

# Moving from What Do English Teachers know? to *How Do English Teachers Experience Knowledge?* A Decolonial Perspective in the Study of English Teachers' Knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

Partiendo de ¿Qué saben los profesores de inglés? a *¿Cómo experimentan los profesores de inglés el conocimiento?* Una perspectiva decolonial en el estudio del conocimiento de los profesores de inglés

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## Abstract

There has been a continuing interest in defining what comprises English teachers' knowledge with the purpose of defining the boundaries of the English Teaching field and developing it as a respected discipline in education (Richards, 1990). The objective of this paper, shaped by the tenets of the Decolonial Turn, is to share some of the results of studying teachers' knowledge with a view of knowledge described by Anzaldúa (2000) as "an overarching theory of consciousness... that tries to encompass all the dimensions of life, both inner –mental, emotional, instinctive, imaginal, spiritual, bodily realms—and outer—social, political, lived experiences." (p. 177). Data were gathered by means of testimonial narratives, and their analysis followed some guidelines of Benmayor's (2012) framework of testimonial narratives writing and communal analysis. The study is also inspired by and grounded in the *Epistemologies of the South* (Sousa Santos, 2004, 2006, 2016, 2018) to think of knowledge beyond the cognitive experiences of teachers. Some of the results show that teachers' knowledge is something experienced by them not only in their cognition but also in their emotions and body. Not only do teachers rely on content, pedagogical or methodological knowledge, but also on emotion, as evidenced in a sample of teachers' testimonial narratives.

**Key words:** English teachers' knowledge; decolonial turn in ELT; bodies of knowledge; teacher's emotional knowledge

## Resumen

Ha existido un continuo interés por definir en qué consiste el conocimiento del docente de inglés con el propósito de definir los límites del campo de la enseñanza de esta lengua. El objetivo del artículo, enmarcado dentro de las premisas del giro decolonial, es compartir algunos de los resultados del estudio sobre el conocimiento docente teniendo como concepto de conocimiento lo descrito por Anzaldúa (2000). El conocimiento entendido como "una teoría de la consciencia global... que intenta abarcar todas las dimensiones de la vida, tanto internas como externas -los reinos de lo emocional, lo mental, lo imaginativo, lo espiritual, y lo corpóreo" (p.177). Los datos fueron recolectados por medio de narrativas testimoniales cuyo análisis estuvo basado en algunas de las pautas encontradas en el trabajo de Benmayor (2012) para escribir y comunitariamente analizar narrativas testimoniales escritas por profesores de inglés. El estudio también está inspirado y fundamentado en *Las Epistemologías del Sur* (Sousa Santos, 2004, 2006, 2016, 2018) para pensar sobre el conocimiento mucho más allá de las experiencias cognitivas de los docentes. Algunos de los resultados del estudio muestran que el conocimiento no es sólo una experiencia cognitiva sino emocional y corpórea. Los docentes de inglés no sólo utilizan los conocimientos metodológicos, pedagógicos o de contenido, sino que también experimentan el conocimiento a través de la emoción, como se muestra en un ejemplo de narrativa testimonial.

**Palabras clave:** conocimiento de los docentes de inglés; giro decolonial en la enseñanza de inglés; cuerpos de conocimiento; conocimiento emocional del docente

## Resumo

Tem existido um contínuo interesse por definir em que consiste o conhecimento do docente de inglês com o propósito de definir os limites da área do ensino desta língua. O objetivo do artigo, no âmbito das premissas da virada descolonial, é compartilhar alguns dos resultados do estudo sobre o conhecimento docente tendo como conceito de conhecimento o descrito por Anzaldúa (2000). O conhecimento entendido como “uma teoria da consciência global... que tenta abranger todas as dimensões da vida, tanto internas como externas - os reinos do emocional, o mental, o imaginativo, o espiritual, e o corpóreo” (p.177). Os dados foram coletados por meio de narrativas testemunhais cuja análise esteve baseada em algumas das pautas encontradas no trabalho de Benmayor (2012) para escrever e comunitariamente analisar narrativas testemunhais escritas por professores de inglês. O estudo também está inspirado e fundamentado em As Epistemologias do Sul (Sousa Santos, 2004, 2006, 2016, 2018) para pensar sobre o conhecimento muito mais além das experiências cognitivas dos docentes. Alguns dos resultados do estudo mostram que o conhecimento não é só uma experiência cognitiva senão emocional e corpórea. Os docentes de inglês não só utilizam os conhecimentos metodológicos, pedagógicos ou de conteúdo, senão que também experimentam o conhecimento através da emoção, como se mostra em um exemplo de narrativa testemunhal.

**Palavras chave:** conhecimento dos docentes de inglês; virada decolonial no ensino de inglês; corpos de conhecimento; conhecimento emocional do docente

## Introduction

In this article I investigate the quest for English teachers' knowledge. Such inquiry is informed by some theoretical tenets of the *Epistemologies of the South* (Sousa Santos, 2004, 2009, 2016, 2018) and the Decolonial Turn (Mignolo, 2000, 2013; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). The issue of knowledge has caught the attention of local scholars, among other things because it has been said that English teachers' knowledge has not been considered when, for example, framing public policy in English Language Teaching (ELT) (Cárdenas, 2004, González, 2007). My interest in English teachers' knowledge goes beyond the categorizations of knowledge that have been persistent in ELT education, namely, those of cognitive or socio-cultural perspectives of content knowledge, methodological knowledge, and pedagogical knowledge, to name but a few.

Along the document, I will be using the first-person personal pronoun “I” and other first person language markers aligned with reflections upon the need for researchers to develop self-reflexivity in the research process (see for example Vasilachis de Gialdino, 2007, 2009). Within postmodern or post structural traditions, there has been discussions on the writing of research reports. Particularly, Rudolph (2016) contends that “researchers actively reveal their subjectivities in conceptualizing and approaching their studies.” (p. 2) Ramos-Holguin & Peñaloza Rallón (2020) highlight that “in academic writing, emotionality and subjectivity are almost always suppressed for objectivity” (p. 40) and one of such signs is the use of impersonal language. From a Decolonial perspective, it is necessary to re-connect our minds, bodies, and emotions, even in research endeavors.

One tenet of the Decolonial Turn is to contest certain practices of Western research such as concealing the subjects of research be them the researcher or the participants for the so-called sake of objectivity. Regarding this issue, Grosfoguel (2013) also explains that the Cartesian view of knowledge is what has stood out, for at least three hundred and eighty-three years in the university context. In that train of thought, there continues to be a tendency to see that knowledge is more valid if it aims at neutrality, impartiality, and universality; that is, if it aims at not being framed within a particular location, a particular body, a particular geography, or a particular person.

Within the ELT field, there has been almost a fascination with documenting the knowledge needed to teach ‘effectively’. That is why much discussion revolves around content knowledge, disciplinary knowledge, methodological knowledge, etc., and mostly the sources of knowledge are thought to be coursework, authors, communities of practice, degrees, books, articles, and so forth. It is but logical that these issues become of interest in the ELT field because that is what the ELT discipline is primarily concerned with; even so, other sources of knowledge are hardly ever considered. In fact, when describing other types of knowledge authors resort to saying that there also exists “a practical knowledge” or “the wisdom of practice” (Shulman, 1984, 2004, Cruz Arcila, 2018), or an “implicit knowledge” of teaching gained in “non-formal ways”

(Mendoza & Roux, 2016). Such terms entail that there are other knowledges which are hardly ever fully approached.

The focus of this paper is on practices of knowledge that come into play during the acts of teaching and learning narrated by participating teachers as tipping moments in their professional lives. What teachers describe as seminal, yet difficult moments, reveal knowledges that might go unnoticed when teaching and learning. What I mean is, content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and methodological knowledge are not the only types of knowledge that teachers cultivate in their professional life to face teaching and learning. Previous attempts to re-conceptualize knowledge have been observed in Kincheloe (2004, p. 51), with his critical-complex view of teacher's knowledge "including but not limited to empirical, experiential, normative, critical, ontological, and reflective-synthetic domains."

Other ways of knowing or probably other relations teachers develop towards knowledge might not have been sufficiently explored in the ELT field leading to a waste of valuable experience. I would like to advance the idea of teachers' 'ecology of knowledges' (Sousa Santos, 2006).

An ecology is about recognizing how plural and heterogenous knowledges are and the need for a respectful interrelation among them (Sousa Santos, 2007). In this inquiry, I normally use the plural *knowledges* because I agree with Sousa Santos (2009) when stating that we should move from one canon of knowledge (a canon that entails one single way of looking at time, social classification, and that naturalizes hierarchies, and holds a productivity driven mind-set) to an ecology of knowledges whose intention is to allow a more horizontal relationship between scientific knowledge and other ways of knowing. In the ELT field, such canon of knowledge is observed in expected levels of achievement, native/non-native divides, or delimited fields of knowledge that normally consider the cognitive or socio-cultural dimensions but may leave aside other existing realities that also encompass knowledge.

I embrace the idea of knowledge as comprised of those experiences that we live in flesh and blood based on the geopolitical location of our bodies (Mignolo, 2000). Indeed, the co-existence of scientific and other forms of knowledge within teachers' construction of their being as teachers is still underexplored in our field because of the overarching emphasis of studying teachers' knowledge from cognitive or socio-cultural perspectives. This research paper unveils those seminal experiential knowledges that sometimes are taken as "teachers' tacit knowledge", but which are hardly ever documented. I am particularly interested in tracing the '*knowledge otherwise*' (Escobar, 2003). I mean that there is need to acknowledge that many teachers, like myself, live on the border of different worlds; we learned (and continue to re-learn and unlearn) the prestigious English language, the methodologies, the concepts, the educational patterns from the Global North, but we are geopolitically located bodies in the Global South. This geopolitical location suffers the colonial difference, that is, the dispossession, the marketization of our resources, the effects of war, the displacement, the struggle for

opportunities to thrive, the lack of legitimacy of the teaching profession, and the loss of hope for a better future. In that train of thought, we rely on multiple ways of knowing to cope with learning, teaching, and living.

The ELT field has extensively theorized the knowledge necessary to teach effectively; however, I am more interested in what Gloria Anzaldúa (2000) calls 'theories in the flesh', that is, how the experiences lived in flesh make up our teaching personas, how for example experiences of joy and sorrow, come into play when entering classrooms. Often, the knowledge for teaching English is reduced to knowing the code, the method, the strategies to teach. I mean the overprivileged knowledge of the language and the methods excel in relevance compared to other forms of knowing that go unnoticed when teaching. The other forms of knowledge have remained, as Grosfoguel (2016) would say, in the 'zone of not being' or as Sousa Santos (2014) would argue: an 'absent epistemology'. By English language teachers' knowledge, I not only refer to teachers' experiences, theories, beliefs, actions, and skills (Díaz-Maggioli, 2012) that teachers are supposed to embrace in order to teach well, but I also include the realm of the silenced, or invisibilized knowledges as seen within a Decolonial view. (See the work of Granados-Beltrán, 2016; Núñez-Pardo, 2020; Soto-Molina & Méndez, 2020; to expand on the Decolonial Turn in ELT in Colombia)

## Literature Review

### A Knowledge Base for English Teaching

I question the concept of knowledge base as being exclusively composed of linguistics, language theory, and practical components as methodology and practice (Richard, 1990) or more normatively speaking, as a base composed of "what teachers need to know and be able to do" (Díaz-Maggioli, 2012, p. 5). If the concept of knowledge base is traced back, one can get to see two genealogies in it. One is the cognitive root (Shulman, 1987) in the need of recognizing teaching as the status of a profession in the North American context in the early 1980s. Shulman (1987, 2005) found out some domains of knowledge which comprised, at least, a) general pedagogical knowledge, b) pedagogic content knowledge (how particular themes are appropriate for the students in terms of their diversity, interests, and skills), c) special professional comprehension of learners, groups, and classrooms, and d) educational ends, their philosophical and historical grounds.

The foundations of this set of knowledges are numerous, namely, the literature in each discipline, the institutionalized processes of knowledge production, and teacher's own wisdom gained through practice. Shulman (1987) maintains that teachers adapt understandings, skills, and attitudes into pedagogical representations. Teachers realize what is to be learned, and how knowledge should be taught. Shulman (1987)

did acknowledge that teachers' knowledge is much more than what has been described here, and he urged for a permanent re-interpretation of the aforementioned categories.

The literature in ELT education validates the concept of teacher knowledge base (Shulman, 1987) in international and local academies (see for example Pineda Báez 2002; Cárdenas & Suárez, 2009; Macías, 2013; Fandiño, 2013; Freeman and Johnson, 1998; König, et al., 2016; Freeman, 2019; Asl, Asl, & Asl, 2014; Mu, Liang, Lu, & Huang, 2018). In that way, the concept may have reached the status of a grand narrative in the field of ELT turning the idea of knowledge for teaching into an issue that appears to be solved, something that has no further perspective from which to analyze. Along with revision (Richards & Farrell, 2005; Johnson, 2006) and despite criticism (Yandell, 2017), the issue of 'knowledge base for teaching' has been a seminal contribution in ELT and general education. Still, as Shulman (1987) concluded, the knowledge for teaching needs continuous revision and reinterpretation.

The other genealogy of the concept of 'knowledge base' is found in computational sciences referring to systems that require a store of information to be retrieved, so that systems will work well. Extrapolating ideas of computational sciences to the ELT field, Freeman, Webre, and Epperson (2019), regarding the concept of 'knowledge base', state, "the information had to be accessible, which meant it had to be compatibly organized, so it could be searched and compiled according to the task at hand" (p. 6). They find similarities between this idea of storing in computational sciences, and how a knowledge base for teaching English works; hence, they describe the knowledge base for teaching as a "socio-professional storage system" (p. 6) that is bound to a specific type of work, time, and place. Such storage regenerates like an item of software because each new knowledge generation replaces a previous one, thereby solving shortcomings or adding new insights.

The first generation of knowledge in ELT answered the question what to teach and appeared to be highly influenced by Psychology and Linguistics. The second generation of knowledge focused on how to do the teaching, and thus pedagogy played a key role. The third generation, highly influenced by the work of Shulman regarding Pedagogical Content Knowledge, highlighted the role of teachers as knowledge holders of their context, classrooms, and students. The fourth generation is more geared towards conceptually reaching better students' learning. Thus, it has two dividing branches: subject matter (content, Applied Linguistics) and knowledge for teaching (language acquisition, methods, curriculum, assessment).

Twenty years after the first approach taken by Freeman and Johnson towards knowledge in 1998, the reengineered version of 2019 by Freeman, Webre, and Epperson acknowledges that the matters of positionality and authority carry weight when it comes to defining what knowledge is worth for teaching English. Freeman et al., (2019) concede that authorities in academic disciplines definitely "shape what is valued" (p. 7). They integrate the concept of identity now in this new version and acknowledge the connection pedagogy-identity. They further go on to mention

the criticism of how the privilege of race and social position structure disciplinary knowledge; however, they could have failed to fully integrate this proposal in a way that really brings up teachers' voices.

As a matter of concern, Freeman (2018) brought up the following question posed by Yep (2007), "What are the disciplinary, collective, and personal consequences when whiteness is the invisible and universal norm of the knowledge produced?" (Freeman, 2018, p. 7, citing Yep, 2007). The question foregrounds the need to inquire why The Global North<sup>3</sup> epistemologies continue to dominate the discussion of what the knowledge for teaching must be. However, when analyzing what should constitute 'the knowledge base' for English Language Teaching, Freeman et al. (2019) reaffirm that there is a need to think of knowledge generations or "patterns to think of how knowledge has been understood" (p. 15), briefly outlined above and summarized as follows:

Table 1. Knowledge generations. Source: Freeman et al. (2019, p. 15)

Generation	Key issue	Versions in ELT
Disciplinary knowledge ( <i>what</i> )	If this is <i>the knowledge needed to teach languages, how is the knowledge used?</i>	1.0: linguistics + psychology 1.1: + literatures 1.2: + sociology & anthropology
Knowledge of pedagogy ( <i>how</i> )	If this is <i>how to teach languages, are differences in teaching deficits in knowledge evidence of individuality?</i>	2.0: + 'innovative methods' & SLA 2.1: + Communicative Language Teaching 2.2: + eclectic teaching; 'best methods'; 'post-method condition'
Knowledge-in-person; in-place ( <i>who and where</i> )	If this is <i>how individuals use knowledge in teaching, if personal experience and context shape what they do, what do language teachers have in common?</i>	3.0: PPK & identity 3.1: PCK & transforming subject matter in teaching 3.2: knowledge as 'contextual, contingent, and developmental'
Knowledge-for-teaching ( <i>why</i> )	If this is <i>how knowledge works in the process of teaching ...</i>	4.0: Knowledge-for-teaching languages 4.1: English-for-teaching

<sup>3</sup> The concepts Global North and Global South, present along this document, are used as metaphors of the division between North America and Europe in respect to the rest of the world, concerning the geopolitical effect of globalization and capitalism created by Europe and North America in different regions of the planet including their impact in the way we conceptualize knowledge (Dados & Connell, 2012). As observed in the review, the bulk of research about teachers' knowledge base has been primarily framed within The Global North academies.

In 2006, Johnson had already brought up the idea that teachers' previous experiences mattered as much as their contexts. The author reflected that teachers' learning was a lifelong process as teachers participated in classrooms, educational programs, and other socially situated spaces in which they needed to socially negotiate their learning experiences. In fact, Johnson (2006) already recognized L2 teachers "as users and creators of legitimate forms of knowledge who make decisions about how to best teach their L2 students within complex socially, culturally, and historically situated contexts" (p. 239). At that time, Johnson also proposed "positioning teachers' ways of knowing that lead to praxis as legitimate knowledge" (p. 241). However, what frequently happens is that teachers' knowledge as it is produced by them undergoes a process of codification or 'academization' to be heard in, for example, academic journals. Therefore, such knowledge gets lost in the words of the experts.

## **A Decolonial Move towards Understanding English Teachers' Knowledge**

We could also understand knowledge as an experience lived the in the flesh (Anzaldúa 2000), that is, accompanied by instances of struggles, contradictions, challenges, and a fight for recognition of hidden epistemologies that may not align with scientific frames. There is a wealth of research related to the concept of knowledge base in the ELT field that does not stray from its modern epistemological root of conceiving knowledge as:

- a) Something passed from educators to teachers to be. (Deng, 2018)
- b) Objects stored in the mind and accumulation of facts.
- c) Theory to be practiced in the acts of learning and teaching. (Ord & Nutall, 2016)
- d) Knowledge generations that recycle themselves on and on. (Freeman et al., 2019)

As the concept of knowledge base has not overcome its modern epistemological root and has not been theorized with other lenses in ELT, there is a dearth of understanding as to how English language teachers experience their own relations to knowledge. The modern root of how we conceive of knowledge has not yet been overcome because there is still a widespread tendency of seeing knowledge as something that humans must grasp: knowledge appears to be awaited to be discovered. Also, there continues to be a tendency to measure how much knowledge one has based on a priori evaluations, standardized testing, generic learning, and standardized curriculums. (Kincheloe, 2001). All these characteristics are constitutive of modernity and the will to dominate nature and humans in the name of the so-called progress. Drawing on Mignolo (2000), Global South peoples should reclaim the right to enunciate, and counter-story tell our cultural truths; therefore, there is need to explore how we experience our relations

to knowledge within geopolitically located bodies in the Global South. The reason is that the modern view of knowledge has separated the knowing subject from what is known, and emotional, historical, or sociological characteristics of the knowing subjects are not generally considered when conceptualizing knowledge.

Exploring the '*knowledge otherwise*' (Escobar, 2003; Walsh & Mignolo, 2018) or "the possibility to craft another space for the production of knowledge" (Escobar, 2003, p. 52) helps us intervene in the discursive practices of our field and think of ELT education in other ways. Finding out new alternatives to conceptualize knowledge, Anzaldúa (2000) defines it as "an overarching theory of consciousness... that tries to encompass all the dimensions of life, both inner -mental, emotional, instinctive, imaginal, spiritual, bodily realms—and outer-social, political, lived experiences" (p. 177). Escobar (2003) proposes, "the need to seriously consider the epistemological strength of local histories"<sup>4</sup> (p. 61). Certainly, according to Doyle and Carter (2003), storying is a crucial way of human knowing, and teachers' storied lives tell us, particularly, of embedded understandings and knowledge gained through the repeated participation in teaching, learning and personal experience.

## Research Question and Objective

Unveiling English teachers' knowledge within an epistemology of wholeness (that is with an approach to knowledge that recognizes our whole humanity in academic endeavors: mind, body, emotion) (Rendón, 2009) entails changing the questions we ask in research. Hence, I posed the question, how does a group of six English language teachers experience knowledge? The main objective with this research question is then to find out relations to knowledge and sources of *knowledge otherwise* in which teachers also draw on during the acts of teaching and learning.

## Methodology

### Using Testimonial Narratives to Trace English Teachers' Knowledges

Marín (1991) explains testimonial narrative as "a kind of writing from the margins about the, and to, the systems oppressing the speaking" (p. 51). Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, and Flores Carmona (2012) maintain that researchers are steadily applying testimonial narratives as a methodological approach, as data, and as pedagogy. Using

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<sup>4</sup> My own translation from Spanish.

these narratives challenges the disciplinary training given to scholars of generating unbiased knowledge. On the other hand, testimonial narratives question impartiality by situating the individual and the collective in tune with situated bodily, spiritual, cognitive, and communal production of knowledge. These authors contend that testimonial narratives can reach several audiences because they can be written, oral, or digital and they should be seen as “much like a gift” (p. 6) by the listener; the listener unfolds the intimate sense of those texts since learning about one person gives us insight into the life of many others.

Saavedra (2011) claims that testimonial narrative is a pioneering Latin American literary genre which helps narrators tell a shared account of dominance or harsh experiences through one person’s narrative. In recent times, testimonial literature has been employed in educational sites as a research methodology and pedagogy (See for instance, Hamzeh & Flores Carmona, 2019). Testimonial data and methodology have been used in critical Latin studies of racist nativism and microaggressions (Pérez Huber, 2011) and in studies of embodied literacies and bilingualism (Saavedra, 2011; Passos DeNicolo & González, 2015). Likewise, testimonies have been used as a pedagogy to understand how to restore the mind-body-spirit in order to disrupt settler colonialism. Crafting these narratives has been recognized as a genuine methodological practice of knowledge production (Hamzeh & Flores Carmona 2019). Lately, authors such as Carvajal (2017) or Ramos (2017) have worked on Decolonial projects using testimonial data in doctoral dissertations concerning homelessness and youth migration, respectively.

## **The Process of Writing, Sharing and Co-interpreting Testimonial Narratives.**

Inspired by Benmayor’s (2012) contributions to methodology using testimonial data, I developed a path to individually write and communally interpret the testimonial narratives of six English teachers pursuing M.A. degrees in Applied Linguistics; these teachers narrated seminal, difficult yet memorable moments in their lives and reflected upon how such narrated events informed their teaching. Participants’ own interpretations of the narratives did not follow any particular framework of analysis as spontaneity, dialogue, and intuition were favored. In my personal case, I had previously chosen to take a Decolonial perspective to study their ecologies of teachers’ knowledge (Sousa Santos, 2004), and therefore, after having read the testimonial narratives several times myself and reading the work of Anzaldúa (2000), or Sousa Santos (2016, 2018), I focused on concepts such as ‘knowledge gotten in previous personal or social struggles’, ‘family epistemologies’, ‘geopolitical location of knowledge production’; I started subtly noticing these items in the testimonial narratives. On grounds of space, I will only approach the issue of knowledge as

experienced through emotion.

The university which offers this M.A. degree is a public university in Bogotá with a strong critical pedagogy component. Four men and two women with at least five years' experience teaching different learners comprised the group of participants. I took from Benmayor (2012) the idea of sharing formerly written testimonial narratives that could guide in the style of writing. Similarly, I followed her idea of read-aloud and communal interpretations. Communal interpretations are achieved by allowing participants to analyze what they listen to from other teachers' testimonial narratives based on their own experiences, emotions, and ideas. The narratives originated in the context of a second language acquisition class framed within a critical perspective that I guided. I asked participating teachers to reflect upon their experiences of teaching and how such experiences related with their own knowledge (i.e., their professional assets developed and accumulated through their careers such as skills, theoretical contents, insights, personal theories, etc.). I particularly asked teachers to focus on those experiences that had been challenging and/or memorable.

As part of the content, I introduced the participants to the testimony genre and some examples from Chicana Latina Life Stories (see Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Burciaga & Tavares, 2006; Benmayor, 2012) were examined to analyze the potential of this type of writing/speaking. The participating teachers left the class sessions with a question that would help them examine their memories, their classes, and their past experiences intending to delve into their knowledges. For example, teachers were asked: What have been some of the most difficult experiences as an English teacher for you? How did you experience that? How do you link it with language pedagogy?

Teachers were encouraged to write or record some preliminary ideas and exchange them with the other participants in following sessions to dialogically help each teacher in the recalling exercise of bringing to the consciousness past episodes. Teachers were asked to decide how they wanted to introduce their testimonial narratives (oral or written). Participants took at least 3 weeks to produce their own testimonial narrative. Once the texts were ready, participating teachers narrated or read aloud their testimonies to *collectively theorize/interpret* (following Benmayor's (2012) words) each story. Finally, such communal interpretations were recorded and sent to each participating teacher for having time to listen to their narratives again, refine their text, and write their theorizations or personal reflections.

The act of verbally sharing one's own experiences with the other participants (i.e., giving testimony) goes in hand with one of the tenets of the *Epistemologies of the South* in which knowing with others is favored instead of knowing about others (Sousa Santos, 2018). In a similar vein, there is a re-conceptualization of what listening entails. Sousa Santos (2018) asserts that "the Western culture privileges writing and speech to the detriment of listening" (p. 175). The idea with listening to the testimonial narratives of other teachers is that a dialogic connection can be

founded, and each contributor can enrich the reading-aloud testimonies. Hence, there is a first layer of interpretation and communal co-construction of knowledge by means of ‘deep listening’ and engagement. As well, there is also an explicit effort to favor the “oralization of written knowledge” (Sousa Santos, 2018, p. 186) considering that scientific knowledge does not encourage oralization because it is susceptible to imprecision. However, following Sousa Santos (2018) in the *Epistemologies of the South*, oralization is favored because it allows for a unique degree of personalization in knowledge construction. The practices engaged in the oralization of knowledge invite the use of vernacular language, dialogic relations, and narrative as a substitute of explanation (Sousa Santos, 2018).

One category of knowledge experience is emotion as it will be evidenced by analyzing the next testimonial narrative through its communal interpretation, and participant’s theorization. The text was written and shared by Lorena<sup>5</sup>, an English teacher who worked in a catholic school by the time she participated in the study. This section will show verbatim her ideas and her colleagues’ own personal interpretations. Afterwards, I will also provide my own Decolonial lens to the narrated episode.

### **Lorena’s Testimonial Narrative: “Teachers don’t cry”**

“The following testimony gives an account of one experience that made me evaluate my role as a teacher. It describes a particular situation I lived with eleven graders. I have been their English teacher for 4 years: when they were in sixth, seventh, tenth, and now in eleventh grade. From my perspective, they have changed their behavior as most teenagers do. I have seen them grow, and they have seen me too. Our relationship has also grown framed into the catholic values of the school, the academic goals we must meet together, and the affection that goes beyond teacher-student relation. Most of the teachers complain about their attitudes and academic skills. Even me in some cases. They are characterized in the school for not being so committed with their responsibilities, for not following the rules, and for challenging the guidelines. However, they are also recognized for being creative and animated teens...

As usual, I got into the classroom at eleven forty to teach my thirty eleventh graders. It was a warm busy morning as the term was finishing (that means a lot of work for them and for teachers). When I got into the classroom, they remained standing up, speaking, eating, and bothering. I had to ask them to organize themselves. I set the attendance, told them what we were going to do on that session, and asked them to open their notebooks to write the date and lesson plan, as the school demands. Some of them followed me, some of them did not. I started teaching them alternative ways

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<sup>5</sup> The names of participants are real not to erase the sources of knowledge.

for using the future tenses. I gave them some examples and explained them how to use them in real situations. While I was speaking some of them were paying attention, and some others were eating, chatting, and even painting their hair with markers. However, I continued speaking pretending everything was okay. Suddenly, one of the students laughed aloud. I walked towards my desk, sat down, and started working on my things. I felt terrible. I felt frustrated. I felt angry. I felt hopeless. I don't know why that day I lost temper... I remained quiet while they continued in mess. One of them silenced them all. Some of them laughed at her, and she insistently called to order. Unexpectedly for me and for them, I started crying. They stayed completely still looking at me while I started speaking. I remember some of the words I said: "Are you serious? I can't believe your attitude. Don't you notice I am here with you? Do I have to start crying so you listen to me? What a lack of respect from you. I think I am always willing to listen to you: if you are sick, if you want to go to the restroom, or even if you don't want to be in my class. I treat you not like students but like human beings. Is it difficult for you to do the same? I am too disappointed. You are nothing of what I remember you used to be. I don't care if you then laugh at me, and everybody in the school knows I cried because of you. I don't care if you learn perfect English. I do care about you as a human being, as persons who I share a lot of my time even more than with my son. Are you going to treat your future family, colleagues, or employees this way? If so, you will suffer and will become horrible people". Those words are just a brief description of what I entirely said. Surprisingly, they did not make fun of me. They seemed to feel ashamed. One student, one of the most displeasing ones, said she or they were sorry about the situation.

Figure 1. Testimonial narrative illustrated by artist Felipe Camargo Rojas.



What is interesting for me about this testimony comes later. The class was over, and I went to the school restaurant to have lunch. Some of my colleagues at the table noticed I was crying. They asked me why. I described what had happened. Some of them said I had made a mistake when crying in front my students. They said words like “you lost the authority”, “why don’t you complain with the director”, “don’t worry, they are leaving in a couple of weeks”, and they looked at me with a shamed gaze. Immediately I responded to those comments: “Beliefs like those are the ones that shape such students’ behaviors. If we as teachers do not allow ourselves to cry in front of our students, we are denying ourselves as beings, as real people. People like them. The day we change that concept of authority, those students’ attitudes will change too. Probably my class was boring, and they were not engaged” My colleagues kept having lunch without replying my comment.

Some days later the classes went better. My students seemed to be listening to me, participating in my class more actively, still bothering but respectfully. What was more interesting even, was a talk I had with some students from that class. They said some words like: ... “Lately our attitudes towards school and teachers are annoying. We don’t care about anything here. We want to leave now. And everybody knows it here, so we are annoying and teachers too. Every class is the same. We don’t care nor the teachers. But when you cried, you showed us that we mean something for you; that was shocking. You opened our eyes. That day we realized that we were crossing the line. But the problem is that it is not common to find teachers like you. The majority of them just stand up in front of us and say: “you just have to care about learning. That is why you are here. Be quiet and write.” That is maybe the reason why we behave that way. You showed us that you are just the same like us. If you had got mad at us, we would have kept the same attitude. But that time it was different. When you cried, you treated us as humans, not as students who follow instructions.”

Something has changed since that day. We are not the same people in that class.”

What follows is an excerpt of co-intepretation in this testimonial narrative through conversation with Javier, Josué, Nancy, Andrés, and Alejandra who are some of the other English teachers, involved in the project. The dialogue took place once Lorena finished reading her testimonial narrative spiced up with background music brought by her to the read-aloud session. Issues of teachers’ power and intended ruptures with the status quo are mentioned.

**Javier:** There’s one thing which is what the school represents not just in terms of the utopic thing, you know? the educational place where every human being gets to flourish, but the status quo of the place where people get... or as Michel Foucault says, become objects. Somebody could argue that probably students were showing agency, resisting the system itself because, in a certain way, that day you represented power for them... Some situations in which they are, they don’t agree. Somehow you broke this stereotype of the teacher as “the super

person” or the-know-it-all; they really saw they were in touch with a person: that is something I found valuable, seriously.

**Lorena:** Yes, they are eleventh graders; they are about to leave [the school], and they have had a terrible year, but I think it is because of the school, yeah? Because they are nice people. The way they behave this year, it is just because of the way the school behaves. For example, el retiro de once\* [eleventh graders trip] is one of the most important things for eleventh graders, and the school didn't do it with them. It's because of their behavior. They are in constant... fight.

**Javier:** Tension.

**Lorena:** .... Things are not that way. I've known them since they were in sixth grade. I know they are great people. The context in the school has made them behave that way, and some teachers don't see it...

**Javier:** That's our reality.

**Josué:** I agree with Javier. I think that maybe oftentimes teachers become the invigilators of processes that students carry out in the classroom, and that is basically what some authors have referred to in the studies of surveillance at schools. In Colombia, for example, Saldarriaga, Alvarez in Spain, Julio Varela, who unveil the connotation of schools where students are controlled, controlling their time, and controlling their space, and the first entity we can call that way is school, that makes sure students do what they are supposed to do, then what you did certainly broke that rule established at school... I think that this experience allowed you to see the other side of the coin in which students really care and pay attention to our classes. We just take it personal: “they don't like my class”, but it is analyzing non-linguistic behaviors, things that we do that are not... clear to us what helps us.

**Javier:** ...Also, students have an identity in which they need to position themselves in terms of, for example, “the cool guy”, the one who talks to women, and academic things are not the most important.... Something you could probably understand: How is this image that we want to project to others? sometimes we harm others in the process...which is something that probably can happen. I am not saying that they don't like to learn, but it's something.

**Nancy:** It is interesting, how you, Lorena in this part when you say: “I asked them to open their notebooks and write the date and lesson plan, the school demands”. Sometimes, as Javier told you, they are... standardized. They must do the same thing, the same routine, even knowing that we are very creative. I worked in a Catholic school; that is why I understand perfectly this kind of attitudes. They are teenagers. Our behavior makes people change. It is not

only that we are human beings; it is that we are influenced by those cultural behaviors. When the teachers told you that you had lost the authority...yes, I had a similar situation and my colleagues told me: “if you cry, it is like the worst thing.”

**Adriana:** I have a question for everybody regarding Lorena’s story... what knowledge emerged in that situation because it is not the typical disciplinary or pedagogical knowledge?... if any.

**Andrés:** To perform as a teacher the way you understand it. What you promote, that is your discourse... I could cry.

**Josué:** Humanizing the teacher, knowledge of the self.

**Alejandra:** And, of the students, because she thought they were going to make fun of her, and they didn’t.

## Communal Meaning Making Themes: Humanizing the teacher

In this section, I will briefly summarize what was concluded in the dialogue among teachers. This communal interpretation is meant to disrupt the Western view that researchers are the only ones who should interpret the ‘data’. Javier reflected upon the double-edged nature of the school system: control and flourishing. He analyzes how Lorena, the teacher, who is invested with institutional power, feels challenged by the teens she has cherished for five years. He also analyzes that the school represents the place in which teens are to exercise agency against the power the teacher represents. Lorena herself studies closely her situation adding a new interpretation which relates to the role of the institution in prompting said students’ behavior. When suggesting that it is the context which has an impact on students’ ways of acting, she acknowledges that students’ ways of being at school are also triggered by certain symbolic violence exercised upon students by the school as observed in actions like not taking them on the end-of-the-year school trip.

More specifically, Josué defines the happening as an instance of surveillance that is intersected with an act of courage performed by Lorena. He highlights how Lorena moves from being an invigilator to showing students her deepest feelings, frustrations, and thoughts. Josué himself reflects upon how the experience Lorena shared is an opportunity to see that students care when really touched by teachers’ actions and words. Javier adds a new interpretation towards Lorena’s students related to how other identities intersect students’ actions when reacting in class. Some of them want to perform the roles of the ‘cool guy’ or the womanizer, and academic identities are left aside. The least thing some teens would like is to appear as devoted students.

On the other hand, Nancy raises the practice of standardization that cuts creativity. Both teachers and students are influenced by cultural models about things such as authority and classroom routines that end up changing our ways of being, behaving, and talking. Similarly, Nancy points to having had a similar experience in which she was also advised not to cry in front of her students as she could lose her authority too. All in all, when asked what shape of knowledge had emerged, Josué and Alejandra suggested that knowledge of the self and knowledge of students.

## A Teacher Who Is Challenging Normalized Practices

### How does Lorena experience knowledge? Lorena's own reflections

Lorena's theorization of what happened in her classroom is a powerful tool to be able to understand her from a Decolonial perspective in which "un diálogo de saberes" (a knowledges dialogue) is always required. Lorena points out the need for a true dialogue with students in which both truly want to hear each other. Surprisingly, a true dialogue with students really came when the teacher's voice was not being heard because she was, as Anzaldúa (2009) would say, "speaking in tongues" not intelligible to students, not because she couldn't communicate, but because the message conveyed was intersected by power devices that harmed the students and in turn their relationships with Lorena as a teacher. It is Lorena's humanity and courage that breaks the molds and fosters real conversation. She says:

"My testimony is the result of several years of observing certain school dynamics... From my perspective, school dynamics convey some power practices behind. School practices portray a hidden discourse of school, and teachers as discipliners and knowledge holders. Hidden discourses also serve to bigger structures we belong to. School, teachers, and even students have normalized such practices.

Crying in front of my students represents a desire of breaking stereotypes of an authoritarian teacher. It embodies a teacher who is challenging the normalized practices within the classroom. Through the words I said to my student during the episode, I read a desire of having my students understand that they are a very important piece of their education, that teachers and learners are equal, that they are expected to respect not because I am the authority but just because we all are humans.

Through this testimony, I explored how I listened to my students' voices and how they listened to mine. In addition, this reciprocal dialogue in which we opened the opportunity of talking about what has been silenced in education, shaped our imaginaries on what being a teacher and a learner need to become. Freire (1998) states: "It is through hearing the learners, a task unacceptable to authoritarian educators, that democratic teachers increasingly prepare

themselves to be heard by learners. But by listening to and so learning to talk with learners, democratic teachers teach the learners to listen to them as well” (p. 65). My students had the chance of reflecting upon their position in the school, in my classroom, and in the world. I also had the chance of exerting agency. Agency that will allow a fairer vision of education: an education that balances the concepts of knowledge and emotion... I grant my class as a *language* class and not as an instructional set of procedures. My class is an opportunity of acknowledging language as a right, as a means of identity construction”. (Lorena’s theorization of her testimonial narrative)

## **Bodies of Knowledge, Bodies of Emotion, Knowledge of the self**

### **How does Lorena experience knowledge? My own reflections**

Lorena’s experience of knowledge is intersected with feelings, emotions, and a vision of emancipatory education through dialogue and reading the world. Lorena differentiates the hidden discourse of teachers as “discipliners and knowledge holders” from that of the teacher who abandons authoritarian practices and draws on emotion to create a rupture of what is expected from knowledgeable teachers: teaching by the book and abiding by the rules. Lorena relied on her emotions to conceive of experience and therefore knowledge. But this reliance would not have been possible without what the Epistemologies of the South call “deep listening”. Sousa Santos (2018) explains that the Western world “privileges writing and speech to the detriment of listening... hearing is the superficial use of one’s ear, while listening implies an act of will” (p. 175). Lorena’s cry showed how deep listening was fostered among learners who are oftentimes taught not to listen deeply.

As a teacher-researcher engaged with a Decolonial perspective I align with Diversi & Moreira (2009) when “refusing to erase the flesh from the study of humans” because “humans...experience the world through a very specific physical location: their bodies...bodies are physical, psychological, social, cultural, and political, all at once always.” (p. 32). Lorena is a body that cries. Sousa Santos (2018) concurs that “bodies are unequal because they feel and are felt in ways that reproduce social inequalities, and the opportunities to feel and be felt are unequally distributed” (p.169). This idea explains why Lorena’s colleagues did not agree with her sudden outburst of emotion as shown to students. Teachers are expected to handle their emotions, have at hand a solution for everything, and are simultaneously compelled to hide any emotional constraint because they could appear weak or powerless in front of learners.

Interestingly, as pointed out in the communal interpretation of this testimonial narrative, a certain knowledge of the self, and of learners, was also cultivated in the whole situation Lorena faced. Here knowledge of learners is not meant as in previous research of teacher's knowledge as related to learners' level, methodology to keep them busy, or even knowledge of learners' developmental behavior for their age. No, here knowledge of the self refers to being able to read the context clues to have a response in the flesh and blood to cope with a complex teaching situation.

The experience Lorena faced can also be explained following Gallagher-Geurtsen's (2012) study of youths' testimonial narratives in neocolonial classrooms. This author highlights that teens "rage against a curriculum created to normalize students' actions, knowledge, beliefs, and lives" (p. 7). Gallagher-Geurtsen (2012, p. 7) argues that neocolonial classrooms develop:

"...a "logo-scientific curriculum (e.g., narrow, objective-driven lessons); universalism (e.g., the same standards and curriculum are appropriate for all groups of people) ... Schools must assure that this multimodal system remains intact through observation. Observation or surveillance is among the most potent tools of colonization and, indeed, schooling. Constantly observing students with the expectation that they "do school" appropriately".

Gallagher-Geurtsen (2012) suggests that students frequently undergo processes of "conversion" in which they "act the part of the "good student" ...and conversion can be promoted by school staff with forms of coercion and disapproval when youth stray from the accepted norms and actions that constitute the official "good students" (p. 8). Actions described by Lorena such as "setting the attendance", "writing the date and lesson plan... as the school demands" or students' accounts of their teachers saying that: "the majority of them [the teachers] say: "You just have to care about learning. That is why you are here. Be quiet and write," show us different levels of coloniality of knowledge and being that destroy a seminal healthy relationship: that of the learner and the teacher. As a matter of fact, teaching is an unquestionably emotional profession in which a big amount of energy is used, and constantly our knowledge of ourselves and others, the students, are constantly reconfigured. While getting to know ourselves and getting to knowing our students, intricate societal issues are at stake. For instance, "unequal power relations impact teachers' emotions at multiple levels, which include the classroom (micro-level), school (meso-level) and society (macro-level)" (p. 93). Probably here, Lorena could have also experienced a case of emotional burnout that left an imprint in her knowledge of teaching. De Costa et al., (2018) highlight that teachers experience emotional burnout related to the absence of value and respect assigned to the teaching profession.

## Discussion and Conclusions

There are multiple ways in which teachers experience knowledge; one of them is through emotion. Knowledge is a completely emotional and corporeal activity as revealed in Lorena's testimonial narrative. Authors such as White (2018) and Martínez Agudo (2018) have documented the neglect that emotions have undergone in the ELT field. Some reasons for such disregard of the emotional component of teaching as an area of exploration are that first, historically, emotions have been treated as irrational, subjective, or feminine. Second, there has been an overprivileged emphasis on reason. Third, the incipient research around emotions revolved around sociopsychological issues of learning such as the affective filter or the affective strategies for language learning. Still, teaching is essentially an emotional endeavor, and it bears a "sociopolitical dimension" (De Costa, Rawal, & Li, 2019, p. 93) that should be analyzed under a more critical lens. Fourth, the connection emotion-cognition was only recognized to back up cognition and not as a full explanation of how people experience the world. A pioneering work such as the one by Zembylas (2007) outside the ELT field discusses the two tendencies that the study of emotions has had: awareness of emotions in teaching and understanding of the social construction of emotion in the transactions of teaching and learning. Yet, Zembylas (2005) acknowledges that within our culture there is the belief that "emotions threaten the disembodied, detached, and neutral knower." (p. 7). If that neglect happens with emotions, much more happens with the body; a connection between body and knowledge is practically absent in ELT, except for a few mentions such as that of Nelson (2011), who brilliantly summarized that "the body is both a site of knowledge and an instrument of knowing" (p. 472).

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