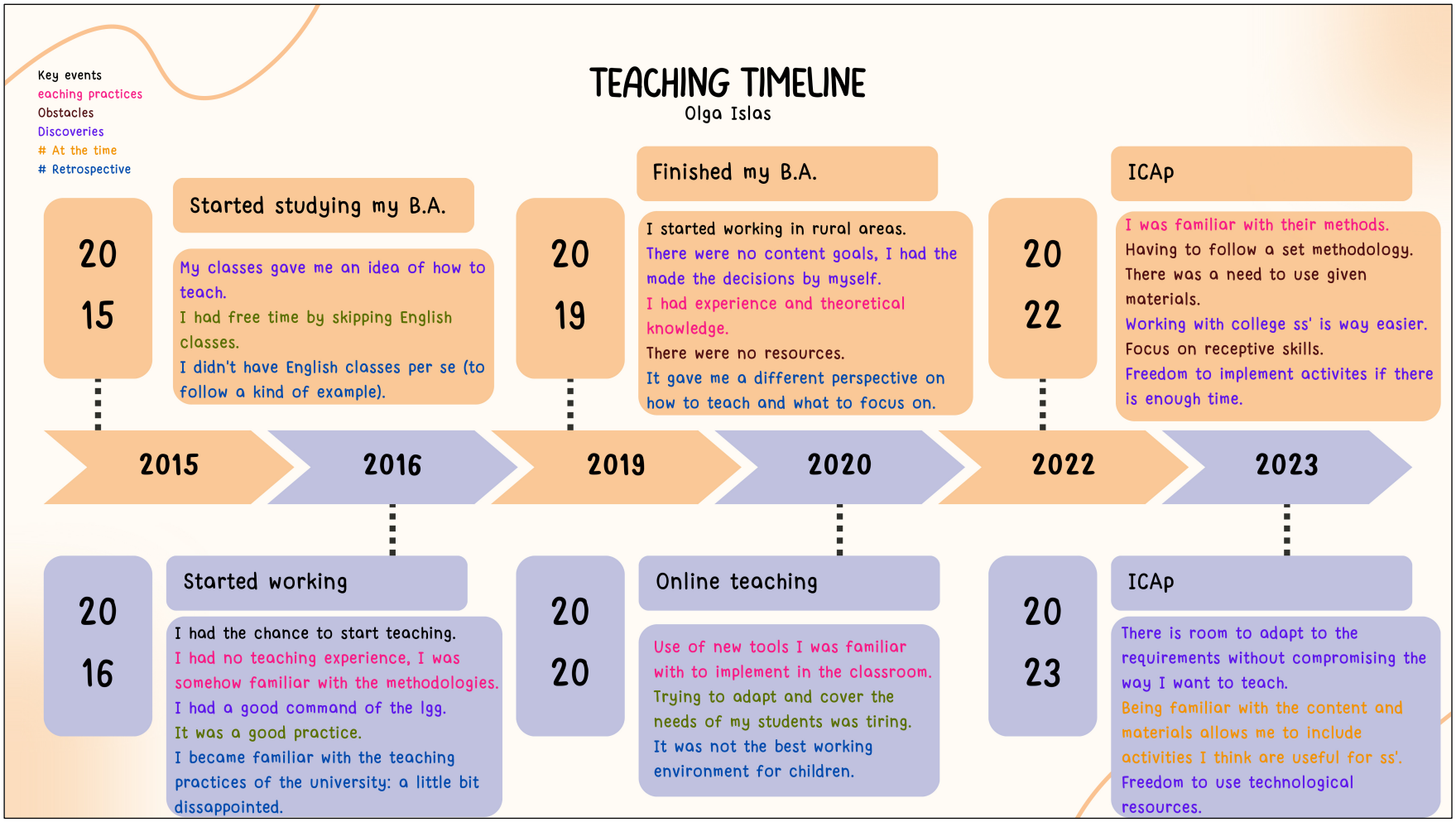
Exploring my personal learning journey through a timeline

When I was asked to produce a timeline of my teaching practices, I wondered whether it would be a very short one. Even though I have been teaching for a while now, I had not really reflected on the different experiences each job had given me. The timeline helped me realise that the more I learned as a teacher, the higher was the next set of goals that I set myself.

As shown in my timeline (Fig. 8.1), I started teaching without a great deal of training; I was doing what I had been taught in my university classes. It was not until I finished my degree that I felt ready enough to follow my own instincts. Seeing on paper my timeline and noticing the impact my job in a rural area had made was eye-opening.

> "I doubt I would have reflected so deeply about it without an activity such as the timeline."

Figure 8.1. Olga's timeline



Working in a context that I had not really been prepared for, I found myself facing not only the common challenges of a classroom, but also certain circumstances that went beyond the classroom. I doubt I would have reflected so deeply about these issues without an activity such as the timeline.

It was the first time I saw that I was actively *choosing* to teach in specific contexts and that it all had to do with what my teaching experience had made me as a teacher. I used to believe that the jobs I had accepted throughout my professional life had to do more with how lucky I was to find them, rather than me actually choosing where to teach. But looking at my timeline, this experience has helped me see that I can choose who to share those skills with. My timeline also brought light to the fact that I have been teaching at the same university that had trained me to become a teacher. For me it was also a way of "testing" myself: even though I have had good teaching experiences in my university, there is still a lot to improve.

Impact on teaching practices and professional growth

In one of the sessions on the course, I discussed with my peers about changing the speaking assignments that we are given by the University. I realised that those activities were unrealistic for students, and I tried to think of something new that would make them practice their speaking in a more interesting way. I came up with the idea of letting them choose a book they wanted to read throughout the semester to practice their English, but that could also be used for their speaking tasks. The speaking tests would no longer be conversations with the teacher, but presentations to their classmates.

During one of the sessions of the course, the facilitators encouraged me to keep doing the activity, but also to think about it in more detail. Since then, I have offered more options for students to read so they do not feel threatened by having to read fully in English; for example, they can choose a novel, a graphic novel, a comic, a stories book, among other genres. Wanting to share their interests through their speaking tasks has proven to be an effective way for students to really *want* to communicate. I doubt I would have implemented those changes so soon if it were not for the professional development

"I felt inspired while reflecting on my teaching, and it made me aware of all the improvements I could make so my ideas could be taken to the next level."

course. I felt inspired while reflecting on my teaching, and it made me aware of all the improvements I could make so my ideas could be taken to the next level.

Overall, the biggest contribution the course gave me was increased confidence to try new things. I have come to realise that the requirements of my university are not necessarily restricting in terms of my teaching practice. In fact, I must admit that my confidence has played a part in implementing changes in the classroom. Now, I feel more encouraged to implement the ideas that might help my students in their learning journeys. On a more personal note, the course gave me a deeper understanding of the reasons why I have chosen specific places to teach during these years and why I want to keep improving as a professional.

Teacher collaboration and development of a community

"I was not aware previously that we had lacked spaces in which teachers could talk about their experiences in order to share ideas, perspectives or new plans."

I have come to notice that ways of improving teaching practices are not explicitly discussed among teachers. Each teacher focuses on their own classes, doing what they see fit for their students and often continue to do so for a long time. That is why I am profoundly grateful for the course, because it gave me the chance to actively analyse my professional development, surrounded by my peers and supported by the guidance of the organisers. I was not aware previously that we had lacked spaces in which teachers could talk about their experiences in order to share ideas, perspectives or new plans. Sometimes we would gather to talk about our groups in general, but it was rarely as in-depth as what we did during the course.

It came as a surprise that being part of this project allowed me to reunite with teachers whose mentorship I had received in my time as a university student. I did not expect to be in the same space as them and that in that moment I was able to see them as colleagues and not teachers. This gave me a sense of belonging I did not know I needed. When you are a young teacher, it is easy to feel that you are not at the same level as more experienced peers. But taking part in the course, working alongside people whose way of teaching I knew firsthand as their student, was reaffirming and validating. It reminded me that no matter how young or old we are, our ideas are valid and worthwhile.

"This gave me a sense of belonging I did not know I needed."

"despite interacting with many of my co-workers, I had no idea of how they saw teaching or what their practices were."

It came as a shock to realise that, despite interacting with many of my co-workers, I had no idea of how they saw teaching or what their practices were. Through the exercises and questions during the sessions, I had a better view of how my peers were teaching and the aspects they were focusing on. I could see we had some things in common, but also big differences in terms of teaching. This interaction helped me feel less intimidated to approach my peers to ask questions about certain academic aspects.

In the second part of the course, I had the chance to interact with different people, but, again, I did not expect my fellow attendees to be my university lecturers. Teachers whose hard work helped during university welcomed me happily. This served to remind me that I was now in a different place; I was now their colleague. That sense of belonging after all my hard work was inspiring. The experience working with more experienced teachers was validating in terms of seeing myself as one of them, believing in the things I had achieved and recognising all the new perspectives as a young teacher that I bring to my place of work.

Self-initiated development and future goals

When you find yourself in a safe workplace, you do not often think of how it could change because you do not believe it has to. It was not until this experience that I started to question myself on how much I had improved as a teacher in the last few years. The initiative led me to start evaluating my teaching, to see whether I was improving as much as I could or if I was sticking to what had worked. I began to think of what activities worked, but also which of those could be changed.

As this course had proven to be very helpful, I joined a new one on teaching literature. It felt like the old days when I had to study new techniques and strategies, but this time it made me happy that those findings were not there just to learn theoretically, but for them to be put directly into practice. Attending additional courses was a reminder on how much more there is to learn, and since I was motivated, I took it a step further. Studying a master's degree had always been in my radar, but due to the pandemic, those plans did not happen. After the course, I began to think of more activities I could do to keep improving my teaching, and I ended up reconsidering doing a master's.

"Attending additional courses was a reminder on how much more there is to learn"

I do believe that I am gradually coming closer to those academic spaces that will help me rethink my teaching and bring new perspectives to the classroom. It is a dream of mine to refine my teaching practices to find a way to help my students learn in such a way that they feel motivated to keep practicing the language and see a real use to what they do in our classroom.

Concluding remarks

One of the most valuable things I gained during this experience was the opportunity to reflect deeply on my journey as a teacher and where I want to go next in my teaching practice. I had the chance to acknowledge what I am already capable of and the many opportunities there are to keep learning.

For someone who does not come across professional development activities related to language teaching that often, I am glad I participated in this one. If I had known about the effectiveness of these spaces, I would have looked for them sooner. The course gave me the tools to reflect on my professional development as well as the opportunity to interact with more experienced colleagues that made me feel part of a community. I was fortunate enough to receive feedback from others, and to see teaching from a range of interesting perspectives.

I would like to close my narrative by saying that I aim to show readers how impactful the course was for me and how it made me realise what my professional development has been like and what my focus will be in the future. After having reflected on my teaching practice, I am now more mindful of the decisions I make regarding how and where I choose to teach.

"After having reflected on my teaching practice, I am now more mindful of the decisions I make regarding how and where I choose to teach."

Chapter 9: Guadalupe's experiences

Guadalupe Tenorio Sánchez, Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo, Mexico

Introduction

My name is Guadalupe Tenorio Sánchez. I hold a BA in English Language Teaching from the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California and a master's in educational technology from Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo. Currently, I am an English teacher at Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo, a public Mexican university. I have been teaching English for more than 20 years, especially to faculty staff since 2011. I am currently piloting a project in which university lecturers incorporate English into their teaching across different academic programmes. I have been involved in both the design and implementation stages, leading me to encourage English teachers to take an active role in making meaningful changes in their classrooms.

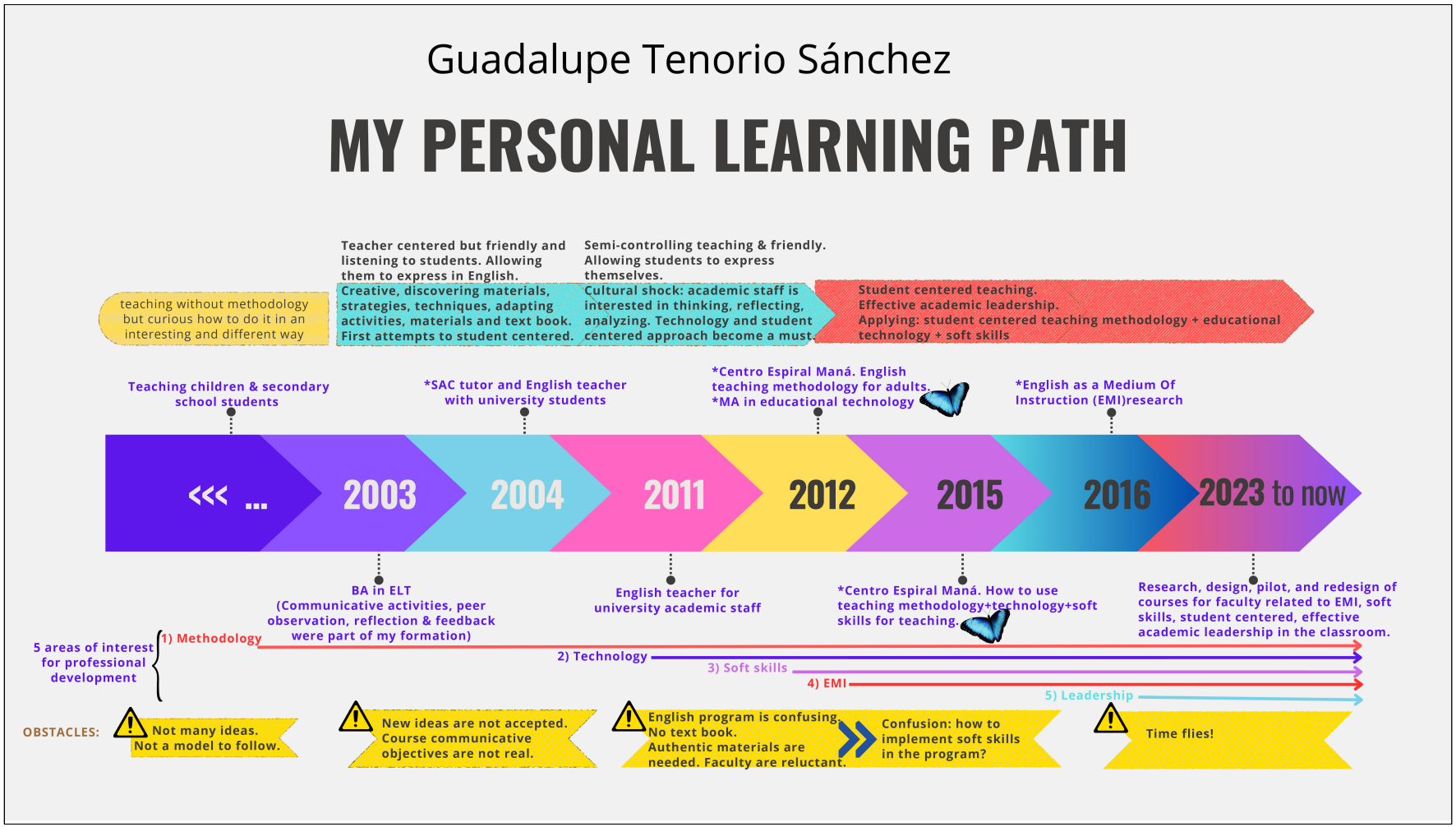
Exploring my personal learning journey through a timeline

Have you been on a long trip and then decided to take a rest for a few minutes? You get out of the car, stretch your arms and legs, you breathe in and out deeply. Then, you open your eyes and enjoy the magnificent view! It is not the first time you go that way, but today everything is different; today your perception of the surroundings is different. That is exactly what happened to me when I participated in the "*Contextualised professional development from a timeline"* course with the Hornby project.

Steve Jobs once said: "*You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards.*" Working with my timeline helped me look backwards identify how my dots connect and see the importance of having a clear path to follow when planning my professional development. It was an objective, fact-based, introspective process in which I identified pivotal moments in my time as an English teacher. These moments were influenced significantly by the challenges that I experienced at different stages of my professional career.

> "Working on my timeline was the perfect opportunity to reflect on what I have achieved so far, and also to see myself from an objective perspective."

Figure 9.1. Guadalupe's timeline



Working on my timeline (Fig. 9.1) was the perfect opportunity to reflect on what I have achieved so far, and to see myself from an objective perspective. When I was planning my timeline, in order to organise the information, I listed the different types of academic events I have participated in and then I grouped them into different categories.

It was during this last part, identifying the categories, that I realised how my teaching skills have evolved. I became aware of how those decisions laid the foundations for being the English teacher I am now, which was motivating.

Impact on teaching practices and professional growth

As a result of my participation on the course, two important aspects from my teaching practices have been impacted. The first was how to use artificial intelligence (AI) for pedagogical purposes. Before taking part in this course, I must admit that I had mixed feelings about AI; on the one hand, I felt curious and wanted to know about it, but on the other hand, I was afraid of it. Now, I am still curious to find out what else I can do with it, and although I am far from being totally comfortable using it, I am much more confident than I was previously.

Currently, I work with lecturers and researchers as part of an institutional project in which they are developing pedagogical competencies. The purpose is to support students who take classes using English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) and what I learned in the course has helped me support them. Two of the main activities that the university lecturers, who are my students, struggle with are formulating objectives and designing lesson plans, which are very time-consuming. After experimenting with new AI tools, they experienced what is like to have their own personal assistant. It was rewarding to see how they began to analyse and evaluate AI suggestions and started making appropriate changes according to their students, objectives and academic programmes.

The second important impact on my teaching practice has been the importance of reflection, which was present in each session. Experiencing the continuous deep reflective process helped me learn, analyse, and evaluate what I was learning. It made me feel empowered and was something I found very satisfying.

"Experiencing the continuous deep reflection process helped me learn, analyse, and evaluate what I was learning. It made me feel empowered and was something I found very satisfying."

Once I saw a quote from John Dewey that read "*We do not learn from experience, we learn from reflecting on experience*". Without doubt, continuous reflection has been one of the underpinnings in the different professional development courses where I have been the facilitator. The group of university lecturers I am working with has responded positively and they recognise the positive impact of reflection. They have also expressed their interest to encourage students to reflect during the teaching and learning process. I am aware it is not an easy task because including reflection in the teaching and learning process requires a continuous sequence of actions: planning, implementing and then reflecting on its results. However, I see my colleagues' willingness to make reflection part of their teaching practices.

Finally, this experience has influenced my confidence because I identified other English teachers who are also open to learning. It is essential that we are aware of our own professional and personal needs, as both of them are the basic nature of each teacher. Once we are conscious of that, we should define our learning path and get on with it. If we take into consideration what Coelho said, *"when you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you achieve it"*, then we should trust that we can find the way to achieve our goals. Participating in this course was one of those opportunities to achieve success.

Teacher collaboration and development of a community

"It is essential that we are aware of our own professional and personal needs."

To unlock the potential of teachers when learning or working together, it is necessary to build a community for learning and work collaboratively; a community in which providing and receiving effective feedback is key to reach mutually agreeable objectives. During the course, a sense of community was fostered among participants, right from the very first session when we introduced each other. In this session, an English teacher from another department of the University introduced herself. The leader of the workshop encouraged that teacher to tell participants about *her* specific academic context,

so that everyone could be aware of our similarities and differences. The impact of this specific gesture was immediate, as the teacher in question conveyed her strong feeling of gratification at being able to express her particular needs.

After that, the same teacher shared her experiences of previous professional development activities, when teachers tended to only be told to do things in a specific way, but without considering that every context has its own characteristics and needs. Unsurprisingly, these previous experiences were not very positive. This was an inspiring community building moment. I am mentioning only one example, but there were other meaningful activities which reinforced the sense of community among participants. Indeed, this highlights the importance of involving all participants, while respecting and taking into consideration their own identities. This contributed to building and strengthening a professional learning community.

"involving all participants, while respecting and taking into consideration their own identities. This contributed to building and strengthening a professional learning community."

Self-initiated development and future goals

I am aware that every action towards developing my skills for inspiring and empowering teachers will somehow connect in my future. To revisit the quote from Steve Jobs that I mentioned earlier: "*You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards.*" Later in this quote, he adds that "*you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future.*" I have already looked backwards and connected many of the dots. Now, I am sure that I am connecting with my near future.

"I have already looked backwards and connected dots. Now, I am sure that what I am doing is connecting with my near future."

There was a time when I wondered how teachers could be convinced to improve their teaching practices. I participated in courses, workshops, seminars and even asked for role models in language teaching, but I could not find an answer. Then, one day, I came across a meme which stated: "*you can lead a human to knowledge, but you can't make him think*". It

may sound silly, but this made me reflect, how can I *convince* a teacher to do something different? What if they are not aware there is something else that can be done? Sometime after I found a quote from William Arthur Ward: "*A good teacher explains, while a great teacher inspires.*" Here is the answer to my initial question: motivation, and inspiration. Therefore, I am now looking for ways to inspire other teachers to teach from their heart.

Based on the deep reflection process and the experiences gained throughout this course, I am motivated to pursue further professional development. I am committed to sharing what I have learnt and the competencies I have developed with other English language teachers. I have already begun a leadership course for women and currently, I am enrolled in another related to socio-emotional learning.

"Based on the deep reflection process and the experiences gained throughout this course, I am motivated to pursue further professional development."

Concluding remarks

This experience allowed me to see myself from a more objective perspective. The opportunities for reflection helped me to identify how I have analysed situations, made decisions, and monitored my learning journey toward specific goals. As a result, I was able to clearly define my decision to become a teacher trainer. To fulfil this role effectively, I know that I must continue my professional growth and pursue further development in teacher training.

Having more than 20 years of teaching experience does not mean that everything has been learnt. On the contrary, ongoing professional development provides valuable tools to enhance teaching effectiveness and ensure that pedagogical practices remain aligned with students' evolving needs. With this in mind, I encourage fellow educators to reflect on their own professional growth.

"Having more than 20 years of teaching experience does not mean that everything has been learnt."

Chapter 10: Maribel's experiences

Yaxinia Maribel Castro Madrid, Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo, Mexico

Introduction

My name is Maribel Castro. I hold a BA in English Language Teaching at the Universidad Autónoma de Puebla and an MA Applied Linguistics at the University of Birmingham in the United Kingdom. I began my teaching career in basic education, before returning to my hometown, where I started working on the BA in English Language Teaching at the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo, where I have worked for over 20 years. Our purpose is to train future teachers of English for higher education. During these 20 years, I have taught a wide variety of content subjects, as well as the teaching practicum and of course the English language itself.

"The reflection process was a moment of "awakening", because I faced what students feel during their learning process. In other words, this exercise allowed me to re-humanise my teaching practices."

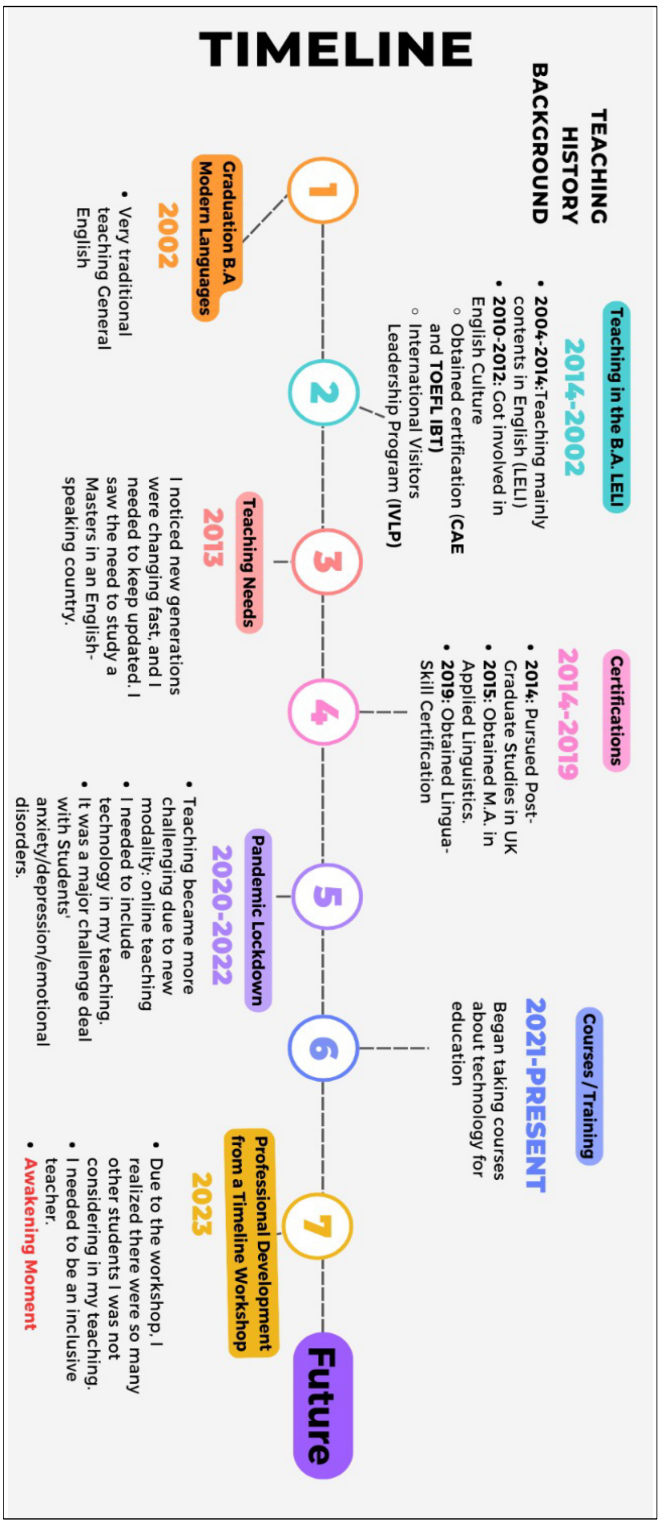
In this chapter, I will share my experiences of participating in the "*Contextualised professional development from a timeline reflection*" course within the Hornby project. Participating in this course impacted me significantly. The reflection process was a moment of "awakening", because I faced what students feel during their learning process. In other words, this exercise allowed me to re-humanise my teaching practices.

Exploring my personal learning journey through a timeline

The last two decades have been a learning process professionally and personally. During the course, I was asked to produce a professional timeline of my previous teaching and the kind of teacher that I wanted to become.

"The timeline activity contributed greatly to my reflection process. It allowed me to structure key elements and events in my teaching and learning path that would have been otherwise forgotten."

Figure 10.1. Maribel's timeline



The timeline activity contributed greatly to my reflection process. It allowed me to structure key elements and events in my teaching and learning path that would have been otherwise forgotten. The timeline and the way the instructor guided us with clear examples and questions prompted my memory and awoke numerous crucial events that I have experienced over the last two decades. I could focus on the essentials and observe explicitly my teaching, and teacher training, history.

Through this exercise, I identified key moments that have impacted me professionally and personally over the years. As I created my timeline (Fig. 10.1), I recalled attending seminars, courses and training programmes which had shaped my teaching practices. In some of them, I was fortunate to meet outstanding professionals and colleagues and thinking back on their sessions, a common component they all had was that there was a reflective element in their training.

My teaching practices have always been shaped by my experience, perceptions and beliefs. I realised that I am only one part of a universe that consists of a wide variety of individuals, personalities, perspectives and ways of learning. Reflecting on such issues was enlightening; indeed, I remembered being deeply moved by how previously uninformed I was regarding those matters. I appreciated being given the opportunity to understand fully the urgency to shape my teaching, especially in terms of inclusive education.

The above-mentioned exercises and training made me grow and mature as a teacher. It has been a reciprocal educational journey which has led to a lot of satisfaction but also has involved many challenges. Nevertheless, in the end, I have gained a great deal, and I consider myself a "winner". Although there is still much more to learn, it has been an enriching process for me personally and professionally

Impact on teaching practices and professional growth

My participation in the "*Contextualised professional development from a timeline*" course done with support of the Hornby Trust has resulted in my professional growth. During the various sessions of the course, a key moment that stood out for me was the lesson on inclusive education. We went through similar conditions to those experienced by colour-blind students (Fig. 10.2), hearing-impaired people and people with autism. In a way, we

were exposed to comparable circumstances to how they perceive the world. How unaware I was about the difficulties such learners encounter every day. I was astonished: that event was perhaps the most striking moment of the training for me. The surprising revelation was that I used to take for granted that every student perceived the world the same way as me; how wrong that was!



Figure 10.2. Constructing a tangram while blindfolded

After the course, I started gradually incorporating some strategies in my classroom. For example, one of the most common actions all teachers face in their everyday professional life is giving instructions. After experiencing the struggle of following instructions while blindfolded in one of the sessions, I understood the importance of giving clear and precise instructions that my students can follow. I consider this activity to have been transformative, and one that all teachers should experience. After sharing these insights with my undergraduate students, they reported being not only more aware of their delivering of instructions, but also more understanding of their learners' feelings of frustration.

The most refreshing change that took place in my teaching has been the incorporation of artificial intelligence to create materials and examinations for my classes. I was deeply thankful for having been shown how to use ChatGPT and Twee as teaching tools for my lessons. I have now designed pedagogical exercises using AI which has facilitated my work enormously and has also been stimulating for my students. There have been times when such materials have led to thought-provoking moments during classes, which has increased students' motivation to pursue their learning goals outside the classroom.

"I consider this activity to have been transformative, and one that all teachers should experience."

Overall, the course has influenced my competencies as an educator. The knowledge I have gained, the raising of my teacher awareness and the reflection process I went through have placed responsibility on me. Nowadays, I am trying to become the type of teacher I have always wanted to be: supportive; diplomatic; tolerant of my own mistakes and of my students' mistakes. In the near future, I would like to be able to say that I have become the teacher I have always wanted.

Teacher collaboration and development of a community

In addition to the multiple ways in which my teaching practices have been modified, another significant outcome of the course was the sense of community it created among the participants. I knew most of my colleagues beforehand, but going through the reflective process made me perceive them differently. I wondered whether they felt the same as me; whether, at times, they despaired when faced with teaching challenges, and how they fought their struggles and overcame such challenges. For the first time, I saw them as my professional "siblings".

"I knew most of my colleagues beforehand, but going through the reflective process made me perceive them differently."

The course fostered a sense of community among us. I had always looked at my colleagues with respect and admiration, but after reflection and analysis, I developed a feeling of sisterhood with some of them. This newly established community has evolved into an ongoing collaborative team. For example, in my attempt to become a more approachable instructor and more empathetic when providing feedback, I have searched for advice from my colleagues. My professional network has been enriched and my teaching practices as well.

"My professional network has been enriched and my teaching practices as well."

Self-initiated development and future goals

Aside from the professional networks that I have developed, another outcome of the course has been an increased motivation to pursue further professional development independently. Having seen how some students strive to learn in spite of their learning disabilities, I searched for additional seminars and workshops to improve my expertise in inclusive education. Moreover, inspired by the content on educational technology, I enrolled on a couple of courses related to digital learning, which have allowed me to gradually incorporate technological tools into my teaching. These small steps I have taken to adapt my lessons should be part of a long, continuous process of transformation. I know this does not end with a couple of seminars. I must be persistent and undergo constant reflection of my teaching practices.

"I know this does not end with a couple of seminars. I must be persistent and undergo constant reflection of my teaching practices."

I envision integrating the learning emerging from the course into my longer-term career goals. For example, at the beginning of this chapter, I mentioned that I work on the BA in English Language Teaching. Consequently, the young, trainee teachers that I am working with would greatly benefit from being trained, as we were, to work with individuals with autism, colour blindness or hearing impairment. It would be significantly more meaningful if this information were in the curriculum of one of their methodological content subjects.

Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I have shared several ways in which my participation in the "*Contextualised professional development from a timeline reflection*" course has influenced me and my teaching practices. The contents of the course made me reflect deeply, allowing me to discover the type of teacher I am and what type of teacher I would like to become. Perhaps the most surprising revelation was that I was not an inclusive teacher. As such, I have begun to modify certain elements of my teaching in an attempt to be inclusive with hearing-impaired, colour-blind students, and people with autism. I have also started to use technology to enhance language teaching and learning. Through these professional development opportunities, I believe I am a better prepared educator.

The benefits have not only been for the sake of my students; I have grown professionally and personally as well. I have created a professional network, and as a result, I have established a learning community with colleagues, who we can approach for advice and guidance. I have also developed clearer plans for the future and my long-term career goals.

To conclude, I would like to highlight that no matter the difficulties we face in our daily professional life, nothing is permanent. There will always be hope regardless of our struggles; the path of a teacher, with all its ups and downs, will in the end be worth a thousand times the pain and the time invested. This is because we are making a significant contribution to shape the future: our students!

"no matter the difficulties we face in our daily professional life, nothing is permanent."

Chapter 11: Isabel's experiences

María Isabel Cervantes Martínez, Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo, Mexico

Introduction

My name is María Isabel Cervantes Martínez and I bring 32 years of experience as an English teacher across various educational levels, from elementary to university. I have a B.A. in Spanish Teaching by a Pedagogical University and I currently teach at the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo. In the university I work in the Linguistics Academic Area where I focus on preparing future educators. In my job I am passionate about creating dynamic and inclusive learning environments that cater to the diverse needs of my students.

In this chapter, I will share my reflections based on the "*Contextualised professional development from a timeline reflection*" course in the Hornby project. The professional development course highlighted several key insights for me. It provided a fresh perspective on routines I had developed over time, demonstrating how small, strategic adjustments can significantly enhance the learning experience for students.

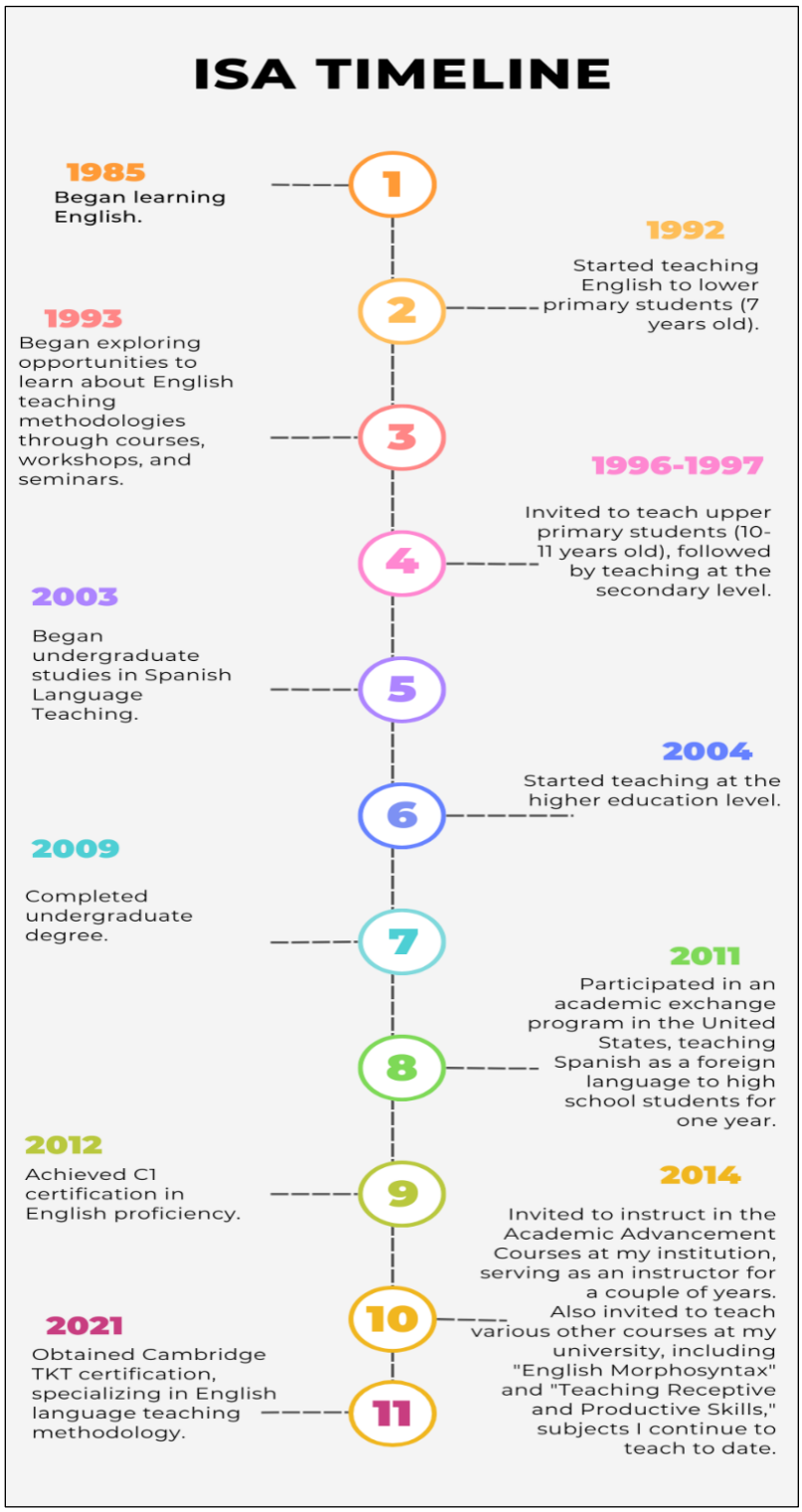
Exploring my personal learning journey through a timeline

The course began with self-reflection, which I have always considered crucial for professional growth. Reflecting on our daily practices and identifying ways to improve is essential in our profession. During this reflection, we discovered or reaffirmed our teaching styles, recognising that we may adopt different approaches depending on the subject, audience, or school policies.

Creating my teaching timeline (Fig. 11.1) was both a reflective and challenging process. As I worked through the timeline, I confronted various moments of both successes and difficulties in my career, leading to deeper self-reflection. The timeline exercise served as a mirror, allowing me to see the trajectory of my teaching practices over the years.

"The timeline exercise served as a mirror, allowing me to see the trajectory of my teaching practices over the years."

Figure 11.1. Isabel's timeline



I realised that my teaching methods have evolved significantly since I first started. I recalled the early years of my career when I was primarily focused on basic instructional techniques. As I progressed, I gradually incorporated more sophisticated methodologies, drawing on various professional development opportunities to refine my practices.

Another surprising insight was how the timeline exercise helped me recognise certain patterns in my teaching career. For example, I noticed that my most significant periods of growth often followed challenging experiences. When I first began my teaching journey, I had no formal academic background in education but was driven by a strong desire to become an effective teacher. Early on, I realised that my knowledge of English for young learners, particularly seven-year-olds, was insufficient. I needed to develop a solid understanding of teaching methodology and learned diverse strategies to engage young children effectively. Determined to improve, I sought out every opportunity for professional development, attending seminars, courses, and workshops offered by various publishing houses.

Balancing professional development with personal responsibilities was challenging, but despite these demands, I gradually developed my teaching practices. After three years of working with young learners, I was invited to teach sixth-grade elementary students. This recognition has encouraged me to view challenges as opportunities for development rather than setbacks.

Another example of these challenges occurred much earlier in life, when I was 18 years old and had just graduated from high school. At that time, I believed that pursuing a university degree was not feasible for me. I saw it as impossible to juggle both work and studies effectively. Many years later, now married with two children, I found myself working as an English teacher. The growing professional demands in my field motivated me to reconsider pursuing a degree. Making this decision was even more difficult than before, as my responsibilities had significantly increased compared to when I was younger and single. Nevertheless, I took the leap and began my studies while managing a demanding schedule. Over the next six years, I balanced my career as a teacher, took care of my school-aged children, managed household responsibilities, and attended classes on weekends and during vacations.

Impact on teaching practices and professional growth

Participating in the "*Contextualised professional development from a timeline reflection*" course has been a transformative experience for my professional growth. During the course, we were introduced to new teaching tools and revisited those we were already familiar with but had, for various reasons, overlooked or forgotten. This experience felt like planting new seeds, which now have the potential to grow and flourish with fresh perspectives.

"This experience felt like planting new seeds, which now have the potential to grow and flourish with fresh perspectives."

One of the most significant aspects of this transformation has been the increase in my confidence as an educator. The course provided me with new perspectives on teaching, particularly in the areas of technology and inclusive education. For example, I encountered tools and platforms that I was previously unaware of, such as Twee. Due to my lack of familiarity, I initially felt apprehensive and viewed them with scepticism, assuming they were primarily used by students to circumvent academic integrity. However, now that I have gained a deeper understanding of these tools and the variety of activities they can support, I recognise their potential to enhance my teaching and facilitate student learning.

One of the first changes I implemented was aimed at motivating students to improve their written work. When providing feedback on their writing, I often noted that they were not using an appropriate register for their proficiency level. I would advise them to elevate their vocabulary, to use a more formal register, and incorporate more complex sentence structures, but they often seemed unclear about what this meant or how to achieve it. With the support of ChatGPT, I asked students to input their original texts into the AI and request a more formal revision. They then compared their initial submissions with the AI-enhanced versions, observing how their work could be improved. The students' initial reactions were both surprising and illuminating, providing them with a clearer understanding of my feedback. We have subsequently continued this practice, ensuring that the original drafts are always written during class time. In addition to ChatGPT, I incorporated the Twee platform into my teaching. This platform allowed me to design

more structured lessons, particularly for developing reading and listening comprehension skills. By using Twee to create comprehension tasks and vocabulary exercises, I was able to provide students with more targeted practice that aligned with their learning needs. The result was more effective and engaging lessons that catered to different learning styles.

"The changes I have implemented have made my classes more engaging, inclusive, and effective"

Overall, the course has enriched my teaching practices by introducing new tools and strategies that have positively impacted my students' learning outcomes. The changes I have implemented have made my classes more engaging, inclusive, and effective, and I am excited to continue exploring new ways to enhance my teaching. I believe that students respond positively to new strategies, techniques, methods, materials, and the innovations that we bring into the classroom.

Teacher collaboration and development of a community

As teachers, we often find ourselves overwhelmed with a never-ending list of tasks, all of which seem to be high priorities. During class time, it can be difficult to find appropriate moments to ask for advice or offer assistance to colleagues. While we do manage to share insights, it often happens in a rush. One of the most rewarding aspects of the course was the sense of community it fostered among participants. The collaborative nature of the sessions allowed me to connect with fellow educators who share similar challenges and goals. Throughout the course, we engaged in discussions and activities that encouraged us to share our experiences and insights. This exchange of ideas not only broadened my perspective but also provided me with practical strategies that I could implement in my own teaching. The sense of camaraderie and mutual support among participants created a positive learning environment where we could all grow together.

"The sense of camaraderie and mutual support among participants created a positive learning environment where we could all grow together."

When given the opportunity to share our experiences -both positive and negative- in an environment focused on mutual learning rather than judgment, I found myself becoming

more confident in both sharing and learning. The atmosphere fostered during those days encouraged open exchange, as we empathised with one another and recognised shared challenges. Listening to others inspired me to share strategies I had successfully implemented with my students, transforming the experience into a meaningful exchange of ideas. It reaffirmed my sense of value and reminded me that my practices could positively impact other educators.

My classes with students have become small communities where we exchange ideas and learn from each other. I enjoy sharing my discoveries about new tools with my students, and in return, they introduce me to the tools they use. This creates a supportive network for everyone. I feel a strong desire to extend this sense of community to my fellow teachers. For example, I believe that brief sharing sessions among teachers would be beneficial, as they would provide an opportunity for us to share new tools, activities, and techniques each semester. I also believe that peer observation is valuable, allowing us to view our practices through the eyes of other educators. By working together and sharing our experiences, we can collectively improve our teaching practices and better serve our students. This sense of community has reinforced my belief in the power of collaboration and has motivated me to seek out more opportunities for professional development that involve working with others.

"I feel a strong desire to extend this sense of community to my fellow teachers."

Self-initiated development and future goals

This experience left me with a strong desire for more professional development opportunities. Prior to attending the course, I was experiencing a period of significant demotivation. While my passion for teaching remained intact, I found myself questioning the value of dedicating additional time to my own professional development. I began to feel that, given my age, pursuing further education, such as a postgraduate degree, was no longer a worthwhile investment. When I received an invitation to attend the course, I was hesitant and reluctant to participate. However, my perspective shifted as soon as the course began. As the session progressed and participants shared their experiences, I felt as though I was rediscovering my purpose.

I realised that I had encountered and resolved challenges similar to those being discussed and that there were still new strategies and approaches I had yet to explore. This realisation reignited my drive to learn, not only to enhance my teaching but also to offer students fresh perspectives, inspire them, and leave a lasting, positive impact on their educational journey.

"I realised that I had encountered and resolved challenges similar to those being discussed and that there were still new strategies and approaches I had yet to explore."

The course has motivated me to pursue further professional development independently. Recognising the importance of staying current with educational trends and technologies, I have taken steps to continue growing as a teacher. I plan to explore additional workshops, courses, and resources that focus on areas such as technology, inclusive education, and innovative teaching methodologies. Moreover, one of my long-term goals is to pursue a master's degree in education. Although I had previously been hesitant to embark on this journey, the experience has reignited my passion for learning and professional growth. I am now determined to find a programme that aligns with my goals and supports my development as an educator.

Concluding remarks

The "*Contextualised professional development from a timeline reflection*" course has been a transformative experience that has enriched my teaching practices and inspired my professional growth. The course provided me with valuable insights into my teaching journey, new tools and strategies to enhance my classroom practice, and a renewed commitment to continuous learning and improvement.

"it is never too late to seek new insights."

I hope that other educators can take from my experience the importance of self-reflection, collaboration, and keeping an open mind to new ideas and approaches in teaching. Ultimately, the course has reinforced my belief that it is never too late to learn, grow, and make a positive impact on future generations. I believe this should be a primary goal for all educators: the constant desire to learn, stay

prepared, and remain open to the understanding that there is always room for improvement: it is never too late to seek new insights.

Part 3: CONCLUSIONS

Chapter 12: Conclusions and future directions for Contextualised Development

Lilia Sulema Bórquez-Morales, El Colegio de Michoacán, Mexico
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Introduction

The project entitled *"Contextualised professional development from a timeline reflection"*, funded by the Hornby Trust, was implemented to address the specific needs of university English language teachers in Hidalgo, Mexico. The project focused on providing teachers with a reflective tool to enhance their professional development and supporting them in developing an enhanced community of practice. By utilising a timeline approach, participants were encouraged to reflect on their professional journeys, identify areas of growth, and adapt their teaching methods to suit their contextual realities. This final chapter discusses the lessons learned from the project, draws key conclusions, and outlines potential future directions.

Main conclusions

The project provided numerous insights into how professional development can be more effectively tailored to meet the needs of English teachers in various contexts. Several key lessons emerged from the implementation and evaluation phases of this initiative.

The power of reflection and timelines

One of the most valuable lessons learned was the power of structured reflection through timelines. Many participants highlighted how the timeline exercise had allowed them to engage in deeper self-reflection, something they had not done previously. Timelines proved to be a practical tool in helping teachers visually map out their professional milestones, challenges, and achievements.

Several participants noted that the timeline activity encouraged them to look beyond their day-to-day classroom activities and consider their broader professional development over the years. As the report indicates, many teachers had never reflected so thoroughly on their careers before the initiative, which led to increased self-awareness and a clearer

sense of direction moving forward. This exercise not only allowed teachers to become more mindful of their growth but also helped them make connections between different phases of their professional journey. By drawing these connections, they were better equipped to recognise patterns in their teaching practices, making it easier to identify areas where they could improve.

There is a growing literature on the value of timelines as a tool for teacher professional development (e.g. Bremner & Li, 2024; Li and Shen, 2024) and it should perhaps not be so much of a surprise that they would be viewed positively by the participants. However, it is actually quite surprising the strength of (positive) feeling towards the timeline methodology, with participants overwhelming expressing their enjoyment and satisfaction with the activity. Given 40 teachers were involved in the project and many of them share positive comments informally as well as the more formal experiences gathers in this volume, this provides further indication that such an activity, adapted to context where appropriate, may be scaled up to further contexts to enhance teachers' professional development.

It was very interesting to note that, on the whole, the main outcome of the timelines was not a concrete and specific "impact on practice". Indeed, the main "impacts on practice" was gleaned from the specific sessions on AI and inclusive education, which were actually "outsider" perspectives that did not emerge from participants' timelines (we discuss the potential role of "outsider" perspectives in more detail below). However, the overall benefit of the timeline was, what we might define as "feelings about practice". For example:

- Timelines helped teachers see the importance of reflection within their own professional practice; and more broadly to maintain an open mind to new things.
- Timelines helped teachers realise how much power and agency they had to make changes within their own context.
- Timelines allowed teachers to acknowledge and validate the challenges they experienced in their context. As opposed to feeling depressed and frustrated when recognising such challenges, it seems to have served the opposite purpose, with teachers becoming more motivated to address them. For example, Olga reached the conclusion that actually, one of the key stumbling blocks in her own context

was not the institutional constraints but merely her own confidence. Seeing this mapped out on her timeline helped her to take stock and gave her the motivation to carry on.

- Timelines helped develop participants' awareness of their strengths and weaknesses. Similarly, the activity helped participants see the value of continuous learning and professional development. As explained by Guadalupe, timelines helped them clarify in their minds the importance of "having a clear path to follow when planning [their] professional development". In some cases, this led participants to identify concrete "next steps" such as further study.

- Perhaps most importantly, the timeline activity gave participants an emotional boost of confidence, with teachers expressing satisfaction and pride in their achievements.

The role of communities of practice

The formation of "professional learning communities" or "communities of practice" (CoP; Wenger, 1998) was another significant outcome of the project. As reported, teachers who participated in this project began interacting more regularly, sharing ideas and strategies that could improve their teaching. The project created a space for teachers to reflect collectively on their professional experiences, which in turn facilitated the exchange of knowledge and mutual support.

One of the key challenges for teachers in remote areas is the lack of opportunities for collaboration with colleagues. The CoP framework allowed teachers to bridge this gap, forming networks of support that extended beyond the course. This collective reflection helped to foster a sense of community among participants, which was essential for sustaining their professional growth after the project ended.

Furthermore, these communities of practice played a crucial role in adapting the insights gained from the professional development initiative within their specific educational contexts. Teachers were able to discuss and refine strategies that aligned with the realities of their classrooms, ensuring that professional development was not only theoretical but also practical and actionable. By engaging in sustained dialogue and peer mentoring, participants developed a shared repertoire of teaching practices that addressed the unique challenges they faced.

Over time, the relationships built within these communities strengthened, leading to ongoing collaborations that extended beyond the initial scope of the project. Teachers continued to support one another in implementing new methodologies, co-constructing knowledge, and critically reflecting on their evolving teaching practices. This ongoing engagement underscores the power of CoPs in fostering long-term professional growth and ensuring that reflective teaching becomes an integral part of educators' careers.

Context matters in professional development

Another key takeaway from the project was the importance of contextualised professional development. Many professional development programmes tend to adopt a one-size-fits-all approach, but the needs of teachers in rural, urban, and semi-urban areas vary significantly. As the project report highlights, the geographical diversity and isolated nature of many communities in Hidalgo present distinct challenges for educators.

The contextualised approach employed by this project ensured that the professional development offered was relevant to the teachers' unique circumstances. Teachers from different parts of Hidalgo reported that they felt their specific teaching contexts were acknowledged and addressed during the course. This not only enhanced the course's relevance but also made it more practical for teachers to implement what they had learned in their classrooms.

Furthermore, the reflection process encouraged teachers to consider how their specific teaching contexts influenced their pedagogical decisions and classroom practices. Many participants shared that engaging with their timelines helped them uncover the underlying reasons for their teaching approaches, including how student needs, and resource availability shaped their instructional strategies. This growing awareness enabled them to reassess their methods and identify more contextually relevant ways to address their learners' needs. In doing so, they were not simply applying any teaching methodology but adapting their practice in ways that felt meaningful and sustainable. By making visible the local realities of teachers' work, the professional development initiative became more than a training course; it became a space for purposeful reflection, informed decision-making, and locally grounded innovation.

This emphasis on context is parallel to the evolving discourse around the concept of "decentring" in English Language Teaching. While the original definition of decentring, introduced in 2019, sought to challenge the dominance of globalised, standardised approaches to ELT, it has since undergone revision following extensive consultations with a broader range of stakeholders (Padwad & Smith, 2023). The Hornby Trust, which promotes decentring as a guiding principle in its initiatives, welcomes these revisions and openly acknowledges that the concept is "fluid and open to discussion and questioning" (p. 83). Indeed, a central tension within any decentring project is the role that "the centre" may continue to play in supposedly decentred work. The Mexican professional development initiative described in this book engages directly with these complexities. While it was built upon an idea initially developed in the UK, it changed through the collaboration of Mexican educators who adapted the tools and activities to meet local needs. As such, the project illustrates both the possibilities and limitations of decentring, showing how reflective tools like timelines can be shaped by, and for, local teachers, allowing them to integrate external ideas into their own belief systems on their own terms.

"Outsider" views are also important

As we have just argued, the evidence presented in this book makes it abundantly clear of the value of "insider" perspectives. However, the experiences of the participants also indicate that there remains an important role of "outsider" influence and perspectives (see Bremner et al., under review).

To begin with, the original idea for the timeline activity emerged from the "outside" – i.e. a British academic working in the UK, who had done research on timelines and was interested in exploring how it might be adapted in other contexts. This research, in itself, drew upon theories of learning and case studies of practice in other countries (Bremner, 2020).

Moreover, arguably the two main content areas that had an impact on teachers' practice - AI and approaches to inclusive education- came from the "outside" too. In this case, the "outside" was technically "closer to home" than a British person 5,000 miles away, but the same principle applied: those in higher level supervisory or teacher trainer positions (Lilia, Milton and Martha) had acquired specialised knowledge (presumably, a mixture

from authoritative theoretical work, studies etc, combined with their own experience) and sought to share these ideas with teachers who had not been exposed to them earlier. Such ideas were seen as very useful by the teachers, for example being called a "surprising revelation" by Maribel, to give just one example.

In our perspective, this "outsider" approach "worked", because a) it was genuinely new and/or meaningful information; b) participants were consulted beforehand to ascertain what *they* might find useful; c) the course was not overly prescriptive; d) the mode of delivery of the course was engaging.

The conclusions that we might draw from this is that a careful balance needs to be drawn between "insider" and "outsider" perspectives. Indeed, we feel that this experience provides convincing evidence that the "decentring" concept, currently being explored by the Hornby Trust among others, cannot simply be interpreted as "inside" = always good and "outside" = always bad. There will remain an important role for both and this should be acknowledged and further explored.

Future directions

Building on the success of this project, there are several potential directions for future professional development initiatives in Hidalgo and beyond.

Expanding the use of timelines

Given the success of the timeline activity in this project, there is potential to expand its use in other professional development programmes. Timelines can be used as a reflective tool not only for English teachers but also for educators in other subjects. By encouraging more teachers to engage in structured reflection, future programmes can foster greater self-awareness and professional growth.

Additionally, timelines could be integrated into teacher education programmes for pre-service teachers. This would allow new teachers to begin their careers with a strong foundation of reflective practice, which they can build on throughout their careers.

Scaling communities of practice

The professional learning communities or communities of practice that emerged from this project should be further developed and supported. One way to achieve this is by formalising these communities and providing them with institutional support. By creating formal networks of teachers, schools and educational institutions can ensure that teachers have access to ongoing professional development opportunities, peer support, and collaboration.

Moreover, expanding these communities to include teachers from different regions or educational levels could foster cross-collaboration and the sharing of best practices on a larger scale. This would contribute to the professional growth of teachers and improve educational outcomes for students across Hidalgo.

Ongoing support and follow-up

While the project was successful in fostering reflection and community-building, one of the challenges mentioned by participants was the need for ongoing support. Future initiatives should include follow-up sessions that allow teachers to continue their reflection and share their progress with colleagues. This could be done through regular online meetings, peer observation sessions, or continued mentorship. By providing ongoing support, professional development initiatives can have a more sustained impact on teaching practices (Sakata et al., 2022).

Future research could address these limitations by expanding the study to include a larger and more diverse group of participants, incorporating longitudinal data to assess sustained impacts, and integrating objective measures of teaching effectiveness, such as classroom observations or student performance metrics. Additionally, exploring the use of digital tools to support timeline reflection and virtual communities of practice could enhance scalability and accessibility, particularly for teachers in remote areas. Another promising direction is investigating how insights from this project can be adapted for different educational levels or subject areas beyond English language teaching. Finally, further research could examine the balance between "insider" and "outsider" perspectives in professional development, refining the concept of "decentring" to better support teacher autonomy while still incorporating valuable external expertise

Limitations of the project

While the project successfully engaged 40 teachers in the sessions, we recognise that this represents only a small fraction of the broader teaching community. Although the voices included in this book provide valuable insights, they may not fully capture the diverse experiences of teachers working in different educational contexts. Additionally, the teachers who participated were likely already positively inclined towards professional development and reflective practice, which may have influenced their enthusiasm for the timeline approach. This raises the question of whether the project's impact would have been the same for educators who were less engaged or sceptical about reflective methodologies.

Another important consideration is the role of power dynamics in shaping participant responses. Teachers may have expressed overwhelmingly positive feedback due to their personal rapport with us or out of a sense of obligation rather than genuine conviction. Likewise, as researchers and facilitators, we are naturally predisposed to view the timeline process as beneficial, which introduces the possibility of our own biases influencing how we interpret participants' experiences. While we actively sought to create an open and honest dialogue, we acknowledge the need for a more critical examination of potential limitations, including whether any participants found the activity unhelpful or impractical.

Furthermore, while we followed up with teachers one year after the course, truly sustainable professional development requires long-term engagement. A more structured and ongoing support system would help reinforce the reflective practices introduced and ensure that teachers continue to feel empowered within their communities of practice. Future iterations of this project should explore ways to extend its reach, diversify the range of voices included, and critically assess both the benefits and challenges of implementing timelines as a tool for professional growth.

In terms of challenges, the project also brought to light the complexity of implementing a professional development initiative across diverse campuses and participant profiles. From a logistical standpoint, coordinating the timeline activity, course delivery, interviews, and data analysis across various phases required significant time, planning,

and human resources. Tailoring the content to the specific needs of different departments meant understanding existing training practices, identifying relevant gaps, and establishing lines of communication with faculty members and academic leaders, all of which took considerable effort. Though there were no explicit criticisms of the timeline activity itself, it is important to note that not all teachers experienced it in the same way. Some may have found the task emotionally demanding or struggled with its abstract nature. While we are convinced of the positive impact of the project, we remain mindful that this impact appreciation has its limitations.

Concluding remarks

The friendship that Nicky and I share, coupled with our longstanding experience as teachers and researchers, was central in bringing this project to life. Having lived and worked in both the UK and Mexico, we developed a shared understanding of the importance of grounding educational innovation in local needs and practices. Our collaboration was built on trust, shared values, and a mutual desire to support teachers in meaningful ways. Through dialogue and co-construction, we created a course that did not attempt to impose solutions but rather emerged from careful listening and genuine engagement with Mexican English teachers. It is our hope that the spirit of this project continues to inspire others to value teacher agency, design context-sensitive learning experiences, and invest in long-term, reflective professional development.

It was this experience that led us to see that reflective teaching practice stands at the heart of meaningful professional development. This project has shown that when teachers are invited to look back at their own trajectories, acknowledge their achievements and challenges, and make sense of their practice in relation to their context, deep learning can occur. The use of timelines proved to be an effective and powerful tool in facilitating this reflection. It helped educators connect personal experience with pedagogical insight, offering a structured way to engage with their own stories and use them as a foundation for growth. More importantly, this process reinforced the value of contextualised professional development: initiatives that respond to teachers' realities, listen to their voices, and respect their expertise.

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