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Becoming Language Teacher-Researchers in a Research Seedbed

Formación en investigación de docentes de lenguas
en un semillero de investigación

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In this paper, a teacher-educator and two students of a B.A. program in foreign language teaching (English and French) of a public university in Colombia discuss our pedagogical experiences in a research seedbed. First, we present the conceptualizations underlying our analysis: research seedbeds, undergraduate research education, and curriculum as a process. Second, we describe our contextual background. Third, we analyze our experiences using three themes: creating and recreating curriculum, negotiating the official and non-official curriculum, and taking positions as teacher-researchers. We conclude that research seedbeds can broaden the pedagogical repertoire of undergraduate research education in foreign language programs and that it becomes necessary to conduct studies in this area in Colombia.

Key words: Foreign language teaching, language education, research seedbeds, teacher education, teacher education curriculum, teacher researchers, undergraduate research.

En este artículo, una profesora y dos estudiantes de una licenciatura en lenguas extranjeras (inglés y francés) de una universidad pública en Colombia discutimos nuestra experiencia pedagógica en un semillero de investigación. Primero, presentamos las conceptualizaciones que subyacen nuestro análisis: semilleros de investigación, educación en investigación y currículo como proceso. En segundo lugar, describimos nuestro contexto. Tercero, analizamos nuestra experiencia alrededor de tres temas: creando y recreando un currículo, negociando el currículo oficial y no oficial, y tomando posiciones como docentes-investigadores. Concluimos que un semillero de investigación puede ampliar el repertorio pedagógico de la educación en investigación de docentes de lenguas extranjeras y que es necesario realizar investigaciones en esta área en Colombia.

Palabras clave: currículum de formación de maestros, educación de maestros, enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras, investigación formativa, maestros investigadores, semilleros de investigación.

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Introduction

In this reflection paper, we discuss our pedagogical experiences in undergraduate research in language education as members of a research seedbed¹ (RS) called “InterAcción”. We are a teacher-educator, Claudia, and Rodolfo and John, two undergraduate students of a B.A. program in foreign language teaching (English and French) based in a regional campus of a public university in Colombia. We frame the discussion of our experiences in light of theories of curriculum as a process, and constructs about undergraduate research education and RS.

On the one hand, according to traditional views, curriculum consists of static and prescriptive documents such as official syllabi, whereas theories of curriculum as a process conceive it as a phenomenon that occurs at different times and moments, and involves diverse agents (Cuervo, 2015). Thus, our understanding of research seedbeds (RSS) is in alignment with the latter perspective since RSS are learning communities that spontaneously emerge and are continuously shaped according to the research interests of their members, namely, students, professors, and/or researchers (Saavedra-Cantor, Muñoz-Sánchez, Antolínez-Figueroa, Rubiano-Mesa, & Puerto-Guerrero, 2015).

On the other hand, the promotion of research in the field of education has a growing tradition and is nowadays conceived as a critical component of teacher education. Its origins could be traced back to the early 20th century when prominent authors such as John Dewey, Maria Montessori, and Ovide Decroly aimed at founding pedagogy as a new science and transforming the work of teachers from an artisan craft to a scientific endeavor (Suárez, Quintana, & Ossa, 2013). This idea has gained greater acceptance in the academic community in the last decades. For example, in the 1970s, in a seminal work, Lawrence Stenhouse (1975) questions the traditional idea

that teaching practices should be regulated by experts, consigning teachers to the application of prescribed curricula. Thus, he discusses the view of teachers as researchers and theorizes different forms of teacher research such as action research and reflective teaching.

In the field of language teaching, Borg (2013) examines different concepts associated with the research conducted by teachers, namely, practitioner research, collaborative inquiry, critical inquiry, self-study, and action research, among others. He states that teacher research consists of a systematic individual or collaborative inquiry that is made public, either qualitatively or quantitatively oriented, and conducted by teachers in their professional contexts. It aims to understand teachers’ work in individual classrooms and, above all, to increase the quality of education at local and broader levels. Despite its potential transformative influence, teacher research is still a minor practice in the field of language teaching. In addition, Borg highlights the necessity of exploring the role of teacher research into both undergraduate and in-service language education programs.

To understand the nature of our experience in initial foreign language teacher programs in Colombia, we explored several local studies related to undergraduate research education and found some recurrent elements. First, official syllabi contain a research component that promotes formative research. Specifically, students are exposed both to theories about research and practical small-scale projects. Second, theory-based research courses tend to focus on applied linguistics issues and privilege a qualitative paradigm. Third, teaching-oriented experiences are framed into action research projects and constitute the core of the professional practicum (Blanco & Linza, 2012; Cárdenas, Nieto, Bellanger, Cortés, & Rüger, 2005; Faustino & Cárdenas, 2008; Gallego, Quintero, & Zuluaga, 2001; García, 2013; Granados-Beltrán, 2018; Hernández & Vergara, 2004; Latorre & Palacio, 2015; López & Zuluaga, 2005; Martínez, 2016; McNulty & Usma, 2005; Rubiano, Frodden, & Cardona, 2000; Viáfara, 2008). In sum, research

¹ *Semilleros de Investigación* is the original term in Spanish and it was translated by the authors for publication purposes.

education in undergraduate foreign language programs tends to be circumscribed to a prescribed curricular strand in the official syllabus.

The commonalities of the aforementioned curricular reforms can be explained to a considerable extent by top-down initiatives and policies that have regulated the inclusion of research in pre-service teacher education programs. For example, the academic project Colombian Framework for English (COFE)² gave birth to the inclusion of research as an integral part of the curriculum in initial foreign language education programs; the decree 0272 of 1998 (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 1998) regulates research in teacher education; and the decree 2450 of 2015 (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2015) promotes the inclusion of different undergraduate research strategies in initial teacher education programs.

In terms of RS, we realized that these groups have a strong tradition at the Universidad de Antioquia, and they are being adopted progressively in other Colombian universities. Besides, RSS have gained institutional recognition and official support. For instance, at a national level, the decree 2450 of 2015 regulates RSS as one of the options for the accreditation of teacher education programs while, at an institutional level, our university recently designed a policy for RSS.

Despite this growing recognition, RSS have not been sufficiently explored in initial foreign language teacher education processes in Colombia. We found only the case of Abad and Pineda (2018) in local journals. These authors discuss the experience of becoming a foreign language teacher researcher in a RS from the standpoint of a mentor and her mentee. They describe RS as a strategy of voluntary participation but under a prescriptive agenda that complements the official research education (Abad & Pineda, 2018).

² COFE consisted of a bilateral project between the British Council and the Colombian Ministry of Education (1991-1997). It aimed to promote networking among universities in order to improve both initial and in-service training for teachers in Colombia (Rubiano et al., 2000).

Therefore, given the necessity of exploring undergraduate research in language education processes, we consider that the analysis of our experience might draw attention to the potential role of RS in the field of foreign languages. Besides, while not claiming that our path is generalizable to other contexts, we contend that RS is a proposal, among others, that can pave the way for prospective students to become researchers and producers rather than mere consumers of knowledge (Kumaravadivelu, 2016).

In the following sections, we present first the theoretical constructs that guide our discussion, specifically the concept of RS, undergraduate research education, and curriculum as a process. After, we describe some institutional circumstances, and illustrate the nature of our learning journey. Subsequently, we present our experience under three main themes (a) Creating and recreating curriculum; (b) Negotiating the official and non-official curriculum; and (c) Taking positions as teacher-researchers. Concomitantly, we provide samples that illustrate some relevant moments in our path. Finally, we share our conclusions.

Theoretical Background

In this section, we integrate the constructs that underlie our reflection, namely, RS, undergraduate research education, and curriculum as a process.

According to Ossa and Sierra (2001) and Torres (2005), RS is a term that identifies a learning community. From our perspective, it has an organic nature in the sense that it emerges from the initiative of not only professors and researchers but also from students, and that all participants share common interests and shape their work according to their goals. They also intend to challenge the traditional ways of addressing research education in undergraduate programs (Bolívar, López, González, & Cardona, 2015; Ossa & Sierra, 2001; Saavedra-Cantor et al., 2015; Torres, 2005). Specifically, students are guided by experienced members so that they can take ownership of their learning process (Saavedra-

Cantor et al., 2015; Torres, 2005). Furthermore, students assume participative roles in decision-making processes, and hierarchical relationships are transformed into democratic participation (Bolívar, 2019; Torres, 2005). In sum, contents and group work tend to be detached from the prescribed syllabus and such a participative nature favors individual and group autonomy, solidarity, democracy, and transformation (Saavedra-Cantor et al., 2015; Torres, 2005).

rss have consolidated as extracurricular groups that promote research culture (Bolívar et al., 2015; Oquendo, Gonzáles, & Castañeda, 2001; Torres, 2005) not only in tertiary education but also in primary and secondary institutions. Specifically, these groups intend to strengthen critical thinking and research skills (Bolívar et al., 2015; Oquendo et al., 2001; Saavedra-Cantor et al., 2015; Torres, 2005). Some of their underlying principles revolve around the idea of conceiving knowledge as a social public good, contextualizing practices that address local and regional issues, and guaranteeing generational renewal and institutional recognition (Ossa & Sierra, 2001; Saavedra-Cantor et al., 2015; Torres, 2005; Villalba & González, 2017). Moreover, different educational activities constitute the pedagogical repertoire of rs. Among others, we highlight posing questions to enhance participants' curiosity, debates to explore different viewpoints, attending academic conferences to be acquainted with the academic agenda, and conducting small-scale projects (Bolívar et al., 2015; Oquendo et al., 2001; Saavedra-Cantor et al., 2015; Torres, 2005).

In terms of undergraduate research education, Healey and Jenkins (2009) conceive it as students' engagement in research alongside their learning process. Specifically, they argue that college students should be exposed to models of research education so that they are systematically inducted into the world of research to eventually become producers of knowledge. These authors cite four main ways of engaging in research: discussions with a tutor on research procedures and

theory; undertaking complete cycles of research; learning about current research in specific disciplines; and developing research and inquiry skills. In turn, in the Colombian context, rss have consolidated as a relevant strategy to promote undergraduate research education since these groups conduct research that foster situated practices and tackle local problems (Bolívar et al., 2015). Thus, by drawing on those authors, we comprehend undergraduate research from two approaches, a theoretical and an experiential. The former refers to learning about research through explicit guidance on theoretical foundations and research procedures, whereas the later deals with students learning by conducting research in an informed manner.

Moreover, we conceive rs as a curricular process that fosters undergraduate research education. Specifically, rss have been traditionally understood as an *extracurricular* strategy (Bolívar et al., 2015; Oquendo et al., 2001; Saavedra-Cantor et al., 2015; Torres, 2005). However, from our perspective, this *extracurricular* notion unveils a traditional view of curriculum. In other words, curriculum is conceived as a compilation of prescribed parameters, methodologies, and contents that regulate the pedagogical practices of a course or an institution. In such a perspective, the concept of curriculum falls short to account for the complex realities of education and the regulation of pedagogical practices, as is the case of rs. For that reason, we consider rs as an *extra-class* yet curricular process that challenges top-down approaches and prescriptive documents.

It is in that sense that Gimeno (2010) affirms that curriculum could be understood only in its process of development, in which curricular prescription is just an element of the whole curricular process. In this view, the curriculum is constituted by various moments in which different actors make decisions. According to Cuervo (2015), curriculum is initially prescribed in laws, regulation, and syllabi; secondly, presented by means of textbooks, videos, and other class materials. Then, it is interpreted by teachers and curricular committees

before its implementation. In addition, the curriculum has a real effect on the subjectivities of the learners, and just some of these effects could be evaluated (Gimeno, 2010). Hence, we can think of RSS as a curricular process, given their pedagogical nature. That is to say, a process of selection, exclusion, and organization of cultural contents that pursues specific effects on its receivers and consists of various moments in which different decision agents intervene (Cuervo, 2015; Gimeno, 2010). These decisions are framed in different curricular determinations that comprise policies, resources, and regulations that either enable or limit the capacity of action of curricular decision makers (Beltrán, 2010). Furthermore, since the agents who make the curricular decisions defend different interests, the selection and exclusion of contents is not, by any means, neutral (Apple, 2004).

Context: Growing Amid Regional and Centralized Conditions

To illustrate our experience, we describe the regional circumstances under which our work has been taking place, the characteristics of our teacher education program in a regional branch, and some generalities of our RS “InterAcción”.

Regional Circumstances and Research

Our RS is located in the East of Antioquia, a strategic region that is currently facing profound social and economic changes (Instituto de Estudios Regionales & Facultad de Educación Universidad de Antioquia [INER], 2013). Specifically, we work within the academic community of the East Campus of Universidad de Antioquia, a regional institution that started academic activities in 1997, as part of a strategy to decentralize tertiary education. However, its agenda tends to be circumscribed by the central branch decision-makers as is the case for research, as explained below.

According to INER (2013), the role of higher education programs becomes of paramount importance given the current structural changes of the East region. Nonetheless, the institutional efforts to consolidate research are still incipient (INER, 2013). That study revealed that the main obstacles for the development of research in the region comprise the decontextualized research policies, the absence of regional-based research groups, the scarce articulation with the researchers of the central campus, and the intermittent work of paid-by-the-hour professors. However, there exists a gradual consolidation of different RSS in the regions.

In terms of teacher education programs, Gómez-Zuluaga (2017) states that the pedagogical practices and educational research initiatives offered by universities in the East of Antioquia tend to be decontextualized. Such is the case of the East campus, since many majors were designed according to the conditions of the central campus and were offered in the region without curricular adjustments, as in the case of our undergraduate program, described below.

Our Teacher Education Program at a Regional Campus

We are members of a regional B.A. program in foreign language teaching that currently has four cohorts of graduates and four undergraduate student groups. Offering this major at the East Campus responds to the expansion of the university in the region of Antioquia and the growing demand for foreign language teacher education programs (INER, 2013). However, its syllabus stemmed from the evaluation of a former academic proposal based at the central campus, almost 20 years ago. No curricular adaptations have been incorporated since.

The official syllabus comprises three components, Language (English and French), Pedagogical Knowledge, and Specific Didactics and Pedagogical Research. The incorporation of the research strand was done as an intention to improve the quality of language education by exposing future teachers to learning experiences in

which theory and practice could be integrated through action-research (Jiménez, Luna, & Marín, 1993). The origin of such a reform dates to the 1990s and explicitly emerged from the COFE project, an agreement between the government of Colombia and Great Britain. The plan consisted of gradually improving foreign language teaching programs through curricular changes in different Colombian universities (Rubiano et al., 2000). In 1998, the statute 0272 regulated the inclusion of research in all pre-service teacher education programs. Nowadays, the decree 2450 of 2015 stipulates research as a fundamental component of initial teacher education programs in Colombia and demands the definition of policies and the implementation of strategies to guarantee effective research education processes. RSS are listed as one possibility.

In our program, the research component responds only to the statute 0272 and COFE project proposals. Accordingly, undergraduate research education starts from the very first semester with *seminar courses* that encourage reflection on pedagogical issues as students develop research skills such as keeping a research diary, conducting documentary analysis, and designing interview protocols (McNulty & Usma, 2005). Later, in the sixth semester, *pedagogical projects* along with theory-based *research courses* continue enhancing the development of research skills as well as addressing research paradigms and methodologies in the context of foreign language teaching. In ninth and tenth semesters, students conduct a one-year action research project in secondary or primary schools. Additional to these courses, the language strand also aims to enhance research attitudes, specifically, through project work methodology (Frodden & Mesa, 2004).

Our Research Seedbed

Our RS emerged in 2015 and currently continues its work. At that time, Claudia, who was the academic coordinator and instructor of the program, decided to invite students to work together, initially with the pur-

pose of reinforcing their language learning. Eventually, some of those students expressed their willingness to work as a study group and other students were invited; thus, John and Rodolfo joined the group. Accordingly, to organize our roles and plans, all the members decided to understand the concept of RSS, given their relevance in our university.³ Since RS matched our expectations, we analyzed Molineros (2010), because his book compiles theoretical constructs and practical ideas about how RSS are created and implemented. This approach prepared the groundwork for our experience and gave birth to our definition of RS:

Our research seedbed is a voluntary, dialogue-based, and extra-class activity whose dynamic revolves around the common interests of its members. It favors interpersonal relationships and is based on collaborative work. Experiences, readings, and prior knowledge are shared so that the appropriation of new knowledge, research education, and human development are favored.⁴

As we were reflecting on the notion of RS, our interest in understanding foreign language research also emerged. Therefore, the next step consisted of studying research reports. During our first year of work, every member proposed a topic, searched for an article in journals and research databases, and prepared a presentation. Simultaneously, we defined group policies about individual and group work assessment, attendance, roles, and procedures to systematize information. Shortly afterwards, thanks to the financial support of our academic unit, some of us could attend academic events that expanded our academic repertoire. A subsequent stage was characterized by a strong interest in connecting theory with our local realities. In our second year, new subgroups emerged as students refined their interests. Particularly, from the very beginning of our RS, the three of us also focused on understanding RS as a strategy

³ Universidad de Antioquia has pioneered the consolidation of RS as a strategy to promote research education (Bolívar et al., 2015).

⁴ Translated from Spanish by the authors for publication purposes.

to promote undergraduate research education, which led to this paper.

Gradually, some students' roles shifted from readers and attendees to presenters in different local, national, and international events related to foreign languages and education. In the third and fourth years, our participation in events focused on small-scale research proposals that we started to design as part of the official courses and that were eventually refined with the feedback of the members of our RS. Additionally, John and Rodolfo started to participate in different activities related to the institutionalization of RS at the Universidad de Antioquia, particularly, in the creation of an institutional policy for RS and in the consolidation of RS in the regional branches.

Reflection: Our Experience From a Curricular Perspective

The origin of this reflection dates to our first year of work in 2015, when the whole group decided to keep a record of our meetings and activities through minutes, reports, and voice recordings. The three of us decided to study our experiences in undergraduate research in language education and socialize our preliminary reflections with other members of our RS and in different local and national academic events. To support our understandings, we have resorted to different theoretical constructs such as RS, curriculum as a process, undergraduate research education, and situated knowledge. Nonetheless, for this paper, we drew on the three first concepts.

Specifically, the three of us wrote individual descriptions of our own experiences as members of RS "InterAcción" and carried out a process of group deliberation. Then, we contrasted the conclusions of our deliberation with documents of our RS such as minutes and reports. Since the connection of our experience with the official syllabus emerged as a key element in our analyses, we decided to frame it from a curricular perspective. In other words, we concluded that the

capacity of curriculum to regulate pedagogical practices (Gimeno, 2010) emerged as a crucial factor that guided the understanding of our experience. In this regard, our reflection has been illuminated by several questions, as follows: What contents are selected in the RS? What roles, activities, and goals are defined? How is time managed in the RS? Who makes these decisions? How does the official syllabus and the RS relate? Therefore, we organized our reflection around the following themes: (a) Creating and recreating curriculum; (b) Negotiating the official and non-official curriculum; and (c) Taking positions as teacher-researchers.

Creating and Recreating Curriculum

According to traditional perspectives, curriculum consists of technical prescriptions in which the participants of the educational process have scarce possibilities to make choices. In contrast, the view of curriculum as a process entails understanding the participation of diverse educational agents in its organization at different moments (Cuervo, 2015). The latter view allowed us to recognize our own experience as a curricular process. Specifically, we went through an organic and cyclical process in which curricular choices were continually created and recreated in terms of group organization and planning.

At the very beginning of our RS "InterAcción", we did not have a prescribed agenda, nor did we have to respond to a pre-established curriculum. For this reason, our willingness to learn became a fertile ground in the initial configuration of our academic work. Besides, decisions about group organization and planning continuously emerged from an organic process of negotiation and dialogue as a group.

In terms of organization, we held regular meetings to discuss academic and organizational issues. To regulate our group work and our individual participation, at the beginning of our RS, we created our own definition of RS, policies about individual and group work assessment, attendance, and roles, among other aspects. Currently,

all members are working in subgroups that naturally emerged according to shared interests. In these groups, we organize our work and select contents autonomously, but our progress is regularly socialized with the whole group either to share knowledge or receive feedback and orientation. Additionally, decisions in terms of time tend to be detached from pre-established institutional agendas, except when we decide to participate in academic events or to apply to institutional subventions to finance our work, as described in the next section.

Concerning planning, in addition to regular meetings, we have periodical special gatherings to evaluate

and plan our individual and group work. They usually take place every semester. Table 1 illustrates an example of this planning process. In particular, it corresponds to a group evaluation process carried out at the end of 2017. At that moment, our academic work was being neglected due to urgent administrative tasks. To find explanations and solutions to such situation, we designed a three-step group assessment activity that took place over three days. There, we reconstructed our past, present, and future work and designed new subgroups. That evaluation also helped us unveil several issues in terms of planning and relationships.

Table 1. Group Assessment 2017

| Stage | Description |
|----------------|---|
| Past | In small groups, we analyzed the minutes of our meetings according to some pre-established categories that we had visualized as the possible roots of our current difficulties, namely, <i>participation in events, group work, topics of interests, personal relationships, and the connections between rs InterAcción and our syllabus</i> . We managed to compile a list of situations that illustrated each category and we eventually identified patterns and solutions with which to tackle our problems. |
| Present | <p>In this second moment, we carried out three activities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Writing a story</i>: In groups, we were to create a story that illustrated our characteristics as an rs. This recount had to include reflections about one of the patterns that we had identified in the reconstruction of our past. 2. <i>Problem-Tree Analysis</i>: In this activity, we formed the subgroups in which our rs was organized. The purpose of this activity consisted of evaluating the current work of those subgroups. Our task comprised the design of a tree. The roots represented the topics and the dynamics; its trunk compiled their expectations, experiences, and difficulties; the branches and fruits depicted the achieved goals to date. 3. <i>Peer-assessment</i>: We designed a poster with the name of each student. It included three columns: <i>Strengths, Weaknesses, and a Personal Response</i>. All members filled in the first two columns of other members' posters. At the end, every student had to write a personal response on his or her poster. |
| Future | The previous two stages permitted us to identify some issues in our rs that required attention: <i>Spaces for discussion, academic events, administrative affairs, leisure activities, financial resources, new members and alumni</i> . Thus, in pairs, we envisaged specific proposals, means, and limitations to tackle the previous issues. |

Negotiating the Official and Non-Official Curriculum

As previously discussed, the organic nature of RS “InterAcción” favored our agency when making curricular decisions. Nevertheless, our agency was framed by some curricular considerations (Beltrán, 2010) such as institutional conditions, resources, and the official syllabus. They shaped our decisions in relation to the selection of contents and some group work decisions, as described below.

Concerning contents, their selection initially emerged from our interests but was also influenced by external conditions at different points in our experience. In an early stage, all members chose the topics that we wanted to learn about. Specifically, we explored post-method pedagogy, critical discourse analysis, world Englishes, language awareness, undergraduate research education, and bilingualism. Thus, the selection of contents emerged as an autonomous search, but also became a guided practice. In this process of selection, Claudia recommended authors or specific papers to some students. In addition, she guided them in the use of academic journals and research databases of the university. This activity somehow shaped our decisions, since we managed to have access to a specific academic repertoire in our field. In a subsequent stage, attending academic events expanded our horizon of contents. Specifically, we became interested in teachers’ and learners’ identities, culture and language, language policies, and narrative as a research method. In other words, these new topics strengthened the academic foundations of our discussions and led us to realize that our initial interests were relevant and related to the current academic agenda in the area in Colombia. Thus, we concluded that our work could contribute to expand the knowledge in our field but from a regional viewpoint. Thereafter, we became familiar with some regional conditions as we visited some schools and conducted fieldwork as part of the seminar courses of the official syllabus. Those visits complemented the

selection of contents in our RS and triggered our interest in issues related to our local realities. Particularly, we started to explore theory and research about school and diversity, rural education in general, language policies in Colombia in rural contexts, language and culture, decoloniality, and gender roles in fairy tales.

Thus, as in the case of Abad and Pineda (2018), the undergraduate syllabus and RS “InterAcción” became complementary paths in our education as teacher researchers. On the one hand, RS “InterAcción” has allowed us to deepen our knowledge about academic contents that are addressed in different official courses. On the other hand, the syllabus became an opportunity to integrate class work with our academic interests in RS “InterAcción”. This interrelation has been favored by the democratic nature of some courses of the official syllabus since students can make autonomous decisions when choosing the topics they want to address in their independent work. For instance, in language learning courses, students can select the particular themes they want to tackle in their project work. In seminar courses, students visit local institutions, observe classes, and plan and conduct micro-teaching sections. Furthermore, in theory-based research courses students can select topics, theories and, in some cases, the methodologies to propose or conduct small-scale projects.

As an example of the reciprocal relationship between syllabus and RS, in Table 2 we describe a small-scale case study research project that initially started as part of a course of the official syllabus, but it was refined and developed as part of the work in RS “InterAcción”. It aimed at understanding how cultural diversities, such as gender, geographic origin, ethnicity, and sexual and religious orientations were recognized from the schooling experience of an indigenous student in an urban school in the region of Antioquia, Colombia.

Other institutional policies have also enabled the implementation of different strategies in our process. For instance, our academic department designed a policy that regulates the distribution of financial

resources to attend national and international academic events. As we already mentioned, our attendance at well-known national events in our field influenced our academic interests and research agenda. Those experiences also helped us realize that our work met the academic expectations of these events, and that our work was worth sharing. Similarly, since the policy allots higher resources to attend national and international events as presenters, many students decided to take a more active role. Furthermore, the above-mentioned research project (Table 2) was funded by our academic department in the context of a call for student-research proposals. This permitted the

implementation of the project and the assignment of tutoring sessions in Claudia's work schedule.

Finally, our involvement in some institutional events has also influenced our agenda. For example, we have attended events of the official program for RS at Universidad de Antioquia and the institutional network of RS (RedsIN). According to personal interests, some members decided to present research proposals in the official seminar for RS and attend workshops about research in education. Overall, academic opportunities at the institutional level are constantly negotiated with our own work and group dynamics.

Table 2. Research Project: Recognition of Diversities From the Schooling Experience of an Indigenous Student

| Time: 2 years | Student researchers: John and another participant of RS "InterAcción" | Resources: funding from our academic department and a tutor (Claudia). |
|---|---|---|
| Official semester in which the student researchers were registered | Activities in the context of RS "InterAcción" | Activities in the official syllabus |
| Fourth | Formulation of the project, participation in academic events, and calls for funding. | The project stemmed from a mini-research project in the course <i>Sociology of Education</i> . |
| Fifth | Visits to the school, document analysis, interviews with the participant, her teachers, her classmates and her parents. | In the course <i>Principles of Language Acquisition</i> , we conducted a mini-project about the student's acquisition of Spanish as a second language. |
| Sixth | Data collection and thematic analysis of data. | Drawing on the concepts of the theoretical framework and the institutional context, in the <i>Contrastive Grammar English-Spanish</i> course, we proposed a project on how to implement a critical intercultural approach in an English teaching class. |
| Seventh | Data analysis, writing a report, and participation in an international academic event. | Considering the preliminary results from the study, in the <i>Research I</i> course, we elaborated an action research proposal to address issues of religious and sexual discrimination in the context of the school. |

Taking Positions as Teacher-Researchers

In this section, we focus on our learning in terms of research education, the transformation of our subjectivities as teacher-researchers, and our roles in academic communities.

As Healey and Jenkins (2009) and Bolívar et al. (2015) state, undergraduate research in language education comprises both theoretical and experiential learning. We experience both approaches in our RS. From a theoretical viewpoint, we analyze and discuss literature related to research contents and procedures. For instance, John managed to understand research designs and paradigms before taking research courses. In Rodolfo's case, he studied language policies before taking the corresponding official course. From an experiential approach, we have been presenters in academic events, formulated research proposals, conducted different research procedures such as data collection and analysis, and obtained financial support to fund small-scale projects, as the case illustrated in Table 2.

Gimeno (2010) states the curriculum may have effects on the subjectivities of students. In our case, the curricular nature of our RS led us to a transformation of our positionality as teacher-researchers. On the one hand, we learned that it is possible and necessary to shift from being consumers to producers of knowledge in Colombia. For instance, John and Rodolfo moved from attendees to presenters in academic events and from readers to researchers of their own projects. These new positions helped us comprehend that our knowledge is valuable and can further the local academic agenda. For instance, when discussing rural education, all members in our RS realized that such a topic should be addressed in the research work of the foreign language teaching field.

On the other hand, our experiences in our RS "InterAcción" continuously change and inform our role as teachers and researchers. To illustrate this point, Claudia states that she constantly confirms the impor-

tance of acknowledging students' voices and holding higher expectations for them, whereas Rodolfo and John have appropriated technical terms in their discourses that inform their teaching practices. Additionally, our conceptions of research have been expanded, and, as Granados-Beltrán (2018) states, we have questioned how action research has become a hegemonic research method in initial teacher education in foreign language in Colombia. Currently, we consider that pre-service foreign language teachers should do research by drawing directly on different fields of education such as sociology or anthropology, and by following different research designs beyond action-research, such as ethnography, phenomenology, and narrative inquiry, among others. From our perspective, by widening the scope of research foundations, future teachers could address language education issues beyond the application of technical research formulas.

Since our RS is a learning community, we keep a constant dialogue and make decisions as a group that constantly changes our roles and responsibilities. However, some participants consistently play a leading role whereas others tend to remain as supporters. In other words, the level of investment of members varies according to their interests, time, and other individual characteristics. For instance, Rodolfo and John consolidated their leadership not only inside our RS "InterAcción" but at an institutional level thanks to their participation in and organization of different events. Particularly, Rodolfo and John participated in the *First Research Camping Retreat of Universidad de Antioquia* as co-authors of the institutional policy for RS. Their participation in that retreat, together with their knowledge about the East region of Antioquia, allowed them to conclude that establishing regional networks with other RS could foster the consolidation of a local academic community. In addition, they became leaders and referents at the East Campus in terms of RS. Thanks to this public recognition and their experience, they feel empowered to continue working

towards the consolidation of a research network with RS at the East Campus.

An example of this engagement with communities is illustrated in Table 3. We describe a local academic event at the East Campus of Universidad de Antioquia, whose organization was led by John, Rodolfo, and some members of other RSS. This event was held in 2017 aiming to promote the recognition of RS and study groups on our campus. The event consisted of three parts: (a) a panel of experts on RS, (b) a poster session to socialize the experiences of local RSS, and (c) a co-creation workshop with RS and professors from our campus.

Conclusion

After analyzing our experience as members of RS “InterAcción” from a non-traditional conception of curriculum, we conclude that our learning and transformation do not rely on prescriptive or static contents or methodologies. Rather, we opt for a creative process of negotiation according to our interests and possibilities. Although deliberations are time-consuming, we strongly believe that the organic nature of the process

has triggered our interests and, above all, our desire to continue working.

Besides, our learning process has been mediated by a two-way interaction with the official syllabus, either as a complementary or independent path that has allowed us to expand and deepen our research perspectives. Specifically, the project work methodology underlying some official courses and the practical nature of seminar courses became a fertile ground in such an interaction. In addition, this experience has favored not only the appropriation of specific research theories or techniques, but the transformation of our positions as teacher-researchers and our roles in academic communities.

Furthermore, despite being part of a decentralized campus of the university where there is not a strong research tradition, our work has been favored by the high status of RSS and research in our institution. Hence, given the scarce possibilities for institutional research at the regional programs, RS could be regarded as a strategic option to continue promoting undergraduate research in language education in these contexts.

Table 3. Second Meeting of RS and Study Groups at the East Campus of Universidad de Antioquia

| Role of our research seedbed <i>InterAcción</i> | | |
|--|---|--|
| This event was proposed, organized, and led by students from different RSS at the East Campus. Members of RS “InterAcción” participated in the organization committee of this event. Such experience allowed us to have direct contact with RSS from other fields of knowledge and define a common agenda. | | |
| Activity | Description | Our participation |
| Panel | It consisted of a recount of the history of RSS at Universidad de Antioquia. The socialization of proposals for RSS. A presentation of different networks of RSS. Discussions about the needs and challenges of regional RSS. | John represented local RSS. Rodolfo moderated the panel. |
| Poster session | RS socialized their experiences: lines of research interest and ongoing or finished projects. | Claudia and other members of our RS “InterAcción” participated in the socialization of our experience. |
| Co-creation workshop | We gathered information about RS (activities, needs, perceptions about research) to set the bases for a local network at the East Campus. | Along with other members of our RS “InterAcción”, Claudia, John, and Rodolfo recounted our experience. |

In terms of challenges, we conclude that RS comprises a strategy that fosters a community-based research education approach in which local and situated research practices are favored. This strategy is contrary to traditional educational methods in which research is taught from prescriptive agendas and conceived as an individual set of skills. Therefore, we contend that embarking on this strategy entails assuming certain challenges.

On the one hand, the theoretical foundations of RS tend to be circumscribed to cognitive views of learning, namely critical thinking and research skills. Therefore, we argue for approaches that question the views of research as a set of theories to be memorized or as a process in which decontextualized skills are taught. Specifically, it becomes necessary to constantly problematize the type of research education underlying RS. For instance, we contend that the nature of research contents should be questioned in terms of ethics, the impact of research on local communities, roles in research projects, or the feasibility of research in different contexts. On the other hand, we state that such problematization should also include questioning the extra-class nature of RS. Specifically, working from a non-traditional perspective of curriculum entails challenging conventional classroom-based pedagogical practices such as hierarchical student-professor roles, prescriptive methodologies, or traditional perspectives of knowledge production.

Given the reflective nature of our analysis and the lack of studies on RS in the field of teacher education in foreign languages in our country, it is necessary to conduct research projects to expand the understanding of this pedagogical strategy and its impact on participants' learning. Hence, further research could focus on exploring innovative methodologies for research in language education at an undergraduate level beyond teaching research skills or theory. Another area for future studies comprises the identities of pre-service teachers as researchers as well as teacher educators as research educators.

Finally, given the significant role of undergraduate research in language education in the legislation of initial teacher education programs in Colombia, RS can broaden the spectrum of research learning strategies in the foreign language field. In addition, these communities may help consolidate democratic relationships among professors and students and enhance the appropriation and production of local research. Moreover, students' voices can refresh the research academic repertoire given their viewpoints as learners.

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