Diagnosing Critical Incidents
by Teachers of English as a Foreign Language
with Reference to Their Domain Expertise
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INTRODUCTION

Networks of teacher knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs have long been recognized as dynamic constructs situated in the social practice of teaching, where the role of place and time is critical (Burns, Edwards, & Freeman, 2015; Burns & Richards, 2009; Borg, 2006; Johnson, 2006; Tsui, 2003; Breen et al., 2001; Bullough & Baughman, 1997). The background and the point of departure for the current discussion about the mental work of teachers, and change processes in particular, are empirical studies on problem-solving and decision-making. The situation of teachers who mobilize perception, attention, memory, and higher order thinking to integrate and enhance sources of professional understanding in challenging circumstances is a special case of human cognition, which holds that the activity of the human mind takes the form of information processing and that existing knowledge structures are actively used for this purpose. Research has demonstrated that efficiency in operating on existing schemata, i.e. quick pattern recognition, a principled manner of representing phenomena, and strong self-monitoring skills are among the major attributes of expert performers (Ericsson, 2006; Thagard, 2005; Calderhead, 1996; Reynolds, 1992; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Shulman, 1986; Peterson & Comeaux, 1987).

This thesis explores the topic of teacher cognition by investigating, as indicated in the title, how teachers of English as a foreign language diagnose critical incidents with reference to their domain expertise. In cognitive psychology, the term diagnosing is understood as a process of problem-solving and feedback, which aims to yield relevant information necessary to distinguish what constitutes the underlying structure and causes of the problem situation before cognitive resources are distributed to make up for deficiencies and mental schemata are built/revised for more effective future use (Johnson-Laird, 1983; Eysenck & Keane, 2010). The concept of critical incidents (CIs) refers to unplanned situations in the classroom which disagree with the accepted norms, and their understanding is thought to be crucial to recover equilibrium (Tripp, 2012). CIs are intentionally created as a result of a cognitive process of inquiry into the origin of observed phenomena. Instructors engage in reasoning and activate, integrate, and evaluate various sources of orientation in teaching (their knowledge, experience, beliefs,
values, and emotions) to produce a rational explanation of perplexing events and to place them in the context of the educational system, a specific schooling institution, or a work setting with its unique properties (Farrell, 2007; Griffin, 2003). Finally, expertise in TEFL is regarded as wide propositional and procedural knowledge demonstrated through its efficient use, i.e. instant recognition and accurate representation of classroom situations along with informed didactic moves made in response to these situations. It is characterized by the teachers’ ability to critically reflect on and continuously refine their practices, with the success of their students in mind.

The learning mechanism in teachers operates, and its outcomes are observable, throughout all stages of their career. It is assumed that the working of the mechanism can be motivated by the formation of critical incidents, i.e. self-regulated examination of disorienting occurrences in search for meaning. This is because change in teachers’ cognitions has been recognized to result from their deliberate attempts to discern and see sense in what contradicts familiar schemata and principles, to register relations, nuances, and variation in classroom phenomena, to problematize the unproblematic, to take position on matters, and to formulate both claims about the state of affairs and feedback for further reference (Johnson, 1998; Rogers, 2002; Freeman, 2002; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 2003; Tsui, 2003; Golombek & Johnson, 2004; Gabryś-Barker, 2012).

The question remains how effectively, if at all, teachers invest and reinvest their cognitive resources to diagnose critical incidents and thus maximize the opportunities to extend their competence. Whether they maintain confidence in established patterns of thought and behavior when interpreting their teaching experiences or tax themselves and engage in progressive exploration to build new schemata reveals their commitment to learning (Freeman, 2002; Berliner, 2001). The way EFL instructors process problems regarding lesson preparation and conduct, syllabus design, classroom management, or testing can either freeze or free their mental resources, which has inevitable consequences for their professional growth. Borg (2005, p. 205) proposes that cross-sectional research on teacher thinking would capture the actual change in teachers’ cognitions and add to existing research findings. Similarly, Ericsson (2002) expresses the need for scientific rather than anecdotal nature of evidence in studies of domain expertise.
The following are the research questions, which regard the issue of diagnosing critical incidents seen, in a broad sense, as cognitive processes activated by EFL teachers in their educational context:

Q1: How do teachers mentally represent critical incidents in EFL teaching?
Q2: What mental constructs and sources of knowledge do they activate to diagnose critical incidents?
Q3: What higher-order thinking abilities do they engage in the process of diagnosing critical incidents?
Q4: What kind of professional judgments do teachers formulate in the process of diagnosing critical incidents?
Q5: Are there patterns and regularities, if any, in the way teachers diagnose critical incidents?
Q6: What kind of relationship, if any, can be discovered between the effectiveness of diagnosing critical incidents and the subjects’ professional experience (in years)?

The method to examine the operations of diagnosing critical incidents by EFL teachers is a qualitative analysis of their written reports on disturbing situations in their work environments. Specifically, a case study was designed in which seven subjects, qualified Polish teachers of English as a foreign language (three novices, three intermediates, and one senior), were granted a year to write no less than ten distinctly structured accounts of what they considered critical incidents in their teaching experience. The task involved 1) describing problem situations, 2) elaborating on their potential causes, and 3) recognizing their consequences for FL teaching and learning. Relevant excerpts from the reports served as data in this study.

The analysis of the material, consisting of 73 texts, was based on the assumption that in order to accomplish the task, the subjects naturally related to their episodic and generic knowledge, emotions, systems of beliefs, and/or heuristics. What they recorded evidenced their cognitive work, i.e. provided an insight not only into the way they represent, categorize, problematize, and define phenomena in the FL classroom, but also into how they use their domain expertise to facilitate diagnostic operations. The content examination procedures were established to address the recommended segmentation of
the texts into description, analysis, and judgment. The data analysis included both identification of the character of mental representations the subjects activated during the recall as well as higher order thinking operations on these representations. The tool for data analysis was meaningful thought unit (MTU), which allowed for the categorization of ideas into visual, affective, and cognitive. Further examination of the categories made it possible to discern and draw conclusions about the sources of teacher knowledge (e.g. prior didactic experience, pre-service training, personal theories), professional concepts (e.g. class management, testing, comprehension check), perception and attention processes, the validity of claims, and learning outcomes as embedded in the discourse.

The aim of the study was to provide an insight into the teachers’ diagnostic abilities with reference to the current state of their professional knowledge by searching for patterns and regularities in the way they examine critical incidents at both the verbal and conceptual levels. Understandably, trajectories of teachers’ reflective thinking depend on a number of external and internal factors, including their feelings about the learning content, the extent of practical classroom experience, current workload, or the processing capacity, to name a few. Among these factors, domain expertise plays a decisive role (Norman, Brooks, & Allen, 1989). Therefore, attempts to determine the predominant dimensions of teachers’ professional understanding, which underpins their didactic decisions, are empirically justifiable. This study shows a substantial degree of explanatory value. It explores teachers’ efforts to discover the missing elements in their perceptions of classroom realities. The verbalization of the process of representing problems and recognizing their nature, selecting and integrating new information from the environment, and formulating feedback (building mental models) for analogous circumstances in the future constitutes evidence of these efforts.

The significance of the collected data is twofold. From the researcher’s perspective, the material might encourage further investigation into relationships between such variables as the spectrum and character of challenges teachers confront in their day-to-day practice and their varied cognitive responses to these challenges. From the practitioner’s perspective, the analysis of the material and its results might have implications for pre-service teacher education. Although critical incidents are inherently unexpected, instructors can develop an effective strategy of turning problem situations into important learning experience irrespective of the stage in their professional life. Pre-
service teachers, lacking practical knowledge to support their didactic considerations, need tools to optimize their analytical operations, including the stimulation or regulation of their emotional reactions. In other words, they need to be given an opportunity to encourage their teaching awareness, i.e. to develop reasoning faculties by problematizing routines and exploring different aspects of meaning carried by psychologically disturbing occurrences. Novice teachers‘ consent and motivation to face the complexity of FL instruction and to engage in developing ways to handle it effectively seem to give them every chance to win the status of virtuous and trusted professionals.
CHAPTER ONE
A COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE ON BUILDING EXPERTISE IN TEFL

1.1. Human Information Processing (HIP)

Cognitive psychology views humans as processors of information (Craik & Lockhart, 1972). Information about the environment, which the brain computes and systematizes, makes our functioning both possible and meaningful. Considered as intelligent and accommodative mechanisms, we think and act to confront change in the physical, social, and symbolic reality, i.e. to strategically address the actual context of the situation (Lindsay & Norman, 2013). This involves converting perception-driven information into the code, which the neural structures of our cognitive system can recognize and organize as four-dimensional (spatio-temporal) conscious experiences, through which we learn the world and form bonds (Sieb, 2017). The process of coding is naturally motivated; it aims to amply construct mental representations of external phenomena and to adequately integrate them with the existing structures of knowledge to allow for optimal thought and behavior.

Mental representations evolve along with the biological and educational growth of the organism (Norman, 1987). Some of these take a temporal form, i.e. they are generated episodically, for example in the process of problem-solving, and get replaced easily whenever feedback proves the need for more adequate arrangements to reach an effective solution. Others become more permanent structures and include accumulated knowledge of the world, schemata, judgments, abstract thoughts, and beliefs that have been hierarchized and offer individuals a broader conceptual framework to function within. The dynamic flow of environmental information into the processing mechanism, the transfer of information between the memory storage systems, and the incessant interaction between the cognitive structures and processes of perception, attention, or reasoning lead to the formation of networks and constellations of information that never cease to elaborate. This means that expanding knowledge (learning) goes beyond representing something mentally; it entails picturing relationships between and framing representations, changes in which are both anticipated and initiated (Strasser, 2010).
Thagard (2005) claims that the best current answer to the question *What kind of system is the mind?* is that the mind is a logical, rule-based, concept-based, analogy-based, imagery-based, and connectionist system, which supports diverse kinds of thinking (p. 134). Despite differences between their theoretical applications, the approaches acknowledge that rules, concepts, images, or analogies are categories of mental representations, and that people use mental procedures to operate on them in order to produce thought and action. Thagard put forward the hypothesis (CRUM, for Computational-Representational Understanding of Mind) that a cognitive theory of mental representation must show its computational power that explains how people learn, use language, and solve problems.

In this thesis, it is proposed that relevant computational processes on mental representations in teachers’ cognitive machinery are related to developing expertise in their fields (here: teaching English as a foreign language). Following the central paradigm of human cognition, which holds that the activity of the human mind takes the form of lower and higher order information processing (Eysenck & Keane, 2010; Nęcka et al., 2013), this chapter explains its nature with regard to the activity of the expert teacher’s mind, especially when problem-solving. The assumption is that teachers progress through problem situations because, when internally or externally motivated, they are able to either manipulate mental representations to produce solutions or simulate scenarios to match their expectations and establish new causal relationships (Feltovich, Prietula, & Ericsson, 2006). Certainly, the ability to think, create concepts, apply rules, or make inferences, connections, and generalizations is not the sole prerogative of expert teachers; however, doing so in a flexible, open-ended, and creative manner is unique to few and communicates an advanced stage in one’s occupational development (Kuiper & Pesut, 2004; Klein, 1998; Feltovich, Spiro, & Coulson, 1997; Patel & Groen, 1991; Glaser & Chi, 1988; Flavell, 1979). Educational settings offer practitioners an inherently dynamic context for cognitive work. In fact, every dimension of teaching – lesson planning, task design, assessment, class management, or interaction with the social environment of the institution – requires high-order thinking, which contributes to the formation of new understandings.
1.2. Teacher cognition

In the cognitive perspective, the postulate that cognition is recognition is consistent with the main strand of language teacher cognition research, which accepts the assumption that teachers’ mental representations and lives — what they know, think, and believe — lay a foundation for their learning processes (Borg, 2012). In this sense, teacher cognition, “the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching” (Borg, 2003, p. 81), is discussed here as a specialized instance of human cognition. Assumptions, attitudes, knowledge, and/or beliefs about FL teaching, learning, students, syllabus, material, and/or themselves as teachers are stored in educators’ minds as mental representations and continually used in the classroom practice to make didactic choices and solve problems or between lessons to plan and evaluate decisions. Published work examining teacher cognitions has shown great variation and discussed ways teacher cognitions interact with their education, professional experience, or contextual factors. This thesis considers research that has sought to answer the questions about 1) sources of teachers’ cognitions, 2) teachers’ computational operations, and 3) teachers’ thought processes when problem-solving.

1.2.1. Sources of teachers’ professional understanding

Woods (1996) observes that in empirical studies of teacher cognition the construct of knowledge is impossible to separate from teachers’ beliefs, which is why they must be addressed collectively as points on a spectrum of meaning. Also, Richardson (1996) argues that personal values and beliefs seem to merge into teachers’ conceptual and procedural knowledge and exert stronger influences in building their understanding of the job particulars than teacher education/training, which is sandwiched between powerful forces of their life history and hands-on teaching practice. Borg (2006) asserts that teachers’ knowledge, judgments, beliefs, and related constructs are situated within contexts of teaching communities and hence their jurisdiction. Separating them in research is unjustified since they are not separated in teachers’ minds. Undeniably, it is difficult to determine whether a teacher’s claim that FL learners feel bad about error correction is informed by his or her classroom observations, latest research findings, personal experience as a language learner, or feedback from the students themselves.

Connors and Halligan’s (2015) conceptualization of beliefs does not relate them very closely with knowledge. In their view, beliefs “comprise primary convictions about
Formulated as statements, they share the characteristic of declarative knowledge, yet their subjective nature is an important distinguishing property. Other dimensions of beliefs include varying degrees of conviction, scope, evidence, interrelationship, or resistance to change that such statements display. For example, in this study, one subject expressed a thought that we [teachers] all need to be in a healthy competitive environment to push us to be better (T1-11). As reasonable as it might seem to be, the reflection communicated the teacher’s personal attitude rather than an empirical truth. The inclusive determiner all left no doubt that she shared an idealized view on professional development.

Indeed, identifying the character of knowledge representations teachers operate on is a demanding research objective. However, it is proposed here that such attempts seem fully justified, for instructional decisions (and statements) teachers make reflect their thinking and understanding of the learners’ thinking and understanding (Macel1lan & Soden, 2003). Problem situations create natural opportunities for teachers to prompt voluntary investigation into their causes and effects. Lines of reasoning and explanations articulated in such circumstances are likely to indicate not only the sources of knowledge instructors activate, but also their relevance. For example, the teacher’s expectation that all group members should deliver their individual speeches on a given topic within equal time limit is didactically valid unless the learners demonstrate diverse language abilities and presentation skills, and the weakest ones get penalized for failing to meet the requirement. Without a rational justification why the speaking time should be a decisive component of the grade in this case, the teacher’s perception of the task merely reveals his or her ignorant disregard for the need of differentiation. When a problem arises and some students show evident frustration, the instructor might engage in analysis, the effectiveness of which will depend to a large extent on his or her awareness of where the idea came from. The discovery that it was a personal inclination rather than an informed choice can motivate change in the teacher, i.e. improve search for and organization of knowledge around problems in the future, but, when openly expressed, it can also substantially support research into sources of teachers’ understanding.

**Experience** provides a source of knowledge in FL instruction cited most frequently by practitioners (Crookes & Arakaki, 1999). Understood as the person’s involvement or exposure to job-related events, it triggers thoughts in or leaves
impressions on teachers that may cause them to build thinking schemata or verify and reinforce existing ones. Calderhead (1996) identifies significant classroom situations as the key components of teaching experience, which make instructors establish sub-types of knowledge used as a basis for instant/interactive problem-solving and decision-making. In Borg’s (2006) view, experience includes both planned and spontaneous choices of instructional strategies, interaction with learners’ motivations, strengths/weaknesses across language skills, temperaments, or prior knowledge, institutional norms and expectations, cooperation with colleagues, as well as emotionally-loaded episodes (Borg, 2006).

Jensen’s (2012) study reports that informal dialogue in a workplace is regarded by teachers as an instance of particularly valuable experience enhancing their understanding of the job. Statistically, mid-career practitioners have been recognized to show a tendency to seek (and receive) confirmation from their fellows that the way they see phenomena is right or that the quick-fix ideas they chose to handle issues in class are just as excusable. In this study, for example, a senior teacher (17 years in service) described a critical incident in which she engaged her colleagues as “impartial” arbiters. Having fumed at the English Faculty students over their use of L1 in group activities, the instructor heard from her fellow teachers that what she had done was the only way to discipline the students and solve the problem. Had the practitioner not proceeded to think through the situation and searched for a deeper understanding, she would have settled the case with a reinforced belief she was right in her interpretations. Instead, she reviewed the literature and developed a scientific perspective on the situation, which considered a range of psycho-linguistic factors operating in the advanced FL classroom that could possibly obstruct the learning process. The explanation emerged from what the teacher recognized as “a didactic challenge” – a disturbance which made her confront her established practical knowledge and see its deficiency. Irrespective of the final outcome, it is tempting to speculate that the experienced teacher perceived other teachers as a declared source of expertise rather than penetrating critique of her competence.

Younger practitioners demonstrate a similar tendency. Huberman’s (1993) study concludes that beginner instructors treasure opportunities to exploit colleagues to help them rationalize their actions, observations, concerns, and feelings about different aspects of the job. Maynard and Furlong (1995) observe the same patterns of behavior among
novice teachers and name it early idealism, the phase characterized by increased eagerness to understand things before they reach the strenuous survival phase. Farrell (2006), however, claims the opposite. His study provides evidence to suggest that beginner teachers fail to be proactive and engage in dialogue until they find themselves in highly disturbing situations that require professional assistance. Novices in ELT environments mainly turn to their mentors in pursuit of psychological comfort and support when they feel helpless to make sense of matters on their own. Yet, those who seek communication and apply the guidelines from the supervisors indeed become better teachers in their early years of practice, for they learn not only from the feedback, but also from the systematic articulation of how foreign language didactics as an academic discipline translates to daily classroom routine.

Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) perceive hands-on experience as a major force that drives adult learners from one stage of development to another. As opposed to other researchers (see Gustin, 1985; Sosniak, 1985; Lesgold, 1984; Flower & Hayes, 1981; Phelps & Shanteau, 1978), they never specified the span of practice required for a novice to fully metamorphose into an expert. The model of skill development which they propose rests entirely upon changes that intensive activity within a domain triggers in learners with regard to their perspectives, commitment, or administration of procedures. Specifically, the path to competence leads from the context-free and rule-bound perception of one’s own performance, typical of novices and advanced beginners, through the mindful review of circumstances in goal setting, planning, and decision making, common for competent practitioners, to the departure from deliberate analytical thinking in favor of action that intuitively copies familiar patterns from the past situations in proficient practitioners. Ultimately, the expert level is characterized by a person’s ability to see what needs to be achieved, but “thanks to his or her vast repertoire of situational discriminations, he or she also sees immediately how to achieve this goal” (Dreyfus, 2004, p. 180).

Beside experience, an equally important point of reference for teachers remains their prior education, i.e. distinct preferences which have grown from both their observations of different teacher styles and their own experiences as learners. For example, a teacher who found graded readers useful for his or her fluency building in English might feel an urge to encourage his or her students to practice the same, while
someone who never enjoyed the taste of group work is likely to diminish its value in favor of individual contribution. Even novices have their conceptualizations of teaching, resulting not only from initial teacher training, but also from memories of their class environments, motivations, and commitments (Wysocka, 2003; Borg, 2003). No matter how naïve and inaccurate these conceptualizations are, when enhanced by teachers’ moral, intellectual, and/or psycho-physical qualifications, they inform their cognitions and set their minds to challenges ahead (Gabryś-Barker, 2012).

The understanding of language learning relies on teachers’ episodic memory and thus forms sets of beliefs and personal theories rather than principled knowledge. Nevertheless, studies show that teachers make extensive use of their learning histories in their classroom practices. For example, Bailey et al. (1996) report that one of the maxims teachers developed and applied in their work concerned the teacher personality and style as most influential in FL learning. Also, Numrick’s (1996) study shows that images from the past form models of action, especially for novice teachers and consequently regulate their choice of teaching strategies. While teaching culture in the English classroom is a highly welcome component, teaching grammar carries mainly negative connotations.

Professional experience and teachers’ memories of their own language learning establish the conceptual foundation for their didactic moves, but they do not exhaust the list of potential influences. Mollon (2000) proposes that what is pre- or sub-conscious can highly contribute to our understanding of reality because “it does draw upon the pre-existing and externally existing words, images, and cultural references” (p. 41). As such it is personal and relevant. There is evidence to assume that some decisions we make are prepared pre-consciously (Eysenck & Keane, 2010, p. 610), or that a pre- or sub-conscious aspect of building and using knowledge is present in every task we approach, preceding, succeeding, or even overlapping the stage of information processing (Sun, Zhang, & Mathews, 2009). However, as Carpenter et al. (1998) comment, we do not know enough about how the brain autonomously unifies diverse sources of information in response to changing external conditions. Neither is it clear how its learning system can remain plastic (adapting new patterns) and stable (preserving old patterns) at the same time (the stability-plasticity dilemma).

The impact of contextual factors on teachers’ cognitions is indisputable. The institution policies, standards, and requirements, the availability of didactic materials, the
relationships within the teaching community, and the culture of the place all interact with
the ways individual instructors understand their roles and responsibilities. The evidence
confirms that such aspects of teaching as lesson planning, arrangement of teaching
resources, group management, and classroom procedures can be seriously affected by the
realities the teachers face and hence shape their concepts, thoughts, and attitudes towards
teaching and learning in general (Crookes & Arakaki, 1999; Burns, 1996; Johnson, 1996).
In this study, a young practitioner made it explicit that her different workplaces (a state
school and an English language center) made her act and think in surprisingly different
modes. Her efforts to cross the gap between these two turned into a critical incident she
felt highly motivated to report.

Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that through active participation within the social
and cultural setting, the beginner builds his or her declarative knowledge, perception of
the venture which the community shares, as well as practical ways of solving problems.
A better understanding of the environment, including people, situations, and activities
marks a shift of a newcomer from the periphery of the group towards its core and might
ultimately grant him or her the standing of an expert.

1.2.2. Teacher learning processes
The capacity to guide thought and behavior equals intentionality, namely predisposition
to act, driven by our curiosity, needs, and attitudes. Intentions can steer perceptual and
attentional processes in the way that they have learning as a goal rather than an incidental
outcome (Reber, 1993). They are hence internal motivations that stimulate the available
resources to work up to capacity, i.e. to plan and initiate activity for the sake of established
objectives as well as to visualize its effects. When in resource deficit, teachers can re-
assess or stimulate alternative concepts and mappings to regulate, in light of the feedback
information, their understanding of and response to the given circumstances. They are
capable, even sub-consciously, of confronting their knowledge, executing command over
their own cognition, and building what might be seen as their self-empowerment and self-
renewal.

However, as discussed above, teachers’ professional understanding has diverse
sources, and their claims can be assumption- or intuition-driven. Certainly, not every
teacher realizes that his or her conviction that Type 2 and 3 conditionals should be taught
together is most probably the result of the textbook controlling the teaching method and implicitly prescribing the classroom procedures. The representation in the teacher’s mind might be strong enough to function as a given and as such participate in the formation of new representations. Kelly (2003) holds that the awareness of learning is largely dependent on the stability and distinctiveness of the representations of what has been learned in the past. Dehaene and Naccache (2001) have associated awareness with increased activity of the brain in its anterior cingulate and dorsolateral prefrontal cortex regions. Brain activation in these parts has also been observed during retrieval from declarative memory. Wheeler, Stuss, and Tulving (1997) maintain that both episodic and semantic memory modes are determined by special kinds of awareness only adults can develop. The former appeals for autobiographical (self-oriented) knowledge that allows them to think back and recollect events and internal states they previously experienced, while the latter requires a more general awareness of ideas and concepts that constitute their knowledge of the world.

Lewicki’s (1986) hypothesis that implicit knowledge is inaccessible to explicit retrieval, non-modifiable, and differing from explicit knowledge representations is not consistent with research findings which indicate that both of the processing modes guide subjects’ behavior in complex cognitive tasks, especially problem-solving. Mathews et al.’s (1989) study suggested that the cognitive system has different architectural features which demonstrate “synergistic interaction rather than potential interference” (p.1099); some processes within the system operate on explicit conceptual representation or mental model of the task (model-based processing) while others on memories of individual experiences with the task (memory-based processing). Similarly, Seger’s (1994) study showed that even when not engaged in hypothesis testing, the subjects could notice and define patterns in the input, which led to the proposition that implicit knowledge representations trigger some sort of awareness that allows human information processing system to apply strategies, look for regularities, and develop clear concepts (p. 174). Fu et al. (2015) hold that past learning experiences increase learners’ tacit understanding of “how resources are cognitively represented” (p. 386), which in turn enhances the way organisms integrate new information through controlled processes of higher-order thinking.
In Kahneman’s (2011) dual-processing model of the brain, human beings are remembering rather than experiencing selves, whose memory, radically speaking, is notoriously unreliable. Kahneman (2011) holds that intuitive, impression-driven, and associative System 1 operates uninterruptedly without intentional control and nourishes human choices and judgments. System 2, by contrast, engages in demanding mental tasks that require computational effort, retrieval, but above all attention. The latter falls back on the former in the sense that high-speed *ego depletion* — the process of draining the cognitive resources — results in System 2 simplifying thought processes and easily adopting (often unjustified) ideas generated within System 1. Thorough analysis is then replaced by hasty conclusion-drawing. According to Kahneman (2011), our confidence in the potency of evidence-based rational thinking is indeed exaggerated and questionable, to say the least. He claims it is fallacies, biases, and illusions that infect our thinking, i.e. lie the foundation for human reasoning and decision-making. “The two fictions” (System 1 and System 2) that account for defective human reason do not prevent people from proposing and disposing their understanding of the world and developing efficient ways of dealing with its complexities. The phenomenon of expertise illustrates this clearly. Expert intuition — an instant recognition of circumstances — is not free from heuristic/cognitive biases, yet it sanctions drafts of reality as the basis for its evaluation, thus lucid and coherent choices.

Seger (1994) suggests that this might be because the human mind continually seeks the consistency between the external environment and its internal representation. According to Chakraborty (2010), the search starts with self-organizing neural networks that govern cognitive processes by following unsupervised clustering algorithms. He identifies the state of a neural network in which a category prototype (top-down expectation) is close enough to the current input (bottom-up signal) as *resonance*. Categories “resonate” with the input (i.e. classify it) if there is a stored pattern that the input resembles within a certain tolerance, while the pattern is modified to a certain degree to resemble the input. If there is no pattern to classify input, there is a new category established by storing a new pattern similar to the input. It is worth noting that learned top-down expectations help to focus attention on significant input, filtering out overwhelming amounts of sensory signals, which could possibly destabilize one’s previously learned memories. Put simply, as intentional human beings, we can choose to
attend to selected stimuli battering our senses. However, as Grossberg (1999) points out, learning takes place only under stable conditions, which means that the top-down mechanism must be active and continually matching the learned expectations about the world against the changing reality (p.12).

Last but not least, situated in the context, information people have access to here-and-now has its specific nature. Its trading rests upon two natural processes: encoding the intended message into symbolic form and decoding language forms into concepts and propositions. Human interaction is a strategic behavior based on cognitive operations. Mutual understanding and influence seem to be determined by the precision of mental representations that people work on, effective synchronization of thought and action, and the accuracy of articulation and interpretation of their communicative intentions. The assumption that learning takes the form of episodes in space and time, which can be regarded as mental operations immersed in the context of verbal communication, implies that human cognitive functioning is dependent on the external stimuli, and other participants in interaction specifically.

In professional environments, information flows between co-workers, the principal purpose of whom is to communicate their expertise and give feedback on the expertise of others. Hence, verbal communication within domains, including FL learning and teaching, creates opportunities for transactions in specialist highly-structured knowledge. The subsystems of the information processing mechanism (e.g. perception, attention, or memory) build meaning by drawing on a wide spectrum of parameters of communicative situations, including the image of partners (their physical attributes, roles, or mental states), the complexity and/or relevance of information they generate, and sensory modalities engaged (Styles, 2006). Attention, for example, intentionally guided towards goals and meant to establish meaningful connections between the individual mind and the world, has the prime role to define the importance of matters, i.e. to decide what information to bring into its clear focus that will form a personal experience, and a memory, and what not. At the same time, though, it reveals limitations such as temporariness, withdrawal, low intensity, or lack of arousal, all of which can be conditioned by environmental/external factors.

In sum, teacher cognition embraces networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs that teachers hold about their field of expertise and that continually grow as a result of
the computational operations of the brain on all kinds of mental representations. These operations drive learning processes, the use of language, and problem-solving. The latter is an important integral component of formal instruction. The cognitive effort teachers put into settling disturbing and/or unexpected situations is given proper consideration in the following section.

1.2.3. Problem-solving

The central tenet of cognitive psychology is that learning occurs as internal processes of the mind and results in controlled re/organization of knowledge representations when solving problems within a domain, no matter if the problems regard planning, decision-making, or explanation (Thagard, 2005). Problem-solving is a case of human information processing (HIP) oriented at finding a solution path by constructing a successful sequence of mental calculations. The latter require activating existing knowledge structures, recognizing and encoding relevant information available in the environment, and identifying a problem space, i.e. missing information needed for effective computing (Lindsay & Norman, 2013).

Professionals, especially those whose knowledge shows the peak levels of organization, can handle non-routine tasks (problems) due to their developed ability to retrieve and intelligently re-deploy information (schemata) accumulated around the principles of their disciplines (Billett, 2001). Their reasoning processes, which involve making inferences, ordering, identifying regularities, analogies, and anomalies, building hierarchies, analyzing, categorizing, and grouping, target at making available information understood, explicit, and elaborate and involve specific brain activation. Studies demonstrate that prefrontal cortex (PFC) and posterior parietal cortex (PPC) are distinctly engaged not only in perceptual processing in order to construct representations of the environment, but also in the assessment of causality therein. For example, Cummins (2014) found out that casual inference activated in both PPC and PFC guides problem-solving as it rests judgments about causes and effects on a great deal of estimation and probabilistic computation rather than logical rules. Other researchers confirm that the moments of problem-solving, which command the increased integration of distributed representations and heavy confidence in memory storage and retrieval, induce the activity of frontal-midline theta, rhythmic waves, whose frequency correlates with the intricacy
of mental tasks, that is the number of relations defined as pertinent to the solution (Cavanagh & Frank, 2014; Holyoak, 2005). In short, it is justifiable to claim that higher mental operations of reasoning are not only largely influenced by the functions of the hippocampus, but also, they actively assist and are assisted by the associate cognitive functions: perception and memory.

These operational abilities indicate that human beings can efficiently make use of their cognitive resources when approaching tasks, and those that present themselves as problematic in particular. Problems, however, take much more than choosing one option from a pool of available alternatives to achieve a goal. They entail composite cognitive operations that move problem solvers from the identification that the situation is tangled to the satisfactory resolution. First of all, for a problem to be effectively solved, it is necessary to define a problem space, which means to represent a gap noticed between the current state of affairs and a desired one while the way to cross this gap is unknown (Hayes, 1989). Understanding the nature of the problem is, then, the prerequisite for its solution. Pretz, Naples, and Sternberg (2003) suggest that developing a solution strategy involves organizing knowledge about the problem and allocating relevant mental resources. Monitoring the implementation of strategy and evaluating its outcome close the cycle of problem solving although Pretz et al. (2003) argue efficient problem solvers are flexible about the sequence of the stages (p. 4).

Mayer (1990) observes that the mental process of problem-solving does not offer any obvious method of solution, nor does it guarantee that the goal will be reached. Some situations are so complex and ambiguous that they rise above a systematic search for a solution – they must be broken down into meaningful units/levels to be able to locate the core of the problem; other situations merely require zooming or inspecting operations on pictorial representations because their solutions depend on visual appearance rather than logical thinking. Also, ill-defined problems – under-specified circumstances which necessitate either gap-filling decisions or producing an answer without a full understanding of the situation (Hayes, 1989) – result in unreliable solutions unless the solver re/frames them explicitly, which involves modifications in perception and coding processes.

The reason why some individuals demonstrate relative certainty and consistency about making choices and formulating judgments within their domains is that the retrieval
information they have access to is highly systematized and structured, and hence can be easily and qualitatively evaluated for its relevance in episodes of strategic goal-oriented behavior. In order to decide what is relevant and what is not, these individuals have to recognize and use valid cues from the environment. For example, it has been observed that even a single discriminatory signal may be enough for an expert to determine the direction of search for solution, while non-experts tend to consider all relevant information before they arrive at a verdict (Chen, 2002). Further, there is evidence to support the view that experts actively monitor the progress towards a goal and shift to superior strategies, for example using the criterion failure—a heuristic that acts as an alarm buzz that goes off whenever the steps forward are too slow (see MacGregor, Ormerod, & Chronicle, 2001).

Sweller and Levine (1982) point out that interpretations of problems can be based on random search or rules of thumb, which impair the accuracy of solutions, including ones generated by experts. In their study, the subjects mainly chose to stick to the means-ends type of analysis (a heuristic based on establishing sub-goals to reduce the difference between the current state and the goal state; Chuderski & Nęcka, 2010) even though it proved entirely inadequate to the given problem. Unterrainer et al. (2004) conclude that although neuroimaging research confirms the increased activity of the brain during in-depth analysis of complex tasks, heuristics also involve operations within the prefrontal cortex, the stimulation of which is linked with complex cognitive processing.

Previous experience plays an important role in problem-solving because concepts, scripts, and schemata formed from past events are constantly made use of in new situations and affect the way we approach current tasks. This transfer of knowledge may be either beneficial or detrimental, though. According to Chen (2002), there are three types of correspondence between problems: superficial (irrelevant details), structural (main components), and procedural (operations) similarity, all of which allow people to engage in past-present analogical reasoning. In many domains of expertise, so-called positive transfer allows people to reach desired goals faster by applying familiar schemata when they decide the current problem resembles one/s from the past. In vague circumstances, though, where more than one correspondence comes in play and reveals different, sometimes conflicting, associations between the previous and current situation, analogies can be generated by “selective focusing” (Holyoak, 2005, p. 125). This is
because people seek achieving analogical coherence and, as evidence shows, they tend to
demean incompatible aspects of “then” and “now” as long as they notice parallel parts
and, on this basis, choose to believe the then and now represent a match (Spellman &
Holyoak, 1992).

Holyoak (2005) sees the ability to acquire and manipulate relational concepts, i.e.
to appreciate analogies between objects and situations as the key aspect of human
intelligence and cognition. He explains:

Two situations are analogous if they share a common pattern of relationships
among their constituent elements even though the elements themselves differ
across the two situations. Typically, one analog, termed the source or base, is
more familiar or better understood than the second analog, termed the target. This
asymmetry in initial knowledge provides the basis for analogical transfer, using
the source to generate inferences about the target. (p. 117)

Holyoak (2005) emphasizes that in problem-solving, analogical thinking goes far
beyond identifying similarities between analogs. The process involves retrieving
structured knowledge from long-term memory, representing and mapping connections
in working memory, making inferences as well as relational generalizations (p. 136).
These have been recognized as four major procedures/practices in analogical reasoning
that aim at activating prior understandings, combining them with novel information, and
establishing plausible theories/schemata for discovered source-target constellations.

Essentially, a target situation that calls for interpretation and response (e.g. a
dilemma/problem) prompts a search for a point of reference and thus can be perceived
as a retrieval cue. The effectiveness of the search for an analogous case and mapping its
segments so as to detect correspondences to the target characteristics might be affected
by the remoteness/proximity of the domain which yields the source analog. Empirical
studies show that noticing the relevance of the latter and retrieving convergence
solutions even from distant past is easier within the same field, and usually takes place
spontaneously (Keane, 1987; Chen, 1996). The spontaneity of transfer implies not only
successful retrieval, but also a strategic tendency of human subjects to build parallels
between their experiences, sometimes at the cost of precision (Holyoak, 2005).
Structural parallels are particularly strong, which means that direct similarity of concepts (e.g. an essay plagiarized, a classroom rule violated, an acute ear inflammation, or yet another romantic movie with a dramatic resolution) can cause an almost immediate reminding from the past and lead to an uncritical replication of responses. The access to source analogs is even easier “when multiple memory traces, each somewhat similar to the cue, must compete to be retrieved” (ibid.)

As imprecise as they might be, analogies are important sources of ideas; however, they seem to obstruct any form of creative problem-solving, i.e. reduce motivation to make deliberate effort and search for new paths to solving old problems (Hayes, 1989). Holyoak (2005) adopts a contrasting point of view; he holds that a source analog can serve as the basis for novel assumptions or diagnoses because “correspondences provide the input to an inference engine that generates new target propositions” (p. 128) and consequently nominate adequate substitutions for the source elements or balance out non-existent yet desired knowledge about the target situation. Holyoak and his colleagues (1994) named these inference building operations “copy with substitution and generation” (CWSG). Numerous studies have confirmed, though, that the procedure is not free from inference errors, especially when parallel elements are mis-mapped and inferences, integrated with prior knowledge, taken for stated facts. This false recognition of inferences in subsequent memory tests is primarily caused by intense intellectual effort that goes into understanding a problem and a ‘desperate’ search through the existing mental representations for a sign of inherent similarities.

A number of relations discovered between the source and the target, including inferences about the latter, leads to building generalizations and over-generalizations, too. Generalizations can be interpreted as “abstract schemas that establish an explicit representation of the commonalities” (Holyoak, 2005, p. 130) and demonstrate the human propensity to continually transfer convergent solutions to new problems and to expand one’s understanding of the underlying causal structures of analogs. Throughout professions, inexperienced practitioners gradually gather experiences which help them construct schemata and enhance the formation of further inferences. By contrast, experts have access to multitudes of representations that are easily stimulated in unfamiliar circumstances to offer familiar interpretations.
Research on **English teachers as problem solvers** is rather limited, yet instructors facing difficulties in their classroom practice have been extensively reported across studies. As expected, the problem space in TEFL is huge and ranges from interactive didactic dilemmas, to teachers’ metalinguistic awareness, to their misinterpretations of observed phenomena, to limited knowledge about language (Breen et al., 2001; Tercanlioglu, 2001; Tsui, 2003; Andrews, 1999; Gatbonton, 1999; Berry, 1997; Breen, 1991). One interesting example concerns a teacher who implemented a process writing approach in her TESOL course but soon discovered it failed to assist the learners in accuracy-building. The teacher’s sense of responsibility for her students’ performance in accuracy-testing assessments outweighed her beliefs about what constitutes an effective way of building writing skills and forced her to return to the product-oriented approach (Tsui, 2003).

The domain of teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) is the territory where didactic moves of the instructors in response to challenges in the classroom rest not only upon their understanding of FL use and learning, but also various contextual constraints, learners’ dispositions and backgrounds, interpersonal relations, and their own teaching capacity. Having said that, teachers, like all human beings, are intrinsically enticed to extend the application of discrete observations or diagnoses to situations at variance. For example, a troublesome student can cause the instructor to antagonize the whole class, which in turn might affect the lesson conduct as well as learning outcomes; the teacher’s aversion to writing might lead him or her to a conviction that nobody likes it and that the deliberate neglect of the skill will prevent the learners from both mental and physical agony; while a successful game-based class is likely to yield a thought that learners have to be entertained to pay attention and collaborate. It follows that an effective problem solver is not only aware of the problem space, resources available for computational purposes, and internal/external constraints on the process, but above all capable of constructing models of problem situations that facilitate rather than hinder the search for solutions.

**1.3. Understanding expertise in teaching**

The nature of human capability to perform expertly and the dynamics of its growth arouse vivid interest among specialists and prompt investigation across disciplines, including the
field of foreign language instruction. Chi, Glaser, and Farr (1988) refer to high levels of competence as “the possession of an organized body of conceptual and procedural knowledge that can be readily accessed and used with superior monitoring and self-regulation skills” (p. xxi). Glaser and Chi (1988) argue that although the properties of knowledge and nature of problems might vary from one area of expertise to another, the effectiveness of using knowledge and solving problems is a distinguishing characteristic of experts across professional domains. Similarly, Eysenck and Keane (2010) hold that performing complex tasks within knowledge-rich domains is a way to demonstrate the attributes of experts, such as perceptual superiority, high speed of processing, in-depth problem representation, and qualitative problem analysis.

The cognitive perspective on expertise provides the basic conceptual framework for further considerations about teachers of English as a foreign language and diagnostic operations they perform when faced with disturbing circumstances, referred to as critical incidents (CIs). What follows are the aspects of expertise relevant to the research objectives of this study, among which professional knowledge – the central dimension of teacher cognition – holds a commanding lead. The others are teachers’ reflectivity, efficiency, and awareness. Complementary approaches to the concept of expertise will be discussed in brief, too. They demonstrate the scope of research agenda including, among others, the attributional dimension of expertise (Sternberg & Frensch, 1992), the relationship between the mind and social practice in which knowing and thinking are embedded (Billett, 2001; Collins & Evans, 2007), as well as the background of this practice, i.e. „the material, spatial, organizational, and conceptual arrangements“ (Eyal, 2013, p. 871).

1.3.1. Professional knowledge
According to Hattie (2003), the prerequisites to competent teaching practice are 1) teachers’ professional knowledge, obtained through pre-service training, and 2) its intelligent use, oriented towards the success of learners. Having said that, a university graduate is likely to commit basic instructional errors in the classroom despite their formal qualifications, while an experienced instructor specializing in teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP) might struggle to effectively plan and conduct general English
classes for younger age groups. This implies that the knowledge which the language
teacher is expected to display so as to be recognized as an expert is difficult to determine.

**Practical knowledge.** The concept of practical knowledge is not uncommon in
theorizing about teacher expertise, yet it has been variously defined. Elbaz (1983), for
eexample, maintains that static components of teacher knowledge, such as knowledge of
the subject discipline and learning conceptions, the curriculum, self, and the institution in
which it operates interact dynamically with “the world of practice” and the teacher’s
values/beliefs, the result of which are actions informed by *personalized theory*, namely
knowledge serving as a function of a teacher’s response to the situation (p. 5). What she
sees as practical knowledge is not merely a repertoire of instructional techniques and
management skills that teachers have successfully developed and extensively employ in
the classroom, but rather those they understand and identify with in terms of their
propositional substance. Elbaz points out the importance of integrating conceptual and
procedural knowledge for the sake of quality teaching, but she describes the application
of the former as entirely implicit. The question remains how practitioners justify/validate
their didactic decisions and determine the quality of teaching, especially in critical
circumstances, if they do not raise questions about the principles governing their choices.
In Wysocka’s (2003) study, for example, teachers of English openly admitted that they
favored the communicative approach to FL instruction, but they were unable to properly
explain how they applied the CLT principles in the classroom, or what these principles
were. Apparently, their conceptual and procedural knowledge, which Elbaz (1983)
recognizes as essentially complementary, operate in isolation and produce intuition-
driven didactic moves/choices.

In contrast, Clandinin and Connelly (1995) argue that the depth of teacher
knowledge can be best assessed through teachers’ accounts of classroom events and
generalizations about teaching based on these events, which secure a continuum within a
person’s experience and provide a perspective to see new experience. In their view, expert
teachers create highly comprehensive representations (models) of situations because they
see a lot and hence build more accurate judgments than less experienced practitioners.
However, similar to Elbaz’s model, the conceptual foundation is lost in what Clandinin
and Connelly call teachers’ *personal practical knowledge* (PPK). First, the underlying
teaching principles might never surface in narratives oriented at the story development,
rather than a diagnostic examination. Second, a most extensive interpretation of teaching experiences does not necessarily equal an informed analysis. For example, an instructor who over-edited her students’ writing and thus caused discouraged reactions of the group could quickly realize that her move was completely counterproductive. However, if the teacher’s determination to reduce the span of correction or to shift its gravity towards positive feedback were solely motivated by students’ response, it would reveal her misconceived idea of error correction in FL production. Apparently, the teacher’s professional role is to help the learners not only eliminate imperfections and push the learning process forward, but also understand that editing their writing is a perfectly opportune moment to do so (the example has been inspired by a critical incident from this study). The line of interpretative thought which merely follows an action-consequence pattern fails to check the adequacy of the classroom reality against the arguments based on the knowledge of discipline.

The conceptions of teacher expertise considering the practical dimension of knowledge as its foundation do not seem entirely unsubstantiated. Empirical research into cognitive processes, which Newell and Simon (1976) identified as fundamental to rational decision-making and problem-solving, led them to the conclusion that, in the face of existing constraints (e.g. natural deficit of available data, time, or human intellectual potency), the quality of decisions is influenced by such factors as the type of task, the conditions under which it is approached, but above all the organization of knowledge that the professional demonstrates. The evidence collected in the 1970s and early 1980s from a range of studies, including chess players, physicists, nurses, engineers, and many more, confirmed that the ways expert and non-expert subjects think while problem-solving are distinguishable, and that the discrepancies lie mainly in how they represent, categorize, and reclaim information.

Chase and Simon (1973) pointed out that experts, like all human beings, store information in schemata by perceptual chunking, the strategy of encoding data by inter-relating elementary units of content and retrieving the representations of those groupings as coherent wholes. However, they are exceptionally efficient in doing so. As a result, in problem situations, they do not agonize or rack their brains about the right selection among alternatives, just as non-experts do (Johnson, 2005). Instead, they tend to investigate problems qualitatively, trying to understand what is required of them, identify
principles behind the challenge so as to set approximate criteria of relevance, and respond with the optimal solution. Chase and Simon (1973) demonstrated that it takes a sizable pool of intricate bits of information (up to 100,000 chunks) and a lengthy span of dedicated practice (up to 10 years) in order to deliver the performance of a chess master. More critically, though, they determined that the capacity of short-term memory of non-expert and expert subjects representing the domain of chess playing is comparable, the superiority of the latter lying in their ability to circumvent the constraints of memory by using patterns of thought (Ericsson & Charness, 1994). Evidence supported the view that knowledge activation when solving problems and reaching decisions can be seen as information-processing operations ranging from a strenuous attempt of a novice to make sense of unconnected units of information in the working memory (backward search), to cognitively effortless retrieval/recall of schemata from the long-term memory as an expert’s response to distinctive cues from the domain (forward search).

The idea of chunking essentially points to the influence of highly-organized domain knowledge on action, and on the efficiency of decision-making processes in particular. Its main criticism concerns the fact that it fails to relate mechanisms at the chunk level with higher level representations used by experts (Eysenck & Keane, 2010). In other words, the information structures it posits seem insufficiently flexible and schematic to facilitate complex problem-solving processes. In such “unstructured areas” of professional activity as teaching or management, where problems are often ill-defined, objectives misty, and the outcome of decisions merely incalculable, experts use analytical reflection on their responses to critical situations which expands their understanding of observed phenomena (see Johnson, 2005). Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) agreed that the competence to make reasoned observations of one’s behavior is an exclusive attribute of expert practitioners; however, they argued that expertise is exactly where fine professional judgments are made “in a manner that defies explanation” (p. 36).

As indicated earlier, this view embraces the leading assumption behind Dreyfus and Dreyfus’s (1986) concept of expertise – experts produce their instant situational responses without apparent thought. Dreyfus’s (2004) understanding is that “with enough experience in a variety of situations, all seen from the same perspective but requiring different tactical decisions, the brain of the expert gradually decomposes this class of situations into sub-classes, each of which requires a specific response” (p. 180).
Sensitivity to subtle clues and symptoms, which experts employ to recognize situation patterns in routinized reality, distinguishes them from other performers within a professional domain. In this respect, knowledge revealed through intelligent action does not require explicit articulation. Conversely, the evidence shows that attempts to evoke declarative knowledge in expert pilots or drivers while on the job can considerably worsen their performance (Tsui, 2003).

Learning theorist, Schön (1983), also recognized the category of know-how which “does not stem from a prior intellectual operation” (p. 51) but saw it as embedded in “much of the spontaneous behavior of skillful practice” (ibid.). He regarded *skillful practice* not only as the process of efficient problem-solving, but problem-setting as well. While the former involves the selection of means to establish ends, the latter requires that means and ends be defined, which, Schön (1983) observed, does not happen a lot in real-world practice (p. 40). In short, he claimed that professionals rest their judgments upon *tacit understanding*, i.e. identifications they cannot specify, for they know more than they can name. Similarly, Benner’s (1984, 1996) studies of expert nurses confirm that judgments of quality they make in their professional life do not result from deliberate analysis of context, but rather from a well-developed perceptual ability and a sense of associations, which allows them to trigger intuitive responses.

The validity of intuitions about one’s knowledge and their in/accuracy was given substantial theoretical consideration. One view on how we know that we know is the assumption that we have direct access to memory traces while- and after learning and that we can identify both the presence and intensity of these traces in memory store (Koriat, 2007; Dunlosky & Hertzog, 1998). Accordingly, the feeling of knowing develops as a result of extracting a relevant item from memory. If the search brings no result, it will continue outside memory, in the input (Hart, 1965). By contrast, the cue-utilization view holds that we cannot access memory contents directly. Therefore, our judgments about what we know earn their validity through the validity of cues on which they are based, namely on “deliberate use of beliefs to reach an educated guess about one’s competence and cognitions, or on the application of nonanalytic heuristics that result in a sheer subjective feeling” (Koriat, 2007, p. 295). The two types of cues draw a distinction between so-called information- (theory) and experience-based cognitive monitoring and judgment, of which the latter is a subjective, unexplained intuition, similar to the tip-of-
the-tongue sensation. Nevertheless, there is evidence that cue-utilization is a common way to evaluate one’s learning outcomes. People tend to make judgments of what they know inferentially, with the assistance of signals of either perceptual or belief-grounded quality.

The interpretation of expertise as intuitive experience-driven action and tacit understanding behind it has been questioned by many researchers of the psychological nature of expertise. One major criticism concerns the incompleteness of the view that the tacit understanding of one’s actions and their consequences is sufficient to build schemata and use them to expertly handle further problems within the domain (Golombek, 1998). Another is that the term practice had been used vaguely, not to say misleadingly (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Römer, 1993; Jørgensen & Lehmann, 1997; Glaser & Chi, 1988). In paid-work environments, people practice their craft skills by repetitively handling the range of cases they are called upon, but practice is also relevant to the period of preparation/training, which is expected to allow the individual to develop adequate competence so as to enable a professional career. Ericsson et al. (1993) claimed that the pre- and in-service activity should be treated separately, as the learning conditions they offer are distinct. For example, with finite resources in their hands (e.g. facilities, organizational skills, or professional development opportunities within an institution) but under the pressure of time and productivity, workers might choose to rely upon “previously well-entrenched methods rather than exploring alternatives with unknown reliability” (Ericsson et al., 1993, p. 368). In such settings, motivated habitual behavior (coping routines) can accommodate them in all sorts of instant or challenging circumstances and possibly obstruct learning processes.

Ericsson et al. (1993) put forward the concept of professional practice which denotes specially designed, highly structured, and closely monitored actions, aimed to maintain high levels of both preparation and operation through regular informative feedback and continuous work towards expertise. They pointed to intentionally maximized efforts to do better that push the person’s learning and referred to them as deliberate practice, its main goal being to notice critical points in task execution perceived as problem situations, to explore efficient strategies for amending them, and to gain ground for more demanding operations. Studies show that there is a relationship between the level of attained performance and the age of the learner; however, evidence
suggests that when committed to deliberate practice, grown-ups, with their substantial mental capacity, expand knowledge remarkably fast, especially at the outset of training, which is the case of adults acquiring vocational qualifications (Ericsson & Smith, 1991). Further on, though, due to individual differences, it becomes too exhaustive for many to sustain or increase both the intensity and quality of practice in order to secure steady progress and to acquire complex abilities that overcome the limits of STM and sequential processing (Ericsson & Charness, 1994, p. 725). Even so, the claim that hours of studious practice result in improved perceptual and motor abilities has been long accepted and built upon in psychology and neighboring disciplines.

**Scientific knowledge.** The complementary perspective on expertise in teaching places the emphasis on teacher scientific knowledge. Shulman (1987), who considers practical knowledge as “a truncated conceptualization” (p. 108), proposes that it is a reasonable interpretation of general propositions and theories within the discipline that naturally aids the validation and internalization of teachers’ practical experience, the process he refers to as anchoring theory in practice. In his view, expert teachers are expected not only to handle the complexities of teaching/learning specific content, but also to offer scientific justification for the didactic moves they make when addressing these complexities. A sustained intellectual effort that teachers make to link knowledge accumulated by systematic study of their professional domain and their daily teaching constitutes what Shulman (1987) called “one central aspect of classroom life” (p. 6).

In their study, Wilson, Shulman, and Richert (1987) used Shulman’s model of content knowledge, whose core constituents refer to the teacher’s understanding of 1) the major findings of the academic discipline to the community and its paradigms established to guide inquiry in the field, 2) the ways of shaping and communicating the content for instructional purposes to make it intelligible and graspable from the learner’s perspective, and 3) the rationale behind the scope of recommended teaching material for specific proficiency levels, ages, or students’ needs. The results revealed that teachers, including teachers of English, have numerous difficulties transforming relevant content knowledge into teachable, or rather learnable, material due to their limited knowledge about their own disciplines. Similarly, a study by Brumfit et al. (1996) suggests that the subjects, teachers of English, showed no awareness of the importance of research into FL teaching/learning for their classroom practice, and grammar teaching in particular. Also,
Andrews (1999) found out that English instructors lacked declarative knowledge necessary to explain the nature of errors which they easily identified in text.

Detectable variables in teacher knowledge, similar to those proposed by Shulman, have been addressed in LATEX studies (Language Teaching Expertise). They referred to the areas of lesson planning, materials design, textbook evaluation, classroom and activity management, rapport building, skills development, and many more. The results of these studies show that good/expert teachers see possibilities for learning present in the situation and improvise a lot (freely depart from their plans) to achieve the curricular objectives. They deliberately consider and choose communication channels and strategies that most adequately activate learners’ cognitive schemata and intellectual potential to develop solutions to learning problems. In other words, they build on learners’ difficulties, i.e. recognize and handle any misconceptions of the content, resulting, for example, from L1 inferences, cultural differences, or fossilization (Tsui, 2003; Berliner, 2001; Richards, 1998; Nunan, 1992).

It is evident that teachers who correctly identify the principles underlying the selection of language input, its time and space distribution, skills development, and/or practice strategies can critically evaluate the relevance of theme-oriented activities. They can propose optional or modify the available material in order to most effectively serve both of these principles as well as learners’ needs. An illustration can be the case of two semantically and syntactically divergent expressions “used to” in English (verb and adjective-based), which are frequently introduced at one and same time in grammar syllabus. The form seems to account for this choice, while the distinct meanings justify a clear separation of these two. To successfully contextualize the two expressions within one teaching unit, i.e. to ensure discourse that highlights their distinct aspects, means to put additional effort not only on the part of teachers, but also on the part of pupils in order to settle relationships between the language forms that are not related conceptually. Expert teachers know how to modify the content and make the material approachable for learners in order to facilitate their learning processes.

The considerations about expert knowledge end with the question: “Is this not expertise which comes from intuition, experience, and ‘right-mindedness’ rather than scholarly disciplinary knowledge?” (Tripp, 2012, p. 129). Tripp’s assumption that the scientific basis of teachers’ thoughts and actions is necessary although difficult to identify
and prove in practice and that the adequate understanding of the nature of teaching/learning might be acquired through both the use of academic skills and practical competencies is logically valid. In isolation, neither of them is a sufficient condition for developing a professional approach to teaching: recognition that the empirical world – their classroom practice – provides for scientific theory. Only knowledge systematized on both practical and conceptual levels and available for continuous verification allows teachers to successfully locate the learners and the target – the command of the foreign language – on a mental map and hypothesize, simulate, and choose the optimal route to reach the destination. In other words, the teacher must know how learners learn, and consequently what to do, as well as how, when, and why so as to make it easier for them (Maclellan, 2015). Importantly, foreign language learning is not a linear process; to assist learners meandering along the path to proficiency, teachers need to employ expert comprehensive knowledge, not flashes of insight and intuition.

1.3.2. Reflectivity
Reflective thinking is a critical constituent of teacher expertise, including EFL instruction. Gabryś-Barker (2012) defines structured reflection as a deliberate intellectual process which integrally aims to confront one’s existing knowledge, to establish a personal meaning and interpretation of experiences, to challenge beliefs and individually-made assumptions, to introduce new solutions to uncertain situations, and to build new knowledge based on learning from experience (p. 73). Dreyfus (2004) further developed the model of skill development proposed by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986; see 1.2.1.) by adding the stages of Mastery and Practical Wisdom, which acknowledge reflectivity as serving a key nurturing function. Dreyfus emphasizes that human beings are constructed and changed by meaning, and we only learn how to construct, maintain, and adapt meaning through situational involvement. Hence, the process of learning should not be seen as simple linear growth, but rather spiral one, stimulated not only by practice, but also moments of reflection.

Psychologists have developed an approach to expertise which accepts the practical dimension of work as a source of knowledge and a pathway to mastery yet authorizes regular attempts on the part of practitioners to mobilize their mental resources, to seek congruence between thought and action, to conceptualize observable variation,
and to justify their decisions. Schön (1983) maintains that the intellectual rigor, executed to periodically inspect one’s own performance and to encourage new interpretations of familiar situations, can potentially enrich the repertoire of one’s principles, images, and behaviors that will serve as points of reference in the future. He stresses out that “through reflection, he [a practitioner] can surface and criticize the tacit understandings that have grown up around the repetitive experiences of a specialized practice” (p. 61). It has been hypothesized that automatized routine, i.e. effortless completion of certain segments of a task in hand, leaves performers with spare cognitive energy/resources to potentially expend to attend to the segments which have been recognized to require higher-order examination and/or novel solutions (Sternberg & Horvath, 1995; Glaser & Chi, 1988). This suggests that experts access their domain knowledge base not only in a cursory search of tried and tested answers, but also in order to deliberately monitor and re-organize existing knowledge representations.

In Schön’s (1983) view, reflection plays a role of an effective modification to over-learning. The syndrome of being over-learned becomes evident in exaggerated reliability on familiar patterns of thought and behavior (schemata) within a domain, which prevents practitioners from noticing and contemplating signs of anomaly or uniqueness therein. More importantly, however, scant attention paid to phenomena which need consideration might not only freeze performers’ perception of what they find and respond to at work, but also adversely affect those who find themselves within the frame of the frozen responses, clients to be specific. In her study of professional teachers in Poland, Wysocka (2003) identified a similar occurrence. She named it excessive competence of experienced instructors, by which she understands instances where practitioners display the utmost degree of confidence, yet slight, if any, inclination to grow professionally through systematic self-inquiry – reviewing their own knowledge, routine, values, and attitudes – intended to ultimately translate into the well-being of their learners. Patients, students, and other customers, whose individual needs are addressed in a highly default fashion surely do not benefit from dealings with over-learned pseudo-specialists. In other words, those who fail to dwell on their practice in a reflective manner minimize not only their opportunities for development, but also learning opportunities of their beneficiaries.

In FL teaching, then, reflectivity can be construed as an approach to formal instruction characterized by the teacher showing an open attitude to his or her didactic
moves and their assessment. This presupposes that the teacher understands the nature of
the task (e.g. anticipated difficulties upon introducing the Present Perfect Tense to adult
learners), what prerequisite skills are necessary to accomplish one (e.g. prior knowledge
of the Past Tense for contrastive purposes), his or her own management capacity (e.g.
effective elicitation techniques, ineffective group-work monitoring), and his or her
learning abilities (e.g. good visual memory, weak analytical thinking). Adopting Richards
and Lockhart’s (1994) interpretation, reflectivity is a form of mental processing oriented
towards the teacher’s current state of propositional and experiential knowledge that
allows the practitioner to heighten his or her awareness of self and of their teaching efforts
and to modify their classroom routines. In other words, every teacher of English can run
a class on the Present Perfect Tense, but only reflective teachers will contemplate whether
they created optimal conditions for the students to learn the new grammar. Richards and
Farrell (2011) emphasize that instructors are obliged to revise their capacities and
repertoire of teaching strategies vis-à-vis the complexities of the teaching-learning
process in the best interest of learners and, more precisely, their language learning
opportunities. As Murphy and Torre (2014) claim, the individual teacher “is better
positioned than anyone else to fully understand the conditions of his or her classroom as
well as the needs and aspirations of the learners in it” (p. 626).

However, one thing is to understand that, for example, reading goals in FL
instruction might differ from the ones outside the classroom and another is to know how
to construct reading tasks which will help learners develop adaptable strategic behavior
to achieve their purposes in different contexts. This involves the identification of
variables that influence how reading progresses, such as the learner’ pre-existing
knowledge, comprehension and self-monitoring abilities, or the type of text, to name but
a few (Chodkiewicz, 2013). The assessment of one’s knowledge in the service of concrete
goals is an integral part of the reflective approach to teaching (McCormick, 2003).
According to Flavell, Miller, and Miller (2002), thoughts and emotion developed in
response to tasks in the past, count as a category of cognitive monitoring and self-
evaluation. For example, both the sense of failure caused by a poorly designed grammar
revision lesson and the agitation which results from successful adaptation of the teaching
material to a mixed-ability class might stimulate studious deliberations about the choices
the teacher made at the planning stage and can determine the structuring as well as the
execution of tasks in the future. However, as Brown and McConnell (2009) maintain, in real-life situations, an error in task execution, registered as a feeling of fiasco, might be too overwhelming to induce reflective thoughts, too trivial to begin a search for solution, or too disgraceful to abandon without desirable correction. They suggest that this is because human self-monitoring behavior is unstable—it transcends individual differences, for it is heavily influenced by fluctuating context-dependent psychological factors.

In the literature of the topic, reflection is consistently discussed as closely associated with teacher learning although its nature, modes, and outcomes have been given alternative interpretations. Gabryś-Barker (2012) reviews some key perspectives, including Dewey’s (1933), who sees reflection as the testing of knowledge resulting in its lucid and rational evaluation; Habermas’ (1971), who emphasizes the importance of self-development and empowerment through the practice of examining one’s own analytical thinking; and Kolb’s (1984), who defines reflection as experience- and observation-driven “interaction between different forms of knowing” that leads to assimilation of this knowledge (p. 75). Furthermore, Schön’s (1983) notion of professional development through reflection on action involves retrospective thinking, especially about the situations where direct use of established concepts and principles appears unsuccessful and one’s own experience somewhat irrelevant. In such cases, reflective practitioners have to be effective learners, i.e. abandon their early assumptions and understandings (frames) of situations and engage into the formation of new ones — the process which Schön refers to as reframing and which gradually assembles a body of new context-bound professional knowing. Essentially, reframing involves challenging one’s perspective of the problem before solving it by searching for information about it and imposing an alternative coherent view on the issue. It is intelligent work done on the existing model of the situation, motivated by the teacher’s understanding that it is deficient for the current context. In short, an integral part of a problem-solving process is to know what is known (available as resources) and what is not, what is relevant and what is not, to make rational and strategic choices, and to recognize one’s subjective impressions and biases the problem creates.

In Mezirow’s (1981) view, teachers’ deliberate efforts 1) to discern didactic principles behind observed phenomena, 2) to formulate judgments about the relevance of
their didactic choices for a teaching context, and 3) to critically inspect these judgments designate the highest levels of professional reflectivity. Sternberg and Horvath (1995) maintain that this kind of insightful thinking about teaching distinguishes experts from experienced non-experts; the latter would rather minimalize their perceptual efforts and activate familiar teaching schemata than voluntarily immerse in intellectual endeavors aimed to expand them. It is thus reasonable to assume that the experience factor can truly operate to hinder teacher learning processes. As Day (1999) puts it:

The development of routines, the presence of tacit knowledge, and the resistance to disclosure and feedback act to control rather than free teachers from the burden of unexamined, accumulated practice. Learning from practice itself, then, will result in experience but without opportunities to reflect in different ways ‘on’ and ‘about’ action. (p. 52)

Benner (1984) also argues that as long as teachers take initiative and test propositions developed from their classroom observations and remain inquirers in all aspects of their working lives, the growth of their further experience is secured, preventing professional regression. This means that the status of an expert does not bring teacher learning to an end. On the contrary, studies show that the dimensions of teaching and learning that experts tend to reflect upon reveal a spectrum of their personal inclinations, interests, and concerns, which stretch from communication patterns in the classroom, to affective climate therein, to the physical working conditions, and eventually to learning strategies. Murphy and Torre (2014) found out that the processes of the inspection of broader aspects of schooling such as historical, sociopolitical, and moral contexts additionally supplement the landscape of a teacher’s reflections.

Wysocka’s study (2003) reveals that teachers of English in Poland hardly ever scrutinize their thoughts and actions in a principled manner. When asked about planning, classroom management, building rapport, testing, material evaluation, error correction, and FL learning processes, many instructors claim to be applying methods and techniques which they fail to elucidate or demonstrate in the classroom. In essence, Wysocka (2003) reports that her subjects’ readiness to reflect and learn on the job is lacking. They highly appreciate new practical ideas for their classes, which they collect from occasional
workshops and conferences arranged by teacher organizations and publishing houses, and which they perceive as sufficient in all respects. Wysocka concludes that her subjects seek to minimize rather than maximize mental efforts they put in their work, and so doing, they do not stand a chance of developing their own instructional style, a vital constituent of expertise, which feeds on teachers’ endeavors to challenge their understanding of FL teaching.

Other studies confirm that practitioners tend to perform intuitively, yet in an uncompromising manner, and that they find reflection unnecessary while theoretical considerations in their fields of expertise detached from their daily practice (Hargreaves, 2003; Tripp, 2012). For example, in her longitudinal research, Elbaz (1983) analyzed one English teacher’s discourse to identify components of her knowledge base. Elbaz found that the subject’s statements of what teaching should be communicated rules and principles inductively acquired through classroom interactions, context, and personal beliefs and images, rather than theoretical viewpoints. Another study, examining the implementation of the action-reflection-moral-consideration model of practice (Handal & Lauvas, 1987) in Norwegian schools, demonstrated that while teachers talk a lot about their didactic decisions, they struggle both to explicitly justify their choices and to recognize their ethical dimension (see Day, 2004). The privacy of the classroom, where teachers gain experience and solve problems, seems to deform their view on their professional knowledge and its development through reflection. Many teachers build personal systems of assertions about formal instruction, which they claim to be always true, help them ensure order and continuity of work, and allow them to meet the requirements of demanding school realities.

It is important to emphasize that the tendency among competent instructors to consolidate rather than critically address what they believe works for them runs a risk of approaching problem situations with ‘quick-fix’ solutions and consequently developing a misconception that this pseudo-efficiency stands for mastery in a domain. For example, Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993) studied expertise in teachers as writers and found out that experts are active striving people who work harder than experienced non-experts with regard to their personal involvement in tasks. It was observed that despite a well-integrated procedural knowledge base, which allowed for an efficient accomplishment of the assignment at a very low level of cognitive effort, experts intentionally mobilized the
energy freed up through the automatization of procedures and strategies and used the capital to investigate the writing task in an in-depth manner. Practically, they attempted to redefine the nature of the task and explore the relationships between premeditated and articulated meanings. Certainly, while the expert subjects willingly activated the released mental resources in order to challenge and transform rather than tell their knowledge in the process of writing, non-experts tended to operate within their comfort zones, reducing the task to the level that could be successfully managed by imprinted routines.

In many educational settings, the ability to engage in reflective review of one’s own practices does not always seem necessary in order to grant the individual the status of an expert. Instead, extensive experience continues to be seen as the main criterion of didactic mastery (Tripp, 2012; Komorowska, 2011; Tsui, 2005). Needless to say, stored patterns of behavior can serve as perfectly accurate formulae in teaching circumstances. Yet, whenever teachers make decisions and adopt strategies which they cannot explain, they perform like doctors or lawyers who tell their clients that procedures they implement are undoubtedly valid and beneficial to them because they feel or hope so. Such was the case reported by an expert teacher in this study: an adult learner found it difficult to accept TPR classes, and her anxiety about hearing the foreign language and not seeing it only increased after the instructor expressed absolute confidence that it was a matter of time before the student felt she was successfully expanding her vocabulary. The fact that the teacher considered it highly effective and enjoyable prevented her at the critical moment from contemplating the adult learner’s perspective and needs. Most importantly, though, the teacher failed to competently address what has been recognized as the deficit of natural capacity to learn from exposure in older age (Zybert, 2003). The frustrated client left the course without an understanding how endless repetitions and lack of supplementary notes could help her learn English. Tripp (2012) holds that the ability to rigorously analyze and to explicitly communicate what teachers do sanctions their expertise. He proposes the following:

Teachers should be diagnostic in the sense that they are able to employ profession-specific knowledge and expertise to recognize, describe, understand and explain their practice in an academic fashion, and interpret
that diagnosis in order to form professional judgments to further the well-being of their clients. (p. 7)

Jacobsen (1997) maintains that reflectivity takes the shape of a highly idiosyncratic property, which results from a number of external and internal factors, for example teachers’ capacity to develop a caring attitude to their learners. In other words, teachers’ impressions, intentions, and beliefs about themselves as instructors affect their behaviors in class, and consequently the beliefs, behaviors, and achievements of the students. The frame of mind which reveals a teacher’s conviction about teaching as an enterprise worth the time and reflective effort creates the most conducive setting to learning of both teachers and learners. It gives the former room to demonstrate self-efficacy and locus of control and to teach in a way that can help learners to endure difficulties they might naturally encounter throughout their education.

To conclude, Rogers (2002) expresses a concern that despite an appeal for accomplishment in systematic and reflective thinking, we still know too little about what reflective thinking is and how it is different from other types of thought, which makes it problematic to assess it as an ability, to foster its value, and to research its effects. Even though reflectivity as a concept is yet to be fully understood, it has been recognized that it embraces processes initiated and controlled by learners (here: teachers) that aim to realize their personal goals, be it expansion of knowledge and understanding or adaptation of behaviors (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011; Pressley & McCormick, 1995; Flavell, 1976). It is a socially-oriented phenomenon in that teachers see events in which they participate as sources of new knowledge to accommodate and to utilize for assimilation of familiar knowledge. While the formation of meaningful connection between experiences is at the service of intelligence and maturity, its potency is individual (Dewey, 1938/1997). Adults show exceptional mental capacities for reasoning and problem solving, so unless they develop a callous attitude towards the intellectual and moral volume of their experiences, they stand every chance of exercising reflective thought and judgment from occurrences they find worthwhile.

Taggart and Wilson (1998) advocate three levels of reflection which integrate the ideas mentioned above. The technical mode focuses on past events in a manner that examines content and people’s behavior, the contextual mode scrutinizes the relationship
between how things work in real life and how they presumably should work, and the *dialectical* mode is the ethical dimension of reflection – it generates thoughts about one’s moral conduct in the classroom (e.g. objectivity, fairness, or superiority status). Schön (1983) adopted a broader view and claimed that any form of reflection demystifies the artistry of practice by re-directing attention to the system of knowing. In general, the surfacing of knowledge in practice is crucial to research into the epistemology of practice, a better understanding of which can raise the standing of practice in professional domains, including education. The ‘post-technocratic’ model of training teachers has already shifted the gravity towards the development of reflective abilities as a tool for informed judgement-making (Gabryś-Barker, 2012; Boshuizen, Bromme, & Gruber, 2004).

**1.3.3. Efficiency**

According to Calderhead (1984), efficiency in teaching is linked to problem-solving. This conception is rather pragmatic and maintains that practitioners prove experts if they are able to swiftly and effectively decide “how to structure the time and experiences of pupils in the classroom” (p.74). In his view, designing both individual tasks and whole lesson units resembles a problem-solving process, and hence involves answering the *What? When? How?* and *Why?* questions. Interestingly, studies show that experts plan mostly mentally, and their notes only partially reflect images and ideas they generate. Their efficiency results from their engagement with internal dialogues aimed to tackle the questions above and make decisions. McCutcheon (1980) argues that although planning lessons when traveling, shopping, taking a shower, or driving may not be recognized as legitimate professional activity, in fact “it has the potential for being the most professional dimension of teaching, as it gives teachers the opportunity to relate all sorts of professional knowledge to particular cases” (p. 8).

Calderhead (1984) maintains that lesson planning clearly discloses how fast teachers can grasp and integrate expectations of their performance at the institutional level (e.g. execution of syllabus, workplace ideology, and code of practice) with their specialist knowledge as well as personal systems of beliefs about teaching (p. 69). This is where experts differ significantly from non-experts. The former rarely implement planning which encompasses lesson aims and objectives, selection of teaching material, and organization and presentation of the content to evaluate the whole process. As Brown and
McIntyre’s (1992) study demonstrated, good teachers do not pursue to fulfil learning objectives formulated for the sake of lesson plans because they find them unrelated to classroom realities and their purposes (p. 88). Instead, they choose to check for the attainment of implicit goals during the interactive phase of teaching, when, despite serious time constraints, they can spontaneously adjust their instructional choices, and during the post-active phase, when they conclude and think ahead (Nunan, 1992). Many settle long-term objectives once a year only (Sadro-Brown, 1990), while on a day-to-day basis they exercise efficient decision-making – selecting relevant procedures so as to meet the needs and abilities of their learners and to ensure a smooth passage of tasks (Kagan & Tippings, 1993; Clark & Yinger, 1987; Peterson, Marx, & Clark, 1978).

Some researchers refer to experts as a-rational executors (Berliner, 1994; Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986) in the sense that they fail to engage in logical reasoning. Instead, they respond instantly, and relevantly, to the most complex situations and contextualize manifold stimuli easily, just like skilled pilots or drivers do. It is due to a well-developed cohesion of perception, “generic notions,” or heuristics that teachers hold about their students, contents, and procedures, which derive from stored routines and experiences of high resemblance. According to Chi, Glaser and Farr (1988), experts have developed efficiency in representing problems at an adequate level of precision, which means that conceptual representations they generate and systematize as hierarchical structures allow them to act malleably, yet more effectively than novices. Studies confirm that experts can differentiate the complexity of tasks and situations and approach them economically, i.e. choose to access and operate on highly selected aspects of schemata and associations between differently coded representations in pursuit of sense and hence a valid course of action (Zeitz, 1997). Most essentially, though, they are able to identify and correct deficiencies or faults in their interpretations of the context of situations and their demands and search for supplementary information to redefine the existing constituents of knowledge (Lesgold, 1984).

A contrasting view on efficiency holds that since experts activate schemata without much of thought (analytical processes), it occurs at the expense of attention to minor detail that less competent practitioners usually pay when working on pattern recognition. For example, a weak learner’s refusal to accept the teacher’s help might be puzzling for a beginner instructor, and hence his behavior closely observed in search for
logical explanation. The same situation might encourage an expert teacher to automatically activate the representation of the student as merely uninterested in the learning process. The category, established on the basis of similar scenarios from the past, might be correctly selected but can also freeze further investigation into the reasons behind the lack of interest. Berliner (1994) claims that expert teachers “ignore a lot about students” (p. 23) because they see classroom situations and behavior patterns through accumulated schemata, which results in the impression that “most of the kids most of the time are not doing anything unusual” (p. 19).

What might be regarded as low reflectivity on the part of experts demonstrates cost-effectiveness, i.e. experts’ attempts to save cognitive resources for highly atypical cases, where controlled processing is necessary to solve problems and reorganize existing knowledge structures. Dreyfus and Dreyfus’s (1986) model of expertise in teaching underlines the transition from the stage of increased awareness of context, rules and institutional expectations as well as teachers’ concerns about selves and social acceptance to that governed by fluidity in decision-making and tacit understanding of the underlying principles. Glaser’s (1996) model of developing expert performance also characterizes the ultimate stage of transition into an expert as the ability of the learner to fill up a scaffolding, erected in collaboration with his or her master/s, with professional knowledge and to continue to adeptly initiate, navigate, and monitor his or her cognitive activity. Although the interpretation of efficiency the models offer excites many controversies among theorists, they rightly emphasize the significance of the concept as a constituent of teacher expertise.

Sternberg and Horvath (1995) emphasize the value of effort-saving thinking processes in didactic expertise, yet they postulate to define efficiency as teachers’ ability to diagnose problems by defining them and organizing available knowledge around them, instead of calling upon stored routine solutions. If the problem concerns discipline, for instance, experts will promptly hypothesize about the potential causes of students’ misconduct, considering a combination of circumstances that might have influenced the behavior, and this way demonstrate both a degree of executive control over their own cognition and attempts at contextual understanding of the case. Sternberg and Horvath (1995) agree that the automatic use of instructional procedures, which reduces the investment of teachers’ mental energy, offers teachers essential room for higher level
operations such as swift but well-grounded professional judgments. In the prototype view of expert teaching (Figure 1), these operations are referred to as the reinvestment of cognitive resources. In short, expert teachers, including foreign language instructors, are able to retain the ability to be highly aware of their teaching and the learning opportunities their teaching provides.

Figure 1: The Prototype View of Expert Teaching (Sternberg & Horvath, 1995, p. 13)

In this thesis, efficiency is understood as a teacher attribute that combines elements of the concepts presented above – it manifests itself in strategic and energy-saving thinking that improves expert performance

- in lesson planning, when experts take advantage of their understanding of language learning, the educational setting in which it occurs, students’ needs, procedures, as well as their own competencies to select and organize the lesson contents;
- in the classroom, where they successfully attend to what demands immediate response despite the fact that the time available to analyze critical incidents is rather limited;
• between lessons, when they consider feedback and demonstrate the capacity to monitor/revise their own decisions and thoughts by positioning problem situations in a bigger educational and social context.

In foreign language didactics, for example, tasks which involve opinion exchange, popular with advanced learners mainly as a means of fluency building or content personalization, can serve other learning objectives, too. As a result of efficient “filtering” for relevance, expert teachers can use them for practice or expansion of conversation strategies (e.g. active listening or fixing communication problems), summary/paraphrase, or intonation. More importantly, they can also detect and diagnose arising problems before they actually materialize. When a class debate begins to fade too quickly, expert teachers can briskly recognize and respond to the potential sources of the problem (e.g. the learners are absent-minded because of an important exam/test they are preparing for; it is someone’s absence that causes the learners to be quieter than usual; or the topic requires knowledge they do not have).

Chiefly, efficiency in problem-solving and decision-making is different for expert and non-expert teachers. It could be summarized as interacting or not with the following constituents of cognitive functioning:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-experts</th>
<th>Experts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Established schemata</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliberate level of teaching practice</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intuitive level of teaching practice</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated sources of knowledge</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tacit understanding</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Productive distribution of attention</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reinvestment of cognitive resources</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1: Efficiency in expert and non-expert cognitive work (the author’s synthesis based on literature review)*
1.3.4. Awareness

Ferrari and Sternberg (1998) define the role of awareness in the cognitive mechanism as “the place of perspective,” which enables human beings to know that they experience the world from the location of their bodies. Perspective-taking is situational in that it emerges within physical, social, and cultural environments while mental processes, inevitably involved in it, contribute to building a sense of continuity in life. Setting goals as well as regulating the amount of effort to accomplish these goals only occur with full awareness. At the same time, it is assumed that not all perception and attentional processes involve awareness of change taking place (Chua & Enns, 2005; Fernandez-Duque, Grossi, Thornton, & Neville, 2003; Gibson, 1979) and that meaning can be processed without awareness (Colflesh & Conway, 2007; Reber, 1993). In this thesis, however, awareness is discussed from the perspective of teachers’ capacity to recognize, represent, and define classroom experience and operate on these representations in practice to solve problems.

In formal instruction, teachers’ awareness can generate both motivation and demotivation to do the cognitive work of teaching, just as it can steer teachers’ decisions to either ignore or attend to stimuli in the environment which indicate novelty or variance in incoming information. For example, the repositioning of components within the grammar syllabus, prompted by the classroom events, illustrates the teacher’s controlled and informed response to the learners’ immediate needs. The expression There was… could be justifiably injected into the planned flow of There is / There are… practice when the English class is delayed due to a major road accident. Creating such opportunities for students to effectively communicate their ideas/intentions demonstrates how teachers deliberately monitor their interactions with the environment (Sternberg, 1996).

What Gabryś-Barker (2012) identifies as an important aspect of classroom responsiveness is teacher presence, i.e. determined effort to relate relevant behavior patterns to specific circumstances, understanding of which might fuel teachers’ involvement in actions they perform. The problem is that things happen spontaneously, many at a time, and some require reactions teachers fail to recognize, especially in emotionally-loaded situations. In such cases, teacher presence exceeds pure technicalities of classroom interaction. A polite manner of speaking, a respectful form of address, a fair degree of enthusiasm that teachers demonstrate, or supportive feedback they offer to students are purposeful controlled strategies that communicate teachers’ thoughtfulness.
and an expert approach to the job, executed as a fully legitimate rather than imposed necessity. According to Rogers and Raider-Roth (2006), teacher presence is realized through

(...) alert awareness, receptivity, and connectedness to the mental, emotional and physical workings of both the individual and the group in the context of their learning environments, and the ability to respond with a considered and compassionate best next step. (p. 266)

It follows that the way teachers react to problem situations can reveal their readiness to embrace the unknown and learn new lessons irrespective of their experience status. For example, awareness that a problem has occurred, i.e. an understanding that existing knowledge is insufficient to provide an instant solution, is likely to initiate a goal-oriented process of working towards one. Consequently, as discussed earlier, all forms of complex thinking can be activated to reframe a perspective of the situation.

Humphrey (2002) emphasizes that predicting, understanding, and manipulating the behavior of other people is a human universal. As such, it underlies teachers’ classroom awareness. It is a prerequisite for them to understand their role in the learning process, i.e. the purpose of their being in class (Gabryś-Barker, 2012). This kind of awareness requires that (1) they direct their attention towards their knowledge of the subject matter, ways of conveying this knowledge to students, as well as conditions which allow for successful interaction; (2) they find out about students, their needs, learning styles, and personalities; and (3) that they discover who they are as people, meaning what kind of relationships they are able to establish within the environment. Gabryś-Barker (2012) sees these relationships as “very much affective and dynamic in nature” (p. 117), which implies that teacher awareness is not merely a psychological state the instructors reach in the course of classroom practice, but rather a changing mental construct reliant on cognitive and social processes and their knowledge representations.

Perry (2003) proposes that in order to better grasp what it means to be in class and teach, practitioners should try and ask questions about seemingly unimportant events from inside and outside the classroom. These events, when examined closely, might stimulate enlightening observations about the teacher’s interaction with the group,
individual students, didactic material, and the process itself. Practice like this can effectively raise teachers’ awareness of their presence in the learning experience of their students. More importantly, though, it can refine teachers’ ability to reflect about instruction in a knowledgeable manner, which results in accurate diagnosing and formulating professional judgments, to be discussed further.

1.3.5. Complementary perspectives on expertise

Eraut (1994, 2007, 2008), a leading researcher of workplace learning, directs theoretical considerations about domain expertise towards its social dimension, maintaining that most learning occurs informally during typical working processes, such as participation in shared activities, observation, and discussion. In his view, these allow workers to build situational understanding – a crucial component of professional performance, which goes beyond tacit processing and use of knowledge when handling tasks, relationships with colleagues, institution policies, and day-to-day occurrences. It necessitates asking questions and formulating rational answers so as to regulate subjective perspectives, preconceptions and biases. It also stimulates transfer of professional knowledge between individuals in a workplace. Regrettably, as Eraut (2008) holds:

The possibilities for deeper conceptualization of practice that might lead to the ability to discuss them [personal experiences] more explicitly are constrained by the absence of any discourse that might trigger reflection or enable any productive discussion. (p. 17)

Tacit knowledge and suppressed discourse reinforce each other in every workplace culture, whereas professional development (building expertise) is impossible without deliberate and sustained focus on tasks within the domain, one’s performance, and critical episodes in context. Accordingly, factors that affect learning at work rest upon both conversations in the form of supportive feedback and well-cast challenges that practitioners have to take on (Eraut, 2000). When professionally administered, these may increase commitment and personal motivation to progress, i.e. reinforce a proactive approach to learning opportunities. Eraut’s hypothesis is that discourse in a workplace is highly influenced not only by workers’ background, i.e. education, family, and
personality, but above all by the way they relate to each other within the institution. Consequently, what is said and not said at work may tell us more about relationships there than about practice. Eraut (2008) argues that mutual sympathy and trust can successfully activate the manifest function of discourse, i.e. encourage professionals to critically approach their own actions, express doubts, and seek ways of improvement. However, research findings indicate that senior workers tend to take work-related discourse for granted and hardly exchange substantive content for other than the “power-sharing equilibrium” reason (Eraut, 2008, p. 16). Also, Flyvbjerg’s (2001) study shows that while intuitive responsiveness is an asset of experts in various respects of their professional domain, their lack of ability to verbalize discrete elements underlying their practice is a serious professional handicap.

Nevertheless, the presence of others in the immediate environment, especially those whose status is recognized as superior, plays a stimulating role in human cognitive functioning. One reason for that is inevitable feedback they provide on the effects of our social and cultural participation. Sullivan (1953) calls them significant others; they are persons the communicative interaction with whom strongly influences an individual’s sense of self, thoughts, actions, and emotions, but it also makes one understand how he or she is supposed to perform in a given context and role. Taking feedback into consideration creates conditions for improvement as long as it binds up with the learner’s intention to adapt to various constraints on the path to accomplishing the task (Eysenck & Keane, 2010). In authentic professional settings, conduct that embraces feedback information denotes deliberate guided attempts of the adult individual to increase the effectiveness of his or her strategic decisions, to strengthen the precision of his or her current state of knowledge, and hence to develop his or her expertise. Givón (2005) asserts that the phenomenon of individual perspectives and understandings of the shared empirical reality constantly refined through encounters with the perspectives and understandings of others can be referred to as co-regulation.

Certainly, the weight of the information received from interlocutors can be inappropriately estimated or its comprehensibility insufficient. It is argued that not every interaction evokes responsiveness in the sense that participants engage with its purpose and continuity, i.e. judge how the present context and human agents inform previously acquired knowledge and skill, and what it might signify with regard to the quality of their
subsequent experiences (Goffman, 1967). Ericsson and Hastie (1994) hypothesize that the reason why we often fail to use our own competence as an instrument of construing situations and their full potency is that we think/act strategically and so mainly aim at the task completion rather than the interpretation of the meaning of our experiences. In other words, the learning opportunities which arise within the context of social encounters and activities, which might substantially aid expertise-building, will often be ignored in favor of the efficient execution of the task (Johnson, 2005, p. 134).

Collins (2013) advocates the idea of the human mind submerged in the world of (vocational) practice, which holds that in order to grasp the nature of domain expertise, it is necessary to consider not only the internal processes, but also sociocultural contributions and their connections to individuals’ formation of knowledge, norms, and professional discourse (Rogoff, 1990; Scribner, 1997; Greeno, 1997; Cobb, 1998). He maintains that through negotiations and collaborative participation in goal-oriented tasks within a work environment, individual conceptions of competence merge and elaborate more inter-subjective domains of knowledge (Newman, Griffin, & Cole, 1989), allowing, in turn, for the development of all members in a work community (Engeström & Middleton, 1996; Rogoff, 1995; Lave, 1993). Research shows that attentive listening, observing, analyzing jobs, dwelling on and asking about artefacts can be an essential formative experience for both more and less experienced workers, especially in environments that promote genuine collaboration and transfer of knowledge. Collins (2013) proposes that since social influences on knowledge construction and engagement in practice are interdependent, expertise, with its relational, embedded, competent, reciprocal, and pertinent characteristics, should be seen as accommodating situational requirements.

Billett (2001) argues that the situational perspective transcends both the view of knowledge as epistemological truth (Ericsson & Smith, 1991) and the finite acquisition of procedural and conceptual knowledge which, in a cognitive perspective, guides thinking processes and non-routine problem-solving. Instead, it shifts the emphasis to the relations between human mental capacities and contextually determined practice. The link seems conclusive for the understanding of expertise-building because problem-solving requires much more than complex and efficient thinking. It takes intelligence to be able to determine and respond to characteristic circumstances/realities that carry a
learning potential (Goodnow, 1990). Indeed, personal engagement in relationships and tasks of rising accountability has been recognized as a pathway to expertise based on the assumption that it ultimately ensures the development of intra-psychological attributes and the tacit mastery of practice (Billett, 2001; Rogoff, 1995; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

The sociology of professions in particular accepts the view that superior accomplishment of assignments, possible by virtue of extensive interacting with advanced colleagues, constitutes the ground for our understanding of competence and knowledge construction (Mieg, 2008; Freidson, 2001; Abbott, 1988). However, it also gives credence to expertise as an attribution that professionals struggle to earn, and that is granted by significant others. Collins and Evans (2007) maintain that the latter play an important normative role, making claims to jurisdiction over tasks, or monopolizing performance criteria. In short, it is experts who define expert execution of work.

![Expertise-Space Diagram](Figure 2: Expertise-Space Diagram (Collins & Evans, 2007))

Collins and Evans (2007) offer a conceptualization of expertise which embraces cognitive, social, and cultural dimensions, and which demonstrates the links between what has to be known (norms, concepts, and procedures) and the knower as a dynamic unity functioning in the society of those who already possess high competence. They refer to this interdisciplinary model as the Expertise-Space Diagram (Figure 2). The Diagram demonstrates how one’s individual or group accomplishment is combined with the extent
of exposure to tacit knowledge of experts, and esotericity of a specific domain — its position vis-à-vis most and least ubiquitous human activities, among which, say, language skills and gravitational wave physics occupy the opposite ends (Collins, 2013). In short, the model promotes expertise as substance or abstract property that can be transferred from individual to individual, rather than competence that professionals develop solely through extensive vocational practice.

Eyal (2013) finds the jurisdictional or attributional perception of expertise deficient and argues that in order to understand the concept as well as the process of becoming an expert, it is necessary to separate the sociology of professions from the sociology of expertise. He proposes that these require “two distinct modes of analysis that are not reducible to one another” (p. 863). More precisely, what it takes to perform competently is not only a network of actors with their skills and attributes, but also a “background of their practices”, that is available tools and devices, spatial arrangements, and concepts, around which orbit the tasks and problems they intend to address (p. 871). Consequently, studies of expertise should aim to examine “a history of tasks and problems” (Abbott, 1988) from the perspective of the conditions which allow to manage them better and faster, the capacity to approach them expertly (Eyal, 2013, p. 869).

Sandberg (2000) rejects the rationalistic approach to expertise. The bottom line of phenomenography – the research approach he endorses – is that it is crucial to capture the meaning of a phenomenon from different points of view to build its deep understanding. Human competence does not equal a specific set of attributes, including knowledge and skills, because attributes do not have fixed meanings, nor scope. Rather, it is the way different workers conceive of their practice that shapes and organizes those attributes into competence, that is determines which ones are to be enhanced and what they mean to performers in their daily work. Similarly, Billet (2001) maintains that it is essential to see professions and expertise as molded by “how individuals construct their conceptions or domains of these situationally-based requirements for performance, based on their socially constituted ontogenies” (p. 5). Sandberg’s study proposes an alternative understanding not only of what makes up competence, but also of how competence grows. In his view, our thinking of competence development, traditionally seen as a linear shift from one stage of proficiency to another (up to the status of an expert), should be advanced and embrace change in the way individuals try and deepen their present
understandings of work. The change in perception, he claims, conditions the change in performance, be it of more or less competent behavior.

Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993) agree that expertise develops from intelligent strategies professionals employ to deal with their work realities, and that is the capability to efficiently process information and adapt reactions to varying situations. In their view, expertise is an open-ended process, during which new knowledge is constructed through practitioners’ attempts to understand the concepts and conditions of norms and rules while implementing them in real-life situations. Importantly, what distinguishes experts from so-called experienced non-experts is the determination of the former to approach tasks and problems situated “at the edge of their competence” (p. 34) and hence to accept struggle when meeting challenges. Their research findings confirm that competent writers, doctors, or musicians respond to apparently same circumstances differently. Some tend to reduce most puzzling occurrences to easily resolvable ones by means of accustomed procedures, while others see opportunities to learn in seemingly repetitive and predictable events embedded in familiar settings so as to “problematize” routines and yet extend the boundaries of their understanding (Tsui, 2003). Without doubt, individual decisions and actions are governed by who we are as people: our mental dispositions, personal stories, and motivational or affective determinants. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993) also recognize a substantial influence of the work environment on the dynamic nature of professional development and possible fluctuations within the process due to the social and personal variables mentioned above. Accordingly, they reject the concept of expert status presented as a static, not to say inert, state, the main attribute of which remains vast experience that manifests itself in growing automaticity and instant problem-solving capacity.

This rather unorthodox interpretation of expertise disregards the principal methodology of research into expertise building, namely the relative approach based on comparisons between experts and novices (Chi, 2006), and instead appeals to thorough examination within professional elites in order to discover why it is that not all experienced practitioners are “effective learners” (Chi, 2011). The argument is that as long as advanced and beginner practitioners’ knowledge and performance are measured by the same criteria, the former will always outshine the latter, which does not say a lot about their level of expertise. Sternberg and Horvath’s (1995) proposal to establish a
prototype member of a domain expert category and use it to judge variability in the profiles of other members of the group seems to be a unique response to Bereiter and Scardamalia’s (1993) appeal for revision of the concept of expertise.

The growth of expertise seen as a continuous process (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993) clearly overlaps with the concept of adaptive expertise (Hatano & Inagaki, 1986). Both emphasize the importance of one’s deeper conceptual understanding of procedures and rules used in day-to-day practice (Schwartz, Lind, Brophy, & Bransford, 1999); both point out the propensity of individuals to learn while executing skills, i.e. the intentionality of their efforts to aim at tasks which push them out of their comfort zone (Bransford & Schwartz, 2009). Finally, as opposed to routine expertise, both define experts as hard-working people who engage in processes of self-explaining why standard solutions work in certain conditions and do not work in others. Put differently, they reflect...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conceptions of expertise by</th>
<th>Influence on constructing expertise</th>
<th>Key terms used in the conception</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| Bereiter & Scardamalia (1993) | Educational | Continuous process  
Experienced non-experts |
| Sandberg (2000) | Phenomenography | Individual perceptions of competence  
Transformation of perceptions |
- Discourse  
- Relationships  
- Workplace |
| Billet (2001) | Social | Vocational expertise  
Situationally-based |
Jurisdiction of significant others |
| Collins (2013) | Sociocultural | Collaborative participation in task |
- Actors  
- Background of practice |

*Table 2: Complementary perspectives on constructing expertise  
(the author’s own systematization based on literature review)*
upon the nature of the conditions, how new components change the structure of the conditions, and how the existing answers could be flexibly adapted so as to satisfy novel circumstances, but also to expand their working knowledge base (Chi, 2011).

It is important to emphasize that across academic disciplines researchers have adopted different perspectives on expertise, expert, and expert performance, and hence proposed sporadically incompatible interpretations of the phenomena studied. Table 2 systematizes the alternative views and key concepts they introduced, many of which can be attributed to the influence of social science. However, a few major developments have been widely recognized as robust aspects of expertise applicable to all domains, including TEFL. Basic mental capacities of expert performers have been identified as exceptional with respect to a narrow domain-specific area of expertise, which means that the decision-making immediacy is largely an outcome of extensive practice and internalization of patterns/schemata, rather than of extraordinary cognitive tools that others are lacking (Horn & Masunaga, 2006; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2003; Lehmann & Ericsson, 1996). Also, an acquired repertoire of highly-organized knowledge is recognized as allowing for the efficient retrieval of information and, on that account, more fluid and confident behavior (Gobet & Charness, 2006; Simon & Gobet, 2000; Vicente & Wang, 1998; Ericsson & Kintsch, 1995). One more agreed characteristic that designates expertise is practice accompanied by reflective self-inquiry understood as close observation of one’s performance that aims to yet increase the level of attainment, even after reaching a seemingly satisfactory stage of development (Deakin, Côté, & Harvey, 2006; Ericsson, 2006; Starkes & Ericsson, 2003).

In conclusion, considered from a cognitive perspective, building expertise in EFL teaching can be characterized as “recurring, transformational processing and complex, reflecting orientation toward knowing” (Alexander et al., 2011, p. 66). The what of teachers’ learning, stimulated by the what happening to them is recognized in this thesis as the outcome of efficient application of professional knowledge and deliberate contemplation/evaluation of this application.
CHAPTER TWO
CRITICAL INCIDENTS IN TEFL

One of the earliest definitions of critical incidents (CIs) in teaching states that they are “highly charged moments and episodes that have enormous consequences for personal change and development” (Sikes et al., 1985, p. 230). Woods (1993) metaphorically calls them “flash-points that illuminate in an electrifying instant some key problematic aspect or aspects of the teacher’s role, and which contain, in the same instant, the solution” (p. 1). From a cognitive perspective, however, both conceptualizations, which recognize affect and spontaneity as major aspects of CIs, are incomplete in that they underestimate the significance of the underlying processes.

As proposed earlier, in this thesis critical incidents are interpreted as unsolicited circumstances occurring in or outside the classroom which practitioners consider exceptional while their rational understanding – as crucial to successful foreign language teaching/learning. They develop from a planned, goal-oriented, and inherently cognitive process of inquiry, i.e. identification and analysis of situations that contradict the accepted norms or go beyond legitimate expectations. They require that teachers, engaged in reasoning about the perplexing occurrences, activate, integrate, and evaluate various sources of orientation in teaching — their knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, and/or emotions. The justifications which educators advance reveal not only choices they make to construct meaning, but also effort they put into revising their current understandings of phenomena and building continuity of the past, present, and future in their teaching experiences (Craig, 2009; Golombek & Johnson, 2004). What validates the formation of critical incidents is change within teachers’ cognitions, motivated by their attempts to distinguish and see sense in what fails to agree with familiar schemata.

On this account, diagnosing CIs in TEFL can be seen as a learning process through problem-solving. Clearly, a teacher has a puzzle to work out if he or she does not know 1) how to introduce fifteen lexical items in one FL lesson or 2) why a student notoriously avoids monthly assessments. In essence, the answers to the How? and Why? questions in these examples are assumed to be what the teacher seeks; however, the process of problem-solving goes beyond recognizing a difficulty in the classroom and putting
forward an explanation produced by a spur-of-the-moment judgment. A search for an optimal solution, be it action or thought, involves, above all, a conceptual effort to understand and define the **problem space**. It requires the solver to recruit cognitive resources to represent the situation, organize his or her knowledge around it, weigh up options, make a strategic choice, and evaluate the accuracy of his or her decisions in the broader context of formal instruction (Pretz et al., 2003).

This chapter presents a literature review of critical incidents in teaching English as instances of problems, i.e. classroom situations that practitioners do not fully understand and hence initiate their thorough examination. The review emphasizes the effectiveness of teachers’ approach to challenges, including the moment of realization that there is a problem, activation/employment of knowledge structures and mental constructs to analyze one, types of learning outcomes, as well as potential threats to these outcomes from biased or inadequate interpretations. Studies in this field are rather scarce, yet they report findings that substantiate the view that critical incidents carry not only an emotional and social, but also a heavy cognitive load.

### 2.1. Recognizing classroom situations as critical incidents

Fundamentally, not every unexpected situation in the FL classroom turns into a critical incident. Nor is it enough for the teacher to tell a story about something funny, shocking, confusing, or embarrassing to effect one. This is because teachers do not encounter CIs as such; they explicitly structure them as **mental models of critical situations**. In principle, the structure of mental models “mirrors the perceived structure of the external system/situation” (Doyle & Ford, 1998, p. 17) in order to represent what is believed to be relevant (Johnson-Laird & Savary, 1996). Complex problems (e.g. involving many participants, behavior patterns, and hence premises) require alternative models on which reasoners rest their views of causality and possibilities, while human beings tend to simplify mental representations to reduce the load on their working memory. This implies that explicit manipulation of models of problem situations involves a considerable cognitive effort.

Representations of critical incidents are based on teachers’ knowledge, including their professional understanding of phenomena in the classroom; they expose teachers’ moral standards and beliefs which guide meaning-making operations. Hypothetically, an
observation that the quietest student in the group has volunteered for the first time ever to read her grammar homework out loud will come as a pleasant surprise to every teacher of English. Many are likely to praise the learner, evoking memories of their ineffective interventions in the past. Not all are likely to put forward an explanation that will take into account the psycholinguistic considerations, the properties of the task, the situational context, the student’s psychological profile, or the ethics of their own behavior. In short, one event may prompt different degrees of analysis, or no analysis at all. It is the teacher’s awareness of how an episode in the immediate context fits (or does not fit) into the teaching/learning principles or a broader structure of the curriculum, the institution, and the educational system as a whole that determines his or her direct reaction, meaning assigned to the event, and change in his or her knowledge representations.

It is safe to assume that a broad scope of background (procedural and declarative) knowledge within the domain predisposes practitioners to efficiently interpret unusual circumstances and apply working solutions. Experienced teachers are expected to demonstrate a high level of ability to systematically process disturbing classroom situations. By contrast, beginners, who have limited response schemata and whose expectations of students, co-workers, and the workplace itself often conflict with the realities of school life, undoubtedly struggle to justify observed phenomena with adequate rationalizations.

However, Tsui’s (2003) study of teacher professional development shows that extensive experience is insufficient to ensure an optimum use of accumulated knowledge and logical thought. Specifically, a novice teacher of English reported to be troubled by signs of boredom from teenage learners during grammar activities; the instructor understood these signs as a call for more interesting ways to manage lesson contents and rushed to devise exciting games to get her students involved. Surprisingly, an experienced teacher, who made a matching observation in class, followed the same line of reasoning and filled lessons with fun-packed tasks at the expense of unfulfilled learning objectives. Both practitioners prioritized entertainment as a driving force behind building motivation to learn grammar, but neither of them considered the potential hazards of replacing grammar teaching entirely with playtime. Tsui (2003) observes that what prevented the instructors from acknowledging alternative views on learner boredom was their limited specialist knowledge and, even more importantly, their disinclination to engage in critical
exploration. They were quick to point at the problem and as quick to decide on the solution. Tsui thinks that short-sightedness of this kind inhibits expertise-building in teachers and ultimately creates so-called experienced non-experts.

Interestingly, Marina, the third subject in Tsui’s (2003) study, adopted a contrasting approach to her well-established classroom practices and chose to problematize/inquire into them in order to test her existing conceptions of teaching and learning. As a result, she was able to “transcend her own taken-for-granted experiential world as a teacher and gain an explicit and generalizable awareness of the relationship between means and ends” (p. 261). An example of doing so was her contemplating what she recognized as her dubious success in maintaining classroom discipline. She came to realize that getting the students to keep quiet out of fear of the teacher had nothing to do with focusing their attention on the instructional objectives, and that it was the problem of the difference between making learning enjoyable and controlling noise levels in class that she had to resolve. The teacher’s critical response to her seemingly effective didactic moves made it possible for her to understand the problem space which “she was earlier incapable of articulating as a problem” and to launch a search for new strategies (p. 269).

The latter observation supports the view that problems can materialize and become critical at teachers’ request. Farrell’s (2007) case study on CIs analysis led to similar conclusions. An ESL instructor, for example, transformed an unpleasant episode (negative feedback from a student) into an “empowering” discovery that the emotional disturbance she experienced was caused by her extreme vulnerability to judgments the student could spread about the course content rather than the dubious validity of his comments. While she had expected an unfavorable evaluation from someone who “from the very first class demonstrated a contemptuous boredom with the program as a whole” (Farrell, 2013, p. 83), she seemed to know little about the scale of psychological damage the exposure to criticism inflicted on her. Farrell (2013) maintains that the teacher’s deliberate decision to “search and share” helped her re-define both the principles behind her teaching practices and the stage of professional development she had reached.

On the other hand, recognizing CIs can be successfully stimulated. The underlying assumption is that diagnosing, discussed in more detail in the section below, is a cognitive process of intelligent reasoning. The capacity to evaluate evidence and derive valid conclusions from premises is possible to increase when actively encouraged. Such was
the aim of Tripp’s (2012) action research program, where teachers assisted one another in raising questions about, and assigning causes to daily classroom experiences. Curiously, it was senior instructors who were observed to struggle to point to difficulties at work. They persisted with claims they had the learning process under full control, and nothing could strike them as surprising. For example, an experienced teacher regarded a young learner who kept bringing in his homework unfinished as completely meaningless to her code of practice. The sole reason why she shared the story with peers was to collect ideas how to elicit what was expected from the boy. The teacher’s stand was clear — the student had no choice but bend to her instructions. However, in the course of analysis, prompted by the support group and moderator (David Tripp himself), she worked out that she acted from the position of her own personal values rather than informed specialist judgments. Her explanations why homework must always be completed (e.g. *it is good for children; it is necessary for learning*) unveiled that the issue needed more thought than it had received. She admitted to drawing a false inference that the boy was lazy and hence deserved to learn his lesson — he was not allowed to start a new activity until he finished the previous one. Tripp (2012) maintains that the incident gained its critical significance when the program participants recognized the “asymmetry of power between the teacher and the student that limited her (rather than his) knowledge” (p. 20). The episode became a CI for one group member, but it was a collective intellectual effort that led to its formation.

In the field of foreign language teaching, each situation where homework has been forgotten, copied, misunderstood, under-performed, or unfinished can result in a critical incident, potentially revealing much more about the learning circumstances than the instructor presupposes. Indeed, under favorable conditions, additional practice is beneficial as it makes learners not only consolidate the course material from the class, but also further develop their factual knowledge, autonomous study skills, and self-discipline — the more time learners spend working with English, the better they get at it (Stirling, 2000; Painter, 2003; Harmer, 2008). It is also true that regular homework serves as a tool for the teacher to monitor students’ progress and to identify learning difficulties (Cooper, 1989). However, teachers often turn homework into a highly discouraging experience, which fosters resentment towards language learning altogether. The faults, such as unclear instructions, unvarying/monotonous formats, irrelevant and non-contextualized
tasks, lack of systematicity, or discouraging feedback, cause learners to perceive homework as both physical and emotional chore, for which they receive no reward. Careful examination of motives behind the students’ reactions towards homework might rule out a rough, yet seemingly common, guess that it is their mere indolence that defeats them. By doing so, educators who develop habitual thinking that students are there to consent to their guidance no matter what, could possibly lead to the formation of CIs, namely an understanding that they largely provoke these reactions and hence should revise their own didactic decisions.

In my study, to be presented in Chapter Three, the topic of homework was raised in CI reports seven times by five teachers of English. Interestingly, two beginner instructors approached the problem highly critically in that they considered the weaknesses of homework when incompetently administered. One made an observation that the way children are assigned homework, and exercises from the textbook in particular, to a large extent conditions their engagement. The other came to the conclusion that the way homework is elicited should not only be visualized but also rationalized at the lesson planning stage, which she failed to do and thus suffered undesired consequences. In addition, the most experienced practitioner among the subjects made a valid point commenting on a request from a colleague to suggest drill exercises on subject/verb agreement for her weakest students to do at home. She argued that supplementary practice must have a motivational dimension to it; therefore, highly personalized writing tasks are more likely to engage the learners when they are working on their own than a list of decontextualized error-correction or gap-filling sentences.

Overall, managing homework is as good a source of critical incidents as other components of language teaching. Atypical or alarming events are likely to capture teachers’ attention and undergo ample scrutiny, but investigating self-evident oddities is one possible way of forming CIs. Screening one’s practices in search of suspicious and objectionable symptoms can be equally effective. When teachers raise doubts about customary procedures and analyze them to critically justify their implementation, the procedures become critical. Little and seemingly insignificant components that make up the classroom reality might have a great potential for being critical. In Tripp’s (2012) words:
The very fact that we have recalled them means that there is probably something important about them, something which has made them salient for us in one way or another. But it is our very judgment of them as trivial which can be a way by which we deceive ourselves into thinking we can legitimately dismiss them, when we should actually consider them in great depth. (p. 35)

Our behavior is regulated by what we think things mean, so the meaning instructors build through addressing and redefining problem situations should be indicative of their professional awareness and expertise and inform decisions about further action.

From the socio-anthropological perspective, experiences originate in interaction between the individual with his or her personal needs, desires, and capacities, and the environment with its immediate physical and social setting (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 43). On that account, every experience carries a substantial impetus for development as it affects both our intellectual and emotional attitudes towards further experiences, as well as objective conditions under which these further experiences will take place. According to Wenger (1998), adult learners at work accumulate positive and negative experiences by involving in and co-creating practices, rituals, conventions, and symbols, which enable them to establish their way of life within a community, but above all fulfil the professional requirements, develop skills, and negotiate a shared sense of competence.

2.2. Diagnosing critical incidents
Hunter (1979) defines diagnosing as a process of observing and analyzing a condition or a situation which employs relevant external and internal information necessary to decide what needs to be done to improve it (p. 41). In essence, the process is a form of problem-solving and consists of reasoning operations that aim to determine both the structure and causes of the occurrence. The assumption is that we can find means of rectifying circumstances or settling problems provided we understand how and why something takes place. In other words, finding a solution is preconditioned by accurate diagnosing.

Interaction in the FL classroom brings about many puzzling episodes and serious didactic challenges, the comprehension and resolving of which might be essential for developing expertise in the field. Needless to say, critical incidents are prompted by the How and the Why questions and require an orderly procedure to decipher their meaning.
It is proposed in this thesis that structuring problems, assigning their causes, and evaluating the impact of the complex situations on effective language teaching/learning constitutes a way of building professional understanding.

2.2.1. Structuring problems

Primarily, diagnosing rests upon explanation constructed by inference from physical and non-physical manifestations. This means that teachers engage in evaluation of evidence and register subtleties in what they observe, just as doctors do. Good diagnosticians avoid making superficial assumptions about what they see, though (Johnson, 1998). To draw a well-informed conclusion about the state of affairs, they collect comprehensive information from various available sources, and vast knowledge representations in particular. Professional photographers, for example, use designated software to closely examine the parameters of shots, and only then do they adjust the tints, temperatures, and other variables to what they know will ultimately please the eye. Their interventions are regulated by expertise rather than bare initial impressions. By analogy, professional teachers are expected to consider a number of interplaying factors in order to determine the appropriateness of the textbook to their students. These factors include the book’s didactic principles and linguistic rationale, range of topics, its self- versus in-class study capacity, language-skill distribution, syllabus, supplementary resources, alternative options on the publishing market, learners’ reactions to sample material, their academic needs, intensity of the course, its profile, and many more. The 2004 LATEX (for Language Teaching Expertise) small-scale study demonstrated that an experienced practitioner could easily make a knowledgeable judgment of a recommended textbook, as opposed to a beginner instructor, whose evaluation was “unsystematic” and “likes and dislikes driven;” it revolved around the teacher’s concern “how she could use it” and revealed “no pre-existing knowledge of what to look for” (Johnson, 2007, p. 62). The attributes of the book the teachers picked out to assess showed how differently they perceived it and how different were the degrees of their expertise.

In this study, a novice teacher chose to diagnose an incident regarding the same didactic issue. A young instructor admitted that while she was preoccupied checking how grammar and lexis were dealt with in different sets of textbooks, she completely ignored the fact that the range of topics in the book she liked the most, and specially speaking
activities based on ones, failed to fit into the context of an evening course for working adults in an English language school. It was not until the learners overtly rebelled against the irrelevant content and tasks that she understood they were inadequate. Surprisingly enough, the teacher repeated the same mistake “three incidents later,” when her way of seeing the book and hence class content was once more limited to their how, not what, for which she was collectively criticized by another adult group she was teaching. Similar to the beginner in the LATEX study, she regarded the textbook as a script for lessons that she felt obliged to follow or insufficiently competent to modify.

Rodgers (2002) is of the opinion that the ‘ability to see,’ which enables teachers to respond intelligently to students’ learning (p. 230), is neither age- nor status-related. She finds this ability analogous to the aesthetic sensibility of artists, which, as Sullivan (2000) depicts it, is “a fine attention to detail and form: the perception of relations (tensions and harmonies); the perception of nuance (colors of meaning), and the perception of change (shifts and subtle motions)” (p. 221). Rodgers (2002) holds that teachers can develop the ability through what she calls a reflective cycle — systematic practice of observing, describing, and analyzing classroom situations. Her assumption is that the shift of thinking from one’s teaching to students’ learning is the key to effective perceptiveness. It can only take place when teachers slow down to spare a critical thought for what it is that learners currently experience, how it can possibly impact the successive stages into the learning process, and how it translates to the lesson design and conduct, which serve the continuity of learning. Teaching that results from the shift of focus should reveal teachers’ adequate understanding of the learning experience, its nature, source, and outcome. It is a response to, not the cause of, learning. The strategic choices teachers make do not close the reflective cycle, though. They merely unfold further classroom interaction, which provides more substance for observation, analysis, and action.

Assigning structure to problems means establishing (causal) relationships between their constituent parts. To do so, it is necessary to name distinctive bits and pieces that make up a complete picture of a situation and prepare valid grounds for explanation (Rodgers, 2002). Similar to language learners, whose speaking task is to first describe a photo and then ascribe meaning to what it represents, teachers create mental representations of students, feedback they receive, subject matter, context, and the dynamics in between these before they turn to interpretative and evaluative statements.
In short, a simplistic account of a situation can only lead to simplistic diagnosing, while the latter is in conflict with professional conduct. By contrast, the discrimination of tiny elements that characterize the teaching/learning reality and interactions between them allows for attempts at well-informed judgments.

However, classroom occurrences may contain inessential, conflicting, fallible or incomplete information, which can corrupt effective processing. One possible complication is that “students can choose which symptoms to display, when and where and to what degree, and even whether to display any symptoms at all” (Tripp, 2012, p. 30). Consequently, the meaning assigned to observed phenomena and strategies selected to deal with ones are nominations from among numerous equally justified options. Their accuracy might not be a matter of teachers’ perceptiveness, but rather the evidence of knowledge, awareness, and reasoning. Further, human agents orient their actions (search behavior) towards achieving a specific goal (e.g. solving a problem of persistent mispronunciation of the word determined in a group of intermediate learners). How they detect and respond to internal and external resource distributions is individually modulated, though (Fu, Hills, & Todd, 2015, p. 388). Past experiences and age appear to be decisive factors in information foraging (Hills, Todd, & Jones, 2015). The change (deterioration) in cognitive abilities, which comes with older age, makes people more reliant on the stored, hierarchically organized, and effortlessly activated knowledge representations rather than exhaustive enquiry. It follows that search dominated by exploitation can obscure one’s capacity to correctly diagnose the instances which demand expert intervention. In other words, a broad scope of professional practice and advanced age put teachers’ diagnostic abilities at risk.

Figure 3 below presents the cycle which Tripp (2012) proposes as a way of enhancing diagnostic abilities in teaching through creating CIs. Similar to Rodgers (2002), he points out that teacher learning does not occur until the actual experience generates methodical meaning-making discourse, which in turn is transformed into action exposed to evaluation. Specifically, an observed (problem) situation becomes a critical incident when the instructor comes to realize it is larger than “here and now,” and instead carries a more general meaning (p. 27). Its understanding dictates responses, which create further situations in the classroom, further CIs, and further scrutiny. In Tripp’s view, following this practice can ‘sensitize’ educators to variables within seemingly familiar
circumstances, prevent them from taking things for granted, and prompt novel approaches and solutions. However, the procedure leaves the phase of interpretation of events undefined.

Figure 3: The cycle of creating CIs in teaching (Tripp, 2012, p.32)

It is proposed that those who remain open to competing ways of seeing classroom situations are likely to demonstrate a rational attitude towards their significance, i.e. take a legitimate position on matters and construct valid yet verifiable claims about teaching and learning. The word possible/possibility in the mouth of an expert teacher, when underpinned with sound knowledge of the subject matter, learners, and the context, does not only embrace the richness and complexity of the substance to handle, but also indicates the teacher’s willingness 1) to unblock limited perceptions and unexamined assumptions, 2) to harmonize the knowledge obtained through teacher education and previous classroom history with the very current experience, and 3) to reorganize/regulate this experience accordingly. Problem situations have great potential of turning into “breakthrough moments” and providing a learning opportunity for teachers as they require that hypothetical interpretations be formulated and tested.
2.2.2. Attribution of causes

As discussed in Chapter One, reasoning, executed through propositions and logical substantiation, principally requires that different brain regions get activated to manage the information available in the environment, i.e. hierarchize, systematize, classify, analyze, compare, contrast, and order it so as to define associations between events that fit into *from-cause-to-effect* or *from-effect-to-cause* patterns (Sieb, 2017; Cummins, 2014). The capacity to make sophisticated causal inferences is dependent on an array of interrelated factors: intelligence, natural aging processes, memory, consistency between established knowledge structures and newly encountered information, as well as individual perceptual abilities to recognize same types of occurrences as prompted by varying stimuli in the environment, to group experiences by their attributes, to sharpen up distinctions between and reconnect the existing conceptual categories, or to discriminate variance in the qualities of context (Sumner & Samuel, 2009). Also, the inherent tendency to think analogically about their experiences impacts the way people approach situations and determine their underlying reasons.

Research on the manner in which teachers of English compute and identify driving forces behind classroom events is scarce, yet there is evidence that they activate prior understandings, map connections, and make relational inferences. A study by Bullough and Baughman (1995) found that a foreign language instructor observed symmetry between problems in the writing programs she taught in two subsequent workplaces and decided that the reason why the learners were not fulfilling their potentials was the fact that she had to attend to mainstreamed students. Likewise, in this study, a university teacher who received complaints from a student (poetry writer) about her low essay grade linked the situation to one in the past where another student (short-story writer) felt the imposed structure in academic writing was limiting his freedom of expression. The interpretation of the two cases was comparable – the problem was not with the essay structure per se but rather the students demeaning its role. A central difference between these studies is that Kerrie, Bullough and Baughman’ subject, considered new contextual constraints (less time for conferencing with students) and possibilities (more guidance in the writing tasks) and modified solutions to the latter problem based on these realities. By contrast, Weronika, a participant in this study, never tried to distinguish the experiences.
Bullough and Baughman (1995) are of the opinion that noticing the specificity of the context, and hence reducing the reliance on the familiar schema, made it possible for the teacher not only to effectively address the issue, but also to recognize that the nature of the problem as wholly distinct. On the other hand, Holyoak (2005) claims that regardless of their expertise level, human beings are fallible and can embark on irrational lines of thoughts and overgeneralizations, believing, for example, that two structurally coherent cases are sufficient to serve as a springboard for useful scheme building. Drawing conclusions based on very limited evidence can be highly ineffective, not to say destructive. It exemplifies cognitive distortion, which results in generating seriously biased perspectives (ibid.).

Studies demonstrate (Tsui, 2003; Johnson, 1996) that when teachers engage in thorough analysis of classroom situations, they tend to be more critical about their instructional decisions and recognize the causes of problems in themselves rather than other parties. For example, in Tsui’s (2003) study, an experienced ESL instructor was deeply concerned about vague student learning outcomes in the writing classes she was teaching. She gave it serious thought, looked at the options available, and came to understand it was a process-oriented approach to writing that she failed to employ in the course. Instead, she had unreasonably high expectations as for the quality of her students’ papers. Similarly, Johnson (1996) reports on a novice teacher disappointed with herself running lessons in a teacher-centered manner although she conceptually disapproved of doing so. The growing tension in the teacher resulted in a journal entry elaborating on how the need to cover all the material made her frequently ignore questions from the learners. Still, she realized the core of the problem was lying in her choosing what was an easy and time-saving solution, namely telling the students what to do rather than exploring the possibilities to combine the two approaches. One more example is provided by Woods’ (1996), in whose study a mid-career teacher admitted to having developed a misconception of purpose in L2 teaching and learning – he believed the notion corresponded to communication practice the learners were provided in class. When they proved to be mainly interested in passing their exams, the teacher took time to process his role in the context of Japanese educational system and decided to adapt his ways of instruction.
Tripp (2012) emphasizes the importance of disciplined search for understanding of one’s classroom experiences, and problem situations in particular, through activation of prior understandings. Most of the thinking strategies he advocates rest upon asking probing, i.e. critique, questions. These examine not only teachers’ knowledge, but also the principles and personal values underlying their interpretations, reveal complexities of formal instruction and major contradictions practitioners hold about it, show how individual inclinations guide actions, and expose gaps in professional expertise. One proposed challenge is asking about things that have not happened because something else has (Tripp uses de Bono’s term non-events, 1987). By doing so, teachers can stimulate thoughts that focus on evidence vis-à-vis alternative scenarios and trigger structured knowledge representations in order to identify causal relations between different, not always observable, constituents of occurrences. The effortful mode of thinking — discussed in Chapter One as System 2 in the dual-process model of the brain (Kahneman, 2011) — functions as the doubter and allows practitioners to reduce their potential overconfidence with challenging self-induced reservations.

2.2.3. Formulating professional judgments

Tripp (2012) observes that societies hold some occupations in higher regard than others not only because of “academically difficult specialist knowledge,” but also because of protection and maintenance that these occupations offer to their clients. Yet, it is the ability to demystify complexities within their domains that grants professionals full recognition, especially when evidence necessary to reach definite judgments is barely sufficient (p. 125). According to Tripp’s definition, professional judgments are “a matter of ‘expert guesses’ that have more to do with reflection, interpretation, opinion, and wisdom, than with the mere acquisition of facts and prescribed ‘right answers’” (ibid.). He does not discount the impact of other constituents of expertise, though, and maintains that:

Its value is produced as much by the judgment of uncertain possibilities as upon certain factual knowledge, and as much upon the importance of the consequences of choices for the client’s well-being as upon the efficient performance of skilled routines. (p. 126)
Eysenck and Keane (2010) classify judgment as a component of decision-making processes and see its prior function in estimating the probability of events in view of the available information. The quality of judgment is then measured by the accuracy of such estimates, i.e. assumptions and inferences drawn from the evidence “at hand” (p. 508). The connection between judgment and decision-making is apparent in diagnosing; the former involves combining various cues to infer what is happening while the latter focuses on the processes, be it cognitive, emotional, or social, that contribute to selecting one out of a number of options to effectively attain a goal — a pragmatic solution or psychological equilibrium.

However, human inclination to simplify reasoning, develop biases, and arrive at overconfident decisions in the absence of complete substantiation reveals systematic errors in the thinking mechanism (Kahneman, 2011). People of various degrees of expertise, ability, or intelligence tend to think intuitively, i.e. operate on heuristics which are “cognitively undemanding and can be used very rapidly” (Eysenck & Keane, 2010, p. 510). Three of these — the representativeness, availability, and recognition heuristics — demonstrate our excessive yet fallible reliance on seemingly easy solutions when under uncertainty. In domains of professional activity, including teaching, heuristic searches aimed to make sense of the unexpected can have a detrimental effect on the development of practitioners in that they prevent the potential realignment of existing belief systems.

First, the representativeness heuristic is used when “we cannot manage to fit a situation into a defined category, and we continue to try to find meaning by assigning it to a secondary level of an already completed organizational system” (Fournier, 2018). Doing so, we activate stereotypes, namely focus on information which we believe is relevant, and often ignore what is clearly pertinent. As a result, we are likely to miscalculate the connotative distance between the features of the event and those of the original framework.

Second, the availability heuristic, based on the idea that the recallability of events from the past closely correlates with their apparent frequency (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973), misleads us into judging possible scenarios as more or less compelling. In a sense, experience, or rather established schemata, serve as a direct point of reference for our thoughts and actions. However, the hazards are that 1) interpretations derived from
uncertain situations might be mistaken and hence prompt mistaken judgments and predictions about the future, 2) we choose to consider the simplest developments when speculating about complex events and hence fail to notice a network of interacting factors and processes, or 3) in conflicting occurrences we are guided by our own understandings and hence overlook the perceptions of others. In short, episodic memory, which deposits the gist of our prior life episodes constructed from the *What?* and *Where?* information, is involved in visualizing future events (Eysenck & Keane, 2010, p. 294).

The recognition heuristic — yet another memory-based tool for uncertain inferences — is the mindset oriented towards solving problems by searching for cue information in the environment and building schemata, which “connect the specific structure of the judgment task with the probability structure of a corresponding natural environment, stored in long-term memory” (Pachur, Todd, Gigerenzer, Schooler, & Goldstein, 2011). Goldstein and Gigerenzer (2002) claim that semantic recognition is sufficient to discriminate between novel and familiar properties of objects and situations and that good inferences are possible as long as recognition matches the criterion to be inferred. Predictably, though, the recognition heuristic is not always an effective instrument to formulate judgments. One major problem concerns low recognition validity, identified as one’s awareness of validity differences between environments (domains) paired with lack of knowledge about the exact validity of one’s own recognition knowledge in these environments, which results in people having to elect alternative strategies to put forward acceptable solutions (Pachur & Hertwig, 2006).

The human propensity to make decisions intuitively and apply short-cut thinking strategies carries implications for professional judgment in such problem-prone areas as language teaching. A very high capacity of pre-conscious information processing, which allows for the rapid assessment of available information as either task-relevant or irrelevant, is particularly advantageous in simple routine episodes, yet dangerously insufficient in complex situations, where the precision in the identification and configuration of conclusive matter is critical for the proper understanding of the potential causes and effects, the intelligent sequence of action, and the rational justification of one’s choices. Hastie (2001) compares demanding decision moments to navigating a boat in a rough sea — it takes much more than instinct “to maintain a meandering course toward the ultimate goal” (p. 665). Similarly, it takes much more than pre-conscious inner
prompting to address students’ conflicting needs in a single activity, to monitor this activity in a large-size class, or to take care of unexpected serious learning difficulties therein.

Time to critically and systematically evaluate information so as to draw valid micro- and macro-scale conclusions regarding problems is a luxury not all professionals can afford. It is reasonable to expect that an operating surgeon, with the patient’s life at stake, will face a decision-time deficit incomparable to the pressures put on a teacher to accurately interpret, react to, and reflect upon good or bad case scenarios in the language classroom. Indeed, a specific rhythm of teaching creates great opportunities to engage with reasoning and judgment, the social and moral dimensions of which constitute the foundation of educational values. Dörnyei (2001) hypothesizes that teachers who seize such opportunities and attach ethical principles to the outcome of their thoughts, actions, goals, and expectations play a part in their learners’ overall success in life. Similarly, Tripp (2012) claims that “the difference between doing something professionally and being in a profession lies in the range of choices that must be made about how to achieve a particular end” (p. 131). The very particular end in teaching, he adds, is the comfort of the learners. Hence, judgments that practitioners generate are ethical decisions, the consequences of which affect whole societies. That is why:

Teachers should be diagnostic in the sense that they are able to employ profession-specific knowledge and expertise to recognize, describe, understand and explain their practice in an academic fashion, and interpret that diagnosis in order to form professional judgments to further the well-being of their clients. (p. 7)

In essence, if teachers efficiently apply instructional strategies but fail to be perceptive and to articulate the specialist knowledge that underlies what they do, they are craftspeople rather than professionals and leaders (Tripp, 2012).

Needless to say, teachers’ judgments are largely informed by their personally-held set of beliefs. Whether teachers discharge moral responsibilities in their attempts to care for the well-being of their clients or not reflects the way they see the world and grow attitudes towards self and society (Tripp, 2012). Ethical imperatives and procedural rules sanctioned by these imperatives lie a ground for correct conclusions of rational discourse.
The ideas that govern our thoughts and actions are not always recognized and articulated, though. It is a scrupulous analysis of situations aimed at a professional conduct that might expose our “personal theories” and, within ones, inherent and sometimes conflicting/competing values. Tripp (2012) argues that work-related dilemmas (critical incidents) teach us a lot about who we are by unmasking what we regard truthful, desired, socially just, or morally wrong; they can also make us recognize that the beliefs we cultivate and act upon bear far-reaching repercussions for the learners.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>source of understanding</th>
<th>practical</th>
<th>diagnostic</th>
<th>reflective</th>
<th>critical</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>professional expertise</td>
<td>reasoning</td>
<td>personal values and beliefs</td>
<td>professional expertise and reasoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>length of processing</td>
<td>short</td>
<td>prolonged</td>
<td>short / prolonged</td>
<td>prolonged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>outcome</td>
<td>workable solutions to problems</td>
<td>increased awareness of one's own decisions</td>
<td>attitudes</td>
<td>verified standards and knowledge representations</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*Table 3: Four kinds of professional judgments (Tripp, 2012)*

Tripp (2012) suggests that four kinds of judgments — practical, diagnostic, reflective, and critical — are particularly important to professional teaching. Table 3 illustrates major differences between them. The first is rooted in expert knowledge, which, when in problematic situations, allows teachers to decide instantly on a swift and effective course of action so as to reverse or correct mistakes and avoid potential damage; it relies on accumulated “wisdom of practice” rather than mere memories of previous experiences. The second yields a logical justification of the decision taken, i.e. builds an awareness of its nature and effects (p. 138). Accordingly, it involves alternative interpretations of events since the exploration of meaning goes beyond their immediate context. Clearly, the doing-and-understanding duet is performed prior to reflection — the type of judgment which concerns the personal (subjective) volume of decisions, and this way chiefly manifests one’s moral standards and values rather than strong legitimate
reason. To illustrate, a teacher who demands that his or her students show an explicit familiarity with FL grammar rules might not link their potential problems in transferring the rules into language production with the way of grammar teaching he or she has developed. Without an informed and analytical approach to one’s convictions, a strong stance that grammar learning requires verbatim memorization might be his or her only source of understanding. The critical judgment challenges and verifies the values behind one’s actions. The process engages the knowledge of teaching principles and procedures, the result of which might be verification of one’s existing understandings.

In his extensive research on judgment in teaching, Tripp (2012) observed a tendency among both experienced and novice educators in Australia to overlook the diagnostic and critical examination of their work. While, as expected, the latter are gradually developing the cognitive and emotional competence to deal with problems and difficult tasks, the neglect of the former comes as a surprise. Indeed, human judgments can be deficient in reliability, validity, and coherence; they can be irrational and incompetent, yet we are all capable of not only intelligent constructing but also evaluating our practical solutions, especially when we clearly identify the properties of tasks we engage with (Shanteau, 1992). The reasons why teachers do not practice diagnostic and critical analyses might be threefold. Realistically speaking, they are either overwhelmed with administrative duties, short of practical skills to perform such operations, or resistant to change in the settled frame of mind.

The perspective adopted in this thesis is that one way to improve this state of affairs is through systematic and rigorous analysis of critical incidents, which requires that different thinking modes and sources of knowledge be integrated to build valid representations of problems in FL instruction, attribute their causes, and formulate feedback for learning from those incidents. Gabryś-Barker’s (2012) study on developing professional judgment abilities in pre-service teachers demonstrated how undergraduates, engaged in a year-long diary writing project, gradually improved their reflectivity and the use of professional literature when reviewing meaningful classroom events (critical incidents). It was observed that students’ systematic attempts to examine what they perceived as disturbing resulted in interpretations grounded in learnt knowledge rather than intuitions and beliefs.
In conclusion, as Tversky and Kahneman (1973) claim, very few professionals will experience the harmony between their probability judgments, personal systems of preferences, biases, and both specialist and general knowledge. A degree of compatibility can be difficult to achieve even for rational judges due to constraints in both the environment and the computational abilities of the individuals. Studies show that well-trained and experienced diagnosticians in medicine and other highly-specialized domains, expected to balance out the missing or imprecise bits of evidence with their professional expertise, struggle to generate critical judgments, just as less experienced practitioners do (Eysenck & Keane, 2010, p. 512).

2.3. The role of emotion in diagnosing CIs

Affective thoughts, be it positive or negative, play a role throughout the stages of diagnosing critical incidents in that the attributes of emotion, such as its episodic, dynamic, structured, and intentional nature, are embedded in narratives. Teacher discourse communicates how a conscious human being interacts with the world and its surprises, acts upon stimuli, rationalizes most confusing experiences, makes different elements of the story fit together, and adopts a personal perspective on life and its various aspects (Goldie, 2000, p. 13). In other words, what people think (and say) is righteous or not and what ought to be or not is affected by their mental dispositions to experience (un)pleasant moments, and the gravity of the emotion they feel about those moments in particular.

In Sternberg’s (1995) words, “an emotion is a feeling comprising physiological and behavioral (and possibly cognitive) reactions to internal and external events” (p. 542). Nairne (2000) views emotion as a psychological event in itself but acknowledges, in line with other psychologists, that its complexity regards a mixture of reactions, namely bodily and expressive responses, accompanied by some kind of subjective experience (p. 444). The cognitive viewpoint also holds that the emotional system lies a foundation for human action and thought. According to Ellsworth (1994), the process begins in advance of explicit identification, “when one’s attention is captured by some discrepancy or change” (p. 192), and it induces an immediate alteration in the state of mind and body. The arousal of the cognitive and regulatory brain systems, be it transient or prolonged, is usually powerful enough to convert to impulsive reactions (Panksepp, 1994, p. 86).
is evidence that “the default network” (Type-I processing system; equivalent to Kahneman’s System 1 in the duo-processing model, 2011) allows for condition-action processing, including emotionally-laden alarm or reactive responding, prior to conscious Type-II processing, the structures of which serve as the ground for deliberate faculties (Keefer, 2013, p. 116). Emotions developed as Type-I adaptations are important tools for the regulation of our behavior, especially in critical circumstances. At the same time, moral reasoning tends to take the form of the rationalization of Type-I decisions. For example, a teacher who vents his or her fury in front of the class in reply to an act of misconduct could easily justify his or her own behavior as provoked by an ill-disciplined student and at the same time find no excuse for the other party’s fault. The experience like this might arrest, at least temporarily, the teacher’s rational thinking in favor of pseudo-rational defense of his or her bruised ego. The critical incident reports discussed in the following chapter allowed to detect both teachers’ emotional systems in operation and the nature of their post hoc thinking stimulated by emotionally-charged episodes.

The affective property of human responses to stimuli has been long recognized in cognitive psychology, while their interpretation, i.e. the construction of meaning, agreed to remain a matter of goal-oriented information processing, rooted in the survival-oriented functioning of the organism (Eysenck & Keane, 2010). Kahneman (2011) diverges from the view that the human thought processes are corrupted by emotions although he acknowledges that feelings are a fundamental part of our remembering selves. He maintains that the deficiencies of human reasoning (cognitive illusions) prompt both deficient emotional judgments about the past experiences and inaccurate predictions of future emotional adjustments. However, research has shown that cognitive processes, and specifically the retrieval of the contents from memory during decision-making and problem-solving, can be impacted by the feeling of anxiety, depression, stress, bad mood, and other emotional states, referred to as “the core drivers of attention and allocation of memory” (Jagtap & Guaro, 2016, p. 2081). For example, a tranquil approach towards a problematic situation often results in manipulating the available information in a broader, more inclusive, and flexible fashion. By contrast, a downhearted frame of mind tends to provoke more scrupulous, biased, and time-consuming processing (ibid.). Newer research confirms that basic emotional competencies — interest, sadness, anger, or surprise — pave the way to experiencing the world, for they are either present
at birth or developed during the first months of life (McDonough, Choi, & Mandler, 2003). This has direct consequences for cognitive and social considerations of affect. If all complex forms of human behavior are to be seen as responsive strategies grown out of the distinct psychological make-up of the individuals, the way we reason, bequeath expertise, react to expectations, handle relationships, or resolve problems demonstrates our prioritization of options in decision-making processes.

Apparently, the literature on emotion mainly focuses on how it is negatively-loaded and thus demands interventions to change it into something of use. Only more recent studies have expanded their scope of investigation over the informative nature of emotion as a mode of communication (Harber, 2005). As McManus (2011) observes:

Rather than measuring, separating, and isolating emotion (and generally being scared of it), we should be focusing on becoming more emotionally literate. Developing the ability to read and interpret the information our emotion conveys to us and being comfortable to consciously acknowledge emotion as integral, natural, and indeed critical would be advantageous in the process of critical reflection (p. 10)

McManus argues that emotional literacy results in a better understanding of one’s system of beliefs and raises self-awareness, which is why the premise that it mainly initiates irrational reactions is highly questionable. Similarly, Jagtap and Guaro (2016) suggest that the practical use of emotional intelligence begins with making a sharp distinction between positive vs. negative or pleasant vs. unpleasant conditions in the environment which are calling for reaction and consequently recognizing the nature and intensity of the feelings experienced when deciding on a course of action (p. 2082). Research has shown that the ability to identify the magnitude of one’s emotions in response to the potency of environmental stimuli gives a strategic advantage to decision-makers. In other words, a higher awareness of emotional experience is found to make induced biases more manageable and cognitive and social judgments better-informed (ibid.). In this respect, the emotional differentiation seems to define the scope of human behavior, within which people disclose individual differences in processing information.
The discussion on whether the influence of subjective perceptions and feelings profits or harms the participants in interaction is not resolved, though. In short, one view is that unless emotions are carefully controlled, they cause people to develop bias that in turn prevents any form of mutual understanding (Shiv, Loewenstein, Bechara, Damasio, & Damasio, 2005). An alternative hypothesis holds that feelings play a facilitating role in life and decision-making in particular. They allow people to shift attention from what is less important to what is recognized as priority. Seo and Barrett (2007) reasonably propose that the degree of affective impact on human choices (decision performance) depends on and hence can be analyzed against the individual capacity to recognize and manage affective states. In other words, emotional intelligence, defined as the ability to discern, interpret, and regulate one’s emotions and the emotions of others (see Goleman, 1996), correlates to some extent with effective functioning within the work environment and navigating one’s way through unexpected occurrences therein.

In organizational settings, including schooling institutions, where participants bring in highly idiosyncratic thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of the system, designated roles, tasks, and all sorts of unfolding events, interaction with others and the environment clearly entails cognitive and emotional tension. It follows that within their professional frameworks, teachers draw not only upon their cognitive but also their emotional capital, both of which play a role in establishing or regaining psychological equilibrium in the individual. For instance, those who demonstrate a high index of excitement in novelty are likely to welcome and adopt to major changes in their environment as opportunities for professional refreshment and personal growth, just as they are likely to take up smoking, enjoy extreme sports, and try exotic foods (Slovic, 2001). On the contrary, irrational fears of the unpredictable might push others into so-called inactive inertia (Anderson, 2003). Correspondingly, decisions made by someone petrified to accept a position of responsibility and the potential risks of failure/regrets it entails and someone confident in their ability to make rational choices in unfamiliar circumstances can be taken as instances of how “emotions affect not only particular options people are attracted to or repelled from but also their decisions about whether to make a decision between alternatives in a systematic manner” (p. 162).

Classroom situations generate endless challenges for both learners and teachers because the cognitive and emotional tension, mentioned above, is there at all times. The
question remains how the two parties can intelligently control their feelings (and which ones) so as to ensure that the individual emotional experience aids rather than decreases their task motivation and accomplishment. Some workplaces make it categorical that the overt expression of emotion should be suppressed altogether, for in the conventional sense emotionality continuously stands in opposition to rationality (in Jagtap & Guaro, 2016, p. 2080). Yet, it is justifiable to assume that teachers have a basic knowledge of psychology and clearly understand that voicing frustration at a student who failed to do homework for the fifth time in a month is a serious violation of professional conduct, just as returning hugs and kisses to younger learners who instinctively seek comfort in caretakers’ arms. The grounds for spontaneous affective responses in such episodes, infuriating and compassionate respectively, are surely unsafe, to say the least.

In a broader perspective, cognitive appraisal, and re-appraisal in particular (i.e. reinterpreting the meaning or adopting a third-person approach), has been identified as a form of modifying emotions. Recent studies in neuroimaging have confirmed that negative feelings can be effectively reduced by higher-order reasoning operations. Other common regulation strategies — situation selection and modification, attention deployment, and response modulation — are known as the process model by Gross and Thompson (2007) and share one definitive goal: to command/re-direct the unstructured stream of emotions and “override people’s spontaneous emotional responses” (Koole, 2009, p. 6). The characteristic instances of respective controlling behavior include avoidance, pre-arrangement/preparation, distraction, muscle relaxation and breathing techniques, visualizations, and self-surveillance release of affect. They stand for intelligent practices which can fulfill the human potential of causality. Palmer (1998) argues that since the process of structuring personal experience is to a degree governed by emotions, on no account should the affective dimension of teaching and its highly delicate nature be disregarded. Apparently, decisions and actions out of emotions, which undergo self-interpretation, become an integral part of narratives and, as Goldie (2000) argues, integrate with the existing system of personal beliefs and values, laying a foundation for further interpretations and beliefs to grow. They preserve and transform into teachers’ practical knowledge — a benchmark in establishing professional diagnoses.

Decisions are naturally influenced by affective factors as well as social context. Kahneman and Tversky’s (1984) prospect theory holds that people approach relatively
simple decisions with the intention of maximizing the chances of making a gain and minimizing the chances of a loss. Interestingly, studies show that human subjects do not always follow the dominance principle – the notion that of two possible options, the better is always naturally preferred. Instead, they develop what one of the assumptions underlying the theory calls *loss aversion* – the tendency to resign from potential gains so as not to face potential loss. Such behavior is the result of placing too much importance on low-probability outcomes of decisions even though there is no rationale for doing so. It clearly demonstrates that the components of the human psychological make-up such as sensitivity to losses, for example, can determine the process of making decisions.

Indeed, emotional factors play a role not only in loss aversion, but in decision-making performance in general. There is evidence that intense feelings may lead to finer decisions than weaker feelings. In the study by Seo and Barrett (2007), the subjects exhibiting extensive professional expertise managed to prevent their emotional states from influencing their decision-making. Also, a rational-emotional model proposed by Anderson’s (2003) indicates that the anticipated emotions of fear and regret can substantially impact decision-making, or even result in omission bias. Here, a social dimension steps in, as decision-making usually involves interpersonal consequences. Some decisions are simply avoided due to high accountability. In many domains, this single factor, which requires that individuals justify their professional judgments, regulates efforts put in reaching a desired goal.

To sum up, teachers’ professional biographies contain a multitude of emotion-driven situations whose analysis might either invest them with corrective power or enhance what they already know, think, and do. It seems of paramount importance to point out that judgments which practitioners make about all aspects of learning and teaching tend to be congruous with the emotional states they experience while making these judgments. This means that the role of emotions is ubiquitous in the domain of formal instruction and that discussing ones is highly relevant to the topic of investigating critical incidents as a way to build one’s professional expertise. In short, “Feelings emerge as constructs that determine the way we go about our work” (Tripp, 2012, p. 107).
2.4. Potential flaws in diagnosing CIs

Tripp (2012) introduces the term *problematics* to refer to underlying knowledge structures which cause the teacher to categorize occurring phenomena as troublesome, to put a reasonable interpretation on them, and to develop routines for future purposes. Tripp points out that established routines might cloud over the structures behind them, i.e. block alternative interpretations and adversely affect the distribution of attentional resources. In other words, automatic/habitual teaching as well as mindless transfer of solutions from the past disconnects from conceptual thinking about the nature of problems, and hence poses “the most insidious occupational hazard” (Tripp, 2012, p. 16).

Teachers who uncritically rely on routines just because they seem to work in familiar contexts run the risk of approaching unexpected situations as so-called *practical problematics* (Tripp, 2012), bearing a single question in mind: how to solve them. Still, selecting a response from a wide repertoire of tested procedures does not ensure its flawlessness. Routine prevents teachers from structuring problems, i.e. deciphering relevant pieces of the whole, subsuming them under a set of fundamental instructional principles, and embedding in a larger conceptual structure in a way that qualifies teachers to construct hypotheses about teaching and learning and examine them through further observation and analysis. Tripp (2012) holds the view that a feeling of knowing often sadly wins against legitimate professional expertise and inhibits the effective diagnosing of critical incidents. By contrast, exploring situations by shifting the problematic from the practical to the critical might be a milestone in raising teachers’ professional awareness. This is because knowledge activated through rigorous examination of one’s own experiences goes far beyond *What? and How?* — it brings to light paradigms, estimates personal values, studies circumstances, and discusses views so as to enhance the process of learning.

In the foreign language classroom, it is not uncommon that teenage learners switch into L1 when engaged in group or pair tasks. Teachers who see it as a practical problem to solve are likely to seek an answer to the question *What to do to make them speak L2 only?* A diagnostic approach to the phenomenon encourages investigation into patterns/regularities in students’ behavior and, as discussed earlier, might take time and effort to notice and register the nuances. Additionally, a good diagnostician tries and recognizes his or her own thoughts about the occurrence (e.g. *Is it that I am bothered by...*)
my students speaking L1 because my supervisor will regard me as an ineffective teacher, or am I concerned with their speaking skill development? Didactically speaking, is it wrong that my students use L1 in FL class or can I knowledgeably justify this tendency and turn it into something useful? If so, how?).

Tsui’s (2003) longitudinal study demonstrated that among four ESL instructors engaged in systematic inspection of both their practices and their effects, one (Marina) successfully developed a habit of “falsifying” her instructional choices by asking why it was that she wanted to do what she did. Over time, her ‘looking-for-problems” approach resulted in a clearer perception of classroom events and her moves, which she found illuminating for a better understanding of her job. The other subjects showed both motivation for improvement and disposition to challenges, too, but they tended 1) to reduce the complexity of problems relying on their intuition rather than exploratory search and 2) to attribute the causes of difficulties to factors that were beyond their control. Tsui (2003) argues that without exercising sound judgment on one’s current level of competence, professional progress is hampered irrespective of a stretch of teaching experience, which proved to be the case with the three subjects.

Tsui’s view seems to affirm the idea advocated in this thesis that diagnosing critical incidents gives teachers an opportunity to practice (and refine) higher order thought processes. Martin (2009) suggests that critical thinking in education should resemble “design thinking” in the sense that it aims at opening up new problems and new possibilities for further reasoning, instead of searching for ultimate truths and formulas. Bereiter and Scardamalia (2003) call it a “make-it-better” heuristic, which rests upon the principle of improving the idea, not its outcome. They argue that while creative efforts remain within intellectual capacities of most educated people, building upon and critically assessing operating concepts is a daunting task for many. Paired with collaborative discourse to communicate attempts at refined thoughts and justifications of one’s actions, confrontation, indeed, becomes a basic necessity in teaching.

In conclusion, critical incidents (CIs) play an important role in TEFL. This is because the engagement in complex diagnostic operations offer instructors an excellent potential for stimulating their cognitive capacities and building their professional knowledge. How successfully teachers of English as a foreign language exploit this potential became the major objective of this study.
CHAPTER THREE

A STUDY OF DIAGNOSTIC ABILITIES OF EFL TEACHERS

3.1. The purpose

EFL teachers’ reflection on classroom challenges remains insufficiently researched although it is potentially helpful to determine their knowledge about teaching and learning English and its effective use to solve problems in the course of daily practice.

The purpose of this study is to explore diagnostic processes of seven qualified Polish teachers of English as a foreign language, based on their domain expertise, with reference to critical incidents (CIs). The subjects were asked to review and report in writing past events from their teaching experience which they regarded as CIs. The written report revealed cycles of 1) describing, 2) analyzing, and 3) interpreting those situations.

Based on the assumption that written discourse provides optimal means to communicate one’s thoughts and professional understanding, the reports provided the source of information for the researcher about the existing knowledge structures activated by the subjects to represent, reason about, and evaluate the significance of the critical incidents in the context of TEFL. The material for analysis consisted of 73 reports, and its examination was guided by the following research questions:

Q1: How do the subjects mentally represent critical incidents in EFL teaching?
Q2: What mental constructs and sources of knowledge do they activate to diagnose critical incidents?
Q3: What higher-order thinking abilities do they engage in the process of diagnosing critical incidents?
Q4: What kind of professional judgments do the subjects formulate in the process of diagnosing critical incidents?
Q5: Are there patterns and regularities in the way the subjects diagnose critical incidents?
Q6: What kind of relationship, if any, can be discovered between the effectiveness of diagnosing critical incidents and the subjects’ professional experience (in years)?
3.2. Research design

In this study, the units of inquiry for the subjects were critical incidents which took place in educational settings, i.e. English language schools/courses in the public and private education system in Poland. The courses of English explored in this thesis included:

- a) evening classes for working adults,
- b) formal instruction in Grade 6,
- c) academic writing for senior students in the Institute of Modern Languages,
- d) individual tuition for teenage low-achievers,
- e) weekend playtime sessions for very young learners,
- f) in-company custom-tailored language programs,
- g) or an integrated-skills course in a bilingual secondary state school.

Each of these provided the natural conditions, under which the teachers customarily planned, performed, solved problems, and deliberated on their classroom practice. The study was designed to elicit reports from the subjects that captured and communicated their thinking about puzzling situations occurring within their work settings, which they sought to understand. The specificities of the task, discussed below, mediated the content of the reports and the manner of its analysis, which focused on how the subjects represented the problem situations, how they reasoned about them, and how they formulated professional judgments about the learning potential of the episodes.

3.2.1. The task for the subjects

The task required that within one school year (2014/15 and 2015/16 respectively for individual cases) the subjects, who were familiarized with the concept of critical incidents, write at least 10 reports aimed to diagnose situations from in and outside the FL classroom which they recognized as potentially critical. First, the selected occurrences were expected to be **problem situations** in the sense that they raised questions which the teachers could not answer or wanted to explore in-depth. The following tips were meant to stimulate the search (this is the author’s translation of an excerpt from the guidelines which the subjects received in L1; see *Appendix A*):
- Think of a situation which distracted you from work because it disagreed with accepted norms,
- a didactic challenge which you managed/failed to handle on the spot,
- something upsetting, amusing, insulting, exciting, or embarrassing that you have noticed, done, or heard as a teacher,
- an event or a lesson procedure that you distinctly remember although it was your usual teaching routine,
- a classroom episode that aroused your curiosity,
- or a moment of realization that your knowledge about teaching English as a foreign language was inadequate for the situation.

It was emphasized that the subjects could choose to report and analyze both pleasant and unpleasant experiences, yet the way they recaptured and interpreted the past events was subjective and beyond the researcher’s control. For example, a request for help coming at the end of the semester from an uninterested student could be retrieved from memory 1) as a puzzling case creating the opportunity to investigate and better understand psycholinguistic aspects of TEFL, or 2) as an easily foreseeable scenario demonstrating a disdainful attempt of a desperate learner to make up his/her wrongs.

The recommended structure of the reports aimed to encourage the engagement of the subjects’ cognitive resources, professional knowledge, assumptions and beliefs about FL instruction, deep reflective thought and emotions in learning from the situations, i.e. constructing feedback for further reference in teaching. Specifically, the subjects were requested to divide their CI reports into three parts – description, analysis, and judgment. The first part meant to describe what actually happened, i.e. briefly portray the scene as it was remembered, including the what, the where, the when, and the who. The next part was devoted to diagnosing, i.e. establishing causal relationships between the professional concepts and categories assigned to the constituents of the situation, and its critical substance in particular. The closing part was expected to provide the evaluation of the learning potential of the incident with the teacher’s future didactic moves in mind. This simple mode of discourse organization was proposed to make the writing process easier for the subjects while the material for analysis more transparent for the researcher. The instructions on the procedure were the following:
Use the checklist below to describe, analyze, and evaluate situations in your teaching experience which you have selected as potentially critical. Follow the steps when both thinking and writing about the occurrences. Address all the points although you do not have to elaborate on each at length. Create a flow of text, in which the emphasis is placed on what you consider the critical element and why. (this is the author’s translation of an excerpt from the guidelines which the subjects received in L1; see Appendix A)

Table 4 is the outline of the directions the subjects were recommended to follow.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>Distinct steps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Description** | Present the background of the incident  
Summarize events, your (re)actions and emotions  
Point to the critical moment |
| **Analysis** | Identify the problem:  
Assign professional concepts/categories to the parts of the incident  
Establish causal relationships between them  
Specify the question(s) which the incident brought up  
Name your responsibility  
Think of alternative scenarios for the incident and its outcomes |
| **Judgment** | Evaluate the significance of the incident vis-à-vis your expertise in EFL teaching as acquired through your initial teacher training, English learning and teaching experience, the subject literature, personal theories, colleagues, etc.  
Construct feedback for future reference in your teaching practice |

Table 4: The sequence of stages and steps in CI report writing

The selection of experiences to examine was the subjects’ free choice, but they received two sample reports (see Appendix A). These were created especially for the purpose of this study and illustrated two contrasting cases of critical incidents (failure and success in teaching). Average in length (604 and 549 words respectively), they both demonstrated that the teachers used different sources of understanding (e.g. personally-held beliefs and values combined with their knowledge of the learners and context, the
teaching and learning principles, and literature review of the field) to represent the problems, support their claims, and formulate the conclusions about the situations. The samples were discussed in detail with all the subjects to ensure the clarity of their task.

To sum up, the seven teachers engaged in recalling, describing, analyzing, and building an enhanced understanding of their past classroom experiences while their written reports provided the source of data in this study.

3.2.2. The plan of the study

The study began in 2014. Formal meetings were arranged individually with all the subjects to familiarize them with the concept of critical incidents, the assignment, analysis guidelines, and the submission procedure. The first meeting was held on 3rd October 2014; the closing collection of CI reports was received in April 2017.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Joining date</th>
<th>Submission date</th>
<th>Reports</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T1</td>
<td>October 2014</td>
<td>September 2015</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T2</td>
<td>December 2014</td>
<td>March 2016</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T3</td>
<td>March 2015</td>
<td>October 2016</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T4</td>
<td>November 2014</td>
<td>December 2016</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T5</td>
<td>October 2014</td>
<td>February 2017</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T6</td>
<td>February 2015</td>
<td>April 2017</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T7</td>
<td>January 2015</td>
<td>April 2017</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 5: The course of action throughout the study*
For the duration of the study, the monitoring method was minimally invasive in order to reduce a sphere of influence on the state of affairs. Essentially, the updates on the work in progress were scheduled to be collected three times in total. They aimed to check the subjects’ understanding of the assignment, offer further clarification, if necessary, and keep statistics. The updates took place two, five and nine months into the study and produced the outcome shown in Figure 4. T1 was the only subject who accomplished the assignment and submitted the set of 11 CI reports within the allocated time (one school year).

![Figure 4: The timeline for report writing in the first year](image)

Other types of communication were sporadic, unplanned responses to arising emergencies. First, T3 (marked red in Table 5) received a comforting support in the third month of the project because his busy schedule gradually weakened his motivation to take any excessive mental strain. Also, random consultations were prompted by a few subjects on the content and composition of CI reports. T4, for example, initiated 9 out of 12 conversations about the cases she was diagnosing, as opposed to T6 who never brought up the topic until asked. Finally, four subjects had to be repeatedly reminded of the deadline and urged to avoid excessive delays.
The electronic submissions from the subjects marked the accomplishment of the task and concurrently the first time the actual content of the reports was made known to the researcher. They all granted permission to include their reports in this thesis but requested to have their real names kept unknown.

3.2.3. The subjects

The subjects were seven Polish teachers of English as a foreign language, referred to as T1 to T7. The designations resulted from the sequence of critical incidents (CIs) report submissions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching experience in years</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Working environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>mid-30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>late-20s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>mid-20s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>mid-20s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>mid-30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>early-40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>early-30s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: The profiles of the subjects

To begin with, the subjects had two common characteristics. First, they all held a university degree in English teaching, so they were qualified/competent practitioners, trained to provide formal language instruction to EFL learners as well as engage in day-to-day problem-solving and decision-making. Additionally, they had a work-based relationship with this researcher in her supervisory or partner capacity, which was of great assistance in constructing their professional profiles. On the other hand, the subjects differed significantly with regard to their age and years of teaching experience, which, translated to their level of domain expertise. Table 6 outlines the essential information about the subjects, and what follows are more detailed individual descriptions.
**TEACHER 1** was a general English instructor in an elementary language program at a local technical college. She had an academic diploma in TEFL but only two-year teaching experience since her genuine interest and professional occupation for nearly a decade had been interpreting. The reasons why she had switched back into foreign language instruction were, as she explained, purely personal.

From day one at the College’s English Department, she made it explicit she wanted to refresh her knowledge about language teaching by collecting specialist advice and practical tips to implement in the classroom so that her students could enjoy and benefit from every single session. She was an attentive listener, always scribbling and mapping new ideas out. She sought to see her lessons as well-structured entities that had a learning goal to accomplish. Yet, she was aware of numerous shortcomings in her conceptual understanding of the learning process, which made her ask all sorts of questions: *How detailed should be feedback on SS’ writing? How to effectively practice word-formation? Is it didactically reasonable to encourage weaker learners to do extra homework?* Shortly, in her view, teaching was a *profession*, not merely a job to do. By this, she meant it was her moral duty to attend to work-related tasks in a most competent and sincere manner, so when she raised her voice in class, she reported feeling extremely guilty for failing as an educator. Similarly, she maintained that self-development was every teacher’s obligation to fulfill — Diploma in English Language Teaching to Adults has been her latest professional achievement.

As a polyglot (she speaks five languages fluently), she showed not only natural enthusiasm for all things English, but also great respect for language learners. While other lecturers complained about the massive use of mobile phones in class, she did research on how to turn the unwanted distraction into an effective learning tool. Soon, she started sharing language-enhancing applications which, she claimed, became an integral part of her teaching routine. In the third year of her academic career, she was granted a Faculty Award for Outstanding Teaching.

**TEACHER 2** was the only study participant who took on the task of diagnosing CIs prior to receiving a formal qualification in TEFL. With her bachelor’s degree in sociology, she was recruited in an English language school as a teacher trainee, solely on the grounds of native-like fluency in English acquired through years of schooling in the U.S.
For weeks, she observed lessons run by senior instructors and examined teaching materials before she stepped into a classroom on her own. Initially, her performance was monitored, and her didactic decisions discussed on a daily basis. Before long, though, she took an MA program in Applied Linguistics at Durham University, UK, and her classroom management abilities improved dramatically. Gaffes were still numerous, but she embraced them wholeheartedly as a trampoline for her professional development. As she put it, her enthusiasm for teaching was on the rise and the newly-acquired specialist knowledge made her realize foreign language instruction was an enormous intellectual challenge rather than an easy way to earn a living.

She never seized to raise doubts and questions about her classroom practice, but increased confidence made a huge difference to the way she addressed problematic issues. For example, when she shared her dilemma about a teenager who regarded himself an individualist and would categorically refuse to contribute to group work, she not only brought forward a few possible solutions, but also weighed up their practical relevance. Her ultimate decision to go for tasks based on shorter and more dynamic patterns of interaction between the peers was justified by the principle of individual differences and their complementariness. She explained it was necessary to both accommodate one individual and protect the rest of the group against his overt resistance. Her well-informed reasoning won her a few praising remarks from much more experienced fellow teachers.

Recently, she has accepted a management job in a language school, where her responsibilities entail syllabus design, selection of teaching materials, and in-house teacher training. She has also set up a website dedicated to English teaching and often posts practical classroom ideas as well as her observations concerning key concepts within the field of FL teaching, for example learners’ motivation, hypothesis testing in language learning, or the role of the teacher in the process of language acquisition.

In sum, the journey from a laywoman to a fully qualified teacher with an impressive record of achievement took her three years only and seemed the quickest career path ever pursued.

TEACHER 3 joined the study in his last year of MA academic program in English, having already received the initial training in FL didactics and served his practicum. His application for a teaching job in an English language school was accepted since in the
In the span of two years, he taught general English courses to groups of all ages (except for preschoolers) as well as individual corporate clients. He gravitated towards teaching adults, but it was the parents of adolescent learners who often came to speak highly of his ways to create bonds with their young ones. Indeed, he radiated a great deal of sincere curiosity in his students. He could remember tiny details of what they said in previous classes, their interests, future plans, and past experiences. He successfully made use of the information for lesson warmers and breathers. However, from a didactic perspective, he was raw, and his teaching awareness only began to bud. For example, he closely followed the scripts in Teacher’s Books but found it difficult to rationalize the sequencing of contents. Also, the homework he assigned covered grammar areas only, took very long to check, but failed to detect and clear up fundamental misunderstandings.

Eventually, he admitted he was in two minds about his career path. On the one hand, he greatly enjoyed teaching; on the other, he had a taste for computer programming and dreamed of his own IT business. His attempt to combine software design studies and full-time teaching was ineffective, yet the deepest wish came true and today he is both a self-employed teacher of English and an IT entrepreneur.

**TEACHER 4** was a university graduate who claimed she had always regarded FL instruction as her true vocation. Unsurprisingly then, when she got her first teaching job in an English language school, she instantly won affection of both her pupils and their parents. While kids dropping into the teachers’ room to greet her and treat to sweets before lessons became a common sight, parents stopping by and curiously asking about their kids’ performance was an unusual, although highly desirable, thing to observe.

Despite a limited teaching experience, she demonstrated how to successfully extend the boundaries of FL learning by persistently chatting with the kids in L2 outside the classroom even though the young learners struggled to find a way into casual non-lesson communication. She complimented, for example, their garments or asked about telephone applications they were busy with. In the presence of their care takers, she praised the children a lot for their class participation and homework well done. This way, she explained, she tried to reach out and get all the parties involved in a way that promoted
more functional associations for language use. Surely, she was different from many other teachers who never switched on the mode for active interaction in English until the classroom door closed and the lesson began.

Otherwise, she performed like a typical novice. To illustrate, class observations showed that she was extremely accurate in following lesson plans and too anxious to disrupt the lesson flow with spontaneous changes. When presenting new vocabulary or grammar rules, she talked endlessly, twisting instead of simplifying the input. She did not have enough of elicitation and feedback techniques in reserve — her reply to wrong answers was a polite but non-variable No. The use of the whiteboard revealed no rational pattern and some activities suffered from poor timing. Despite these failings, she managed her classes more than well. She filled them up with delightful language games, ensured the optimal distribution of skill practice, and paid attention to pronunciation, spelling, and grammar mistakes.

For two years, she combined her evening teaching duties with a full-time job in primary education. However, when she announced the launching of her own language school outside the city, it was hard to believe one person could cope with this much work. She continues to commute daily and fulfill her various commitments.

**TEACHER 5** used to be a student of this researcher at a local high school, where she held her first teaching post. The girl stood out from the rest of her class for several reasons: she was always prepared, eager to answer questions, curious about new material, and highly respectful. A few years later, she completed her bachelor’s studies in TEFL in the UK and returned to Poland to work as an English teacher herself.

In September 2010, she made a start in an English language school. Four years went by until she left for a full-time teaching job in a prestigious state school, where she works up to the present and specializes in the Matura exam. Upon departure, she had already been involved in the study of critical incidents.

During her service, she proved to be a dedicated teacher, always willing to go the extra mile to help learners achieve their language learning goals. Passionate about reading, she claimed that teaching the skill, and extensive reading (ER) in particular, was largely overlooked. Voluntarily, she drew up a program for teenagers which aimed to enhance their English competence through practicing the ER principles: reading on topics
of their choice, with the teacher – an active reader – setting an example to follow. She accumulated an impressive collection of literary texts and kept a systematic record of students’ comments as the reading sessions took place. She was encouraged to present the project to her fellow teachers in an in-house CPD workshop, but, apparently, she did not feel ready. The plentiful evidence she had gathered mostly pointed to the affective aspect of the new learning experience, while it remained unexamined how the reading routine actually impacted the development of language skills, she explained.

She never got too excited about her ideas; instead, she methodically checked her lesson execution against the lesson plan and openly named both the elements she had successfully implemented as well as those she had failed upon. She could frankly pinpoint that she struggled giving explicit directions, bridging activities meaningfully, or judging the relevance of accidental lexical items students asked about. At the same time, she could easily elaborate on individual differences between students and justify how the class activities addressed their diverse needs as language learners.

TEACHER 6 has a PhD in Applied Linguistics and currently works at both the local university (the Faculty of Modern Languages) and technical college. When she joined the study in 2015, she was teaching in an English language school. It was surprising to hear from an instructor with nearly two decades of classroom experience that it was natural curiosity that was driving her into the project. She claimed the analysis of CIs could help her broaden the focus of attention beyond learning styles, her research field.

Her classes could serve as a model for pre-service teachers in terms of organization of contents, pre-activities, grammar contextualization, class dynamics, interaction patterns, elicitation techniques, error correction, timing, feedback, group management, and teacher talking time in particular. She avoided overwhelming rattle, especially when giving instructions. As she explained, regardless of proficiency level, the transition into the mode of independent work required a special climate: a well-aired room and clear directions, not a five-minute buzz from the excited teacher.

She was considered an expert in teaching and yet was often misunderstood by her colleagues. For example, she caused major disturbance during a team meeting when she openly admitted that she tended to overlook the role of authentic materials in FL instruction and hence unintentionally created a gap between the learners’ exposure to the
target language as used in and outside the classroom. She explained that the attractiveness and convenience of specially designed L2 resources might disable teachers’ critical evaluation skills and distort their understanding of the fundamental functions of input. In response, her fellow teachers assured her she was an excellent practitioner full stop.

In general, despite the extensive experience, she reacted emotionally to the circumstances she faced. The training workshops on motivational techniques and teacher creativity, which she volunteered to conduct, received positive feedback, but her use of specialist language was criticized, which she found upsetting. Yet, it was her students’ academic failures and successes that caused her ups and downs. Indeed, she never showed indifference to those.

**TEACHER 7** was a fully qualified English instructor with a six-year employment history although she claimed she derived greater personal satisfaction from translating literary works. In fact, from the first semester in an English language school, her performance showed a crying need for improvement in classroom management strategies and lesson structuring. She put effort and developed ways of connecting activities to build a sense of continuity in learners, adjusting tasks to address both stronger and weaker students, or practicing new grammar structures to suit different learning styles. The progress was quick and evident, but she gave a strong impression that she forced herself to act well and meet DoS’ expectations.

Surprisingly, she agreed to take up the challenge to run a fifteen-hour course in a local orphanage, which other teachers refused to do. It was a demanding enterprise due to children’s irregular attendance, their short attention span, mixed ages and abilities, a complete lack of motivation, and highly aggressive behavior. Lesson preparation was usually in vain in the light of the problems she faced. She struggled a lot and yet managed to effectively implement some of her new strategies of classroom management. Her patience and determination deserved genuine admiration.

It was not until the job appraisal that she confessed what a great deal of hardship she had been put through. However, the experience helped her uncover the features she had never identified in herself before. For example, she came to realize that she could handle the unexpected as long as she was mentally ready to take it, that she learnt to recognize symptoms and patterns in students’ conduct, which allowed her to think
proactively, and that loud music played in the car straight after the classes with the orphan kids retained her sanity. Most interestingly, though, she discovered that the learning process ceases to matter in the L2 classroom if the students and teacher fail to relate to each other in a positive way.

She continued in the language school for another three years (engaged in adult and young learners teaching), but she does not work there anymore. She made a return to translating jobs.

### 3.2.4. Criteria for data analysis

A written report was the main source of data in this study. The subjects’ utterances served as a means to communicate their thoughts, knowledge, and emotions engaged in representing, relating, and rationalizing phenomena in teaching. The analysis of the material and coding its content was a four-step process, which took into account the qualitative and quantitative dimensions of the study.

1. The first step was to determine what types of situations the subjects identified as critical incidents. Discourse, the external representation of internal representations of the episodes and teachers’ thoughts about them, was analyzed for evidence pointing to factors that commanded the teachers’ attention and contributed to their selections. As a result, a broad division into incidents showing positive and negative associations was made, based on key lexical items (e.g. failure, problem, critical), clear-cut verbal expressions (e.g. *It was a very rewarding experience* or *It was a real let-down*), and as unambiguous wording as *I had no idea what to say; Then, a real drama started; or They [students] were all mesmerized by my idea*. Supplementary sub-categorization resulted from the search for topical cohesions between the ideas represented by both the pleasant and unpleasant memories. Specifically, the texts were examined to identify aspects of teaching the critical incidents concerned. These were 1) the subjects’ didactic decisions and behavior, 2) their observations of learners and other teachers, or 3) feedback they received from learners, their parents, and supervisors.

2. The second step was to establish what mental constructs and concepts the subjects activated in the process of diagnosing critical incidents. To do so, the content of the
reports was broken up into meaningful thought units (MTUs), which referred to words, phrases, or clauses communicating complete ideas, for example:

- *Disaster! Shock!* – Interjections; discourse markers
- *I agreed* – A simple sentence; speech act
- *but he was successful doing sport* – An independent clause
- *I didn’t want the conflict to escalate and affect the whole group, yet I could not leave such a misconduct and property damage like this* – A complex sentence

The dividing into MTUs is illustrated below. The sentence

*As the students enjoyed having a math problem in an English class, I suddenly had an idea to extend this task into a survey activity.*

consists of two MTUs as indicated below.

1. *As the students enjoyed having a math problem in an English class* // 2. *I suddenly had an idea to extend this task into a survey activity.*

Likewise, the following example is composed of two MTUs.

3. *In class I made them repeat the wrong pronunciation many times* // 4. *which means its auditory representation was created and stored, even if temporarily.*

However, there is a substantial difference between these sentences. While the thought units marked orange indicate that the teacher noticed (1), decided to do (2), and actually did something (3), the unit marked green stands for a reflective/critical thought the teacher had with regard to her action (4). The first three MTUs represent experiences as recalled...
by the subject and hence were granted the status of description. The last one, on the other hand, represents semantic knowledge which the subject activated to help her make sense of what happened and hence was categorized as analysis.

Accordingly, each MTU was recognized as belonging to one of the major functional segments of the reports: description, analysis, or judgment. It was crucial to discriminate different kinds of MTUs and thus the constituent parts of the texts so as to be able to study them in detail and without confusion even when the discourse failed to follow the structure recommended earlier in Table 4.

Furthermore, MTUs were examined with regard to professional concepts in TEFL. In the examples presented above, the thought units related to the following:

- **MTU1** – learners’ behavior as a reaction to the lesson content,
- **MTU2** – the teacher’s spontaneous decision to drift from the lesson plan,
- **MTU3** – the pronunciation mistake the teacher ingrained in her students,
- **MTU4** – the teacher’s understanding of the linguistic consequences of such a mistake.

Other professional concepts identified in the discourse included, for instance

- **content** (e.g. The task was essentially an editing exercise where the students had to correct the underlined words in the text and make corrections related to the capital letters, punctuation and pronoun reference.),
- **planning** acts (e.g. It was a thing to examine at a later stage),
- **group work** (e.g. Students communicated with one another and exchanged the needed information using the grammar point they just learned),
- **class management** (e.g. The ladies wanted to help; I stopped them and told Monika I’d be happy with simple language as long as she gives me the main points),
- **comprehension check** (e.g. I asked whether they understood the instructions),
- **attitude** (e.g. I wanted to make a good impression),
- and many more.
Three types of mental constructs were discerned as default settings to assemble commonalities between the concepts mentioned above. As presented in Table 7, the grouping contained cognitive, affective, and imagery representations because the subjects engaged in autobiographical retrieval, which embraces controlled search for information, emotional processes, and visual imagery (Cabeza & St. Jacques (2007)).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>Professional concepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>planning acts; lesson procedures; language management; time management; level check; comprehension check; self-critique; problem recognition; knowledge of context; knowledge of learners; self-knowledge; past teaching experience; learners’ prior knowledge; decisions; noting learners’ reactions; noting learners’ progress; feedback; content; search for information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>attitudes; feelings towards learners; emotional reactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagery</td>
<td>visual descriptions of objects, people, and actions; figurative descriptions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 7: The types of mental constructs (Cognitive, Affective, Imagery) and corresponding professional concepts identified in the reports*

The analysis of discourse, and coding of thought units in particular, was supported by NVivo QSR Application, a software program that enabled a high degree of data organization and storage. The classification of the material opened up various possibilities to analyze it. For example, the subjects’ thought units were investigated with relation to the focus of their attention, emotional factors, or complexity of the problems they referred to. To illustrate, it was observed that T3 systematically depicted learners’ behavior as integral parts of critical situations. The remarks he made in Entry 1 (*At the end of the lesson, one of the boys was quite frustrated ...*), Entry 5 (*I saw they wanted to be noticed*), Entry 8 (*The boy realized he was actually good at English and apparently he appreciated the praise*), and Entry 10 (*She said nothing, but I could tell she did not buy my explanation*) failed to overlap in lexical terms yet, although separated in time, appeared analogous, pointing to a habitual tendency of the teacher to see people/events in a certain way — the interpretation of
his attitude impossible to yield without the close examination of the series of
narratives.
The concentration of emotionally loaded thoughts during the description, analysis,
and judgment stages was measured as 1.0 for regular emphatic expressions and 2.0
for what was considered strong by the extended use of modifying language and
punctuation, for example It was difficult to focus versus Disaster! The numerical
representation of these was 1x1.0 versus 1x2.0 respectively.

3. The third step was to identify the areas of cognitive activity which the subjects
engaged in when diagnosing critical incidents. Specifically, the attempt was made to
determine how the teachers reviewed the available evidence to support their reasoning
about the potential causes of critical incidents and formulating logical/valid
evaluations. For this purpose, the MTUs in the analysis and judgment segments of the
reports were examined for lines of thought indicating the subjects’ attempts to define
problems, to establish causal relations between the constituents of the situations, to
propose solutions, and assess one’s own decisions. This encouraged inferences about
the teachers’ understanding of classroom realities (premises) and their judgments
(claims) as influenced by their professional knowledge as opposed to their personal
values, attitudes, or preferences. Tripp’s (2012) typology of professional judgments,
including practical, diagnostic, reflective, and critical evaluations, was used as the
benchmark to classify concluding remarks identified in the CI reports. For instance,
T3’s thought units mentioned above demonstrated that the instructor pressurized his
perceptions of students’ reactions into absolute certainty, although they were based on
his subjective impressions. Similarly, his statements I’m positive that the boy was
used to being rebuked by his teachers and parents all the time, and he expected the
same from me, or Getting mentally ready for a challenge brings peace to heart were
recognized as reflective thoughts rested on schemata and personally-held systems of
beliefs, the propositional value of which was rather limited. Conversely, the MTU:
The effectiveness of note-taking is dependent to some extent on the way the
information is organized on the board/slides was classified as demonstrating a
didactically justified concern of T7 that a chaotic and accidental use of the whiteboard
is of doubtful assistance to the process of language learning.
4. The last stage of the analysis was to determine how, if at all, the subjects related in their CI reports to the What of their learning stimulated by the What happening to them. Following the typology by Alexander et al. (2011), the three kinds of learning outcomes — newly formed habits, instant resolutions to problems, and abstract concepts — were considered as feedback that the teachers constructed for future reference in their teaching practice. The respective categories of learning outcomes were communicated through more or less explicit use of language, such as

- **Teaching writing was a big learning lesson, and there are some basic things that I have in mind when I approach students’ papers now;**
- **I felt proud that I could find a swift and effective solution to the problem (...) Later, I used the same idea again and again and each time it was as successful (the teacher managed to shift a two-year-old child’s attention from the fear of being separated from her mother);**
- **Rules are extremely important but only when they serve the purpose.**

The complexity of the problem situations was considered to play a role in teacher thinking and to affect a degree of the subjects’ interpretative efforts. Therefore, the reports were examined to discern the relationship between the two variables.

The material was analyzed according to the established criteria, organized in four distinct steps, which aimed to obtain information necessary to formulate conclusions about the effectiveness of diagnosing critical incidents, seen as cognitive processes activated by EFL teachers in their educational context.

**3.2.5. Data material**

The seventy-three reports submitted for analysis presented events in teaching as seen through the eyes of first-person narrators presented above. The reports gave access to the teachers’ memory representations. It was assumed that their nature was fallible to a certain degree because the novelty of being part of a study might have induced in the subjects an exaggerated determination to attend to the assignment and please the researcher even at the cost of false or misleading information. However, the material
clearly indicated what aspects of the past events (in the context of EFL teaching) received the most and least consideration from the instructors. In other words, the representations made it possible to detect and locate the teachers’ focus of attention in the process of retrospection.

Similarly, the content of the reports, and the segments devoted to the analysis and evaluation in particular, presented evidence of claims and judgments the teachers formulated drawing from their domain expertise, familiar schemata, personal convictions, and reasoning operations, to name but a few. The writings reported trains of thoughts the teachers developed to express causal relationships between the constituent elements of the events, but they also exposed what could count as gaps in their rational thinking. To illustrate, a conspicuously missing explanation how mini-presentations by weak students led them within a year to considerable improvement in asking follow-up questions (CI4) aroused doubts about the subject’s interpretative abilities.

The texts were the source of both quantitative and qualitative data, which allowed for the analysis that merged the emphasis on individual diversity with statistical procedures. Featuring the range from 132 to 1304 words, the written reports provided copious descriptive material, the exploration of which posed serious challenges. While breaking the reports down into meaningful thought units or identifying visual references in MTUs was a massive yet straightforward task to do, identifying the way the subjects related events or drew conclusions about their significance was exceptionally complex. Another difficulty was disordered discourse of the reports. Some of them lacked an internal structure and instead resembled stream-of-consciousness monologues (e.g. T1-3, T2-4, T3-2). A few presented rich substance and yet expended a great deal of effort to understand their authors’ attempts to control a coherent line of thoughts (e.g. T4-5, T6-3, T7-8). Many were so emotionally loaded that the transparency of narratives suffered severely (e.g. T3-5, T4-4, T5-6). Despite the constraints, the texts constituted sufficient empirical material to discern patterns in teachers’ diagnostic behavior. Among others, emerging regularities concerned the character of situations selected as critical incidents, the specificity of knowledge activated in diagnosing, or the manner of reasoning.

Although the complete reduction of personal bias was practically impossible, both her moral and academic responsibility made this researcher operate pedantically on the demanding material towards the following results.
3.3. Results

The following are the results of the data analysis and their interpretation. The organization of this section is in alignment with the applied procedure. Due to the specificity of the collected material, the results of the study were presented in both figure-based and quote-based formats. All the citations from the CI reports are in italics.

3.3.1. The teachers’ perception of critical incidents

It was recognized that the majority of 73 narratives reported unpleasant rather than pleasant classroom circumstances (a 58:15 ratio), i.e. memories of didactically oriented situations which aroused adverse emotions in the subjects. Although the instructors had been provided with both comprehensive explanation of the term critical incident and examples representing a satisfying and upsetting cases, four of them voluntarily chose to examine mainly distressing experiences (T3/10:1, T4/9:2, T6/10:2, T7/9:1), and T2 referred to no happy moments whatsoever (10:0). This indicates that the teachers’ attention was biased, i.e. guided to search for the events that evoked perplexity and caused concerns as more relevant to the assignment.

The predominantly negative content of teachers’ narratives was determined by what was expected to be defining words and expressions. However, key lexical items such as fail, problem, or critical did not always communicate clearly what type of incident the subjects chose to diagnose. To illustrate, the word fail in T4-9 openly named a fiasco in duty and allowed for an easy inference that in the teacher’s eyes the episode was disagreeable (I completely failed to use the situation and make everyone relate to such a natural context), whereas the use of the word successful in T4-3 was “misleading” in that it related to the way the teacher evaluated the solution to the problem she had come up with rather than the critical moment in the narrative. Another observation was the conspicuous rarity of the word critical (43%), which was anticipated to facilitate the classification of the incidents by teachers’ instant elaboration on their causes, as in T6-5: It was clearly a critical incident as I felt rather uneasy about what was happening and desperately needed to understand the situation; or in T3-6: The incident was critical for me, for I was torn between two things, caring about our clients and the truth which was unpleasant for the father. On the whole, the subjects barely categorized CIs in an explicit manner (27%), which resulted in their reports having to be interpreted mainly through
expressions revealing their mental states or feedback they received from the environment (e.g. I was heartbroken; I felt like a lousy teacher; One of them took my remark personally and said it was insulting).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>T1</th>
<th>T2</th>
<th>T3</th>
<th>T4</th>
<th>T5</th>
<th>T6</th>
<th>T7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fail</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no idea</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>problem</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>critical</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I didn’t know</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shock/ed/ing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: The frequency of key words in the teachers’ reports

Other key words raised questions, too. Although 58 critical incidents revolved around problems that the subjects faced, 31% of them gave no indication of the word; only 15% of the reports included the overt remark that the teacher had no idea what to do; and 6.8% that they didn’t know how to handle the situation (Table 8). There was also confusing coexistence of key lexical items with positive and negative meaning, an example of which could be T3-3, where the teacher claimed he was happy and unhappy at the same time. In the light of these complications, the reports were examined with special attention paid to nuances of expression.

The words used by T2 were rather symptomatic; the frequent repetition of fail and problem (Table 8) was consistent with her selecting unpleasant teaching experiences only. However, the number of negative critical incidents she reported (10) was comparable to other novice teachers in the study (T3=10; T4=9). Essentially, she examined two cases of unfavorable feedback and admitted five didactic faults in her procedural knowledge, which was a mirror-reflection of the types of incidents reported by T4. Interestingly, T4 hardly used the word fail with reference to her own failures. Even more surprisingly, a single pleasant memory described by T3 did not contain the word happy, as opposed to his reports of disturbing moments, where happy appeared five times as a semantically neutral item.
In sum, the key wording tended to be ambiguous and its correspondence to the character of incidents frequently false. Lack of verbal clarity can imply lack of conceptual clarity, which means some CI reports might have been poorly thought through.

**Conflicting representations**

The reports of unpleasant incidents (marked red in Table 9) revealed one defining characteristic. Most of them (91.4%) described occurrences which conflicted (labelled C in Table 9) with the mental representations of situations, people, and behavior the subjects had stored in memory as schemata/models for recognition purposes. Specifically, in 29 instances (50%), the teachers openly communicated that there was dissonance between an anticipated scenario and the classroom reality they actually encountered. These are illustrated below as Ce (explicit conflict). In 24 other cases (41.4%), the subjects described critical incidents in a way that implied rather than expressed precisely how the events failed to meet their expectations.

![Table 9: Teachers’ experiences conflicting with their expectations](image)

A vivid example of an explicit conflict is T7-5, where teenagers waiting quietly for lessons to begin, with their eyes and minds fixed on their telephones, not their peers, were what the teacher regarded unacceptable, to say the least. She tried in vain to stir her students up because she wanted to have a friendly group to teach, and in her view a
friendly group engaged in informal interaction before the class even if it was restricted to copying homework from one another. Similarly, a beginner instructor (T3) had a strong representation of himself as a fair, unprejudiced teacher (CI1: *I had been working exceptionally hard not to disregard anybody during my lessons*), which fractured when a young boy blamed him for paying more attention to the girls. The teacher clearly verbalized that the situation deviated from the principle he was in faithful agreement with.

On the contrary, T2-8 reported the teacher’s behavior as a reaction to what she found objectionable, but the reason why she found it objectionable — a schema within which she acted — was never specified in the text. In short, the novice tore a quiz submitted by an eleven-year-old who failed to solve it as he was too busy fidgeting and fooling around. The instructor did realize that her frantic move was a demonstration of teacher hegemony which she had arrogantly exercised to solve the problem; however, the unrealistic expectation that hyperactive junior footballers would sit still for ten minutes patiently filling in past forms of verbs revealed the inflexible concept of testing she brought into class, which resulted in her desperately battling any sign of misbehavior.

Among the CI reports indicating how the subjects’ anticipations differed from the reality, there were three pleasant memories (marked green in Table 9). Two of these were overtly evidenced: T1 made it explicit that it was an *eye-opening experience* to discover how informative feedback from students could be on top of sweet compliments she was used to (CI8), while T4 admitted it came as a total surprise to see teenage learners engaged in an English-related activity in their spare time (CI2).

**Types of critical incidents**

As highlighted in Table 10, the dimensions of teaching which prompted the subjects to engage in reflection were the teachers’ *actions*, *observations*, and received *feedback*.

The category of teachers’ actions comprised over 30 reports, 75% of which concerned unpleasant memories. Here, the situations which gave the subjects the impulse for analysis included 1) their failures to make informed instructional decisions, 2) biased responses to the teaching tasks, and 3) acts of unfairness against the learners. Interestingly, an element of discontent, fault, or confusion appeared to be common to the reports of the beginner teachers as well as those at higher career levels. For example, T1, with a brief yet intense teaching history, appeared the most critical about her own actions,
devoting four out of six reports to the didactic problems she created: over-correcting students’ writing (T1-1), misunderstanding the use of cell phones for learning purposes (T1-4), enforcing new rules unexpectedly (T1-6), and neglecting the needs of the weakest learners (T1-10). The novices in the study demonstrated a comparable inclination: T2 referred to her instructional moves in five reports, and she criticized all of them; T3 did so in seven out of eight reports; and T4 in four out of five reports (see Table 11). While

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEGATIVE (58)</th>
<th>POSITIVE (15)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher in action</strong></td>
<td><strong>Teacher in action</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>didactic failures</td>
<td>didactic successes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>responses to the task/context</td>
<td>response to the task/context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unfair behavior</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Observations</strong></td>
<td><strong>Observations</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learners’ responses to the content/task</td>
<td>learners’ responses to the content/task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learners’ non-academic behavior</td>
<td>learners’ non-academic behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other teachers in action</td>
<td>other teachers in action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Feedback</strong></td>
<td><strong>Feedback</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>from learners</td>
<td>from learners</td>
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<td>from supervisors</td>
<td>from supervisors</td>
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<tr>
<td>from parents</td>
<td>from parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Misc.</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>personal matters</td>
<td>1</td>
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</table>

Table 10: The classification of critical incidents

the “error-ridden” stage of professional development (Berliner, 1994) could make the novices naturally reactive to their fiascos, failures in professional conduct reported by the teachers with long-acquired practical knowledge could indicate that having gathered confidence and established day-to-day teaching routines, the experienced practitioners chose to put all their energies into exploring and exposing their own shortcomings.
The second type of perplexing situations that stimulated the subjects to examine as critical incidents were observations they made in and outside the classroom. They concerned learners’ behavior as reactions to the learning tasks, other students, and the teacher. Moreover, a few subjects chose to report how their colleagues’ didactic decisions created rather negative impressions, such as an idea of producing additional hand-outs for the weakest learners to practice sentence structure on their own (T6-12) or introducing young learners to the affirmative, interrogative, and negative forms of There is/are in one teaching unit (T7-7). In both cases, the experienced instructors explained that they had developed different views on the issues in question, which shows that their distinct understanding of certain aspects of FL teaching made it impossible for them to accept conflicting ways of thinking.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T1</td>
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<td>O+</td>
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<td>O–</td>
<td>F+</td>
<td>A+</td>
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<td>O+</td>
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<td>A–</td>
<td>F–</td>
<td>F–</td>
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<td>A–</td>
<td>O–</td>
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<td>F–</td>
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<td>A+</td>
<td>F–</td>
<td>A–</td>
<td>F+</td>
<td>M–</td>
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<tr>
<td>T7</td>
<td>F–</td>
<td>A+</td>
<td>O–</td>
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<td>O–</td>
<td>A–</td>
<td>O–</td>
<td>F–</td>
<td>O/A–</td>
<td>O–</td>
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</table>

Table 11: The occurrence of positive and negative AOFs

Finally, the subjects regarded feedback from their students, supervisors, and other parties as a CI-prone dimension of teaching, although the evidence indicated that what they heard or read about their performance was of least significance to them. Critical comments expressed by learners constituted 66% of all the feedback-related reports. T5 devoted 25% of her reports to the topic (criticism from her superior – CI5; praise from her former students – CI7). Similarly, T6 wrote 30% of her reports about feedback, yet all of them, be it a post-observation conference with HOD (CI6) or learners’ opinions (CI2, CI5, and CI11), were unfavorable, to say the least. In T6-6, the instructor emphasized that in her view feedback is always a learning experience, which she values a lot despite 17 years in service. The statement might account for her selection of didactic
situations to examine as critical incidents, but it also reveals a mature attitude of a senior teacher towards professional development.

The three predominant dimensions of FL instruction — teachers’ actions (A), observations (O), and collected feedback (F) — demonstrated the same order for positive and negative experiences (Table 10), which confirms that the distribution of attention in the subjects was uneven and the focus on monitoring one’s own didactic performance very strong. Table 11 above maps the accounts of contrasting memories (+ and –) inspired by AOFs. Their inspection led to two observations about the nature of the search for CIs.

Firstly, T3 and T4 — young and inexperienced teachers of English with the same initial training background — were differently motivated in their selections of critical incidents. They both seemed to suffer from the so-called “reality shock” (Farrell, 2009), i.e. struggled to survive the transition into distinct working environments where they learned what it truly meant to teach. However, the former focused on his deficiencies: poor language management, lesson planning, and interaction with learners and their parents (A’s). Conversely, the attention of the latter was divided between the faults she noticed in her own teaching and the behavior/reactions of her students (A’s and O’s). The two instructors saw critical incidents elsewhere, and the analysis of their diagnostic efforts, discussed later, only broadened the gap between the novices.

By contrast, T6 and T7 – differing in age, teaching experience, and professional goals – displayed similar patterns of the search. They both chose to write about how they had to cope with learners showing clear signs of withdrawal (T6-8 vs. T7-4), disagreed with didactic decisions of fellow teachers (T6-12 vs. T7-7 and T7-10), or witnessed aggressive/rude conduct in class (T6-7 vs. T7-3). In addition, their elaborations on potential causes of the incidents revealed a degree of analogy. It might be assumed that it was the psychological make-up of the teachers, coupled with effective knowledge activation, that guided their comparable responses to the environment.

In conclusion, there was evidence of bias in the subjects’ perception and attention processes towards memories of didactic defeats rather than successes, although forces steering this sensitivity remain undetermined except for the fact that the realities of teaching were numerously alluded to as failing to conform to the teachers’ expectations. In a cognitive view, this could suggest that, on numerous occasions, the schemata the subjects relied on were incomplete. Finally, the selection of critical incidents was
characterized by three recurring themes, the most common of which were the subjects’ instructional moves as opposed to feedback they received from their learners and superiors.

3.3.2. Mental constructs in diagnosing

Each meaningful thought unit, the tool for data analysis in this study, was identified as belonging to an adequate type of mental construct (Cognitive, Affective, and Imagery). The CAI classification was preceded with the functional segmentation of MTUs, which allowed to map sources of professional knowledge the subjects activated at different stages of task accomplishment.

Functional segments

The distribution of MTUs in the description, analysis, and judgment segments of the written reports is illustrated in Figure 5. Without exception, summarizing what happened, when and where received proportionally more attention from the subjects than the analytical breakdown and evaluation of the critical incidents.

![Figure 5: The proportion of description, analysis and judgment thought units (MTUs) in the CI reports](image)

The description of the events ranged from 94 to 451 and from 91 to 696 words for pleasant and unpleasant CIs respectively. It was observed, however, that the actual word count did
not relate to the character of the reports. In general, T5 wrote the shortest texts of all (146 words on average). By contrast, T1, whose file consisted of 6 entries on the plus side and 5 on the minus, was fairly exhaustive about all the incidents (253 words on average), and yet not as detailed as T6, who described 2 gratifying moments in a more meticulous manner than 7 traumatic ones (344 words on average). T2 submitted the longest reports (448 words on average). They all focused on distressing classroom occurrences, which could produce a reasonable expectation of their high scrupulousness. However, the texts showed distinct signs of repetitiveness, one typical example of which is the following excerpt (CI1):

*I asked whether or not they understood the instructions. In exchange I got a firm head nodding with a confident “yes” from the three of them [...] Based on the firm confirmation, I assumed students were ready for the speaking task and I ran the activity [...] Once the ball reached Ula, she started talking about herself and providing information on what she used to do 10 years ago, but does not do anymore. She spoke about herself instead of the man in the pictures [...] I did not correct the student because I did not want to embarrass her. I ignored it and I let her finish her idea [...] Seeing how embarrassed Ula was, I pretended to perceive her deviance from the task objective as a choice and not a mistake and I said: “Yes, we are supposed to talk about the man from the pictures, but if Ula prefers to talk about herself then that is fine with me.” I pretended not to notice her mistake as a mistake because I thought that embarrassing this student in front of the class would do more harm than not correcting her. Hence, I made it seem as if it was her deliberate choice instead of a misunderstanding.*

Frequent restatements characterize free writing — discourse that resembles a stream-of-consciousness monologue in a personal journal rather than a structured report, although the insertion of direct speech suggests the opposite. It is assumed that the novice teacher was uncertain or too anxious about what to write in her first CI report. Interestingly, she was the only subject whose CI1 showed minimal comparability to her closing reports, three of which were told in a highly concise and planned manner (247, 433, 380 words).
In short, the subjects demonstrated consistency in degree of elaboration in the description segments of their reports, irrespective of the kind of memories they revived. The outstanding volume of these segments can be interpreted as reflecting the complexity of the critical incidents. Otherwise, it could be indicative of the teachers’ involvement in extensive reconstructing what they decided were special moments in their teaching experience.

**Imagery**

Across the reports, verbal description of scenes (e.g. *When I opened the door, I saw my group creating a robot out of cardboard boxes; Margaret was the first to enter the room; she saw me and withdrew*) coexisted with figurative devices such as metaphors (e.g. *She flew out of the classroom spitting out a curse*) and similes (e.g. *a big classroom as silent as the grave*). Importantly, the depictive language like *I put on a good front and acted my best, but inside I was boiling or I ignored the mistake and let her finish* was excluded from the category of visual imagery, for on top of constructing the plot, it illustrated procedures, decisions, and/or patterns of behavior reflecting the teachers’ understanding of FLT/L problems. These will be discussed as cognitive representations.

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*Table 12: The imagery thought units in description, analysis, and judgment*

Table 12 shows the proportions of imagery MTUs during describing, analyzing, and evaluating critical incidents. On the whole, the descriptions involved much more visual references than reasoning operations at the later stage. A strong inclination for
storytelling was observed in the texts written by three individuals: a passionate novice (T4), an insightful senior instructor (T6), and a well-read mid-career translator (T7). While the extensive use of imagery harmonized with the wordy and curious personalities of T4 and T6, a vivid narration by more reserved T7 came as a surprise. Images of students rolling eyes, barking back, fuming, giving gentle smiles, or expressions such as waxy faces, big-headed teachers, intense lighting, to name but a few, revealed how rich were the subject’s mental representations of the external world, although they were never expressed vocally. T5, on the other hand, almost entirely abandoned outlining visually descriptive details about the incidents. Instead, she voiced her opinionated views on the situations and participants, disconnecting from the construct of visual imagery (e.g. This experience of mine refers to one student who did not work hard throughout the whole year or In the first year of my IB career, I got to teach a group of teenage girls with really strong personalities and proud to be doing an IB course).

At the stage of analysis, the subjects employed figurative language much less frequently. The following are samples of how it was used to communicate their personal search for understanding. In each case, the subjects clarified what professional concepts they actually referred to, which implies that imagery was not used to circumvent limitations of their lexical repertoire (idiosyncratic linguistic proficiency boundaries) but rather to simplify the complexity of abstract notions through visualization. The comments were added to the quotes below, yet some of them were adopted for the purpose of this outline.

**T1**  
Allowing learners the space to look for ways to overcome obstacles is like teaching a child to walk  
detailed guidelines might debilitate rather than enhance autonomous learning

**T2**  
I spoon-fed them and translated the meaning  
the attempt to teach grammar communicatively gave way to the straightforward grammar-translation method

**T3**  
This thought was like a blow on my head  
transparency, which involves being faulty, is a merit

**T4**  
I wanted to strangle him  
the student had courage to share his negative opinion about the lesson

**T6**  
All of a sudden, I saw a good student enslaved by a tiny little thing which completely imprisoned her manners  
the non-academic situation (use of phone in class) turned academic as the teacher’s perception of the student was verified to her disadvantage
Visually descriptive information was the smallest proportion of the reports. In 32 texts (43.8%), depictive language was used to recount the decisive “heart-stopping” moments, which inspired the teachers to write about them. Examples included an eight-year-old who froze having to say something about his recently deceased father (T4-1) and a little girl hiding in her mum’s lap trying to prevent being parted from her and having to enter the classroom (T7-2). However, in several instances, visual elements could be considered supplementary, so as not to say futile. To illustrate, the fact that a student who texted in class and snapped at the teacher did not bother to raise her eyes from the telephone screen (T6-7) or that the teacher blushed like a teenage boy when his incompetence was exposed by an advanced learner (T3-10) produced colorful effects but hardly increased the empirical worth of the retrospective reports. Still, the introductory scene in T6-2 took the emphasis placed on minor and yet insignificant detail to the extreme:

I remember it was a morning lesson on a dark winter day. When the class took off, I still felt a bit drowsy. The room was particularly small, lights on, and only three rows of desks in front of me. I saw my reflection in the window the moment I lifted my head from above the attendance list. I also remember the topic – stars and outer space exploration. At the mention of it, one of the female students on my left said out loud, “It sucks!” She took me by complete surprise, and I could only ask, “What sucks?” In reply, she explained that the topic was off-putting, and it was a waste of her time to discuss it.

The passage reveals T6’s remarkable narrating skill/disposition, but visual imagery it includes raises questions about the subject’s information retrieval from memory. There is no evidence to support the claim that she could easily conjure up the details which were an integral part of a deeply disturbing experience nor that she generated the
representations of events inferentially, manipulating accessory information, which would make their relation to the actual mental processes rather loose.

Having said that, figurative language, evidenced in most of the subjects’ reports, seemed to play an important role in enhancing the descriptions and analyses of critical incidents. Its notable absence in T5’s discourse makes the significance of imagery transparent.

**Affective language**

When describing and analyzing critical incidents, teachers communicated more or less explicitly how they felt about the learners, lessons, problems, behaviors, and/or decisions. The emotionally loaded thought units referred to both positive and negative feelings, the examples of which could respectively be *I was trembling all over my body with excitement and joy* (T6-1) and *I got really frustrated that they never raised the issue of one of the men being black* (T5-1).

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*Table 13: The emotionally loaded thought units in description, analysis, and judgment*

T2 produced the lowest number of thoughts reflecting her psychological frame of mind at the stages of description and analysis (6,5% and 4,5%), whereas her beginner counterparts (T3 and T4) frequently related to their attitudes and mental states: T3 — 17,2% and 21%; T4 — 11,7% and 26,8% (*Table 13*). One possible explanation of the massive difference between the three novice instructors was the cultural and educational background they came from. T2 was raised abroad and hence accumulated different experiences and perceptions, which could possibly result in a different intensity of
emotional retrieval. The evidence shows that her narratives grew slightly from scarce mentions of how she felt in the critical situations (CI1: *It struck me how wrong I was*) to more powerful and engaged styling (CI8: *I felt like a failure*; CI9: *Everything went wrong; so much stress*). This implies that the working environment, where she collected her first teaching experiences, could impact not only the way she perceived the instructional realities, but also the way she felt about them.

The concentration of emotionally loaded thoughts during the description phase for this case is illustrated in Figure 6. Specifically, the first critical incident included three affective thought units, two of which were interpreted as average in potency and one as strong (CI1 = 2x1.0 + 1x2.0). A sudden increase in the number of affective thought units towards the end of her CI series might be entirely accidental, but it might as well be interpreted as related to the environmental influences under which T2 worked for the duration of the study. It did not go unnoticed that her reserved outlook on classroom realities, initially expressed by the frequent use of the word *fail*, gave way to the descriptions of her didactic moves as *vain*, *hysterical*, or *unnecessarily apologetic*.

![Figure 6: T2’s affective thought units in description](image)

As opposed to T2, the data regarding T3 and T4 (*Figure 7*) demonstrates a widespread occurrence of both more and less intense emotional thoughts during the initial stage of task execution. The similarity between these two is striking even though the former displays a faint thinning out characteristic. Along with the decreased number of strong affective thought units, the instructor started noticing and including in her
descriptions such elements as lesson content, feedback, or language management. These components of teacher knowledge will be discussed next.

At the phase of CI analysis, the distribution and intensity of affective thoughts for the three novice teachers highlighted further differences. As presented below, T3 and T4 consistently resorted to quite strong feelings when working towards understandings of events. The emotional language they used to make sense of their own actions and the behavior of others can be justifiably assumed to reflect the way they processed information. For example, T3 considered the day when he came under his student’s criticism the worst in his life (CI2); he felt he was making a fool of himself setting
homework he never had a chance to check (CI4); and he was extremely embarrassed when he understood that a drastic example he had used to illustrate a grammar point unintentionally hurt the feelings of a girl in the group (CI7). Similarly, T4 fell in love with a boy, who first was making trouble in the classroom but changed his attitude after they talked through the problem (CI3); she was brought to her senses by an eleven-year-old who found the assessment of her notebook highly unfair (CI6); and she felt naïve believing that times have changed and professional teachers avoid telling their students how disappointed they are with their performance, which was her own learning experience (CI7).

On the other hand, T2 remained affectively detached except for the gratitude she expressed to her supervisor for stimulating her to reflect maturely about her troublesome students (T2-9) and the mixed feelings she admitted to having about changing the course of an activity as a result of poor lesson planning (T2-10). It might be concluded that while T2 was exceptionally aroused at both the stage of description and analysis of CI9, T3 and T4 displayed a tendency to respond affectively to disturbing memories no matter which part of the task they were engaged with. Their patterns of behavior did not show evidence of substantial change throughout the study, which leads to a reasonable assumption that T3 and T4 exerted limited control over their affective thinking about the situations they recounted.
The examination of the emotionality of the novice teachers’ verbal responses to CIs revealed the difference in the way they evaluated their didactic defeats. As an illustration, T2-10 and T3-11 reported analogous incidents: in the course of the lesson, the instructors understood that the activity they were about to launch required instant modification, which they successfully executed. However, the language they used to analyze the situations (see below) made it clear that what one of them perceived as a professional success was interpreted as a failure by the other. In retrospect, T2 appreciated her students’ enthusiastic reaction to the game, which she made up spontaneously in order to spice up homework checking, but on the whole, she found her planning strategy more than disappointing. Her state of mind instigated by the event leant heavily towards a self-critique:

> Why did I think it would work? I did visualize this activity. Where did I make a mistake? [...] I had mixed feelings about what happened. On the one hand, I was glad I had survived. On the other, I was extremely frustrated with myself to have failed to plan the activity the right way [...] My lesson planning was not well-informed. The sudden doubts that crossed my mind in the class made me panic [...] 

Conversely, T3 seemed to see the incident as a valuable lesson, which, as he claimed, opened his eyes and gave him a new outlook on planning and evaluation of teaching content. More importantly, though, the satisfactory outcome of the unplanned task completely dimmed the feeling of failure in the teacher, caused by a sudden realization that the initial scenario misfired:

> My students did not fail me. We practiced a lot of simple adjectives in a literary context having great fun of our creative effort. I told my fellow teachers about this success and two of them (experienced instructors) implemented the same idea in their groups. When they gave me very positive feedback, I was over the moon [...]

In short, it was different attitudes to seemingly comparable classroom situations that caused the teachers to create contrasting memories, and hence polar opposite types of critical incidents (red-circled A+ and A– in Table 11).

A low number of affective thoughts was an anticipated result for T1, T5, T6, and T7, who had been in the job from three to seventeen years and presumably learnt to recognize and regulate their biases and subjective impressions about emerging problems so as to be able to analyze them with the use of professional knowledge rather than emotion. Indeed, T1 and T5 effectively restrained from emotional deliberations. The latter expressed scarce affective thoughts about, for example, improper conduct she was exposed to or, reversely, a fair-minded approach she adopted towards the learners, for which she was generously praised. CI8, that scored highly in the number of affective units, and hence added the total up to 31.4%, dealt with the exceptionally delicate topic of her daughter’s impaired development. The way it influenced the teacher’s professional identity and performance was communicated by unsurprisingly emotional, yet unpretentious language: painful experience, vulnerable people, rewarding practice of raising awareness, appreciate what they have, etc. Similarly, T7 engaged in the analysis of one specific event (CI9), which resulted in her particularizing on how both the student and she faced the nightmare of individual tutoring that proved to be a complete fiasco. The three intense thoughts the instructor had on that occasion constituted an oddity rather than regularity.

The CI reports written by experienced practitioners (T1, T5, T6, and T7) showed high variability with regard to the concentration of emotion-ridden thought units. Their descriptions of incidents contained comparable quantities of affective thoughts, yet the spreading of the two distinct types (affective vs. strongly affective) varied from an abrupt disappearance of both (T1), to their scarce surfacing at the opposite ends (T5), to an impressively systematic emergence of one kind (T7) (for details, see Appendix C). T6’s texts were outstanding in this respect. They revealed a sign of gradual alteration in the way the instructor generated and distributed affective thought units (Figure 10). Essentially, she depicted her ways through the critical situations in a markedly heartfelt manner (e.g. honored to witness the transformation; failing spirit; ultimate pleasure to teach them). It was mainly the early entries, however, that included frequent expressive touches to them. In the course of time, the teacher’s references to her mental states both
dropped in number and ceased to be emotionally intense (e.g. *I was impressed by their work; would be happy to grant her the highest score*). The reasons behind this gravitation towards less excited reconstruction of her emotions and events might vary, but the attention the teacher paid to detail (imagery thoughts units) remained rather unvaried from CI1 through CI12.

![Figure 10: T6’s affective thought units in description](image)

It seems that the distinct nature and/or significance of the incidents T6 selected for her critical reflections could be factors mediating, among others, the intensity of feelings the circumstances evoked in her. It was noted that the values as contrasting as CI1 and CI8 referred to broadly analogous, yet polar opposite stories. Both of them concerned a radical change the teacher observed in a learner, the difference being its positive and negative outcome. While the former elaborated at length on how the instructor was impressed by the flourishing of a learner, the latter reported a serious deterioration in a student’s performance and largely focused on the moves the teacher initiated to arrest it and to stimulate the girl’s use of L2. The feelings the instructor experienced in this situation stay unspecified, though.

At the stage of analysis, T6’s affective thought units appeared at a relatively steady rate. Figure 11 shows that in ten out of twelve reports, she employed feelings in building her understanding of critical incidents, and eight of these occurrences demonstrated intense emotions (e.g. *I was rejected; I have never recovered from this feedback; I wish I could fight it in me and finish my career in an honorable manner; I desperately needed*...
to understand; I regret not having asked). This was a peculiar finding considering how successful she was having brought emotion under control at the stage of narrating towards the end of the report series (Figure 10). However, T6-10 clearly showed that being emotional did not freeze the subject’s analytical abilities. On the contrary, the critical incident, which concerned the teacher’s discontent with her impulsive behavior in class, included professional comments on 1) yelling as a least effective form of communication and an abuse of authority, 2) reprimanding the whole class as an act of social injustice against participating students, and 3) her expectations of full attention from learners as childish.

Finally, it was observed that the language of the CI reports communicated personally held attitudes of the subjects not only to the events, but also the concepts the events represented. T3-10 and T7-6, for example, clearly demonstrated the teachers’ position on academic honesty and integrity. The linguistic incompetence which the instructors displayed during a lesson was perceived as disturbing by both teachers, yet their interpretative thoughts had the center of gravity elsewhere. In short, T3 felt awful having lied about the meaning of a word he could not remember; he never admitted his wrong to the student but instead wallowed in self-pity (it was better to be honest; whatever but this; loads of embarrassment; it took a few days to recover; I had forgiven myself; smashing experience; I was ready to start from scratch). T7, on the other hand,
was uncomfortable having drummed into the learners an incorrect pronunciation of a new vocabulary item and, when exposed by her superior, decided to immediately address the problem in class letting that be a lesson to her and the students alike (*I felt embarrassed because of my students; I made the correction although it cost me a lot; I chose the easiest option; I was honest; I was happy that I told them about the error; I felt professionally relieved; we even joked about it; misleading students is unprofessional)*.

Even more representative an example was the subjects’ response to criticism. T4, T6, and T7 heard disapproving comments from the students about the learning content management. The teachers’ initial reactions were uniform — they took the remarks personally and grew sulky. However, both the solutions and afterthoughts they produced disclosed their varied understandings of and feelings about feedback. The youngest teacher (T4) was more than pleased to be able to hold a friendly talk with a bold teenager, which helped them both to reset the opinions they had of each other (CI3). Unlike T4, the oldest teacher (T6) refrained from confronting the student in favor of in-depth analysis of the case. She was consumed with guilt over her immature thoughts, linked the incident to the broader concept of teacher credibility, pondered over the nature of learning English for special purposes, and came to the intrepid conclusion that learners’ interests are not always the priority in L2 classroom (CI2). Lastly, T7 admitted that the criticism was well deserved and managed to improve her ways of introducing adult learners to class activities, clarifying their goals and outcomes (CI1).

In sum, while the occurrence of affective thought units was expected in reporting critical incidents, which are inherently emotionally loaded memories, intense feelings identified at the stage of analysis suggest that the subjects’ cognitive processes were biased and hence doubtfully efficient.

**Cognitive dimension of discourse**

As highlighted in Table 14, the thought units of cognitive character were most frequent in the accounts of critical incidents. They communicated the subjects’ reasoning operations and their professional understanding of the classroom situations (e.g. *I was monitoring the activity and, as usual, took notes on students’ mistakes to comment on ones later*), the sources of which varied from the instructors’ prior didactic experience (e.g. *I had used the material with other advanced students for some time now*). To their
personal beliefs and convictions about teaching English (e.g. I was convinced it served academic purposes very well). Both the abundance of the material to analyze and the number of observations resulted in the description, analysis, and judgment segments of the discourse discussed at greater length compared to imagery and affective MTUs.

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Table 14: The cognitive thought units in description, analysis, and judgment

First, there were commonalities between the cognitive thought units which showed different magnitudes at different stages of the task execution. They came into the following groups:

**Procedural Knowledge** – thoughts representing the teachers’ didactic moves, i.e. group, language, and time management, content, planning acts, instructional matters, elicitation, and/or instances of explicit choices they made in the course of action (e.g. We focused on different parts of speech; I wanted the students to practice plural forms in sentences when playing a board game; I did not translate nor explain the grammar point at all during the lesson; I allow students to use telephones, for instance, to do research before they start writing; I deliberately arrived earlier to see what I can do with one or two students; I refused, not because I wanted to make the student’s life miserable, but because I believed it wouldn’t be fair)

**Knowledge of Context** – thoughts outlining the background to events, including the specificity of the course or classroom setting within an educational institution (e.g. In
September it turned out that I had to teach Language and Literature without the training because there was no money; I knew I should make the father happy because every client of our school was important; My supervisor was building a bank of resources and naturally needed a bit of support from staff members.

**Self-knowledge** – units about teachers themselves that played a role in the critical incidents they described, mainly as introductory statements (e.g. *I am fully aware of how negatively I respond to yelling, and I wholeheartedly reject it as a form of communication; When it comes to learning grammar, I absolutely love rules and I think that I would be lost without them; As an idealist, I believed I could ...*)

**Knowledge of Students** – information about learners’ distinctive qualities, interests, attitudes, and/or studying preferences (e.g. *Maciek is a cheerful and energetic boy; Kuba was one of the disobedient and at the same time smartest students in the class; Clumsy, inattentive, a bit absent-minded, but weak*)

**Past Didactic Experience** – clear indications of teachers being either familiar or unfamiliar with various aspects of classroom instruction (e.g. *I wasn’t used to having 13 adults in the same room for the lesson; the only group of 13 people I had was a group of kids or teenagers, but never adults; I had used the material with other advanced students for some time now*)

**Teaching Beliefs and Assumptions** – thoughts demonstrating teachers’ convictions and views about FL teaching, learning and learners rather than domain expertise (e.g. *A teacher who sees students once a week can hardly induce any change; The context of large size classes does not make it any easier to explore the learning potential of individual students*)

**Search** – thought units which communicated both teachers’ need to look for answers to the probing questions about the circumstances they found themselves in and the outcome of their exploratory activity, i.e. relevant knowledge they acquired from the domain literature, competent colleagues, and/or reflective analysis (e.g. *Why did I think it would*
work? Where did I make a mistake? – all these questions were bombarding me; My university teacher used to say that transparency is a merit in the profession; I was lucky to share this experience with the person who strongly holds to the belief teachers show the deepest respect for students when they are able to turn language learning into a personal story)

Feedback – comments and opinions collected from learners, fellow teachers, supervisors/mentors, and parents about the teachers’ classroom performance, didactic decisions, and/or implemented ideas (e.g. According to my observer, such form of elicitation was not an optimal way to do it; DOS asked me to stop being apologetic and put things in perspective as if that had been someone else’s class)

Problem Areas – thought units identifying the challenging moments in teaching (e.g. The situation was getting ridiculous because her trainer approached me asking to give her a chance for a better grade, while I started having doubts that she deserved what she had; I realized that even though the concept of the activity was clear to the students, it was very difficult to handle practically)

Self-critique – illuminating, confrontational thoughts which expressed teachers’ realization that their actions were faulty (e.g. All went smoothly until later when I realized that I completely failed to use the situation from the beginning and make everyone relate to such a natural context; the only reason why she got a lower mark was because according to me it was illegible)

In addition to the categories listed above, two instances were distinguished across the reports as related to teachers’ knowledge of English. Specifically, T3 could not remember a lexical item a learner asked about (CI10), and T7 taught wrong pronunciation of the word endurance (C16). The cases were considered marginal and hence disregarded in the broad classification. They differed from more frequent references the instructors made to language management, an integral component of Procedural Knowledge, which included input (e.g. Talking about countable/uncountable nouns, I referred to an unusual
observation about Krzyś, who always has a few erasers in his pencil case; This was an occasion to talk about the definition of ‘tolerance’), output (e.g. Ula started talking about herself and what she used to do 10 years ago; They exchanged the needed information using the grammar point they just learned), correction (e.g. The student used the phrase ‘explain me’ which I corrected on the board – I made a model sentence and underlined the necessary preposition), or teachers’ understanding of foreign language learning process and such phenomena as L1 interferences (e.g. I corrected the phrase because I thought B1 is high enough level of proficiency to draw learners’ conscious attention to this incorrect calque from Polish).

**Cognitive MTUs in description**

Table 15 shows that in the description segments, the subjects mainly reported their procedural moves and the context in which they were placed, as opposed to personal beliefs and self-knowledge, to which they resorted with great moderation. The reasons for this ranking seem justifiable as the Procedural Knowledge category (PK) was the ampest of all, and it best suited the descriptive nature of the task in hand. Within PK, the distinguishing of learners’ behavior and reactions to the lesson content, peers and the teacher himself/herself comprised the largest proportion of MTUs, except for T5, who focused on what was taught/learnt before anything else. T3 expressed 30 MTUs referring to learners’ responses, and so did T6 (31 MTUs). T4 produced as many as 48 MTUs of the kind, ranging from 2 to 9 per episode. The impressive quantity of 39 was discriminated in T7’s writing, too, although, perplexingly enough, the thought units “vanished” abruptly and for good halfway through the reports, exactly at the point where language management MTUs came into sight. On the whole, it was common for more and less experienced practitioners to relate to their students’ behavior as a key component of the past events, but it remains unexamined how they used this information as the basis for problem-solving and decision-making.
Table 15: Cognitive thought units in description

The evidence indicated, however, that irrespective of the level of their practical competence, all the subjects failed at times to respond back in an informed manner, i.e. apply adequate didactic principles when the circumstances required ones. The examples below demonstrate such occurrences and speak volumes about teachers’ professional awareness on those occasions:

- When asked by the weakest learners why their writing scored low, T1 elaborated on their mistakes one by one, which took a long time and made the students give in to complete discouragement;
- T2 received answers during free speaking practice which she found dangerously drifting away from both the topic and following activity, and so she wrapped up the discussion ‘her way’ — with a wholly irrelevant remark;
- T3 admitted to disliking a student who was constantly speaking in class; in return, the boy was asked endless questions, which he obviously could not answer;
- T4 was requested by a happy-go-lucky boy to clarify a grammar point before the test; his remark that he wanted a good grade made the teacher think instantly that he cared, was ambitious, and had motivation;

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<th>Categories of Thought Units</th>
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<tr>
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<td>11.8</td>
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<td>7.9</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td>1.9</td>
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<td>3.4</td>
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<td>5.4</td>
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<td>Selves</td>
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<td>Beliefs</td>
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• **T5** tried hard to elicit from her students the skin tone of one character in the movie they watched in class; the fact that they regarded the man being dark as an unimportant detail, while she thought the opposite, led her to the conclusion that they completely misunderstood the concept of tolerance;

• **T6** was confronted by an adult learner who rejected the TPR-based lessons and demanded regular notes of lexis to take home; the woman heard from the teacher that she was supposed to be more patient;

• **T7** spared no effort to make a tutoring course any interesting for a low achiever who, in her view, spared no effort to interact with the teacher;

The tendency of cognitive processes to minimize processing effort and to be selective is evident in the cases above. The instructors made mental short-cuts to draw conclusions based on insufficient premises and overlooked key stimuli in the environment to make informed didactic decisions. This means they acted on temporary mental models to identify and instantly solve emerging problems.

The analysis of cognitive MTUs in description showed that the teachers’ attention directed at learners’ behavior differed significantly from the amount of information they had about the learners. Table 16 shows a gulf between the two variables, which encourages an interpretation that the instructors either found it unnecessary to provide the basic characteristics of the key participants of the events, or their knowledge of the learners was limited. Some respondents would elaborate at length on their own mental states or weather conditions and thus create particularly rich settings for the scenes; concurrently, they would fail to disclose who their students were as individuals. For example, a couple of details about the child penalized for using highlighters in her notebook might have fully clarified why a lower grade came to her as a shock. In fact, **T4** never made it explicit that the girl was a good student. This inference was possible due to the remark which the student passed to the teacher that highlighting helped her to study (CI6). Similarly, the university student criticizing **T6** for an inadequate choice of lesson content remained entirely unattributed (CI2). Even more interesting was the configuration of MTUs for **T5**, which displayed the highest proportion of information she used about the learners and yet the lowest about their actions (circled red in *Table 16*). Indeed, the curious case was considered exceptional among others, which demonstrated a correlation
(+0,7343) between the two variables (Figure 12). This means that the higher the number of thought units reconstructing students’ reactions, the higher tended to be the number of ones presenting their profiles as learners.

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<td>6,4</td>
<td>17,3</td>
<td>23,1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge of learners</td>
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<td>2,7</td>
<td>7,3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9,7</td>
<td>4,4</td>
<td>3,5</td>
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*Table 16: The proportions of MTUs about learners’ behavior and learners as individuals in description*

The concluding observation about the sources of knowledge activated within the description stage of CI report writing concerned explicit identification of problems the subjects faced in teaching situations with regard to just as explicit evidence of search for professional understanding which they initiated. Apparently, a close examination of the narratives revealed that the sporadic but manifest indications of problems hardly paired

*Figure 12: The relation between Knowledge of Students and Noting Students’ Behavior MTUs*
with thought units oriented at search for information (T1-2/11; T2-1/10; T3-2/11; T4-3/11; T5-0/8; T6-3/12; T7-3/10). On the contrary, it was not uncommon for the least experienced practitioners to implement the incoherent strategy of defining the critical issues and launching an adequate probe (T2-6/10; T3-7/11; T4-5/11) although more competent teachers left traces of doing so as well (T1-4/11; T5-2/8; T6-4/12; T7-3/10). T3-6 clearly exemplifies this pattern. When talking to a parent, the teacher realized that he was in between rock and a hard place, for neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the disappointed client was an optimal solution. The choice he made was intuitive, yet the subsequent analysis of the incident focused on his lacking necessary confidence to present personal opinions openly, instead of rational exploration of the predicament he was caught in (i.e. the inability to speak expertly on behalf of the educational institution when the parent proved ignorant of the general principles of schooling). One reasonable interpretation of this and a number of similar cases might be that struggling to overtly address problematic situations as problematic, the instructors blurred the boundaries of the aspects of teaching they intentionally related to and consequently failed to advance their enquiring activity in conjunction with the former. However, the analytical part of CI reports showed an increased correspondence the teachers built between the two, which will be discussed next.

Cognitive MTUs in analysis

In the second segment of the reports, analysis, the subjects integrated available sources of knowledge (perspectives) and applied higher order thinking to analyze the critical incidents. It was observed that in 64 reports (87,6%), the instructors used more than one source of information to facilitate their reasoning operations and create a meaningful representation of the issue in hand. One illustration could be T1-2, which combined the students’ excitement at the pronunciation of the word colloquial, the teacher’s comparable English learning experience with the word enthusiastic, and the literature on the so-called cuddle factor in FL learning. As a result, she constructed an understanding that downgrading the language of instruction seemed unnecessary in L2 classroom as challenging pronunciation could be appealing to many a learner. The categories of knowledge the teacher activated for this purpose (Search, Class Navigation, and Past
Experience) ranked markedly higher and lower as far as their frequency was concerned. Table 17 demonstrates that the choices of other subjects displayed distinct tendencies, too.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Categories of Thought Units</th>
<th>T1</th>
<th>T2</th>
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*Table 17: Cognitive thought units in analysis*

Across the analyses, beliefs constituted the prime point of reference for the teachers when establishing interpretations of the incidents. The thought units recognized as beliefs in teachers’ CIs reports were statements demonstrating varying degrees of personal conviction, evidence, or resistance to change. For example,

**T1-1:** I believed that once they checked the corrections, they would learn from them and wouldn’t make them again.

**T2-7:** Shifting the balance towards one of the ends of the extreme [fluency vs. accuracy] could cause more harm than acquisition.

**T3-5:** Those "popular kids" started perceiving me not as a teacher (somebody they should look up to, somebody who deserves respect), but as a friend.

**T4-3:** I’m positive that the boy was used to being rebuked by his teachers and parents all the time and he expected the same from me.

**T5-5:** Consequently, they use the time more effectively [SS separated from their telephones].
T6-3: *I was already certain that my students and I could only benefit from all the disturbance, which in turn allowed me to gradually cumulate my mental powers to deal with the incident afresh.*

T7-3: *The conversation with the parent was necessary, I knew that.*

Most of the content within the category appeared to have multifaceted classification, a good illustration of which is T6-2. The most experienced practitioner of all, who reacted sulkily to a critical remark from a student about the lesson topic, analyzed the situation as follows:

*I sent a clear signal to the class that I took things personally; that I am there in front of them as a person, then a professional. This way, students could see that emotions can easily take over in other critical circumstances, namely assessment of their work.*

The teacher used commonsense thought (social perspective) to evaluate her own actions and their potential impact on the way she would be perceived as a professional in the future. Still, with no evidence available, the statement was tentative in the sense that while she could easily assume how the students felt about the incident, she could not be sure if they thought about it in the first place, nor what other lines of interpretation they possibly developed. Further, her thinking was both episodic and propositional in nature — it referred to a specific situation in class, but concurrently it unveiled the teacher’s general view that instructors are expected to draw a line between their personal and professional identities. Indeed, it seems it was the teacher’s beliefs that provided her with an explanatory framework for processing information, i.e. allowed her to integrate new observations into the established system/structure.

As Table 17 shows, three practitioners (T1, T3, T5) in particular reached fair proportions of belief-oriented thought units in their analyses. Importantly, T5 expressed merely a couple of these, yet they scored well, owing to a short length of the reports she submitted. Her comments, however slight in number, demonstrated how the practitioner deliberated about important aspects of instruction, namely the role of the teacher, the psychological make-up of young learners, or the function of grades. She rationalized her
views impressively although the assessments that 1) students can only feel safe and achieve their learning objectives when they have emotional support from their teachers, or that 2) grades serve as feedback that should above all be sincere seemed to be morally, rather than didactically, programmed/justified perspectives.

By contrast, T1 and T3 produced four times as many thought units conveying beliefs — 41 and 36, respectively — and considerable evidence of unsubstantiated, evaluative, and/or wishful thinking. Specifically, the former created such categorical statements as *the best* thing about group work is that students might discover their talents and learn how to use them to benefit others (T1-6), feedback should be *based exclusively on* what the students have learnt (T1-8), or what motivates *all of us as humans* is to see that somebody cares (T1-10). Quite uncompromising in her convictions, T1 was a middle-aged individual in the process of refreshing her FL teaching skills, unlike T3, who was taking first steps in the profession and yet, at times, proved as assured about his outlook on observed phenomena. For example, he considered the CEFR concept profit-driven and its nomenclature artificial (T3-9), named what teacher attributes are most popular with young learners (T3-10), and repeated a philosophical mantra that people are the way they are, so there is nothing the teacher can do about it (T3-5; T3-8). The expert among the subjects, T6, appeared more cautious expressing her beliefs. There is evidence, however, that her interpretations of incidents could be biased, too (16% of her belief MTUs in analysis). In her view, for example, English philology students who spoke L1 in a skills development class *demonstrably questioned what legitimized their status* (T6-3); all teachers tend to be over-sensitive about feedback as they perceive it as assessment of their competence (T6-6); while the conflict between the schooling institutions banning the use of telephones in class and addicted youth is growing serious and getting out of teacher’s control (T6-7).

Beside beliefs, the categories of knowledge most frequently referred to in analysis were search and self-critique. The fewer mentions, such as past experience, knowledge of students, or context, also led to a couple of interesting observations. First, T3 and T6 revealed strikingly contrasting proportions of thought units dedicated to their search for knowledge and understanding (3,3% and 42,1%). At the outset of the study, both the recent graduate and the late-career-stage instructor declared that they regarded the anticipated intellectual effort as an opportunity to address their deficiencies and to grow
professionally. Whether the figures translated to improvement in their situational awareness and clearer perception of classroom phenomena remains unresolved yet cannot be categorically ruled out. T3, essentially, gave signs of probing by asking himself rhetorical questions, doing research, and thinking about the problems. On the contrary, T6 seemed to specialize in considering several probable options to be able to formulate a professional judgment. These were different from her belief MTUs as she was clearly speculating about the possibilities rather than claiming their validity. A good example could be the instructor’s attempt to understand what had happened to a once speaking student who, two years after they first met, produced no English at all (T6-8). The teacher named three likely reasons although she admitted she knew too little about the case to approach/solve it expertly. In other analyses, she would ask several questions, which exceeded the recurrent What caused the problem? For example, when she investigated the instance of a student who quit a beginner course for adults (T6-5), she posed four challenging questions about the nature of the TPR method and possible ways to adopt it to the student like Lena (e.g. What did I overlook making assumptions about the effectiveness of TPR? What kind of learner needs doesn’t it accommodate?). In this respect, T6 stood out from among the other subjects, whose search-oriented thought units obtained the following results: T1 – 16,3%, T2 – 25,2%, T4 – 16,5%, T5 – 5,7%, and T7 – 15,7%.

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*Table 18: The distribution of self-critique thought units in analysis*

The comparably recurrent self-critique thought units, which illustrated the teachers’ slips, mistakes, and deficiencies, indicated that the instructors recognized their own faults as being partially or fully responsible for the critical incidents. The words of
T2 and T3 clearly demonstrated this understanding: *It was my mistake to take for granted the adults' motivational factor as a certainty in class* (T2-1), *I knew I sometimes had problems controlling those rude kids* (T3-5). All the teachers, including the least and the most experienced ones exposed themselves to self-criticism except for T5 (*Table 18*), who entirely restrained herself from unfavorable comments about her decisions and actions. Another shared characteristic was a more frequent occurrence of critical TUs in early reports. T1, T2, T3, and T6 gradually seized to refer to their own inaccuracies when carrying out the diagnostic analyses. T7 became less regular, too. Interestingly, the tendency did not correlate with the increase of frequency in any other category of knowledge, excluding T4, who, commencing with CI7, initiated regular search for knowledge. One explanation of the irregular distribution of self-critique thought units could be that the teachers felt motivated to confront the memories of their didactic lapses and this way quell the potential psychological disturbances.

T4’s interpretations of events and the sources of knowledge she activated for this purpose attracted closer attention. The young female scored highest of all with regard to thoughts spinning around her past experience both as a teacher and learner (14,1%) and her self-knowledge (12,8%). The former stressed that while she was unfamiliar with certain aspects of teaching (e.g. *first time teaching teenagers; the first group on a higher level*), she had clear memories from her school days, which she integrated into her professional activity and thinking about it (e.g. *All I ever wanted ... was to be different from the teachers from state schools as I myself thought of them badly; I remember teachers continuously complaining about our behavior in the class; They used to say we were the worst; we started to believe that; When I was a student the teachers used to order: Red is a color for teachers; Nobody dared to disobey*). Taking into account the teacher’s age, her self-knowledge was quite impressive, too. She frequently employed her understanding of who she was as an individual when building her understanding of critical incidents. She could distinctly name her attitude to teaching (*I was doing my best to please them as I really cared*, CI3), outlook on life (*As an idealist, I believed I could introduce such novel methods ...*, CI5), and her work environment (*I have heard how parents, learners, and teachers, prioritize the private sector over the state one; I never get provoked by such comments; they make me feel embarrassed*, CI11), to name just a few.
Similarly, T6’s references to various sources of knowledge when diagnosing the critical episodes in her teaching practice did not go unnoticed. For example, a finding that an instructor with seventeen years of classroom experience scarcely made use of her past (1.3%) to explain the present came as a surprise. Yet, evidence of thinking back was detected in her writing, which only confirmed how skillfully she could link the new observations with well-known ones. Trying to work out the “frozen English” issue (CI8), she remembered how her own sister had struggled to memorize French vocabulary and to grasp grammar rules in German. She considered then cognitive deficits as a potential hindrance to learning. Also, when she lost her temper and scolded students for not paying attention in class (CI10), she came to realize that she had resources to deal with the problem more professionally — what usually worked for her was watching the group and waiting patiently till they returned on the right track. She only could not understand why she failed to apply the effective solution. Her self-knowledge (2.6%) and knowledge of the context (< 1%) were equally neglected in her analyses. This encourages the speculation that the teacher oriented her participation in the critical incidents study at exploration rather than exploitation of her work conduct.

**Cognitive MTUs in judgment**

The closing stage of the assignment — the formulation of professional judgments — rested entirely on the cognitive content of thoughts. Teachers’ beliefs appeared to be the prevalent category identified as feeding their evaluations. Among the belief-ridden statements, there were informed assertions manifesting professional expertise through references made to the underlying principles of foreign language teaching and learning, as well as highly opinionated, clichéd, and controversial conclusions. The following are examples of judgments rooted in expert didactic knowledge:

- **T1** acknowledged that part of her job is to help her students build “autonomy in learning” by demonstrating, for instance, how to effectively use monolingual online dictionaries (T1-4),
- **T3** summed up CI11 with a judgment that the problem he faced in class did not really lie with the boring reading passage but rather how he saw it as boring because he had failed to “critically evaluate the material at the planning stage,”
and T6, in response to the student rejecting the structure of an academic essay (T6-11), contemplated “the attributes of a good writer” and displayed an understanding that it is “not only great sentence skills,” but also “organization of ideas” that matter in writing, and that it takes “maturity,” if not “intelligence,” to see that “structure does not constrain talent.”

What is more, in 45 out of 58 (77.5%) accounts of unpleasant classroom experiences, the teachers clearly verbalized that the diagnostic effort they put into understanding critical incidents allowed them to adapt their classroom practice or thinking of their practice accordingly. Among the pleasant memories, only two (T4-8 and T7-2) included similar declarations (13.3%). What might partially account for the nature of this evidence is the postulate that disturbing episodes in life are easier to bring to mind as they tend to be followed by a period of instability and/or change, which improves their long-term retention as autobiographical reminiscences (Berntsen & Rubin, 2002). The remarks such as Now, I am more careful with …; I started a new habit of …; or As a result, I spend more time … exemplify how change in behavior was recognized by the teachers as their intentional response to the processing of upsetting occurrences in their classroom practice. Interestingly, the assignment asked the subjects to describe and evaluate only their immediate reactions to incidents rather than patterns of behavior developed in their wake. Therefore, the fact that 13 reports (22%) did not mention how teachers’ performance was refined in the long run is considered rather non-symptomatic. It would have been unwise, though, to completely overlook the observed tendency among the teachers to declare noticeable improvement in their pedagogical strategies, especially in view of the reasoning processes they performed, which will be closely discussed in the following subchapter. Also, the content of thought units expressing the teachers’ evaluations of critical incidents will be discussed at greater length in section 3.4.4., which specifically examines the nature of professional judgments they made.

3.3.3. Higher order thinking in diagnosing
The subjects demonstrated cognitive activities which resulted in three categories of learning outcomes – developing instructional habits, initiating spontaneous procedural moves, and creating personal theories about teaching (Alexander et al., 2011).
It was noted that while T2, T6, and T7 became absorbed in building their own notions of different aspects of FL teaching/learning (e.g. teachers as authority figures, the role of feedback, or the criteria of validity for reading-based vocabulary selection), T3, T4, and T5 rather oriented the problematic situations towards establishing practical classroom routines (e.g. checking the accomplishment of lesson objectives, eliciting the understanding of task instructions, or arranging extra speaking practice for weaker students). These two categories of teacher learning showed a very high negative correlation (-0.9555) illustrated in Figure 13 as the yellow and green series. The third level — working solutions discovered in action (e.g. writing a poem with new lexical items for a spelling drill, turning homework check into a competitive game, or recommending fun-packed activities as alternative to exercise-packed handouts) — featured as the smallest proportion of the teachers’ knowledge gaining experience.

Figure 13: Three types of learning outcomes: instant solutions, habits, and abstract concepts

Another observation was that at the level of concept-building, the subjects demonstrated varying amounts of interpretative effort. Table 19 outlines the critical incident reports which concluded with the subjects’ panoramic thoughts about FL
instruction, but it also indicates which conclusions were drawn with the most (●●●) or least (●) involved consideration. The color coding was used to represent what was identified as three degrees of complexity of the problems – the lightest shade standing for relatively straightforward situations, for example the inconvenience caused by the poorly designed teaching aid (T2-5). Apparently, there was a sign of correspondence between the gravity of the cases the teachers deliberated on and the depth of their deliberations.

Table 19: The complexity of CIs in relation to the subjects’ conceptual elaborations

However, the regularity concerned only the opposite extremes among the CIs. As Table 19 illustrates, the highly sensitive incidents largely overlapped with those most thoroughly reflected upon, while least demanding circumstances, with one exception (T6-10), coincided with the ones resulting in rather schematic conceptual thinking. T6-7 and T1-3 exemplify this interrelationship. The former, a seemingly straightforward discipline issue (the use of telephone in class), turned into a serious misconduct, provoking an extensive line of practical and moral reasoning about how the regulations within the university seemed to conflict with the needs of the young generation and deepen the gulf between the two worlds, and how, in the circumstances, the singular teacher faced a dilemma whether to tilt at windmills or not. By contrast, T1, who elaborated on her
attempts to make it easier for learners to grasp the concept of adverbs in English, concluded the report with an axiomatic claim that teachers should raise students’ awareness of how they can benefit from understanding their own learning styles. The realization like this might be a crucial learning moment at the personal level and hence should not be underestimated, yet the two instances fall far apart as for the convolution of problems they addressed.

While penetrating insight was expected from a very experienced teacher (T6), the deep analytical thoughts expressed by a young practitioner in T3-10, for example, were not. The critical incident illustrated an act of teacher’s dishonesty, followed by mature reflections about building professional reputation, students’ expectations, as well as psychological damage the offence could possibly inflict on the advanced learner. The matter was delicate and was approached with most serious consideration. Remarkably, the evidence exposed no transformation in the character of the teacher’s thinking across the cases. Six of these, including the final report, span around habit rather than concept-building. Also, the two situations investigated by T7 (CI4 and CI5), which showed extraordinary energy she expended in hypothesizing about reasons behind students’ behavior, evaluating her own reactions, and outlining possible solutions to the problems, seemed to be the highlights among the other analyses she performed.

Indeed, the three What's of learning varied in proportions for the individual subjects, but their dispersion displayed neither increasing nor decreasing tendencies. The shift towards concept-building was impossible to observe, either. What could be established, however, was whether or not accounts demonstrating the development of procedural knowledge (habit-building) were fueled by higher order thinking, and, reversely, those indicating the propositional content of thought driven solely by valid reasoning.

There were four areas of higher order thinking identified in the CI reports: reasoning, evaluating evidence, problem-solving, and self-regulation (Schraw & Robinson, 2011). As for the category of reasoning, 84.7% of the situations the instructors examined included generalizations about their classroom practices, themselves as individuals, or principles of FL teaching/learning. The inductive logic, detected in 61 reports (Table 20), was undoubtedly encouraged by the task as it was the sphere of personal experience where the teachers were asked to set out their narratives, and the
level of broad statements was expected to close their diagnostic analyses of the incidents. The only teacher who mostly demonstrated the reverse mode of thinking was T2 — 70% of her reports were based on deductive reasoning. Being schooled in the United States, she might have acquired a distinct broad-to-narrow habit of thinking, which she transferred directly into her reflective writing for the purpose of the study. On the whole, reasoning operations were obvious in 98.6% of analyses, irrespective of their learning outcomes. One report (T1-11) remained unclassified because it expressed a highly confusing line of reasoning and hence made it impossible to define as either deductive or inductive.

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*Table 20: The types of reasoning vis-à-vis the learning outcomes*

The mosaic-like table above combines the type of reasoning and the learning outcome for each CI report. For example, T5-4 shows that the teacher developed a new habit based on an inductive inference. In this case, the recognition of learners’ weaknesses in speaking motivated the instructor to make them give mini-presentations as a free practice routine at the beginning of the lessons. Another 15 instances, half of which were identified in novices’ reports, followed the same pattern: the conclusions formulated from premises the subjects believed to be true were directly translated into practical
application. This means that processing oriented towards habit-building was in tune with teachers’ logical thinking. Similarly, spontaneous sequences of actions coincided closely with inductive reasoning. A good illustration is T1-9, where the teacher decided on impulse to give learners more practice of calculating averages as she both noticed they enjoyed doing so and thought it was a challenging lexical item to acquire. On these premises, she made a generalization that \textit{what it takes to plan a fun activity is to observe what the students enjoy and then act upon it} (CI9).

It was noted, though, that some of the patterns the teachers thought they correctly recognized were based on limited and often uncertain premises, which led to false conclusions. T3, for example, argued in CI5 that teenagers creating cliques (premise) always cause problems (claim), and that the clique in his class (premise) was the worst possible (claim) because they were those popular kids in their public schools (premise) who wanted the same kind of attention in the language course (claim). The line of reasoning developed further into a reflective judgment that trying to win students’ hearts is pointless. The weakness of the argument seemed to lie in its foundation, which pointed at the clique in a very matter-of-fact way. In total, 18.3\% of pieces of reasoning bore similar signs of doubtful logic. The highest frequency was noted in T1’s, T3’s, and T5’s reports, and gave no indication of changing rates (marked as \(X\) in Table 20). All this implies that the lessons the instructors believed to have learned from the critical incidents were to some extent mistakenly prompted. This also implies that the process of interpreting and integrating new information into the existing structures of knowledge was to some extent contaminated. The question remains what caused the distortions and interferences.

The final observation emerging from the examination of reasoning processes vis-à-vis learning outcomes was that the configurations of these revealed, on the one hand, the balance of inductive concept-oriented thinking in both T6 and T7 and, on the other, the variability of thought in the other instructors. T2 and T4, for example, achieved three kinds of learning outcomes applying two kinds of logic. As a result, their CI reports demonstrated four different analytical approaches. The division does not reflect the scopes of classroom experience the teachers had. It is tempting to assume, then, it relates to individual differences between the subjects, and their cognitive capacities in particular.
Evaluating evidence was another cognitive activity evident in the reports. In the conduct of their arguments, all the subjects relied heavily on the narratives of what happened, which unsurprisingly served as the basis for the justification of their claims. Although it has been argued that the plot taken as the only proof limits the rationality of individual human thought because the naïve confidence in storylines easily prevents arguers from acknowledging alternative perspectives (Wilkes, 1997, p. 294), in truth, several CIs reports proved this assertion wrong. T6 and T7 were particularly critical about their perceptions of events and reasoning based on “story-telling.” The inquisitive character of their approach was apparent in the doubts they raised about the evidence at hand and the attempts to diagnostically revisit other related experiences. For example, T6-10 described the incident where she scolded the students for not paying attention and asking the same questions over and over again. Her thinking about the episode was enhanced by calling to mind the techniques/solutions she would successfully apply on other occasions to deal with the lack-of-focus issue. She also projected and evaluated what appeared to be contrasting principles guiding her professional and private conduct. Most importantly though, she considered the perspective of the guilt-free learners who were exposed to her severe reprimand. Despite varying degrees, all the subjects used the strategy of combining the experiential evidence with other forms of validation.

In 34.7% of the reports the instructors highlighted causal evidence, i.e. focused on the size or extent of change observed as a component of critical incidents. Although the measurement was mainly impression-based rather than figure-based, the teachers clearly aimed to capture the scale of improvement or deterioration. For example, T4 described how a group of students who had gained the reputation of lazy and demotivated got involved in activities with the use of their mobile devices. The report (CI8) focused on the increased interest among the learners, including them volunteering to prepare vocabulary quizzes on their own. Likewise, T5, whose idea of mini-presentations was mentioned above, confidently commented on how the short speeches and follow up questions noticeably boosted the learners’ fluency in the course of a school year. The scenarios in another 23 incidents across the reports were highly comparable.

The third category of higher order thinking was problem-solving and critical thinking. As discussed earlier, without a comprehensive definition and representation of the problem area, it seems practically impossible to develop solution strategies, organize
knowledge, monitor progress toward the established goal, and evaluate the outcome. The subjects struggled to clearly identify the problems, which consequently made it difficult to successfully complete the problem-solving cycle. It was observed that while the teachers could admit that a solution was needed and they did not have an immediate one, they often misinterpreted the nature of the problem and poorly steered the paths to achieve the goal. For example, T6 realized that an adult student was battling her way through a TPR course and hence demanded change in the approach:

*I could obviously anticipate that some of them would rebel against the method until they discover how much they can remember in the course of a month or two without keeping a written record of the target language. I was right in my predictions except for one learner’s resistance to constant repetitiveness and her demands to jot things down. She rejected my counselling remarks and requests for a bit more patience. She wanted to take the class contents home and revise the material comfortably on her own. That was the way of learning she was used to.*

The teacher was seriously disturbed (*many sleepless nights*) because the rebellion was stronger than expected and her *counselling remarks* fell flat. In her view, the obstacle to solve the problem lay with the learner — she would not bind to what the teacher knew would work for her. There was no way to convince Lena (the student) to stay and, sooner rather than later, cherish spectacular results. Paradoxically, the instructor saw it as the only possible means to settle the issue. The important probing questions came too late. The incident (CI5) demonstrated that a very experienced teacher addressed the symptoms of the “headache,” largely overlooking its genuine cause — the learner’s individual needs.

Table 21 outlines the critical incidents regarding problematic situations and suggested solutions. It shows that well-defined problems constituted the minority of the reports (24%), which means the subjects barely determined them in a way that offered one successful formula and a simple means of applying it, such as T4-9, where the novice discovered she had ignored a perfectly relevant real life context to illustrate a grammar point and hence understood she needed to be more observant and use the information from the environment as natural orientation for learners. A very interesting finding was
that T2, with her limited experience and training background, managed to effectively define three out of ten problems and propose adequate solutions. Even more interestingly, T7, an intermediate among the subjects, scored the highest as for the number of clear-cut problem identifications (5 out of 10). Also, she was the only instructor whose problem-solving skills seemed to improve in the course of time. Towards the end of the study, she succeeded in amply defining the issues in nearly every single instance.

Table 21: The well/ill-defined problems across CI reports

Conversely, T6, with her extensive practical teaching experience and professional expertise, managed to plainly define the scope and goals of two problems out of twelve. Despite a good extent of domain knowledge and presumably as good a structure it had (i.e. the attributes of effective problem-solvers), she diluted the initial stage of problem-recognition by an exaggerated engagement in descriptive details and hence confused rather than clarified the matters. Such was T6-2, for example, where the teacher fused references to 1) her poor mental state on a dark winter morning, 2) a critical remark from a student about the lesson topic, 3) the stupidity of the comment in light of the genuine value of the rejected content, 4) her “willingness” to teach no matter what, and 5) the student’s reckless disregard for this positive attitude. Needless to say, the situation was difficult to deal with, and the prolonged discourse of T6-2 leads to the speculation that
the instructor put a lot of effort into making sense of it, yet the basis became unnecessarily complicated and prevented her from defining the problem in an explicit way.

Last but not least, problem recognition was not always followed by generating workable solutions nor their assessment. The reports with explicitly stated problems were accompanied by solutions in 85.7%, but 83.3% of these appeared truly viable. On the whole, 10 out of 58 problem-oriented critical incidents (circled in Table 21) included what counted as an unambiguous definition of a problem, a legitimate tactic of handling it, and a satisfactory didactic outcome, be it a conceptualization of FL teaching practice or a new classroom routine.

The strategies of metacognitive character were the last type of higher order thinking observed in the reports. They concerned the constructing of concepts that constituted the problem, mapping them out in search for potential interrelationships, finding out what was known or believed to be known about the topic and what needed to be learnt, planning, monitoring, as well as assessing the effectiveness of one’s probe. Thoughts directed at self-regulation were verbalized through all the segments of CI reports. For example, the subjects identified challenges in their daily teaching practice as learning goals, chose and justified solutions, examined their affective responses, raised questions about the rationality of their thinking, and eventually made general claims about

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*Table 22: The most frequent assessments the teachers made in CIs*

FL instruction by inference from specific cases. Their metacognition skills were assumed to be grounded in different sources of understanding activated for analytical purposes. Essentially, required to think and write of the ways they navigated the complexity of classroom phenomena, the teachers were instructed to evaluate their perspectives on the
critical situations although the mode of doing so remained at their discretion. As a result, the subjects most frequently channeled their assessment efforts towards the circumstances they encountered, their own knowledge, decisions they made, and the outcomes of these decisions.

As demonstrated in Table 22, it was observed that the first component proved to be a regular feature (→) in the CI reports. This confirmed the earlier findings that despite the difficulty the instructors experienced to effectively define the core of the problems they faced, it was rather easy for them to categorize the episodes as shocking, stressful, surprising, or illuminating. The other regularity was the conspicuous lack of regularity in the teachers’ evaluation of their knowledge (→). Four out of seven practitioners, including beginners, intermediates, and the expert, commented rather unsystematically on the state of their procedural and declarative knowledge. Importantly, most of the comments related to deficient expertise in teaching. A speculation here is that since the selection of critical incidents embraced mainly unpleasant experiences, the practitioners’ incapability might have been one of the reasons to conjure the memories up. However, further investigation and more data would be necessary to find out whether there was any relationship between the emotional valence of experiences and rational evaluation of one’s knowledge as employed to analyze ones. The assessment of decisions and their outcomes varied from teacher to teacher and included increasing, decreasing, stable, and unstable tendencies. The section below presents four types of professional judgments that the teachers employed in their reflective writing. The results released a significant overlap with what the analysis of the teachers’ metacognitive skills put on display.

3.3.4. Professional judgments of CIs in the subjects’ reports
65 out of 73 reports (89%) contained concluding statements, which were formulated as judgments of the critical incidents or overall propositions concerning FL instruction. The judgments were regarded as “expert guesses,” resulting not only from acquisition of facts, but also interpretative work, reflection, and wisdom the qualified practitioners put into their examination. They varied in degree of generalization, coherence, or legitimacy and offered copious, although empirically demanding, material for analysis. Following the premise that rational explanation of phenomena rises above one’s subjective preconceptions, it seemed imperative to navigate the investigation of the judgments in
CIs' reports towards a search for arguable conceptual thoughts, which demonstrated harmony between professional understanding of the task, content, conditions, or learners, and moral principles the teachers attached to their reasoning.

It was noted that the concluding statements represented extremely contrasting quality. On the one hand, 15.4% of reports exposed fallacies in judgment, the samples of which are presented below (Table 23). They expressed propositions based on unsound/unsubstantiated reasoning.

| T1 | Next time we spot weak students in class, let's start by building a good teacher-student relationship and then everything else might fall in place (CI10). (Additionally, CI11) |
| T2 | Authenticity of materials could be of higher value in the ELT classroom than simply effective methodological approach (CI3). |
| T3 | There is no point in trying to make the students like you. Of course, it is a nice attribute of a teacher when he is liked by his students, but more importantly, it is not the most substantial thing during the course. We have to be both nice and understanding towards students, but we cannot let them feel too comfortable with us (CI5). (Additionally, CI4, CI6, CI7, CI9) |
| T4 | I've heard somewhere: Teaching becomes at the end of your comfort zone. I agree that if we really care about our students and their learning process, we should be open for changes and try out different things and methods (CI8). |
| T6 | The longer texts students have to write and the more rules they come across, the more rebellious they seem to become about writing. No wonder the skill takes the longest to master (CI11). |

Table 23: Samples of fallacious propositions in judgment

On the other hand, each participant was able to put forward rational and well-informed arguments about different aspects of formal English instruction (Table 24). Essentially, it turned out that the specialist in FLT (T6) committed an error in logical thinking, just as her younger inexperienced counterparts did. Relating the volume of writing tasks and learners’ negative attitudes to ones was reasonable, indeed. Establishing a direct relationship between rebellious reactions brought by the increasing complexity of assignments and the hindered development of the skill indicated, however, rather oversimplified and unsubstantiated reasoning. Still, she was the only teacher who closed 75% of her reports with highly insightful judgments. On the opposite end of the spectrum, T3’s conclusions demonstrated major deficiencies in coherence and validity. For
example, his claims that teachers sometimes have to be creative and make their own decisions (CI4), that it takes much work to be good at something, even at English (CI6), that a professional teacher should be careful with everything he or she says (CI7), or that proficiency levels should be comfortably broad to make both teachers and students feel good about the classification practice (CI9) raised serious doubts about their reliability. Hypothetically, the intended communication might have been distorted by the instructor’s inept verbalization of thoughts, which conveyed the impression he failed to rationalize the critical incidents, although it was noted that merely 1 out of 11 judgments (9.1%) the graduate formulated actually bore signs of rational proposition.

| T1 | The lesson that can be learnt from this incident is not to underestimate the sound of the new words and perhaps not to be afraid to expose the students to the language that might be above their level. The unusually sounding word might attract students’ attention and make them more motivated to learn (CI2). |
| T2 | Teacher power is not a sign of vanity. Or at least it should not be. It should come from expertise, i.e. our understanding of the complexity of the process and willingness to lead students safely from the departure point to the destination, no matter whether this learning experience stretches over a semester, year, or decade (CI8). |
| T3 | Assessing the value of teaching material is a big must before we enter the classroom, but we tend to think perhaps that a meticulously planned chapter in the book will do the thinking for us. Ideas in textbooks and our own ideas must be approached critically unless we think of teaching as a source of easy money (CI11). |
| T4 | It is important for language learners to develop the feeling of language ownership. It can assist communication a lot as we all tend to tell stories about our life and experiences. Students who practice a lot of personalized language will benefit from it in the long-run (CI9). (Additionally, CI4, CI6, CI10, CI11) |
| T6 | Metacognitive skills hypothetically allow the learner to monitor and regulate the [learning] process in some degree, yet, psychologically speaking, not every student is suited for successful self-regulation, just as many students are perfectly suited for self-destruction (by which I mean choosing the counterproductive learning strategies that hinder rather than enhance their cognitive efforts) (CI8). (Additionally, CI1, CI2, CI3, CI4, CI5, CI7, CI9, CI12) |
| T7 | If students make an effort to write down things during the class, what they take home should serve a purpose. This purpose is, speaking most generally, to learn from the notes. The teacher cannot monitor everything the students write down but must understand that she can structure the class clearly and use emphasis to point to the elements worth keeping a record of (CI10). (Additionally, CI11, CI2, CI5, CI6, CI9) |

Table 24: Samples of valid propositions in judgment
The absence of T5’s judgments in the tables above is notable. Apparently, the instructor mainly generated micro-scale conclusions, i.e. communicated how she found and evaluated certain circumstances in her teaching practice. To illustrate, the extensive reading component she added to the syllabus was a rewarding experience for both her students and herself (CI3), while having to teach a course she felt incompetent about resulted in students gaining insufficient knowledge about the subject (CI6). She hardly expressed general propositions concerning teaching English as a foreign language even though the brief mention of the necessity to teach young people to accept their flaws (CI2) directly related to the grading system in schools which, as she claimed, allows for massive manipulation by both students and educators. All in all, T5 approached the task of judging the critical incidents in a highly distinct way. She clearly placed more emphasis on the moral dimension of the episodes rather than their didactic aspects. The ethical imperatives, which seemed to lie the firm ground for T5’s reflective considerations about difficult situations at work, perfectly agreed with the instructor’s profile. Furthermore, it was not uncommon for the subjects to advance conclusions which clearly demonstrated either rudimentary didactic knowledge that all qualified teachers should be equipped with from day one in class or worn-out clichés about teaching and learning. The data revealed that T2, with the least of ITT background, made regular attempts at axiomatic articulations like Error correction, as beneficial as it is in some instances, could cause more harm than benefit when used inappropriately and at a wrong time (CI7) or Teaching methods should be eclectic and adjusted according to the situation in class (CI2). However, a fresh university graduate (T4), appeared just as eager to share the domain knowledge which she “discovered” through challenging events. She admitted, for instance, the critical incidents taught her that Each student requires individual approach as all students vary (CI3) or that The attitude towards individual students and the group in general seems to be crucial as for students’ motivation and willingness to study (CI7). It is hard to accept that she lacked this elementary knowledge obtaining her diploma in teaching; hence, it is reasonable to assume that real life situations brought the teacher’s tacit understanding of the central principles to her attention, which she then interpreted as a learning experience. Similar postulations collected from much more experienced instructors came as a surprising finding, though (Table 25). In sum, 24,6%
of the finalizing thoughts displayed what seemed self-evident truths about FL instruction, generated not only by beginner but also mid- and late-career practitioners.

**Clichéd propositions**

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<th>If we want to make students more autonomous learners, we do need to give them more space (CI7). (Additionally, CI3, CI9)</th>
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<td>T5</td>
<td>Only by ensuring emotional support can students feel safe in school environment and focus on educational goals more successfully (CI7).</td>
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<td>T6</td>
<td>The context of large size classes does not make it any easier to explore the learning potential of individual students (CI1). (Additionally, CI2)</td>
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<td>T7</td>
<td>Ready-made materials are not always there for teachers to use (CI8).</td>
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*Table 25: Samples of cliché-driven propositions in judgment*

The subjects in this study executed four types of professional judgments, which included varying degrees of practical, diagnostic, reflective, and critical evaluations (*Table 26*). Specifically, the occurrence of practical judgments — the instant and effective application of expert knowledge to fix problem situations — ranged from 25% to 60% of the reports. The number of diagnostic judgments (embracing more than one perspective on the grounds of which teachers validate their didactic decisions) disclosed yet broader differences between the subjects. They all made attempts to develop fuller awareness of their teaching experiences, but only T6 and T7 demonstrated an exceptional habit of challenging their initial interpretations with rational alternatives.

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*Table 26: Judgments identified in the CI reports (based on Tripp’s typology, 2012)*
T6, as mentioned above, found the use of L1 in an advanced English class highly inappropriate and the feeble excuses of the group members even more obnoxious, yet the thorough examination of the case made her realize that the students could be the victims of the system and educators like herself largely overlooking psycholinguistics aspects of FL learning at high proficiency level. Concurrently, T7, who thought back to her own schooling and decided that her colleagues were all wrong in their approach to teaching *there is/are*, eventually saw justification in their choices possibly influenced by the methodology applied in the teaching materials they used (T7-7). The resemblance between the teachers might be purely coincidental as T6 and T7 were nowhere near in terms of their age, scope of classroom practice, and job status. Despite dissimilarities, though, they both opted to look at problems from different angles and change the frame of their thought more than once. In this respect, T6 and T7 could be safely regarded as exceptions. The distinctly lower scores of other teachers not only revealed less intense search for possibilities, but they also translated, as discussed below, to less critical approach to one’s judgments. Importantly, the term *diagnostic* is not fully justifiably applied here with reference to a number of options instructors consider in the process of decision-making. However, the meaning proposed by Tripp was not rejected for the purpose of the consistency of measurement technique.

Interestingly, the reflective type of judgments, which pointed at personally-held systems of beliefs and values as an integral part of decisions taken, was evident in every single report composed by the subjects. The subjective tone was not always as sharp as T5’s reaction to the pressure from both the coach and headmaster to grant a higher grade to a successful sports-girl who was a low achiever in English (CI2). The teacher openly rejected the suggestions as morally wrong. By contrast, numerous instances merely but clearly implied teachers’ convictions. Such was the case of T1, who hoped to help learners eradicate mistakes from writing by painstakingly meticulous correction (CI1); T3, who assumed that innovative ideas by default motivate students to attend classes (CI3); or T6, who perceived decent participation in class as active participation (CI10). Leaving their validity aside, the ubiquity of reflective judgments seems to be indicative of a profound influence the teachers’ subjective views have upon their professional mode of thinking.

Last but not least, critical judgments – oriented at analyzing and verifying one’s convictions – gave highly contrasting results for the individual teachers. Two instructors
(T1 and T5) never questioned the positions they subjectively adopted at the outset of the analysis, while another two (T6 and T7) did it on a regular basis. The three remaining practitioners ranked in between, showing sporadic attempts at critical evaluation of their own ideas. The pattern emerging from the evidence is transparent although rather inadequate to wholeheartedly endorse. It points at mid-career practitioners as unenthusiastic about doubting their own conceptualizations and novices as courageous enough to do so on occasions. Once more, T6 and T7 remain an enigma — different, yet closely related by a strikingly similar attitude towards intellectual challenges of demystifying their teaching practice.

![Figure 14: The occurrence of the four kinds of judgments in the CI reports](image)

As Figure 14 above demonstrates — “under the umbrella of their beliefs” — the subjects generated much fewer critical judgments than practical and diagnostic ones. This observation partially corresponds to Tripp’s (2012). However, diagnostic judgments, particularly low in number in his study, ranked relatively high here. The conclusion might be that there is a tendency among teachers to rationalize their teaching realities although they often fail to notice how these operations are affected by their personal biases and cognitive processes, too.
3.3.5. Patterns in diagnosing CIs

The general observation concerning the subjects’ diagnostic behavior, made on the basis of the analysis of the material, was that imprecise problem-defining did not prevent them from formulating propositions about EFL teaching and learning. While it was a common practice among the teachers to devote great effort to reconstructing the circumstances surrounding the critical incidents, the following stage was characterized by rather brief reasoning and led to even more compact evaluations of the situations vis-à-vis one’s teaching experience and FL formal instruction in general. The load of processed information carried through the descriptions, analyses, and judgments seemed inversely proportional to the solidness of the underlying principles. In other words, the volume of the subsequent parts in the CI reports and the validity of the concepts they hinged on were considered highly suggestive. Figure 15 shows particularly exaggerated extents of the opening and closing sections of the reports. These will be discussed below.

![Diagram of Description, Analysis, and Judgment Sections]

**Figure 15: The content of the description, analysis, and judgment sections in the CI reports**

First, most of the subjects developed complete narrative frameworks. They included descriptions of the context, environmental stimuli, triggered responses, the climax and falling action, the course of verbal communication between the main characters, and the emotional climate of the events. The amount of information was impressive at times but not always necessarily adequate. It was discussed earlier that certain questions remained unaddressed at the initial stage (e.g. the basic profile of the students involved in the incidents), while they could help to better understand whether
the teachers possessed sound knowledge to securely establish relationships between the phenomena or merely made calculated guesses. Presumably, it was the role of a storyteller that they took more seriously than one of a doctor gathering relevant information to be able to point to the critical element and reach a specialist diagnosis.

The effective recognition and representation of the professional categories and/or concepts that upheld the critical incidents (e.g. poor time management or negligence of learners’ needs) could be easily weakened by the diversity of detail which caught the teachers’ attention and deflected it away from the decisive matter. The disproportion between the scale of minor and major support in the subjects’ descriptions showed a resemblance to a sizeable framed picture hung on a feeble pin. To illustrate, T3 was bothered by the fact that his advanced students always had something to say, and that listening to all of them made it impossible for him to implement what he had meticulously planned. While the description of the situation constituted 63% of the report (CI3), it failed to include a single mention of time management. Peculiarly enough, the teacher did not address the issue in his analysis, either. Instead, he scrupulously depicted the critical moment when a 5-minute speaking activity (!) in his lesson plan turned into a 30-minute heated discussion, which once more, “ruined” the class scenario.

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F – factual  P – policy  V – value

Table 27: Types of claims identified in the CI reports
Lack of well-defined problems resulted in analyses lacking in a clear organization of professional knowledge about their immediate causes and solutions. The more premises and claims the subjects incorporated in their reports, the more compound and ambiguous was the line of argumentation they generated. The three common types of claims identified in teachers’ writing were of factual, value-, and policy-based character, and they co-existed in 69.1% of reports, which indicates multilevel reasoning the subjects engaged in (Table 27). Grown out of more or less correct assertions, they sometimes reached the level of absurdity, such as in T3-8, where the teacher claimed that his student thought he could do anything he wants (sic) and that the boy realized he actually is good at English. The young instructor did not know the factual state of affairs, yet his belief made him present the situation as if he did. His doubtful assumption was grounded in as doubtful knowledge of the teenager — he was this “sportsman student” type — very successful at school not for his accomplishments in various school subjects, but because he was extremely good at playing football. These words communicate utter disregard, but the teacher was transparent that such was his attitude towards the student (Honestly, I just hated him). Numerous cases of erroneous conclusions allowed to speculate about a pattern in teacher analytical thinking as based on personal convictions and theories and governed by their own biased logic.

At the closing stage of the task, diagnostic judgments (one’s controlled attempts to combine different sources of knowledge to produce coherent explanations of observed classroom phenomena situated in the broad educational context) were detected in the CI reports although not as commonly as reflective judgments, namely subjective perspectives, as mentioned above. These constituted the most frequent endings. Presumably, the fact that 1) a situation was challenging, 2) invited a moment of structured contemplation, and 3) brought about an impression of understanding was enough to close the case. In fact, categorical propositions such as It is crucial to have the right attitude towards individual students as their willingness to learn depends on this attitude (T4-7) ran a serious risk of both bias and blatant implausibility. Paradoxically, the same teacher, who enjoyed the classes with her young adults, admitted to being willing to strangle a boy for his cocky remark in T4-3 and murder yet another couple of 11-year-olds for misbehavior in T4-4. As emotional narratives as these concluded in a tone comparable to T4-7. However, the teacher did not formulate a critical judgment to revisit her reflective
thinking and acknowledge the lesson she had (hypothetically) learnt. Instead, she got into a vicious circle of repeating a meaningless mantra. Similarly, the other teachers hardly ever questioned the validity of passed evaluations with well-informed and rational thought. As a result, it was safe to assume that such a discernable strategy represented a pattern of diagnostic behavior. The following section discusses professional judgment and its various aspects in more detail.

To sum up, pattern by definition is a regular and perceptible way in which something is done. Therefore, repetitiveness was a key factor in establishing the model presented above. Indeed, it might create the impression that diagnosing critical incidents by the seven teachers of English was a complete fiasco, which is untrue. There was evidence that all of them were capable of demonstrating professional knowledge, attending to problems, and drawing valid conclusions. The analysis revealed a smaller proportion of these, though, which left them out of sight in model-building.

3.3.6. Diagnostic abilities of the subjects vs. their professional experience in years

It was noted that different components of the diagnosing process revealed different degrees of comparison or contrast between novice and experienced teachers. The table below outlines the major areas of examination, within which the similarities and differences were recognized. Some observations were accidental in the sense that they did not relate to the research objectives but became by-products of the analysis. An example is declared improvement in one’s classroom practice. Indeed, comments regarding how the teachers’ performance changed for the better were interpreted as evaluation of the outcome which their decisions or new understandings led to; however, the study was not designed to examine one particular aspect of instructional behavior in the course of time, neither were the instructors asked to narrate events about selected procedures and their systematic modifications. Instead, they could relish the freedom in learning lessons from different strands of teaching through their inquisitive attempts, which in turn were meant to help to assess their diagnostic abilities.

The extensive list of similarities embraced the characteristics shared by the seven instructors irrespective of the scope of their professional experience. Among these, there were major overlaps in individual preferences and traits, including teachers’ choices to write about negative rather than positive experiences or to use metaphorical language.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics shared by novice and experienced subjects</th>
<th>Exception</th>
<th>Characteristics differentiating the subjects</th>
<th>Opposites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attention channeled towards unpleasant CIs</td>
<td>T1</td>
<td>Application of key words in narratives</td>
<td>T1 T4 T5 vs T2 T3 T6 T7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activation of pre-existing mental models of situations</td>
<td></td>
<td>Degree of detail in recollections</td>
<td>T1 T5 vs T2 T4 T6 T7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metaphorical language in use</td>
<td></td>
<td>Distribution and intensity of affective MTUs</td>
<td>T1 T2 vs T3 T4 T6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disproportion between description, analysis, and judgment</td>
<td></td>
<td>Distribution of beliefs in analysis</td>
<td>T1 T3 T5 vs T2 T4 T6 T7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvement in classroom practice affirmed</td>
<td></td>
<td>Distribution of search MTUs in analysis</td>
<td>T2 T6 vs T3 T5</td>
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<tr>
<td>High noticeability of learner behavior in description</td>
<td></td>
<td>Distribution of self-critique MTUs in analysis</td>
<td>T2 T3 T7 vs T1 T5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited information about learners in description</td>
<td></td>
<td>CIs stimulated by subject observations</td>
<td>T3 vs T7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instances of ill-informed responses to learner behavior</td>
<td></td>
<td>CIs stimulated by subject action</td>
<td>T2 vs T5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of situations vis-à-vis poor problem-defining</td>
<td>T7</td>
<td>Learning outcomes: concept vs practice building</td>
<td>T2 T6 T7 vs T3 T4 T5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate search vis-à-vis poor problem-defining</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ratio of rational vs irrational judgments</td>
<td>T3 vs T6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incomplete problem-solving cycle</td>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage of practical judgments</td>
<td>T2 T5 vs T1 T3 T7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Predominance of beliefs in analysis and judgment</td>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage of diagnostic judgments</td>
<td>T1 T5 vs T6 T7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreasing self-critique in analysis</td>
<td>T4</td>
<td>Percentage of critical judgments</td>
<td>T1 T5 vs T6 T7</td>
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<td>Inductive reasoning</td>
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<td>Instances of ir/rational reasoning</td>
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<td>Critical judgments</td>
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*Table 28: Similarities and differences between the subjects with varying years of EFL teaching experience*
The bulk of the features, however, pointed to what seemed to portray early career stages, for example ill-informed responses to learners’ behavior, inadequate search for knowledge resulting from poorly-defined problems, or scarcity of critical judgments. Instances of the kind occurring at the mid- and late-level of career are far from striking as long as they arise sporadically due to exceptional circumstances (e.g. added complexity, pressures, constraints, or fatigue). Otherwise, they might raise serious questions about teachers’ competence. The stretch of the study, specifically the number of incidents diagnosed by each teacher, did not allow to draw such conclusions, though.

The listing of differences in Table 28 encouraged more interpretation. First, the extremes accompanying the specific characteristics did not represent a clear novice-expert division at all. By contrast, in 14 out of 20 groupings, inexperienced and experienced practitioners came hand in hand only to be contrasted with just as mixed formations. One illustration could be the distribution of search-oriented thought units in the analysis segment of the reports. While the least and most experienced instructors met at one end of the spectrum, demonstrating their strong exploratory streak, another novice and intermediate barely revealed the tendency. Even more thought-provoking was the observation that the application of one’s beliefs and personal convictions for the purpose of CI analysis brought the expert and beginners together. Apparently, combinations of the polar-opposite teachers (i.e. T6 and T2, T3, T4) teamed up by the same attribute or its intensity showed in 6 instances, 5 of which included the T2/T6 tandem. The possibility that the two teachers shared some undetected qualities which tied them closer than anticipated should be excluded on the grounds that the senior ended up coupled with T3 and T4 – two and four times, respectively.

Second, it became evident that T5 and T1, both semi-experienced but highly passionate about teaching, in general ranked in opposition to T6, except for low self-critique scores in their analytical attempts. Especially T5 and T6 carried to extremes such characteristics as the formation of diagnostic and critical judgments, learning outcomes, or degree of detail in their event recollections. The former reduced her accounts to skimpy descriptions, the gravity of which was shifted either towards successful implementation of innovative ideas or herself being victimized for demanding fairness and quality within the educational system she was an integral part of. Interestingly enough, T6 also chose to write at times about how she was not appreciated for the effort she put into daily lesson
conduct, yet her insightful approach would make her elaborate upon potential causes, revise long established views, pay attention to detail, and conceptualize phenomena. It is true that none of the subjects was as advanced in their teaching expertise as T6, a PhD holder in Applied Linguistics, but T5 and T1 were not unqualified instructors. On the contrary, they possessed specialist knowledge of the subject matter and quite a stretch of classroom experience to be able to competently interpret and respond to difficult situations. However, they also seemed to possess a habit of exploiting rather than exploring their knowledge. This assumption is based on the examination of personal beliefs the teachers employed to analyze the critical incidents. Specifically, the proportions of belief-underpinned thought units in the analysis segment for T1 and T5 reached 47.7% and 37.5%; T6 generated 28.9%. Hypothetically, her sophisticated understanding of various aspects of FL teaching and learning allowed her to freely rest upon the accumulated knowledge. She did not, though. The fact that she was an actively searching practitioner placed her in a league with the young and anxious instructors, not experienced ones.

In this respect, the exception, and concurrently the final observation emerging from Table 14, was that T7, a born translator and a skilled enough teacher of English, appeared to share quite a few characteristics with T6. They both reconstructed the events in great detail, subdued their beliefs in favor of rational thinking, proposed sometimes conflicting interpretations of the phenomena, and subjected them to critical evaluation. This outstandingly mature attitude towards the task was demonstrated, as discussed earlier, by two very unalike individuals. Doubts arise whether they genuinely were. From a cognitive perspective, the processes of perception, memory, and higher order processing, performed by the two teachers, produced substantially comparable outcomes. The single point of differentiation was noted with regard to T7 being more critical about herself as a decision-maker. The most unusual finding, however, was that she exceeded the other subjects in the clarity of formulated problems. Indeed, T7 came across as a highly intelligent person, accepting challenges although seeking none.

The concluding comment boils down to the statement that the scope of teaching experience did not directly correspond to the efficiency of diagnostic operations carried out by the practitioners. While the novice-expert polarity was ruled out as an influence
on the teachers’ abilities to diagnose CIs, the intriguing configurations within the extremes came into view unexpectedly. These are worthy of further consideration.

3.4. Discussion

This study sought to shed light on diagnosing critical incidents seen as cognitive processes activated by teachers of English as a foreign language prior to the formulation of judgments about these incidents in the context of FL teaching and learning. Although it is not known how the seven subjects benefitted from the task of diagnosing CIs in the long run, it has been determined how effective or ineffective were the analytical efforts they made in the course of several months to critically review situations in teaching which they knowingly pronounced to be learning experiences. Dörnyei (2001) argues that instructors as learners themselves tend to rest their enthusiasm and intellectual commitment to develop professionally upon fragile and context-confined pillars, for example positive feedback. However, in this study the occurrences selected by the subjects were mainly unpleasant memories of things they did, saw, or heard in their classroom practice. Therefore, it is safe to assume they were motivated to explore and learn from their failures rather than accomplishments. The subjects’ reports served as an inventory of information about the situations in which they were involved. The analysis of the material resulted in a few major observations.

First, some recollections of CIs lacked essential facts although they often provided loads of insignificant details. Rogers (2002) maintains that any form of personal narrative by default fragments subjectively experienced phenomena into meaningful components and hence gives a solid basis for further reasoning and decision-making. This is a relevant point; however, a subject’s claim that, for example, teaching a Language and Literature course in a high school was too demanding without an initial training was regarded as unsupported because there was no clear explanation what specifically constituted the challenge and caused her to develop a strong bias. Different qualities of stimuli trigger different reactions in people. On this account, finding out that what a teacher observed in his/her environment but not knowing the attributes of the agent could substantially affect the interpretation of the instructor’s capacity to successfully manage his/her attention and activate adequate sources of knowledge to establish meaningful relationships between
new and old information. When important aspects of the situations were left unaddressed, the validity of argumentation and judgment was impossible to assess.

Second, the subjects’ reasoning was identified to incorporate numerous value-, conviction-, and belief-underpinned claims, which led to impressionistic rather than informed evaluations of CIs. The evidence supports Zawadzka-Bartnik’s (2004) view — teachers’ reliance upon their personal, practical, and tacit knowledge seems pervasive in their attempts to make sense of their experiences while effort to engage in self-inquiry and rational theoretically-informed thinking rather sporadic. It has been determined in this study that there is no close correspondence between the efficiency of diagnostic operations performed by the early, mid, and late-career subjects and degree of their domain expertise. It seems that neither the older nor younger generations of teachers are protected from formulating fallible judgments, but diagnosing CIs undoubtedly mediates both externalization and reinternalization of personal understandings irrespective of the nature of thoughts teachers generate. It offers what Verity (2000) calls “a zone for thinking” (p.184) and a tool for potential development or recovery, the process which is never linear nor determined by one’s professional standing. Borg’s (2006) hypothesis that teacher thinking results in building “personal theories,” which constitute an integral part of their professional knowledge base, is plausible in light of the data analysis. It could be further proposed that even if teachers’ conceptual elaborations hardly relate to principled propositions in TEFL, and instead rest upon their broader understanding of how things work in general, the lines of reasoning they develop can still demonstrate their diagnostic abilities and thus allow for their evaluation. For example, an enthusiast of pre-arranged seating plans for teenage learners failed to competently discuss their merits. However, she expressed confidence that different configurations of students working together prove worth and teach young people to solve problems and cooperate with those they detest. The claim was unsubstantiated and seemed to have more to do with folk-psychological knowledge than an informed didactic view, yet, as Ericsson and Simon (1984) hold, “The report X need not be used to infer that X is true, but only that the subject was able to say X (i.e. had the information that enabled him to say X)” (p. 7).

Another important observation based on the data analysis is that the subjects’ reflective attitudes towards learning experiences embraced not only cognitive (be it weak or strong) but also moral and affective dimensions. The latter constituted a vast space of
exploration in the majority of the CI reports. Undeniably, the study navigated the teachers towards emotionally loaded events in their classroom practice as the content for systematic inquiry, yet the instructors had absolute discretion as to how their further considerations were handled. The outcome they produced demonstrated a remarkable coexistence of affective and cognitive representations not only at the stage of description, but also analysis of the incidents. This prompts speculation that the professional judgments the instructors closed the cases with were substantially influenced by these two modes of processing. This is also consonant with Golombek and Johnson’s (2004) research findings emphasizing the catalytic role of emotions in teacher transformation. The examination of teacher-authored narratives led them to the conclusion that emotional dissonance caused the respondents to identify and attend to contradictions in their instructional context, which in turn effectively engaged them in resolving the problems by cognitive restructuring (p. 323). In this study there was evidence that intense feelings never left the subjects at the stage of analysis, but in many instances they appeared along with rational thoughts and valid arguments.

Finally, the study provided variable evidence of teachers’ diagnostic behavior but exposed a few relatively distinct strands. The common shortages observed among the instructors supported Eysenck and Keane’s (2010) claim that on the whole people tend to struggle to adequately define and hierarchize problems, to organize their knowledge, choose optimal strategies for solutions, and evaluate decisions taken. It seems that the structured practice of documenting their reflections on critical incidents, which the teachers adopted for the purpose of empirical analysis, requires both a longer run and individually-adjusted procedures to tangibly refine their diagnostic abilities. At the end of the day, the task was intellectually demanding and the seven subjects (three novices, three semi-experienced teachers, and one expert) were all taking rather hesitant steps along the way. In this sense, the distance between the teachers’ idiosyncratic learning paths transpired smaller than anticipated.

3.5. Conclusions to the study
To accomplish the assignment, the subjects had to channel a great deal of cognitive effort into retrieving, representing, relating, and reasoning about the What, the Who and the Why
of their past teaching experiences. The complex yet fascinating interaction of personal beliefs, values, knowledge, feelings, and environmental stimuli provided the basis for narratives and in turn the material for scholarly inquiry. The scope of this inquiry was the teachers’ mental activity of diagnosing critical incidents in their educational context. The research questions aimed to determine

Q1: How teachers mentally represent critical incidents in EFL teaching
Q2: What mental constructs and sources of knowledge they activate to diagnose CIs
Q3: What higher-order thinking abilities they engage in the process of diagnosing CIs
Q4: What kind of professional judgments they form in the process of diagnosing CIs
Q5: What patterns/regularities can be identified in the way teachers diagnose CIs
Q6: What kind of relationship can be discovered between the effectiveness of diagnosing critical incidents and the subjects’ professional experience

The subjects approached the task in distinctive manners, which at times defied the application of consistent instruments to discern the sources of knowledge they activated, reasoning operations they performed, or generalizations they passed. However, the CI reports achieved their primary objective. They provided collections of data which allowed to make interpretations and inferences about how the instructors executed their current professional expertise to build new understandings of FL teaching and learning through diagnosing problem situations in their classroom practice. The following is a condensed overview of the answers to the research questions:

Q1: The teachers mainly see critical incidents as unpleasant experiences in their classroom practice, caused by their own didactic failures or observations of learners’ negative reactions to the task. They point at new information from the environment as often conflicting with their mental schemata of situations, which triggers their analytical processes. Recall of the CIs, which contains thoughts of visual, affective, and cognitive character, falls as the highest proportion of the teachers’ narratives although the relevance of the retrieved information is not always obvious.
Q2: The cognitive content of the reports demonstrates an impressive spectrum of professional concepts, the most extensive part of which is procedural knowledge in description and beliefs in both analysis and judgment. The teachers refer knowledgeably to all aspects of FL instruction when diagnosing critical incidents, but they also employ other sources of understanding, such as feedback, controlled search for information, or context. The hypothesis is that missing facts in the reports, which often impair the clarity of description or analysis, do not necessarily indicate lack of teacher knowledge, but rather imprecision of communication. On the other hand, belief-ridden statements in analysis and judgment, including opinionated, clichéd, and controversial propositions, raise serious doubts about the cognitive control the teachers exert over diagnostic operations. The visual references and affective thought units are numerous in description and analysis of the problem situations, yet imagery and emotions reveal varying degrees from teacher to teacher and hence resist generalizations.

Q3: The teachers establish meaningful relationships between new information and existing structures of knowledge in a simplified way. In their attempts to determine the potential causes of the critical incidents, they examine the available evidence, but their exploratory operations fail to include the explicit identification of professional concepts which the incidents, or rather their constituent parts, represent. Without such nomination, claims about causal relationships between the elements are doubtful, not to mention difficulty in defining the core of problems. This does not stop the teachers from formulating conclusions about their instructional experiences as embedded in the broad context of TEFL and evaluating their own didactic moves. Needless to say, ineffective inductive reasoning traps teacher thinking in a vicious circle.

Q4: The teachers can propose workable solutions to problem situations although they admit that in the first instance, they have no idea how to respond to the challenges concerning group management, error correction, lesson planning, or elicitation, to name but a few. They hardly consider alternative ways of handling the problems. Instead, they accept the first suggestion as a given and a springboard for further actions. The instructors commonly review the classroom disturbances against personally-held systems of moral standards and beliefs, yet they do not critically verify those systems in light of new
information. Following Tripp’s terminology, the subjects succeed in formulating both practical and reflective judgments, but they struggle to generate diagnostic and critical assessments. The fact that the teachers show difficulty evaluating their own knowledge and assumptions indicates that their strategies of metacognitive character are conspicuously underdeveloped. Effective search for understanding begins with the realization what is known and what needs to be learnt.

**Q5:** There are several characteristics which the early-, mid-, and late-career instructors share as “diagnosticians.” Most of these characteristics can be regarded as factors obstructing the process of effective diagnosing. They include poor problem defining, reliance on beliefs in analysis and judgment, or fallacious reasoning. Also, the character of selected situations to examine as critical incidents is a point of resemblance among the teachers. Interestingly, they voluntarily choose to deal with disturbing didactic memories exposing their instructional fiascos, yet the process of diagnosing these situations seems, as mentioned above, only partially effective. It is assumed that teachers’ awareness of what it takes to diagnose effectively is rather limited.

**Q6:** The distinctive features concerning diagnosing, which the individual subjects revealed in the study, resist regularity in relation to their professional experience. Novice and senior teachers demonstrate comparable characteristics in all kinds of configurations. This means that a similar degree of detail in description, a level of emotionality in analysis, or a conceptual effort in evaluation might pair instructors in their first and tenth year in service, respectively. This also implies that teachers who, in the course of years, accumulate practical classroom experience, not its conceptual understanding, remain novices in some aspects of FL instruction.

The results of this study might have considerable implications for the field of foreign language teaching and learning. The concept of diagnosing critical incidents relates to an important yet empirically unexplored dimension of teaching – its post-active phase. It prompts further questions about teachers’ cognitive responses to challenging situations, for example the effectiveness of their reasoning processes in relation to the time gap between the episode and its analysis or the teachers’ ability to critically re-
examine their professional judgments about CIs from the past. In pre-service teacher education, the study can be used to facilitate the development of tools for novice teachers to optimize their processes of representing, categorizing, problematizing, and defining classroom phenomena. Beginner instructors lack confidence in their didactic abilities and hence are particularly prone to psychologically disturbing situations. Therefore, effective mechanisms for regulating their emotional reactions, grasping the complexity of FL instruction, and building teaching awareness might give them the opportunity to face the challenges like real professionals do.
CONCLUSIONS TO THE THESIS

The fundamental processes which mediate experts' superior performance and define the nature of expertise in teaching have been discussed in this thesis. They are the continual renewal of knowledge, problematizing the unproblematic, and attempts to maximize the opportunities to extend competence by progressive problem solving (Tsui, 2005). The view that practitioners never stop growing professionally is frequently contrasted with one which accentuates the polarity between novices and experts with regard to the efficiency of information processing as affected by different extents of their teaching experience. Despite the critical distinction, both of the perspectives accept that the initial stage of teaching demonstrates deficiencies which instructors make up for in the course of time, and that extensive classroom practice can result in experienced non-experts if teachers mindlessly repeat rather than deliberately develop patterns of thought and behavior (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993). Serious irregularities in the teachers’ diagnostic abilities identified in this study are hardly consistent with the conceptualizations above.

First, although beginner instructors tend to show emotionally-loaded and superficial reasoning and judgment, they also prove to be mature and knowledgeable diagnosticians. The cognitive mechanisms, such as interpretation, pattern recognition, or knowledge integration and retrieval seem to operate in inexperienced teachers with unpredictable effectiveness. In short, a degree of expertise is evident in novices. This finding supports Sternberg and Horvath’s (1995) view of teaching expertise which holds that practitioners belong to broad categories defined by the attributes of knowledge, efficiency, and judgment, and members of each category can bear varying degrees of correspondence. The unexpected configurations of similarities and differences between teachers are hence accepted, which makes it impossible to place them on the learning continuum. Exploration of novice teachers as experts is required.

Second, teachers’ professional knowledge, beliefs, and assumptions about the didactic process have been recognized as conflated and influenced not only by their prior training, but also by their own learning experience, forces operating in the workplace, feedback, or mental states they develop. Individual differences such as motivation, awareness, emotionality, or intelligence, to name but a few, materialize and meddle in all
aspects of instruction, including the way teachers mature professionally, i.e. direct their learning processes and perform fundamental self-monitoring procedures — reflective observation and evaluation of their own practice (Gabryś-Barker, 2012; Rodgers & Scott, 2008; Dörnyei, 2001; Beane & Lipka, 1986; Kolb, Rubin, & McIntyre, 1979). Similarly, the norms, policies, culture, and relationships within a specific teaching community interfere with the professional growth of every individual. This study confirms that a multitude of coexisting sources of orientation in teaching intensify and obstruct the processes of knowledge construction and reorganization in teachers. They are both constructive and destructive forces behind the teacher learning outcomes.

Hattie (2003), who strongly advocates the identification of attributes of mastery in teaching, synchronously observes that doing so should never be perceived as merely building a checklist. On the contrary, the prior reason why the goals should be located and thoroughly appraised is that we need fundamental principles not only for teacher education and professional development programs, but also “for extolling that our profession truly has recognizable excellence, which can be identified in defensible ways, and for a renewed focus on the success of our teachers to make the difference” (p. 1). Johnson (2007) adds that establishing benchmarks and a universal representation of expertise is not an easy task, since there are always factors of distinctive character that will foil such attempts (pp. 63-64). Prevailing canons within teacher education systems, social expectations, or even individual learning expectations might all determine what views theorists and practitioners hold about expert performance, meaning that the concept naturally has its geo-political variations.

Diagnosing critical incidents can be perceived as a powerful instrument for developing teachers’ diagnostic abilities as it encourages the activation of cognitive resources, intelligence, awareness, and emotional literacy in pursuit of understanding. It should, therefore, be a hands-on rather than conceptual dimension of teaching English as a foreign language. Forming strong enough a habit of examining one’s didactic moves and perceptions might result in the capacity to effectively recognize when and why we trip over in our classroom practice. Preparing student teachers to reflect in a structured manner is even more important and should be part of their initial training experience (Loughran, 1996, p. 25). However, the process of teacher learning should continue as an
integral part of professional activity in order to successfully facilitate the process of language learning.
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2. Jak je rozpoznać? — Każdy postrzega rzeczywistość na swój własny sposób, więc sytuacja, którą ja uznam za potencjalnie krytyczną, wcale nie musi być krytyczna dla ciebie. Na przykład, prośba o wyjaśnienie materiału ze strony ucznia, który nie wykazał najmniejszego zainteresowania nauką w trakcie całego semestru może być potraktowana jako klasyczny przykład desperackich prób nadrobienia zaległości w ostatniej chwili, które pozostawią nauczyciel niewzruszonym, ale może być także punktem wyjścia do poszukiwań odpowiedzi na pytanie dlaczego tak się dzieje, a tym samym zgłębiania psycholingwistycznych aspektów uczenia się/nauczania języka obcego. To właśnie brak odpowiedzi na postawione pytania, czyli luba w wiedzy fachowej lub znajomości czynników składających się na daną sytuację generuje problem. Jego rozpoznanie i chęć wyjaśnienia stanowi początek procesu diagnozowania zdarzenia. Wskazówki poniżej mogą okazać się pomocne w poszukiwaniu sytuacji do analizy. Zdarzeniami krytycznymi mogą być:

a) nieoczekiwane sytuacje, które przykuły twoją uwagę i wytraściły z rytmu pracy ponieważ odbiegały od przyjętych norm
b) wyzwania dydaktyczne, którym podełkalięś/lub nie


Posługuj się poniższym wzorem opisując, analizując, oraz oceniając znaczenie zdarzeń, które wybraliś/ś jako krytyczne w twoim dotychczasowym dorobku dydaktycznym. Podana kolejność kroków powinna towarzyszyć ci w trakcie twoich rozważań i pisania. Postaraj się odnieść w kilku słowach do wszystkich punktów. Raport powinien mieć formę tekstu ciągłego, w którym największą rolę odgrywa określenie i wyjaśnienie czynnika krytycznego.

A. Opis
a) Przedstaw kontekst sytuacji np. charakter lekcji lub kursu jako tło zdarzeń
b) Streść zachowania i emocje uczestników
c) Wskaź moment, który uznajesz za krytyczny

B. Analiza
a) Zdefiniuj problem kategorizując fachowo poszczególne komponenty zdarzenia oraz ustalając związki sprawcze pomiędzy nimi
b) Sformułuj pytania jakie sprowokował incydent

c) Określ zakres swojej odpowiedzialności za zdarzenie

d) Rozważ alternatywne scenariusze i ich skutki

C. Ocena

a) Sformułuj ocenę własnego zachowania jako reakcji na zdarzenie i jego efektywności

b) Określ znaczenie zdarzenia w kontekście nauczania języka angielskiego, korzystając ze swojej wiedzy fachowej, doświadczenia dydaktycznego, doświadczenia uczenia się języka obcego, literatury przedmiotu, oraz innych dostępnych środków

c) Sformułuj wskazówki jakie wynikają ze zdarzenia dla twojej dalszej pracy


6. Przykłady – Poniżej znajdują się dwa przykłady analiz zdarzeń, które mogą stanowić punkt odniesienia dla twoich tekstów.

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Z GÓRY DZIĘKUJĘ ZA WSPÓŁPRACĘ
Example 1

A student of mine was surprised to find my comment on her writing assignment, an opinion paragraph about home-schooling, which threw doubts about its authorship. She was a 17-year-old course attendee in a language school. Her receptive and productive language skills were rather basic (B1+) while the text demonstrated not only advanced sentence structures and vocabulary, but also perfect coherence and unity. Obviously, she’d got it written or copied although she denied it. The critical part was that after she failed to explain selected expressions from the writing (e.g. bitten to the quick or a nagging anxiety), she said she could easily discuss the topic in Polish, and anyway she did not think it was necessary for her to understand what was there in English!

I found it critical for two reasons: a young adult, who had been learning the foreign language for the greater part of her life, openly discredited its central purpose – meaningful communication; to make it worse, she turned arrogant doing so. It was both an unexpected and shockingly disappointing moment.

I can identify a few potential causes of the incident. The student’s sharp reaction must have been provoked by my note. Morals aside, the submission was rejected while she knew it was well-composed and hence deserved compliments rather than criticism. A sudden rush of emotion made her snap out without a thought. Otherwise, she was exposed as academically dishonest, which she could consider offensive. If in actual fact she had worked through the ideas with a more proficient writer, she justly claimed intellectual property rights. Still, the striking misconception that it was fine to lend a hand to speak for her might have been a massive failure on the part of her educators, who apparently did not manage to instill into her a taste for success achieved through her own learning effort. Another possibility that comes to mind is an attitude problem. Secondary school goers are usually busy with loads of assignments and tests. She could be struggling and thinking the evening tuition was to make things easier for her, not the opposite. This does not excuse a cheating behavior but might indicate a desperate choice she made in order to survive.

In response to her comment, I confirmed that she was good enough to successfully express her ideas in decent English and that potential mistakes were going to be discussed to help her make progress, not to shame her. However, her vigorous denial and disdainful remark brought an end to our conversation, which made me very upset as it seemed she was not fully benefitting from the course at her own request. I asked if she wanted to add anything to prove me wrong, but she did not. I think I communicated quite explicitly that I was disappointed, but I doubt whether it was necessary. After all, my feelings were a side issue.

It might be due to external conditions or personal convictions; whatever the motive, though, it does happen that some learners perceive homework assignments as a burden, so they will use any possible means to leave the hardship behind while some instructors turn the assignments into tough verdicts on learners’ capabilities, only reinforcing unpleasant associations. It takes both didactic expertise and a good knowledge of L2 learners to set them relevant tasks, drawn up transparent guidelines, stimulate learners to achieve an outcome, and give them feedback that fortifies rather than threatens their future efforts (Ellis, 2003, p. 16). Tasks do not cause learning but engage attentional processes that lead to learning (Van den Branded, 2016, p. 248), which an experienced 17-year-old L2 learner is capable of understanding.

I was supposed to run a class about the use of capital letters in English. My adult students were B2+ learners, so the content was well-familiar and only needed to be consolidated. The textbook, though, outlined the overwhelmingly long list of rules, followed by many error-correction-oriented exercises. In the language school where I worked, book-based practice that exceeded 10 or 15 minutes was considered boring, not to say counter-productive, by the participants and teachers alike. And so, I devised a game, in which small groups of students took turns to select a number in a 25-digit grid drawn on the board, hear a corresponding sentence, and guess how many capital letters it contained. If they got it right, they would score as many points as was the sentence number. If not, other groups could go for the same item. The competition proved ultra-involving. I could see most students mouth the sentences and use their fingers for a count. Critically important was the moment when I realized this simple activity exceeded my expectation of fulfilling the lesson objectives.

It was critical because the game opened my eyes to its capacity as a learning tool. At the planning stage, I was convinced it would give my students fun but above all an opportunity to revise different uses of capital letters in one go.

In practice, though, I discovered that its success was lying also with the relevance of content (Dorota, a 21-year-old film fanatic found the sentence about Tom Cruise and his latest Mission Impossible very true for her), a confrontation with interfering rules from L1 (one group was extremely disappointed to overlook a capital letter in a street name, following a Polish convention by mistake), an unusual format (a listening task was combined with spoken production as several students reconstructed the sentences over and over again to make sure they did detect all the capital letters), and a linguistic challenge (some sentences contained up to six capital letters).

I gave the group a very positive feedback, but I was also proud with myself. I decided the idea was so beautifully versatile that I was going to re-use it in the future, for example to revise punctuation marks, pronouns, or auxiliary verbs. Regrettfully, I never submitted the activity for students’ review. Judging by their expressive gestures and a wild applause for the winners, they liked the game a lot, yet I failed to show interest in hearing whether there was anything I could improve about it. Neither did I make any use of the textbook, believing the entertaining part addressed my students’ needs sufficiently. It was an unwise thing to do.

Gee (2013) observes that if contemporary approaches to learning are to be effective, they must take account of new forms of attention. Indeed, in the digital era, language learners easily run out of patience with gapped or incorrect sentences in their textbooks. After all, more interesting stimuli are continuously competing for their notice. However, when expertly managed, classic exercises cannot cause harm. By contrast, they offer controlled practice all learners require irrespective of times we live in; they serve as comprehension check and skill/system progress review. It is crucial therefore to knowledgeably diversify classroom procedures and by no means abandon unspirited yet valuable practice in favor of unceasing excitement.

APPENDIX B: Subjects’ CI reports

TI/CI1: Assessing writing

Last year it was my first time teaching the Writing Module at our university. I was not very sure how to go about it, and I have to confess that I have made some very basic mistakes.

One day I collected the students’ first writing task and started grading it in my office. I was absolutely overwhelmed by very basic mistakes that some of the students had made. I guess that I expected their level to be much higher as their speaking skills seemed to be stronger. I could not resist the temptation to correct all the basic mistakes, such as 3rd person singular in the present tense, possessive –s, there are/there is, etc. In addition, I decided to develop a color-coding system to distinguish between the high, average and low performing papers, and to allocate a green sticker to a very good paper, a yellow sticker to an average paper and a red sticker to a very poor paper. My intention was to show the students their starting point and to encourage them to work hard. I was hoping that as they would ‘move up’ a sticker, it would give them a sense of achievement and I was hoping to be able to give all of them the green stickers in the end.

However, there were a number of things that I learnt later which I had not considered initially. First of all, as expected, the weakest students approached me asking me why they had been given the red sticker. There were so many mistakes in their papers that I didn’t know where to start. By the time I got to the point of explaining their third mistake, they were frustrated and totally demotivated. This also meant that I had to spend a lot of time with one student at a time, and the rest of them had to wait. Second, while grading, I mostly focused on the language and I underestimated what I was actually teaching, which was the paragraph structure. To be more specific, that term our focus was on the topic sentence, supporting details with transitions and concluding sentence. I realized only later that assessing language and structure were two very different things. This was actually pointed out to me by a more experienced colleague. Third, even though I tried hard to explain the mistakes, the students kept on repeating them. I guess that I wanted to tackle all of them at the same time, but I did not give an opportunity to students to process them step by step. I did prepare an editing exercise which I believed was useful for the stronger students, but perhaps not that useful for the weaker ones. Fourth, I never gave the students a chance to follow up on their mistakes. I believed that once they would check the corrections, they would learn from them and wouldn’t make them again. Only later on I came to realize how wrong I was.

Teaching writing was a big learning lesson, and there are some basic things that I have in mind when I approach students’ papers now. If I had to summarize them in a few points, they would go as follows:

- When grading students’ papers, read the paper first. The first reading should provide you with a general idea, i.e. if the student is struggling with the language or structure. Read it the second time, and this time look for the repetitive mistakes. Highlight them, but do not correct them.
- After giving the papers back to students, ask them to correct the mistakes by themselves. This way they will be engaged, and in this ‘detective-like’ process they will find out what is wrong with their paper. As they learn from their own mistakes, the learning process will be more effective.
- When you spot repetitive mistakes over a number of papers, focus on tackling the issues one at a time. For example, work on tackling the possessive –s. Prepare discovery format exercises and let students work out the rules. In the subsequent writing, check if the students can apply the possessive -s correctly.
- If you’re using some kind of the color-coding system, perhaps focus on assigning colors to the mistakes but not to the whole paper, and balance between green, yellow and red stickers in all the papers. This way students will not feel frustrated by their performance but will work on eliminating their issues.
- Allow for peer correction. Students can learn from each other, even at the cost of using their mother tongue.
**T1/CI2: Words that are appealing to our ears – ‘Cuddle factor’**

I suspect that the warm-ups can have all sorts of ‘shapes and forms.’ Some topics are more interesting than others, and the one that sparked some interest in the class that I am about to describe was all about the function of birds’ feathers. We had a short discussion on why the birds had feathers when we stumbled over the word ‘mate’.

As the male birds in the text were referred to as ‘mates’, I used the opportunity to introduce the colloquial meaning of the word. I do not recall word by word what I said, but it might have been something along these lines: “Does anyone know what the word ‘mate’ means in the street language? Who or what would you call ‘mate’ in the British English? What is its colloquial meaning?” Once I explained that the word ‘mate’ meant ‘a man’/‘a guy’ in the British English and it was very commonly used, two of my students demanded that I repeated the word ‘colloquial’ and told them what it meant. They absolutely loved the sound of it. I had to write it down for them on the board.

Later on, while preparing for DELTA course, I came across the term ‘a cuddle factor’. This essentially means that students remember the words or phrases they can create an emotional attachment to. To put it in other words, if the students like the meaning of the word, its sound or the associations they can make with this word, they are more likely to remember it.

Once I learnt about it, I also recalled how much I liked the word ‘enthusiasm’ when I heard it for the first time. I wanted to use it in every sentence. Suddenly, I was ‘enthusiastic’ about everything I could have possibly been enthusiastic about. I was about fifteen years old at the time.

The other thing that this incident made me think about is that the word ‘colloquial’ is a very difficult word for A2/B1 students. However, the two engaged girls also wanted to know the word for a person who likes humans – a philanthropist. Again, it is a pretty big word! Then, it crossed my mind that I do have a tendency to simplify the language in class as I want to make sure that everyone understands me, but it clearly seems to be to the detriment of my students. Thanks to the research I have done for the DELTA course I have learnt that there is a huge debate between the use of real and simplified language in class. The biggest challenge is to strike the right balance between the two.

The lesson that can be learnt from this incident is not to underestimate the sound of the new words and perhaps not to be afraid to expose the students to the language that might be above their level. The unusually sounding word might attract students’ attention and make them more motivated to learn.

**T1/CI3: Students with the analytical minds**

If I had to describe my learning style, I would probably say that I am a ‘hybrid’ of visual, audio, hands-on and analytical learner. When it comes to learning new words, I enjoy hearing and pronouncing them, writing them down and working out how they are used in context. When it comes to learning grammar, I absolutely love rules and I think that I would be lost without them. This sometimes makes me think how my students learn the language and what I as a teacher should do in class to help them acquire the new language. I do need to see grammar broken down in ‘pieces’, but is it what the students need?

In the writing classes I often deal with the English grammar. Once we focused on the different parts of speech. I remember explaining the difference between nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs. It turned out easy to point out that English nouns, adjectives and verbs work in a very similar way to the nouns, adjectives and verbs in their L1. However, the parts of speech students sometimes struggle with are adverbs.

When explaining the adverbs, I tend to say that they describe verbs and can answer the question ‘how do we do something?’ I also tend to simplify and say that some adverbs are easily recognized because of the –ly ending. Sometimes I demonstrate the adverbs by doing some actions in the class, such as cleaning the board quickly, walking impatiently, speaking slowly. However, it still takes a few classes till the students truly understand what adverbs are.

What made this particular class special was the moment when I was approached by one of the students who surprised me with her question: “Miss, how do I know that a word is an adverb, if it does not finish in –ly?” I absolutely loved her question, and it sparked a great discussion which made the both of us very excited!

As teachers, we are aware of our learning style, and we might be able to find out quite easily what the learning styles of our students are. But is it enough? This makes me think that our job as teachers is not
only to find out more about the learning styles of our learners, but in order to make students more autonomous learners, we need to make the students aware of their own learning styles. Some people say, “Knowledge is power.” So, by discovering how they learn, the students might focus more conscientiously on the strategies that correspond to their preferred learning style and benefit more from the classes. Would that help making our students more independent learners? Well, it would certainly be a step forward.

**T1/CI4: Phones in the class?! Oh, no!**

If there is one thing that drives every teacher crazy nowadays, it is to see students playing with their phones. I believe that we have grown so antagonistic towards the phones that even a thought that the phones could be positively integrated into the learning is sometimes irritating, and hence quickly dismissed. The concerns like ‘they will not do the assigned task on the phone anyway, but they’ll start texting’ and ‘it will take ages to put the phones away once the task is completed’ can easily sneak into our minds.

I guess that I am also very much annoyed by the phones, but I still allow students to use them, for instance, to do research before they start writing or to play Kahoot games at the end of the class. However, whenever students want to translate an L1 word into English, I prefer to explain it to them as opposed to let them use their phones to find the meaning of the word on their own. But is it the right thing to do?

While preparing for the Delta module 1 exam, I read an article about the use of dictionaries in class and found out: “If we ‘ban’ bilingual dictionaries, we only guarantee that students will not receive the guidance needed to use them efficiently – because we can be sure that students will use them on their own.” Unfortunately, I have not taken a note of the source. However, the good thing is that this quote took me back to grading my students’ papers when I often see that they opt for a wrong translation of the word that they want to say.

Clearly, there is a space for me to reconsider if my approach towards the use of dictionaries on phones is right. As I will not be there for them all the time, I believe that it is my job to show them how to use the dictionaries effectively. What might happen is that once the students learn how to use their phones for learning purposes, we as teachers might be less concerned of losing the control in class if we allow students to use them. Wouldn’t that be killing two birds with one stone?

**T1/CI5: How your hobby can be integrated into teaching – Writing poems**

There is one thing that I enjoy a lot which is writing poems. I don’t do it very often though. I get usually inspired when I have to write a postcard for my friend’s birthday or wedding. I especially enjoy the challenge of being given a couple of words and trying to link them together in a poem or having a couple of ideas that I want to express in a poem.

In one of my last classes of this term I wanted to prepare a spelling exercise. Suddenly, when I looked at the words that I intended to revise, I realized that they were all somehow related. It crossed my mind that I could actually write a poem. I got very excited about it, and it took me a few minutes to write one. I composed it in a way that the words I wanted to test were predominantly the last words in the line, and they rhymed with other more common words.

In the class I introduced the activity as a memory challenge. I said that I would read a quick poem and the students would have to listen very carefully. Then they were given the same poem with the blanks (I left out the most problematic words in terms of spelling), and they had to fill up the blanks with the words they could recall. The activity was a great fun!

Perhaps sometimes we underestimate how our hobbies or skills could be integrated into the learning. I wish I was good at drawing or singing. I guess that I would come up with lots of ideas how to integrate my skills into the class to make it fun and enjoyable.
**T1/CI6: Class management – The power of seating plan and group work**

One of the most important issues that I have been struggling with since I started teaching at the current institution was related to the class management. We happen to teach fairly big classes of 35 students. Initially, I was not very comfortable with the noise levels in my classes. The most obvious ready-made tips that the more experienced colleagues ‘supplied’ me with were the following:

- State the rules from the very beginning
- Stick to the rules at all times
- Plan your lesson well and be mindful of the timings (move swiftly between activities)
- Vary the activities in the class (if the activities are boring for you, they are most likely to be boring for the students)
- Include all sorts of media: visual aids, audios, videos, Power Point presentations
- Vary the interactions (individual/group work)

But what if you do all of that and you still find disruptive students in the class?

Last term I shared the section with an instructor who decided to implement the seating plan in the class we happened to co-teach. She would change the seating plan every week. I decided to approach her and discuss the seating plan with her. We decided to work on it together. We would create heterogeneous groups with high, mid and low performing students, and we would also make sure that the friends were not in the same group. It was wonderful to see that this seating plan worked really well. I observed that as the students worked with the students they would not usually sit with, they would engage better in the activities and there was less chatting in the class.

This term I decided to continue with the seating plan. I implemented it only in one of my more disruptive classes. The seating plan was not very well received. However, it soon became a part of the students’ routine. The students would come to the class at the beginning of the week, find their seat on the seating plan placed on the wall by the door and simply join their assigned group. The seating did wonders to the class dynamics again.

Unfortunately, I did not implement the seating plan in one of my initially well-behaved classes. I thought that there was no need to introduce it. However, what happened after a few weeks was that the class started to be more disruptive as the students got to know each other better. When I tried to implement the seating plan later on that term, I felt that it was indeed too late as the seating plan was not welcome at all. Even though we did lots of group work before the seating plan was introduced, I felt that the students really opposed the seating plan, and hence the class started to get more and more disruptive towards the end of the term.

So, I guess that the lesson learnt here is that placing the students in different groups each week by changing their seats has to be implemented early in the term. As there are numerous benefits to group work not just the class management, we might consider implementing it in every class regardless of the fact if the class is disruptive or not. The reason behind it is that working in groups with different people every week can teach students how to work with others (even with the people they don’t like), how to communicate, how to distribute tasks, how to meet deadlines and how to cope with possible difficulties as a team. These are all useful skills that will prove useful not only at university but also in the real working environment. And what’s the best is that in the end the group work might help students to discover what their talents are and how they can use them for the benefit of others.

**T1/CI7: Lack of reading instructions practice**

During this year’s midterm exam my students were exposed to a task where the reading of instructions proved to be crucial. The task was essentially an editing exercise where the students had to correct the underlined words in the text and make corrections related to the capital letters, punctuation and pronoun reference. However, not all of them understood the instructions correctly, and those who misunderstood the instructions fixed only one type of mistakes.

When grading their papers, I realized that I had hardly ever asked the students to read the instructions before they started working on the task. It would be usually me who explained to them what
the exercise was about and what they were supposed to do. That made me think: “Am I truly giving them 
an opportunity to be autonomous learners and make them responsible for their own learning?”

I decided to change this situation, and I took action straight in the class that followed the exam. I 
gave the students the task they had never worked on before. I gave them some time to read the instructions 
and then I asked them to explain to me what they were supposed to do. I was happy to hear that the 
instructions were understood by some of the students but not all of them. Throughout the rest of the term I 
tried to give the students more exercises in which the careful reading of the instructions was important, and 
it seemed that this practice paid off.

Later in the year I prepared a revision challenge with twenty short questions where each question 
was accompanied with different instructions. The tasks were based around the vocabulary. The students 
would have to provide synonyms, antonyms, different parts of speech, etc. I was pleasantly surprised that 
the students knew what to do. Moreover, as it was a competition, we all had lots of fun!

So, the learning here is that if we want to make students more autonomous learners, we do need 
to give them some space. It is fine to let them struggle over the instructions, unknown vocabulary or 
challenging reading as they are capable of finding the tools and ways to overcome the potential obstacles. 
I suspect that it is like teaching a child to walk. First, you hold your child’s hands as they try to make their 
first steps. Then, as they acquire more balance, you let them make some steps on their own. Finally, you 
just watch them walk and fall as this is the only way they get to learn how to walk by themselves. You 
might not like to see them fall as it hurts, but when they are suddenly able to run and they land in your 
arms, you know that you did something right.

T1/C18: The end of term feedback

At the end of the term I am usually very keen to obtain the feedback on my classes from my students. I tend 
to either ask them to write a few comments or I sometimes prepare a quick questionnaire. The feedback is 
anonymous so that the students would feel free to write what they think. However, this year the feedback 
session was quite an eye-opening experience. It is not that I did something completely different compared 
to other years, but I guess that I have finally realized that what I have been doing until now was certainly 
not the way forward.

When I read the feedback from my students this year and looked for the comments on how to 
improve my classes, apart from some nice ‘thank-you-and-good-bye’ and ‘you-are-the best teacher’ 
comments, the best advice I could get was to include more games. So, at that point I had to ask myself: Can 
students be truly instrumental in helping us understand what we as teachers do well and what we can do 
better? I am absolutely sure that they can be. They do not come to classes as the blank sheets of paper. 
Quite the opposite. They have had some previous learning experience and they are able to voice what helps 
them learn and what activities they enjoy the most. So, then the question is how to ask for the feedback in 
the right way?

People say that the greatest success of teachers is to see their students exceed them. In other words, 
if the teacher can teach and lead his or her students in a way that one day, they will surpass the teacher’s 
knowledge and skills, the teacher can give himself a tap on the shoulder for having done a good job. So, 
following this saying, the feedback should be based exclusively on what the students have learnt. I guess 
that the questions that we should include in the form are the following:

- What have you learnt this term?
- What have you enjoyed learning most?
- How are you going to use what you have learnt?
- What will you focus on in the next term?

Having these questions answered, we might be able to understand better, if we have succeeded in 
passing the knowledge we have intended to pass. We might also be able to see, if the students have 
understood that learning is the never-ending process, so there will always be something new to learn. Now, 
if we succeed in doing that, then perhaps we will stop showing the best students’ comments on our classes 
to each other and see our egos grow, and instead we will be quietly proud of our students’ knowledge and 
rejoice in seeing them grow.
**T1/CI9: Building a fun activity around one word**

As I am diving more into the DELTA course, it seems that sometimes my mind starts to operate in a
different dimension that is outside my control and I must say that I do enjoy it a lot. I guess that what I
enjoy the most are these ‘eureka’ moments that started happening to me most recently.

One of them happened a few weeks ago when I stumbled on the word ‘average’ while introducing
the new vocabulary. As calculating the average can be quite an engaging task, I went ahead with it. After
establishing who was good at Maths, I drew a quick table on the board. I described myself as a student
looking at her quizzes’ scores this term. The table looked something like that:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quizzes</th>
<th>Quiz 1</th>
<th>Quiz 2</th>
<th>Quiz 3</th>
<th>Quiz 4</th>
<th>Quiz 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Out of 20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I asked the students to calculate my average score as quickly as they could. I wanted to see who
could be the fastest. There was a great working buzz in the class, and I got the answer pretty quickly. As
the students enjoyed having a math problem in an English class, I suddenly had an idea to extend this task
into a survey activity. I asked the students to think of the question that they could survey. I gave them a
couple of examples:

- How many hours do you sleep per day?
- How many hours do you study before the exams?
- How many cups of coffee do you drink per day?
- How much cash do you usually carry on you?

Once they wrote down their question, they had to stand up and interview at least 10 people, write
down their answers and calculate the average.

This unplanned activity was a great success. This incident made me think that sometimes what it
takes to plan a fun activity is to observe what the students enjoy and then act upon it. This discovery might
not be rocket science, but it might be a gentle reminder that the spontaneous activities can be fun and useful
at the same time.

**T1/CI10: Weak students**

At our institution we teach relatively big multilevel classes. It means that the students who join the class
might be at the A1 or B2 level and sometimes there are some extreme cases where the students can hardly
make a sentence in English. It is obvious that this situation is quite troublesome for a number of reasons.
However, what troubles me the most is how to engage the weakest students and help them to improve in a
way that they would be able to catch up with the rest of the class.

Last year I managed to identify about six very weak students in the very first week. My assessment
of their level was based on their writing and oral skills. Now, three of them were very conveniently seated
in the first row and they wanted to be engaged in the class. As they were physically close to me and they
were asking me questions all the time, I paid a lot of attention to them. They even asked for more
assignments to do in their free time. We followed up on the extra assignments after the class. As the time
passed, they made quite a good progress. I felt that their progress could be seen due to the fact that their
motivation was high, we built a rapport, the extra tasks were adjusted to their needs and I was constantly
monitoring their progress.

However, the other three students were scattered in the class, so they were further away from me;
their motivation was not as strong as in the case of the first three students, and most importantly I did not
approach them as often as I could to offer more support. At the end of the term I felt that they did not make
as much progress as needed.

So, what shall we do when we have weak students in the class? To bring them closer to us? To give
them extra tasks? To constantly monitor their work? I believe that the best teachers are those that can
motivate others in a way that they don’t need teachers anymore but start working on their own because they
simply want to. However, this is much easier said than done. I also believe that the key is in building the
personal rapport. Perhaps every student has a different motivation to be in the class. But what motivates all of us as humans is to see that somebody cares. Perhaps next time we identify the weak students in class, let’s start by building a good teacher-student relationship and then everything else might just fall in place.

**T1/CH11: Surrounded by inspiring colleagues**

Working as a self-employed public service interpreter in a highly competitive environment like London will put you face to face to a very harsh reality: if you are good and constantly work on trying to be better, you will get plenty of interesting jobs and build a network of clients. But if you are not good and you are not trying to do anything about it, your highly driven colleagues will take over and you will soon have to start looking for other career options.

As an interpreter, I would have to constantly prepare for my assignments which would vary enormously. One day I would be in the hospital assisting the patient to get ready to have a complex surgery, the other day I would stand next to the defendant facing the criminal charges. The preparation for every job would take hours, starting from reading the relevant literature and researching the vocabulary. Moreover, I would read the latest interpreting books and articles, and I would not miss any conferences organized by professional interpreting bodies. As an interpreting teacher, I would prepare to a great extent all the possible materials the students would need to be prepared for the real-life interpreting and we would spend hours practicing the interpreting techniques in class. My driving force was my passion, but I would also make sure that I was surrounded by the people who could be a source of inspiration for me and from whom I could learn a lot.

How is it different to what I am doing now? Is there any parallel that can be drawn between the interpreting and teaching profession? What can you do to be a better teacher?

These are the questions that I ask as it is the first time, I have a full-time job as a teacher. I have been teaching English and Interpreting since I was at university, but my passion has always been interpreting and learning languages. Looking around me, I have realized that having a full-time job can make you feel relaxed and perhaps neglect the full potential you have to excel at your profession. Teachers have different attitudes to teaching just like any other professionals have towards their professions. Some of us see teaching as a mission, some of us see it as a job.

The critical point that I guess I am trying to make here is that one can never excel on his own. We all need to be supported by others and we all need to be in a healthy competitive environment to push us to be better. I am grateful for having motivating and inspiring people around me. They research and write papers, sign up for professional courses, read and look for the new teaching strategies, create wonderful teaching materials, share their experience, inspire others with their positive attitudes towards teaching and glow when they talk about their students. Perhaps the key is to find someone inspiring near you and ask ourselves what we can do to be a bit like them one day.
There are numerous issues involved with giving instructions in the ELT classroom. Some are related to students’ comprehension of what is expected of them. Students’ awareness and comprehension of task instructions are often taken for granted and overlooked by teachers.

One of the crucial elements of classroom management highly emphasized on university teacher training courses is ensuring that students understand what to do once given instructions for an activity. It has been said that simply asking students „Do you understand?” does not function as an effective evidence provider because for a number of reasons, such as embarrassment, students often signal that they do understand the instructions, even when they do not. Therefore, „getting concrete evidence from the students that they know what is required” (Scrivener, 2005, p. 91) is one of the ways to ensure comprehension of instructions. According to Scrivener (2005, p. 91), an effective way of achieving this is to have students explain what exactly they are about to do during the task completion. It is therefore such form of checking comprehension of instructions that this teaching reflection focuses on.

Keeping in mind the necessity of eliciting activity comprehension from students, as an effective way of checking their accurate understanding of instructions, I often followed this technique with my younger learners. It seemed obvious to me that children are more likely not to admit that they do not understand an instruction, hence I perceived it as a necessity to directly ask them to explain what is required of them. However, the matter appeared slightly different with adults. I often perceived them as highly motivated, independent and goal-oriented individuals. Due to this conception, unconsciously I failed to notice the need of asking them for explanation of a task, as I thought adults are mature enough to admit they do not understand instructions, thus I did not see the point of losing time on this.

In one of my adult groups, I ran a speaking activity. Its aim was to activate a previously taught grammar point, the “used to” form. After giving a detailed explanation of the task and providing some picture prompts for the students to have a ground on which they could base their speaking, I asked whether or not they understood the instructions. In exchange I got a firm head nodding with a confident “yes” from the three of them.

The objective of the activity was for students to look at some pictures of a man, portraying his life now and 10 years ago. They were supposed to create ideas about what he used to do 10 years ago, when he was very poor, and what he does not do anymore because he is rich now. They sat in a circle and passed on a ball to one another. The person holding the ball had to speak without stopping and without hesitating.

Based on the firm confirmation, I assumed students were ready for the speaking task and I ran the activity. Students kept on passing the ball and adding their ideas to the “story.” Once the ball reached Ula, one of the ladies from the group, she started talking about herself and providing information on what she used to do 10 years ago but does not do anymore. She spoke about herself instead of the man in the pictures. It was a pivotal moment because it really struck me how wrong I was in my belief about adults’ directness and the redundancy of checking their understanding of instructions.

However, I did not correct the student because I did not want to embarrass her. I ignored it and I let her finish her idea. Not surprisingly, one of the clever students interrupted and said in a hesitant manner: “but... err... I thought we were supposed to talk about the guy in the pictures”. Seeing how embarrassed Ula was, I pretended to perceive her deviance from the task objective as a choice and not a mistake and I said: “Yes, we are supposed to talk about the man from the pictures, but if Ula prefers to talk about herself then that is fine with me.” I pretended not to notice her mistake as a mistake because I thought that embarrassing this student in front of the class would do more harm than not correcting her. Hence, I made it seem as if it was her deliberate choice instead of a misunderstanding. Then, I drew a lesson from this to always check understanding of instructions beforehand.

After class, I realized that in reality adult ESL students are not yet different from the younger students, as they could also have various reasons for failing to admit they do not understand instructions, and it was a mistake for me to take for granted the adults’ motivational factor as a certainty in class. This experience could indicate that adults, as much as younger learners, should be asked to explain the purpose of an activity even though, it may seem as if they are mature enough to admit misunderstandings. In turn, this could imply a need for changes in class management techniques among adult ESL learners.
Grammar teaching methods has been a topic of ongoing debates in the TESOL field for many years. Scholars have argued over most effective grammar teaching methods, and they have even wondered whether grammar should be taught at all. One of the major terms that has been the center of the debate, is the communicative language teaching.

After years of research, results have suggested that teaching grammar communicatively, where students use the language for communicative purposes, is more effective than explaining grammar directly. It has been said that language is acquired by using it for communicative tasks with non-linguistic goals (Willis, 1996). Also, it has been argued that students should “use the language to learn it instead of learning language to use it” (Prabhu, 1987). By implication, it seems reasonable for teachers not to explain grammar rules and language meaning explicitly in class. Instead students should try to use the language for real purposes and deduct its meaning from context (Scrivener, 2005). Being convinced of the validity and integrity of such theory, I followed this methodology in class with all of my learners.

In one of my beginner adult groups, I conducted a grammar lesson followed by a speaking task to activate the grammar point. Students learned to use the verb to be with I, she, he, and they. They practiced talking about themselves and other people using the verb to be. We practiced it in the context of concepts learned in the previous lessons. For example, students already knew how to talk about a person’s nationality, their job and they could briefly describe a person’s personality and emotions such as: friendly and sad. They could also describe things using adjectives such as: cheap and expensive.

The lesson started with some exposure to language in use where students could see the grammar point (verb to be) in context. They read texts and answered concept questions about the content (not form). It seemed that the meaning of the grammar points was fully established as students demonstrated understanding of its use. Afterwards, I provided some help with the form and we created schemes for how to make positive and negative sentences using the verb to be. For example: subject + to be + the rest of the sentence. Some example sentences were as follows: “They are from Poland”, “She is a teacher”, “He is sad”. I did not translate or explain the grammar point at all during the lesson.

Afterwards, students completed some controlled practice activities where they had to fill in blanks by putting in the correct form of the verb to be. Once they were ready, I set up a speaking task to activate the language and to give them a chance to use it in real, meaningful conversation. I gave them an information gap activity because such activities are believed to provide a real communicative purpose and a desire to speak (Harmer, 2007, p. 70). To my great satisfaction, students communicated with one another and exchanged the needed information using the grammar point they just learned. They used it fluently and without errors. There were no communication breakdowns and the task goal was achieved. All the information they needed to gather from one another, has been gathered and students achieved the non-linguistic goal by means of a linguistic form. I was convinced that I did my job and that now students were ready to use the language point fluently. Moreover, I succeeded to do so without translating and explaining the meaning of the language taught.

However, to my surprise, at the very end of the lesson, one of the ladies asked me in L1: but teacher…. What does “they are” mean at all? I was completely struck. I realized that deductive and communicative grammar teaching might be practically effective in enabling students to use it. However, it occurred to me that the students’ need to understand the literal meaning of words could often overcome the need to communicate.

As a result of this situation, and after having succeeded to conduct the lesson in a wholly communicative manner, I “spoon-fed” the student and just translated the meaning of “they are”. The supposedly innovative and effective grammar teaching, at the very end of the lesson gave way to the traditional, old-school and in fact the most straightforward grammar-translation method. By implication, this could suggest that communicative language teaching should be done carefully and accordingly to the classroom context. This situation could also carry an implication that methods should be eclectic and adjusted accordingly to the situation in class, rather than dictated solely by theory.
T2/C13: Authentic materials

One of the crucial elements of English Language teaching is the materials that are used in the classroom because they are one of the main driving forces of classroom teaching. Everything that teachers use in the classroom to teach language could be considered as a teaching material. The different types of materials available for classroom use is a vast topic and the following teaching reflection is focused on the textbook as a base for language teaching, in contrast with the potential of authentic materials.

At the beginning of the school year I needed to evaluate and choose textbooks for each one of the courses at our school. When analyzing different textbooks, the main framework I used to evaluate the books was the approach and methodology present behind the design of the textbook. Methodological factors were the main guidelines I used to evaluate the validity of the textbook. Topics and realia were secondary or rather, I even failed to consider them when choosing a textbook. One of the main aspects I paid attention to was the way in which language (grammar and vocabulary) is presented in the textbook. For example, I looked at whether or not grammatical structures are preceded by exposure to language in use, such as texts and activities oriented at non-linguistic themes with the language elements implied in it. I also considered the elements of practice and whether or not students are given enough controlled practice of the grammar structures before they move to free practice and language use in freer speech. Also, the presence of tasks with non-linguistic goals was crucial because I perceived it as a necessity to activate the language taught. Methodology factors were pivotal.

Finally, I chose the Cutting Edge for most of my adult groups. As the course progressed, one of the lessons in the elementary/pre-intermediate group was designed around a grammar point. The aim of the instruction was to enable the students to use the Present Simple 3rd person singular forms of verbs correctly and fluently. It was supposed to be a speaking lesson with a non-linguistic task. The lesson was preceded by typical grammar lessons where students were exposed to texts with the desired grammar point in it. They had plenty of exposure to the language as I considered it a crucial factor. Practice activities followed to give students a chance to use the grammar point in controlled activities and to focus on the form.

For the following lesson I prepared a speaking task to activate the language and enable the students to use it freely. Students were first given a listening task where they focused on how others did the same task, so the students were given a base (Willis, 1996). They listened to a textbook audio recording where different people analyzed holiday course adverts and chose various courses for their friends, according to their friends’ likes and dislikes. The following is an example of an extract from the text-script: “Maybe the sailing course is good for her because she likes spending time outside and she always goes swimming on Fridays.”

Students had a proper listening task where they had exposure to the language use and they also had a chance to analyze the language forms used by the speakers to complete the task. Next, the students were given the desired speaking task. They first read some course adverts. Then they listened to some textbook characters talking about their hobbies, likes and dislikes. The aim of the task was for the students to decide on the best course for each character, as a group. As stated in Willis’s framework (1996), the task had a non-linguistic goal, but was likely to activate the grammar point.

During the task completion I was surprised by how reluctant my students were to complete the task and they weren’t engaged in the task at all. I tried to prompt them, and I simplified the task by breaking it into smaller steps. For example, I asked the students to first list the likes and dislikes of each of the characters. Then I asked them to come up with one course for one of the characters and then to agree or disagree on it with other students. However, it did not change anything. My students were evidently bored and failed to engage in the task.

According to my perception of the situation, the students failed to engage in the task because they did not see the point of talking about some fake characters from the textbook. They seemed to find it pointless to choose a holiday course for people they don’t know, or even for people that do not exist. As a teacher, I failed to take into consideration the fact that authenticity of classroom materials is a major motivational factor for ESL students (Dörnyei, 2001). I considered the methodological factors of textbook design over the authenticity of audio materials. I disregarded the fact that affect is as important as effective teaching methods in class (Arnold, 1999).

In a spur of the moment, I adapted the speaking task and told the students to talk about their own likes and dislikes in pairs. Then they were supposed to choose a holiday course for one another and present their ideas for the class, instead of choosing it for artificial people from the textbook. I did this based on the theory that personalizing content in the ELT classroom is crucial for language acquisition (Krashen, 1981). As a result of this change, the students were more eager to complete the task and seemed to have found the
need to actually use the language in class. Therefore, such situation could carry a conclusion that authenticity of materials could be of higher value in the ELT classroom, than simply effective methodological approach.

**T2/C14: Lesson planning**

Failure to visualize the lesson in advance and anticipate unexpected issues is one of the aspects which may have led to various inconsistencies during the lesson. It is not to say that the plan was not thoroughly prepared at all. Rather, it seems as if during the planning stage I often become too preoccupied with planning the major aims and content of the lesson, unconsciously ignoring the smaller details of it, which could often turn out to be as important as the main aims of the lesson. According to Scrivener (2005: 109), one of the major aspects of the skill of planning is careful visualization of how things are likely to appear during the lesson. It is the visualization of the small details and individual procedures such as how to elicit a specific answer or how to word an instruction that I seem to omit in the planning stage.

In turn, such failures to imagine the details of the lesson result in various issues in class. An example of such oversight in one of the writing lessons I taught is the use of a stapler to hold pieces of slips together instead of a clip. In class, each student was handed out a letter on A4 sheet with a small set of little slips attached to the corner of the sheet. The students were told to tear them off and try to figure out where on the letter each slip should go to create a correct structure of the letter. Even though, it may seem as if it is such a small detail, in fact it has caused some significant inconveniences for some students, as they could not detach the slips. The focus shifted from the actual content of the activity towards technical issues, which in this case, could have been easily avoided. According to Harmer (2007: 373), “a good plan tries to predict potential pitfalls and suggest ways of dealing with them.” It is at this stage of predicting pitfalls that I seem to struggle.

Another point of planning the lesson which I failed to properly lead is the wording of instructions. According to my observer, “put your answers on the board” was not an easy instruction to follow. This in turn leads to the planning stage because I could have planned how to word the instructions more carefully. Instead, I only gave a command and took the students’ understanding of it for granted. Following Thornbury (1999: 4), such issues could be due to the fact of novice teachers’ lack of experience to draw on. Therefore, in the future the problem could be resolved along with the process of gaining more experience and reflecting on causes of various issues.

Consequently, this leads itself directly to another aspect which I failed to master, which is class management in terms of being able to cope with the unexpected or to deviate from the lesson plan if needed. In my case, by class management I refer to abilities to be flexible and manage the class according to what happens moment by moment (Harmer, 2007: 364), instead of strictly following the linear plan. This follows Harmer (2007: 367) and his claim that using a lesson plan should be done in a form of a “dialogue” where the teacher negotiates between the planned elements and the dynamically changing progress of the lesson. It is at the level of this dialogue that I fail because it seems as if I treat the plan as the proper indicator of what exactly should happen in class.

To provide an example, when trying to elicit the answers for the correct sequence of sentences in the letter, the students started to read out the sentences chorally. Since I did not plan in advance of how exactly I would elicit these answers, and I did not expect the students to do it chorally, I failed to come up with an alternative way to do it soon enough. According to my observer, such form of elicitation was not an optimal way to do it. However, I did not try to change the procedure simply because I could not deviate from the plan, or rather, such event was not predicted in my plan. According to MacLennan (1987: 196), aspects of class management are directly entrenched in the process of planning and emerge as a result of successful planning or a lack of it. Therefore, it took me a significant amount of time to come up with an alternative way to elicit the answers, simply because it was not included in the lesson plan. Following Scrivener (2005: 109), “teachers should teach the lesson, not the plan” and from my reflection it appears that I was in fact trying to teach the plan and not the actual lesson. All it would take to resolve this situation would be for me to think about the actual moment in class and how to resolve it, instead of disparately looking for answers in the lesson plan.

In other words, I rely on the plan extensively. I fail to think of every detail of the lesson in advance, and then whatever comes up in the lesson that I did not plan for, I cannot cope with properly. It is as if I see the plan as everything that there is to inform my decisions. According to Mallows (2002: 4), language
learning is “non-linear” and interaction that takes place in the classroom is too complex to be sufficiently catered for by a single lesson plan (p. 8). Therefore, I sometimes fail to adjust to this “complex interaction system” (Mallows, 2002: 8), by trying to approach it with a structured plan and apply a stiff plan to something that is complex and dynamic.

Harmer explains that crucial moments in the classrooms are those when suddenly a spur of interest or engagement among the students develops, and a teacher should be prepared to take advantage of those moments to develop genuine communication, instead of trying to stick with the plan nevertheless (Harmer, 2007: 366). During the lesson I taught, such moment occurred at the initial stage when I tried to set the context of the notion of complaining. I tried to elicit from students an agreement that it is sometimes very useful to officially complain when we are not happy with a product or a service. However, the students started to talk about how in their community it is not useful and difficult to get a refund. This created a sudden interest and movement among the students. It would be a perfect moment for me to use that sudden spur of interest as a trigger for an activity or communication. Instead, I had the lesson plan and what I needed to do next in mind. I was constrained by the fact that I planned for this conversation to lead to something else and I missed an opportunity to create what Harmer calls “successful rapport” (2007: 366). I neglected what the students were saying, and I pushed for the opposite answer, that it is in fact useful to complain, because I expected such answer to lead to a subsequent activity that was planned.

As a matter of fact, classroom management could be “on the spot common sense and charisma” (MacLennan, 1987: 193). This means that an element of spontaneity is part of classroom management and it is this spontaneity that I have trouble with developing. However, MacLennan also claims that classroom management could be careful planning and foreseeing events (1987: 193). Hence, it is a balance between these two aspects that I need to establish in my future teaching. This could be done by trying to anticipate potential pitfalls more profoundly, however in class trying to sometimes set the plan aside and paying attention to what actually happens, to inform my procedures based on such observation.

**T2/CI5: Student autonomy**

The following teaching reflection is related to concepts such as teacher-centered lessons and creating opportunities for students to develop autonomy as well as some decision-making in class. Even though teachers are usually leaders in class, running the whole courses, students sometimes take initiatives which are beneficial to both the student and the teacher. It seems to provide development opportunities for students and has the potential of filling in gaps that teachers sometimes happen to create.

In a group of 7 children who were first graders, I was teaching a vocabulary lesson with some new food items. I planned the activities focusing on the techniques I would use to provide practice opportunities for the students. First, the students listened to some audio recordings. They were supposed to listen and find various food items in a picture. Next, students were given writing exercises where they filled in blanks. Subsequently, I decided to create a fun activity for the second part of the lessons to include a motivational factor and a vocabulary consolidation opportunity at the same time. The procedure of the activity involved reading a story to the students. The story included all of the vocabulary that was taught during the lesson. The students were divided into 2 groups of 3 students each. Each student in a group was given 4 vocabulary words, but each group had the same vocabulary. The children lined up in rows parallel to one another. For example, if the child in the front of the row had “cheese, muffins, spinach and butter,” the child in the front of the second row had the same exact vocabulary. Each student was given 4 pictures of food items. I read the story and every time a student in each group heard one of their words, they were supposed to run around their row and come back to the same spot as fast as possible. The child to return first scored a point for their group.

Initially, I explained the procedure and the aim of the activity to the students. I also ensured they understood it by asking them to explain to me what they were supposed to do. I was about to run the activity when one of the students interrupted and said in L1: “But teacher…. It is a bit difficult to see the pictures we were given because they are stuck up in a pile…. Can we just sit down and spread them on the floor in front of us so we can see all of the pictures?”

I realized that even though the concept of the activity was very clear to the students, it was very difficult to handle practically. The students could not see the pictures because they simply could not hold all the 4 pictures in a way to be able to see them. As a teacher, I failed to foresee such potential technical problem and I failed to plan how I would arrange the activity logistically. However, one of the children
noticed a problem and not only reported the problem to the teacher but suggested a solution. This could indicate that even though lessons are usually teacher-centered especially with young learners, students have a natural desire of fixing problems on their own rather than looking up to the teacher for solutions every time they occur.

Consequently, I decided to give credit to the student who came up with an interesting idea for adapting the activity and I praised her for it. I handled down a piece of my teacher authority and I let the students contribute to the lesson procedure. With little effort and not much change to the lesson plan, I feel that I let the lesson be more student-centered, at the same time giving the students a slight chance for autonomy development.

T2/CI6: Adult topics

This teaching reflection is related to the one written previously, namely it concerns recognizing methodology matters over authenticity of textbook topics. In this essay, the term “authenticity” will refer to how authentic a certain topic is to individual students and his or her own reality. In other words, this reflection will concern the extent to which a textbook topic reflects a student’s own life and reality, and whether or not it complies with his or her expectations of the course content.

Following my own beliefs of the most effective teaching methodology, I planned my lessons very carefully to ensure those beliefs were reflected in the lessons. On one of the adult language courses I used the Cutting Edge textbook as the base for the course content and I used it as a source to plan my lessons. I added and adapted many activities, but as I believed the textbook to be of high methodological value, I used it as a syllabus. The students who were all over 40 years old seemed to enjoy the course a lot and as a matter of fact, I felt as if they were the most satisfied out of all the groups I have been teaching. They were always engaged and motivated during the lessons.

Generally speaking, I tried to follow communicative language teaching methods throughout the course. I incorporated all language skills as well as grammar and vocabulary. I used the reading and listening texts from the textbook as language exposure source regardless of the topics they were created around and I followed up with practice activities, usually speaking activities, to activate language.

As the course progressed, I decided to carry out a mid-year evaluation in all of the groups. I created a questionnaire in which I asked students how satisfied they were with the course and they were supposed to give it a number score and then fill out some detailed open answer questions. Surprisingly, this particular group which I believed to be the most satisfied with the course, gave me the lowest mark on the scale and included some negative comments; namely, most of the students wrote that they did not like the content of the course because the topics were not related to real life and did not comply with the way in which they would actually use the language outside of school. After some close analysis of the students’ remarks I reached a conclusion that they expected to be learning language functions such as: ordering food, buying clothes and asking for goods and services. They wanted to practice dialogues they would actually use in real life.

Such an experience could carry a number of implications. For example, according to the communicative approach, language used in class should resemble language that is used in natural conversation (Scriven, 2005). As a teacher, I seemed to ignore this element of the approach. I paid attention to the way in which language is presented in class, rather than what is actually presented. In other words, I paid attention to the “how” instead of the “what” of a course. According to Cook (2003), topics on adult language courses should have the potential of developing the conversation to an adult-level extent or reflect the way in which adults would discuss matters outside of class. However, I failed to take this into consideration, and I introduced topics from the textbook without giving it much thought in terms of content, and mostly paying attention to how successfully the certain topic would present the desired language point in context.

After having examined the evaluation questionnaires, I followed up with some questions to get more feedback on what exactly my students did not like. They referred to specific lessons, for example a lesson where we worked on The Present Simple 3rd person form of verbs. They had a listening comprehension activity in which a pop star manager was talking about Adele’s likes and dislikes. The aim of such task was for the students to be exposed to the 3rd person singular form of verbs. Referring back to the lesson, the students said they did not find talking about Adele engaging at all because it was not of any
interest to them and they would rather talk about “life-related” topics such as shopping or Holiday preparation errands.

As a result of such experience, I decided to give more consideration to the content of discussions and the topics they were designed around, rather than solely the way in which language was taught and presented. I asked the students to identify language functions they would like to work on, and I purchased a strictly language functions-oriented book to prepare my lessons with a language function as a starting point and then following it up with language points that would arise from it, rather than doing it the other way around. In other words, instead of aiming to teach a grammar point and then creating activities that would activate the language I aimed to give students practice of language functions and then adding some practice on language points that would arise from the role-plays.

T2/C17: Accuracy and fluency

The following teaching reflection concerns the balance between accuracy and fluency work in the second language classroom. It is believed that a well-balanced variety of activities allowing for focus on both, accuracy and fluency, is most likely to lead to language acquisition (Ellis, 1982). Even though fluency development seems to be more challenging to achieve and mastery of a language is equal to being fluent in it, accuracy is also part of fluency (Harmer, 2007). Shifting the balance towards one of the ends of the extreme however, could cause more harm than acquisition and this teaching reflection touches upon such teaching mistake.

The following classroom situation occurred in a one-to-one session when I was teaching grammar to a 12-year-old boy. The boy was preparing for his 6th grader’s exam in English, therefore I decided that grammar and accuracy would be an important element of the course because teaching communication would be different than teaching exam courses. During one of the lessons, we were working on the verb to be with the past simple tense. The lesson started with a listening comprehension where the student was exposed to the grammar point. Next, I directed his attention to the form of the verb, and he created a scheme for its use. Next, we practiced positive, negative sentences and question forms. We did some controlled practice activities where the student needed to fill in blanks in sentences. Next, I designed a freer practice activity to give him a chance to speak using the verb to be. The aim of the activity was to ask and answer questions with the verb to be, for example “Where were you yesterday at 5 pm?” or “I was at home. How about you?”

The aim of the activity was for the student to communicate (with me) using the grammar point and convey meaningful messages instead of just using the verb to be for the sake of using it. Therefore, I regard this as a fluency-oriented activity. The focus was supposed to be on the actual information passed between 2 speakers rather than sole grammar practice.

During our conversation, the student made a mistake and I immediately corrected him. He was trying to say where he and his friends spent the last weekend. However, he did not finish his thought because I interrupted him and corrected his grammar mistake. I did not wait for him to finish, to hear the actual essence of his message. I immediately focused on the accuracy of his utterance and interrupted him. As an effect of this, the student forgot was he was going to say altogether. He corrected his grammar mistake but did not finish it in any meaningful way. I tried to bring the conversation back on the meaning-related track and I asked the student to go ahead and say what he wanted to say. However, he could not remember it and he even seemed disappointed about making the grammar mistake. In such manner, I continued the speaking activity and told the student to start a new question, even though I could tell that the student was not very keen on completing the activity anymore.

I believe that my interruption caused the communication breakdown because I directed the student’s attention towards a grammar problem rather than the meaning. According to Harmer (2007, p. 143), error correction should be more direct during accuracy work, but during communicative activities students should not be interrupted in the middle of the conversation because such behavior could actually prevent learning rather than allow for language acquisition. Consequently, reflecting on the situation it seems reasonable to claim that as a teacher I made the mistake of limiting communication, a purpose for which language is learnt in the first place. The implication of such situation could be that error correction as beneficial as it is in some instances, could cause more harm than benefit when used inappropriately and at a wrong time.
T2/CI8: Torn paper and heart

Teacher power is not a sign of vanity. Or at least it should not be. It should come from expertise, i.e. our understanding of the complexity of the process and willingness to lead students safely from the departure point to the destination, no matter whether this learning experience stretches over a semester, year, or decade.

My Jagiellonia boys (11-year-old junior footballers) took a pop-up quiz on regular forms of past verbs, but the test turned into a mess as they could not sit still for 10 minutes. I kept quieting them; they kept chatting and fidgeting. When the quiz was just about to finish, Marek submitted his paper with no answers in it, yet completely covered with smeared cartoon pics. It was the last straw. I grabbed the paper, torn it into pieces and threw away. He said nothing but acted sulky till the end of the lesson. After the class, his mother came to tell me that the moment he got into the car, he burst into tears and explained what I did. She was not angry, which surprised me a bit. When I told her my version, she said Marek is not easy to deal with and she is still looking for the right way to approach him, but beneath the front, he is sensitive like everybody and responds emotionally to cruel/unjust treatment.

I went to talk to the Director of Studies, and once more got surprised to hear a very calm remark that misbehaving students should not be treated viciously because they are hardly ever bad by nature. There is always something that triggers them to misbehave, and I should decide and let her know if I want to diagnose the causes and administer treatment or not. I apologized for acting so emotionally and left feeling like a failure.

The lesson I learned was not to avoid injustice, though. It was an obvious piece anyway. I realized that the teacher is not only expected to register and respond to events in class, but also see her own behavior as a component of the lesson, which, when controlled, might actually achieve more than frantic/hysterical pedagogical moves. It does not belong to the category of planning and acting upon what has been planned, and hence can be easily overlooked. However, allowing the negative emotions to grow inside and vent eventually is like excusing myself as an imperfect human being yet not accepting others as such. The fact I am a teacher does not give me ultimate power. Quite the opposite, the master, by definition, has reached the point in development where he can accept much more than non-masters because he/she can see and understand more. Yes, on June 4th, 2015, I decided to become a master one day.

T2/CI9: Let them move about

Another critical incident related to my Jagiellonia boys took place at the beginning of the same semester. With my limited teaching experience, I found it very difficult to deal with seven hyper-active boys, especially in terms of class management. My supervisor was there with me almost every class, but that day the boys were all over the place. So, few of them and so much stress! I didn’t want to shout in her presence, which made it even more demanding for me. Everything went wrong. No homework, no attention, and no sign of interest in the material I had prepared.

During the feedback session, DOS asked me to stop being apologetic and put things in perspective as if that had been someone else’s class. We focused on who my students were and why they were coming to the language course once a week. Gradually, while presenting the group profile, I began to realize that

- keeping 11-year-old footballers in chairs for 60 minutes on Friday afternoon was rather sadistic on my part;
- except for Łukasz, all of them were struggling with the school subjects, including English;
- it was the ambition of their coach to bring up the next generation of Messi’s and Ronaldo’s and ensure that their international careers do not get wasted because of poor language skills;
- they were threatened to lose their place in team if they failed in English;
- wearing the club attire outside the pitch made the boys full of themselves.

I was asked then which of the points above I could possibly address in the class. All of a sudden, I had no doubts that my role was to help them succeed in the course, but the meaning of success gained a new dimension altogether. Under the circumstances, I could do very little about their language progress, yet I could arrange the time in class in a way that suited dynamic and unquiet youngsters. I had to make them move, play, work both physically and mentally, and hope that bits of English planted on that difficult
ground would ever flower. I had to give them a sense of achievement in what they perceived as an unnecessary burden. Most importantly, though, I had to give myself a chance to see the experience as meaningful and find my way through it. The feedback finished, and I felt comforted to have discovered a workable solution — Eureka. My classes were still far from perfect, but towards the end of the year I managed to establish a rapport with the boys and get the amount of attention needed to navigate them through the material.

I understand now that a moment of structured reflection can work miracles in my job. Interestingly, being inexperienced and discovering things on my own is not a hurdle; just the opposite. It is a great pleasure to come up with a reasonable solution and verify it in practice. Of course, specialist knowledge would save me a lot of trouble, but it is also possible that an experienced teacher would trip over the group like this. I am grateful to my mentor that she did not provide me with the answers but asked me the right questions to generate ones on my own.

**T2/C110: Homework checking**

Related to the previous one, the incident below concerns my efforts to make classes for the football club students better suit their needs and capacities. Since I was positive that they needed be physically active, the first thing I decided to do was to check their homework in a rather unconventional way. At home they were supposed to practice *There is / There are* phrases and write three sentences describing the positions of things in their rooms. Four out of six boys in class had their homework done. The plan was to ask each of them to come to the board one by one and copy a selected sentence for others to correct if necessary.

I was just to begin when I understood the idea was all wrong. The boys were not going to pay attention. Except for the writer, nobody is going to enjoy the activity. They might be taking advantage of me monitoring one of them and not see any point of doing the same. In fact, they will be right. They will benefit very little as individual learners from following peers writing something on the board. Their temper will find it boring. I also find it boring. It will take ages for boys to finish. The student by the board might find peer correction intimidating. Why did I think it would work? I did visualize this activity. Where did I make a mistake? — all these thoughts were bombarding me.

Within seconds, I decided to change the task and ask the first and subsequent students to select a sentence from the notes, learn it by heart, come to the board and reconstruct it from memory. If they could not remember, they were allowed to go back to the sentence and take a look, yet the winner was the one who never returned to double check. This, I thought, would trigger their memory of syntax and spelling and potentially make the sentences meaningful to the students.

The boys entered the competition enthusiastically. Those without the homework were allowed to make up for theirs to join the activity. There was still the issue of correcting a few mistakes in the writing. I corrected the wrong forms and the fun began from scratch, that is the students whose writing was corrected could decide to have their sentence erased and rewrite it. All of them wanted to do so as there were quite a few things to correct.

Later on, I had mixed feelings about what happened. On the one hand, I was glad that I had survived. On the other, I was extremely frustrated with myself to have failed to plan the activity the right way. The conclusion is I was more than willing to improve my teaching, but my lesson planning, although enhanced with visualization, was not well-informed. The sudden doubts that crossed my mind in the class made me panic.

Today I think it is impossible to avoid moments like this no matter how long you have been on the job. In the literature, departing from the lesson plan designates a higher stage of professional development, which I disagree with (Benner, 1984). Reasoning is not a privilege of experienced teachers only. Intelligence might issue a warning and activate effective thinking processes. Inexperienced teachers can be intelligent, can’t they?
**T3/C11: Favoring my students**

One of my groups in the school I teach in consisted of 10 students - 4 boys and 6 girls. We had an everyday lesson one time where I was asking lots of questions; the lesson was focused on role-playing, discussions and other speaking activities mostly. To each topic which was discussed, I had prepared some questions which could not be found in the handouts or in the books, so to proceed with my lesson I started asking those questions. I thought all of the students were participating equally in the lesson and by equally, I mean the fact that I was spending the same amount of time on each student evenly. Suddenly, at the end of the lesson one of the students was quite frustrated and asked me "why do you keep asking girls questions and you focus less on boys in this class?"; and I didn't know what to do.

That question left me with awkwardness, and I was feeling uncomfortable for a few days at least. I started thinking about whether I really had been focusing on some students more and neglecting others? I was extremely curious and disappointed at the same time. I was disappointed because when I started working as a teacher, I knew I couldn't favor any student because of my personal reasons (e.g. he is nice to me or because he does his/her homework every time). But what disappointed me the most in my behavior was the fact that I had been working exceptionally hard not to disregard anybody during my lessons, but as the boy said, it had happened.

I talked to my co-workers and read some books about such behavior and the literature said that it is normal that depending on gender, teachers tend to focus on students of opposite sex more. But I did not agree with what I had read; for me it was something different. What I had always wanted to do, was avoiding being partial in any way possible. I started noticing that maybe I had been focusing on girls more, but the only reason for doing this was that I did not want them to feel disregarded because I am a man. A male teacher is something that doesn't happen too often, but when it does, boys feel more comfortable and more confident during the lessons and girls feel ignored; and for me, that was the reason for my behavior during that lesson, when the boy asked me that question. However, maybe subconsciously that opposite sex thing worked there as well - I really have no idea.

**T3/C12: Difficult lesson**

There was a student of mine who I had individual lessons with - a businessman in his 30s who happened to be a boss of one of the departments in the company he worked in. I came to his office where we had our lessons and I took out the handouts. He was a very peculiar student - I can't even remember if he had ever shown any interest in my choice of topics which were prepared especially for him (business vocabulary, e-mail writing, phone conversation phrasal verbs and many more). All I could see from his face was "Yeah, sure, whatever"; not in a negative way - it was more like completely neutral. He wasn't rude or unkind; as I said, he had a very specific character.

One day I brought him my next handouts about the topic I cannot even remember now, and we had a normal lesson. Because it was hard to tell whether he liked the topic or not, I assumed it was OK. It was going quite well until the end of the lesson when he suddenly said "You know what? I did not like this lesson at all". I asked him what was wrong about it and he said that he hadn't intended to be rude or anything like that, but he felt the lesson had been a bit too difficult for him and it hadn't been an interesting topic. Of course, he explained that he had told me that because he wanted to be honest with me so that I wouldn't repeat preparing too difficult lesson. But back then, that was the weirdest and one of the most shocking moments I had ever experienced.

Because the incident happened early in the morning (and I did not have any lessons later that day) my whole day was a complete disaster. All I could think about was that moment when he had finally given me feedback about the lesson - his first feedback ever, wow! Some would say I should be happy he had finally said something; I wasn't, however. When I heard his opinion about those 60 minutes of my effort (not counting my time preparing those handouts etc.), I stopped dead in my tracks, but I had to say something, so I apologized for that and I assured I would pay more attention whether the topic is proper for his level of English. I was angry at first, because no one had ever told me anything like that. I was irritated because the first feedback coming from his mouth was not positive, but negative - I couldn't stand it! We had had our lessons for over 6 months then and after such long time he finally decided to speak out.

My first thought was that I had been preparing those lessons all wrong for 6 months. I also thought that he had been fed up with my choice of topics and the way I was preparing the classes that he finally
burst out - I felt so embarrassed that I started to think my other students might have the same feelings about my lessons. As I said, that was one of the worst days of my life.

I tried to analyze the whole situation to understand it better. The process of analyzing that incident bit by bit helped me to notice a few things. Because I have a strong personality, I couldn't stand the idea of somebody criticizing my lesson especially after about 1,5 years without any major complaints. I even realized it was a positive thing - these days I do not take anything for granted; every time I have a lesson, I am more careful with selecting the material which should be suitable for the level of my student.

What is the most important is the fact that I started a new habit in my lessons - I always ask my students (mostly individual ones) whether the level of the lesson was alright and if they liked the topic. I know they sometimes feel a bit awkward when it comes to confessing face to face that they did not like my lesson/topic - that is why I do my best to make them feel as comfortable as it is only possible. I have had 2 such feedbacks about topics my students did not like but after those situations I received 2 positive feedbacks in the end of the following lessons, and I did not take it as bad as the first time. It actually strengthened me, and I had the motivation to prepare something better; to prove I am a good teacher who is not perfect and who sometimes makes mistakes. Going back to that peculiar student of mine, he also told me a month later he loved that lesson we had had (about grammar, which he hated!) and I mentioned this critical incident to him and thanked him for being straightforward.

T3/CI3: Too much speaking

During 2015/2016 school year I had an amazing group of students (C1 level) - probably the best group I have ever had. Everything was going great with them - role plays, grammar exercises, discussions, writing activities; literally everything. However, this group had this tendency to speak a lot - not in Polish but in English and it was not something which disturbed the lesson, no. What they were saying was always somehow connected with the lesson, but each of them had something to say about certain aspect of the topic. There were 9 people in this group, so it took some time to listen to what each student had to say.

So, there was one time, when I prepared a lesson where I had everything scheduled and planned for specific number of minutes (5 minutes discussion, 15 minutes exercises... etc.). But the discussion started and as each of them loved to present his or her perspective, the discussion time prolonged from the scheduled 5 minutes to, wait for it, 30 minutes. I apologized for that because in the end, we did not manage to do everything I had planned; they, however, said that they loved the discussion (of course they did).

At first, I thought it was nice, because they had enjoyed the speaking part - that is usually my goal, to make my students like the lesson. But on the other hand, I realized that the fact they liked it did not mean it was adequate from teaching point of view. I noticed I had a problem with arranging work in that group - it wasn't like that in other groups (usually other students are not so eager to speak so much; one-sentence answer seems OK for them). I was very happy that this C1 group enjoyed using as much English during my lesson as possible, and I was unhappy at the same time. I knew I had to do something with it, because going with this course of things could lead to not covering all the topics from syllabus.

The solution I came up with amazed my students to the point that they did what I told them to; I told them I had come up with an idea of something called "Casual speaking class". The rules are very simple: I will start interrupting them if they speak too much but as a reward, I will organize "Casual speaking class" during the last lesson of each month. During such class we didn't do any handouts - we were bringing snacks, something to drink (Coca-Cola, Orange juice, water...) and we were talking about everything: movies, food, our school, their schools, hobbies; we were even playing some board games during those lessons. That gave them opportunity to finally let their all thoughts out. This kind of class bonds everybody together - even a father of one of my students told me (during the parents meeting at the end of the course) that it is the greatest idea I could have come up with, because for the first time his son opened up to other people (this student had problems with making friends).

This solution was praised by my co-workers, my students, their parents and even by my friends. Some parents mentioned that for the first time they hadn't had to force their children to come to the lessons - they wanted to come just like that. That gave me motivation to create innovative ideas for my lessons; to do something that nobody had ever done before that will motivate my students to come to my lessons and take from them as much as it is possible.
**T3/CI4: Problems with organization**

In the beginning of the academic year 2015/2016 I got a proposition from my boss to teach a group of people from one of Bialystok IT companies. The lessons were supposed to take place once a week for 90 minutes at 13:30 - it meant the workers were coming to my lessons in the time of their working hours.

In the beginning of the course I had about 13 people coming to my class, which was nice and difficult at the same time - I wasn't used to having 13 adults in the same room for the lesson; the only group of 13 people I had was a group of kids or teenagers, but never adults. However, after some time, the company changed the time of the lessons so that they had them after their working time; and of course, the number of students coming to my lessons suddenly dropped. After that, the usual number of students in my course was 4 or 5. And that is when the problems began because it was never a stable number of students and what was the most irritating was the fact, that every week I had different people coming. What is more, I got information from my supervisor that I should give them lots of homework because we had lessons only once a week. After receiving that information, I came to their company and I gave them homework, but next week none of the people who had received the handouts came and I started to wonder if that makes any sense.

On the one hand that was not my problem that some workers of that company were not coming to my lessons; on the other hand I felt I was making fool of myself - I tried my best at preparing suitable topics and exercises for the lessons (especially connected with IT things, such as the Internet, Computer hardware, software vocabulary etc.) and I was not receiving the homework for the next lesson because simply, those students were absent then. The whole idea of homework was pointless; moreover, even introducing new vocabulary or even grammatical structures was pointless too as every time I was presenting new structures or vocabulary, I could not revise it during the next lesson because once again, those students who had been to the previous lesson did not come. The fact that they were absent was not irritating me the most - I understood that coming to my lessons was not obligatory from the company's point of view. However, I was angry with this whole organization. I was asked to give homework every time the workers and I were meeting, so I was doing my best to prepare valuable. The results of my efforts were going in vain, though.

I find this incident critical because for some time I had no idea what to do. I was in between two parties: my supervisors and the way things were in practice. I wanted to change something in here - I got it that giving them homework is pointless and introducing new grammatical structures had no sense as well.

So, I focused on vocabulary and practical skills only - mostly speaking activities. I realized that sometimes I have to work on my own (even though occasionally it is "organized"), and that not always things go as planned - sometimes we need to be creative and make our own decisions as teachers; and that is what I did. The feedback was quite satisfying - they told me they knew about the information about homework because it was these workers' boss who asked for that. They, however, found it unnecessary and they appreciated my approach and that I took some actions to change that.

**T3/CI5: “Cool teacher” – not**

There was a group of teenagers (14-16-year-old boys and girls) who were in my group. The group consisted of 13 students who eventually formed subgroups. That is probably the most unwanted thing a teacher wants, because there are usually some unwanted things happening between those formations (in case of behavior). I had one of the worst cases - in my class there were 4 people (1 boy and 3 girls) who wanted to rule all the kids there.

However, it was not like that from the beginning - I saw they wanted to be noticed, because they were kind of those popular kids at their public school; and they wanted to bring it to our lessons too. I knew there were going to be some pedagogical problems with them. I tried to avoid those problems, so I acted to be this cool teacher, who speaks their slang, who knows what is viral on the Internet and so on. However, I did not stop to take my job seriously, no. But occasionally, when there was something funny, they were talking about, I tried to keep the pot boiling and I continued their topic referring to what we were discussing during the lesson. But then it got out of control; they started treating me as their friend and they moved to being casual to the point that it started to disturb the ambiance in the class every time we met. What is more, I spent more time controlling their behavior than on teaching them.

When I realized what had been going on then, I thought it was too late to change it. I knew I sometimes had problems with controlling those rude kids, but sometimes there is nothing you can do with
such people - they are the way they are. But here, what stroke me the most was the fact that I had let them do that; I opened the door for them with their behavior and they got used to that. I lost respect because those "popular kids" started perceiving me not as a teacher (somebody they should look up to, somebody who deserves respect) but they perceived me as a friend, who they can joke with. Of course, let's not exaggerate it, it was not like I did not control the whole situation in class, no. It was more like I had to put more effort to keep them quiet and so on.

One day I had to put an end to this, and I stopped being a funny teacher and I became a strict one. I knew it is connected with them disliking me, but I did not care about that back then; what I wanted was getting back the situation and rules I had been supposed to maintain in the beginning of the course. I separated those kids from each other - you would not believe how angry they were; they looked as if they wanted to kill me. I did not care, though. Because they were showing me their lack of appreciation, I decided to stay after the lessons. I talked to them about their behavior and told them that if they behave well for the next 3 lessons, they will be able to go back to their seats. Surprisingly, after those 3 lessons, only 2 of them wanted to go back - and so they did. The other two (2 girls) asked if it was OK to stay on the new places. Those two girls even started expressing their interest in the lessons which they had never done before, and they tried to participate in the lessons more than usual.

That made me think, that there is no point in trying to make the students like you. Of course, it is a nice attribute of a teacher when he is liked by his/her students, but more importantly, it is not the most substantial thing during the course. We have to be both nice and understanding towards students, but we cannot let them feel too comfortable with us.

**T3/Cl6: Parents meeting**

I had a student who was quite nice but shy. He was a withdrawn person, so he was not too eager to participate in our activities. His results of the tests were not too satisfying either (the lowest in the group despite being 2 years older than his colleagues in the group).

In the end of the semester, there was a meeting with students' parents - they were coming to school to see the final results of their children's and to talk to me about my view on their kids' English skills and behavior. So, this one student's father came to the meeting (those were individual meetings, about 5 minutes each). Because I was working for private language school, I had this thought I should do anything to keep the clients for the company I was in. And because it was my first parents meeting in that school, obviously I was stressed a bit. When the meeting started, I tried to convince the father that his son was doing well (because sometimes he tried) but he should do a little bit more at home, because doing more at home would bring better results for sure. After hearing that, the father seemed to be angry and showed his frustration that he pays for the lessons so his son should take something out of our lessons, not out of home. And that was the moment I did not know what to do - should I go on and praise this child and agree with his father or maybe I should confront his point of view?

I was stressed during the whole meeting; I knew I should make the father happy, because every client of our school was important. I could agree with his opinion and give him this pleasure of being right there; however, I could confront his views and present my own, which would not be too pleasant for him - especially when they would come out of a young teacher (somebody younger than an old, experienced with life father).

The incident was critical for me, because I was torn between two things: caring about our clients and the truth which was unpleasant for the father. I chose to confront his views and we had a little discussion where I told him that school gives a lot of possibilities connected with English, but it does not mean that when one goes to English lessons, he becomes very good at it just like that. It takes much work to be good at something, even at English - working at home is essential as well. After saying that, the father left the meeting unsatisfied; I was scared he would leave our school after that semester. However, he did not do that; his son participated in the lessons throughout the next semester and his results got much better. To be honest, his results were close to the average score of the whole group and that was a success. That meant his father took my words to his heart and accepted what I had told him.

What I took out of this incident was that I should not be afraid of presenting my opinions, especially to the parents of the children I teach. I had always been scared they would perceive me as a young inexperienced know-it-all teacher, who knows nothing but says a lot. But it wasn't like that. I started believing in myself and it was in the beginning of my career, so I've been more confident since then.
**T3/C17: Watch your mouth**

One day during my lesson with a group of teenagers (13-14 years old) we had a lesson on structures which may explain future. We talked about using Future Simple, BE GOING TO and Present Continuous. When it came to BE GOING TO structure, I started explaining that we can use it (similarly to Future Simple) to express our predictions basing on some visible events, such as "Look at those clouds! It is going to rain".

Because I had always been trying to find some innovative ways to catch teenagers' attention, I made my way towards interesting, funny and sometimes drastic examples. I did not try to do that for fun, but only to make them remember some things easier (that had always worked in my case). So, going back to BE GOING TO structure, I gave the students another example: "Look at that man hanging from the building! He is going to fall!". I wanted to tell them that this structure is used not only to express intentions, as it had been taught in schools in the beginning. As it turned out later, one of my students' dad died at the construction site (I don't know if the situation was the same as in the example). I noticed that girl did not laugh as other students when I was presenting that case, and that made me think.

When one of my co-workers told me about what had happened to this student's father, I felt so embarrassed and I was angry with me. I did not do it on purpose, but still I hurt somebody's feelings. I started to think if during my career of a teacher I did the same thing without noticing the reaction of some students. I just thought it is an interesting way of presenting some uses of grammatical structures. Maybe it was interesting for some of those students of mine, but surely it was not suitable and not sensible. In one word, it was just risky.

During my analysis of this incident, I realized that as a teacher I have to be careful with everything I say. Before that happened, I had thought that drastic (of course not too drastic) examples would make their process of remembering smoother, but I was wrong. Kids in such age take everything personally - I do not know whether this girl thought I did it on purpose or not - it is not important now. What is important is the fact that such thing shouldn't have taken place during the lesson and a professional teacher should be careful with everything he or she says.

From then on, I started finding new innovative ways of presenting examples, which would not hurt anybody's feelings and I stuck to funny examples only.

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**T3/C18: Motivation**

In one of my teenage groups there was a boy who was a tough kid. He was very intelligent and clever, but he was extremely difficult to control - he was constantly speaking and so on. Honestly, I just hated him; I was asking him questions connected with our lessons all the time and he usually could not answer them because he was simply not paying attention to what was going on in the class. He was this "sportsman student" type – very successful at school not for his accomplishments in various school subjects, but because he was extremely good at playing football and he was the captain of his school team; that is why he thought he could do anything he wants.

The other day, after one lesson I asked him to stay after the classes so that I could talk to him about his behavior and his attitude towards me. When I asked him why he behaved like that and why he did not study at all, he simply answered "I just have no motivation to do so." I was angry that he did not want to say anything else; all he was doing was looking at the door as if he wanted to leave the room immediately. I was even thinking about calling his parents to present the situation that was taking place during our lessons. I was frustrated that he was like that. But then I thought maybe I was doing something wrong.

This whole time I thought it was his own or his parents' fault – not my problem. He was like that because he was who he was. Maybe it was his parents' mistake that they hadn't paid too much of attention to the way they had been bringing him up. But then I realized, that maybe I could not change the way he was, but maybe I should try changing what I could change - his motivation. Because as stated before, he said that he did not have motivation to study etc. So, instead of taking my anger out on him (by asking him questions to prove he does not pay attention etc.), I tried to ask him simpler questions and praised him for good answers. Of course, I was still controlling his behavior, because I knew it would not change so quickly. The boy realized he actually is good at English and apparently, he appreciated the praise coming out from me after all these days of being scolded for doing many wrong things.

I came to conclusion that I should control my feelings towards students. I should not favor anybody, that is obvious, but more importantly, I should never take my anger out on somebody (even if the
anger is caused by this particular person) because that is not a solution. Even those rude students deserve some praise which may lead to a complete change.

**T3/CI9: B1 or B2?**

At the beginning of this semester, a teenage student stayed after the class and she asked me what it really means that she was in a B1 group. Her friend was placed at the B2 level and she could not understand why they could not learn together. I confidently answered that B2 is slightly higher than B1, but since the differences are not big, she should not feel bad about it. She wanted to know precisely what the two levels were all about, and at this point I found myself in trouble.

I realized that I was not able to explicitly point to those little things that differed one from the other. This made me feel ashamed. As a qualified teacher, I should discriminate even if instinctively what skills characterize different stages of the learning process. My answer to Ola was far from satisfactory but I did my best to hide ignorance. I explained that her friend could have understood the placement questions faster or used more advanced grammar structures without hesitation and mistakes. I had no idea though what structures in use draw a line between B1 and B2. When I open the textbook to prepare another lesson, I rely on the syllabus so much that I don’t think about the logic behind the sequencing of material. I only saw that the higher the level, the more review in the books, which learners take for unnecessary repetition.

The first thing I did at home was checking CEFR tables and contrasting the two levels. I was surprised to discover that the ability to achieve most communicative goals and express oneself freely on a range of topics, as designated for B2, is very different from the ability to express oneself in a limited way, which characterizes B1. I don’t think in language education this division works in practice. Some of my B1 students are very effective in interaction in L2 although they keep making very basic grammar mistakes. Was the placement test wrong? No, as long as the teacher can define in the learner the areas that need improvement and observe progress within ones in the course of a semester or two, the name for the level is of secondary importance.

I know that CEFR aims to standardize levels and enhance material distribution, but to my mind it sounds a bit like an artificial grouping. Besides, it competes with previous standards and jargon, namely upper or lower intermediate, etc. I am tempted to think that it is more about business and money than logic. Also, it gets teenage learners like Ola into thinking that the level means a lot and defines her as a person.

To my mind, the levels should be comfortably broader to make both teachers and students feel good about the classification practice.

**T3/CI10: Embarrassment**

I made a language mistake during the lesson with my advanced Saturday students. One of the girls asked about the word *deceit*, which came as a surprise. My mind went completely blank and I could not remember the actual meaning. I looked at the context and said something like, “it’s synonymous to disrespectful.” She said nothing but I could tell she did not really buy my explanation. I felt awful but put on a good front and continued the lesson. I knew it was much better to be honest and excuse myself, look up the word on the phone, or even joke about my selective memory. Whatever but this.

It took a few days to recover from my personal and professional failure. By next Saturday I had forgiven myself and was ready to start from scratch. To my yet bigger surprise, the student told me to the face that I was wrong the previous lesson, that she double checked the word and got disappointed about being misled. I surely deserved this exposure. Whatever I did not do the week earlier I had to do now. I apologized and said I clearly confused the word with something else. I blushed like a teenage boy.

It was a smashing experience, which turned into critical as I started thinking about building reputation in teaching. My mistake cost me loads of embarrassment, but the student must have felt even worse. She was treated like a kid who can be easily talked into believing crappy stuff. With kids, teachers who come across as friendly are found the best of all. The effects of learning do not matter, what matters is rapport and good fun. But the older your students are, the more elaborate expectations they develop towards their instructors. These can conflict unpredictably. Of course, it is impossible to satisfy all the needs but at least it is necessary to ensure that you are reliable as a human being.
My university teacher used to say that transparency is a merit in the profession. It is not a shame not to know all the answers as long as you make systematic effort to learn. But you are and always will be a person whose car would not start on a winter morning, who had a sleepless night because of heavy road works, who failed to remember about his or her mother’s birthday, or who has just got engaged and brings tons of emotions to class. You are the person who knows things and does not know things. Your students should see you happy and unhappy. Your students will believe you then. This is what she used to say.

This thought was like a blow on my head. How illuminating!

_T3/CI11: Personal adjectives_

The unit in the textbook was all about personal adjectives. Most of the kids in my class already knew words such as *interesting, helpful, caring,* or *hard-working.* That’s why I had a big problem how to manage the two subsequent classes, filling them up with something meaningful and interesting to learn.

Just as I expected, after we covered the reading passage about a young competition winner, my kids looked very bored. The next part was to personalize the content and ask them about their big achievements and personality traits which give the grounds for such achievements. I asked Paweł first, but he shrugged his shoulders and replied “Nothing.” Nobody was willing to talk to me while the alternative was to return to the book and do even more boring things. Disaster.

I had an idea. The students got into 4 groups of three and each was going to contribute to storytelling on the board. We started creating a comic strip. Each group had one minute to decide spontaneously how to continue what the previous group proposed and drew. There was only one condition — the students had to create and maintain their own character throughout the whole plot. Those could not be just ordinary people; there must have been something special about them. My students did not fail me. We practiced a lot of simple adjectives in a literary context having great fun of our creative effort.

I told my fellow teachers about this success and two of them (experienced instructors) implemented the same idea in their groups. When they gave me very positive feedback, I was over the moon. I understood that there are ways to deal with familiar content and that my instinctive idea outdid the one in the book. Or at least stirred up the class which was heading for an unhappy ending.

Now I think that the problem did not really lie with a boring reading passage but rather how I saw it boring. And how I saw my initial idea of having a serious talk with my teenage students any interesting, while their response and rolled eyes opened mine. Assessing the value of teaching material is a big must before we enter the classroom, but we tend to think perhaps that a meticulously planned chapter in the book will do the thinking for us. Ideas in textbooks and our own ideas must be approached critically unless we think of teaching as a source of easy money.
T4/CI1: Can your dad…?

Right before winter break, I had a class with my favorite group consisting of twelve 8-year-old cute students (4 boys and 8 girls). During that class, we were supposed to revise the material from the last 3 Units from the coursebook. One of the points on the list was the use of the verb CAN. During the first semester the children learnt to ask their friends what they can do (e.g. Can you stand on your hands? and answer (e.g. Yes, I can/ No, I can’t and the same with all the pronouns). Through the lessons, the children got to know a lot about themselves: they knew who could play the piano, skate, play chess and the like.

I started the class with presenting some pictures illustrating either people or animals doing certain activities and asking them if they could do something or what they could do (more advanced students). In order to conduct the second activity, I prepared a ball consisting of 12 pressed layers of paper with the questions on each page. The class loved the idea of using a ball during the lessons, so I did my best to use it on almost each class. The children were supposed to take off the top layer of paper, read the question and answer. It was Maciek’s turn. Maciek is a very cheerful and energetic boy. He read the question (Can your dad ride a bike?) and froze. He is a really clever boy, so normally he doesn’t need my extra support during the classes. Eventually, he said: I don’t have a dad… And all of us could notice how sad he suddenly became. I knew that he had a sister so I changed the question and Maciek answered: Yes, she can. But that moment, I did everything I could to cheer him up.

After this situation, I was heartbroken and angry with myself. I wished I hadn’t included such a question at all or at least it might have been better thought-through. However, the very same question was included on the revision page in the coursebook, so maybe it wasn’t entirely my fault… But still, it made me think if it could have been avoided. I didn’t know how this situation might have been perceived by a little boy. Maybe his dad left them, died or his parents were divorced. After the winter break, I talked to his mum who told me that her husband died on the building site in September, so it was only 1 month before the language course started. It was his very optimistic attitude that didn’t make me realize what he had to struggle with.

This incident taught me to be more conscious about such sensitive issues. I wasn’t prepared for such a scenario. It only assured me that being a teacher entails certain consequences and that our job requires more responsibility than I thought.

Now I spend more time on simply getting to know my students better (e.g. during the first classes in each group) so that I may avoid such incidents in the future. However, it’s a kind of information you don’t necessarily want to share with others. As a result, such situations may occur and maybe we should just accept them …

T4/CI2: Clanker the Robot

It was a beautiful sunny day at the beginning of June. At the primary school I work in, normally students do not have ‘normal’ classes and by normal, I mean working with the coursebook. Instead, when it’s boiling hot, they usually go outside together with the teacher and play games at the school playground. And it was one of such days. I teach the group of 21 10-year-olds. The fact is that the majority of them are linguistically inclined and their motivation to study English is very high.

That day, they didn’t have one of the lessons as their Science teacher was absent. I had my office hours so they asked me for the keys to the common room so that they could draw something and play games. They even refused to go outside with me when I offered that to them… “Weird,” I thought, but who cares … There were other teachers in the teacher’s room so normally we just take turns to check on the group. When the time was coming to an end, I was supposed to check if the students didn’t make much mess and make sure to lock the classroom. To my surprise, when I opened the door, I saw my group creating a robot out of cardboard boxes. But it wasn’t any robot, it was Clanker the Robot – the main character in our comic story in each unit in the coursebook. They all looked at me and said: Ta-da! Now, we can use it in the classroom while acting out the Clanker story!!!! – they were all very enthusiastic about it.

The whole situation was a shock for me since I would never expect a group to do something connected with the classes when they could literally do ANYTHING. And they wanted to make ME a surprise. What is more, it seemed that they were all involved in the creation process. It made me think of what a huge impact motivation has on students. How interested in the classes or maybe even more in the
comic story they must have been to spend their free time on creating something that we could use in the classes.

As my students wished, we’ve been using THE ROBOT ever since. In June we revised all the comic stories from the coursebook. The cardboard robot was used as a costume. No wonder everyone was dying to be Clanker in each episode!! Certainly, they made me wear the costume several times which made them fall off their chairs while laughing. I thanked the group for their involvement in the classes and said that it was a dream to have such wonderful students. They promised to create their own Clanker stories next school year and act them out in the groups.

T4/CI3: Cocky student

It was one of the first lessons in my group consisting of L2 teenagers aged from 13 to 18 (B1.2 level) It was the first time I was teaching teenagers. No wonder I wanted to make a good impression and make sure that we started off from the right foot. The lesson was going as planned. I was very well prepared and having a number of extra fun activities up my sleeve. The students seemed very pleased, we were laughing and telling jokes, too. However, in the second part of my class, we were focusing on the differences between Present Simple and Present Continuous tenses (as scheduled in the coursebook). I started with asking them to come up with the ideas (making gestures as if trying to brainstorm the ideas). But before anyone had a chance to think of any, one of the boys (the cocky one) remarked: I FEEL LIKE AT MY SCHOOL which means “BOOOOOORING”. “You piece of shit!!!!” – I said to myself totally appalled by his remark. I went on and other students provided some ideas. Needless to say, I gave up on the activities from the book and replaced them with the extra ones just to distract them from this disaster.

This incident gave me a lot to think about. I was doing my best to please them as I really cared… And this student had enough courage to share his negative opinion about the lesson with the class. I wished that the ground had opened up and swallowed me that moment. Kuba was one of the disobedient and at the same time the smartest students in the class. I already had to discipline him several times during the first lessons.

I decided that it was enough, and I needed to take a serious action. As a result, I asked Kuba to stay and talk to me after the lesson. In fact, I had no idea what to say to him as it was a spontaneous decision. The boy obediently waited till all the other students were gone and eventually came up to me. He looked so innocent and apologetic that I decided to follow another plan. All I said was: Yes, Kuba… You do really well in the class. I’m really pleased with your active participation. Really, just keep going. Thank you. (and I gave him a smile). He seemed shocked and couldn’t believe what happened there. He didn’t know how to thank me. Before leaving he even asked me if I needed help with all the equipment. I was surprised with both mine and his reaction. I didn’t have the faintest idea if it worked or not. But after the next class, I knew that the talk was successful. He totally changed his opinion about me, and I haven’t had any problems with him since then.

The whole situation was taken extremely seriously by me. All I ever wanted as a teacher was to be different from the teachers from state schools as I myself thought of them badly (my personal experience). I’m positive that the boy was used to being rebuked by his teachers and parents all the time and he expected the same from me. I wanted to strangle him at first, but then I literally fell in love with that boy. This incident taught me that each student requires individual approach as all students vary. That is, there are methods which may work on someone, but they may be powerless in other people’s cases.

T4/CI4: Disobedient students

In the primary school I work in I have a group of nineteen 11-year-olds from which at least 4 boys are troublesome. They very rarely do their homework and they are often very rude towards the teachers. At the beginning of a school year we set a rule that if they needed to go to the toilet, they had to ask me in English: May I go to the toilet, please? Actually, they picked it up very quickly as the rule was introduced by me the previous year.

One day, one of the most disobedient students in the group (Paweł) asked me this question but in Polish and I said NO. Instead of correcting himself, he just mumbled: OOOO… After around 10 min
another male student asked me the very same question, but this time in English, so my response was: Of course, go quickly. And then a real drama started. "Ooo serio????!! Tak ??!! to ja też sobie pójdę!!! - Paweł shouted. Przemek added: To ja pójdę na Panią do dyrektora!!! I was shocked. „You cocky little bastard!!! I will kill you and I will feed Paweł with your dead body!!!!!!” – I thought.

I’ve been working as a teacher the second year already and I’ve never experienced such disrespectful behavior before. It was so intense that I almost lost control over myself. The whole incident must have been extremely serious as the whole group froze waiting for what I was going to do with it. It was almost the end of the lesson, so I said very seriously that they had to stay after the lesson. And they did. However, my edifying ‘chit-chat’ didn’t seem to work on my ‘favorite’ students. They were just nodding their heads and rolling their eyes as if they had heard it millions of times. Certainly, they apologized for the whole situation although it wasn’t sincere at all.

I felt like a lousy teacher… 2 years of teaching and I don’t deserve their respect…. But I needed to take some action in order to find all the possible reasons for their misbehavior. First, I consulted other teachers about those students. They all agreed: They were all problematic before, but that year the situation only got worse and the other teachers experienced very similar problems during their lessons. The class teacher informed me that Pawel’s parents are alcoholics and he might end up in the orphanage in a couple of months. Przemek, on the other hand, is very disrespectful towards teachers as his parents present a very negative attitude towards teachers in general and they let their children talk over them at home. I had some problems with Przemek and his siblings before, so I called his mum in order to inform her how concerned I was about his behavior. Not surprisingly, she said she would talk to him, but she can’t promise me anything since she (HIS OWN MOTHER!!) can’t handle his behavior at home.

This incident taught me a lot, namely:

- In order to better understand my students’ behavior, I need to understand where it comes from
- No matter what happens during the lesson, I can’t let my emotions take over.
- Contact with parents doesn’t have to be helpful unless they want to cooperate and stop harming their children by defending everything they do.
- It’s very useful to consult other teachers. I’m not alone with my problems at school.

They are always students that teachers hate. But the key point is to “punish” their behavior and not themselves as individual human beings so that they know that they are good people and only their actions are bad. I do my best to reward the good behavior and draw the consequences when it comes to the incidents like the one described above.

T4/C15: Formative assessment

I work in two places. One of them is a language school and the second is a primary school. Whereas the former strongly focuses on the acquisition of L2 and hires enthusiastic and energetic teachers, the latter pays more attention to the students’ behavior, contact with parents and generally the whole bureaucracy. The majority of teachers are old and not open for changes. As an idealist I believed that I could introduce such novel methods in the state school. To be honest, I did my best to do so.

However, there were some things that were bothering me a lot. Every time I was dictating the class the subject of the lesson (e.g. Present Simple – negatives.) I felt as if something was wrong. As if it was a compulsory part of my job there and inseparable part of the whole system. The next thing that made me think was the aim of the lesson. As opposed to the language school where the classes last 90min, the lessons in the primary school were only 45min long. It seemed obvious that the students should have clear goals concerning the lesson since normally their plan for the school day is to survive and nothing more. Giving my students ‘normal’ homework (such as ex.1,2,3,4/p.7 (WB)) also didn’t seem right. I knew I needed to take some action, but unfortunately it took me a year to think it through and change the pattern I recklessly followed.

During holidays and at the beginning of the school year I heard of formative assessment. In order to learn something more about it, I participated in a number of conferences and I did some research online. It totally changed my attitude. I decided to implement the proposed changes and see what it would be like. I started with the topics. I changed the dull subject into more interesting ones.
them laugh as they know that I’m a messy teacher. Their main task was describing my own messy desk which picture I took at home and showed my pupils on the big computer screen. We started including the aims of the lesson under the subject (e.g. I can describe my room.), which was also successful as now they knew the practical value of the class. In fact, I didn’t change the homework that much, but I made it more interesting. For example, instead of writing about their most wonderful day, they were supposed to write about the worst one (and they loved it!).

I think that this kind of assessment should be compulsory in every school. Unfortunately, the teachers from my school are not willing to make such changes and that’s a real pity. Of course, I continue to do so. One of my friends told me about a marvelous idea to write all the aims of each lesson on a small piece of paper and put it into a jar. My students were excited about this idea and we implemented that. Now, when I want to revise the previous material with them, my students just pick a card from the huge jar which is placed on my desk and check if they remember that or not. Homework began more fun (who wouldn’t like to come up with the excuses for not having homework?).

I can see that students are becoming more and more involved in the classes. They are more willing to do extra homework and also more active during the classes. Evaluation of my students became more difficult for me because I focus individually on each student and instead of a simple mark, they receive a personal note about what they did best and what they have to pay more attention to. Formative assessment literally changed my attitude towards teaching in a state school.

T4/C16: Highlighters

As an inexperienced teacher of English, I told myself to set clear boundaries from the beginning and make rules so that the students feel safe in the classroom environment. I thought: I am the boss here, so they have to do what I say. One of the rules was not to use highlighters in their notebooks. I didn’t like the idea of using so many colors on each page which made my eyes hurt. Instead, they were supposed to use color pens to highlight the most important things like English words or certain rules.

One day, I decided to finally collect the notebooks to check them at home. Surprisingly, one of the girls (11 years old) didn’t follow my VERY REASONABLE idea and all the pages were covered with all the possible colors. Obviously, I gave her a lower mark as she completely ignored the rule I set. After that, the girl came up to me and said: I don’t understand why I got only B-. The response was obvious: You deliberately dismissed my principle. But her answer stunned me: But it’s easier for me to remember things when I highlight them. The only thing I could say to defend myself was again: BUT IT WAS A RULE.

Thanks to this situation, I came to my senses. It made me realize that I set the rule which would make my life easier (while checking their notebooks) and not theirs. It was totally unreasonable and not well-thought. It might have been because when I was a student the teachers used to order: Red is a color for teachers!! Nobody dared to disobey this command. I might have subconsciously fell into a trap of setting similar principles. Rules are extremely important but only when they serve the purpose. In this case, the principle was pointless. The student gave me a lot to think about. I spent days pondering over her response: BUT IT HELPS ME…

I just couldn’t leave it that way, so next time when I had a lesson with them, we spent some time discussing the methods that help them memorize the vocabulary. Certainly, a number of students came up with the idea of highlighting the words as the majority of them were visualizers. I felt guilty and apologized the group. Then, we together decided that the highlighters are allowed under one circumstance: they cannot overuse them (highlighting ALL the text in their notebooks). This is because the purpose of this was to HELP them to memorize the words and not to CONFUSE them. After the lesson, I talked to the girl and excused myself. In fact, the only reason she got a lower mark was because according to me it was illegible. She admitted she got carried away with the colors but she’s glad she’s allowed to use them from now on.

T4/C17: Respect

My classes with the group of teenagers (secondary school and high school) take place on Wednesdays and Fridays. Through the whole semester I was racking my brains just to make the lessons interesting and get them to like me as a teacher. It was the most demanding group from all the groups I had. I spent hours
preparing their classes – not only because I wanted to make the lessons fascinating but generally it was my first teenager group on the higher level than I normally teach so it took me more time to prepare…. We really got along, and I could see how much they enjoyed the classes. Every time before the lesson started, I was expressing my satisfaction with their presence by saying something like that: Hi!!!! (big smile on my face) It’s so good to see you today. I was looking forward to meeting with you! Sometimes, someone would say that probably I was just kidding but I kept on doing that anyway. After the class I used to thank them for the whole meeting, tell them that they did great (if they actually did), and I also wished them a nice evening. What is more, I often informed them how much I liked them.

One day, we were having a chat at the beginning of the lesson. Some students mentioned tests coming up and started complaining about their homeworks and stuff. A few of them admitted that their teachers hated them. I remarked: It can’t be true. What makes you think so? SS: Because they tell us that every single lesson! You’re the first teacher who says that actually likes us!

It made me look back to my school years. I remember teachers continuously complaining about our behavior in the class. They used to say that we were the worst classes at school. We were the worst in the primary school, secondary school and high school! SHOCKER! They used to tell us that so often that we started to believe that. No wonder our marks were bad, attendance very low (we were avoiding some lessons) and generally our motivation was equal zero. But who can we blame?

My mum used to say that a lie said a hundred times becomes true. And I think that it perfectly reflects the situation I described. If teachers have such a negative attitude towards students and they don’t hesitate to express the opinion about the group WITH the group, how does it make the students feel? If I as a teacher don’t believe that they are capable of something, why would they believe in that? I was naïve to think that the times have changed, so that it is all going into the right direction and maybe teachers learnt from their past teachers’ mistakes. Certainly, it’s only my opinion and not the fact. I took only my past experiences and my students’ opinions into consideration.

The whole situation only proved my point. The attitude towards individual students and the group in general seems to be crucial when it comes to students’ motivation and their willingness to study. This is why, I continue to make my students feel special and needed. And I do that by making myself equal to them e.g. telling them some embarrassing stories from my life… I often praise them and keep on telling my students how glad I am to be their teacher. As a result, they pay me back with doing their homeworks, behaving themselves in the classes and generally trying not to let me down.

**T4/C18: Technology in the classroom**

It was June, three weeks before the end of the school year. The weather was really nice, and we had already finished the material planned in the curriculum. It was the group of sixth graders who were supposed to enter gymnasium the following year. The class is considered very lazy and generally demotivated. All they care about are the social networks they use to update on their status and post the new selfies. The half of the group wished to get a selfie stick as their Christmas present. At school, there is an Internet connection but normally students are not allowed to use it or at least it is said that they can’t as they all know the password to the school’s network, but the teachers pretend that they don’t know anything about it. Since they are so interested in technology and we have the overhead projector with the Internet connection, why wouldn’t we try to teach them that way?

One day, I informed them not to forget their smartphones for the next lesson. They were shocked and kept asking me what for but of course they all brought them. I introduced to them some online quiz games such as [www.kahoot.it](http://www.kahoot.it) about which I learnt at the conferences and workshops I took part in. Not surprisingly, they were all mesmerized by this innovative approach towards learning. The quiz I prepared consisted of the vocabulary and grammar revision from the whole year. They enjoyed the idea so much that they asked me if they could take turns to prepare such quizzes themselves for the next lessons (and they did). After that, I presented some other online activities and observed my students working in groups, asking questions in English as if it was something natural, and having fun. We also prepared some made up Facebook profiles and sang the English songs completing them with the missing words.

The whole situation just ensured me that the methodology of teaching should be so to speak, compatible with modern times. My experiment proved that literally everybody can get interested in the subject if they are motivated enough. Certainly, we shouldn’t exaggerate with the use of technology, but since the number of students are computer addicts already, why wouldn’t we turn it into something useful.
I shared my thoughts with other teachers at school but only a few of them (those in their thirties) picked up my idea and started using technology in their classroom which increased the motivation of the least motivated students and generally improved their results. I’ve already tried it out with my other groups in the language school as well as my classes in the primary school and it was very well received by all the students. I’m still an active participant of conferences and webinars devoted to technology in the L2 classroom and continue to learn more and more about the latest innovations which I later use with my students. To my surprise I even bought an iPhone in order to keep up with all the novelties although I was strongly against such phones before. I’ve heard somewhere: Teaching becomes at the end of your comfort zone. I agree that if we really care about our students and their learning process, we should be open for changes and try out different things and methods.

T4/C119: So and Because

Around 15 minutes into the class, Kasia entered the classroom gasping heavily. I welcomed her and of course I asked what kept her busy. She explained in Polish that her mum came home late from work and there was nobody else to drive her to the language school. I showed understanding and the lesson continued. We focused on causal relations between actions and practiced So and Because sentences. All went smoothly until later when I realized that I completely failed to use the situation from the beginning of the class and make everyone relate to such a natural context. Instead, we made up situations for the grammar illustration.

I could not understand why this happened to me. I was angry first and then very disappointed with myself. The more I thought about it, the stronger was the need in me to excuse myself. Oh, yeah, that day I had classes at university, and we found out the deadline for one of the pending assignments. I remember how it got on my nerves because my schedule was already tight. And then before the class my sister called me to say she could not accompany me to our parents in the countryside at the weekend as she had an unexpected dentist appointment. Basically, I had reasons not to be able to focus the way I normally do.

But the feeling that I seriously screwed up with material presentation was trailing along for a few days. As a result, for a few days I was particularly attentive to things happening around and decided to turn it into a habit to collect data concerning my students and use them as relevant examples. It followed that once talking about countable and uncountable nouns I referred back to an unusual observation about Krzyś, who always has a few erasers in his pencil case, and practicing the second conditional with my teenagers we had a guessing game about their future professional careers based on what I knew about them up to date. We all were surprised that there is a lot of information we sneak into the classroom through our dress style and small talk.

T4/C110: Help me, Miss

Before the end-of-semester test, I was having a revision class with my 11-year-olds. The material was not very demanding, and we were still in celebration moods (after Christmas), so we managed to go over the exercises quickly and even had a spare moment to play a game at the end. After the class, a student approached me and asked for help with the Present Perfect Tense. We had only begun this grammar component so the only structure to include in the test was the model question: Have you ever ...? I was very surprised to hear the request.

First, Tomek had never shown much interest in learning the language. He was the one to ask each lesson when it was going to finish. Second, his workbook was a total mess. Detached pages and some extra handouts that I could not even recognize flying out of it every time he unpacked. Twice I had caught him copy homework, so we talked about it. He said he keeps forgetting, which I kind of believed because he
could answer the related questions in class. That is why, I never thought of him as a weak student. Clumsy, inattentive, a bit absent-minded, but weak. In fact, he was a cute boy and I liked him a lot. No wonder I wanted to help.

The problem was I was just about to begin my next class and he didn’t really like the idea of coming to school the next day. The following day was the test. It was extremely difficult for me to leave him unattended in those circumstances. There was no reason to feel guilty about the whole thing, but I felt genuinely uncomfortable. Yes, I did ask why he hadn’t told me before, although I knew the answer. Indeed, he said he thought he could understand, but that day he did all the answers wrong. He added he wanted to get a good grade in the test. This surprised me even more. He cared, he was ambitious, he had motivation!!!! I was happy and unhappy at the same time. The next class students were gathering in the classroom and we needed to leave. On the way out, I tried to explain things quickly, which looked rather ridiculous. So, I cheered him up saying that I was sure in the test the questions would be all clear and he would score high.

I am sure I need to be prepared for situations like this in the future. Some students will always see teachers as the emergency unit in hospital. Regardless of age, those are people for whom achievement equals passed quizzes and exams. Their learning efforts will be guided towards ones and knowledge measured the same way. Tomek was still a child and there was good hope his language instructors would succeed in directing his learning process the right way to make him gradually realize he needed it for other purposes than exams. I understood it was my responsibility to contribute to a good change.

By the way, Tomek sailed through the quiz and was very happy, but the next semester I introduced a new rule to the whole group and watched him follow suit. The idea was, as described in some previous incident, to clearly name the objectives of lessons, name them funny ways and check at the end if we could demonstrate what we have learnt. Those were little things like compare two objects in the classroom before you leave it or count the times you have drifted away in class. He sometimes suggested nice ways to name the objectives beneath the lesson topic, but I cannot be certain what effects it has had on his English learning in general.

T4/CII1: But my teacher says …

I can’t remember exactly the topic of the lesson but at some point Marysia, a teenage B1 student in the language school, used the phrase explain me, which I corrected on the board because I thought B1 is high enough level of proficiency to draw learners’ conscious attention to this incorrect calque from Polish. I made up a model sentence and underlined the necessary preposition. Marysia immediately responded that her English teacher at school always says explain me/you. The way she said that sounded to me like: She knows, doesn’t she? You are too young to know anything!!! I had no idea what to say. It was a torture to see other group members stare at me waiting for a response. Eventually, I said that the problem with the structure is that it is so similar to our mother tongue equivalent that we all tend to forget about it and if Marysia doesn’t believe me the best way is to check herself.

It wasn’t a good idea. Like it or not, this way I spoke against another teacher and I believe that teachers should not do so. Questioning someone’s competence arises doubts in students. Who is Marysia going to rely on from now on? This risk is, however, inherently involved in co-taught subjects, or like here two professional yet seemingly conflicting educational settings. Funnily, I work in both state and private sectors and despite young age I have heard several times how parents, learners, and teachers, too, prioritize one over the other for so many different reasons. I never get provoked by such comments. They make me feel embarrassed.

The working of the whole system has definitely something to do with it rather than individual teachers, I like to think. It is not my fault that I can hardly make my humble living with my state income. I cannot feel guilty because private language schools have resources and do their best to outshine state institutions in terms of learning conditions, teaching methods, and professional in-service development. Most importantly, though, there are good schools in both sectors just as there are poor ones.

Having said this, I found the situation difficult to deal with. I hope it will never happen again or I can go with something like: Let me double check. I’ll get back to you the first thing next class. At least I could feel I consciously prevent the exposure of another teacher as language incompetent. Loyalty. This is what I can call it.
**T5/C11: My beliefs confronted**

Since I started teaching in IB DP program I have been skeptical about the knowledge passed onto students while teaching. The topics are imposed on teachers and in many cases, they are opposite to my private beliefs and practices. In the first year of my IB career I got to teach a group of teenage girls with really strong personalities and proud to be doing an IB course. When conducting classes I struggled not to express my personal opinion about current socio–political affairs because it would be hugely unpopular among my students who were open to LGBT environment, multiculturalism, etc.

One day we watched „Billy Elliot” film in which in the final scene we can see a homosexual couple, one of the men being black. When discussing this scene, the students never mentioned the color of skin of one of these men. I was eliciting it from them but in vain. I got really frustrated that they themselves never raised the issue of one of the men being black. As they explained later, they never noticed it. It came to me as a shock, how can you not notice somebody being of a different skin color?

I believe my students understood tolerance as not noticing differences. This was an occasion to talk about the definition of tolerance and how sometimes pretending you cannot notice the otherness of an individual can bring more harm than good.

**T5/C12: Sportsgirl**

This experience of mine refers to one student who did not work hard throughout the whole year, but she was successful doing sport. At the end of a school year I gave the student 3, which seemed a reliable feedback and it reflected how much (or rather little) involvement she demonstrated. The student asked me if she could do something to make the grade higher. I happily agreed and suggested a time of our meeting. The student kept coming four times but was never successful in improving her grade. What is more, she proved that she probably did not even deserve the grade she received (3).

The situation was getting ridiculous because her trainer approached me asking me to give her a chance for a better grade. I happily agreed and suggested a time of our meeting. The student kept coming four times but was never successful in improving her grade. What is more, she proved that she probably did not even deserve the grade she received (3).

The situation was getting ridiculous because her trainer approached me asking me to give her a chance for a better grade. I happily agreed and suggested a time of our meeting. The student kept coming four times but was never successful in improving her grade. What is more, she proved that she probably did not even deserve the grade she received (3). I refused, not because I wanted to make the student’s life miserable but because I believed it wouldn’t be fair. The way I see the marks is that it is a feedback which should be honest. Why giving too low marks is considered unjust and making them unreasonably higher seems all right?

This experience made me think about our educational system where marks are too important because they create statistics. Schools promote this unhealthy attitude to learning that what counts most is the numbers. Why do we always want to be perfect in whatever we do?

To my mind, students are not taught how to accept themselves with different flaws and imperfections. And they should.

**T5/C13: Extensive reading**

Extensive reading program – students read in class for pleasure. Once a week, students don’t bring their coursebooks, but they read books they choose for themselves. The criterion when choosing the book is that it is supposed to be reading in English for pleasure. These are usually graded readers. For students of higher levels, they even read books in original versions. After a few lessons we talk about books they have read.

When students from other groups ask their teachers to read in their classes I know I am doing the right thing. I remember one group where students did not want to start this project because they did not believe they would benefit from this experience (their English was really bad). After a first book read some of them got really excited about the fact they actually can read in English.

It is a very rewarding experience both for students and for me as a teacher.
**T5/CI4: A big step forward**

A very weak group of students in terms of English skills. I explained to students that every lesson I ask somebody to do some talking at the beginning of each lesson. They could either be spontaneous or prepare something to talk about.

After a year, the students speak and can even ask one another follow up questions. They are not fluent as yet, but I can see a process of opening up for this opportunity to communicate in English. Initially it was very hard for them to create questions, a very complicated process of applying grammar rules into practice. Thanks to consistent practice, I noticed a big step forward, especially in case of weaker students.

It shows how my consistency in stimulating my students brings positive results for them.

**T5/CI5: Mobile phones**

As the first teacher in my school I put a ban on mobile phones in my school (for my students). Although officially mobile phones are not allowed during lessons, it was extremely difficult to execute the law in practice. I had been thinking about implementing this rule for weeks but unsuccessfully.

Then, a parent of my student expressed her surprise that we did not have this arrangement in class/school yet. Her daughter had an issue with her mobile, which caused her many problems. She was addicted to her mobile and her marks got tremendously low because she was constantly distracted by messages on the device. The mother insisted on limiting access to mobiles during lessons for all the students. I didn’t wait long. The following day I explained to my students that from then on, all mobiles were not allowed in the classroom.

Since then all devices are put away onto an allocated area and students pick them up on their way out after the lesson. Initially students were perplexed but the effect of this arrangement is more students’ attention on what we do in the classroom, on each other.

Consequently, they use the time more effectively. The marks of the above-mentioned students improved. This is my common practice now.

**T5/CI6: No support**

Teaching English A: Language and Literature in IB DP program. In June I was offered to go on a training and join my colleague to teach this subject. I agreed.

In September it turned out that I had to teach this subject for a few months without the training because there was no money. It was a let-down because the subject is really demanding. I went to ask for some support in the form of observing my colleague (which was connected with some arrangements for my students) but I was rejected. I did not receive any support whatsoever, I was even talked to in a way that was meant to manipulate me into thinking that either I am capable of teaching or not.

This lack of support was a key thing in my thinking about teaching this subject. It requires a lot of preparation, but I did not receive any support. My attitude towards this subject is very negative because I don’t feel competent to teach it.

In consequence my students miss out on this because they would benefit from classes conducted by a professional in this field.

**T5/CI7: A “thank you” from the kids**

A thank you from students finishing school. Students told me that they received a lot of support from me and that in difficult times I was the person who they liked to turn to. They said that they admire not only the way I speak to them and treat them in our classes but also the way I speak about people who are not present. They expressed their appreciation because they could experience a high level of respect and support and wish more teachers demonstrated these features while carrying out their work duties.
I don’t have to explain that this feedback was hugely important to me and made me realize that apart from lecturing students and practicing certain English language skills, as a teacher I have a more intangible role to play. Students are young, vulnerable people who seek support and understanding on a daily basis. Only by ensuring emotional support can they feel safe in school environment and focus on educational goals more successfully.

*T5/CI8: My daughter*

Finding out about my daughter’s disability did not take place within one particular day, it was a process of observation, constant discussions and meeting with her teachers in kindergarten. However, I remember very clearly one day when I first heard the word „disability” in the context of my daughter. We had regular meetings with teachers and a psychologist to discuss my only child’s development and future planning for her education. I had known that my daughter had big difficulties with learning in terms of math and abstract thinking in general and I was well-informed about how little progress she was doing considering the amount of work done to support her. Nevertheless, I did not expect this to come. The specialist told me that if the pace of acquiring knowledge stays as it is (which is very slow), when she reaches school age and some IQ test are carried out the diagnosis might be „intellectually disabled”.

I do not need to explain how shuttered I felt, to the extent that I burst into tears in front of my students when I eventually got to work that morning. I took me a while to come to terms with this reality, a couple of weeks probably.

But once I accepted my fate (a very big word but that’s how I feel about it) I am a happy mom and a teacher who can raise awareness about more vulnerable people in our society. Sometimes I talk to my students about disabilities around, encouraging young talented people from a very good school to notice those not so talented.

I want young people to reflect upon struggles disabled people might have and become more sensitive to the needs of other people. But also, I want my students to learn to appreciate what they have. Very often they take their abilities and talents for granted, which to me is quite painful.

I find this practice very rewarding because sometimes students approach me telling that they actually have a disabled sister or brother and they do not want the world to reject them. I know for a fact that in most cases the fact of having a disabled member of a family is kept to oneself. I want to break this taboo. Life mission? I don’t know but at least I feel I don’t waste my life...
T6/C11: Blossom

In January, four months into the Fall semester, I had a class about tourist attractions around the world. As usual, the beginning of the lesson was meant to increase students’ interest, so I asked random girls (all-female group) where they’ve been, which of the places they recommend seeing, and why. All of a sudden, the quietest girl in class raised her arm and answered all the questions in beautifully fluent and coherent English.

I thanked her for that impressive contribution but said nothing about how surprised I was by such an unexpected performance. Actually, it was my conscious decision not to bring that triumphant moment into the public eye. I was trembling all over my body with the excitement and joy which I can hardly describe. I felt moved and honored to be able to witness her transformation in my class. On the other hand, I wanted to demonstrate my appreciation, so I supportively commented on her ideas and continued the small talk with the rest of the class.

I find the incident critical because I had never heard the girl produce any language whatsoever. Even when working in groups, she would act with evident reservation, literally avoiding any form of communicative effort. Her listening comprehension skills were fine, though. She was meeting the course expectations: always present in flesh, never late with submissions. It was only her eyes – continually fixed on her desk – that revealed how distant she actually was. I thought, “It is a listening course, and she’s doing well. Why should I bother her and enforce production, which, by default, plays a secondary role in here?” In fact, I was afraid to approach her as her quietness seemed completely unpredictable.

My first interpretation of the incident was purely psychological – something had happened in her personal life that allowed her to open up and change her self-perception as well as the perception of the environment. She was not scared any longer. Or maybe she was no longer bothered by other people’s opinions because someone or something gave her a gentle motivational push that boosted her self-esteem (and it wasn’t me, unfortunately). Yet another possibility was that her English was praised, which helped her build courage to use it more openly. I never thought of this case in terms of my own contribution for the reasons mentioned above.

However, I talked with several fellow teachers about what happened, and now I regret not having asked the girl outside the class. Today I would know, I assume, what was hiding behind the incredible moment. My colleagues inquired about the student, which made me realize I knew next to nothing about her as an individual except for a couple of observations above. I also realized that the change might have been caused by more factors. Linguistically speaking, she might not have been ready for language production although she was not a complete beginner. This silent period could be crucial to her not necessarily because of my course. The load of input in parallel courses could be the reason behind her slower accommodation. She could also consciously decide to channel different amounts of energy to different skill-oriented classes. After all, my course was listening, not speaking. Ultimately, the emergence might have taken place earlier if I had made an effort and stimulated her language production.

All in all, the student “blossomed”, which does not provide any evidence of language development. Instead, it shows that in the same circumstances the student started acting differently (up to teacher’s expectations). The behavioral change was evident. The context of large size classes does not make it any easier to explore the learning potential of individual students. Neither does class specialization/focus. The process of learning can become easily disintegrated when the division between skills is created and artificially reinforced.

PS. Since the critical class, she continued to respond openly. However, the semester finished soon after and I never found out how she did further on.

English Department at a local university; Listening course; Freshman students

T6/C12: It sucks

I can’t remember many important things about that class, but I remember it was a morning lesson on a dark winter day. When the class took off, I still felt a bit drowsy. The room was particularly small, lights on, and only three rows of desks in front of me. I saw my reflection in the window the moment I lifted my head from above the attendance list. I also remember the topic – stars and outer space exploration. At the mention
of it, one of the female students on my left said out loud, “It sucks!” She took me by complete surprise, and I could only ask, “What sucks?” In reply, she explained that the topic was off-putting, and it was a waste of her time to discuss it.

I did not try to defend my selection of material – it might not have sounded fascinating at first, but I had used it with other advanced students for some time now, and I was convinced it served academic purposes very well. Its merits were numerous and evident to me as a teacher, and I was ready, despite the sleepy mode, to share them with the class. Having heard the comment, my spirit failed me. I went sulky, which was perhaps the silliest thing I could do as a professional. How immature of me! I put on a good front and acted my best, but inside I was boiling. I still remember thoughts that bombarded my mind: that behavior was offensive; it was rude; it was disrespectful; how could such an intelligent girl make such a silly remark? It was going to be a tough morning anyway, but this start? What to call it? – With these notions on mind, I found it extremely difficult to focus and display cheerfulness I usually displayed in class.

I believe that the level of energy the teacher brings into class is karmic in a way. Not decisive, really, but it can improve students’ motivation to make an effort, increase their interest in and perception of themes (including boring ones), and influence their processing, ergo learning outcomes in the long run. It was critical to see that objectively well-designed input was rejected before it was given a try. I was rejected. At least, this is how I interpreted the incident on the spot.

Both my reaction and the interpretation of the incident were far from rational (I am describing the situation several months later). I sent a clear signal to the class that I take things personally; that I am there in front of them as a person, then a professional. This way, students could see that my emotions can easily take over in other critical circumstances, namely assessment of their work. Teachers’ credibility is a difficult thing to build, but rather easy to lose. Ultimately, I failed to acknowledge that it is impossible to make everybody happy with our pedagogical choices no matter how hard we try to consider all students’ interests and learning styles.

On the other hand, should a 30-hour-course framework, which for many students boils down to a number of ECTS points to collect on their way to graduation, prioritize changing student needs and interests or rather a carefully devised material that can potentially benefit all of them with regard to academically oriented vocabulary in context as well as production opportunities? This question goes beyond learning English as such; it concerns English learning for special purposes, the most important of which is academic in nature, not entertaining. It sounds radical, yet genuinely.

T6/C13: L1 in C1

PART ONE; After the Christmas break, the third-year students of English returned to my speaking course to continue the topic of freedom. As usual, the Wednesday group eagerly involved in the opening small talk. We had a chat about leisure, which I deliberately navigated at the first speaking task. Divided into three clusters, they were supposed to produce a few questions regarding the topic of freedom for other groups to deliberate about. The objective was simple enough — to orientate the use of English toward the goal by selecting relevant content (addressing both the subject matter and the peers in the class context) and form (linguistically and conventionally accurate interrogative forms).

Predictably enough, as soon as the students turned to their partners, a few of them switched back into Polish. I interrupted the activity and told the class in a straightforward yet composed way that I was fed up disciplining them over and over again, that I found their behavior most disobedient, that they violated a course requirement which was to speak English in class only; I also explained that English Studies undergraduates — advanced foreign language users — could not afford to waste their time playing games like this.

Shock therapy, which often teaches a lesson, was all in vain this time. The students’ excuses ranged from L1 use as sporadic and completely harmless time-savers in conversation, to their natural rebellion against requirements of any sort. A remark from the group that anyway all the talking was a waste of time made me close the argument. I thanked the group for their comments but promised myself to sleep on ways to break their necks in the future.
PART TWO: The incident gave me a blow on the head. On the one hand, I thought of it as my personal failure because I could not execute the rule that I had made clear from the start. To make it worse, the students demonstrably rejected the principle, and in the same way questioned what legitimized their status. They refused to acknowledge that articulacy in EFL involves much more than producing planned and well-rounded utterances for the purpose of academic presentations or debates.

My fellow teachers, to whom I turned for consolation, wholeheartedly agreed with me. They expressed discontent, which only fortified my conviction that my Wednesday group was particularly immature and that I had every right to demand that they adapt. On the other hand, when we were collectively venting our resentment, I started to develop a feeling that what happened served a didactic challenge, and that it was not the right thing to merely complain.

Within a couple of days, I managed to subdue the emotions and think of the incident as an important lesson to learn from. I think that was a turning point. I instinctively came to realize that I needed to try and take the situation in stride, as a representation of something bigger. But to do so, it was important to consider all the ingredients, including my students’ rebellious replies, who they were, where they came from, the goal of the course, my personal goals and teaching ideology, the institution where we met, its ethos, and many more. I was already certain that my students and I could only benefit from all the disturbance, which in turn allowed me to gradually cumulate my mental powers to deal with the incident afresh.

PART THREE: I eventually spent an hour or so reading through teacher resources and confronting what I knew about the developing of learners’ speaking skills. I realized I’d completely disregarded the psycholinguistic dimension of speaking, which rests upon students’ readiness for and willingness to participate in communicative situations, even as trivial as informal negotiations with peers. Instead, what I took for granted was a normatively perceived level of proficiency in the third year of studies, which is expected to materialize in the form uninhibited and fluent language production regardless of the task.

Apparently, my students lacked resources — previous training/experience as well as knowledge — that they could activate to help them through casual conversation in a free and easy manner. Also, their avoidance behavior might have manifested their reluctance to engage in work, which

- was not closely inspected by the teacher, and thus not intended to receive any formal feedback,
- they found far from natural in the sense that they had to simulate an informal talk with peers with whom they mostly communicated in L1 outside the classroom, and yet the task did not resemble real-life situations, which made it irrelevant for them in terms of speaking practice they needed/valued,
- might have exposed evident discrepancies in grammar and vocabulary use among the classmates.

My final conclusion was that advanced learners of a foreign language might struggle developing the speaking skill the way less proficient learners do, but deficiencies at the advanced level can be twofold adverse. First, they are much more difficult to detect in the course of learning focused on more demanding discourse forms to practice like argumentation or opinion exchange. Second, unattended for a long time, they enhance a false picture of learners’ competence, which can cause a lot of distress to both the students and the teacher when eventually unveiled.

That is why, it is crucial that the teacher recognizes his/her advanced learners’ readiness for speaking and select input and tasks during the course that will both reinforce their strengths and address their weaknesses.

*English Department at a local university: Speaking course; Senior students*

*T6/CI4: Go and ask*

Unsurprisingly, my students struggled composing the simplest written texts. The problems were manifold: sentence structure, coherence, subject and verb agreement, pronoun forms, tenses, to name just a few. The scope and magnitude of these varied due to individual differences and language learning experience. Yet, most of them showed a highly reluctant attitude towards written tasks, most of which, according to the syllabus were descriptive in their nature. In order to change that, I asked the group from time to time to
write a couple of sentences in response to a topic-related question, asking about their opinions, suggestions, explanation. What mattered for a start, I used to say, were their ideas expressed in a more or less comprehensive way.

Of course, the form mattered too, yet the mention of it would be rather counterproductive, I thought, as my aim was to build in students a more positive approach to writing in general. The critical decision on my part was how to provide feedback on language so that they could feel encouraged to write again in the future and a bit more enthusiastically. I intended to focus on meaning in the first place, which meant that each student received his or her writing back with a question I would like to hear an answer/elaboration on. Each writing also had a few selected language mistakes underlined. In class, each student was supposed to come over and talk to me twice: responding to my question and presenting how they had corrected three of the mistakes.

A good thing about the activity was that the students could move from their seats, queue and chat while waiting for their turn, be treated individually, but most importantly think back and critically about their own language production. Whenever they admitted they’d got stuck with self-correction, I sent them to go and consult other students. After two or three rather chaotic attempts, we all learnt the rules and I hardly heard complaints to my face. Instead, I could see the peers in different configurations doing the language correction as a kind of by-product of their writing efforts. In the public, I only commented on the ideas which I found interesting, hilarious, or intriguing.

To my astonishment, by the end of the semester students’ writing ceased to show the third person singular slips, inconsistent pronouns, or present verb forms only. I could not believe that a couple of sentences scribbled carelessly on strips of paper, attended to in a rather unorthodox manner made such a difference.

I am far from exaltation upon my own idea, but it worked in a way I wanted it to work. I could see a few downsides to it, of course. At some point, for example, the best students in class stopped coming to show their self-correction. They were excessively exploited by others, instead, which made me think the task required better monitoring techniques. Besides, I decided to be consistent and refuse to help them myself. It might have adversely affected those weaker students who, especially at the beginning, could not manage on their own and had to rely exclusively upon their classmates. It has been long recognized that the credibility of peers is rather limited in the eyes of teenagers. Also, the writing we practiced had no structure, which could cause quite a headache to their future English instructors.

In the last class, when we got together to congratulate each other upon the successfully accomplished course, my kids praised the idea of informal writing, as we used to call it, and admitted they’d quite enjoyed the experience. Finally, I explained to them how I watched them develop their writing skills and how impressed I was altogether. I am not sure if that was a well-chosen moment for the feedback of this kind. What mattered on that day were wishes and good-bye rather than insight into the course of action.

The judgment concerning language learning and teaching might be that free or unstructured writing can be successfully implemented as the foundation for more structured forms, and at this introductory stage it is more important to motivate learners and emphasize their achievements rather than place emphasis on language accuracy. The latter should not be completely overlooked, yet the gravity must be shifted towards building a positive bias.

_Presslanguage school; General English course; a group of ten 13-year-old learners (level A2+)_

_T6/CI5: TPR_

I couldn’t wait to begin the course bearing vivid memories from the past when I tried out TPR for the first time and fell in love with it in no time. My affection resulted from an amazing progress the learners made throughout two semesters with regard to language production, which made me believe the effectiveness of the method became evident.

The profile of my group last year resembled the one from the past: beginner adults who found enough time and motivation to start learning a foreign language despite their work and family loads. I was excited about exposing them to what was going to take them by surprise, to say the least, although every group member was told at the interview that there was going to be no textbook and we would focus on listening and speaking. I could obviously anticipate that some of them would rebel against the method until
they discover how much they can remember in the course of a month or two without keeping a written record of the target language.

I was right about my predictions except for one learner’s (Lena’s) resistance to constant repetitiveness and her demands to write things down. She rejected my counselling remarks and requests for a bit more patience. She wanted to take the class contents home and revise the material comfortably on her own. That was the way of learning she was used to. After two months, which caused me many sleepless nights (and perhaps her too), she quit the course with an ultra-negative feedback.

I did not lose my enthusiasm because the rest of the group proceeded successfully, and they could tell stories by the means of verb-based phrases. Quite predictably, though, what happened gave me food for thought. It was clearly a critical incident as I felt rather uneasy about what was happening and desperately needed to understand the situation. Questions started bombarding me, for example: What was it that I overlooked making assumptions about the effectiveness of TPR? What kind of learner needs doesn’t it accommodate? How to adapt the method to maintain its precious characteristics and still satisfy the students like Lena? When modified (with the written form introduced along with the development of speaking skills), is the method going to bring comparable results?

All in all, I thought a lot about the course structure, the distribution of the material, potential limitations, and forms of assessment, and came to the conclusion that even though only a small part of English can actually be TPR-ed, it offers the learners a unique opportunity to produce basic meaningful language within the first few months of learning (unless they need a longer silent period) and hence boost their confidence a lot. Perhaps the best illustration of how the method nicely builds on the ‘physical’ vocabulary and takes the learners to a more abstract level is the pool of phrases around the verb GO. Go to the board / go to the restroom / go to the wedding / go to work / go abroad / go out for a drink with friends / go on holiday – are just a few examples of how the learners can increase their language repertoire through acting out and storytelling.

I remain convinced that TPR can benefit the learners a lot and smooth their submersion into more advanced areas of grammar, syntax, and lexis. It facilitates the formation of mental representations and interconnections between them. It might not provide, though, a solid tense orientation. Still, Asher’s concept seems to fit Polish learners of English just as it fitted Spanish ones.

*Private language school; General English course; Beginner Adults*

**T6/C16: Feedback**

I’ve been observed several times in my teaching career, and I’ve observed many teachers too. On that account, the concept of feedback is quite familiar to me. What happened this time, though, took me a bit by surprise, which is why, I consider it a critical incident.

The class was typically arranged, with the element of new vocabulary (transitional signals) at its heart, preceded with context building, and followed by practice and production components. As usual, I incorporated a bit of fun activities, including a theme-related warm-up, changed the seating patterns, made sure it was learner centered and coherent. Although I did not find it the best class I had ever had (the students in this section were always very friendly, yet on a rather quiet/passive side), we had an enjoyable time working out a story puzzle with absurdly jumbled linking expressions in it.

When the feedback session started with an official remark from my supervisor: “I will not say a word about what I liked I will only tell you what I saw,” my immediate and highly uncomfortable thought was that she did not like anything. Then for 20 minutes I did hear an account of the lesson procedure that sounded reserved and formal. All the time I was trying to figure out what my boss was heading for describing the lesson stages one by one, refraining from descriptive adjectives, comments, and questions whatsoever. I was waiting for her to explain what she had planned to observe specifically and how she found it. Instead, in the end, she made a recommendation: I should pay more attention to one student at the back of the room who seemed to be waiting for me to ask her something. I replied that I failed to notice the girl’s willingness to answer as she never gave me a sign of readiness. In a class of 27, it is difficult to come in contact with every student individually, but luckily teacher-student interaction is not the only way they can benefit from the lesson.

I wish I had been more straightforward when my supervisor asked me what I wanted to add to the feedback. I should have asked what she meant by “seemed to be waiting for me to ask.” However, I only
thanked her for her time and left highly confused about what I experienced. I struggled to make sense of it. If I was to learn from that feedback, what would it be that I was taking with me? That day I only knew that the next time I observe a teacher, I must avoid acting like my boss.

Feedback is an emotionally loaded experience regardless of the number of years on the job because it is seen as evaluation of one’s expertise, and we all tend to be oversensitive about it. Actually, it is evaluation in that it offers a learning opportunity which is all about correcting what requires improvement, but it also acknowledges what and how different aspects of professional knowledge become evident in the classroom practice. It should be a driving force to do better and better for both senior and novice instructors. The learning dimension of feedback does not only regard the observed, though. The observer is learning too, and telling a fellow-teacher that they are inspiring is perhaps the best compliment they could receive.

I have never recovered from this feedback, yet I tried to understand why it was provided in this peculiar manner. One possibility is that my supervisor, an experienced teacher but new to the post, aimed to establish her distinctive way of giving feedback, for I heard from other academics they were given the same format. Another idea is that by default she approached people in a way that emphasized her standing in hierarchy, which is not such a bad thing altogether as long as the subordinates are offered conditions for learning. To my mind, the best work environment is genuinely stimulating, and feedback is possibly the best opportunity to stimulate.

Local University, English Department; Vocabulary Course; Sophomore Students of English

T6/C17: Phone issue

The class aimed to revise the argument type of essay and get the students ready for a writing assignment. I asked the group a set of questions checking their understanding of the concept. As usual, among fifteen girls, there were those few who always volunteered to reply and Daria, whose participation was totally unpredictable to me. That day, she would answer every single question until she received a message on her telephone and switched off completely.

The problem began when I asked her to put the phone aside. Without raising her eyes from the screen, she said it was something important and kept typing back. The situation got much worse when I insisted on her stopping. I referred to the official regulations forbidding the students to use their mobiles during the classes, but she didn’t allow me to finish and talked back arrogantly about how emergencies must be excused. When I mentioned that the attitude she gave me was going to be reported to Student Affairs, she flew out of the class spitting out a curse. My heart was beating so fast that I could hardly breathe. What a misconduct!

Before she left, I told Daria to come to my office to discuss the issue, but she never showed up. I was left with very limited options: I could either report on the student or drop it altogether. I am not proud to say that what I did was the latter, but I considered all pros and cons, and they led me to the following conclusions.

First of all, the behavior I watched was not academic in its nature. After all, I had every reason to be pleased with Daria’s performance for most of the class. Yet, it clearly manifested how the ubiquitous use of technology, happily encouraged by schooling institutions, is gradually taking control over the human mind and action. The establishment which is strict about the use of telephones is heading for a collision with device-addicted and very confident youth. This becomes a serious issue, which a single instructor is not going to solve with his or her consistency in rule obedience. More importantly, though, the question arises whether it is truly necessary to reprimand students for those instances where they drift their attention off from class to check up on the messages? They do it anyway, don’t they? Only the phone issues are more detectable. Why am I supposed to guard young adults and hear from them how they find it unacceptable? I used to accept my role of a wrestler; I do not any longer.

Additionally, it was almost the end of the academic year and I knew my report would ruin Daria’s records as a probation student. In a way, this train of thought transformed my emotion from anger to pity. All of a sudden, I saw a good student enslaved by a tiny little thing which completely imprisoned her manners.

Of course, I felt bad about the incident because I always try to obey rules and emphasize that to my students. However, should I be emotional about them disobeying ones? Not necessarily. If the way someone was brought up accepts rule violating, and this violation does not affect other people, making a fuss of it might be a waste of time. Unfortunately, Daria’s behavior affected herself. I found the case unsolved from her side (Daria openly showed me utmost disrespect and never apologized), which means I
mentally excluded her from the group. The non-academic situation turned academic in the sense that my perception of her as a student and individual was drastically verified to her disadvantage. This bias might have had more serious outcome in a lower education setting, I believe. University students can enjoy freedom of choice which includes how they approach the courses and the workload they carry as well as how they cooperate with instructors and peers. Respecting this freedom boils down to us academics refraining from interference, which is highly regretful, especially when lack of engagement of one party results in lack of engagement of the other.

School has always been more than a place where they trade knowledge. It endorses moral values, the loss of which might lead whole civilizations to collapse. Irrespective of the subject, there is a moral dimension to every class. It seems that we have reached the times when morality became a vague term, permissiveness is omnipresent and education of individuals, be it foreign language instruction or thermodynamic engineering, might be adversely affected by tensions of sociocultural rather than cognitive character.

Local Institute of Technology; The Introduction to Academic Writing; Junior Students

T6/CI8: I don’t speak English

I recognized Monika in my class after meeting her once only during a peer observation in a language school. Back in time, I watched a presentation her peers and she gave on the topic of living in big cities. It was a basic Matura group, but the speakers were confident, fluent, and very creative. I remember this clearly because after the lesson I talked with my fellow teacher about the effort she was putting into leading the students through the exam tasks, and how impressed she was to see them making progress this fast. Having spotted Monika in the back row, I thought I could hope for a highly motivated performer.

The critical moment was the first group task two weeks into the course. The students were supposed to brainstorm and discuss the major differences between the lower and higher education in Poland using a selected pre-writing technique. I was walking around and monitoring their work. The first time I approached Monika’s group, I saw two ladies out of three talking and one taking notes. The one writing was Monika. Only later did I realize that the points she jotted down were all in Polish. The second time I took a look, Monika was still quiet looking through the window. I asked the two girls to try and engage the colleague. I also told Monika I was sure she had interesting things to say, and her contribution was important for the task completion. They all answered “OK”, and the work continued. Nothing has changed, though. The two girls were active, Monika was not. The time came to hear an account of what they decided on. I asked Monika to report on the discussion, but she said she could not speak English. The ladies wanted to help, I stopped them and said to Monika I would be happy with very simple language as long as she gives me the main points. She refused. The peers did the job while I asked her to stay after the class. She did not.

I could not force her to talk to me. Very soon I discovered that her writing was more than weak. I could hardly understand the way she expressed her thoughts. Consequently, her grades were the lowest in the class. I wrote remarks in her papers asking her to come over to my office so that we could talk things through. No response. During the lessons she never spoke again. What did all this mean? From a vivid presenter, Monika turned into a silent class participant; from a decent language speaker, she turned into a very weak writer. Just in two years.

One probable interpretation is that she did not feel motivated at her technical studies to work on her English skills any longer. If she felt she had achieved her goal, namely the Matura exam, she might have switched her attention to something else. Fair enough. Also, it is possible that she liked the exam preparation course so much that she doubled or tripled her efforts to succeed and please the instructor, but later lost all the enthusiasm or simply got disappointed with her teachers/class-mates, which resulted in her developing a bias against the subject. Another option is that the Matura exam was literally the last time she spoke English. If there was no need for her to actively use it (however ridiculous it sounds, foreign languages are still taught the way that does not require learners to open their mouths), it froze for good. I had never had a chance to evaluate Monika’s aptitude. I knew too little about her English skills to claim that she found it too difficult to comprehend and produce it (that was the case of my sister, who started learning three languages and always gave up after a few months complaining about pronunciation in English, syntax in German, and vocabulary in French). I never learnt about Monika as an individual. I did not know her story. What locked her up? I had no clue.
The general judgment I drew from this experience is that language learning is a highly sensitive process. It has its ups and downs because the learner interacts with a wide array of influences. These ups and downs might be of different intensity and include instances of drastic if not complete relapse. Metacognitive skills hypothetically allow the learner to monitor and regulate the process in some degree, yet, psychologically speaking, not every student is suited for successful self-regulation, just as many students are perfectly suited for self-destruction (by which I mean choosing the counterproductive learning strategies that hinder rather than enhance their cognitive efforts).

Local Institute of Technology; The Introduction to Academic Writing; Junior Students

**T6/CI9: We wrote it!**

The course was a one-semester pilot project in the English Department. Two sections were randomly selected to develop creative rather than academic writing skills. The syllabus involved practice in general aspects of written language (e.g. coherence, paraphrasing, consistency, etc.) and a few assignments, one of which was a literature-and-science task of storytelling. Students worked in groups and created a plot that related to a well-known scientific theory. In addition to composing a text, they were supposed to illustrate the read and print out a hard copy for assessment. The word limit was 1200 words. The other official requirement was to avoid any sensitive topics. The rest of the enterprise lay with the students.

In my male section, three boys worked on the story about an arrogant manager, who learnt his lesson after he challenged his friend to climb a dangerous mountain only to become himself a victim of an avalanche. Rescued by a tribe, he was put to an endurance test having to deal with hostility from some of its members. The outline of the story impressed me. The boys had a clear concept of how the manager’s adventures illustrated the law of gravity. They thought of a creative title (The Fall) and began to build the content. Importantly, they were B1-B2 learners of English, whose speaking skills came across as mediocre, similar to written tasks they did in class.

The critical incident grew out of the fact that the final draft of the story read much more advanced than the skills I had observed in the students. It is true that they stood out of the class in their intelligence and maturity. Several times before I’d thought that having such learners is every teacher’s ultimate pleasure. Yet I could not restrain from asking them directly if it was they who wrote the story. The elaboration of the language seemed a bit overwhelming at times. One of them especially took my remark personally and said it was insulting. They explained that naturally they had used resources such as dictionaries and thesauruses to write, but it was all theirs and they even suggested I could ask them about any piece of language in it.

That was unusual. First, I wanted to check upon the originality of the story, but my intention was far from accusing them of plagiarism. I had to explain myself extensively. The only good thing about the incident was that we had a constructive and open conversation, so even when Arthur told me how he felt about the situation, he seemed to keep emotions aside and his voice calm. I asked the boys a few times if they could understand my perspective and motives for raising the issue. They replied a few times they could. However, I still think it was a critical moment in my teaching as my action could easily cause a serious and unsubstantiated clash between me and decent learners.

I think what happened shows that I felt confident enough to confront the students, but before I did, I had not considered the scenario like this. Consequently, I was taken by surprise to hear that my assessment was wrong. On the other hand, I was brave enough to admit to false conclusions and avoid patronizing comments towards them to protect my reputation. The boys impressed me once more, which might mean my estimation of their language potential was wrong. I do not like to think that they were cheaters, but I never put them to a test so I cannot be absolutely sure.

What judgment can I formulate about teaching and learning English then? Well, language skills develop dynamically and differently from one another, and the manifestation of this development is not always straightforward/transparent. Production observed in class and this stimulated by the comfort of your own study might bear different characteristics. It is possible that an adult language learner has acquired the axioms of foreign syntax and can intelligently use established representations of the world and lexis in L1 to successfully convey meaning in L2.

English Department at a local university; Creative Writing Course; Junior Students
T6/CI10: Inconsistency

I can hardly explain the sequence of thoughts that occurred to me, but the other day I was enjoying my morning coffee, which is usually quiet contemplation of current affairs in my life, when I came to realize how inconsistent I tend to be in my professional and personal life with regard to venting my emotions.

In general, it appears I raise my voice way more frequently in the classroom than outside it. Actually, my everyday creed is to protect my home from any form of verbal aggression as I find shouting at people completely counterproductive. I am fully aware of how negatively I respond to yelling, and I wholeheartedly reject it as a form of communication. The truth is, though, poor service drives me mad. When I am attended to unprofessionally, I complain and explicitly show dissatisfaction immediately. Then I can turn sarcastic and mean even though my husband keeps reminding me it is not customer service people that take direct responsibility for the faults I report.

So, why is it so that a week or two ago I reprimanded my students for not paying attention in class, asking the same questions over and over again, and making the same mistakes in thesis statements? I lost temper in the second part of the class after they actually worked fine for forty minutes. Yet I did not show appreciation. I wanted everybody to be focused till the end. How childish and how embarrassing of me! The next time we met, I sort of made up for my faux pas telling the students I was happy with their initial performance but then I lost them, and I kindly asked them to try and survive for another two weeks until the semester ends. Funnily enough, I did not apologize for my behavior.

Do I take it for granted that teachers are eligible to show off their authority through raised voice? After so many years in the teaching “industry” I should understand that I can hardly motivate people pointing out their weaknesses. On the other hand, I do sometimes wait for the class to lower their voices. It does work when I simply stand in front of them looking at those chatting or texting. Someone will always poke them to give a signal to stop. Indeed, not every student is respectful; not every student cares about his or her conduct; some cheat and turn vicious towards you. There is always an amount of hatred in their evaluations even if you act like an angel because anonymous comments have a therapeutic meaning for some people. And still I should ask, so what? Do I take a revenge when I shout? What about the students who did not disturb in any way? How do they feel when they hear the teacher calling out the pitiful comments towards the crowd?

Is my behavior as a teacher so tightly connected to my psychological state at a specific moment that I fail to control my responses? If it is so, I might be doomed as I am aging and gradually I might have less and less patience on the whole. Somehow, the stereotypical image of an elderly teacher that I keep in my mind is one of a malcontent. I wish I could fight it in me and finish my career in an honorable manner. Is it called double standards, isn’t it? Respect and understanding, which I believe are the foundation of healthy relationships within family and which I expect to build in mine, do not seem to be the priorities in the classroom. I should definitely monitor my behavior more effectively and remember that I can be different (better) than this.

English Department, Local University; Academic Writing; Junior Students

T6/CI11: Limiting structure

A student stopped by my office to take a look at her in-class written assignment (process essay), which scored 89 percent. She was not pleased with the result and wanted to see her mistakes. We went through the rubric together and concluded that it was the faulty structure of the paragraphs that lowered the grade. Each sentence therein presented contrasting information about two cities, while the model for students to use asked for elaborating on each of them separately. The student could not understand the problem. I explained that the structure of the essay aims to organize ideas in a clear way and hence to help the reader follow the text easily. I added that anyway she was a good writer so if she could improve on the structure, I would be happy to grant her the highest score. Then she replied that she writes poetry and needs to feel free to be able to write well. Structures constrain her and her talent. I kindly disagreed with the student and said the frame still leaves a lot of room for free expression and she is most welcome to choose what to write and how. Without the frame, however, it would be impossible to treat students’ writing in a fair unbiased manner, not to mention how difficult it would be for them to develop their writing skills in a systematic goal-oriented way. She left.
Then I remembered that I encountered a similar case a couple of years earlier. Another student complained about how difficult it was for him, the novelist, to satisfy the requirements for the argumentative essay. I am not sure what my reply was then, though.

What happened was essential as I got a signal from good students that they felt they had failed as language learners and they found it difficult to accept that. In my view, they did not, but how can a teacher convince a student he or she is successful with the feedback that involves pointing out their wrong-doing? If they take such feedback personally, little can be done to reverse it. What’s the alternative? Not to tell them? No, it’s not the option either.

I like to think that a talented writer displays not only great sentence skills, but also coherent and well supported thinking. This takes intelligence, and intelligence allows him or her to accept the fact that writing comes in different forms and they are governed by different rules. This also means that a good writer understands that an email to the teacher is inherently more formal than a text message to a friend; that the latter might give up on the opening and closing courtesies while the former should not; that when he or she argues a point, it is important to stay objective and remember about opposing views for the sake of one’s own credibility. A structure is imposed, true, but it does not interfere with the content of the text. It is evident in writing as opposed to listening or speaking. But the two also use structure. Basically, everything in life is structured in one way or another. Writing poetry is regulated just as storytelling. They could probably judge how well or poorly someone was doing within their field of expertise. Stages and sequences that organize ideas are always there, unless anarchy rules.

On the other hand, learners of English, including quite advanced students, might perceive writing as a painful necessity, without which life could be way easier. Especially in the era of high-tech information exchange, paper-and-pencil writing activities come across as out of place. Many learners question the skill itself but perhaps the majority object to restrictions they have to follow within specific formats. The skill demands a lot of conscious control from the writer over foreign syntax, lexis, mechanics, grammar, but above all unified and coherent ideas. To coordinate these is a challenge for most L2 learners. The longer texts students have to write and the more rules they come across, the more rebellious they seem to become about writing. No wonder the skill takes the longest to master.

English Department, Local University; Academic Writing; Junior Students

T6/CII2: Extra work

A fellow-teacher asked me one day if I could inspire her with ideas for Subject-Verb agreement exercises, which she meant to prepare for her weakest students as additional practice at home. Quite unexpectedly to her, I had to refuse as I had developed a strong bias against all sorts of handouts in the era of ubiquitous photocopies.

First, I simply hate it when I enter the classroom only to find paper left all over the place after the previous group. Several times I studies the abandoned pages and wondered why a teacher would bother to use tones of A4 format paper and even more printing toner to present students with blurred and ultra-unattractive black and white pictures, clumsily arranged reading passages, the font size six at the largest, not to mention endless grammar exercises brought in to class for the sake of mutual torture.

Second, as a learner, I tend to be very well-organized. It is important for me to have a textbook and a notebook in which I can freely jot down or highlight the content to refer back to in the future. The photocopies have always caused an organizational dilemma to me. How to store them? How to study from them? There is such a strange touch to them. What if our learners feel the same way?

Third, I could not understand why my friend volunteered to put much extra effort in the making of a hand-out to be most likely ignored by the three weakest girls. As she explained, they were not very happy about the idea of doing extra exercises at home, yet she believed they could benefit from this practice. I could easily imagine how frustrated she was going to be if they failed to accomplish the task. Teachers cannot afford to waste their precious time on their own request. To be well-understood, it is not that extra work is wrong, but extra work in the form of additional exercises for sure is, especially if the student shows resentment at the outset.

Here the problem was S-V agreement. I immediately thought of storytelling. The students could be asked to simply write an anecdote and illustrate an important part of it so as the reader had to guess the message behind the picture and combine it with the text to make complete sense. OR: The students could
be given a nice colorful notebook (small size) as a present from the teacher. They would be asked to write one sentence every day following the pattern FUSS — funny, unusual, scary, stupid. OR: After the class the teacher could write three pre-thought sentence beginnings in the student’s notebook, e.g. Puppies … When my best friend …, etc. The idea is to approach the issue in a way that stands the slightest chance of success, and at the same time to save preparation time. Every sentence in English includes the issue in question, which means this extra practice might have been literally everything.

The event was critical because with my friend’s request came a reflection about my own stance on photocopying and hand-outs. Having named the things above, I can clearly see that it is important to critically judge the value of another handout we want to prepare for class and think ahead of the points I tried to make.

This is exactly where teacher creativity lies. We should expand boundaries and surprise our students who tend to think low of handouts. Extra work is a burden and we make it very heavy for them.

Language School; B1 teenage learners of general English
**T7/CI1: Uncountable nouns**

The situation took place during a lesson with my adult B2 group. We had previously revised uncountable nouns and the nouns with the plural forms only, so I wanted the students to practice these in sentences when playing a board game. Divided into small groups, my students were supposed to move along and discuss sentences such as *Modern furniture is less comfortable than old-fashioned furniture*. Every time they stopped at a statement like this, they had to express their own opinions on the topic and discuss it with the other group members. I was monitoring the activity and clarified things when necessary. As usual, I took notes on students’ mistakes to comment on ones later. When the game finished, one of the ladies asked if she could say something. She said she couldn’t see the point in doing exercises of the kind as she was not corrected even once and hence had no idea if she was doing well or not. The remark hurt my feelings. I took it personally.

For the first time a student of mine publicly criticized my ways of arranging things in class and showed discontent so explicitly. Within seconds, my surprise turned into frustration that she had completely failed to grasp the objective of the task. In reply I emphasized that it was a communicative activity and my aim was to provide them with the opportunity to build spoken fluency while exchanging spontaneous comments. That’s why language accuracy was of secondary importance even though I kept record of their common mistakes and it was a thing to examine at a later stage. The student and her peers nodded showing understanding of the arguments.

It was the moment when I realized my irritation was caused by my own fault, not hers. I was actually angry with myself for not explaining things earlier. I understood that learners, especially adult ones, need to make sense of what they do so as to regard it as useful. The teacher’s role is to ensure they are aware of the goal before they engage into an activity. Lack of clear explanation discloses incompetence.

The incident made me more vigilant and perceptive. I try to motivate students to work through activities showing to them how useful they are for the process of language learning.

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**T7/CI2: Teddy Eddie**

This year I have been running lessons for very young learners (2 and 3-year-olds), using the Teddy Eddie teaching method. The Teacher Pack contains toys: the teddy bear and other fluffy characters, flash cards, and a colorful sock, to name just a few, which I usually carried into the classroom in a big box. Due to their age, the kids come to the school with their parents, but during the lesson the latter stay outside the room, which causes many problematic situations. It happens that saying “Goodbye” is very painful for both. Kids often cry, refuse to leave mummy or daddy and join their peers. This could always affect other kids, whose moods and behavior were easily influenced by the moods and behavior of others. A quick yet subtle response seemed crucial in such circumstances so as not to attract anybody’s attention.

For the first time I faced such a situation at the beginning of the spring semester. There was a new girl in the group, and that day before the class she was very upset. Sitting on her mum’s lap, she looked as if she was just about to burst into tears. Her mother was trying to convince her to go and enjoy the class, yet unsuccessfully. I was afraid this could be noticed by the other group members, so I showed the girl a mascot – Teddy Eddie – and said that the bear was upset that day and needed someone to take care of him.

My intention was to induce the girl’s sympathy for the toy, which felt the same way as she did. Maybe this way, non-consciously, she could identify her own feelings and re-direct them towards the object. To my surprise, the girl took on a new role immediately. She grasped the toy, detached her mum and found her place among other kids in the classroom, cuddling the bear.

I felt proud that I could find a swift and effective solution to the problem. Later, I used the same idea again and again and each time it was as successful. This experience made me understand that with very little kids the key point is to shift their attention from such distracting factors as fear of being separated from the parent. Even more importantly, though, adults should take advantage of this inherent property in children to help or assist and to play roles, from which they derive a lot of excitement and satisfaction.
**T7/CI3: Kasia and Ola**

The situation took place in the group of sixth-graders in a language school. The children were usually very responsive and motivated. Yet, at an early stage of the year I made peculiar observations. Two girls (Kasia and Ola), who seemed to have made friends, stopped talking to each other and chose distant seats in the classroom. Kasia’s behavior caught my attention in particular. She showed signs of inferiority complex, got demotivated far too easily, claimed that she could not understand anything and that she was supposed to be at a lower level altogether. I was fed up with her remarks about how stupid she was. When I was explaining new things, she would not listen but keep herself distracted with other things as if she found her ignorance a comfortable state to be in; she made zero effort to follow instructions, to read a passage, or to do an exercise as her assumption was these were too difficult tasks for her.

The thing was the way she perceived herself did not reflect her language competences. I had no doubts she was rightly placed at the B1 level, which became evident in quizzes and whenever I approached her individually to clarify something. She could do things more than satisfactorily. My guess was that with her bizarre behavior she meant to attract attention to deeper problems she was struggling with. Did she attempt to induce sympathy in me for her imaginary misery? I can’t tell. I tried a few times to make it clear to her that to me she was much more capable a teenager than she thought and that her self-image was distorted. Positive feedback and praise she got from me concerned the tiniest things: a well-completed sentence or an explanation of a word to the group. She would not buy any of these.

A critical situation emerged in the spring semester when one day I asked Kasia to read out loud a sentence from the exercise on adjectives describing emotions they had just finished. She mispronounced a word in her sentence and Ola, her former friend, corrected her. It was clear that Kasia took the correction personally. She angrily snapped that she found the remark needless. That provoked Ola, who barked back about the unbearable behavior of the other. All of a sudden, Kasia tore a page out of the textbook and threw it into the bin. Everybody, including myself, was shocked.

First, I had no idea what to do. I didn’t want the conflict to escalate and affect the whole group, yet I could not leave such a misconduct and property damage like this. I tried to cool things down with a bit of humor and since the topic was Emotions, I said the girls perfectly illustrated the feeling of anger we had just used in the exercise. I asked Ola to choose an adjective to describe her feeling; she selected frustrated and gave me a gentle smile. Kasia, on the other hand, was still fuming. She was sitting still while we went on with the exercise. Unexpectedly, two girls jumped towards Kasia and grabbed her calipers. Apparently, she wanted to hurt her hand, which I hadn’t noticed. Kasia had no sign on her skin, so I could not tell if it was true, but I confiscated the instrument anyway. I found the whole incident highly alarming, but Kasia smiled, which made me even more concerned.

I decided to inform her parents no matter if she really meant to injure herself or not. I waited for her dad to collect her after the class. We had talked before about Kasia’s behavior, so he was not surprised and as previously he promised to talk to his daughter at home. He also confirmed my suspicions that she had a very low self-esteem not only with regard to English but other school subjects too, while the conflict with a good friend did not make it easier for her. I ensured him that there were numerous reasons to praise her and told him about her sporadic but good performance in English.

In retrospect I still have doubts if my reaction was adequate. The conversation with the parent was necessary, I knew that. Yet, perhaps I should have talked to the girls after the class first and try at least to help them resolve their problem. This I am not sure about, though. Did they need this intervention from someone who did not even know what it was all about? I suspect I was not ready to leave the role of their teacher and to become a counselor instead. What I regret the most though is that I never talked to the girls about their behavior in class and made them realize how personal matters should not distract the lesson for others.

**T7/CI4: I can’t read Miss**

The class was at the very beginning of the school year and the textbook had not been selected yet. But it was already the fourth lesson and high time to get down to ‘hard work.’ The group were teenagers at the intermediate level in a language school. At some point of the class, while I was distributing handouts with a reading passage, a boy asked me to not give him any because he could not understand texts in English,
and, interestingly, it was a waste of paper anyway. He also said that he could read in English but without comprehension.

I was shocked but, to start on a light-hearted note in case he was joking, I said that it could be the most interesting text he had ever encountered in his life and maybe the easiest one, so it would be a pity if he missed that opportunity. He took the paper reluctantly but while the whole group was reading and searching for their answers, he was fiddling with the paper and rolling his eyes a lot. I did not ask him about anything, but he could see I was watching him.

The task was to read about a nightmare holiday, highlight all awful things that happened to the tourist and rate them from the worst to least disturbing. The next step was to exchange the information in groups, and if possible, demonstrate agreeing/disagreeing functions. The class aimed at group diagnosis rather than skill development. I was monitoring their work, trying to build a map of who is working enthusiastically, and who is taking advantage of others, how they participate in communication, how quickly they lose interest in the task and each other. I elicited reports from selected group members and asked random students about their experiences before we moved on to vocabulary exploration. The boy kept quiet during the group discussion, but he volunteered to talk about his nightmare holiday. I interacted as if everything was ok because I heard a decent, although language-wise poor, account of events.

After the class I analyzed the case. It was critical because I got stuck. I had no idea what to do. The fact that I ignored the boy was perhaps too drastic. Basically, apart from the joke, I did very little to encourage him to work. I let my confusion take over. On the other hand, I succeeded (especially with the conversation we had) because my instinctive response revealed a bit about him. One option is that he said what he said because he meant to entertain the peers with his cocky ways. He could hope to irritate the teacher and enjoy the scene even more. After he understood that this did not work, he became active and absorbing attention as soon as he could. Actually, telling the story, he giggled himself once or twice and watched the group as if in pursuit of applause.

Another option I could think of was that he genuinely struggled to make sense of written language. Hyperactivity, short attention span, intellectual deficiencies? I hadn’t noticed anything strange about him before, but it was all possible. If that was the case, my sulky attitude was highly inappropriate. My job is to identify and address students’ difficulties, not act upon assumptions. He reached the intermediate level of proficiency and had to deal with texts at school too.

I had no choice but investigate, i.e. observe how he managed text on the board, slides, and colorful leaflets – was it that associations he had about reading 300 words in print put him off? I would have to ask indirect questions checking his understanding of discourse. I could talk to him or his parents to find out more. I could consult more experienced teachers, or study literature. I realized that not knowing much the teacher can only open to both more interpretations of the case and perhaps even more options to solve it.

Getting mentally ready for a challenge, whatever it takes, paradoxically brings peace to heart and makes us more sensitive in our observations.

T7/C15: Talk? Thank you. I have my phone

Last semester I was teaching teenagers in the language school, and some of them gave impression that the afternoon classes are a form of punishment for them. Before the lesson, they sat in the room completely absorbed with their telephones and practically there was no talking between them. They did not exchange Hello’s, nor did they ask about homework to copy, which would perhaps be less irritating than dead silence up to the point the teacher broke it. I noticed that uncomfortable opening silence a few classes in a row. I would step into the room, greet the group, receive one reply maybe, unpack my things with them uninterestingly following my moves. I would chat them up about the day, compliment someone’s hairstyle, and still nothing.

Once I deliberately arrived earlier to see what I can do with one or two students. Would I manage to trigger a conversation and take it into the lesson so that others could see that interaction feels better than indifference? This cost me a lot and I hate to say my efforts did not bring desired effects. Margaret was the first to enter the room. She saw me and withdrew. I encouraged her to come in while arranging some stickers on the board. I was casual in the way I addressed her. I lowered my voice even so as not to sound like a teacher. I said I somehow confused the time and came an hour earlier. She did not find it as funny as I did. When I asked if she had ever confused the time, she could not remember. Importantly, we spoke in L1 to make it more natural. Then Bartek joined us. He sat across the room. Since we had once met in a
supermarket nearby, I asked if he lived in the neighborhood. A sharp ‘No’ and that was it. I was devastated. I thought they hated me for the reason I could not work out. I kept quiet for 15 seconds and the next thing I saw were their smartphones. Complete disaster. I gave up. I conducted the class as usual but then late in the evening I thought a lot about it.

The critical thing here is that I could identify a problem and tried hard to fix it while my students did not seem to see the problem at all. Interestingly, that was the only problem I had with that group. During the class they did things as instructed, so when I instructed them to exchange information, they did talk to each other, their faces a bit waxy, though. Why did they behave like this before classes then? Perhaps this was the only way of behavior they knew and there was no need to explore others. If this is how they function at school and more importantly at home, the teacher who sees them twice a week only can hardly induce any change.

Another possibility was that the configuration of characters in the class was so that none of them stood out. There was no distinct leader among them to shake them up a bit; someone they admired or envied; someone funny to make them laugh; someone they could tease – no personal chemistry. They were all decent kids, nothing special, meaning boring. Funnily enough, the school would always emphasize the communicative approach to language teaching and its effectiveness. My job was to ensure that they got a chance to negotiate meaning, namely open to partners in interaction (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). That was impossible to my mind with their frozen selves and I was not sure how to melt them. At the same time, I thought partners in communication do not have to like each other, and openness is about intellectual effort of making sense, not necessarily smiling at people and keeping the conversation going. It might be that I exaggerated and was too emotional about the whole thing because I wanted to have a friendly group of collaborating people to teach. Me giving up was the right thing to do, but I think the motive behind it was wrong. I was sulky.

The young generation of learners see communication very differently from the generation of their teachers. They do not stop being influenced by social media and technologies when they come to English lessons. Hence the concept of information exchange as they perceive it cannot be ignored in L2 classroom. Communicative activities must be designed around goals to achieve. They have simply become tasks to do, which can still give them a sense of success, although this success does not have to do with establishing relationships any longer.

**T7/C16: Endurance**

I had a class observed about a month ago. It was a listening and vocabulary-oriented lesson from the textbook at B2 level. Young adult students in a language school, an evening course. During the feedback, I heard that I had mispronounced one of the new lexical items – “endurance” – in which the stress falls on the second, not the first syllable. I thanked for pointing out the problem.

The Director of Studies did not make any fuss of it. She simply asked me to double check in the future the low-frequency words as we all tend to confuse them. I felt embarrassed not because of my supervisor but because of my students. In class I had made them repeat the wrong pronunciation several times, which means its auditory representation was created and already stored, even if temporarily.

I made the correction the next class although it cost me a lot. I had struggled thinking of the right way to do it, so out of mental fatigue I chose the easiest option. I was honest. I admitted in front of my students the error was pointed out by my supervisor. I also took advantage of this situation to discuss the difference between mistake and error as the latter is internalized and rather difficult to root out. We even joked about how now I need to unlearn the wrong pronunciation and learn a new one.

I think instinctively I knew they would sympathize because they can find the problem of picking up the right/wrong pronunciation relevant, especially in the era of unlimited English resources on the Internet which come from a wide range of speakers. One student even admitted that he experienced this kind of embarrassment in his Speaking Matura Exam when he kept pronouncing the word “purchase” the same as “poor” and was ultimately corrected by a member of the exam panel. I was happy that I told them about the error. Personally, I felt relieved, but also professionally pardoned.

Interestingly, with more proficient students it seems fully justifiable to return to and fix things if necessary, as their metacognitive skills are already decently developed, and hence, they can consciously control the regulation process. Another point is that misleading students, however unprofessional, does happen out of teachers’ incompetency.
Good teachers are not those who never make mistakes, but those who understand their consequences and hence decide to put them right.

**T7/CI7: There is / Is there?**

I heard a conversation in the teachers’ common room the other day (a private language school) about “there is/there are” – a colleague of mine consulted another about ideas to introduce and practice the structure with ten-year-old kids. What attracted my attention was the fact that they both assumed 60 minutes of a lesson was enough to present affirmatives, questions, and negatives, so the whole talk was spinning about how to do it, not why to do it in one go.

Because I am not a very experienced teacher, I said nothing so as not to come across as big-headed or something. Besides, it was both my intuition and own learning experience from ages ago rather than well supported professional knowledge that made me think kids would hardly benefit from such an overloaded lesson. I said nothing but it bothered me for a while, which is why I find it a critical incident.

The structure itself does not exist in Polish, and I remember how I struggled to grasp the difference between JEST expressed by IT IS (e.g. *It’s cold outside.*) and JEST expressed by THERE IS (e.g. *There is snow outside*.). The model that emphasized nouns and adjectives that respectively followed JEST did not help much because my knowledge of grammar terms was not well developed at that time yet. My teacher did it all in Polish, so I keep this confusing JEST memory up to day. To my mind, kids need to capture the concept first, which takes time as they should be exposed to natural and level-appropriate contexts to illustrate the usage. Demonstrating what you, the teacher, have in your bag, and then explaining the rules of question- and negation-making in one short class might turn language learning into a ridiculous memorizing experience for the sake of written tests.

In this case L1-L2 discrepancies are clearly one factor that helped me understand how difficult it can be for the learners to comprehend the new language. The prior knowledge of plural and singular nouns and potential problems with its application are not the only things teachers should consider before they get down to lesson preparation.

One reason why many instructors approach *there is/there are* in a rather mechanical (no to say superficial) manner might be that textbooks do the same. Usually, they offer a picture of a space with objects in it as a starting input point, followed by a couple of pictures for students to identify differences or more grammar-oriented tasks of choosing the right TO BE form. No wonder, teachers are tempted to replace these with something more exciting, overlooking at the same time the core issue – the challenging nature of the structure itself.

Another reason might be that they do not differentiate the age groups and take it for granted that mental processes involved in building representations for *there is/there are* in children resemble those in older learners, who make much more associative work on new structures.

**T7/CI8: Key words**

My supervisor asked me around the end of the school year to select a reading passage for my teenage B2 students for their final exam. She was building a bank of resources and naturally needed a bit of support from the staff members. I found what I consider a very interesting text about the Siri voiceover and the woman behind the application. The DOS agreed that the text was perfectly suitable both age and level-wise, which is why she wanted to include it in our teaching resources platform with a couple of exercises to go along. I was encouraged to select words from the text for students to remember and think of a task for their effective use in practice. I decided that a summary writing or completion would be a good idea, so I went on to pick the lexical items.

However, my choices were rejected, and I could only understand why after we discussed them one by one. For example, I included the word *embrace* on the glossary list while my mentor made me realize that it was highly irrelevant for the exercise I had on my mind. Instead, I completely ignored words such as *nonsensical* or *insecurities* which related to key events in the woman’s story (e.g. The Apple company recorded her read nonsensical phrases which they later cut into pieces to create the phrases they needed. OR: She had a lot of fears and insecurities about her life at the time she was offered the job.). *Embrace, on*
the other hand, was used in the concluding part of the text to refer to the characteristics of the job she did (You are expected to embrace the opportunity …).

I realized that my thinking about the vocabulary selection was very superficial compared to this approach. I simply liked certain words and the phrases they were part of. I did not really think a lot about the perspective of the students and their potential benefits. I assumed that since the level was recognized as the right one, any outstanding lexis will do. Very naïve and unprofessional.

I am glad I could experience in practice what it means to decide on my own about the adequacy of language and how it feels to regret that I hadn’t considered things more seriously/expertly at the outset. I perfectly understand what summary is about, just as I understand the concept of key words, yet I failed to demonstrate this understanding in practice. Out of curiosity, I selected another text and highlighted the key words for my boss to check if I was going the right direction. This time it was intermediate. I succeeded.

The point is the ready-made materials are not always there for teachers to use. Especially with authentic sources which teachers decide to adopt for instructional purposes, we need to be careful when selecting the words to learn. Rationalization might be a key word here. To bear our students in mind is not enough. We need to ask and answer several questions about their prior knowledge of language, relevance of the words, their functionality, etc.

T7/C19: Individual classes

For two months last semester I had individual classes with a 12-year-old girl, whose mum thought a tutor could miraculously help her daughter to pass the English subject at school. Ola was a low achiever. She was coming to classes twice a week mainly to brush up on the material from her textbook. Every lesson was a huge challenge for me because interaction with the girl seemed impossible. She never answered a single question (including Did you have breakfast today?), which means I talked, and she sometimes read passages from the book or sentences from the exercises. I got fed up. I suffered physically and mentally before our Tuesday and Friday meetings. I would develop headaches and anxiety, and I really questioned the whole idea.

When Ola’s mother made a decision to give up on our lessons, I was the happiest person in the world, but I also started thinking about how I couldn’t manage this burden. I was impatient and completely demotivated to think of original ways to help the girl, so my classes were boring. She would be sitting in front of me in a big classroom as silent as the grave and I would be looking forward to the end of the horror. The classroom - that was the second reason for the failure, I think. The physical conditions of our lessons were unfavorable. The acoustics of the room, its size and bare walls, intense lighting, and a conspicuous absence of other students made the atmosphere difficult to relax. I was not myself either. Normally, I would joke and play around with children to shake them up a bit but with Ola, everything was somehow inappropriate. She never showed emotions. I never knew how she found my ideas.

It must have been very difficult for the girl too. I don’t think she talked openly with her mum. I don’t think she ever talked to her mum. But of course, she could understand what was happening to her. I’m afraid the individual classes with me could only deepen reservations in the girl about learning English. I never complained about this experience, but it was a nightmare in terms of conduct and effectiveness.

The conclusion could be that individual tuition maintains its status as a remedy to learning difficulties. Focus placed on one student supposedly allows the teacher to discover his or her strengths and weaknesses and address them expertly. Gaps in knowledge can be worked on meticulously, time devoted to practice regulated accordingly, and activities adjusted easily to the individual interests. However, tuition does not guarantee success. A few conditions must be met to make it work, among which the environment, attitudes, and mental disposition for one-to-one interaction are essential ones.

T7/C110: Peer observation

In the language school I work in it is a common practice among teachers to observe each other as a form of professional development. Sometimes the Director of Studies prompts such observations that are supposed to target at specific areas of teaching, for example class management or instructions giving. The latter was my task. I observed an experienced teacher running a class for C1 adult learners and was expected to
comment on how I found her ways about instructions. During the lesson something else caught my attention, though. It was the use of the board, which I considered a bit disturbing. At the end of the class the surface was covered with various unrelated records, scattered all over in a clumsiest way possible. For instance, there was the word *efficient* because someone asked for correct spelling; there was the phrase *cause someone to do something* because a student made a mistake; there was a *T-diagram* for the topic they discussed; there was some sentence to illustrate the use of the *opening* *Among others, there is* … and many more items. I could see some students copied into their notebooks whatever she wrote, which made me contemplate the usefulness of such notes.

If I were a student in her class, I wouldn’t mind perhaps. However, if I had to use my notes to prepare for the exam, I would have no idea in a couple of weeks or months why I had some of the items in there at all. A general assumption is that studying is rather difficult from disorganized notes, which I experienced a lot at studies and the prejudice was still strong enough. On the other hand, the argument might be that the whole class is reflected on the board. You look at it and you can see topic-related vocabulary. I would disagree. The word *efficient* was accidental in the sense it was a by-product of a group discussion during which a student was noting down the main points to report back on, and the teacher spotted the misspelling. Of course, advance students should organize their notes their own way and clarify or highlight what should be remembered about the elements. But do they?

All in all, the effectiveness of note-taking is dependent to some extent on the way the information is organized on the board/slides. In other words, ideally, if students make an effort to write down things during the class, what they take home should serve a purpose. This purpose is, speaking most generally, to learn from the notes. The teacher cannot monitor everything the students write down but must understand that she can structure the class clearly and use emphasis to point to the elements worth keeping a record of.
APPENDIX C: Graphs and tables

The distribution of the components in the subjects’ CI reports including the thoughts units about the critical points.

P1

Critical Incident Description Analysis Judgment

P2

Critical Incident Description Analysis Judgment
**T1’s affective TUs in the description and analysis segments**

![Graph 1]

**T5’s affective TUs in the description and analysis segments**

![Graph 2]
T7’s affective TUs in the description and analysis segments
SUMMARY IN POLISH

Struktura poznawcza człowieka jest bytem zmieniającym się w czasie, a ewolucja jaką przechodzi odbywa się przy udziale jednostki (procesów myślowych/interpretacyjnych, którymi steruje) oraz interakcji społecznych. Nauczyciele języka angielskiego dysponują wiedzą specjalistyczną wynikającą ze stosownego wykształcenia akademickiego, osobistym doświadczeniem uczenia się i nauczania języka obcego, ale także ukształtowanymi pod ich wpływem przekonaniami i postawami wobec zadań i roli nauczyciela w procesie edukacyjnym. Podejmowanie decyzji dydaktycznych oraz rozwiązywanie problemów nieustannie angażują dostępne źródła wiedzy, przy czym, jak wykazują badania, wysiłek umysłowy nauczycieli ekspertów cechuje się wyjątkową sprawnością operacyjną.

Przedmiotem badań w niniejszej pracy jest analiza procesu diagnozowania zdarzeń krytycznych, czyli sytuacji, które zaskakują swoim przebiegiem a tym samym motywują nauczycieli do zdefiniowania ich przyczyn oraz znaczenia w kontekście uczenia się/nauczania języka angielskiego. W podejściu kognitywnym, które stanowi zakres terytorialny dla teoretycznych rozważań na temat zmian w strukturze poznawczej nauczycieli, diagnozowanie zdarzeń krytycznych postrzegane jest jako pobudzanie procesów kognitywnych, którego skutkiem jest nie tylko lepsze zrozumienie zależności przyczynowo-skutkowych, ale także pogłębianie istniejących struktur wiedzy. Celem pracy było zatem rozpoznawanie i ocena potencjalnych zmian w charakterze wykorzystywania informacji oraz rozumowania jako czynników wpływających na budowanie wiedzy fachowej nauczycieli. Narzędziem analizy były raporty o zdarzeniach krytycznych wygenerowane przez nauczycieli języka angielskiego w ciągu roku lub dwóch lat pracy w zawodzie.

Dysertacja składa się z trzech rozdziałów. Rozdział pierwszy przedstawia miejsce wskazanej problematyki w literaturze naukowej i stanowi przegląd koncepcji i teorii na temat rozwijania umiejętności eksperta w nauczaniu. Uwagę skupiono zwłaszcza na efektywnie sterowanym wykorzystaniu zasobów uwagi, pamięci i wiedzy w procesie rozwiązywania problemów, przy czym źródła wiedzy nauczyciela oraz jej charakter stanowią szczególnie istotny element w dyskusji na temat jego fachowości. Stopień refleksyjności czy świadomej obecności nauczyciela w klasie zostały omówione tutaj.
jako zmienne atrybutywne, których natężenie ma ogromne znaczenie w procesie rozwoju zawodowego.

Rozdział drugi poświęcony jest zdarzeniom krytycznym w nauczaniu języka angielskiego jako obcego. Podkreśla on intencjonalność jako warunek rozpoznania i analizy zdarzeń. Przedstawia także wieloetapowość procesu diagnozowania wydarzeń w klasie i nominowania ich do rangi krytycznych, na podstawie którego nauczyciele formułują wartoścujące sądy w obrębie dziedziny nauczania języka. Emocjonalny odbiór zdarzeń stanowi ważny czynnik regulujący procesy myślowe nauczycieli i jako taki zyskuje szczególną uwagę w tej części pracy.

W rozdziale trzecim zawarta jest opisowa analiza i interpretacja materiału badawczego zgromadzonego w ramach studium siedmiu przypadków przy użyciu hybrydowej metody jakościowo-ilościowej. Zawężony i uszczegółowiony obszar badania, a tym samym materiał badawczy, podniósł jego skuteczność i wiarygodność, choć umiejętność refleksji i narracji, możliwości intelektualne poszczególnych osób, czy wreszcie ich zaangażowanie były decydujące dla uzyskanych wyników. Analiza materiału pozwoliła sformułować wnioski na temat prawidłowości rządzących procesem diagnozowania zdarzeń krytycznych przez badanych nauczycieli.

Wnioski wypływające z przeprowadzonego badania, zawarte w zakończeniu pracy, mogą być szczególnie przydatne w procesie kształcenia akademickiego nauczycieli języka angielskiego. Budowanie mechanizmu reagowania na to co nieprzewidywalne i emocjonalnie trudne do przyjęcia wymaga wysiłku poznawczego, który może nie tylko zaowocować słusznymi decyzjami i skutecznymi rozwiązaniami problemów w klasie, ale także pozwolić na lepsze zrozumienie szkolnej rzeczywistości i uniknięcie wielu problematycznych sytuacji.