# Plurality of Voices in Reflecting Upon the Research Process: Trajectories of Collaboration in an Argentinian Setting

## Pluralidad de voces en la reflexión sobre el proceso de investigación: trayectorias de colaboración en el contexto argentino

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This article describes the trajectories of collaboration experienced by three individuals in three different roles (informant, research assistant, and supervisor) in two research projects about English as a foreign language reading in a higher education context in Argentina. Data come from reflection logs and retrospective narratives written by them from 2009 to 2016 which were analyzed using content analysis, focusing on a continuum of collaboration. The article aligns with the critique of the discourse of "newer researcher" as a linear developmental trajectory as it illustrates the participants' fluid, critical, complex, and personally relevant pathways. Placed within the debate regarding the affordances, complexities and challenges of the measured university, this research contributes perspectives from a peripheral setting generally underrepresented in the literature.

*Keywords:* language education research, newer researcher, research process, simultaneous roles

Este artículo describe las trayectorias de colaboración de tres individuos con diferentes roles (informante, asistente de investigación y supervisor) en dos proyectos de investigación sobre la lectura en inglés como lengua extranjera en un contexto de educación superior de Argentina. Los datos incluyen sus diarios de reflexión y narrativas retrospectivas escritos durante 2009–2016, que fueron analizados usando análisis de contenido, con el foco en el continuo de colaboración de Macfarlane. El artículo se alinea con la crítica al discurso del "investigador novato" como una trayectoria de desarrollo lineal ya que el estudio ilustra los caminos fluidos, críticos, complejos y personalmente relevantes experimentados por los participantes. La investigación contribuye perspectivas de un contexto de la periferia.

*Palabras clave:* investigación en enseñanza de lenguas, investigador novato, proceso de investigación, roles simultáneos

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## Introduction

The following extract is a retrospective narrative written in 2012 by co-authors Anahí and Mariela in our roles as informants in a research study and later as research assistants. The excerpt illustrates our changing views about reading and the learning of English as a foreign language (EFL) at a local university, or put differently, the scholarly conversations we engaged in during the 2009–2016 period. At the same time, the extract gives a flavor of the non-linear, critical, reflective, and multifaceted pathways that we experienced in our trajectories toward becoming researchers in a higher education setting.

> In our first approach to the texts, although we were conscious of the importance of the cultural aspects, we assumed the role of students, paying more attention to the content and its interpretation, and taking into account local, lexical, and linguistic aspects. Without realizing it, we attached importance to the fact of remembering. In our second approach to the texts, we stopped directing our attention to the linguistic content to start focusing on other factors, such as the approach from an intercultural perspective.
>
> This double perspective allows us to distance ourselves from our initial position as active individuals but mere informants in the research carried out by others, to situate ourselves now as researchers.

This extract is about informants, researchers, and their changing views of what EFL reading means in this setting. It resonates with literature that attributes a central role to the participants in the research process (Brew & Jewell, 2012), particularly in language education (Canagarajah, 1996; Li, 2007; Mearns, 2012), and that highlights the need to use alternative ways of talking about research and of communicating research findings in the scientific-academic domain, in this case in the field of English language teaching (ELT; Canagarajah, 2006, 2012). This article seeks to describe the trajectories of collaboration experienced by three individuals who fulfilled three different roles in two research projects, over an eight-year period, about EFL reading in a higher education context in Argentina. These roles are informant, research assistant, and supervisor.

After a general background of the research and a brief theoretical framework about the usefulness of contributing an article with a plurality of voices in the language education field, we introduce Macfarlane's (2017) recent continuum of different forms of collaboration to illustrate our case. Our content analysis indicates that three forms of collaboration surfaced, namely, collaboration as intellectual generosity, as mentoring, and as communication. We tie our findings to a critique of the discourse of "newer researcher" because our data indicate that we did not follow a linear developmental trajectory but rather experienced fluid, critical, complex, and personally relevant pathways that are unique to us. We argue that the critical trajectories revealed here were possible by the engagement in scholarly conversations during the process. An example of this scholarly conversation is the debate about what reading in a foreign language involves—illustrated in the initial vignette. We then locate our article within the debate regarding the affordances, complexities, and challenges of the measured university of current times, and we show that in our case, the experience of different forms of collaboration during this eight-year period led to a sense of agency. The specific value of the research reported here resides in the particular peripheral setting, generally underrepresented in the literature. We conclude with some implications.

## Background Information About the Research Projects

Broadly speaking, the data on which this article is based come from two research projects undertaken between 2009 and 2016 about the cultural dimension of EFL reading in Argentina (Project 1: 2009–2012 and Project 2: 2013–2016). The theoretical framework follows a constructivist perspective on learning and a socio-

cultural conception of reading that takes into account intercultural perspectives. Both projects were funded by the Argentinian Ministry of Science and Technology and the National Research Council and were carried out in the School of Humanities and Sciences of Education at Universidad Nacional de La Plata (UNLP, Argentina).

The general objective was to describe how the population under study in this context (college students—future English teachers and translators—at UNLP) understood the cultural content of literary narrative texts in EFL (see Porto & Byram, 2017). The Argentinian setting is in tune with the need expressed by TESOL professionals (Canagarajah, 1995; Vavrus, 2002) regarding the importance of the individual and the local in-classroom-based research efforts that describe how literacy in English is experienced in peripheral countries. Following Canagarajah (2002) and Canagarajah and Said (2011), Argentina can be seen as an example of a peripheral country in South America. Thus, this article echoes the compelling need pointed out in the literature to recover local aspects from specific cultural contexts and can be considered as "work which seeks *understanding* of the experience of people involved in education" (Byram, 2008, p. 91, his emphasis).

The informants were Argentine prospective teachers and translators of English, from 21 to 22 years of age at the beginning of the first project. Mariela and Anahí were part of this group of undergraduate students and Melina was the project supervisor. Students read three literary narrative texts in English about Christmas celebrations in different contexts, and they performed some tasks. For instance, they wrote a reading response (that is, a personal interpretation of the texts) and they also produced a visual representation whereby they portrayed each text visually (using drawings, charts, graphs, cartoons, etc.). They were then interviewed individually. Data were collected in the native language, Spanish, during 2009–2010. Overall, the main finding is that "the process of cultural understanding . . . is not composed of independent and discrete elements,

processes, or stages" (Porto & Byram, 2017, p. 29) but is fluid and complex.

This article does not focus on these data. However, this background about the research projects is necessary at this point because the article shall offer reflections about the conceptions of reading that the informants had when the first project was launched in 2009, to reveal later how these views changed as they engaged in scholarly conversations about cultural understanding in foreign language reading during the eight-year period reported here.

## Justification for the Need for, and Importance of, an Article With Plurality of Voices in Language Education Research

In the field of TESOL, Canagarajah (1996) states that the need for coherence in the report—achieved by the closure, the tight structure, and seamless writing—can hide the false starts, wrong moves, misleading tracks, and interpretive gambles that usually characterize the research process. There is a similar suppression of the gaps, contradictions, and conflicts in the data for the sake of textual coherence. The report thus gets considerably removed from the existential conditions of research. (p. 324)

While an analysis of why this happens is beyond our scope here, it is possible that "'the bureaucratization of writing [that is] the way in which a certain writing style is encouraged, perhaps even rewarded in the academy" (Kindt, 2016, p. 1086) has something to do with it. Canagarajah (1996) suggests the need to explore alternative, more critical ways of communicating research to the academic community. In this sense, one possibility resides in co-authored texts, that is, texts that "are jointly written by the researcher and the informants/subjects and, therefore, are considered collaborative reports. They attempt to dramatize the tensions between the perspectives of the researchers and subjects" (Canagarajah, 1996, p. 326). An alternative genre is the dialogic text,

which "consists of counterpoised dialogues between the researcher and informants/subjects. Although the text more authentically explores the conflicting voices of the subjects, resolving the ensuing interpretive tensions is the responsibility of readers" (Canagarajah, 1996, p. 327). Häusler et al. (2018) use "collective memory-work, a research framework with transformative aspirations that integrates narrative writing with group analysis and dissolves the boundaries between theory and method as well as researcher and research participants" (p. 282). We take Canagarajah's (1996) conclusion as our starting point when he states that

> it is necessary, therefore, to see reports co-authored by esol researcher/teachers and students. Rather than the researchers filtering the students' divergent positions through their own perspectives, it is important to let the students' views remain in tension (if necessary) with the researchers' positions. (p. 328)

This article is an example of this kind of report.

Furthermore, the focus on a plurality of voices that we propose in this article contributes to the ecological validity of the research (Cohen et al., 2018) given its descriptive and exploratory nature. From this perspective, our research, and this article, echo the advantages mentioned by Canagarajah and Said (2009):

> Rather than looking at communities and classrooms through professional spectacles, we see them for what they are as we design specific approaches to suit them . . . Such an ecological approach additionally has the advantage of keeping all the variables and contextual richness intact, as we teach or research English in diverse contexts. (pp. 169–170)

This article is conceptualized with this intention in mind, and it is, for its part, a hybrid between the genres mentioned before.

The plurality of voices distinguishes this article from others in language education research. For example, Li (2007) writes in the first person about a third party

(a graduate student) and Canagarajah (2012) writes in the first person and offers different voices that come, however, from the same individual (Canagarajah as a teacher, as a researcher, etc.). In our case, we present the multiple voices of three participants involved in the research projects in different roles and capacities.

## Collaboration as a Moral Continuum

Theoretically, we depart from Macfarlane's (2017) discussion of the current neoliberal university that cares about measurement, performativity, market drives, and individuality, and that places conflicting demands on collaborative work amongst researchers, oriented toward individual goals on the one hand and collective goals on the other. Peseta et al. (2017) describe the challenges involved in this way:

> The demand to count, measure, rank, quantify, evaluate and judge the work of universities (along with those who labour and study in them) haunts virtually all aspects of our work: from the quality of research, to targets for income generation, counts of patents, citations of articles and public testimonies of policy impact made visible and likeable online; from the quality of curriculum, to teaching with technology, responding to student feedback, watching the employment destinations and salaries of graduates as a comment on the value of their education; to whether a university is healthy, sustainable, sufficiently globalized or doing enough to position itself as the world leader in this or that discipline. (pp. 453–454)

Likewise, Sutton (2017) affirms that "performativity is central to the culture of measurement within contemporary universities" and concludes that "the soul of academic labour is becoming lost in performativity" (p. 625). Along similar lines, Bottrell and Manathunga (2019) conclude that this neoliberal ethos runs counter to "conceptions of universities as collegial institutions concerned with public and democratic purposes" (pp. 1–2).

Within this framework, Macfarlane (2017) argues that "collaboration is a modern mantra of the neo-liberal university and part of a discourse allied to research performativity quantitatively measured via co-authorship" (p. 472). He highlights the complex and contradictory nature of this mantra because "academic staff are exhorted to collaborate, particularly in respect to research activities, but their career and promotion prospects depend on evaluations of their individual achievements in developing an independent body of work and in obtaining research funding" (p. 472). He proposes a continuum of collaboration as a moral continuum containing two types of collaboration he calls "self-regarding" and "other-regarding." Self-regarding (or self-oriented) collaboration aims at personal and career benefits and comprise the following:

- collaboration-as-performativity to increase research output;
- collaboration-as-cronyism by means of practices "that reinforce the power of established networks"; and
- collaboration-as-parasitism involving the exploitation of junior researchers by seniors.

In turn, other-regarding (or other-oriented) collaboration focuses on knowledge as a common goal, academic duty and friendship in academic life, and interest in helping less experienced researchers and comprises these points below:

- collaboration-as-intellectual generosity involving the free sharing of ideas for the common good of scientific advance;
- collaboration-as-mentoring to foster the development of less experienced colleagues; and
- collaboration-as-communication to disseminate knowledge in scholarly platforms.

This classification is useful in the current debate regarding the affordances, complexities, and challenges of the measured university (Hancock et al., 2016; Macfarlane, 2017; Peseta et al., 2017; Sutton, 2017) since

collaboration as intellectual generosity, as mentoring, and as communication seem naïve in the surge for performativity (Macfarlane, 2017).

## This Research

Framed within participatory and narrative research and auto-ethnographic studies (Cohen et al., 2018), this study was designed and planned as a longitudinal investigation of the trajectories of the collaboration experienced by three individuals who fulfilled three different roles in two research projects over an eight-year period about EFL reading in a higher education context in Argentina. These roles are informant, research assistant, and supervisor. It is an example of self-study research aimed at examining and learning about one's practice (in teaching, research) to forge new opportunities based on a process of exploration, discovery, reflection, and critical analysis (Mitchell et al., 2005).

The research question is: What trajectories of collaboration do individuals experience as they take part in a longitudinal research undertaking in which they perform different roles?

Data come from reflection logs and retrospective narratives written by three research participants, the co-authors of this article, during 2009–2016 at a public national university in Argentina. Dr. Melina Porto, an experienced investigator in the field of foreign language education and professor in the English teaching/translation programme, was the research director. Anahí started taking part in this case study as an undergraduate student in the English teaching programme in 2009 and graduated in 2012. She was in her early twenties then. Mariela, who is blind, is a teacher of Spanish graduated from UNLP. She was in her late twenties when this case study began and was an advanced student in the English teaching/translation course at the time.

Anahí and Mariela were first involved as informants in 2009–2010 and wrote logs reflecting on the research. These reflection logs resembled the stream of consciousness approach characteristic

of learner diaries (Allwright & Bailey, 1991) with no specific guiding questions. They were both undergraduate students then. In early 2012, they produced a retrospective narrative of their experiences as informants who had provided data in 2009–2010 (following written instructions) and they also became research assistants. These narratives were written during 2011 until August 2012 (between one and two years after they had participated in the original project). They participated as research assistants from September 2012 to 2016 and also wrote reflection logs during this period. Melina kept reflection logs during the eight-year period as research supervisor. The instructions and questions that functioned as a guide for the retrospective narratives were:

- Write about your perceptions on how you conceptualized your participation in the project as informant that generated data. What matters is the process, your perceptions, the views that you have as insiders.
- Write, in Spanish, a stream of consciousness on what you remember about the 2009–2010 experience. These questions may serve as a guide, although it is not necessary that you limit yourselves to them: What do I remember about my participation in that project? How did I understand the tasks to be performed? Do I understand them in the same way today? What motivated me to participate?

What aspects are negative and which ones could be positive about that experience?

They responded in Spanish and voluntarily translated their responses into English for the purpose of this article.

Data were analysed qualitatively focusing on content analysis (Cohen et al., 2018). Particular attention was given to the six forms of collaboration identified by Macfarlane (2017), namely collaboration as intellectual generosity, as mentoring, as communication, as performativity, as cronyism, and as parasitism. There were three layers of analysis. Following Cohen et al. (2018), the first layer comprised a holistic overview of all data sources to get a global sense of what was happening. The second layer of analysis was deductive and involved tracing evidence of Macfarlane's six forms of collaboration in the reflection logs and retrospective narratives and coding on this basis. The third and final phase was inductive or data-based, involving the identification of emerging themes, commonalities, and unique perspectives which would otherwise have remained unnoticed. Descriptive, narrative, and interpretive vignettes and multiple examples were used throughout the process to document the analysis and illustrate findings. Table 1 includes a summary of participants, research instruments, analysis, and timeline.

**Table 1.** Methodology: Participatory, Narrative, Auto-Ethnographic Research

|  | Melina | Anahí | Mariela |
|---|---|---|---|
| Age (at the beginning of study in 2009) | Early forties | Early twenties | Late twenties |
| Degrees | MA in ELT and PhD in Educational Sciences | Advanced student in English Teaching course (graduated 2012) | Teacher of Spanish. Advanced student in English Teaching/Translation programme |

| | Melina | Anahí | Mariela |
|---|---|---|---|
| Teaching experience | Professor in a Teaching/Translation programme at a national university | First formal teaching experience in primary and secondary education in 2012 | Experience as a private and on-line tutor of Spanish and English |
| Research experience | Experienced researcher at National Research Council | First trajectories during the projects described in this paper | |
| Roles | Supervisor | Informants (2009–2010) and research assistants (2011–2015) | |
| **Research Instruments and Timeline** | | | |
| Reflection logs (free style, spontaneous, no guiding questions, stream of consciousness approach) | Between 2009–2016 (as research supervisor) | During 2009–2010 (as informants) and 2013–2016 (as research assistants) | |
| Retrospective narratives (following guiding questions) | | During 2011–2012 (based on experiences as informants in the first project) | |
| **Data Analysis** | | | |
| Layers of analysis | 1. Holistic, impressionistic | | |
| | 2. Deductive using Macfarlane's continuum of collaboration | | |
| | 3. Data-based: emerging themes, commonalities, and unique perspectives | | |
| **Findings** | | | |
| Four propositional statements combining the three layers of analysis | | | |

## Findings and Discussion

Following Cohen et al. (2018), findings are presented in propositional statements that capture the essence of the thematic analysis undertaken combining the second and third layers of analysis focusing on the forms of collaboration that were evidenced and on recurrent themes respectively. Data extracts appear verbatim, and clarifying information appears between brackets. The evidence for the points made is highlighted in the data extracts that serve as illustration.

### Other-Regarding Forms of Collaboration Prevailed

The analysis did not reveal any of the three forms of self-regarding collaboration identified by Macfarlane (2017), namely performativity to increase research output, cronyism reinforcing the power of established networks, and parasitism involving the exploitation of junior researchers. It did show the other-regarding forms, namely collaboration as intellectual generosity ("sharing ideas freely with others for the advancement of science as a common good"), as mentorship ("working with less experienced colleagues to encourage and support their development") and as communication ("disseminating knowledge claims via a range of scholarly platforms"; Macfarlane, 2017, p. 477). Of these three, collaboration as mentorship was prevalent. In the supervisor's words:

Anahí and Mariela were outstanding students in my course. As informants, they revealed critical and reflexive perspectives about reading, and interest in research. We prepared a collaborative paper for a local conference and I accompanied them to deliver their first talk in a

university setting. After that, I invited them to join my research and they worked enthusiastically. I was never given these opportunities when I began my research career and I wished to change that. (Reflection log, Melina, 2014)

From the informants' perspective, this mentoring began initially with member checks. According to Bishop (1999), checking with the actual informants is the

ideal scenario [because] sharing our work with our informants as often as is feasible and as interactively as possible will not only enrich our cultural understanding, involve us in triangulation as process, but also allow our readers to know what we did and why it worked out that way." (pp. 120–123)

Similarly, Freeman et al. (2007) say that "qualitative methodologists also encourage member checks [because] the practice of checking a researcher's interpretations and representations with participants prior to publication is valued" (pp. 26–28). Member checks were continuous during the eight-year period and became "an important step for helping students navigate the scholarly conversations in our discipline" (Leung et al., 2017, p. 217). It should be recalled that, at the beginning of this case study and when these member checks were first undertaken, Anahí and Mariela were undergraduate students, that is, totally unacquainted with current theories of foreign language reading.

For instance, an example of mentoring through such scholarly conversation is precisely the debate about what reading in a foreign language involves— illustrated in the initial vignette. This debate revolves around the need to go beyond remembering textual information with accuracy (to say that somebody has comprehended a text) toward being able to interpret linguistic and cultural elements appropriately in context taking into account personal interest (Porto & Byram, 2017). The next excerpt illustrates the initiation into this scholarly debate:

In our first approach to the texts, although we were conscious of the importance of the cultural aspects, **we assumed the role of students**, paying more attention to the content and its interpretation, and *taking into account local lexical and linguistic aspects*. Without realizing it, we attached importance to the fact of remembering—or not—what we read in punctual aspects, *perhaps under the influence of our own learning of English, basically mnemonic*.

On some occasions, we gave importance to the things that the text somehow marked as prominent, sometimes without exploring in greater depth the importance that such elements had in the light of our own interests, put at stake in our understanding of the texts, and even when we did not incorporate, later, those items into our reading hypotheses.

(Retrospective narrative, Anahí and Mariela, 2012)

The text in italics indicates awareness of the excessive influence of the linguistic dimension to the detriment of the cultural during comprehension in this setting. At the same time, there is evidence (underlined) of an evolving understanding of reading that takes individual interpretations into account. It is important to mention that this evolution in conceptualization occurred as Anahí and Mariela visualized themselves as undergraduate students on this occasion, that is, not as proper participants of the research, which is indicated in bold.

The following extract also shows this understanding of the move from the linguistic toward the cultural during interpretation, which represents a turning point in the focus of attention, a distancing from the linguistic in order to consider other aspects such as the intercultural or the pragmatic:

Even when we did spend some time on linguistic aspects, we no longer considered them as elements to be decoded with respect to their content, but rather we approached them on the basis of their pragmatic function, or their contribution to our understanding from this cultural perspective. (Retrospective narrative, Anahí and Mariela, 2012)

This change of focus from the linguistic toward the intercultural in comprehension forms part of a current scholarly conversation in the field of foreign language reading (Porto & Byram, 2017) and can be seen as a form of collaboration around mentorship.

## Collaboration Became the Seed of the Researcher

In the following excerpt, there is a shift from a vision as students toward a perspective as researchers, which arose from the methodological decision to use member checks:

> In this sense, *it was also of some help to have the results of the research*, to which we had previously accessed [at the time of member checks in 2011], *at our disposal. . . .* To become part of the project as subjects [informants], *we were motivated by the desire to approach research, with that initial curiosity which is the mother of research work.* (Reflection log, Anahí, 2014)

In other words, it is possible to observe here a genuine and disinterested desire for research, away from the performative, instrumental, and individual drives characteristic of the measured university (Macfarlane, 2017; Peseta et al., 2017; Sutton, 2017). This engagement with research was sparked by the invitation to join as informants in 2009–2010. It is worth remembering that by the time the data were initially collected (2009–2010), Anahí and Mariela were still only half through their courses of study, which means that their role as undergraduate students was predominant.

Furthermore, Anahí and Mariela developed a great capacity to reflect and think critically. This reflection and critical analysis significantly contributed to the evaluation of the methodological decisions taken at that moment from perspectives emerging from their role as research assistants. The evidence is italicized in the following extract, which is again simultaneously an example of collaboration as mentorship:

> In this case *we were not only placed as "subjects"* [informants], *but rather we were incorporated to the research itself*, being allowed to reflect on our own reading practices.
> *In this sense, what contributed to a great extent were, on the one hand, the deferred interviews, which allowed us to think some concepts and reading strategies over, and on the other hand, the possibility to make comments after the activities and readings were over.* [*sic*]

They considered their participation in the 2009–2010 project as an opportunity to reflect on their own reading practices. Never during the research was it explicitly indicated that this reflection was valuable. They discovered its value on their own and the evidence is underlined. Moreover, they identified the research tool which made this possible, the deferred interviews and the comments after the gathering of data. The evidence appears in italics where a chain of evaluative terms can be identified ("*what contributed to a great extent*," "*which allowed us to*," "*the possibility to*").

In sum, collaboration as mentorship, as experienced by Anahí and Mariela in this study when they were undergraduate students, took the form of an initiation into scholarly conversations around current conceptualizations of foreign language reading. In turn, these conversations, complemented by Melina's invitation to engage as research assistants, sparked their interest in research and, by 2011, they were research assistants in a funded research project even though they were simultaneously undergraduate students. This is very rare in this Argentinian context because it breaks with the expected developmental pattern associated with the career as researcher that one can experience in this country (for example, to be a researcher the candidate must have at least an undergraduate degree and must be enrolled in a postgraduate programme). This scenario is related to the discourse of the newer researcher that we address next.

## Critical Reflection and Personal Stories Dominated the Discourse of "Newer Researcher"

During the third layer of data analysis focusing on emerging themes, it was evident that, although Anahí and Mariela could certainly be considered "newer researchers," as the excerpt below illustrates, they both evaluated critically the advantages and disadvantages of one research instrument—the deferred interview—in this specific context of work and considered its suitability on the basis of the identities and roles in which they engaged along the research process. Criticality and reflexivity, characteristic of the research endeavour, are evidenced for instance in the chain of expressions in bold.

> However, the interviews, as they were carried out, also presented **a somewhat limiting aspect**, at least in our case. When transcribing our own interviews, **we realized that** our contributions **could have been much richer**. **We account for this drawback by** referring to something that has already been said, the fact that during our first approach to the texts, after which the interviews took place, we still adopted the role of students, **which somewhat placed us in an asymmetrical position with respect to** the educator/interviewer.
> (Retrospective narrative, Anahí and Mariela, 2012)

This critical reflexivity is key in a critical discourse of "newer researcher" as opposed to the developmental one focusing on progression in pre-determined career paths (Hancock et al., 2016). This consciousness and critical reflexivity permeated Anahí's and Mariela's roles as informants and research assistants, even when they were still undergraduate students as the opening vignette of this article also illustrates:

> This double perspective allows us to distance ourselves from our initial position as active individuals but mere informants in the research carried out by others, to situate ourselves now as researchers. (Retrospective narrative, Anahí and Mariela, 2012)

Overall, the critical reflexivity shown in this section accompanies the critique of the discourse of the "early career" or "newer researcher"

> based on an assumed progression from relevant undergraduate study to subsequent doctoral study and postdoctoral roles [by taking] account of the critical (rather than developmental) function of he [higher education] research [and] the different contexts within which research is undertaken in the academy. (Hancock et al., 2016, p. 283)

In terms of context, as mentioned initially, this research portrays the lived experiences of English literacy by Spanish speakers as well as their fluid and complex paths in becoming researchers in a peripheral country (Canagarajah, 2002; Canagarajah & Said, 2011). In terms of the discourse of the "newer researcher," Anahí and Mariela did not follow the linear and traditional career trajectory associated with it, that is, they began being undergraduate students and in the eight-year research process reported here, only one of them earned her degree and enrolled in a master's programme.

By contrast, this article captures their critical reflection trails, personal stories, and experiences in this process, or the "non-linear and often serendipitous 'pathways' that problematise the question of who is a researcher of he" (Hancock et al., 2016, p. 290), showing that "the temporality and trajectories of he researchers are more complex and considerably less linear than this discourse implies" (Hancock et al., 2016, p. 292). The following reflection log, written by Mariela in 2015, illustrates these pathways (evidenced in italics). Departing from what can be considered a limitation, her blindness opened up unthinkable expectations for personal development and engagement in research in this case. The significance of personal experience and individual stories is highlighted in bold.

> *I have never started any course of studies thinking of my blindness as an obstacle*, although it is also true that **I have never wanted** to study something **for which**

**my blindness made me unsuitable** . . . By the time I graduated as a Literature teacher, I found out that *something had changed in my expectations*: I had started studying English, mostly on my own, and had decided to start the English translation course of studies. ***That was, I guess, a turning point in my life. Until then my only prospects had to do with a job as*** *a teacher or a private tutor and maybe* **the possibility of becoming a writer...someday. Somehow, I believed that as a blind student/teacher,** *these were the things I would be able to do. However,* **my participation as an informant in this project made me look beyond those goals to consider going further.** *I decided to participate in the project because I was curious to know how much I could learn from the experience, and maybe that curiosity shows an incipient tendency to do research. If so, I was not aware of such a tendency in me . . . and then there was no turning back. Once the process started, it just could not be stopped.*

These trails, personal stories, and experiences were significant in Anahí's and Mariela's growth as researchers partly because they were valued by Melina, their supervisor, and supported by her concrete actions. In her words:

Our faculty did not have a Braille printer available for blind researchers and there was only one computer with the software she needed. I wrote several letters to the authorities and contacted the relevant office to get financial support. After two years of comings and goings, we got one computer for our research group. The printer, however, was never available during the eight-year period. (Reflection log, 2015)

## Collaboration Instilled a Sense of Agency

The thematic analysis also revealed that Anahí's and Mariela's participation in this research in their roles as informants and research assistants, supported by Melina as their supervisor, motivated them to adopt an active

and transforming role in their teaching practices. The notions of agency and discretionary judgement, which are required in every professional activity, particularly in the case of teaching, emerged here (Freidson, 2001; Tatto, 2007). With the comparison between the way in which they learnt English at school and during their first years at university, and the reading experience that they participated in during these research projects as a starting point, they reconsidered significant changes in their current teaching practices (italicized in the excerpt below). They mentioned concrete initiatives that they would try to implement in their teaching practices, such as the use of two research instruments, the immediate reflection log and the visual representation, in their own teaching.

We started to wonder about the possibility of transferring the reading tools that we approached during our work on the texts (immediate reflection log and visual representation) and take them into the classroom, in order to apply them in our own teaching practices. This interest emerges when comparing our own initiation into the foreign language, where what probably took priority was the approach to the texts by memorizing lexis and structures, and the decoding of words, with this reading experience, where *we can observe that greater opportunities are given to approach the text from the reader's experience and particular perspective, aiming at a holistic understanding.* (Retrospective narrative, Anahí and Mariela, 2012)

All of this happened in the context of the process of their undergraduate studies at university: the context of an English teaching course at UNLP. In this sense, the experience described in this article acquires profound significance for teacher education and continuous professional development, in particular through the sense of agency that it instilled in the research assistants. This sense of agency is described by Brew (2010) in these terms:

The capacity of individuals to inquire not only into their learning and teaching, but also into other aspects of academic practice, becomes critical to the change

process . . . The scholarship of academic practice is academic development because when academics take responsibility for inquiring into aspects of their practice, they learn about their practice and they learn how they may be able to change it. (p. 113)

This sense of agency developed as they were able to put into practice, by means of their participation in these research projects, their theoretical knowledge about different aspects related to teaching acquired during their studies as undergraduate students. The following excerpt illustrates the scholarly conversations Anahí engaged in (italicized).

> In my case, *I believe that my education in the School contributed a lot to my change of perspective, too.* Partly, the development of the linguistic competence itself as we advanced in our studies *allowed me to take a different approach to the texts. I think that even though decoding is not a central aspect to reading, the ability to do the decoding more fluently frees us from having to pay attention to this level in order to focus on more global aspects.* In this sense, I am thinking about the roles of code breaker, meaning maker, text user, and text analyst as presented by Anstey and Bull (2006). *The subject called "Didactics" was, for me, fundamental to change my perspectives on language and the teaching of English, to understand, for example, the importance of lexis and routines in language; I also believe that Didactics helped me a lot to develop a sense of agency. For all this, I think that research maintains continuity with such academic learning rather than breaking away from it, as a possibility to continue in the same direction in new roles.* (Reflection log, 2016)

This sense of agency became real in a research context which encouraged the interconnection between research and continuous professional development through collaboration. In the supervisor's perspective:

> It was satisfying to see that participation in this research project led to awareness of key theoretical notions, familiarization with new research instruments in the field

of reading and the initiative to engage in pedagogic innovation in the foreign language classroom. (Reflection log, Melina, 2016)

## Conclusion and Implications

Here we have reflected upon the research process as we experienced it in two projects during an eight-year period in Argentina. Two of us, Anahí and Mariela, were initially informants and produced part of the data for analysis while later we became research assistants, guided by Melina, our supervisor.

The plurality of voices in this article highlights three fundamental aspects. First, it captures the recursiveness, complexity, temporality, non-linearity, and personal investment involved in becoming a HE researcher, which comprised critical reflection paths and personal stories and experiences over an eight-year process. Thus, the study aligns with the critique of the discourse of "newer researcher" as a linear developmental trajectory put forth by Hancock et al. (2016) in the debate regarding the affordances, complexities, and challenges of the measured university of these times (also Macfarlane, 2017; Peseta et al., 2017; Sutton, 2017). While our university does not escape global trends in performativity and accountability, this study subverts these trends and accommodates the non-linear, the personal as well as individual experience.

Second, the process cultivated scholarly conversations (Leung et al., 2017) about current issues in our discipline such as the cultural dimension of reading in a foreign language and, in this sense, it constitutes a step forward in Anahí's and Mariela's academic socialization by "assisting the transition to academia" (Matthews et al., 2014, p. 112). This article highlights the importance of "offering support for research at the level of process and creating opportunities for peer learning in a context in which peers are not discipline experts but equal participants in the [research] learning process" (Blaj-Ward, 2011, p. 705). The plurality of voices described here offers

testimony of the research paths that Anahí and Mariela took as research assistants, which were characterized by a combination of support and autonomy leading to self-efficacy, with the confidence that they "can successfully perform research tasks", consequently contributing to their feeling "more interested and motivated to conduct research" (Overall et al., 2011, p. 792).

Thirdly, the process also bears testimony to Anahí's and Mariela's emerging sense of agency and discretionary judgement as educators (Elliott, 2015), contributing in this way to their professional development and to the forging of an identity as educators marked by reflection, a critical spirit, and action (Elliott, 2015; Scott, 2014) and situated in an Argentinian setting that is simultaneously local and peripheral (Canagarajah, 2002).

This study has theoretical, ethical, and practical implications. Theoretically, Gibson et al. (2017) highlight that including students as co-enquirers in participatory research requires attention to matters of identity, agency, ownership, and labelling beyond the procedural level of carrying out a participatory investigation. The underlying conceptualizations of these notions have an impact on all research stages and processes as well as on stakeholders. Together with Häusler et al. (2018), they argue that "studies which aim for participants to act as co-enquirers are political by their nature" (Gibson et al., 2017, p. 110). Critical reflection on these dimensions is fraught with challenges and becomes essential. Ethically, this study illustrates the potential and challenges of participatory research in this local setting. For example, Anahí and Mariela experienced shifting identities that resisted fixed labelling such as "student as participant," "student as co-enquirer," "research assistant," "newer researcher." This labelling was problematic in terms of identity issues and how to name and address all the co-authors of this article at different moments in this longitudinal study. Naming and labelling stakeholders poses methodological challenges which are political by nature and challenge power issues and institutional structures (Häusler et al., 2018). Practically, these chal-

lenges have an impact on several dimensions, of which research reporting is an example. In this case, the drafting and redrafting of this article fostered deep questions about naming, representation, and labelling. Overall, as McGinn and Niemczyk (2013, p. 1) remark, there is a need for what can be called "research praxis development": "distinctive spaces for learning and teaching research . . . for research team members to acquire, practice, and enhance research knowledge and skills through participation and collaboration with others who have different skills, interests, and background experiences" (also Grundy & McGinn, 2009; McBurnie, 2011). This study illustrates how this space was enacted and how this praxis was developed in this local context, contributing to the call for more research in this area (McGinn & Niemczyk, 2013; Turner, 2010), underexplored in the South American region.

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