

SHAPING MY PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY THROUGH NARRATIVE INQUIRY: BEING A GUIDE ON THE SIDE IS NOT ENOUGH

DANDO FORMA À MINHA IDENTIDADE PROFISSIONAL POR MEIO DA PESQUISA NARRATIVA: SER UM GUIA AO LADO NÃO É SUFICIENTE

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ABSTRACT

In this narrative inquiry, I narrate and compose meaning of an experience as an English teacher who designed a course that integrated premises of gamification and digital gaming to foster students' engagement and central participation. I begin by explaining the context in which the research took place and presenting the reasons for my proposal. Subsequently, I go over the task proposed, where students answered a questionnaire on the traits they would like to keep or change in me as their English teacher, given the chance. Their answers based the writing of a poem, which showed the need for me to step off the spotlight. The following experience narrated was having my students gamify their final oral test while I tried to be the guide on the side. I learned their central participation led to engagement and a positive attitude towards the learning process. I also understood that my urge to be a guide on the side and not a sage on stage was not enough. What really awoke me to continuously review my professional identity was having lived the experience together with them.

Keywords: Narrative Inquiry; Professional Identity; Student and Teacher Central Roles.

RESUMO

Nesta pesquisa narrativa, narro e componho sentidos de uma experiência como professora de inglês durante um curso que integrou premissas de gamificação e jogos digitais para promover o engajamento e a participação central dos alunos. Começo explicando o contexto em que a pesquisa foi realizada e apresentando os motivos da minha pesquisa. Em seguida, analiso a tarefa proposta, na qual os alunos responderam a um questionário sobre as características que, se tivessem a chance, gostariam de manter ou mudar em mim como sua professora de inglês. Suas respostas basearam a escrita de um poema, que mostrou a necessidade de eu sair do centro das atenções. A experiência seguinte narrada foi a de fazer com que meus alunos gamificassem sua prova oral final enquanto eu tentava guiá-los. Aprendi que o protagonismo deles conduziu ao engajamento e a uma atitude positiva em relação ao processo de aprendizagem. Também compreendi que meu desejo de estar ao lado e não em uma posição central não era suficiente. Ter vivido a experiência junto com eles foi o que me despertou para rever continuamente minha identidade profissional.

Palavras-chave: Pesquisa Narrativa; Identidade Profissional; Protagonismo discente e docente.

1. CONTEXTUALIZING THE EXPERIENCE

Narrating and reflecting upon my teaching practice were the research goals that guided me while teaching a course that integrated premises of gamification and digital gaming. The course aimed at fostering students' engagement and central participation, so I set out to the field to live a narrative inquiry experience, drawing on the works of Dewey (1938), Clandinin and Connelly (1995; 2000; 2015), Connelly and Clandinin (1988; 1999) and Clandinin (2007; 2013; 2020). As specific goals for my umbrella research, I intended (i) to understand how my research participants lived the proposed activities in the gaming context, paying closer attention to situated learning, and (ii) to narrate and reflect upon my teaching practice, in search for attitudes which might foster my students' central participation. It is towards the latter that I turn to for the length of this paper.

The stories I tell are among those I lived with students from two English-speaking classes who attended the language center at a Federal Institute where I used to teach. Our interactions were in English since they belonged to intermediate-level classes. One of the classes, comprised of 8 students, met every Wednesday and Thursday from 5:30 to 7 p.m.; the other, with 14 students, every Saturday morning from 8 to 11 a.m. Students enrolled in these classes were technical high school students, undergraduates, alumni, and staff members of the institution. My research participants were the high school students participating in the weekday group, and who signed a consent form to be research participants. For anonymity purposes, they all chose pseudonyms, to be referred as: Austin, Blueberry, Boyofcomputer, Claudio, Iahra, Johnny, Julia, and Spock. Additionally, I serve as research participant, considering the nature of narrative inquiry.

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My eight research participants had a genuine willingness to learn English as a common characteristic. Although they arrived at the Federal Institute at 7 a.m. and just ended their daily chores at 5 p.m., they participated in my English classes with dedication and interest. They did not seem afraid to try to speak this additional language and were curious to learn more and expand their knowledge.

For the curriculum design of the course, I questioned the dominant narrative of the use of an internationally renowned textbook and planned the integration of gamification and game design with the aim of fostering my students' engagement. The institutional proposal was to follow a textbook by a widely recognized publisher in the English language teaching field. Although the use of this textbook was mandatory, I was free to adapt the activities considering my personal and professional practical knowledge.

An important step before entering the field while designing the research that would be undertaken was to understand the “so-whats?” and the “who cares?”, which refer to the ‘whys’ or the justifications of a research proposal, as wisely put by Clandinin (2013). First, I justify my investigation personally by clarifying why it matters to me as an individual. As a person, I prefer to adopt a position of always being open for self-improvement, to learn more. Thus, when I noticed this “grand personal narrative” behind my teaching practice, of being a teacher who is used to putting up a show (Souza, 2020), I felt the need to question it. What I could learn through this inquiry is also my practical justification, i.e., the difference it might make to my own practice, since I could delve into my storied professional knowledge landscape and find out ways to improve. Finally, to justify this research socially and theoretically, I felt I could share disciplinary knowledge of the theoretical and methodological path of narrative inquiry with my peers.

It is also important to clarify who I am in this narrative inquiry experience. Am I just a researcher who collects data, analyzes it, and shares findings with the academic community? According to Clandinin (2013, p. 21), “if we change the stories we live by¹, quite possibly we change our lives”. In narrative inquiry, stories to live by is the term to refer to identity, and I believe I am always open to shape my identity, to live different experiences in a Deweyan sense, to tell them, to retell them, and to get ready to relive my stories having learned from the experiences granted to me. In this inquiry, I am “the one who should shoulder the responsibility for my students’ understanding of the content” (Samah, 2019, p. 17), but I am not the only bearer of this responsibility, which I should share with them so I can learn from them while shaping my identity.

My research started with coming alongside participants and living stories with them, process described by Connelly and Clandinin (2006, p. 478) in these words: “a more difficult, time-consuming, intensive, and yet, more profound method is to begin with participants’ living, because in the end, narrative inquiry is all about life and living”. As a novice narrative inquirer, I attempted to make meaning in the midst. Aware there are no real beginnings or ends in the theoretical and methodological path I have trailed; it is to the midst I will turn in the following section.

2. MEANING MAKING IN THE MIDST: I HAD TO BECOME A TRUE GUIDE ON THE SIDE

Five weeks after starting the course which integrated gaming and gamification, I wanted feedback from my students. How well was I doing in implementing this new design? I was teaching the topic of Unit 8, which was “What if?”, and specific grammar contents such as if-clauses and wish-clauses in this point of the course. The topic made it easier for me to get the feedback I wanted.

To match my will to ask them how I was doing as a teacher with the mandatory curricular content, I posted a task in our virtual learning environment in the Moodle platform. The task was to be completed individually and to be sent exclusively for my reading, so they could feel like writing their opinions without chances of criticism by their peers. The assignment instruction was: **Write a short text that will include the following sentences: - “If I could change something about my English teacher...” and “If I could keep something about my English teacher...” Add reasons! Save it and upload your assignment.**

Aware that I could not ignore the influence of power relations while trying to make meaning of my teacher identity (Zembylas; Chubbuck, 2018), I knew some answers could have been written to please me – their teacher

¹ As stated, stories to live by is a narrative inquiry term which corresponds to identity. These terms will be used interchangeably in this research text.

– and I understood I could not stop my inquiry then. So, I combined the answers I received from the assignment explained in the preceding paragraph, and the field notes I had written so far in the research experience and composed a ‘found poem’” basing myself loosely on the ‘found poetry’ proposal by Huber and Clandinin (2005). These researchers point to Richardson (2002) and Butler-Kisber (2001) as the authors who coined this methodological strategy, “as they ‘find’ participants’ words and phrases and pull them into new interpretive texts they call ‘found poetry’” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 152). The poem I wrote was:

FEEDBACK FOR THE TEACHER

If I could change something about my English teacher
 What would it be?
 If I could keep something about my English teacher
 What would it be?
 She is always lavishing her happiness to the people around
 That’s something to keep
 Her enthusiasm, her creativity, her enthusiasm
 Her enthusiasm, her persistence, her enthusiasm
 Her enthusiasm, her will to learn, her enthusiasm
 That’s also to keep
 Dynamic activities, YouTube videos, true and false games
 Games, games, we have fun
 Games, she speaks the language we speak
 Funny, crazy, awesome moments
 She’s full of energy
 I feel comfortable with her way to teach

If I could change something about my English teacher
 Does she really want to know?
 I can’t think of anything my teacher needs improving
 I hesitate, I hesitate, I hesitate
 Classes are not boring...
 I like her teaching methodology very much ...
 Are there only things to keep?

If I could change something about my English teacher...
 Does she really need to be plugged in electricity?
 Too fast, too fast, too fast
 Slow down during your explanations
 Slow down because I got lost with just a word I didn’t understand
 Slow down a while after you begin to talk
 Slow down like a snail or something like that
 When you speak fast, it may help us get used to native speakers
 But slow down!
 It’s Saturday morning, we are almost sleeping
 Slow down!
 Sometimes we don’t come to class on our best days
 Slow down!

If I could change something about my English teacher...
 Does she really want to know?
 Consider me!
 Ask me which kind of thing I would like to have to learn more

Ask me more during class because I need to practice my “English talk”
 Consider me!
 I’m shy
 Play music according to the lessons we have studied
 Consider me!
 Teach more standardized classes
 I feel more comfortable to talk in English when we don’t have any surprises
 Consider me!

The poem is not the truth; it is one of the possible representations of my identity as a teacher, an angle of repose or a stance, one of “the various perspectives through which we frame the collection and interpretation of data” (Ely, Vinz; Downing; Anzul, 2001, p. 32). Since narrative inquiries are relational, researchers moving on this trajectory should consider principles, such as: acknowledge participants as collaborate researchers, reconstruct meaning instead of judging, be open for judgment and perceptions, and attend to multiple interpretations of text (Clandinin, 2007). I considered such principles and invited my participants, the high school students mentioned previously, to collaborate with me in making sense of the ‘found poem. We sat down in a circle inside a classroom, had a coffee break, and engaged in conversation, a methodological tool typically used by narrative inquirers.

Printed poems in my hands, ready to initiate, to scaffold and to structure the moment, the words of Hollingsworth and Dybdhal (2013, p. 170) echoed in my mind:

[t]o develop living narratives to guide my work, I have to engage in conversation fully aware of the factors that shape the stories, the issues of relationship, identity and power as we are constructing conversation, how to structure the narrative so that all characters’ ways of seeing the world are included, and how to leverage the story to affect policy and practice.

Firstly, I needed to develop trust, so I told them that in narrative inquiry, a researcher is not looking for truth, but for multiple perspectives. I also explained that the bumping places or the tensions lived in a storied life were very dear in narrative inquiry, whose researchers listen nonjudgmentally and encourage talk about topics that are controversial and difficult, especially those considering themselves. I told them suggestions of what they would change in me as a teacher were very welcomed; that was a chance for my growth as a professional. Then I read my poem and asked if they felt represented by those words and what they would change in it. Silence reigned for a few seconds, and I noticed this resonated with a part of the poem: ‘I hesitate, I hesitate, I hesitate’. Then they started speaking up their minds.:

I feel represented. I could actually listen to parts of what I wrote in my task while you read the poem. And I am sure I know who wrote about being sleepy on Saturday morning!

Comment 1

Source: Researcher’s notes

I think the poem represents us in general, but not in all details. I don’t think you go too fast. It is not fast for me. I couldn’t write what you should change since you are the best English teacher I have had.

Comment 2

Source: Researcher’s notes

Well, I hesitated to give suggestions to change you. You are a great teacher. When we compare, there are things I want other teachers to change, more than I want you to.

Comment 3

Source: Researcher’s notes

I didn’t send you the assignment. Can I still do it, please? Sometimes I get embarrassed because I can’t reach your expectations.

Comment 4

Source: Researcher’s notes

The fact that they felt represented by the found poem felt less important when I listened to their comments critically. I understood, especially by the second comment, there would always be diversity since people naturally have different opinions. So how could I use the comments they made to improve my knowledge as a teacher, of myself? Clandinin and Connelly (1995, p. 7) define teacher's knowledge as "that body of convictions and meanings, conscious or unconscious, that have arisen from experience (intimate, social, and traditional) and that are expressed in a person's practice". Plurality of opinions should not hinder the reflective process about my teaching practice, my knowledge as a teacher. I had to rethink the body of convictions and meanings around my practice and, for that, I could not consider only what they would keep.

Besides their hesitation and silence, which points to power relation issues (Clandinin, 2020), it was important to give special attention to what they would like to change in my practice. Maybe it would be much easier to focus on acting more slowly, as they said "too fast"; however, "considering them" felt like a more challenging endeavor. To consider them, it was important to consider myself. Comment 4 hit me as "a bumping place to be considered" (Clandinin; Connelly, 1995), an uneasy state of my professional identity, since it showed my students' need to live up to my way of teaching. It made me understand I was still in a position I no longer felt comfortable: the sage on stage when I only wanted to be a guide on the side (King, 1993).

Understanding, as Dewey (1938), that life happens in an experiential continuum, which means previous experiences change the objective conditions under which subsequent experiences take place, I looked retrospectively at my teaching career. As a teacher, I had always tried to live up to my flaunting style, so I searched for pedagogical, methodological, technological ways to teach interesting classes, in a way my students would be moved to comment "What a great class" after the lesson came to an end. To be honest, I often achieved my goal, and my students were generally enthusiastic about my classes, found ways to show their appreciation of my teaching style with cards and gifts, and most of the time, I felt very proud of myself.

I hadn't reflected upon this before becoming a member of a narrative inquiry support group and listening to a doctoral candidate questioning herself when she tried to be the center of attention as a teacher (Bengezen, 2017). She felt ashamed when she acted like that. That led me to question my own teaching style. What is the matter of being such a teacher? Am I centering my teaching practice and keeping only myself in the spotlight? Do my students resent that? Shouldn't I share the spotlight with them? Am I so worried about putting up a show that I forget how my students feel?

That troubled me because I had always been interested in my students' well-being, beyond their learning. Composing the found poem and listening to my students in our conversation session, I learned there was more to be done. When I entered the research field, I really wanted to provide moments of engagement and central participation for my students, but I couldn't stop my need to stay in the spotlight - me, the center of attention.

Puzzled by the context and aware of my limitations, I decided to plan an experience in which I could actually let my students be the center of attention. I realized it was important to consider the concept of "world-traveling" (Lugones, 1987; Dewart *et al.*, 2020), an exercise in which one shifts from the mainstream construction of his/her life to another one's position. Wonders may happen when I travel to my students' worlds and let them travel to mine. I proposed that my students do my work while I played the guide on the side. The experience we have lived beginning with this proposal will be theme of the next section.

3. GAMIFIED ORAL TEST: TRYING TO BE THE GUIDE ON THE SIDE

The activity I proposed to my Wednesday/Thursday group was to gamify the final oral exam. According to the pedagogical project of the course, 14 points should be awarded for this test. I had in mind a more formative exam which included some ideas around gamification. In this section, I begin with concepts accessed before we began planning the oral test. In the sequence, I go through the whole experience schedule, sharing what happened and my reactions to the experience lived.

3.1 Getting ready for the experience: concepts of play, game and gamification

We began by reading the short online article "How can I gamify my ESL classroom?" (Pesce, s/d). The text offered a definition for gamification, some reasons why English teachers should use it in the classroom and

a 7-step guide of procedures on how to gamify a classroom or a set of classes. We explored an illustration of the steps of a gamification design presented in the article. From their questions and comments, I understood they visualized how they could gamify the oral test experience.

Earlier, when I decided to use gamification and digital gaming, I had to consider theoretical background about historical, linguistic, and cultural aspects underlying the concepts of play, game and gamification. I turned to Huizinga (1938), Caillois (1967) and Brougère (1998) in search for understanding some of these concepts more deeply. Huizinga (1938, p. 147) states that play:

is an activity which proceeds within certain limits of time and space, in a visible order, according to rules freely accepted, and outside the sphere of necessity or material utility. The play-mood is one of rapture and enthusiasm, and is sacred or festive in accordance with the occasion. A feeling of exaltation and tension accompanies the action, mirth and relaxation follow.

Play is at the heart of gaming and “gamification”, and the latter is also known as “ludification”, referring to the current tendency to use elements commonly found in games (plot, score, reward, feedback, etc.) in contexts other than games to motivate the user and increase activity and information retention. According to Deterding *et al.* (2011), “gamifying” involves understanding what games can teach us, learning from their design, and enjoying the possibility of having fun.

Kapp (2012) broadens the concept for the use of game-based mechanisms, game aesthetics, and game reasoning to engage people, motivate action, promote learning, and solve problems. The researcher leads us to reflect that gamification does not suggest the mere addition of game mechanics, such as rewards and badges, to make everyday tasks less boring. Nor is it an activity that aims to trivialize learning processes. Additionally, he defends it should not be minimized to a novelty or something simple to create.

Lee and Hammer (2011) reinforce the idea that only game elements are not gamification, and exemplify with the school assessment process, in which students earn ‘marks’ to complete tasks, which translate into badges (in educational terms: grades), which are considered for level change (or not) at the end of the year (in school: to pass or to flunk). It is important to consider under what circumstances game elements can lead to changes in learning behavior, as the gamification process affects students’ emotional experiences, their sense of identity, and their social roles. In education, gamification proposals may range from individual teacher actions, for example, converting homework assignments into missions, to institutional endeavors, which I illustrate with Quest to learn², a New York City Elementary and High School (11-18 years) where the curriculum is guided by games, digital or not.

On the one hand, gamification can motivate students to engage in school, body and soul practices, seeking more situated learning, and offering teachers better tools to guide their students through meaningful experiences. It can show students that learning in the school context can be a positive experience. On the other hand, it is necessary to consider that there are challenges, as this process can absorb teachers’ energy and time resources and convey the idea that students should only learn if they receive rewards. There is a recurrence of positive reports regarding educational gamification although obstacles are also presented.

In general, gamification is understood as having the aim to increase extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and get participants involved in the task through ludic activities and the use of game elements and game design techniques in non-game contexts. “In education, gamification is a technique that proposes dynamics associated with game design in the educational environment, in order to stimulate and have direct interaction with students, allowing them to significantly develop their curricular, cognitive, and social competence” (Manzano-León *et al.*, 2021, p. 2). It has become a trend, especially among teachers who consider their students’ engagement in gaming in their daily lives, and want to bring their knowledge on games to classroom interactions.

3.2 The experience: a general plan and missions that followed

Ready to be the guide on the side and feeling prepared to help my students with the knowledge built after reading theoretical background on gamification, I made the proposal of gamifying the final oral test. I said we would do the planning in the following class and asked if anyone had any ideas for us to think about. Spock said

2 For more information, visit the school website at: <https://www.q2l.org/>.

we could play 20 questions. I asked if it was similar to a game we played in the beginning of the course. She said it was similar, but different. I asked them to think of several alternatives so we could discuss later.

In the following class, I began with the topic of the gamified oral test. I recalled Spock's suggestion of playing a game, but reminded them the idea was that it could not be just a game in one of the classes. Her idea of 20 questions could be in the process, though. We should consider that "to gamify", as we had read in the article, included to use game elements and game design techniques in non-game contexts, as stated previously; in our case, in the educational context and process. After many opinion exchanges, we designed the following planning:

FINAL ORAL TEST GAMIFICATION – Speaking Operation Campaign

Goals of Gamification activity:

- Improve speaking skills;
- Collaborate in designing the final oral test for the class;
- Learn to negotiate in terms of language and gaming.

Rationale for the Gamification activity:

The game will be based on the first-person multiplayer shooter Counter-Strike. In this game there are campaigns, which are comprised of a series of missions. Completing them allows teams to upgrade.

Score for the Gamification activity:

- 14 points (Final Oral Test) + Extra point for the winning team
- Each completed mission is worth 4 points
- Designing the mission is worth 2 points

Duration of the activity:

- 4 weeks – missions given on Wednesdays and completed on Thursdays;
- November 8th and 9th, 16th and 17th, 23rd and 24th, 30th and December 1st;
- December 3rd – Presentation of the 4 missions for the other class for election of the best in their opinion.

Procedures of the Gamification activity:

- Students are paired up after a draw.
- Each pair (team) will design a mission that will be completed by the three other teams. The pair will give the rules and the points which will be distributed so there is a winning team for each mission.
- The teacher – Gamemaster – will accompany the design of missions helping whenever needed.
- When all missions are completed, they will be presented by the Gamemaster to the other class and students will vote for the best mission designed.

Teams/pairs (in sequence of designing mission):

- Spock and Johnny; Julia and Claudio; Austin and Blueberry; Iahra³ and Boyofcomputer

We agreed that, for the first mission, Spock and Johnny would share information about the task on November 8th, during class time, and they informed us that we would play a guessing game about book-inspired movies, as I posted in the discussion forum on Moodle:

Mission 1 – By Spock and Johnny.

Let's play 20 questions with movies that were inspired in books. You have until tomorrow to search for names of such movies in English so you can discover them faster. Each team will receive 4 names of movies, 2 movies for each member of the team. The proposing team and the Gamemaster will be responsible for writing down the numbers of questions used to discover the names. The team that uses fewer questions wins the mission.

We conducted the mission at 6:30 pm on November 9, but the preparation took place for two days. Spock was the spokesperson for the team and interacted with me via WhatsApp and e-mail. Initially, I suggested that they use a theme from the book and sent the following e-mail message to Spock and Johnny:

3 So that readers understand the references to braille, it is important to acknowledge Iahra is a visually-impaired student.

Hi kids! :)

Spock told me about your idea of playing 20 questions and I found it awesome! We are going to keep talking about people who help others, since it is a textbook topic, so I figured you could use this category to play. Do you think it is a good idea?

Would it be possible for you to choose the people you will use to play beforehand, so we could ask the braille specialist to write Iahra's character information in braille? We will have time for just one round, so you need to choose 6 people.

I found some websites that can be helpful.

Well, maybe you could make a list today. We draw the numbers and then you prepare the 20 sentences just for the 6 ones that are drawn.

Let's keep talking.

xoxo

However, they did not accept my suggestion and preferred to use book-inspired movie names and planned the game. Participants would ask questions to be answered with YES or NO, up to a maximum of 20 questions. I was initially concerned about how long it would take each group to guess while the others listened, but Johnny suggested that the groups play together. They sent me a list of 12 names and asked me to select 2 for the braille specialist to translate. They would write the little raffling papers themselves.

At the time of the mission, I accompanied Austin and Blueberry, Spock accompanied Julia and Claudio, and Johnny accompanied Iahra and Boyofcomputer. As they were having a hard time guessing the names, some rules were changed. Spock suggested they needed a tip so they could ask a WH-question, which means, questions which begin with 'what', 'where', 'when', 'who', 'which', or 'why'.

The result of the first mission was posted as the following message on the Moodle forum:

Spock and Johnny – Mission Design Completed – 2 points

Julia and Claudio – Mission 1 Completed – 4 points

Iahra and Boyofcomputer – Mission 1 Completed – 4 points

Austin and Blueberry – Mission 1 Completed – 4 points

Winners of Mission 1 – Austin and Blueberry

We commented on how good Blueberry was when it came to guessing movie names, and that she and Austin probably dedicated overnight to win the mission. We all congratulated them.

For the second mission, we had to adapt the pairs/teams because Boyofcomputer had schedule problems and moved to the class that met on Saturdays. Thus, I stopped being GameMaster and became Iahra's partner. On November 16, Julia and Claudio just said that for the mission we had to pick 10 words and send them to their email. At first Julia and I interacted to exchange ideas about the mission, but as soon as I became a competitor, she and Claudio acted very autonomously to plan the activity. I just arranged with the braille specialist so she could write Iahra's words in braille.

Earlier on the day of the activity, which happened in the last half hour of class, I heard some conversation between Blueberry and Claudio and Julia. Blueberry wanted to know if, in the mission, one pair would use the words sent by another pair, if they would use the words sent by the pair itself or if all the words sent would be mixed up. They explained that it would be the words sent by the pair/team itself.

Austin, her partner, hadn't arrived yet. She explained she was worried because he had sent her words he had found in an old dictionary. He selected 10 words he did not know and studied them. He believed that his words would be used by all teams, so he picked unknown words to have the advantage of knowing words no one else knew. We joked that he would drink from his own poison and that poor Blueberry would be the most harmed because she would use his words during the mission.

When he arrived in the room, Blueberry told him they were supposed to use their own words to create a dialogue, and he giggled. As the mission began, Julia suggested that the two begin, but Iahra and I offered to go first. It was a lot of fun, the dialogues were super creative. We had a lot of laughs. Spock and Johnny did a very good job. He was very creative in using the words and did everything quickly. Austin and Blueberry did well too;

she was awesome at inserting hard words like: ENWRAP, FURLOUGH, ECCENTRICITY in the dialogue she had with Austin.

I summarized the second mission in a post on the Moodle forum, as copied below.

Mission 2 – by Julia and Claudio

All players were supposed to send 10 words or expressions by e-mail. The mission was to have a three-minute conversation trying to use as many words as possible from the partner's list. The words and expressions prepared by one partner were used by the other one. During these three minutes, the mission designers each gave words to one of the players and they had to fit them into the dialogue. Players could pass three of the words. At the end of the turn, the mission designers counted how many words were used and how many words were passed. The winner would be the pair that used more words. If there were a tie, the pair that passed fewer words would win.

The result of the mission was posted by me on the Moodle forum, as copied below:

Spock and Johnny – Mission 2 Completed – 4 points
 Julia and Claudio – Mission Design Completed – 2 points
 Iahra and Teacher – Mission 2 Completed – 4 points
 Austin and Blueberry – Mission 2 Completed – 4 points
 Winners of Mission 2 – Spock and Johnny

The third mission was planned by Austin and Blueberry. They previously informed us that 10 words should be sent to Austin (this time no one searched for difficult words in the dictionary). They explained each student was supposed to send 10 words to Austin's e-mail.

Julia and Claudio started the third mission. They were supposed to sit down facing each other. Each of them, alternately, received a word and had to sing a piece of a song containing that word. After about 3 words, Julia suggested that the two could collaborate and think of a song for each word together, not alternately. Everyone accepted the change in rules. They guessed a lot of songs because they are always singing in English in the classroom. When Iahra and I had our turn, I felt the tension of having to remember pieces of music with words, but we could remember plenty. The last pair to play was Spock and Johnny, but they could barely score because they chose words that we don't usually find in lyrics, like: PEN, PENCIL, NOTEBOOK... Spock got mad at poor Johnny for the words he had selected. Among laughter, I mentioned he probably did not imagine the words were for lyrics of songs.

The summary of what I reported in Moodle is copied below:

Mission 3 – By Austin and Blueberry

In the beginning, each member of the pair had to sing a song in English with the words proposed by the other. But after suggestions, it was decided that both could cooperate to sing a song. Players had a limit of 30 seconds to think of a song, and could pass if they didn't know any. Each correct word/song entitled the pair a point. The winner would be the pair with more points.

The result of this mission was posted by me on the Moodle forum, as copied below:

Spock and Johnny – Mission 3 Completed – 4 points
 Julia and Claudio – Mission 3 Completed – 4 points
 Iahra and Teacher – Mission 3 Completed – 4 points
 Austin and Blueberry – Mission Design Completed – 2 points
 Winners of Mission 3 – Iahra and Teacher

It was time for the last mission to be proposed. The idea of this mission began when the pair/team was still Boyofcomputer and Iahra. We met in the hall the day I talked about gamification and Iahra suggested they do something related to theater. Boyofcomputer supported the idea at the time. We already had a first draft, so we

discussed about it in detail: if the play would be in person or in video, if everyone would have the same topic (but Iahra thought that would greatly restrict the creativity of the pairs), if we would judge the scripts and pick the best. Then I had an idea: instead of the winner being the best script or performance, we should have a more objective score. Hence, I suggested the sketch be made from riddles' answers. Iahra liked the idea, and we outlined the following mission that was later reported on the Moodle forum by me as copied below:

MISSION 4

24 HOURS TO PUT UP A PLAY

You are supposed to prepare a 2-character play together with your partner that must last from 5 to 8 minutes and contain the ten words which are the answers we expect for the list of 10 riddles that follow:

- 1) What has four legs during the day and six legs at night?
- 2) What is the first thing a woman dries when she gets off the shower?
- 3) What is twice the half of two?
- 4) The cat falls in the pool. How does it get out?
- 5) Which month has 28 days?
- 6) What has legs but can't walk?
- 7) What has 39 brothers and is burned to death?
- 8) What flies without wings and cries without eyes?
- 9) Who arrives first in a race: the policeman, the mechanic or the athlete?
- 10) What is easily lifted off the ground but hard to throw to a distant place?

If you use exactly the word we have in mind, you will get a point for each word used. If you use a synonym or another possible correct answer, you get half a point. If your play is under five minutes or over eight minutes, we will subtract a point.

Let the shows begin!

Some students wrote on WhatsApp trying to clarify their questions about their mission. Spock wrote: "So we need to guess the answers to the 10 questions and these words that we guess should be put in the script/scene?". I answered affirmatively.

The pairs were incredibly creative. Spock and Johnny started and pretended that a fire was going on in the neighborhood. Then Austin and Blueberry performed a comedy using some inside jokes from the class. Finally, Julia and Claudio pretended to be in a store, where Julia went shopping, but at the end there was a thief who stole some products - Claudio had to call the police. All the scripts were in English, and they spoke very fluently. I was so proud. After counting the words they used, we could determine a score. The result was posted on the Moodle forum, as copied below:

Spock and Johnny – Mission 4 Completed – 4 points
 Julia and Claudio – Mission 4 Completed – 4 points
 Iahra and Teacher – Mission Design Completed – 2 points
 Austin and Blueberry – Mission 4 Completed – 4 points
 Winners of Mission 4 – Julia and Claudio

Since each pair had won one of the missions, there was a tie, so we would let the other class evaluate the missions of that class and decide on the most interesting one. To this end, I replicated the project designed by the Wednesday/Thursday class in the Saturday morning class over a two-hour period. We did the 4 missions for the oral test grade and, afterwards, they voted for the most interesting mission. The winner was mission 1, so Spock and Johnny earned 1 extra point for their oral test.

My attempt to write about the experience I lived with my students in this section is supposed to illustrate how I tried to create an educative learning space (Clandinin, 2020), inviting my students to gamify the oral test while I could be the guide on the side. It is necessary to unpack the experience lived and told in the next section.

4. UNPACKING THE EXPERIENCE: LEARNING FROM TENSIONS LIVED

In Narrative Inquiry, we work within the three-dimensional space to “unpack” the lived and told stories. “Unpacking” is the part of the research process in which the researcher retells the stories envisioning possibilities, trying to understand them more deeply. To do so, the researcher should consider the three-dimensional view of a narrative inquiry proposed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000; 2015), composed of three commonplaces: temporality, sociality, and place, which will be explained in the paragraphs that follow.

For the temporality commonplace, past, present, and future are coupled. For Clandinin and Connelly (2000; 2015), events under scrutiny are in temporal transition, and meaning from experience is composed by going forward and backward in time. We are composing and constantly revising our stories to live by as we go along.

Interaction is framed in and by the social context and this criterion is brought into life in the sociality commonplace, as contended by Clandinin and Connelly (2000; 2015). The person is constituted simultaneously by the personal and the social conditions under which experiences and events unfold. Narrative inquirers turn inward to attend to matters of emotions, aesthetics and morals; they turn outward to attend to what is happening, to the milieu which is constituted of events and people in their experiences. Either turning inward or outward, the individual is always central to this process of noticing the sociality of an experience.

This leads to the third commonplace in Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000; 2015) three-dimensional proposal: where the experience takes place. The place commonplace was added to the researchers’ dimensions of a narrative inquiry after having worked alongside participants and explored how places shaped who they were and their personal practical knowledge. Place is defined by Connelly and Clandinin (2006, p. 480) as “the specific concrete, physical, and topological boundaries of place or sequences of places where the inquiry and events take place”.

Considering the three commonplaces, I guided myself into understanding my storied professional knowledge landscape after having lived and told the experience. There are three resonant threads/plotlines that relate to my research goals and to the tensions I experienced: (i) from trying to control to letting it flow, (ii) from following the textbook to a student-designed experience of gamification and (iii) from being a guide on the side to living alongside. They are all connected to the understanding of my professional identity and to learning ways for my students to have central participation while I am a participant alongside.

First, it is important that I remind the readers of this paper of my attempt to live out an image of myself as a teacher who tries to be the center of attention, who tries to be in control. Language teachers are the ones who usually decide what an oral assessment will be like: the goals, the procedures and the criteria. Sharing this responsibility with my students, I believed I was not the controller; however, the narrative I tell shows that it did not happen when we started out.

I set the tone of the experience we were about to live by exploring the topic of gamification. I told my students “they” would design the gamified experience, but when the first student suggested a game, I was quick to remind them what gamification was all about. Wouldn’t it be less controlling if I had asked the other students their opinions instead of stating mine? What if I had proposed the student herself to reflect upon her suggestion? It seems I was not ready to live a story in which I was not the authority, in which I was not in control, and thus the center of attention.

Later, when my students were designing the first mission, my need for authority can be perceived again. I suggested a topic for them to design their mission, but they did not accept my suggestion. I view the tension of my students not accepting my authority as an opportunity to learn how to be genuinely open not be the center of attention. They were supposed to design the mission; I should be the Gamemaster who was determined to be the guide on the side. I was in no position to suggest a topic. I learned my students’ voices need to be unconditionally heard so that their central participation can be authentic and secure.

Little by little, retelling the story, I can notice I was more open to listening to their voices and going with the flow. When one of my students looked up difficult words so his team could win the mission and they found themselves in a dilemma of having to use those words, I did not interfere or try to fix the situation. I did not try to control the context and accepted how the experience was flowing. When students suggested changes in the ongoing missions, I felt glad I was no longer in a position of Gamemaster, so I could invite the whole group to decide democratically if the suggestion would be accepted or not. Again, I had the opportunity not to be in control, not to be the center of attention,

In the last mission, having become a member of the pair, I felt comfortable in welcoming the plan for an activity related to theater, envisioned earlier. Although I had the idea of a more objective way to assess the winning team, it was a suggestion which could be rebutted if my partner did not agree with it. Sharing the decisions and engaging with her when writing the riddles collaboratively flowed naturally and demonstrated to me how a student and a teacher can work together. Moving from controlling to accepting helped me understand my professional identity could be shifted. In a way, I could understand the complexity of the professional knowledge landscape.

Secondly, I turn to a thread/plotline in which I consider the dominant narrative of the textbook and the sacred stories coming with it. A dominant narrative is related to conduit-delivered policies and guidelines which control or inform specific fields of education. Using a textbook published by an internationally renowned publisher has been part of the dominant narrative in the realm of English teaching worldwide. Sacred stories are part of this dominant narrative and teachers may feel comfortable by following a textbook and aligning their teaching practice to the conduit, in educational conformity to these sacred stories.

I was ready for an educative⁴ experience of rethinking the use of a textbook imposed to me by the institution where I used to work in my gamification proposal, but I guess I did not consider the difficulty in establishing and maintaining a new story in the professional landscape. Clandinin and Connelly (1995) state that positioning an alternative story of professional teacher identity within the conduit means extended negotiations are needed to continually evolve. Sacred stories powerfully shape the horizons of the professional knowledge landscape. It feels like my pedagogical proposal merely aimed at replacing one sacred story, that of the textbook, for another sacred story, that of gamification.

My attempt to convince the designers of the first mission to align the topic to the one we were dealing with in the textbook hints to the fact I was not ready to live a completely new story in the professional landscape. Even though I sent some links so they could use the category I was suggesting, they declined my idea. Again, this intensely felt bumping place helped me reshape my stories to live by and think of the need to modify my teaching practice.

As a teacher who wanted to foster students' central participation, I can find that I probably failed to consider Dewey's words:

[a] primary responsibility of educators is that they try not only be aware of the general principle of the shaping of actual experience by environing conditions, but that they also recognize in the concrete which surroundings are conducive to having experiences that lead do growth (Dewey, 1938, p. 40).

The experiences that would lead to growth depended on my students' agency and not on the sacred stories proposed by the textbook or by the theoretical principles of gamification. The student-designed experience of gamification did not need to follow the topics of the textbook. My students could see it sooner than I did that the blurring of boundaries between what they were learning in the formal environment and the informal knowledge of English they had, in games, in conversation, in music and in theater/series/TV plots, could inspire them to learn in "lifewide, lifelong and lifedeeep ways", as well put by Lee and Harmer (2011). Although I understand there could have been a more socially and politically engaged way of living this experience, they had room to bring topics which were meaningful to them.

They came up with creative ideas for an activity which is very problematic in additional language classes: the oral assessment. They explored the potential of games and gamification and applied real-world activities into the missions that composed the campaign. I began by following Brougère's premise on games and education: "it must begin in the initiative of a teacher that permits the design of activities according to the aims, a reason for the game to be marginalized" (1998, p. 204). However, letting my students come up with the aim, the gamification process was not marginalized and became central to the experience. The textbook was put aside, thanks to my students' attitudes and engagement and to my narrative relational perspective of listening and of trying to learn from the stories being lived.

4 John Dewey (1938) compares educative and miseducative experiences, in terms of the possibilities offered of having richer experiences in the future. While the former expands these possibilities, the latter restricts them, arresting or distorting the growth of further experience.

In line with Clandinin et. al. (2015, p. 22), I learned “it is easy to get swept into thinking paradigmatically and to sustain ourselves as narrative inquirers amidst knowledge landscapes that cast narrative inquirers as not knowing when seen from within dominant plotlines”. It seems I still felt the sacred stories of the textbook and the premises of gamification safer sources of knowledge.

The two previous threads/plotlines are intimately connected to the third: what I learned moving from being a guide on the side to living alongside. Earlier in my career I began considering the need not to be a sage on stage, the kind of teacher who lectures and who has all the answers and does not consider his/her students’ needs and wants. Moving backward and forward and reflecting upon my experiences in my storied professional landscape, I understand my positive attitudes towards my students. I try to memorize their names in the first classes, strive to remember what they care for, study hard about technological devices and pedagogical innovation so I can speak the language they are used to, to get closer to the experiences they have, to promote meaningful experiences for them.

Dewey (1938) anticipated many of the issues we need to deal with in our current educational period and proposed “a system that respects all sources of experience, one that offers a true learning situation that is both historical and social, both orderly and dynamic” (p. 5). I understand I have tried to deal with the dynamics of the temporality, sociality and place of the experiences I live as a teacher. After living, telling and retelling the story of the gamified oral test, I find myself reflecting upon competing notions of good teaching and moving beyond the sage on stage versus the guide on side dichotomy.

The image of good teaching I held shifted when I planned to be a guide on the side and to act as the Gamemaster of the gamified oral test experience. Being a Gamemaster did not favor my practice in a way my students could have central participation. From Mission 2 on, after Boyofcomputer switched to the Saturday group due to schedule issues, I was no longer a Gamemaster, but one of the participants. In this new context, being one of them, I could really travel across worlds, as proposed by Lugones (1987), gain understanding of myself, others and the context, reconstructing images I carried.

During Mission 1, as an outsider, the guide on the side, I remember congratulating the good job of the winning pair/team. It felt different when I pointed to the creativity and the good work of the pairs/teams in Mission 2, being one of the competitors who acknowledged the others had done a better job than we did. In Mission 3, I felt the tension of remembering songs with the words given to my partner and me and I also felt happy about doing a good job so we could accomplish the mission. I recall the same feeling of enthusiasm when we designed the fourth mission and promoted a moment of language practice, performance and laughter. I understand becoming one of the competitors was a way to truly live alongside my participants and to discover a novel notion of being a teacher who learns **with** her students.

Finding this new position in the professional knowledge landscape, I understand how meaningful it was to move from a sage on stage, then to a guide on the side and, finally, to a living-together place. I learned from being a learner; I learned that their personal practical knowledge and their stories to live by should be central in all the pedagogical experiences we could live together.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

All in all, it is important to mention the gamified oral test experience made much more sense than many pedagogical proposals I have ever envisioned. Genuine use of the language happened in both classes, not only while my students were completing the missions, but also when they were preparing them. The interaction and the negotiation while deciding on the missions was an extra class practice, which they seemed not to see as a burden, not as unwanted homework.

However, building a proposal to enrich our experiences in the classroom has not fostered a completely successful and uneventful experience. I was ready to live a different pedagogical practice which favored my students’ central participation, but I lived tensions of control, of alignment to sacred stories and of discovering a new meaning on the concept of ‘guide on side’, which was so dear to me. In Connelly and Clandinin (1999), I read a story “about the establishment of trust and the emergence of a relationship that began by my listening and responding to student voice”. The same happened in the gamified oral test experience; I had to listen and respond to my students’ voices along the way so I could really shift my professional identity.

In Narrative Inquiry, there is no final telling, no final story, and no singular story we can tell. This does not mean we do not come to conclusions in the midst; we actually do. Clandinin (2013) states no one leaves a narrative inquiry unchanged, and this shows to be especially true in this research text: the gamification experience helped me shape my professional identity; there were changes in my stories to live by.

The process of conducting a narrative inquiry was central to how I have changed. I understand a similar outcome would be harder to be achieved if I conducted a quantitative research using questionnaires or a qualitative research in which I observed participants from afar. This reminds me of Mello's dissertation and the way she uses the image of a Brazilian Carnival parade to point to what is happening on the Sambadrome and to illustrate how a narrative inquirer would be taking part of the parade, on the Sambadrome avenue, interacting with peers along the way (Mello, 2004). I was on the Sambadrome avenue of the teaching experience. I lived an experience alongside, as a participant, not as a sage or as a guide.

Having lived this experience, I understood I was eager to position myself as a guide on the side and not a sage on stage. However, what I learned was that being a guide on the side is not enough when a teacher can live the experience together with her students, when she can world-travel to her students' context and share control, no longer being the center of attention in the educational milieu.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

I hereby declare, for all due purposes, that I have no conflict of interest with regard to the article "Shaping my professional identity through narrative inquiry: being a guide on the side is not enough", submitted to the journal *Trabalhos em Linguística Aplicada*.

DECLARATION OF AVAILABILITY OF RESEARCH DATA

The research data is indicated in the bibliography of the article.

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