

**VOICING SELF- CONTAINED TEACHERS' NARRATIVES IN A COLOMBIAN  
BILINGUAL CLASSROOM**

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**UNIVERSIDAD PEDAGÓGICA NACIONAL DE COLOMBIA**

**FACULTAD DE HUMANIDADES**

**MAESTRIA EN ENSEÑANZA DE LENGUAS EXTRANJERAS**

**BOGOTÁ D, C. COLOMBIA**

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## ABSTRACT

This research explores the narratives of primary school teachers working under the *self-contained* model in a bilingual private school in Bogotá. In this model, a single teacher is responsible for teaching multiple subjects in English, which creates pedagogical, emotional, and professional demands that often exceed traditional training in foreign language teaching.

The study adopts a Narrative Inquiry approach to examine how teachers construct and reinterpret their professional identity through lived experiences. The stories of four educators were analyzed using the dimensions of temporality, sociality, and spatiality (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Findings reveal that teacher identity in bilingual contexts is not static or defined by institutional manuals but is continuously reshaped through the tension between institutional expectations and classroom realities. Participants highlighted strategies of resilience in response to heavy workloads, limited resources, and the need to negotiate their roles with colleagues and students.

The study concludes that teacher empowerment requires more than technical training; it demands a deep recognition of human experience and the specific context in which bilingual education is practiced. In this sense, the research contributes to institutional reflection, teacher education programs, and professional development initiatives, while also opening avenues for further studies on professional identity in bilingual education settings in Colombia.

**Keywords:** Teacher Professional Identity, Narrative Inquiry, self-contained model, Bilingual education, teacher empowerment.

## RESUMEN

La presente investigación aborda las narrativas de docentes de primaria que trabajan bajo el modelo *self-contained* en un colegio bilingüe privado de Bogotá. Este modelo, caracterizado por la enseñanza de múltiples asignaturas en inglés por un mismo docente, plantea exigencias pedagógicas, emocionales y profesionales que van más allá de la formación tradicional en enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras.

El estudio se enmarca en el enfoque de Narrative Inquiry, que permite comprender cómo los docentes construyen y resignifican su identidad profesional a partir de sus experiencias vividas. Se analizaron las historias de cuatro maestros, considerando las dimensiones de temporalidad, socialidad y espacialidad (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Los hallazgos muestran que la identidad docente en contextos bilingües no es estática ni definida por manuales institucionales, sino que se transforma continuamente en la tensión entre expectativas institucionales y realidades de aula.

Los participantes revelan estrategias de resiliencia frente a la sobrecarga laboral, la falta de recursos y la necesidad de negociar su rol entre colegas y estudiantes. La investigación concluye que el empoderamiento docente requiere más que capacitación técnica: demanda un reconocimiento profundo de la experiencia humana y del contexto particular en el que se ejerce la enseñanza bilingüe. El estudio aporta tanto a la reflexión institucional como al diseño de programas de formación y acompañamiento docente, además de abrir caminos para futuras investigaciones sobre identidad profesional en escenarios de educación bilingüe en Colombia.

**Palabras clave:** Identidad profesional docente, investigación narrativa, modelo self-contained, educación Bilingüe, empoderamiento docente.

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## CHAPTER I

This chapter outlines the main components of the study, including the theoretical background, the statement of the problem, the research question, and the research objectives. The discussion situates this research within the broader context of bilingual education in Colombia, highlighting the importance of examining the experiences of self-contained teachers.

### **Introduction**

English has consolidated its role as one of the most widely used languages worldwide, increasing the demand for effective communication across academic, professional, and social contexts. In this regard, foreign languages are understood not only as linguistic systems but also as tools for interaction, learning, opportunity generation, and social development (MEN, 2019). Within this broader context, this study focuses specifically on how these global demands are experienced in the Colombian educational setting.

In response to these global and local pressures, the Colombian government implemented the National Bilingual Program (NBP; Ministerio de Education Nacional [MEN], 2006), which positioned English learning as a national priority and promoted bilingual education as a key strategy. This initiative was further supported by the adoption of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001), which established standardized levels of language proficiency. This tension suggests that bilingual education in Colombia has been driven more by global competitiveness discourses than by a critical understanding of local educational realities, resulting in policies that are not always aligned with classroom conditions.

Despite these efforts, a persistent gap remains between the objectives of bilingual education policies and their implementation in educational settings. Standardized assessments, such as SABER tests, continue to reveal low levels of English proficiency among students. For example, data from Bogotá indicate that approximately 84.5% of 11th-grade students are classified at basic levels (A1–A2), while only a small percentage reach intermediate level (B1–B2) (MEN, 2005). These results suggest that policy goals are not fully reflected in classroom practices. This situation highlights the need to move beyond policy analysis and focus on the experiences of teachers who are responsible for implementing bilingual education. In this study, particular attention is given to how self-contained teachers interpret, negotiate, and respond to these demands in their daily practice, addressing a dimension that has received comparatively less attention in previous research.

These challenges are particularly evident in the case of self-contained teachers (SCTs), who are responsible for teaching multiple subjects—such as mathematics, science, and social studies—through English in bilingual institutions (mainly pre-school and primary). These teachers are expected to demonstrate both high levels of language proficiency and strong content knowledge, even when they have not been formally trained in all subject areas. As a result, self-contained teachers face increasing pedagogical, emotional, and professional demands, including curriculum design, classroom management, and the creation of meaningful learning environments. These responsibilities are often intensified by limited institutional support, contributing to stress, anxiety, and professional dissatisfaction (Abel & Sewell, 1999).

Within this framework, this study emerges from the need to explore self-contained teachers' narratives to better understand how they construct meaning around their professional roles and experiences. From a narrative perspective, teachers are viewed as key sources of

knowledge about educational realities, since their stories provide valuable insights into the complexities of teaching practice and the meanings they construct through experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This research focuses on self-contained teachers working within a bilingual institution, where a single teacher is responsible for teaching multiple subjects to the same group of students throughout most of the school day (Chan & Jarman, 2004). Although this model was originated in the United States, its implementation in Colombia has taken on different characteristics, particularly in bilingual educational settings.

In this context, self-contained teachers are often required to act as generalists, managing diverse subject areas while teaching in a second language. However, research suggests that the self-contained model may generate increased workload, instructional pressure, and challenges related to teacher satisfaction and classroom management (Strohl et al., 2014). Given these conditions, it becomes essential to examine teachers lived experiences to better understand the complexities of bilingual education in this field.

By foregrounding teachers' narratives, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of educational practices and to inform discussions on professional development, institutional support, and educational policy. When teachers' stories are given proper attention, they can serve as powerful tools for critically examining existing discussions about accountability, performance management, and the effectiveness of education. Therefore, accurately representing teachers' perspectives is essential for fostering more genuine and well-informed discussions about educational practices and policies.

This study aims to deepen the understanding of bilingual education practices and provide meaningful insights for institutional reflection, professional development, and educational decision-making. Rather than remaining limited to the specific school context in which it was

conducted, the study also seeks to contribute to broader educational discussions by highlighting the everyday experiences and challenges faced by self-contained teachers working in bilingual settings.

### **Statement of the problem**

The challenges faced by teachers in Colombian bilingual education are best understood as the result of multiple interacting factors rather than a single cause. Although the National Bilingual Program was originally designed to improve English language proficiency and to position Colombia more effectively within global contexts (MEN, 2006), a clear gap continues to exist between these policy goals and everyday classroom realities.

One visible sign of this gap is students' relatively low levels of English proficiency, as reflected in national standardized assessments. These results have commonly been linked to factors such as limited instructional time, insufficient resources, and ongoing challenges related to teacher training and language proficiency. However, while these issues have been widely examined at the policy level, less attention has been paid to how teachers experience and go through these difficulties in their day-to-day work. As Usma (2009) reflects, the implementation of language policies in Colombia often rejects the local school culture and the experiences of teachers, prioritizing instead the demands of international competition and standardized testing.

In response to the growing demand for bilingual education, many private schools in Colombia have adopted instructional models in which English is used as the medium of instruction for core subjects. Within this context, the self-contained teaching model has become increasingly prominent, particularly in pre-school and primary education. Under this model, a single teacher is responsible for teaching multiple subjects in English, it may promote greater

exposure to the language, but it also adds considerable complexity to the teaching role. As Truscott de Mejia (2005) addresses, the opening to new immersion-style models in Colombia requires teachers to not only possess advanced linguistic competence but also to be able to master complex subject-specific pedagogies, a dual demand that often leads to significant pressure on the practitioners' professional identity.

A significant challenge within this model is the institutional silence regarding clear national guidelines and meaningful professional support. Many self-contained teachers find themselves in a state of uncertainty because they were trained to be English language educators, yet they are suddenly expected to be multidisciplinary experts in fields like Math or Science. As Flores and Day (2006) argue, the early years of teaching and transitions into new models are critical periods where the clash between a teacher's personal values and the hard institutional realities can lead to fragmented professional identity and significant emotional exhaustion.

This exhaustion may come from the responsibility of assuming multiple roles at once, including language instruction, content teaching, curriculum design, and emotional support for students. These overlapping responsibilities not only increase their workload but also intensify the cognitive, emotional, and linguistic demands of their work, which can lead to stress and, in some cases, professional burnout. As Fandiño-Parra (2013) points out, the professional development of English teachers in Colombia has historically focused on linguistic and methodological training, often ignoring the personal, social, and emotional dimensions of the teaching self.

Despite their central role in the implementation of bilingual education, the perspectives of self-contained teachers remain largely underrepresented in academic research in Colombia. Much of the existing literature has focused on policy design, program evaluation, or student

outcomes, often overlooking the lived experiences of the teachers who bring these policies to life in the classroom. This lack of attention limits a deeper understanding of how bilingual education is seen in practice, as well as how teachers interpret and respond to institutional demands. For this reason, it becomes essential to explore teachers' narratives to gain richer insights into their professional identities, their pedagogical practices, and the emotional dimensions that shape their work.

### **General Research Question**

- How do self-contained teachers construct their professional identity and interpret the pedagogical and emotional demands through narratives in a bilingual private school in Bogotá?

### **General Research Objective.**

- To interpret self-contained teachers' narratives to understand how they construct their professional identity and perceive the pedagogical and emotional demands of their role in a bilingual private school in Bogotá.

### **Specific Research Objectives.**

- To analyze the meanings that self-contained teachers attribute to their professional identity when teaching content subjects in English.
- To examine how self-contained teachers narrate their pedagogical roles in relation to students and colleagues within the institutional context.
- To examine the emotional and professional tensions reflected in teachers' narratives regarding workload, preparation, and institutional expectations.

## **Rationale**

This study emerges from the need to understand the conceptual ambiguity and the limited attention surrounding the role of self-contained teachers in Colombian bilingual schools.

Although this model has been increasingly adopted in private educational institutions, its pedagogical implications, professional demands, and impacts on teachers' professional identities remain insufficiently explored.

In many cases, self-contained teachers are selected primarily based on their proficiency in English and are often trained as language teachers, as it is shown explicit in one of the school documents "Docentes bilingües de (nivel C1 mínimo) debidamente capacitados para implementar los programas de manera efectiva" (see appendix 1). This issue between teachers' professional preparation and institutional expectations generates significant tensions that shape both their teaching practices and their professional identities. Understanding how teachers experience and make sense of these demands becomes essential for developing a more comprehensive view of how bilingual education is established in real classroom settings. This situation often generates tension between teachers' preparation and the expectations placed upon them in bilingual school settings.

Additionally, this research seeks to contribute to the field by bringing forward the teachers' voices whose perspectives have often remained in the background. By focusing on teachers' narratives, the study explores how educators construct meaning around their professional roles, negotiate institutional expectations, and interpret their everyday experiences in the classroom. In this way, the study contributes to ongoing discussions on teacher professional identity and bilingual education, offering empirical insights into the realities faced by teachers in Colombian bilingual schools.

From a practical perspective, the findings of this study may inform teacher education programs, professional development initiatives, and institutional support. The study aims to identify areas where further support and more context-sensitive approaches may be needed. While existing literature has pointed to some of these challenges, there is still a need to explore them in greater depth from the perspective of teachers lived experiences.

## CHAPTER II: Theoretical Foundations

Understanding the experiences of self-contained teachers in bilingual education contexts requires engaging with a range of theoretical perspectives. Rather than relying on a single framework, this chapter brings together different lines of research that help to make sense of the complexity of this role. It explores studies related to *bilingual education in Colombia*, the *self-contained teaching model*, *teacher professional identity*, and *narrative inquiry* as an approach to understanding teachers lived experiences.

### Literature Review

To build a solid epistemological and empirical foundation for this study, this literature review is organized through twelve studies. These studies are grouped into four themes that reflect the main concerns of this research.

First, three studies focus on *teacher professional identity*, paying special attention to how it is continuously shaped and redefined within changing educational contexts. Second, three studies highlight the potential of *narrative inquiry* as a methodological approach that allows for a deeper understanding of teachers lived experiences. Third, three investigations examine the *self-Contained teaching model*, particularly its pedagogical implications and the challenges associated with taking on a self-contained role. Finally, three studies situate these discussions within the context of *bilingual education in Colombia*, critically addressing the relationship between national language policies and classroom realities. Taken together, these twelve studies not only provide a foundation for this research, but also make visible a gap in the literature, which this study seeks to address.

To ground the concept of identity within this research, it is important to draw on the work of Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004) in their study “*Reconsidering research on teachers’ professional identity.*” Their review has become a key reference in the field, as it outlines four central features of professional identity. First, identity is understood as an ongoing process of interpretation and re-interpretation of experiences. Second, it involves continuous interaction between the individual and the context, suggesting that teachers construct their identities in relation to the environments in which they work. Third, professional identity is composed of multiple sub-identities that need to achieve a certain degree of balance. Finally, the authors emphasize the role of agency, highlighting that teachers actively shape their own professional development and self-understanding.

Building on this perspective, teacher professional identity can be further understood as a dynamic and evolving process rather than a fixed condition. In this sense, Suárez and McGrath (2022) define identity as a multi-dimensional construct that is “negotiated through experience and the sense that is made of that experience” (p. 9). This perspective is particularly relevant for the present study, as it highlights how identity is constantly negotiated in response to contextual demands through the interaction between teachers’ internal beliefs and the external demands of their institutional contexts.

This is where Hsieh’s (2010) contribution becomes especially useful. In her work “*Exploring the Complexity of Teacher Professional Identity,*” she argues that identity should not be seen as a unified or stable construct, but rather as the result of an ongoing negotiation between personal history, professional preparation, and institutional context. One of her key insights is that identity can become “fractured” when teachers work in environments that do not align with their pedagogical beliefs. From this perspective, the experience of self-contained teachers can be

understood as a continuous “struggle for coherence” (Hsieh, 2010). Teachers are often required to perform roles for which they may not feel fully prepared, such as teaching complex subject content in a second language. As a result, they must constantly bridge the gap between their sense of self as language educators and the expectations imposed by their institutions. This process involves not only pedagogical adjustments, but also deeper negotiations related to identity and professional integrity.

At the same time, “*Teacher professional identity: How to develop and support it in times of change*” (2022), suggests that a strong sense of teacher professional identity can help educators connect “who I am” with “what I do,” strengthening their sense of agency. However, this process is not without challenges. As noted in the OECD (2022) working paper.

Research on the identity of teachers is relevant for policy because it may help understand what strategies and experiences enhance teachers’ professional identity. Thus, policies can be created based on evidence with the aim of improving teachers’ commitment to the profession and the quality of their teaching. (p. 15).

This highlights the importance of institutional support, particularly in contexts where new models—such as self-contained teaching—place additional demands on teachers and may lead to feelings of tension or even professional disconnection.

Bringing these perspectives together, teacher professional identity can be understood as a dynamic and, at times, contested space, shaped by the interaction between personal agency and institutional demands. In this sense, the experiences of Colombian SCTs often reflect tensions between their different sub-identities (Beijaard et al., 2004), particularly as they attempt to reconcile their expertise in language teaching with the multidisciplinary expectations of bilingual

schools. Exploring these experiences requires moving beyond static definitions of identity and focusing instead on how teachers interpret and give meaning to their professional lives. For this reason, the following section turns to Narrative Inquiry as a methodological approach that makes it possible to access these processes, paying attention to how teachers construct and narrate their experiences within the Colombian context.

In terms of narratives within education, the study “*culture, emotions and narratives in education for cultural diversity: a sociocultural approach*” Muller Mirza (2016). It explores how the verbalization of personal experiences and emotions within the learning environment facilitates a process of 'secondarization.' According to Muller Mirza, when individuals narrate their lived experiences, they move from a purely subjective or emotional state to a more conceptualized and collective discourse. This transition is essential for professional development, as it allows the narrator to distance themselves from the immediate experience and analyze it through a reflexive lens.

Regarding the contributions to my research, Muller Mirza’s framework justifies the use of Narrative Inquiry as a tool for transformation in the educational context. By voicing these experiences, as Muller Mirza (2016) suggests, the teachers are not merely recounting events; they are engaging in a psychosocial process that enables them to connect their personal struggles to broader educational concepts. Therefore, this study supports the claim that narratives are a fundamental resource for SCTs to construct a more coherent professional identity amidst the complexities of the Colombian bilingual classroom.

Consequently, in order to ground the narrative axis within the local academic landscape, this research “*Narratives about being and becoming English language in an ELT education program*” by Castañeda-Trujillo, Alarcón-Camacho, and Jaime-Osorio (2022) focuses on how

pre-service teachers in a Colombian ELT program construct and consolidate their professional identities through narrative frames and interviews. A key contribution of this study is the observation of how educators move from a 'technical perspective' of teaching toward a more (re)signified understanding of their profession based on their lived experiences in the practicum and other social settings.

Within my study, for the self-contained Teacher (SCT) context, this work is highly significant as it validates the transformative power of the narrative process. It suggests that identity is not a finished product given by a degree, but a continuous state of 'being and becoming.' By citing Castañeda-Trujillo et al., this thesis argues that the narratives of Colombian teachers serve as a space for professional (re)signification. Just as the participants in their study transitioned from technical to experiential identities, the SCTs in this inquiry use their stories to navigate the shift from being 'language instructors' to 'multidisciplinary educators,' ultimately reshaping their professional self-concept within the pressures of the bilingual private sector.

Additionally, the work of Altan and Lane (2018) *“Teachers' narratives: A source for exploring the influences of teachers' significant life experiences”* highlights the importance of teachers' stories as meaningful sources for understanding teaching and professional development. As they argue, “teachers' stories provide key resources for effective teacher education programs” (p. 238). From this perspective, teaching cannot be understood as a purely technical activity. On the contrary, pedagogical decisions are deeply shaped by dispositions that teachers have developed over time, often long before they formally enter the classroom.

In the context of this study, this idea becomes particularly relevant for understanding the experiences of self-contained Teachers (SCTs) in Colombia. By engaging with the narratives of SCT, this study seeks to identify the Significant Life Experiences (SLEs) that shape these

dispositions and enable teachers to sustain a sense of professional coherence, even when facing strong institutional pressures.

Following this line, another key contribution of *“Teachers' narratives: A source for exploring the influences of teachers' significant life experiences on their dispositions and teaching practices”* by Altan and Lane's (2018) lies in their emphasis on the role of context in shaping teacher dispositions. They point out that *“supportive learning environments influence teachers' dispositions positively”* (p. 238), while personal attributes such as a strong sense of responsibility or perfectionism also play a significant role in how teachers respond to everyday classroom challenges. This dual influence of context and personal history is clearly reflected in the narratives analyzed in this research.

According to this study, engaging with teachers' narratives allows for a more situated and “bottom-up” understanding of professional identity. As Altan and Lane (2018) suggest, storytelling is not only a way of recounting experiences, but also a reflexive process through which teachers make sense of their professional trajectories and clarify their sense of purpose. Within the self-contained model—where teachers assume a broad and multifaceted role—narratives become essential, as they offer a way to capture the complexity, tensions, and meanings that shape teachers' everyday professional lives. Building on this narrative perspective, the following section turns to the specific context of Self-Contained teaching, to examine how these identity processes unfold within this educational model.

To introduce this topic, from a critical and decolonial perspective, the work of Camargo Cely (2018), *“Unveiling EFL and self-contained teachers' discourses on bilingualism within the context of professional development,”* becomes central to this research. Her study brings to light the tensions that emerge between dominant constructions of bilingualism and the ways teachers

experience and exercise their professional agency in the Colombian context. Camargo Cely (2018) questions how prevailing discourses—often grounded in frameworks from the Global North—tend to position teachers as mere implementers of language policies, overlooking the sociocultural realities that shape everyday classroom practices.

In relation to self-contained Teachers (SCT), who are at the core of this study, this perspective invites a deeper understanding of the model beyond its organizational dimension. Rather than being a neutral pedagogical choice, the self-contained model can be interpreted as part of a broader bilingual agenda that, as suggested by Guerrero (2008) and Camargo Cely (2018), reflects elitist assumptions about language learning and educational quality. Within this framework, SCTs are expected to simultaneously teach content subjects such as Science, Mathematics, and Social Studies in English, which places them in a particularly demanding professional position.

This situation generates what can be understood as a form of double pressure. On the one hand, teachers are expected to perform what could be described as a *hegemonic bilingual identity*, associated with a high level of proficiency and accuracy in English. On the other hand, they are also required to embody an *expert content identity*, demonstrating mastery across multiple academic disciplines. As Camargo Cely (2018) suggests, this overlap is not merely a pedagogical challenge but can be seen as a form of structural tension that places significant demands on teachers' professional identities, to the point of raising concerns about equity and sustainability within the system.

At the same time, Camargo Cely's work highlights the importance of reflective spaces in enabling teachers to question and reinterpret these imposed expectations. Through narrative reflection, teachers can begin to distance themselves from dominant discourses and critically

examine their own positioning within the system. In line with this perspective, this thesis argues that the fragmented and, at times, tension-filled identity of the self-contained teacher is not an individual issue, but rather the result of broader institutional structures that attempt to operationalize bilingualism through highly demanding and often unsustainable practices.

Complementing this critical perspective, Pabón-Rodríguez (2023), in her study “*Self-contained Teachers’ Knowledges in an EFL Classroom in Public Contexts*,” identifies important challenges related to teachers’ pedagogical knowledge. Her research reveals an uneven distribution of essential knowledge among self-contained teachers, particularly in areas such as language teaching methodologies and theories of language acquisition. This gap has direct implications for classroom practices, as it can limit the implementation of communicative, interactive, and student-centered approaches that are widely recognized as effective in language learning.

These findings resonate with the purpose of the present study, as they highlight the importance of examining how self-contained teachers construct their professional knowledge in contexts that are both pedagogically and structurally demanding. Rather than viewing these challenges as individual shortcomings, this research aligns with Pabón-Rodríguez (2023) in understanding them as part of a broader need to rethink teacher preparation and support within bilingual education.

To further explore the structural implications of the Self-Contained role, this study also points on Stewart (2015), “*Teachers’ perspectives on self-contained and departmentalized instructional models*.” Stewart’s research provides valuable insights into how teachers in the United States experience the demands of working within a self-contained model, particularly in comparison to departmentalized systems. One of the key contributions of this study is the

identification of a significant trade-off: while the self-contained model allows for the development of stronger and more holistic teacher–student relationships, due to the extended time spent together, it also entails a considerable instructional workload. As Stewart (2015) notes, self-contained teachers often struggle with the design of the curriculum, as they are responsible for planning and teaching multiple subject areas daily. This can lead not only to increased levels of stress, but also to a perceived lack of depth in specific disciplines. In the Colombian bilingual context, this challenge becomes even more complex, as SCTs are required to manage this multidisciplinary responsibility while teaching through a second language (English).

In this sense, the SCT model creates a particular form of professional tension, teachers value the close relationships they build with their students, which contributes to a more supportive and meaningful learning environment, but they must go through the constant pressure of responding to institutional expectations. This tension reinforces the relevance of Narrative Inquiry as an approach for capturing how teachers make sense of these competing demands, and how they reconcile the rewarding aspects of their role with the challenges that shape their everyday professional experience.

Building on these discussions of the self-contained teaching model, it is also necessary to situate this role within the broader field of bilingual education. Understanding how bilingualism is conceptualized, implemented, and experienced in educational settings provides a wider framework for interpreting the demands placed on SCTs. The following section, therefore, examines key studies on bilingual education to further contextualize these dynamics within the Colombian and global landscape.

First, the study “*Retos del programa nacional de bilingüismo*” by Fandiño-Parra et al. (2012) provides an important perspective on the material and institutional conditions required for the effective implementation of bilingual education in Colombia. The authors emphasize that successful bilingual programs depend not only on policy design, but also on the availability of adequate resources, specialized teaching materials, and ongoing professional support for teachers. In this sense, they argue that bilingualism should not be understood as an “imposed model,” but rather as a collaborative process that considers local contexts and respects teachers’ professional integrity.

From the perspective of this study, this contribution is particularly relevant for understanding the realities faced by self-contained teachers (SCTs). The demands placed on these teachers often exceed the level of institutional support available, creating a significant gap between expectations and actual working conditions. By engaging with Fandiño-Parra et al.’s (2012) critique, this research interprets the professional identity of SCTs not only as a response to pedagogical challenges, but also as a form of resilience within a policy landscape that frequently demands high levels of performance without providing the necessary structural support to sustain it.

To complement this perspective, *Insights on Bilingualism and Bilingual Education: A Sociolinguistic Perspective* by Miranda Montenegro (2012) offers a critical view of bilingualism in the Colombian foreign language context, questioning simplified understandings of bilingual education and emphasizing the importance of sociolinguistic, cultural, and policy dimensions. He argues that bilingualism should not be reduced to levels of language proficiency but rather understood as a complex social and individual phenomenon. His analysis draws attention to the

conditions necessary for the development of functional bilingual communities, conditions that often do not fully align with the realities of foreign language education in Colombia.

This perspective is particularly useful for rethinking the role of the SCT beyond the classroom. In many cases, the self-contained teacher becomes the primary point of contact students have with the second language, shaping what could be understood as a kind of “micro bilingual community” within the classroom. From this point of view, the pressures experienced by SCTs are not only pedagogical, but also sociolinguistic in nature. The tensions that emerge in teachers’ narratives can therefore be interpreted as part of a broader gap between idealized visions of bilingualism and the actual conditions in which teaching and learning take place.

Finally, Joya and Cerón (2013) in their study “*Reflections on the Process of Bilingual Education in Latin America: A Perspective from Globalization*”, analyze bilingual education in Latin America from a globalization perspective. Their research suggests that the promotion of bilingualism in the region has been strongly influenced by global economic dynamics, where English is positioned as a key resource for competitiveness. At the same time, they critically point out an ethnocentric tendency in many bilingual models, where external standards and cultural references are often prioritized over local realities. This perspective provides an important backdrop for understanding the experiences of the teachers in this present study. The tensions they describe are not limited to classroom practices but are also shaped by broader pressures linked to globalized expectations of bilingualism. In this context, Narrative Inquiry becomes particularly valuable, as it allows for an exploration of how teachers negotiate their professional identities and pedagogical decisions while responding to both institutional demands and the specific needs of their local contexts.

In sum, the studies discussed in this section make it possible to understand bilingual education in Colombia not as a neutral or purely technical model, but as a complex and, at times, contested field shaped by the intersection of pedagogical, sociolinguistic, and structural factors. From this perspective, it becomes evident that global expectations of bilingualism often coexist—sometimes in tension—with local realities and the material conditions of schools, directly influencing teachers’ professional experiences.

Within this landscape, self-contained teachers (SCTs) are positioned at the center of these demands. They are not only expected to respond to institutional and policy-driven expectations, but also to sustain meaningful and context-sensitive teaching practices. In this sense, this study argues that understanding bilingual education requires moving beyond policy discourse and focusing on how these dynamics are lived and interpreted by teachers. Consequently, this study positions Narrative Inquiry as a key approach to explore how SCTs interpret, negotiate, and respond to these challenges, ultimately shaping their professional identities within the Colombian bilingual context.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Self-Contained teaching**

#### ***Self-Contained teaching background***

The term self-contained teacher is commonly used to describe a classroom organization in which a single teacher is responsible for teaching multiple subjects to the same group of students throughout most of the school day (Chan & Jarman, 2004; McGrath & Rust, 2002). Within this model, the teacher typically remains with the same group for most of the day, while students only leave the classroom to attend lessons with specialist teachers in areas such as

Art, Physical Education, Music, or Dance. Historically, the “one teacher per classroom” structure became the dominant organizational pattern in elementary education in the United States and continues to be widely implemented, particularly in early elementary grades (Chan & Jarman, 2004; Parker et al., 2017).

From a pedagogical perspective, the model positions teachers as generalists responsible for teaching across multiple subject areas, including literacy, mathematics, science, and social studies (Gerretson et al., 2008; Chan & Jarman, 2004). While this configuration has often been associated with continuity in instruction and a closer understanding of students’ learning processes (Chan & Jarman, 2004), such benefits should not be assumed as inherent to the model itself. Rather, they depend on how teachers face the complexities of integrating content, sustaining meaningful interactions, and responding to diverse learning needs. In this sense, the self-contained classroom may enable more holistic and student-centered approaches, but it simultaneously places significant demands on teachers’ pedagogical decision-making.

This duality reveals a central tension: what appears as continuity at the structural level often translates into complexity at the pedagogical level. As Strohl et al. (2014) suggest, integration across disciplines is not an automatic outcome of the model, but an ongoing process that requires high levels of flexibility and intentionality. Teachers must constantly shift between subject-specific demands while maintaining coherence, a task that involves not only curricular knowledge but also the ability to prioritize, adapt, and make situated judgments in real time. Consequently, the self-contained role extends beyond content delivery, becoming a space where multiple professional competencies intersect.

Indeed, as McGrath and Rust (2002) argue, the effectiveness of this model largely depends on the teacher’s capacity to balance breadth and depth across disciplines—an

expectation that is often underestimated in institutional discourses. At the same time, literature reveals an important conceptual ambiguity surrounding the term *self-contained*. In some contexts, particularly in special education, it refers to classrooms designed for students with specific learning needs or disabilities. The term self-contained is not fixed, but rather context dependent. In contrast, within elementary education contexts, it commonly refers to a single teacher responsible for teaching multiple subjects to the same group of students throughout most of the school day. This dual usage makes its uncritical transfer across educational settings particularly problematic.

This ambiguity becomes even more significant in the Colombian context, where the term has been increasingly adopted in bilingual private schools, yet remains insufficiently theorized and empirically examined. In these settings, the model is not simply replicated but reinterpreted, often as a strategy to increase students' exposure to English. However, this shift introduces additional layers of tension, as teachers are expected to integrate content and language without necessarily having access to clear methodological guidance or institutional support. As a result, the role of the self-contained teacher in these contexts becomes considerably more complex. These conditions intensify the cognitive, instructional, and emotional demands placed on teachers, positioning them within a space of constant negotiation. From a narrative perspective (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), it is precisely within these tensions that teachers construct, interpret, and redefine their professional identities.

Therefore, the self-contained teaching model should not be understood merely as an organizational arrangement, but as a dynamic and contested pedagogical space. It is within this space that broader educational discourses such as bilingualism, efficiency, and standardization intersect with the lived realities of teachers. Examining how this model is established in

Colombian bilingual schools is thus not only relevant but necessary, particularly in a context where its adoption has left behind its conceptual and pedagogical development. In this sense, the present study seeks to contribute to this emerging field by foregrounding teachers' narratives as a way of understanding how they make sense of, and respond to, the complexities of their professional practice. However, understanding the model in its original context is only a starting point. When transferred to different educational settings, its meanings and purposes are inevitably reinterpreted and reshaped. The following section, therefore, examines how the self-contained model is taken up and reconfigured within the specific context of Colombian bilingual schools.

### ***The Implementation of Self-Contained Teaching in Colombia***

The origins of the self-contained model in the Colombian educational context remain uncertain and under-researched. Although it appears to have been transferred from the United States, its adoption in Colombian private bilingual schools has not followed a clearly defined trajectory. Instead, it has gradually adapted to local institutional demands. In its original context, self-contained teaching is primarily associated with organizational and pedagogical purposes—such as structuring core subjects within a single classroom or supporting students in special education settings—without an explicit focus on second language development (Merritt, 2017; Chen, 2023).

In contrast, Colombian bilingual institutions have reinterpreted the model in response to the increasing demand for English language learning. Here, the emphasis shifts from subject organization to language exposure, particularly for English Language Learners (ELLs). However, this shift does not necessarily focus on a coherent pedagogical integration of content and language. Classroom practices often continue to prioritize content delivery, generating a

persistent tension between subject learning and language development. As Coyle, Hood, and Marsh (2010) argue, effective integration requires deliberate pedagogical planning, which is not always evident in these contexts.

In many cases, the model appears to resemble principles of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). However, this connection is often implicit rather than systematically implemented. As Dalton-Puffer (2011) suggests, the success of CLIL depends on clear methodological frameworks that guide the relationship between language and content—conditions that are not consistently present in Colombian classrooms. As a result, integration may remain superficial, reflecting parallel rather than genuinely interconnected processes. For this reason, the self-contained model in Colombia can be understood as a hybrid approach. While it incorporates elements from international models, its implementation is largely shaped by local practices and institutional expectations rather than by consolidated theoretical foundations. This hybridity contributes to the conceptual ambiguity surrounding the role of self-contained teachers and reflects broader processes of educational transfer and adaptation (Phillips & Ochs, 2004).

This dynamic is closely linked to processes of educational internationalization. Many private bilingual schools rely on imported curricular materials and international standards, often positioning English as the primary medium of instruction, as it is shown in one institutional document where they explicitly mention the pedagogical methodology “*Metodologías pedagógicas: Singapore Math (Lower School), Collaborative Learning, CLIL, Differentiated Instruction, PBL, CAFE Daily 4, Lucy Calkins Writing Workshop*” ( see appendix 1). While these practices aim to increase language exposure, they also reveal a strong dependence on external frameworks that may not fully align with local realities. As Ayala and Álvarez (2015) notes:

Because Colombian standards for foreign language teaching are barely structured, attention has been given to foreign models. In general, standards have been obtained by importing the ones that were developed in other places under different circumstances and contexts. Although those standards are valid and reliable for foreign academic communities, it does not mean that they would fit the particularities of our institutions, language learners and so on (p12)

The expansion of bilingual education in Colombia has been largely driven by market dynamics and parental expectations, where bilingualism is often marketed as a high-value commodity. This shift has transformed the labor market for educators; today, subject-area expertise (such as in Mathematics) is frequently overshadowed by linguistic proficiency. Consequently, many qualified content teachers find themselves excluded from the private sector simply because they do not speak English. This creates a paradoxical situation where institutions prioritize language proficiency over pedagogical depth, assuming it is easier to train a linguist to 'study the contents' than to support a content expert in acquiring the language. This trend not only marginalizes experienced educators but also risks reducing complex subjects to mere vehicles for language practice. As Guerrero (2008) argues, the discourse of bilingualism in Colombia often aligns with neoliberal agendas that treat English as a 'technical skill' for global competition, potentially devaluing the pedagogical expertise and local identities of teachers who do not fit this specific linguistic profile

As Truscott de Mejía (2015) explains, this expansion has largely followed a bottom-up logic, driven by institutional and social expectations rather than centralized policy. Overall, the implementation of the self-contained model in Colombia can be understood as a complex, evolving, and context-dependent practice. Rather than functioning as a clearly defined

pedagogical approach, it operates at the intersection of global influences, institutional demands, and teachers lived experiences. This highlights the need for further research that explores how teachers interpret and enact this model in practice, particularly in a context where its conceptual and pedagogical foundations remain unclear.

Since the model in Colombia remains largely unregulated in Colombia, as there are no specific national guidelines that define its implementation, this lack of policy clarity contributes to its ambiguous status, particularly in private bilingual schools where it is most used. Although it shares similarities with CLIL (Marsh, Maljers, & Hartiala, 2001), the boundaries between these approaches are often blurred, leading to conceptual confusion and inconsistent practices. With no clear policies and unclear pedagogical foundations, teachers are required to develop their own strategies to integrate content and language, frequently without sufficient institutional support, as it is noted on the institutional document where this study is set “No se exigirá realizar labores sin la debida capacitación, pero se espera una actitud proactiva en la investigación y el *perfeccionamiento autónomo*”. (see appendix). As Ball, Thames, and Phelps (2008) argue, effective teaching in these conditions requires specialized knowledge that goes beyond content mastery, particularly when multiple domains must be integrated. Consequently, the self-contained role becomes a site of ongoing negotiation, where teachers respond to competing demands related to curriculum, language policy, and classroom realities, recurring to constant self-preparation.

Finally, understanding these dynamics requires attention to the historical, social, and cultural dimensions that shape bilingual education in Colombia. The effectiveness of the self-contained approach will depend on the development of more contextually grounded pedagogical frameworks and policies that respond to local realities. In this sense, the following section

presents the research setting, focusing on how these broader tensions are experienced by the participating teachers in their everyday practice. To better understand these broader dynamics, it is important to look at how the self-contained model is experienced within a specific institutional context. Focusing on these localized practices makes it possible to see how teachers navigate and make sense of the tensions described above in their everyday work. The following section, therefore, presents the research setting where these experiences unfold.

### ***Self-Contained teaching at the setting***

Understanding how the self-contained model is perceived in this study requires examining not only institutional intentions, but also how these are interpreted and experienced by teachers in practice. This section draws on institutional documents alongside the narratives of four participating teachers to explore how the model is conceptualized and implemented within the school. From a qualitative perspective, this approach allows for an analysis of how policy is translated into practice in situated ways (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012).

At the institutional level, the school frames its bilingual education model through initiatives such as *Transforming English Teaching: Effective Strategies with Daily 5, Writing Workshop, and Phonics at LB (annex 1)*, which sets measurable goals for students' literacy development. These objectives are operationalized through structured routines, including leveled classroom libraries, the use of digital platforms like Raz-Kids, and continuous assessment practices. While these strategies align with differentiated and skill-based approaches, they also reflect a strong emphasis on measurable outcomes. As Cummins (2000) suggests, however, the development of academic language proficiency requires not only exposure and practice, but also meaningful and cognitively demanding interaction—an aspect that may not always be fully addressed through standardized systems alone.

The adoption of programs such as *Daily 5* and *Lucy Calkins Writing Workshop* further illustrates the institution's reliance on internationally recognized models. Although these approaches promote autonomy and literacy development, they were originally designed for first language contexts, not for foreign language learning. Their use in this setting reflects processes of policy borrowing (Phillips & Ochs, 2004), where models are transferred across contexts without full recontextualization, potentially generating tensions between pedagogical intentions and classroom realities.

Similarly, the use of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) as a reference framework raises questions about contextual relevance. While these standards offer structure, their adoption may overlook local linguistic and educational conditions (Ayala & Álvarez, 2015). At the same time, teacher support appears limited to initial training sessions and sporadic guidance, leading many teachers to rely on personal initiative and peer collaboration. This gap between expectations and support (Ball et al., 2008) can intensify the demands placed on teachers, particularly within a model that requires them to integrate content and language across multiple subjects.

Consequently, within the classroom, the self-contained teacher assumes a central and highly demanding role, teaching various disciplines through English while supporting students' language development. This requires not only content knowledge but also strong pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987). However, the role itself is not always clearly defined at the institutional level, which may lead to inconsistencies and ongoing negotiation of expectations in practice. These dynamics are further reinforced by institutional documents such as the *Acta de compromiso y acatamiento de la estructura académica 2025–2026* (see appendix 2), which outlines a socio-constructivist approach and the integration of multiple methodologies, including

CLIL, PBL, differentiated instruction, and literacy frameworks. While this suggests coherence at the policy level, it also reveals a dense pedagogical landscape where multiple approaches coexist. Rather than being implemented as a unified model, these frameworks often translate into overlapping and sometimes competing demands that teachers must navigate in their everyday practice (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012).

In this sense, the institutional framework not only organizes teaching practices but also shapes how teachers experience their role. Expectations such as the use of English as the primary language of instruction “ Los docentes contratados para enseñar en segunda lengua (inglés, francés) deberán emplearla en sus interacciones con estudiantes y colegas en todos los contextos profesionales, salvo en situaciones de crisis emocionales, alta complejidad disciplinaria” ( see appendix 2), continuous assessment, and the integration of active methodologies position teachers within a highly structured environment. For self-contained teachers, this implies enacting multiple roles simultaneously—language instructor, content teacher, and facilitator of interdisciplinary learning—while negotiating the tensions between policy expectations and classroom realities.

Overall, the research setting reflects a complex configuration in which multiple pedagogical approaches, international frameworks, and institutional expectations converge. From this perspective, self-contained teaching is understood not simply as an organizational model, but as a dynamic professional space in which teachers continuously interpret, adapt, and redefine their role. To address this gap, this study turns to teachers’ narratives, using Narrative Inquiry to explore how Self-Contained teachers interpret and negotiate these expectations in practice.

## **Narratives**

Following the contextual exploration of self-contained teaching, this study approaches narratives not simply as descriptive accounts, but as meaningful ways of understanding teaching as a lived experience. Rather than reducing teachers' work to variables or measurable outcomes, a narrative perspective allows us to attend to the meanings teachers construct as they navigate their professional trajectories (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). In this sense, the "truth" of teaching is not found in generalizations, but in the situated and socially constructed interpretations that teachers give to their experiences.

Narrative inquiry is particularly relevant for this purpose, as it focuses on the stories individuals tell to make sense of their lives. Through storytelling, teachers organize events, emotions, and relationships into coherent accounts that help them understand what they do and who they are as professionals. These narratives are not neutral representations of reality; rather, they are shaped by memory, language, cultural context, and social interaction (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008). Teachers' narratives are particularly valuable in educational research, as they provide insight into how educators understand their practice, their professional roles, and the challenges they encounter.

Similarly, Goodson (1998) argues that teachers' life stories reveal forms of professional knowledge that are often overlooked in policy-driven or performance-based research. Ignoring these narratives risks reducing teaching to a purely technical activity, overlooking its relational, emotional, and contextual dimensions. Narrative inquiry has therefore gained prominence in language education to explore teacher identity, professional development, and the emotional dimensions of teaching (Barkhuizen, 2011; Barkhuizen et al., 2014). In educational research, this approach is particularly valuable because it allows us to move beyond abstract descriptions of

teaching and instead explore it as a relational and dynamic practice (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008).

In the context of this study, narratives offer a way to explore how Self-Contained teachers experience and negotiate their roles within bilingual education settings. Through their stories, it is possible to identify not only practices, but also the meanings, tensions, and identity processes that emerge from their daily work. As Polkinghorne (1988) suggests, narratives allow individuals to connect past experiences, present actions, and future expectations, creating a sense of continuity in their professional lives. Ultimately, narratives are understood here not only as a source of data, but as a way of knowing. They reveal how teachers construct and reconstruct their identities over time, positioning themselves in relation to their students, their institutions, and broader educational discourses. In this sense, narrative inquiry makes it possible to examine teaching not as a fixed set of practices, but as an evolving, situated, and deeply human experience.

### *Narrative inquiry and the three-dimensional inquiry space*

Building on the understanding of narratives meaningful ways of making sense of experience, this study adopts narrative inquiry as its guided methodological and analytical framework. Following Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative inquiry is not simply about collecting stories, but about approaching experience as something lived, interpreted, and continuously reconstructed over time. One of the key contributions of this perspective is the idea of a three-dimensional inquiry space, composed of *temporality*, *sociality*, and *place*. Rather than acting as rigid categories, these dimensions offer a flexible way to engage with teachers' narratives while honoring the complexity of their lived experiences.

- The first dimension, *temporality*, highlights that experience unfolds over time. Teachers' stories are not isolated accounts, but connections between past experiences, present practices, and future expectations. Paying attention to this dimension allows the study to understand how teachers' beliefs, decisions, and professional identities take shape and transform their trajectories.
- The second dimension, *sociality*, brings attention to both personal and social conditions. This includes teachers' emotions, values, and beliefs, as well as the institutional expectations, relationships, and cultural norms that influence their work. From this perspective, teaching is understood as a deeply relational experience, shaped through ongoing interaction rather than individual action alone.
- The third dimension, *place*, focuses on the context where experience happens. Classrooms, schools, and institutional environments are not just settings, but active spaces that shape what teachers do and how they make sense of their work. In this study, particular attention is given to how the bilingual school context frames and conditions teachers' experiences.

Together, these three dimensions make it possible to approach teachers' narratives in a more holistic way, where experience is seen as interconnected across time, relationships, and context. Instead of fragmenting experience into isolated elements, this framework allows for a more nuanced understanding of how meaning is constructed in practice. Within this study, this three-dimensional space guides both data collection and analysis. Teachers' narratives are explored not only in terms of what is said, but also when it is situated, how it is shaped by interactions and emotions, and where it takes place. This makes it possible to better understand how self-contained teachers interpret and navigate their professional experiences. This approach

becomes particularly relevant in bilingual education contexts, where teachers often face multiple and sometimes competing demands. As their stories suggest, teaching is not only about applying methodologies, but about responding to institutional expectations, supporting students, and constantly adjusting their role in practice.

In this sense, narrative inquiry allows this study to position teachers as active meaning-makers. Rather than evaluating what they do, the focus is on understanding how they experience and interpret the complexities of self-contained teaching. Their narratives, therefore, become a central way of accessing how this model is lived and negotiated within the Colombian bilingual school context. The following section turns to the notion of professional identity as a dynamic and socially constructed process. In this sense, identity is approached as an interpretative lens to connect personal stories with broader pedagogical meanings.

### **Professional identity**

Professional identity has become a key construct in educational research, particularly within narrative approaches, as it allows us to understand how teachers make sense of who they are in relation to what they do. Rather than being a fixed or stable attribute, professional identity is better understood as a dynamic and evolving process, shaped through experience, interaction, and reflection (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Sachs, 2005). From this perspective, identity is not something teachers simply *have*, but something they continuously construct and negotiate their professional lives. Narrative inquiry offers a particularly powerful lens to examine this process because it focuses on how individuals interpret their experiences through storytelling. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest, it is through the reconstruction of experience in narrative form that meaning emerges. In this sense, when teachers tell their stories, they are not merely

recounting events; they are actively interpreting them and positioning themselves within those experiences.

As Polkinghorne (1988) and Bruner (1991) argue, narrative is a central mode of human meaning-making, allowing individuals to create coherence and continuity in their lives. Thus, professional identity is constructed through the stories teachers tell about their practice. However, these stories do not emerge in isolation. Identity is also shaped by broader social, institutional, and cultural forces. As Gee (2000) points out, identities are enacted through discourse and social interaction, meaning that teachers take on different positions depending on the contexts in which they participate. In this sense, professional identity is influenced not only by personal beliefs and values, but also by institutional expectations, policy demands, and power relations. Narratives, therefore, become a space where these tensions are made visible and negotiated.

This relational dimension is further emphasized by perspectives that understand identity as socially constructed through participation. Sfard and Prusak (2005) describe identities as “collections of stories,” while Wenger (1998) highlights how identity develops through engagement in communities of practice. These views reinforce the idea that teachers’ identities are shaped through their interactions with students, colleagues, and institutional structures, rather than through individual processes alone. From a narrative inquiry perspective, this process can be more deeply understood through the three-dimensional framework proposed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000): temporality, sociality, and place. Identity is constructed over time, through relationships, and within specific contexts. This allows us to see how teachers past experiences, present conditions, and future aspirations intersect in the ongoing construction of their professional selves.

In educational contexts, and particularly in language education, this perspective becomes especially relevant. Teachers often navigate multiple and sometimes competing demands, including language proficiency, content teaching, and institutional expectations (Barkhuizen, 2011; Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2014). These demands can generate tensions that are not always visible in policy or formal descriptions of teaching. Through narratives, however, it becomes possible to understand how teachers experience and respond to these complexities in their everyday practice. Additionally, professional identity is inherently developmental. As Flores and Day (2006) argue, it evolves over time through critical experiences and changing contexts. Narrative inquiry is particularly well-suited to capturing this process, as it allows researchers to trace how teachers reinterpret their past and construct new meanings about their practice. This temporal dimension is essential for understanding processes of growth, adaptation, and even resilience.

In this study, professional identity is understood as a dynamic, relational, and contextually situated process that emerges through narrative. By focusing on teachers' stories, this research seeks to explore how self-contained teachers make sense of their roles within the demands of bilingual education. In doing so, it moves beyond viewing teachers as mere implementers of pedagogical models and instead positions them as active meaning-makers who continuously negotiate their professional identities. Ultimately, narratives become the space where this negotiation is both revealed and constructed. They allow access not only to what teachers do, but to how they experience, interpret, and give meaning to their work. In this sense, narrative inquiry makes it possible to capture those dimensions of teaching that often remain unspoken—such as tensions, uncertainties, and moments of transformation—offering a more nuanced understanding of teacher agency within the Colombian bilingual school context.

## **Bilingual education**

Bilingual education can be understood not only as a pedagogical model, but as a complex educational project where language policy, curriculum design, and classroom practices intersect in meaningful and sometimes tension-filled ways. Rather than focusing solely on increasing exposure to a second language, it implies the intentional integration of language and content in ways that support both academic learning and linguistic development. In this regard, Cummins (2000) emphasizes that language proficiency does not develop simply through exposure, but through meaningful interaction and cognitively demanding engagement with language in use. This understanding is closely aligned with sociocultural perspectives, particularly Vygotsky's (1978) view of language as a mediational tool for thinking and knowledge construction.

From this perspective, bilingual education becomes a space where language and cognition are deeply intertwined in everyday classroom life. Expanding this idea, García (2009) challenges traditional views of bilingualism as the separation of two autonomous languages and instead conceptualizes it as a fluid, integrated practice, often referred to as translanguaging. In a similar line, Baker (2011) underscores that effective bilingual programs require a delicate pedagogical balance between content learning and language development, suggesting that both dimensions are inseparable in practice even when they are conceptually distinguished.

Beyond instructional design, bilingual education can also be understood as a social space where meanings, relationships, and participation are constantly negotiated. From a sociocultural lens, Wenger (1998) conceptualizes schools as communities of practice, where learning emerges through interaction, participation, and shared engagement in everyday activities. Within these communities, teachers and students do not only develop linguistic and academic competencies but also construct ways of being and belonging in the educational space. In this sense, Norton

(2013) reminds us that language learning is always connected to identity, since individuals are continuously positioning themselves and being positioned by others through language use in social contexts.

In Colombia, bilingual education has developed within a broader landscape shaped by national language policies and the expansion of private schooling. While governmental initiatives have promoted bilingualism as an educational goal, private institutions have often taken the lead in implementing immersion models, international curricula, and increased exposure to English. These settings frequently offer more favorable conditions, such as smaller class sizes and greater access to resources. However, as De Mejía (2002) notes, bilingual education in Colombia cannot be separated from its sociopolitical context, where access to high-quality programs remains unequal and strongly linked to socioeconomic privilege. In this sense, bilingual education also reflects broader structural inequalities within the educational system.

This critical perspective is further developed by Usma (2009), who argues that national bilingual policies may unintentionally reinforce global hierarchies of language and power, positioning English as a dominant linguistic capital while marginalizing other linguistic and cultural resources. These tensions become particularly relevant when examining teachers' professional identities in bilingual settings. The demands of integrating language and content, responding to institutional expectations, and adapting to diverse classroom realities directly influence how teachers understand their roles and position themselves professionally.

From a narrative perspective, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that these lived experiences are not isolated events, but part of broader identity trajectories shaped across time, relationships, and contexts. Similarly, Barkhuizen (2011) highlights that language teachers' identities are constructed through ongoing tensions and negotiations within their professional

environments, especially where pedagogical, linguistic, and institutional expectations intersect. In this study, these tensions are particularly evident in the spatial dimension of identity, where institutional discourses and classroom realities often come into friction. As teachers navigate these overlapping demands, their professional identities are continuously reconfigured through practice.

Therefore, bilingual education can be understood as more than a methodological approach; it is a dynamic and lived space where teacher identity is constantly constructed, contested, and renegotiated. The experiences of teachers—shaped by temporal trajectories, social interactions, and institutional conditions—invite a deeper understanding of bilingual education not only in terms of student outcomes, but also as a critical site for examining how teachers make sense of their professional selves, particularly within Self-Contained bilingual settings in Colombia. This chapter presents the theoretical foundations guiding this study, bringing together Self-Contained teaching, narrative inquiry, professional identity, and bilingual education. Taking together, these perspectives offer a comprehensive framework for understanding teaching as a situated, evolving, and deeply human practice.

### CHAPTER III: Methodological Design

This chapter outlines the methodological framework of the study, which is grounded in a qualitative research paradigm. Rather than focusing on the collection of factual accounts, the study seeks to explore the meanings that teachers construct through their everyday professional experiences and the ways in which these meanings shape their understanding of their roles.

To achieve this aim, narrative inquiry was selected as the methodological design. This choice is intentional, as it provides a space to engage with teachers lived experiences as stories that carry temporal, social, and contextual depth. Within these narratives, it is possible to identify moments of tension and transformation—referred to in this study as “pedagogical shocks”. In this methodological framework, the concept of *pedagogical shock* is introduced as a central term of the analysis. It is defined as the identity and emotional crisis teachers face when transitioning from language specialists to a self-contained model. Through these accounts, the study seeks to understand how policy and practice intersect in teachers’ professional lives.

The following sections present the research setting, a primary school in Colombia that serves as the context for these experiences, as well as the participants, who are self-contained teachers whose narratives constitute the core of the study. To capture the complexity of their experiences, data were generated through semi-structured interviews that facilitated open and reflective dialogue, complemented by an analysis of institutional documents. This combination of sources allowed for a process of triangulation that strengthens the credibility of the findings and supports a deeper understanding of professional identity and empowerment as situated and relational constructs.

## Research Paradigm

This study adopts a *qualitative research framework*, prioritizing an in-depth exploration of educational phenomena through the subjective meanings participants attribute to their lived experiences. This approach centers on interpretive analysis and contextual variations, thereby positioning the participants' unique perspectives as the primary source of knowledge (Creswell, 2013). Such a methodology is essential for capturing the complexity of professional transitions that cannot be fully encapsulated by quantitative data. Qualitative research occurs in the natural setting where the phenomenon experiences its daily reality (Creswell, 2013).

In this study, the "setting" is not just a geographical location in Colombia; it is the socio-pedagogical ecosystem of the primary classroom. I am not analyzing teachers in a vacuum, but within the physical and emotional space where they face the pressure of teaching multiple subjects. This allows me to observe how the environment itself shows the teachers' identity shifts. In qualitative studies, research is the primary tool for data collection. I recognize that I am not a neutral observer. By conducting the interviews and analyzing the institutional documents myself, I am not just "gathering data", I am interpreting professional human beings.

Additionally, qualitative research seeks to develop a complex and richly detailed understanding of the phenomenon under study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). In this study, the focus extends beyond an evaluation of teachers' effectiveness in teaching English. Instead, it aims to construct a holistic account of their professional lives. This includes attention to their emotional well-being, their relationships with other disciplinary areas, and their sense of belonging within the school community. By bringing these dimensions into dialogue, this research conceptualizes teachers as whole individuals navigating systemic change, rather than as mere transmitters of linguistic content.

This study does not aim to confirm hypotheses or measure variables. Instead, it seeks to understand how teachers working within the self-contained model, interpret, explain, and find meaning in their professional experiences in bilingual education. Therefore, teaching is examined as a practice shaped by social, emotional, and institutional factors, rather than just a series of observable actions. Additionally, this paradigm is appropriate because it allows teachers' voices to emerge in their own terms, acknowledging the complexity of their professional realities and the meanings they assign to their roles (Burns, 2003).

Consequently, it is situated within the qualitative research paradigm, a choice rooted in the belief that the phenomenon of self-contained teaching in Colombia cannot be reduced to static metrics or standardized outcomes; rather, it exists within the depth of human experience. The adoption of this framework stems from the necessity to capture the essence of the teaching profession through an interpretive and naturalistic lens. In this investigation, my role as a researcher is not to seek universal generalizations, but to bear witness to the complexity of the educational landscape. The intrinsic connection between this paradigm and my study lies in the understanding that a teacher's transition into a self-contained model is not merely an administrative shift; it is a profound metamorphosis of professional identity.

By prioritizing a qualitative approach, I acknowledge that the "truth" of this research is found in the emotional tensions of the classroom, and the ongoing reconstruction of pedagogical knowledge. Finally, this paradigm allows me to validate the classroom as a sociopolitical and human stage, where expertise is not simply applied but is co-constructed and renegotiated daily amidst the uncertainty of systemic change.

### **Research Approach: Narrative Inquiry**

This research adopts narrative inquiry as both a methodological approach and an analytical lens. Narrative Inquiry is grounded in the assumption that human beings understand and give meaning to their experiences through stories constructed over time (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Within this approach, teachers' narratives are not treated as objective accounts of events, but as interpretive constructions through which participants negotiate professional identity, institutional expectations, and personal beliefs. Narratives connect past experiences, present practices, and future aspirations, offering insight into teachers' professional trajectories.

Furthermore, Narrative Inquiry has become a prevalent method in language education research, serving as a valuable tool for investigating teacher identity, professional growth, and the emotional aspects of the teaching profession (Barkhuizen, 2008; Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2014). These investigations acknowledge teachers as active creators of knowledge, with their personal experiences representing valid sources of professional understanding. Considering the intricate nature of self-contained teaching within bilingual environments, where linguistic, pedagogical, and emotional factors converge, narrative inquiry offers a suitable approach for examining how educators interpret their roles and obligations.

### **Type of research: Case Study**

In this research, I employ a qualitative collective case study design. According to Merriam (2009), a case study is an "intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded system" (p. 40). For the purposes of this research, the "case" is bounded by the specific institutional context of a Colombian bilingual primary school and the lived experiences of four female teachers navigating the transition to a self-contained bilingual model.

The choice of a case study is not merely a matter of scale, but a commitment to understanding the "how" and "why" complex social phenomena that are inseparable from their real-life context (Yin, 2018). In this study, the pedagogical transition cannot be understood through isolated variables; it must be viewed as a "contemporary phenomenon within its real-world context" (Yin, 2018, p. 15). Furthermore, as Stake (1995) argues, the researcher's interest is in the "particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances". In my research, these "important circumstances" are the systemic pressures of bilingual policy in Colombia, and the "activity" is the profound identity negotiation and pedagogical experiences lived by the participants.

By focusing on four female teachers with diverse years of experience, this research adopts what Stake (1995) defines as a collective case study. This approach is instrumental because it allows for the examination of several cases to "investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition" (p. 445). The intersection of experience and identity: selecting participants with varying professional trajectories, serves a strategic purpose. As Merriam (2009) suggests, the most significant insights in qualitative research often come from "purposeful sampling" (p. 77). In my view, the contrast between the participants' years of service provides a longitudinal dimension to the case, allowing me to analyze how the "pedagogical shock" is mediated by a teacher's established professional history. The decision to focus exclusively on women honors the demographic reality of primary education. It acknowledges that the "professional self" is often tied to gendered roles of care and instruction, a nuance that a case study is uniquely equipped to capture.

This study does not seek to establish a single, universal truth; instead, it aligns with Stake's (1995) concept of naturalistic generalization, in which readers, through thick description, are able to engage with the teachers' experiences and potentially relate them to their own professional contexts. From this perspective, the role of the researcher is to construct an interpretive bridge between the theoretical framing of the self-contained model and the lived narratives of the four participating teachers.

The teachers' accounts are approached not as isolated data points, but as situated narratives that reflect broader educational and policy shifts within the Colombian bilingual education context. Through collective analysis of these four cases, the study seeks to generate a multi-layered understanding of how teacher agency is shaped, constrained, or transformed when professional responsibilities are expanded within institutional frameworks. In this sense, the case study offers an interpretive space to explore the tensions between policy, practice, and professional identity as they unfold in context.

### **Research Setting**

This study took place in a private bilingual school in Bogotá, Colombia. This institution has approximately 650 students and implements a bilingual educational approach in which English is taught as a subject and is also used as the primary medium of instruction for most content areas in primary and pre-school. More specifically, the school follows a high-intensity bilingual or immersion-oriented model, where most subjects are taught in English, while Spanish is maintained as a subject and for specific areas of the curriculum. This approach aligns with what Cummins (2000) describes as an additive bilingual model, in which the second language is developed alongside the first without replacing it. In this context, language and content are

closely integrated, requiring students to develop academic knowledge through English while maintaining their first language.

Moreover, such a model places significant demands on teachers, who must simultaneously address content learning and language development. As García (2009) suggests, bilingual education involves dynamic language practices that go beyond strict language separation, highlighting the complexity of teaching in multilingual classrooms. The institution also prioritizes a holistic educational model, integrating academic instruction with the development of social and emotional competencies. This environment is particularly relevant for examining self-contained teaching, as educators are responsible not only for teaching multiple subjects in English but also for fostering relationships and supporting students' emotional development throughout the school day.

Consequently, in this study, the choice of a specific school is not just a matter of convenience or a simple "case" to be analyzed. Instead, I view the research setting as a *"Professional Knowledge Landscape"* a term coined by Clandinin and Connelly (1995) to describe the complex, living space where a teacher's personal history meets the school's daily demands. By focusing on one bilingual school in Colombia, I am looking at the school as a territory of meaning. There is constant tension here: on one hand, we have the *"out-of-classroom"* place, where official bilingual policies and high-level curricula are decided. On the other hand, there is the *"in-classroom"* place, the private world where the self-contained teacher lives. This study is built on the belief that to understand a teacher's identity, we must look closely at the friction between these two spaces—at how they bridge the gap between what the institution expects and what their students truly need.

The value of focusing on this specific setting lies in what we call narrative authority. Identity is not something that can be measured in a number; it is shaped by the environment. As Altan and Lane (2018) reminds us, a teacher's background and their daily surroundings are deeply intertwined. By staying within the heart of this one school, I can show how the "self-contained" model is not just a job title, but a unique, human response to a specific set of challenges. Ultimately, this setting provides the "anchor" for the study. It ensures that the theories of *Teacher Professional Identity* discussed in these pages are not just abstract ideas, but are rooted in the real, breathing reality of a Colombian classroom. It is in this setting that teachers find the room to grow, to struggle, and to redefine who they are.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study were four self-contained teachers who work at the school, specifically in the lower grades from (Transition through 3rd). Employing *a purposive sampling* approach, this investigation identified individuals possessing firsthand experience with the self-contained teaching model (Creswell, 2013). The selection of participants was *intentional* and guided by the aim of capturing diverse perspectives within the same institutional context. Teachers were chosen based on their varied levels of professional experience, academic backgrounds, and the different grade levels they teach. This diversity allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of how the self-contained model is enacted across distinct classroom settings and how teachers' trajectories shape their professional practices.

As Patton (2002) suggests, *purposive sampling* (a purposeful selection of participants), enables the identification of information-rich cases that contribute significantly to in-depth qualitative inquiry. In this sense, the participants, representing diverse academic histories and professional tenures, contributed to a more nuanced comprehension of the topic under

examination. Additionally, their selection was also based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study. In adherence to ethical research protocols, all participants provided voluntary consent and signed informed consent documents prior to their involvement in the study, I invited four of my colleagues to walk this path with me, my choice was guided by a deep respect for their individual journeys and our shared reality:

- **A shared identity:** I chose four female teachers who, like me, live the "self-contained" role every day. In our hallways, the role of the teacher is deeply tied to a sense of care and motherhood, and I wanted to capture how that specific feminine energy navigates the pressures of bilingual education.
- **The experience:** It was important for me to listen to different "rhythms" of teaching. I looked for diverse backgrounds, some who were born to be teachers and others who found their way to the classroom through different professional turns. This diversity allowed me to see that while we all face the same institutional demands, our stories are as unique as our past.
- **Proximity:** I did not choose this school because it was easy; I chose it because it is home. Because I work alongside these women, a bridge of trust already existed between us. They did not see me as a researcher coming to judge their performance, but as a peer who knows exactly how the workload feels. This shared status allowed us to speak truthfully about our doubts, our exhaustion, and our triumphs in a way an outsider never could.

## **Teachers' profiles**

### ***Teacher A***

Teacher A holds a bachelor's degree in Spanish and English Language Teaching from Universidad Pedagógica Nacional. She has approximately six years of professional experience in the field of education, three of which have been within the self-contained model. Recently, she obtained her master's degree in foreign Language Teaching, which has contributed to the consolidation of her pedagogical knowledge and professional development. Currently, she teaches second-grade primary school students, where she continues to refine her instructional practices in early bilingual education contexts.

### ***Teacher B***

Teacher B holds a degree in English Philology from Universidad Nacional de Colombia and has 23 years of teaching experience in various private institutions in Bogotá. For approximately 12 years, she was involved in the design and organization of self-contained curricula, playing a key role in the development of bilingual educational programs. Over the last eight years, she has worked directly as a self-contained teacher, strengthening her expertise in this pedagogical model. Her extensive trajectory positions her as a highly experienced educator in bilingual education contexts.

### ***Teacher C***

Teacher C holds a bachelor's degree in French and English Language Teaching from Pontificia Universidad Javeriana. She has eight years of teaching experience, including three years within the self-contained model. Her professional practice has been primarily oriented towards early

childhood education in private institutions. Additionally, her experience as an au pair in the United States contributed to her linguistic competence and intercultural awareness, which inform her teaching practice in bilingual settings.

### ***Teacher D***

Teacher D is a Russian educator who has been working in Colombia as a self-contained teacher for approximately 13 years. She holds a degree in English Language Teaching Pedagogy from a pedagogical university in Russia. Although her initial goal was to become a translator, her professional path led her to education, where she has developed extensive experience within the self-contained model. She demonstrates strong pedagogical competence across subject areas, particularly in mathematics, and her trajectory reflects a process of adaptation and professional growth within intercultural and bilingual contexts.

**Table 1.** *Teachers' professional background and work experience.*

	<b>Teacher A</b>	<b>Teacher B</b>	<b>Teacher C</b>	<b>Teacher D</b>
<b>Educational Background</b>	B.A. in Spanish and English (UPN); master's in foreign Language Teaching	Degree in English Philology (UNAL)	B.A. in French and English (Javeriana)	Degree in English Teaching Pedagogy (Russia)
<b>Years of experience</b>	6 years	23 years	8 years	13 years

<b>Experience as a Self-Contained teacher</b>	3 years	8 years	3 years	13 years
<b>Educational context</b>	Lower school (2nd grade)	Lower school (3rd grade)	Lower school (Transition)	Lower school (First grade)
<b>Professional focus</b>	Language teaching and early education	Curriculum design and bilingual programs	Early childhood language teaching	Multidisciplinary teaching (strong in math)

### **Data collection instruments**

To generate the rich, contextualized data required for this study, I employed a variety of qualitative sources. This approach facilitates methodological triangulation (Denzin, 1978), ensuring that the findings are not based on a single perspective but are grounded in a comprehensive understanding of the teachers' lives, crossing different types of information, I can offer a more balanced and rigorous account of how professional identity is constructed within the school landscape.

#### ***Semi-structured interviews***

Qualitative interviewing enables researchers to move beyond surface-level descriptions and access deeper layers of meaning embedded in participants lived experiences. From interpretive and narrative perspectives, interviews are understood not merely as instruments for data collection, but as dialogic spaces where meaning is co-constructed through storytelling,

reflection, and interaction. In this sense, participants' accounts are approached as situated narratives that reveal how they interpret, give meaning to, and make sense of their professional experiences within specific social and institutional contexts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008).

I conducted four individual interviews, each lasting approximately [40 minutes]. Each session followed a protocol of some open-ended questions designed not for short answers, but to spark reflective and narrative responses. These questions were carefully crafted to touch upon the essential dimensions of their professional lives:

- **Professional trajectories:** How they became the teachers they are today.
- **The self-contained experience:** The transition from being a specialist to a generalist.
- **Content in a second language:** The pedagogical and linguistic effort of teaching through English.
- **Human connection:** The deep, often emotional relationships built with their students and colleges.
- **Institutional landscapes:** How they navigate the demands and resources provided by the school.

### ***Institutional documents***

To complement the interviews and understand the policies of the school, a qualitative analysis was conducted to analyze key institutional documents. These included the Teacher's Manual, curriculum guidelines, and the 2026 school policy regarding inclusion and bilingualism. According to Prior (2003), documents are not neutral records; they are social facts that set the

"official" expectations for professional behavior. By analyzing these texts, I was able to identify the friction points where the school's mandates meet the practical, daily reality of the self-contained classroom. In addition to interviews, institutional documents provided by the school were incorporated as a complementary data source. These included documents related to the school's pedagogical model, bilingual education framework, and guidelines for self-contained teaching (see in annexes). As Bowen (2009) explains, document analysis allows researchers to contextualize participants' narratives within institutional discourse and to contrast formal policy with lived experience. In this study, institutional documents were used to support interpretation rather than to establish objective truth.

### **Researcher's Role**

In Narrative Inquiry, the researcher is never a detached observer; instead, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest, we are "participants" in the very landscape we study. My researcher role is uniquely shaped by a dual identity as researcher but also self-contained teacher in a bilingual context. This "insider status" allowed me to enter a deep relational space with my colleagues, where shared language and mutual trust became the foundation for our conversations.

Being a self-contained teacher allowed me to transition from a formal interviewer to a relational listener. I understand firsthand the physical and emotional weight of managing multiple subjects in a foreign language; I know the silence of the classroom when a resource is missing and the joy of a breakthrough with a student. This shared reality meant that teachers did not see me as an external evaluator, but as a peer who speaks their "professional language." This common ground allowed them to share their "Secret Stories" those honest, vulnerable reflections that are often hidden from official institutional reports.

I acknowledge that my own experiences as a self-contained educator influence how I interpret these narratives. Rather than viewing this as a bias to be eliminated, I adopted a reflexive discourse, using my subjectivity as a tool for deeper empathy. I constantly questioned how my own professional journey shaped my understanding of their stories. By recognizing the tensions, we both face in the classroom, I was able to honor their narrative authority, ensuring the analysis is a collaborative bridge between their voices and my lived understanding of the model.

Finally, my role carries significant ethical weight since I belong to the same professional community, I feel the responsibility to be the guardian of these stories. My commitment goes beyond anonymity; it is rooted in "narrative ethics" the promise to represent the self-contained role with the dignity, complexity, and humanity it deserves. My goal was to create a safe space where the challenges of our shared profession could be told truthfully, ensuring that the teacher's heart remains at the center of this academic work.

### **Analytical Categories and Narrative Focus**

Rather than functioning as predefined thematic variables, the analytical framework of this study was grounded in the **three-dimensional narrative inquiry** space proposed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000): temporality, sociality, and spatiality. These dimensions were approached as flexible interpretive lenses that guided the analysis of participants lived experiences.

From this perspective, *temporality* refers to the continuity of experience across time, allowing the researcher to consider how past experiences, present practices, and future projections are interconnected in the construction of teachers' professional lives. *Sociality* attends to both personal and interpersonal conditions, including emotions, values, and relationships with others within the educational setting. *Spatiality* focuses on the specific contexts and

environments in which these experiences take place, emphasizing the role of place and institutional conditions.

In alignment with narrative inquiry principles, these dimensions were not treated as fixed or independent categories. Instead, they were used to guide the interpretation of participants' narratives in a holistic and relational manner, recognizing that experiences are simultaneously shaped by temporal, social, and spatial factors. This analytical approach allowed the study to remain open to the complexity of teachers' experiences, while ensuring coherence with the epistemological foundations of narrative inquiry.

### **Data collection instruments and procedures**

Data analysis in this study followed an interpretive and deeply reflective narrative process. As Barkhuizen, Benson, and Chik (2014) note, narrative analysis is non-linear and recursive; it requires a continuous movement between the stories, the theoretical landscape, and the researcher's own lived experience.

The process was carried out through a series of interconnected stages designed to honor the complexity of the teachers' lives:

1. ***Transcribing and Listening:*** All interviews were transcribed verbatim beyond words; I aimed to preserve the "emotional prosody" and the silences of the participants. This allowed for a deeper engagement with the data, identifying what Riessman (2008) describes as the "meaning making" moments in their construction of experience.
2. ***Narrative Coding and Categorization:*** Rather than using a rigid coding system, I employed an inductive approach. Initial segments related to beliefs, classroom tensions, and professional identity were identified. Through a process of constant comparison

(Creswell, 2013), these codes were grouped into broader themes. This followed the thematic analysis approach of Braun and Clarke (2006) but always remained sensitive to the individual context of each teacher.

3. ***Cross-Narrative Synthesis:*** To preserve the coherence of each life story, the data was first organized by participants (Teacher A, B, C, and D). Once each "individual story" was understood, a cross-narrative analysis was conducted to identify the shared tensions and unique resonances across the different accounts.

### ***Multi-Dimensional Triangulation***

To enhance the rigor and trustworthiness of this study, I employed a multi-dimensional triangulation strategy. Following Denzin (1978), triangulation was used not to find a single "truth," but to enrich the interpretation by examining the phenomenon from four distinct angles:

- **The Narratives:** The primary source of knowledge was the lived experiences and "Secret Stories" shared by the teachers during our dialogues.
- **Institutional Documents:** I analyzed the school's manuals, 2026 inclusion policies, and curriculum guidelines. Comparing these with the narratives allowed me to identify the friction points between what is "mandated" and what is "lived."
- **Theory:** The data were continuously put in conversation with the theoretical framework—specifically the works of Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and Altan and Lane (2018). Theory served as a mirror to reflect upon and validate the findings, allowing for a deeper interpretation of the teachers' narratives.
- **The Researcher's voice:** As a self-contained teacher, my own "narrative authority" played a crucial role. My "voice" was used as a reflexive tool to interpret the data with empathy

and professional insight, ensuring the analysis remained grounded in the actual reality of the Colombian bilingual classroom.

This triangulation ensures that the study's conclusions are not merely subjective observations but are rigorously constructed through a dialogue between the individual, the institution, the literature, and the shared professional landscape.

### **Trustworthiness**

To enhance trustworthiness, this study employed data triangulation through interviews and institutional documents. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility in qualitative research is achieved through prolonged engagement with data, transparency of procedures, and grounding interpretations in evidence. By integrating multiple data sources and maintaining coherence between methodology, the theoretical framework, and findings, this study ensures that interpretations are well-supported and analytically robust. To ensure the trustworthiness of this qualitative study, several criteria of rigor were considered, following established principles (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These criteria include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

*Credibility* was addressed by engaging deeply with the data through repeated readings of the narratives and by ensuring that interpretations remained grounded in participants' accounts. The use of triangulation, through the comparison of interview data with institutional documents, also contributed to strengthening the internal consistency of the findings.

*Transferability* was supported by providing detailed descriptions of the participants, the research context, and the educational settings in which the study took place. This allows readers to determine the extent to which the findings may be applicable to similar contexts.

*Dependability* was ensured by maintaining a clear and transparent description of the research process, including data collection and analysis procedures. This methodological transparency allows the study to be followed and understood by other researchers. *Confirmability* was addressed through the researcher's ongoing reflexivity and the systematic organization of data, which helped to ensure that the findings are shaped by the participants' perspectives rather than researcher bias.

In summary, this chapter has meticulously outlined the *methodological trajectory* of the study. By grounding the research in qualitative paradigm and narrative inquiry, I have established a rigorous framework designed to honor the voices of the four participating teachers and their unique professional journeys. Having defined the 'how' and the 'why' of this investigation, the following chapter—Analysis and Findings—will unveil the narrative threads gathered through this process. It will delve into the *pedagogical shocks* and identity reconfigurations experienced by these educators, providing an empirical and humanized account of the self-contained model's impact within the Colombian educational context.

## CHAPTER IV: Data analysis and findings

This chapter presents the findings derived from the narrative analysis of interviews conducted with self-contained teachers working in a bilingual private school in Bogotá. Using a thematic narrative approach, the analysis focuses on how teachers construct meaning around their professional role, identity, and the pedagogical and emotional demands of self-contained teaching. The findings are organized into themes that emerged from participants' narratives and are illustrated through excerpts from the interviews.

The aim in this section is to articulate a dialogue between the teachers' voices, institutional documents provided by the school and the theories previously discussed in the research. Rather than just listing what they said, I want to show how their personal experiences with the 'pedagogical shock' of the self-contained model match—or challenge—what the experts say about teacher identity. The findings are organized by the main themes that came up in our talks, showing the honest, day-to-day reality of what it is like to be a self - contained teacher in Colombia right now. Finally, this chapter is about understanding the human side of educational changes.

### Introduction to the findings

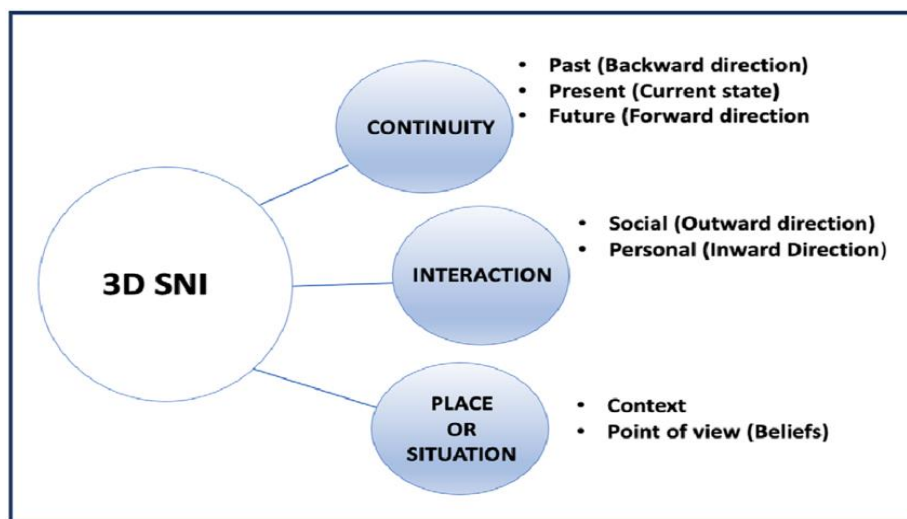
The analysis of participants' narratives was organized into three main categories, informed by the three-dimensional narrative inquiry framework of *temporality*, *sociality*, and *place* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Rather than treating these dimensions as separate elements, they were understood as interconnected, shaping teachers' experiences simultaneously.

The first category (temporality) focuses on the construction of professional identity over time, highlighting how teachers' past and present experiences shape their sense of self. The

second category (sociality) examines how participants negotiate their pedagogical roles within their institutional context, emphasizing the interaction between social relationships and the specific demands of the bilingual school setting. The third category (spatiality) explores the emotional and professional tensions present in teachers' narratives, considering how these are influenced not only by interpersonal dynamics but also by contextual factors. As is presented in the following image.

**Figure 1.**

*3D SNI Model*



*Note.* Three-dimensional Space Narrative Inquiry (3-D SNI). Adapted from *Clandinin & Connelly, 2000*.

Using a thematic narrative approach, the analysis focuses on how teachers construct meaning around their professional role, identity, and the pedagogical and emotional demands of self-contained teaching. The findings are organized into themes that emerged from participants' narratives and are illustrated through excerpts from the interviews in this matrix.

**Table 2.** *Analytical categories: narrative inquiry dimensions*

<b>Research Question</b>		
How do self-contained teachers construct their professional identity and interpret the pedagogical and emotional demands through narratives in a bilingual private school in Bogotá?		
<b>General Objective</b>		
To interpret self-contained teachers' narratives to understand how they construct their professional identity and perceive the pedagogical and emotional demands of their role in a bilingual private school in Bogotá.		
<b>Specific Objective #1</b>	<b>Specific Objective #2</b>	<b>Specific Objective #3</b>
To analyze the meanings that self-contained teachers attribute to their professional identity when teaching content subjects in English.	To examine how self-contained teachers narrate their pedagogical roles in relation to students and colleagues within the institutional context.	To examine the emotional and professional tensions reflected in teachers' narratives regarding workload, preparation, and institutional expectations.
<b>Narrative #1:</b>	<b>Narrative #2:</b>	<b>Narrative #3:</b>
Professional identity as a Self-Contained Teacher (Temporality)	Negotiating pedagogical roles within a bilingual institutional context (Sociality)	Emotional and professional tensions in the Self-Contained teaching setting (Spatiality)
<b>Axis of analysis 1:</b>	<b>Axis of analysis 2:</b>	<b>Axis of analysis 3:</b>
Becoming a teacher and gaining		

experience as a self-contained teacher.	Teacher-student relationship.	Institutional vs classroom realities.
<b>Axis of analysis 2:</b> Identity transformation through pedagogical experience.	<b>Axis of analysis 2:</b> Teacher-teacher relationship.	<b>Axis of analysis 2:</b> Workload and demands inside the classroom.
<b>Axis of analysis 3:</b> Tensions between initial and current practice.	<b>Axis of analysis 3:</b> Negotiating pedagogical roles within the bilingual institutional context.	

The categories presented above provide a structured framework for interpreting participants' narratives in alignment with the principles of narrative inquiry. While each category emphasizes a particular dimension—temporality, sociality, and place—these are not understood as isolated components, but as interconnected aspects of teachers lived experiences.

The following sections develop each category in detail, illustrating how participants construct their professional identity over time, negotiate their pedagogical roles within the institutional context, and experience emotional and professional tensions associated with self-contained teaching. Through this organization, the analysis seeks to offer a nuanced and holistic understanding of the phenomenon under study.

### ***Professional identity as a Self-Contained teacher***

The construction of professional identity among self-contained teachers can be better understood as a process that unfolds over time, shaped by what teachers have lived, what they currently experience in their classrooms, and what they expect for their future. From a narrative perspective, identity is not something fixed, but something that is constantly being reconfigured through experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

In this sense, becoming a teacher and gaining experience within the self-contained model involves much more than applying prior knowledge; it implies rethinking initial beliefs and adapting to the realities of practice. As teachers engage in their daily work, their identities gradually shift, which aligns with the idea that professional identity is continuously shaped through practice and reflection (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). However, this process is not free of tension. Many teachers experience a gap between what they once imagined teaching would be and what they encounter, particularly within the demands of bilingual education. These tensions resonate with Britzman's (2003) view of teaching as a space full of contradictions, where personal expectations often collide with institutional realities.

### ***Negotiating pedagogical roles within a bilingual institutional context.***

At the same time, teachers' professional identity is deeply influenced by their relationships within the school context. Rather than being constructed individually, identity emerges through interaction with others and participation in everyday practices (Wenger, 1998). Within the self-contained model, teachers frequently find themselves navigating multiple roles, which require constant negotiation of their professional selves.

This becomes especially visible in their relationships with students, where teachers often go beyond their role as language instructors and position themselves as guides, supporters, and sometimes even emotional anchors, reflecting the ethical and relational dimension of teaching (Noddings, 2005). In addition, relationships with colleagues also play an important role, as moments of collaboration, disagreement, or shared understanding contribute to how teachers see themselves within the institution. As Gee (2000) suggests, identity is recognized and shaped through social interaction, which highlights how these daily exchanges influence teachers' sense of who they are.

### ***Emotional and professional tensions in the self-contained teaching setting***

The emotional and professional experiences of self-contained teachers reveal how identity is also shaped by the specific context in which teaching takes place. Teaching is not only a cognitive or technical activity, but also an emotional one, strongly influenced by working conditions (Hargreaves, 1998). In the case of the self-contained model, teachers often face demanding workloads and multiple responsibilities, which can generate a wide range of emotional responses. Feelings such as stress, frustration, satisfaction, or even fulfillment become part of how teachers understand their role and themselves as professionals. In this regard, emotions are not secondary but central to identity construction (Zembylas, 2003).

Moreover, the tension between institutional expectations and what is possible in the classroom reflects the complexity of teaching in real contexts. As Day (2002) points out, teachers' identities are shaped not only by personal experiences but also by the broader institutional and policy environments in which they work. Altogether, this shows that professional identity is not formed in isolation, but within specific spaces where emotions, relationships, and institutional demands intersect. To understand how these intersections breathe

and evolve in daily practice, we must move from the theoretical landscape to the lived landscape. In the following sections, I navigate into the unique professional worlds of Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher C, and Teacher D. Through their individual narratives, the abstract tensions of the self-contained model become visible, personal, and profoundly human.

### **Collecting memories and stories: analysis of the narratives**

This section presents the analysis of the narratives constructed from the voices of the four teacher participants in this study. Their stories are not approached as mere descriptions of professional trajectories, but as meaningful narratives through which they construct, negotiate, and make sense of their teacher's identities within specific educational contexts. The data collection and analysis were structured through three semi-structured narrative interviews, designed to go through the three-dimensional inquiry space—temporality, sociality, and spatiality—as defined by Clandinin and Connelly (2000).

The *first interview* aimed to reconstruct the teachers' early life stories and vocational beginnings. The *second interview* focused on their current lived experiences and social interactions within the bilingual classroom. The *third and final interview* prompted a reflection on the systemic challenges and the physical and emotional demands of the school environment. This approach ensured that the resulting narratives were not merely chronological accounts, but deeply contextualized stories reflecting the complex interplay between the person, their social circle, and their institutional place.

### ***Narrative of Teacher A***

*"Education is an act of love, and thus an act of courage. It cannot fear the analysis of reality. It cannot avoid creative discussion without the risk of being a farce." — Paulo Freire*

The narrative of Teacher A is a compelling journey of an educator who was "born" into the classroom, evolved through academic rigor, and is currently facing the complex realities of a systemic pedagogical shift. Her story is proof of how professional identity is a living, breathing entity that changes with every challenge.

For Teacher A, the teaching profession is not merely a career choice, but a family legacy. Her identity is deeply rooted in her childhood, specifically at the age of eight, when her mother—also a teacher—introduced her to the pedagogical world. *“Desde que yo era pequeña, creo que tenía unos ocho años, empecé a reconocer que mi mamá era profesora. Mi mamá me llevaba al aula de clase y yo veía cómo enseñaba. Eso marcó el inicio de mi deseo de convertirme en docente”* (Teacher’s A narrative, May 2025). This immersion was so meaningful that she and her sister were occasionally trusted to assist in the classroom. This early contact with students fostered a sense of responsibility and natural comfort within the school environment. For Teacher A, becoming a teacher was an inevitable destination: *“Ver a mi mamá en el aula fue lo que me motivó a convertirme en docente y, posteriormente, a iniciar la carrera en la universidad”* (Teacher’s A narrative, May 2025).

However, a teacher's identity is shaped not only by positive role models but also by "critical incidents" that define what they refuse to become. Teacher A carries a vivid and painful memory of a university professor who corrected her badly in front of her peers, causing a moment of self-doubt. *“Recuerdo especialmente un profesor de inglés en la universidad que fue muy duro conmigo... delante de todo el grupo me corrigió de una manera muy fuerte. Eso me hizo sentir muy mal, al punto de pensar que no iba a lograrlo”*. (Teacher’s A narrative, May 2025). Rather than discouraging her, this experience became a cornerstone of her own philosophy. She advocates for constructive over destructive correction, viewing the teacher as a

protector of the student's emotional well-being: *“Considero que corregir gritando o maltratando no es adecuado; la corrección debe ser constructiva y no destructiva”* (Teacher’s A narrative, May 2025).

Teacher A describes a clear boundary between the "theoretical world" of the university and the "daily reality" of the school. She reflects on how true professional development only began when she was required to stand alone in front of a classroom. *“En ese momento uno empieza a desenvolverse en la planeación y a entender muchas cosas que en el pregrado solo se veían de manera teórica... es en la práctica cotidiana donde realmente se aplica”* (Teacher’s A narrative, May 2025). This belief in continuous learning led her to pursue a Master 's degree, which she describes as a space for reflection: *“Considero que me dejó muchas reflexiones a nivel pedagógico. Es importante revisar otras investigaciones, reflexionar sobre la práctica y cambiar los métodos de enseñanza”* (Teacher’s A narrative, May 2025).

In 2023, Teacher A entered the self-contained model, a moment that represents a significant disruption in her professional narrative. This shift forced her to move from being an "English language specialist" to a "generalist" responsible for subjects like science and social studies. The most intense part of her "pedagogical shock" involves Mathematics *“Uno de los principales desafíos fue enseñar matemáticas en inglés. Aunque no me considero mala en matemáticas, es una materia desafiante... fue necesario sentarse a revisar el libro y planear cuidadosamente las actividades”* (Teacher’s A narrative, June 2025).

This highlights a key tension: her linguistic competence is being stretched to cover disciplinary areas where she feels less secure. She describes the workload as a "heavy burden" because she is operating outside her comfort zone: *“Aquí uno debe enseñar materias en una lengua que no es la propia... la única materia con la que uno suele sentirse más cómodo es*

*inglés o literacy*” (Teacher’s A narrative, June 2025). Despite the exhaustion, Teacher A’s narrative finds its "reward" in her relationship with her young students. She describes her bond with children as "maternal": *“A los niños los trato con afecto, porque considero que en esa etapa lo necesitan y lo perciben como un afecto maternal”* (Teacher’s A narrative, June 2025). For her, the gratification of the model is found in the human feedback: *“No es solo que uno les enseña; también aprende de ellos. Existe una reciprocidad en la que ambos crecen”* (Teacher’s A narrative, June 2025). To conclude her narrative, Teacher A returns to the concept of vocation. She believes that without a deep love for it, the responsibility of teaching—which she describes as "risky" and "delicate"—would be impossible to bear. *“Si una persona no tiene vocación docente, es mejor no dedicarse a esto... Uno tiene en sus manos la formación de muchas vidas y el impacto que se genera en ellos se refleja en el futuro”* (Teacher’s A narrative, June 2025).

### ***Narrative of Teacher B***

*“Education is not an affair of 'telling' and being told, but an active and constructive process.” — John Dewey*

Unlike those who feel a "call" to teach from early ages, Teacher B’s entry into the profession was marked by pragmatism and external guidance. Faced with a choice between physical education and languages, she followed the advice of an experienced mentor who pointed toward the broader opportunities of English. *“La decisión de convertirme en docente no fue completamente propia, sino influenciada por la recomendación de alguien con mucha experiencia en la enseñanza del inglés”* (Teacher’s B narrative, May 2025).

Her university years were a period of overcoming obstacles. Initially struggling with the language, she adopted a self-taught discipline to fill the gaps in her knowledge: *“Decidí*

*esforzarme, estudiar por mi cuenta y llenar los vacíos que tenía. Poco a poco le tomé gusto al idioma”* (Teacher’s B narrative, May 2025). This narrative suggests an identity built on resilience and effort rather than innate talent, a characteristic that defines her later patience with students. Teacher B’s early professional identity was constructed in a highly structured environment, the Centro Colombo Americano. Here, she experienced the reality of the classroom while still a student. Her narrative includes a humorous "critical incident" involving an observer falling asleep during her class: *“El día de la observación... al mirar al supervisor, lo vi dormido. Fue muy gracioso y al mismo tiempo confirmó mi percepción [de que mis clases eran aburridas]”* (Teacher’s B narrative, May 2025).

This moment of vulnerability led to a commitment to pedagogical dynamism. Through constant feedback and "trial and error," she moved from a rigid, insecure beginner to a teacher who understands that teaching is an "art" that requires constant adjustment. A unique dimension of Teacher B’s identity is her great experience as a curriculum developer. For twelve years, she was the "architect" behind the scenes, creating programs for math, science, and social studies without being the one to deliver them in the classroom. *“Allí se planeaba todo el año académico, desde el saludo hasta la despedida... En ese rol comencé a desarrollar programas no solo de inglés, sino también de matemáticas, ciencias y sociales”* (Teacher’s B narrative, May 2025).

This phase provided her with a systemic view of the self-contained model. Before becoming a self-contained teacher herself, she was a coordinator who observed others. This "top-down" perspective gave her a theoretical mastery of the model that most teachers lack, allowing her to understand the "how" and "why" of the curriculum before re-entering the "where"—the classroom.

When Teacher B eventually returned to the classroom as a self-contained teacher, she faced the "heavy burden" of the model from a position of experience. Unlike Teacher A, she felt comfortable with the content of science and math because she had designed the programs herself. However, the shock came from the emotional and administrative intensity: *“El trabajo era exigente debido a la carga académica, la dirección de grupo, la atención a padres y el acompañamiento emocional... el self-contained asume múltiples responsabilidades que van más allá de una sola asignatura”* (Teacher’s B narrative, June 2025). She identifies the self-contained teacher not just as an instructor, but as a mediator between psychologists, parents, and institutional demands. Her identity here is that of a "multitasker" who must balance academic rigor with the diverse needs of students with conditions like ADHD or autism.

Teacher B’s current identity is characterized by confidence and adaptability. She has moved beyond the textbook, utilizing digital platforms and experimental science to spark wonder in her students. Her greatest gratification comes from seeing the long-term impact of her work: *“Recuerdo el caso de una niña que expresó su deseo de ser científica gracias a esas clases... fue muy significativo para mí”* (Teacher’s B narrative, June 2025). Teacher B’s narrative concludes with a message of professional solidarity. Recognizing that "nobody knows everything from the start," she views the teacher’s role as a process of constant learning and adaptation. Her journey from an unconvicted student to a master of curriculum and classroom management reflects a mature, grounded professional identity. *“Paciencia. Es fundamental apoyarse en la experiencia de los compañeros... Este es un proceso de aprendizaje constante que requiere tolerancia”* (Teacher’s B narrative, July 2025).

### *Narrative of Teacher C*

*“The principal goal of education in the schools should be creating men and women who are capable of doing new things, not simply repeating what other generations have done”. —*

*Jean Piaget*

For Teacher C, teaching was an identity long before it was a degree. As the eldest sibling and cousin, her childhood was defined by a natural inclination toward leadership and instruction. Unlike others who might find the classroom daunting, she discovered her passion during her mandatory community service in a public kindergarten: *“Me encantaba ir, jugar con los niños, escucharlos... Mientras para mis amigas era una experiencia difícil, para mí era algo que disfrutaba profundamente”* (Teacher’s C narrative, May 2025). This early "joy in the difficult" suggests a professional identity rooted in empathy and active listening. Her decision to study pedagogy was supported by her family and a scholarship, which added a layer of academic responsibility to her natural vocation. Teacher C’s university years were marked by a vast "social mapping" of Bogotá. She experienced seven different internships, ranging from elite bilingual schools to the precariousness of public districts with forty students per class. However, it was her time at a university hospital that provided a defining "critical incident": *“Viví una experiencia muy difícil cuando uno de los niños con los que trabajaba falleció. Esa experiencia me ayudó a comprender que no deseaba continuar en el sector hospitalario”* (Teacher’s C narrative, May 2025).

This encounter with grief forced her to redefine her boundaries. It taught her that while she wanted to "touch lives," she needed to do so in an environment focused on growth and development rather than crisis and loss. A recurring theme in Teacher C’s narrative is the tension between her training as a "languages teacher" and the demands of the "self-contained teacher."

She reflects honestly on how her university education focused on social and cognitive development but did not fully prepare her for the disciplinary rigors of subjects like mathematics: *“Sentí con claridad que, mi formación no había estado centrada en áreas específicas como matemáticas o ciencias, sino en el desarrollo social, emocional y cognitivo”* (Teacher’s c narrative, June 2025).

Additionally, when forced to teach older children (9-10 years old) in a previous job, she experienced a significant impact. She had to become a student again, studying content she had forgotten to keep up with the curriculum. This highlights a systemic issue: institutions often hire based on language proficiency rather than disciplinary training. Currently working in a private bilingual school, teacher C describes a reality where the main challenge is not the children, but the institutional expectations. She notes that every school has its own "hidden curriculum", rules and methodologies that the university never taught. *“Muchas veces el reto no es adaptarse a los niños, sino a lo que la institución espera del docente... la formación universitaria no prepara completamente para todas las metodologías que se exigen”* (Teacher’s C narrative, May 2025).

In the self-contained model, she faces a high workload, teaching multiple subjects to the same group all day. She points out a structural unfairness: salaries are often linked to language levels or degrees, not to the actual intensity of managing several subjects and constant group direction. On the other hand, in an era dominated by digital platforms, Teacher C maintains a firm idea on hands-on learning. Her identity is that of a "traditional-modern" educator who uses technology only for transitions (opening/closing) but prioritizes physical interaction for the core of her teaching: *“Con los niños pequeños prefiero el uso de materiales concretos, exploración y experimentación, más que plataformas digitales”* (Teacher’s C narrative, June 2025).

This choice reflects her belief that creativity is fostered through the physical world, showing a commitment to the developmental needs of the child over the convenience of digital tools. Teacher C views the self-contained model as a growing reality in Colombia, driven by the demand for bilingualism. However, her advice to newcomers is centered on the humility of the learner. She believes that being a teacher means being in a permanent state of flux. *“Este es un proceso de aprendizaje constante, de prueba y error, de capacitarse, preguntar y desaprender para volver a aprender”* (Teacher’s C narrative, June 2025).

In one of her narratives, she revealed that she went to the USA to work as an-Au pair (babysitter position) to improve her English and come back with an almost native level, it was her main purpose apart from getting to travel and know many places. In this program she lived with a host family that paid her monthly for her work. She pointed about this experience *“Fue una gran experiencia que me llevo a aprender mucho, mejoré mi nivel de inglés, adquirí mucha fluidez y vocabulario, además de eso cuando regresé esto me ayudo a ingresar a una institución de nombre y conseguir mejor salario que mis colegas, por el hecho de haber vivido en un país angloparlante”* (Teacher’s C narrative, July 2025). It may show how she was pursuing a dream and ended up chasing that hegemonic identity that could position her in a better place compared to someone who has never traveled abroad, showing that hegemonic bilingual identity. In the Colombian context, having lived in an English- speaking country often functions to show prestige and it also reveals that need to sound almost like a native, which may lead to a certain way to find security and recognition in a competitive market.

### *Narrative of Teacher D*

*"Through others, we become ourselves."* — **Lev Vygotsky**

For Teacher D, teaching was never the goal. Her primary passion was linguistics and translation, and she entered a Pedagogical University in Russia simply because it offered the highest level of English training available. *"Realmente, nunca quise ser profesora; mi meta siempre fue ser traductora... Convertirme en docente no fue una decisión vocacional inicial, sino algo que ocurrió por circunstancias de la vida"* (Teacher's D narrative, May 2025). When she finally entered the classroom, she faced an "entry shock." The fear of managing three-year-olds and the realization that her university training—conducted in a different country and era—did not align with the Colombian context, forced her into a state of total professional reconstruction: *"Tuve que aprender prácticamente desde cero: desarrollo cerebral, metodologías utilizadas en Colombia y aspectos culturales"* (Teacher's D narrative, May 2025).

Working primarily in First Grade, Teacher D's identity has evolved into that of a mediator between developmental stages. She identifies a recurring tension between the "infant" world of kindergarten and the "academic" world of Primary school. A significant part of her narrative involves educating the parents as much as the children. *"Parte de mi rol es también enseñar a los padres, explicarles cómo funciona el desarrollo del niño y por qué estas exigencias son necesarias"* (Teacher's D narrative, June 2025)

Her gratification comes from the transformation she witnesses annually. She describes the emotional weight of seeing parents—who initially resisted the academic rigor—return at the end of the year with tears of gratitude, seeing their children as independent and secure learners. This

shows her identity is not just about "delivering content," but about managing the emotional transition of the entire family unit. Because Teacher D began her career as a self-contained teacher, she views it as her "natural" professional state. However, she is aware of the disciplinary fragmentation it causes, while she feels secure in her English and Math teaching, she admits a lack of passion for science and social studies, highlighting the common struggle of the generalist teacher. *“Uno de los grandes desafíos... es que cada materia puede requerir un programa distinto. Como self-contained teacher, debo conocer y aplicar todos estos programas, incluso cuando nunca me formaron en ellos”* (Teacher’s D narrative, June 2025)

She describes the logistical "multiplication" of work: three subjects mean three different curricula, three types of planning, and a constant sacrifice on her personal time. Her narrative reveals a teacher who has turned "automatic" knowledge into a survival strategy to handle the high administrative and emotional load. A defining characteristic of Teacher D’s current pedagogical practice is differentiation. Because she spends almost the entire day with the same children, she has developed the ability to manage "two or three different curricula" within the same room to meet the diverse needs of her students. *Se logra conocerlos profundamente... esto facilita aplicar estrategias como la instrucción diferenciada, ya que en un mismo salón puede haber niños muy avanzados y otros con mayores dificultades”* (Teacher’s D narrative, June 2025)

This deep bond often leads to children calling her "mom," a sign of the maternal-professional hybrid identity that the self-contained model fosters in early primary education. To conclude, Teacher D acknowledges that while the model is demanding and limits the ability to "deepen" any single subject, it has forced her to grow in ways she never imagined when she was a student in Russia. She sees the self-contained role as a space for constant professional stretching.

### **Cross narrative- findings**

After reconstructing the individual stories of the four participating teachers, this section moves toward a cross-narrative analysis. The aim is to identify the "golden threads" that connect these diverse life stories while acknowledging the unique tensions that emerge from their different backgrounds. As suggested by Stake (1995), a collective case study is not merely a collection of isolated reports but an analytical strategy to understand a broader phenomenon through multiple lenses.

The findings are organized into thematic categories that emerged from a process of constant comparison of the narratives, interpreted through the three-dimensional inquiry space proposed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). By analyzing the teachers' narratives across the dimensions of *temporality* (their past roots and future expectations), *sociality* (their relationships and emotional labor), and *spatiality* (the specific landscape of the private bilingual school), this section highlights the complexity of being a "self-contained teacher."

These categories do not seek to homogenize participants' experiences into a single truth; rather, they demonstrate that teacher identity is dynamic and ongoing process of negotiation, "unlearning," and resilience. Through this dialogue, the study reveals how the institutional demands for linguistic and disciplinary expertise intersect with the teacher's personal and professional realities, revealing the multifaceted nature of the self-contained professional identity.

#### **Professional identity as a self-contained teacher (Temporality)**

*“Observando a mis compañeras... las cosas empezaron a mejorar” (Teacher D narrative, May 2025).*

The construction of professional identity among the participants is a complex "narrative inquiry" that transcends the mere accumulation of years in service. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest, identity is a "stories-to-live-by" process, where teachers constantly negotiate their personal histories with the professional landscapes they inhabit. This category explores the evolution of the self-contained teacher's identity through the lens of temporality, sociality, and spatiality. Additionally, the construction of professional identity in this group of teachers is not a linear event, but a multifaceted process shaped by diverse life stories and institutional demands. This category explores how the transition into the self-contained model has reshaped their perception of what it means to be a teacher.

***Becoming a teacher and gaining experience as a self-contained teacher.***

The participants' entry into teaching reveals a spectrum between inherited vocation and professional pragmatism. On one hand, *Teacher A* and *Teacher C* represent a "cradle vocation," where being a teacher was a childhood certainty influenced by family ties or early community service. For them, entering the classroom felt like a natural step in their life narrative. From an early stage, *Teacher C* positions teaching as part of her personal and embodied identity. She recalls that even before formal training, she engaged in teaching-like practices within her family context: "*desde pequeña jugaba a ser profesora: enseñar, organizar, corregir. Siempre sentí que ese rol hacía parte de mí*" (Teacher's C narrative, May 2025) This suggests that her identity as a teacher was not externally imposed but internally constructed from childhood, reflecting an early sense of belonging to the profession.

From a narrative perspective, this early exposure is not merely a background detail but a formative moment that continues to shape her present identity. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argue, experiences are not isolated events; rather, they are part of an ongoing narrative continuity

in which the past is constantly reinterpreted considering the present. In this sense, her account reveals how her early experiences function as narrative anchors that inform her current sense of self as a teacher. In contrast, *Teacher B* and *Teacher D* entered the field through more practical or accidental paths—*Teacher B* following a mentor's advice and *Teacher D* seeking linguistic expertise in Russia. However, regardless of how they started, all four teachers experienced a "second birth" when they faced the self-contained model. It resonates with Day's (2002) argument that teacher identity is not a fixed entity, but a process of continuous transition, often triggered by changes in school structures that force a redefinition of what it means to be a professional.

Becoming a self-contained teacher is a process that all participants described as a "gradual mastery"—a form of learning that is not acquired through a single course but through the daily endurance of the classroom. This evolution responds to a very clear institutional expectation: the ability to integrate English into other subjects naturally. According to the school's Institutional document (2024), teachers are expected to "*integrate the language into the content of other subjects in a coherent and meaningful way, identifying natural opportunities for its use*". However, when triangulating this mandate with the teachers' life stories, it becomes evident that this "naturalness" is the result of profound, and often silent, emotional and professional labor. For instance, for Teacher B, this process was both a technical and a vital transition; she moved from being someone who designed programs on paper to someone who "lives" and breathes them in the classroom, finding those language opportunities in the heat of practice. For Teacher D, on the contrary, it represented a "second birth" (Day, 2002) within an entirely new cultural landscape, where integrating language and content became her primary tool for professional survival.

This is where the theory of Clandinin and Connelly (2000) comes to life: there is a constant tension between the "Sacred Story" of the school—which demands a fluid and coherent integration—and the "Secret Story" or personal narrative of the teacher, who often grapples with their own disciplinary insecurities in subjects like Mathematics or Science. Ultimately, what the school labels as an "integration skill," the teachers narrate as a constant negotiation of identity: a journey of ceasing to be just "English teachers" to become holistic educators who are learning at the same time as their students.

***Identity transformation through pedagogical experience.***

Identity in a self-contained classroom is never a finished product; it is a "living, breathing" negotiation. For Teacher A and Teacher C, the transition into this model sparked a deep inner shift—moving away from the narrow identity of a "subject specialist" focused solely on English, toward a more expansive, student-centered role that embraces the "whole child." For both women, the classroom became a space for what Bruner (1996) calls "meaning making." Their experience was about much more than "delivering lessons"; it was a brave act of pedagogical agency. Their stories remind us that becoming a generalist in a bilingual school is often a journey of "unlearning." They had to let go of the safety of being a specialist to embrace the vulnerability—and the ultimate power—of being a teacher who guides the whole human experience.

This metamorphosis was not a solitary journey. It was often sparked by simply watching others face the same storm. As Teacher D beautifully captured in the cross-narrative dialogue: "*Observando a mis compañeras... las cosas empezaron a mejorar*" (Teacher's D narrative, June 2025). This simple act of witnessing her peers allowed her to shed the heavy "weight" of the bilingual mandate. Her confidence grew not because the work became easier, but because her

sense of self expanded; she began to see herself not just as an English teacher, but as a facilitator of a child's entire world. In the words of Piaget (1977), this is the essence of accommodation: she did not just add new tasks to her day; she fundamentally restructured her professional "schema" to hold the complex reality of her new environment.

Teacher B and Teacher D, however, highlight a transformation toward resilience and adaptability. They have learned to move between being math teachers, science guides, and emotional counselors in a single morning. As Teacher B noted, her security grew through "trial and error," suggesting that the self-contained experience forces a shift from "knowing the subject" to "knowing how to face the classroom's complexity." In relation to this, Teacher B states how experience, trial and error, and continuous learning have strengthened her confidence: *"Hoy puedo cambiar de enfoque rápidamente según el tipo de estudiante y el contexto"* (Teacher's B narrative, June 2025). This reflects a stage of identity consolidation, where she demonstrates agency, flexibility, and pedagogical awareness.

### ***Tensions between initial and current practice***

This subcategory explores the friction that arises when the "Past", the professional identity forged during university years—collides with the strong demands of the "Present" within the self-contained model. For all four participants, this tension is fundamentally temporal: there is a painful mismatch between the training they once received and the reality they inhabit today. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest, identity should be a continuous thread, but when a sudden shift in professional expectations occurs, it creates a "narrative fracture."

For Teacher A and Teacher C, the tension stems from their roots as specialists in language and early childhood pedagogy. Their "Initial Reality" was built around the beauty of language

development, but their "Current Reality" demands they become disciplinary experts in fields like Mathematics. This creates a temporal gap they must constantly bridge. Teacher A describes a vulnerable present where she must "re-study" concepts from her own school days, *“Antes de mi trabajo actual, estuve en otro colegio donde, por decisiones administrativas, tuve que enseñar Matemáticas e Inglés en segundo grado, con niños de nueve a diez años, fue un reto grande, tanto por la edad como por las temáticas. Tuve que estudiar contenidos que no recordaba y aprender a manejar procesos de desarrollo distintos a los de la primera infancia”* (Teacher’s A narrative, June 2025). Similarly, Teacher C narrates this process as a painful "unlearning" of her specialist past to survive her generalist present. Here, the past is not just a memory; it is a standard of competence that feels threatened by the weight of new, unfamiliar responsibilities.

On the other hand, Teacher B and Teacher D experience this tension as a major transition in their life trajectories. For Teacher B, the friction lies in the shift from a technical, "behind-the-scenes" past in curriculum design to the immediate class management. She also adds this personal thought: *“El futuro del rol del self-contained teacher es complejo. Hoy en día hay una creciente diversidad de estudiantes con condiciones como autismo, TDAH y otras necesidades educativas especiales. Muchos docentes no estamos preparados para enfrentar estos retos sin apoyo especializado, el colegio no nos capacita, solo nos exige hacer las adecuaciones con poca guianza”* (Teacher’s B narrative, May 2025). Another aspect that has not been studied and paid attention to, that teachers, apart from being asked to teach all subjects, seem to be asked to be specialists in special needs children’s curriculum and management.

According to the recent manual of self- contained teachers at the school (2026), *“Adaptamos los procesos de enseñanza y evaluación para garantizar la inclusión de estudiantes con necesidades educativas especiales”*. From a temporal perspective, this represents a "collision

of expectations." The Past " was trained to teach a language or a specific subject, yet "the Present" is legally and institutionally bound to an inclusive model for which they received no prior preparation. As Day (2002) suggests, this lack of alignment between a teacher's initial training and their current professional landscape leads to a sense of vulnerability.

The teachers are forced to negotiate their identity in real-time, struggling to bridge the gap between an institutional mandate of "guaranteed inclusion" and their own human and professional limitations. This tension reveals that the self-contained identity is being stretched beyond pedagogy, moving into the realm of specialized therapeutic and clinical support without the necessary "temporal" bridge of continuous professional development. For Teacher D, the tension is both cultural and biographical. Her initial reality was formed within a completely different educational logic in Russia, which now clashes with the specific expectations of the Colombian bilingual model. As Day (2002) argues, these teachers are living through a "critical transition" where their long-held assumptions about what it means to be a "teacher" must be dismantled and rebuilt to make sense of the now.

Ultimately, for these four women, the tension between who they were on graduation day and who they are today in a self-contained classroom reveals that identity is not a static diploma. It is a constant, exhausting process of "re-writing." The "Sacred story" of their university degrees is in direct conflict with the "lived story" of their current jobs, creating a space where simply "knowing English" is no longer enough to feel like a complete professional.

The narratives within this first category reveal that the identity of a self-contained teacher is not a fixed destination reached upon graduation, but a "living timeline" characterized by constant renegotiation. Through the lens of *temporality*, we see that these four women are not merely performing a job; they are reconciling who they were (non- expert SC teachers) with who

they must become (experienced SC teachers). As they navigate this transition, they move beyond being mere instructors of a language to become holistic mediators, proving that in the Colombian bilingual landscape, the teacher's soul is as much in transition as the curriculum itself.

### **Negotiating pedagogical roles (Sociality)**

*“A veces se les sale el 'mom' o 'mamá'... y uno siente que ya no es solo la que dicta la clase, sino alguien que les da seguridad en todo su día. Es un vínculo muy fuerte porque uno los ve llorar, reír y frustrarse con las materias, no solo con el inglés”* (Teacher's D narrative, June 2025)

The second category of this study shifts the focus from the personal timeline to the relational sphere: Sociality. In narrative inquiry, sociality examines the interplay between the personal (the teacher's inner life) and the social (the external expectations of the community). As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) assert, teachers do not live in a vacuum; their identities are deeply embedded in a web of relationships with students, parents, colleagues, and administrators.

In this section, I move beyond what the teacher knows (their training) to explore how they relate and belong. I examine the shift from being a "language specialist" to becoming a "social anchor" for their students. This negotiation is often invisible, occurring in quiet interactions and the emotional responses to the daily challenges of the Self-Contained model. Through these narratives, I uncover that being a generalist is, above all, a social performance—a continuous balancing act between meeting official standards and honoring the diverse human lives within the classroom.

### *Teacher- students relationship*

In the self-contained model, the relationship between teacher and student go beyond the traditional boundaries of language teaching. Within the dimension of Sociality, this bond becomes the primary landscape where identity is negotiated. Because these teachers spend most of their day with the same group of children, they move from being "language providers" to becoming what Noddings (2005) describes as "carers."

The narratives of the four participants reveal that this social connection is the most rewarding, yet emotionally demanding, aspect of their roles. For Teacher A and Teacher D, this relationship is often expressed through the metaphor of motherhood. They recount numerous instances of being called "mom" by their students, a slip of the tongue that reveals the depth of the emotional safety they provide. As Teacher A reflects, this bond is what allows for true learning to occur; it is the "Ethic of Care" that serves as the foundation for the academic curriculum.

However, this closeness also creates a unique social tension. Teacher C highlights that being the "sole" reference point for the students means absorbing their emotional highs and lows throughout the day. This aligns with Hargreaves' (1998) concept of emotional geography, where the physical and social proximity of the self-contained classroom collapses the distance between the professional and the personal one. The teachers are not just teaching Science or Math in English; they are navigating the social complexities of childhood, from playground disputes to individual emotional crises.

For Teacher B, this relationship is seen as a form of "Social Scaffolding." She notes that the deep knowledge she has of each student, their fears, their strengths, and their home lives—

allows her to tailor her teaching in a way that a specialist teacher never could. This reflects Bruner's (1996) idea that education is a social communal activity. The "mastery" here is not just pedagogical; it is the mastery of a social space where the teacher acts as an emotional anchor, proving that in the self-contained world, the heart must be engaged before the mind can follow.

### ***Teachers- teachers relationship***

The dimension of Sociality also encompasses the "professional knowledge landscape" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) that teachers inhabit with one another. In the self-contained model, the relationship between peers is transformed into a vital survival mechanism. Because the role demands mastery over multiple disciplines, teachers often find that they cannot survive in isolation; they must rely on the collective wisdom of their "community of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Teacher B offers a particularly illuminating perspective on this social dynamic. Having experienced the model from a leadership and oversight position, she understands that the "sociality" of the school is not just about friendship, but about institutional scaffolding: *“Es fundamental apoyarse en la experiencia de los compañeros... nadie lo sabe todo desde el inicio”* (Teacher's B narrative, May 2025) This narrative of collective wisdom is further echoed by Teacher A, who highlights the practical nature of this social bond as a continuous laboratory of pedagogical innovation: *“Además, aprendo mucho de mis colegas, intercambiando estrategias que funcionan en el aula”* (Teacher's D narrative, June 2025).

However, Sociality also involves how teachers perceive their own status and effort in relation to others. Teacher C introduces a layer of tension into this professional landscape by comparing the self-contained role to that of the subject-specific or "cátedra" teachers. She notes a

significant disparity in the weight of their responsibilities, “*Comparado con el rol de profesor cátedra, la carga es significativamente mayor. Aunque los profesores cátedra pueden tener muchos cursos, el self-contained asume múltiples responsabilidades que van más allá de una sola asignatura*” (Teacher’s D narrative, July 2025).

This comparison reveals a relational tension within the school environment, while the teachers lean on each other for survival, they also harbor a silent sense of being "over-burdened" compared to colleagues who only manage one subject. This reflects Hargreaves' (1998) warning about the "intensification" of teaching: when teachers feel that their social role is being stretched too thin, it impacts their sense of professional belonging. In the dimension of Sociality, this is called a "Relational tension." It's the feeling of "us vs. them" (self-contained vs. Subject-specific teachers). Ultimately, the bond between these educators is a complex mixture of solidarity and comparison. They are "learning to be" teachers by watching and supporting one another, but they are also navigating a landscape where they feel their specific role is uniquely demanding. Through this social lens, we see that identity is co-constructed not just through help and "exchanging strategies," but also through the collective recognition of the specific weight they carry together.

### **Emotional and professional tensions (Spatiality)**

“*Los salones no están adecuados para la enseñanza óptima de todo... nos piden enseñar Math bajo el método Singapur y nos dan solo cuatro paquetes de materiales concretos para muchos niños en el aula. No hay suficientes libros en cada salón, lo cual nos obliga a buscar más herramientas por nuestra cuenta*” (Teacher’s C Narrative, July).

The third and final dimension of this narrative analysis is Spatiality, a concept that moves beyond the physical boundaries of the classroom to examine the "landscapes" where professional identities are lived and contested. According to Clandinin and Connelly (1995), a school is a complex professional knowledge landscape comprised of different "places" that carry different meanings. There is the "out-of-classroom" place, where official policies and institutional mandates are created, and the "in-classroom" place, where teachers live out their pedagogical lives in relative isolation.

For the participants of this study, the spatiality of the self-contained model creates a unique set of Emotional and Professional Tensions. The classroom is no longer just a room for language instruction; it is a high-stakes environment where the image of bilingual excellence and global standards—such as the Singapore Math method—meets the "Secret Story" of material scarcity and institutional gaps. This category explores how the physical and symbolic "place" of the school shapes the teachers' sense of competence and belonging.

### *Institutional Vs classroom realities*

Spatiality in this research setting is not just a geographical location; it is a landscape of high expectations that often lacks the material infrastructure to support them. For the participants, the classroom is a site of constant negotiation between "official" pedagogical demands and the "real" scarcity of resources. This creates a specific kind of spatial tension: the feeling of being professionally exposed without the proper tools to succeed.

A significant tension emerges between the institution's pedagogical ambitions and the material conditions provided to sustain them. While official school documentation (see Appendix 1) explicitly states that the institution "identifies and ensures the readiness of resources such as

multiple anchor charts and pensieves for each teacher and a full equipped library” to guarantee program effectiveness, the narratives of the participants reveal a starkly different physical reality. Teacher C highlights this disconnect by pointing out the scarcity of resources required for specialized methodologies: *“Nos piden enseñar el método Singapur y nos dan solo cuatro paquetes de materiales concretos para muchos niños... no hay suficientes libros”* (Teacher’s C narrative, July 2025). This lack of 'concrete materials' in a context that demands high-level reasoning forces teachers into a narrative of professional improvisation, where they must bridge the gap between institutional expectations and classroom limitations.

This sense of inequity is further echoed by Teacher A, who describes the personal and financial burden placed upon the staff: *“Los anchor charts... los tenemos que comprar o hacer nosotros... nos parece injusto, pero por los niños lo hacemos”* (Teacher’s A narrative, July 2025). This 'invisible labor', the act of self-funding and self-creating mandated resources, transforms the teaching role from one of pedagogical implementation to one of personal sacrifice, highlighting a profound mismatch between official policy and the lived experience of the educators.

Teacher D provides a similar idea, noting that while there may be institutional intent, there is a fundamental lack of spatial alignment. She observes: *“Si bien el colegio está tratando de invertir, sus expectativas o lo que quiere no es acorde con lo que se tiene. El colegio tendría mejores resultados si se hiciera una inversión real en lo que se necesita para enseñar... buenos laboratorios, una biblioteca equipada, pero no hay suficiente hasta ahora”* (Teacher’s D narrative, June 2025). This narrative reveals a profound Institutional Tension, the version of the school is one of a modern, bilingual landscape, but as Teacher D points out, the results are capped by the physical limitations of space. This reflects Hsieh’s (2010) struggle for coherence:

the teachers are trying to enact a "First-World" curriculum within a landscape that lacks the "Laboratories" and "Equipped Libraries" to sustain it.

The physical classroom, therefore, becomes a site of "Compensatory Labor." The teachers (A, B, C, and D) are not just teaching; they are personally filling the spatial gaps left by the institution. They are buying their own visuals, searching for their own books, and improvising experiments without labs. This reveals that in the self-contained model, professional identity is defined by resilience in scarcity. The "place" of the school is a demanding one that requires the teacher to be the primary provider of both knowledge and the physical tools to convey it, leading to a sense of professional exhaustion that is often invisible to the administration.

### ***Workload and demands inside the classroom***

In the self-contained model, the "in-classroom" place becomes a site of intense professional pressure. Within the dimension of Spatiality, this is experienced as a lack of physical and mental transition. While subject-specific teachers move between different classroom landscapes, providing them with a "spatial reset", the self-contained teacher remains anchored in the same room for the duration of the school day. This constant presence leads to what Hargreaves (1998) describes as the intensification of teaching, where the workload is not only increased but condensed into a single, unyielding space.

The narratives reveal a shared sense of being "spatially overwhelmed." Teacher C highlights this by comparing her reality to the "cátedra" (subject) teachers, noting that while they may have many students, her workload is "significantly higher" because she must manage the entire physical and pedagogical ecosystem of one group: *"El self-contained asume múltiples*

*responsabilidades que van más allá de una sola asignatura*” (Teacher’s C narrative, May 2025). For Teacher C, the classroom space is a place where responsibilities pile up without a "spatial break" to clear the mind.

This tension is crossed with the experience of Teacher A, who views the classroom space as a site of constant visual and organizational demand. For her, the "workload" includes the physical maintenance of the bilingual environment, buying and creating the "anchor charts" and visual aids that the institution expects but does not provide. This adds a "hidden" layer to the workload: the teacher is not just a pedagogue, but the curator and financier of the room’s physical landscape. As she notes, they do it *“por los niños”* (Teacher’s A narrative, June 2025), showing how the spatial demands of the room are tied to an emotional toll. Teacher B and Teacher D connect this spatial workload to the institutional story. Teacher B, with her background in oversight, recognizes that the school’s expectations often exceed the physical time and resources allocated within the classroom. She describes a landscape that requires "patience" because the workload of adapting a curriculum for diverse needs (ADHD, Autism) happens entirely within those four walls, often without the "laboratories or equipped libraries" that Teacher D identifies as missing.

Teacher D’s narrative provides the final crossing point: she argues that the effectiveness of the model is hindered because the "place" (the classroom) is being asked to perform functions it is not equipped for. The workload becomes a struggle for "coherence" (Hsieh, 2010), where teachers are trying to fit a high-level bilingual curriculum into a space that feels materially "thin." Ultimately, the spatiality of the self-contained classroom transforms the workload from a series of tasks into a state of permanent alertness. The teachers are not just "working"; they are

"inhabiting" a high-pressure landscape where the physical boundaries of the room reflect the expanding boundaries of their professional roles.

The narratives explored in this final category reveal that Spatiality is the stage where the most acute tensions of the self-contained model are performed. For Teachers A, B, C, and D, the classroom is not a neutral container for instruction; it is a "contested landscape" where the institution's high-level bilingual ambitions collide with a reality of material scarcity and spatial confinement.

Through the lens of Clandinin and Connelly (1995), we have seen how the "Sacred Story" of the school—one of global standards and seamless integration—often ignores the "Secret Stories" of the teachers who must personally subsidize and physically improvise the tools for their own survival. Whether it is Teacher C struggling with a lack of Math materials, Teacher A financially providing the room's visual environment, or Teacher D identifying the structural absence of laboratories and libraries, the message is clear: the "place" of the self-contained teacher is one of private sacrifice. The narratives explored in this final category reveal that Spatiality is the stage where the most acute tensions of the self-contained model are performed. For Teachers A, B, C, and D, the classroom is not a neutral container for instruction; it is a contested landscape where the institution's high-level bilingual ambitions collide with a reality of material scarcity.

Through the lens of Clandinin and Connelly (1995), we see the friction between the 'Sacred Story' of global excellence and the 'Secret Stories' of teachers who personally subsidize their own survival. Whether it is Teacher C's lack of Math materials or Teacher A's financial sacrifice for visual aids, the message is clear: the self-contained identity is defined by a private resilience. Ultimately, this spatial analysis shows that 'Pedagogical Shock' is a physical

experience of intensification. Being anchored in one room creates a state of permanent alertness that stretches the teacher's identity to its limits. Yet, within this tension, we find a profound agency: these teachers prove that while the school may provide the walls, it is the teacher who builds the home. self-contained identity is a triumph of humanity over infrastructure.

## CHAPTER V: Conclusions

This final chapter presents the conclusions of the study, structured to directly address the research question and the objectives established at the beginning of this journey. This study aimed to understand the professional identity of four female teachers working with the "self-contained" model in a Colombian bilingual school. By listening to their stories, this study moved from broader educational policies to the personal, lived realities of the classroom practice. The following sections provide a synthesis of how these educators negotiate their roles, emotions, and professional growth, offering a final reflection on what it means to be a bilingual teacher in today's demanding educational context.

### Conclusions

The findings of this study indicate that professional identity in a self-contained model is a process of constant re-authoring. The participants do not see themselves exclusively as English teachers; instead, they have assumed more complex roles as "multidisciplinary mediators." However, this shift often creates a sense of "identity fragmentation", as teachers experience pressure to demonstrate expertise in subjects like Mathematics or Science while maintaining their identity as language educators. The analysis suggests that identity is strengthened when teachers embrace a holistic pedagogical role, but it becomes threatened when institutional expectations reduce their work to "content deliverers."

In terms of sociality, the findings show that the "self-contained" fosters close and sustained relationship between teachers and students. Due to the extended time spent together, the teacher's role goes beyond instruction and becomes one of "emotional scaffolding."

This dynamic aligns with the concept of "emotional labor" (Hargreaves, 1998). Teachers feel emotional pillars for their students, often sacrificing their own well-being to ensure a safe and loving bilingual environment, which is a role rarely recognized in formal policies.

The tensions identified in the teachers' narratives can be analyzed through Clandinin and Connelly's (1995) concept of the *Professional Knowledge Landscape*. The findings suggest that the 'pedagogical shock' experienced by the participants stems from the friction between the 'Sacred Stories'—the institutional policies and the idealized self-contained model—and their 'Secret Stories', which encompass their lived experiences of uncertainty, vulnerability, and exhaustion within the classroom. Consequently, to navigate this landscape, teachers often construct 'Cover Stories' to portray a sense of competence and alignment with official expectations, while their personal and professional well-being is frequently sacrificed in the process.

The research also identifies highlights a significant gap between institutional expectations and the "spatial reality" of the teachers. A key conclusion is that while the school provides the *physical* environment for instruction, it frequently lacks the *pedagogical* resources (specialized materials, ADHD/Autism training, or enough planning time) for a successful self-contained model. As a result, teachers are required to assume additional responsibilities such as developing materials investing personal time and effort to bridge these gaps. This situation positions the classroom as both a place for pedagogical creativity freedom and a context of professional strain.

Finally, "voicing" these narratives reveals that teacher empowerment in the self-contained model is not about more training; but also involves recognition and validation of teachers' experiences. The general objective of this study was to understand teachers' professional identity, and the main finding is that these teachers are "resilient survivors" of a complex system. Their

identity is built on the tension between the "ideal teacher" required by the school and the "human teacher" they are in the classroom. Supporting bilingualism requires not only policy development but policy development but also a greater focus on teachers' working conditions and professional well-being.

## **Implications**

The findings of the study highlight the need to create professional spaces not just for training but for reflection and dialogue. This study suggests that when teachers are provided with opportunities to voice their struggles and victories, they begin to process the effects of pedagogical shocks and start to develop a stronger sense of professional identity. For self-contained teachers, it is crucial to recognize that their "human role" (being emotional support) is just as professional and valuable as their "instructional role". It is recommended to implement a "Teacher transition protocol", beyond administrative assignment, the school should provide structured mentorship during the first semester, allowing experienced teachers to share 'narratives of success and failure' to mitigate the initial Pedagogical Shock. The creation of monthly 'Teacher Narrative Circles' is proposed. Based on Wenger's (1998) *Communities of Practice*, these spaces would allow 'Secret Stories' of isolation to be transformed into collective wisdom, moving the school culture from a focus on 'Standardized Excellence' toward Integrated Teacher Well-being.

These findings imply a need to move beyond providing just a physical classroom or a textbook. To truly support the self-contained model, include that the institution allocates sufficient planning time, offering targeted professional development for content teaching in English and providing resources to support students with diverse learning needs. This includes: more planning time specifically designed for teaching subjects like Science or Math in English,

rather than general language workshops, specific tools to support students with diverse learning needs (ADHD/Autism) so that the teacher does not feel isolated and overwhelmed.

Additionally, the tension experienced when teaching content (Science/Social Studies) in a foreign language suggests a need for more flexible curricula. Institutions should encourage *translanguaging* practices and differentiated instruction to ensure that academic content is accessible to all students, especially those with diverse learning needs, without compromising the teacher's well-being. This research challenges the "idealized" representation of bilingualism often promoted in national policies. The findings suggest that bilingual programs are more likely to be sustainable when they explicitly consider teachers' working conditions and the well-being of the educator. In this sense, there is a need to redefine "teacher empowerment" in Colombia—not as the attainment of higher levels of English proficiency, but as the recognition of the teacher's agency, emotional engagement, and the complex of managing multiple roles in a second language.

Furthermore, this study highlights the value of Narrative Inquiry as an approach for understanding educational processes and change. Future research should continue to explore the "silent voices" in bilingual education, including those of parents and school administrators, to foster more collaborative context and less demanding environment for everyone involved.

### **Further research**

While this study provided meaningful insights into the lived experiences and identity constructions of self-contained bilingual teachers, several areas remain for future academic exploration:

Future research could adopt a longitudinal design to examine how teachers' identity evolves over time within the self-contained model. Exploring the transition from the initial "pedagogical shock" to possible long-term "professional stabilization" or "burnout" would provide invaluable data for teacher retention policies. One of the most pressing concerns raised by the participants was the challenge of teaching subjects in English to students with diverse learning needs (such as ADHD or Autism). Research focusing on the intersection of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) and inclusion in primary education is urgently needed to develop inclusive bilingual frameworks.

Although, this study focused on the teachers' perspective; future research could incorporate the views of the school, coordinators and principals to better understand how institutional practices and leadership approaches influence the implementation of self-contained models and teachers' well-being. Similarly, examining students' perspectives could provide valuable insights into how they perceive their teachers' roles and how this model shapes their academic and emotional development. Just as this study "voiced" the teachers, future inquiries could explore the students' narratives. How do children perceive their self-contained teachers? Do they recognize the "hybrid identity" of their teachers, and how does this close, multi-subject bond affect their own language acquisition and emotional development?

To conclude, as an insider researcher, this research has profoundly transformed my own perception of bilingual education. Listening to my colleagues' stories allowed me to recognize the same silences and tensions within my own practice. This 'voicing' process did not merely marginalize the participants' experiences; it facilitated a metacognitive shift in my professional stance. I transitioned from being a language practitioner to becoming a researcher-advocate,

acutely aware of the political and emotional dimensions that sustain the self-contained model in the Colombian context.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1. School policy regarding inclusion and bilingualism

	FO-DES-39	Versión 1 11/10/2023
	DISEÑO DE PROYECTOS ESTRATÉGICOS LB	

#### TÍTULO DEL PROYECTO

Transformando la Enseñanza de Inglés: Estrategias Efectivas con Daily 5, Writing Workshop y Phonics en el L.B.

#### • OBJETIVO

Lograr que para el periodo académico 2027-2028, el programa de literacy permita que al menos el 80% de los estudiantes de Lower School logre un desempeño accomplished en rúbricas de escritura y avancen tres un mínimo de tres niveles anuales en los Running Records, gracias a la implementación efectiva de la versión adaptada de los programas Daily 5, Lucy Calkins Writing y Lucy Calkins Phonics, con el fin de fortalecer sus habilidades de lectura, escritura y oralidad en inglés.

#### 1. ALCANCE.

El proyecto inicia en el mes de enero del periodo académico 2021/2022 y se llevará a cabo hasta finalizar el periodo académico 2027/2028; la población objetivo de este proyecto comprende todos los estudiantes de lower school y los profesores homeroom teacher de cada grado.

Los programas implementados para la mejora del nivel de Inglés en Lower School del L.B son los siguientes: Daily 4, Writing Workshop, Phonics units of study de Lucy Calkins y Let's talk.

#### 2. TERMINOLOGÍA

- **Literacy:** La capacidad de leer y escribir en un idioma, que es el enfoque principal del proyecto.
- **Daily 5:** Un programa de lectura que forma parte de las estrategias educativas implementadas en el proyecto.
- **Lucy Calkins Writing:** Un programa de escritura utilizado en el proyecto para mejorar las habilidades de escritura de los estudiantes.
- **Phonics:** Enfoque de enseñanza de la pronunciación y comprensión fonética de las palabras, una parte importante del proyecto.
- **Running Records:** Evaluaciones de lectura utilizadas para medir el progreso de los estudiantes en su nivel de lectura.
- **Pensieves:** Registros de conferencias que proporcionan información sobre el progreso individual de los estudiantes en lectura y escritura.

*Note.* Follow this link to find the complete document. <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1-xHAft8m1nsLY4-X-eE2mY5vrrK6Orm76I9JrKhNkps/edit?tab=t.0>

## Appendix 2. Teacher's manual and institutional guidelines

### Año escolar 2025/2026

Como docente del LB, dentro de lo que corresponde a mi sección (Upper School/Lower School) y asignaciones particulares (Homeroom Teacher, especialista bilingüe o especialista no bilingüe), me comprometo a seguir los lineamientos del programa académico para el año escolar 2025/2026 y a participar activamente en todos los procesos de mejora continua.

### Marco pedagógico del LB

- **Teoría pedagógica:** Socio-constructivista.
- **Enfoques pedagógicos:** *Design Thinking, Action-Oriented Approach.*
- **Metodologías pedagógicas:** *Singapore Math (Lower School), Collaborative Learning, CLIL, Differentiated Instruction, PBL, CAFE Daily 4, Lucy Calkins Writing Workshop.*
- **Estrategias pedagógicas:** *21st Century Skills*, integración de tecnología, zonas de desarrollo próximo, metacognición, investigación sostenida y estrategias centradas en el estudiante.

### Lineamientos de práctica docente

1. La estructura de clase responde al marco metodológico anterior. El conocimiento se presenta en breves cápsulas y se desarrollan diversas actividades por sesión, evitando las clases magistrales.
2. La disposición del aula debe ajustarse a las necesidades de cada actividad, favoreciendo el trabajo en pequeños grupos, parejas o círculos, en lugar de la disposición clásica en filas.
3. La planeación (Thematic Unit, Daily Planner) debe entregarse en los formatos oficiales y dentro de los plazos establecidos por los líderes académicos.
4. Reduiremos el uso de papel en la medida en que los programas académicos lo permitan.
5. Los docentes contratados para enseñar en segunda lengua (inglés, francés) deberán emplearla en sus interacciones con estudiantes y colegas en todos los contextos profesionales, salvo en situaciones de crisis emocionales, alta complejidad disciplinaria

*Note.* Follow this link to find the complete document.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ZObOcGkrIUv5XrBIrqFxdVyE-4M6OnNUiZbmXA36VMI/edit?tab=t.0>

### Appendix 3. Type of interview with color coding

**Interview Date:** May 13th, 2025

**Participant – Colleague:** Teacher B (Pseudonym)

**Researcher:** Wendy Tatiana Tabares Narvaez

**Interview modality:** Virtual via Zoom

Transcription coding key:

- **Green:** Guiding questions that explore the participant's life story and professional journey.
- **Blue:** Professional responsibilities and the transition to the self-contained model.
- **Yellow:** Critical incidents and significant experiences (Pedagogical Shock or emotional milestones).
- **Gray:** Evolution of professional identity and self-perception.

**Interviewer:** ¿Podrías contarnos cómo se dio tu decisión de estudiar idiomas y comenzar tu trayectoria profesional?

Teacher B: En la familia en la que crecí había una señora que trabajaba como profesora de inglés. Había estudiado en la Universidad de los Andes, había realizado especializaciones en Estados Unidos y era una profesora muy experimentada en el Colegio Cafam. Cuando llegó el momento de escoger una carrera, tenía dos opciones: educación física o idiomas. Me recomendaron que con los idiomas tendría mejores oportunidades, así que ingresé a la Universidad Nacional a estudiar Filología e Idiomas en 1988.

Al inicio no estaba muy convencida y tampoco era especialmente buena en inglés durante el colegio. En el primer semestre de la universidad no obtuve buenos resultados, pero decidí esforzarme, estudiar por mi cuenta y llenar los vacíos que tenía. Poco a poco le tomé gusto al idioma, descubrí que tenía disposición y comencé a mejorar notablemente mi nivel de inglés. La decisión de convertirme en docente no fue completamente propia, sino influenciada por la recomendación de alguien con mucha experiencia en la enseñanza del inglés.

**Interviewer:** ¿Cuál fue tu primera experiencia real como docente?

Teacher B: Mi primera experiencia real en el aula fue mientras estudiaba en la Universidad Nacional, cuando el Centro Colombo Americano recibía estudiantes de últimos semestres para enseñar. Me presenté, fui aceptada y comencé a enseñar allí.

Al inicio fue muy difícil, porque no sabía cómo enseñar, cómo manejar la disciplina ni cómo estructurar una clase. Todo era nuevo para mí.

Recuerdo una anécdota muy particular de esa época. Yo sentía que mis clases eran aburridas y le pedí al supervisor que se enfocara en eso durante su visita. El día de la observación, la clase era después del almuerzo y, en un momento, al mirar al supervisor, lo vi dormido. Fue muy gracioso y al mismo tiempo confirmó mi percepción.

Interviewer: ¿Cómo fue tu acercamiento al modelo self-contained?

Teacher B: Mi incursión en el modelo self-contained es relativamente reciente. Durante muchos años trabajé exclusivamente como profesora de inglés, tanto en centros de idiomas como en colegios privados.

Posteriormente trabajé durante aproximadamente quince años en el Montessori British School como desarrolladora de programas académicos. En ese colegio no estaba en el aula, sino en un departamento dedicado a la creación de programas. Allí se planeaba todo el año académico, desde el saludo hasta la despedida, incluyendo materiales, evaluaciones, juegos y actividades. En ese rol comencé a desarrollar programas no solo de inglés, sino también de matemáticas, ciencias y sociales, desde preescolar hasta quinto de primaria.

Posteriormente regresé al aula como profesora self-contained en el Colegio San Tarsicio, un colegio masculino con grupos grandes. Allí enseñaba inglés, literatura y ciencias. Aunque ya tenía mucha experiencia, el trabajo era exigente debido a la carga académica, la dirección de grupo, la atención a padres y el acompañamiento emocional de los estudiantes.

Interviewer: ¿Cómo percibes la carga laboral y la responsabilidad del self-contained teacher?

Teacher B: La carga laboral del self-contained teacher es muy alta. No se trata solo de la enseñanza académica, sino también del acompañamiento emocional, familiar y convivencial de los estudiantes. Además, se deben atender padres, coordinar con psicólogos, terapeutas y cumplir con exigencias institucionales.

Interviewer: ¿Cómo ha evolucionado tu percepción del rol docente a lo largo del tiempo?

Teacher B: Mi percepción del rol docente ha cambiado profundamente. Comencé enseñando en academias de idiomas, luego en universidades y posteriormente en colegios. Cada contexto es diferente y exige habilidades distintas. Con el tiempo, aprendí a manejar la disciplina, la planeación, la atención a padres y la evaluación.

La experiencia, la prueba y error, y la formación continua han fortalecido mi seguridad y mi capacidad para adaptarme a diferentes poblaciones. Hoy puedo cambiar de enfoque rápidamente según el tipo de estudiante y el contexto, algo que al inicio me generaba mucha

## Appendix 4. Informed Consent

### Subdirección de Gestión de Proyectos – Centro de Investigaciones CIUP Comité de Ética en la Investigación

En el marco de la Constitución Política Nacional de Colombia, la Ley 1098 de 2006 – Código de la Infancia y la Adolescencia, la Resolución 0546 de 2015 de la Universidad Pedagógica Nacional y demás normatividad aplicablevigente, considerando las características de la investigación, se requiere que usted lea detenidamente y si está de acuerdo con su contenido, exprese su consentimiento firmando el siguiente documento:

#### **PARTE UNO: INFORMACIÓN GENERAL DEL PROYECTO**

Facultad, Departamento o Unidad Académica	
Título del proyecto de investigación	
Descripción breve y clara de la investigación	
Descripción de los posibles riesgos de participar en la investigación	
Descripción de los posibles beneficios de participar en la investigación.	

<b>Datos generales del investigador principal</b>	<b>Nombre(s) y Apellido(s):</b>		
	<b>N de identificación:</b>	<b>Teléfono:</b>	
	<b>Correo electrónico:</b>		
	<b>Dirección:</b>		

### **PARTE DOS: CONSENTIMIENTO INFORMADO**

Yo \_\_\_\_\_ mayor de edad, identificado con Cédula de Ciudadanía \_\_\_\_\_ de \_\_\_\_\_ con domicilio en la ciudad de \_\_\_\_\_ Dirección: N decelular: \_\_\_\_\_ Correo electrónico: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Como adulto responsable autorizo expresamente el uso de las grabaciones de las conversaciones sostenidas con mi colega – participante como resultado de mi participación en este proyecto y

#### **Declaro que:**

1. He sido invitado(a) a participar en el estudio o investigación de manera voluntaria.
2. He leído y entendido este formato de consentimiento informado o el mismo se me ha leído y explicado.
3. Todas mis preguntas han sido contestadas claramente y he tenido el tiempo suficiente para pensar acerca de mi decisión de participar.
4. He sido informado y conozco de forma detallada los posibles riesgos y beneficios derivados de mi participación en el proyecto.
5. No tengo ninguna duda sobre mi participación, por lo que estoy de acuerdo en hacer parte de esta investigación.
6. Puedo dejar de participar en cualquier momento sin que esto tenga consecuencias.
7. Conozco el mecanismo mediante el cual los investigadores garantizan la custodia y confidencialidad de mis datos, los cuales no serán publicados ni revelados a menos que autorice por escrito lo contrario.
8. Autorizo expresamente a los investigadores para que utilicen la información y las grabaciones de audio, video o imágenes que se generen en el marco del proyecto.
9. Sobre esta investigación me asisten los derechos de acceso, rectificación y oposición que podré ejercer mediante solicitud ante el investigador responsable, en la dirección de contacto que figura en este documento.

Como adulto responsable autorizo expresamente a la Universidad Pedagógica Nacional utilizar mis datos y las grabaciones de audio, video o imágenes que se generen, que reconozco haber conocido previamente a su publicación en el repositorio de la Universidad Pedagógica Nacional.

En constancia, el presente documento ha sido leído y entendido por mí, en su integridad de manera libre y espontánea.

---

Firma el adulto responsable.

---

Nombre del adulto responsable:

Fecha

**Declaración del Investigador:** Yo certifico que le he explicado al adulto responsable del niño o adolescente la naturaleza y el objeto de la presente investigación y los posibles riesgos y beneficios que puedan surgir de la misma. Adicionalmente, le he absuelto ampliamente las dudas que ha planteado y le he explicado con precisión el contenido del presente formato de consentimiento informado. Dejo constancia que en todo momento el respeto de los derechos el menor o el adolescente será prioridad y se acogerá con celo lo establecido en el Código de la Infancia y la Adolescencia, especialmente en relación con las responsabilidades de los medios de comunicación, indicadas en el Artículo 47.

En constancia firma el investigador responsable del proyecto,  
Nombre del Investigador responsable:

N.º Identificación:

Fecha:

*La Universidad Pedagógica Nacional agradece sus aportes y su decidida  
participación*