

What Teaching Taught Me About Myself: Becoming a Teacher Across Time

by

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Abstract

This thesis explored how my personal and professional lives shaped my identity and teaching practices as an ESL teacher, as well as how teaching became a way of understanding myself. Using autoethnography and arts-based educational research (ABER), I examined my experience across 12 years of teaching English through writing and artistic inquiry. Data generation included drawings, painting, sculpture, mosaic, music composition, and personal reflections. The analysis followed a visuo-textual approach that considered both written and visual data. The findings were organized in three timeframes representing different stages of my personal, professional, and academic lives.

The findings showed that my identity and teaching practices were shaped through ongoing interactions between personal experiences, professional environments, institutional expectations, and emotional experiences. Teaching was closely connected to repetition, adaptation, and belonging. The analysis also showed how different educational contexts influenced the ways I understood myself as a teacher and how I navigated professional expectations.

This thesis contributes to studies about teacher identity and arts-based research in ESL education as a space where teachers might come to understand themselves over time.

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This thesis began with questions about teaching and ended up becoming a conversation with myself.

To my advisor, thank you for your guidance and patience.

To my brother, thank you for being direct and explaining things in a way I was able to understand better. I hated not receiving the answers right away, but I now understand what you meant when you said I had to figure it out for myself.

To Babi, thank you for dealing with my newfound feelings and for helping me whenever I asked for help, even when I almost made you have a heart attack with the alginate on my face.

To my parents, thank you for raising me, supporting me, and helping me through the hardships of life.

To the versions of myself, the traces you left behind were important enough to have a story to tell.

Dedication

Dedicated to the girl who kept drawing before she understood why.

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Chapter 1 — Introduction and Situating Myself

According to some of the Indigenous teachings I learned in 2024 in my class with Leah Fontaine, the circle is a very important shape for Indigenous peoples. Numerous meanings come from the circle. During one of the classes, Leah Fontaine explained the importance of students being able to connect with themselves, their culture, and their family. She mentioned the four guiding questions created by the Honorable Murray Sinclair (see Figure 1) which, from an Indigenous perspective, help balance the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual systems of the individuals (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2022). This Indigenous Education Policy Framework draws on the Circle of Courage (Brendtro et al., 2002) to support an inclusive education system for children and youth empowerment, and is in turn based on the First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2022).

I do not focus on the Mental Wellness aspect of the framework; rather, I focus on the four guiding questions to have a deeper connection to myself. Wellness is a balance of the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of life, which is the focus of the framework. I am connecting parts of myself with my research; therefore, I feel the need to understand important aspects of my life. And to do so, I have decided to structure my work using the four guiding questions to situate myself in this research. Although teachings associated with the circle differ across Indigenous Nations, the Mamâhtawisin framework presents four cardinal directions and each direction with its meaning and question: East means belonging, and the question is who am I?; South means meaning,

and the question is where do I come from?; West means purpose, and the question is why am I here?; and North means hope, and the question is where am I going?

Figure 1

Indigenous-inclusive Education System Based on the First Nations Wellness Continuum Framework (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2022).



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Fontaine told us that Indigenous peoples usually start the circle from the East. The East can mean a new beginning. For example, when in a meeting, leaving the East

open is an invitation to the spiritual presences in the circle. Starting the circle in the East with the question *Who am I?* makes sense because a person needs to know who they are to start something. The answer to this question is still foggy to me. This thesis is one of the tools I used to try and answer this question. To illustrate, I share two examples of how I tried during the course of my M.Ed. classes to answer who I am.

I want to note that although I have Indigenous blood (grandparents and great-grandparents), I do not consider myself an Indigenous person. Brazil is over 500 years old and my blood is as mixed as any Brazilian. The weight of having Indigenous blood for my family is different. I was not taught the importance of Indigenous beliefs and values. To us, having Indigenous blood meant nothing, just like the Spanish blood on my mother's side also meant nothing. To my family, I was Brazilian, a Brazilian who has relatives living on the other side of the Paraguay River, which is what I was taught. I am using Indigenous perspectives for this thesis because Canada's attempts to reconcile its relationships with Indigenous peoples are still quite recent, and half of the classes I took while doing my Master's program had Indigenous teachings. I decided to use one of them as a way to show what I have learned.

Who am I in relation to others? (East – belonging)

I kept journals of the classes I took in 2024. I wrote thoughts and plans of what to do and what to say when I needed to say something in class. The first example is from one of the first courses I took in Winter 2024 with Dr. Sreemali Herath. I had to make a prologue about me, and I decided to use letters to myself to complete this assignment. The other was one of the assignments I had to do for Ms. Fontaine's class. It was a

painting that represented my positionality, to answer why I was in that class. Here are some excerpts from those assignments:

Letter to myself – “Hello Giu, how are you doing? You know that I have a lot of difficulties talking about myself. Being open, use the word ‘I’. Well, in these letters, this word will show up a lot. I have decided to use the prologue as an introduction to my life. Let’s start with the basic introduction then... maybe that will help me navigate to these letters easily.

I am Giuliana da Cunha Moura, I am 29 years old and I am from Brazil. I live in a small city, I mean, I used to live in a small city called Campo Grande. It is the capital of Mato Grosso do Sul. We are ‘neighbors’ with Paraguay, and because of that, a lot of our culture comes from Paraguayan and Indigenous traditions. The other part of the mixture is from all over the world, but I will focus on Japanese. Campo Grande has a large population of Japanese descendants because of the construction of the railway in 1914 (Pires, n.d.; G1, 2014). I had to talk about this social mix because I have a father whose roots are Paraguayan, Indigenous, and from Spanish because of Paraguay colonization. I have a mother whose father is Indigenous, and mother’s root is Spanish, and I have an older brother, whose blood is as mixed as mine. Apart from that mixed family, I grew up surrounded by Japanese people and culture. My father and uncles knew a Japanese family and they were pretty close to them, so we often spent time together. Besides that, I studied with a Taiwanese girl who has an older sister, and she studied with my brother. So, I also learned a lot from her as well about her culture. At least, I learned what a kid would understand about culture.

Speaking of school, besides kindergarten, I studied in a public school until I graduated from high school. In kindergarten, I learned how to write and read. The school was

so great that when I went to first grade in the public school, I already knew what they were going to learn. Because of that, I was 'moved up' to second grade, which made me be ahead of my classmates until I finished my first undergraduate course. It is also important to explain that the school year starts in January and my birthday is in September. So, I spent $\frac{3}{4}$ of the school year "two years apart" from my peers. For example, in 9th grade students usually start the year at the age of 13 and end the year at the age of 14. I was 12. From that, I believe it impacted me because I 'grew up' in the wrong time. There were a lot of things during school time that tried to match human growth and learning. Since I was behind of my classmates in age, the things I learned "weren't supposed to be learnt when I was so young". For example, in Brazil students learn about human reproduction in 8th grade, when the students are 12-13, when the body changes start, with hormones and stuff. I was 11, playing with dolls and cars with my brother and cousins. After high school I went straight to university. The first couple of years in university are when the young adults are at the age of drinking and going to parties, making some bad decisions that hopefully help them grow. I was underage for the first two years of university.

I matured too early.

I will end this letter with that sentence. It will make you think about your life, or at least what you remember about your life. I know you don't like it, but it will help you."

Interpretation of my painting – "It's not the shape of a circle but it has the four directions. For East and South I made a map of my home country. It is where I spent the last 29 years of my life. It is my life, where I built my life. Green represents nature, and red represents the color of the ground. My city is called *Cidade Morena* (Brunnet City) because it

is the color of the ground. Like I said, I spent my whole life there. I have always loved drawing since I was a kid, but 'Art does not give you money'. My country does not support Art as much as I would like, and my parents just wanted what was best for me. So, I majored in Architecture because it was the closest to drawing I could get.

But it was not the same.

I worked as an English teacher because I was young, and I received that opportunity so why not? It was my first job, it was supposed to be temporary and here I am, 12 years later, still an English teacher but now with another major in language and literature.

My spirit is of an artist. I have kept drawing and using artistic approaches as much as I could while teaching English. I was inside classrooms because I liked to help and for safety, of course. But as I said before, I tried to put Art in whatever I could because my heart, in this case representing emotion, is drawing. I am a crayon. One could say I had everything, but I wasn't happy, fully happy. People usually try to find happiness. It's supposed to be like this, isn't it? But hey, why do that if you can run away? It is easier.

For the West and North I drew the Turtle Island. The 13 phases of the moon here represent the knowledge I am trying to find. I have been on Turtle Island for eight months now. I am learning a lot, but I am still trying to find myself. I came here for a Master's degree in second language education, but what if this is not really the reason why?

I am a broken crayon. I am broken in half because my heart is in my homeland and so is my past. I am a broken crayon because I am looking for knowledge trying to find myself."

Figure 2

Broken Crayon. August 2024.



Note. This figure illustrates the first assignment of the class “The Crayon Factory”. This drawing represents the conflicting emotions I experienced during my first year of teaching. Original drawing.

There was a book someone mentioned in one of the classes I was attending called *Third Culture Kids: Growing Up Among Worlds* by David C. Pollock et al. (2017). The class was about applied linguistics and we discussed intercultural identity. A classmate mentioned a book about children whose parents travelled to other countries mainly because of their professional careers, and the impact on the children who were now developing new perspectives because they were being raised away from their relatives and culture. They mentioned the good part of it: development of language skills and cross-cultural competence. However, there was also a negative part, which was the identity challenge those children faced because of the lack of fully belonging to a place. I think adults who move countries to study or work also suffer the challenges of identity, belonging, and cultural adaptation the book mentioned.

Reflecting on my letter, I realized how structured my writing about my past was. It seems like a recipe I followed: write your name, age, your city, education. It did not have a reflection; it did not have a deeper analysis of who I was. It was facts of my life. Regarding the painting assignment, I liked my interpretation of the assignment because it allowed me to see meaning in the drawing that I had not consciously planned. I usually draw things based on the message I am trying to send. I think that was one of the few times I drew something and then had to come up with an interpretation. I could sense the disconnection I was still feeling even after eight months in Canada. I was not fully embracing this new step of my life. Pollock et al. (2017) mentioned the complexities of moving to another country. And I was feeling this anxiety, and it was evident through my drawing. I will not speak on behalf of everyone, because I do not remember all the assignments my peers produced, but for sure more than half of my peers' assignments

were not as dark as mine. By dark, I mean emotionally unresolved. While my classmates' assignments appeared lighter or more contained, mine showed anxiety, fragmentation, and uncertainty. I believe this contrast matters because it shows how people occupy different emotional and identity positions within the same assignment.

From the examples above, I believe it is easier to understand how uncertain my East, my sense of belonging, was in 2024 and how tentative it remains while I am writing this section. In 2024, my sense of belonging was uncertain because my relationships, references, and sense of place were being broken by migration. While writing this section, my East felt weak because this sense of belonging was not fully reestablished yet. I now know that I cannot separate the parts of my life as singular lives, mainly because my brother had given hints about it whenever we discussed my thesis in our conversations. They are all connected to who I am. And to understand who I am, I also need to know where I came from.

Where do I come from? (South – meaning)

Through my coursework, my professors always emphasized the importance of positionality. At first, it seemed easy to address that when I completed assignments, but as I took more classes, I realized how complex it is to position oneself in their research. Maybe it was not that hard, but my lack of knowledge of myself plus shallow reflections on parts of myself made those positionality sections difficult to write. I then asked my professor what topics needed to be covered when positioning myself in research. Dr. Schmidt gave me a range of issues researchers usually address in their positionality statements: personal identity, educational background, professional experience, cultural and socioeconomic context, power dynamics, biases and assumptions, status in relation

to my participants, subjectivity, and objectivity. Apart from those issues, she highlighted how positionality is influenced by context. Maher and Tetreault (2001) explained that defining positionality involves recognizing how the self is identified “not in terms of fixed identities, but by their location within shifting networks of relationships” (p.164). This thought and what my professor told me resonated with me because, for a long time, I looked at aspects of my identity as separate sections that couldn’t be connected. And now, I realize that these identities overlap in ways I didn’t perceive before.

To answer the question of the South, I use parts of the list my professor gave me to position myself in my research. Understanding where I come from means understanding the connections to me, my community, and my past, which influences how I became who I am (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2022). Equally important is understanding my West: why I am here. Moreover, I analyze paths of my personal, academic, and professional lives, and the values that shaped my beliefs. In addition, one way I have positioned myself is through my relationship with art. Drawing played an important role in shaping my identity, influencing both my academic and professional journey.

I love drawing. Drawing is a hobby I have had since elementary school. Art was my favorite class, and I remember I even used to complete my brother’s assignments when it was something related to drawing. It gave me the label of the *artist of the family*, and I liked that title. I loved the idea of a simple pencil being able to create perfect copies of real things and turn imagination into reality. It is also important to add that I took drawing lessons when I was 14-15 years old to practice for university entrance exams. Those lessons were important for the entrance exams, but they were also

important because they made me realize that although I liked drawing, I was very good at making copies only. As I looked at the drawings and paintings I made for the past fifteen years, all of them are copies from something that existed, either in real life or things from the Internet. I wondered how someone who claims to love drawing is not good at creating their own art, and how loving to draw made me use art when I was teaching English to my students.

Growing up, my family emphasized the importance of education, sports, and learning a new language. Those practices were the foundation of my values and have shaped a significant part of who I am, even when I did not recognize them at that time. I would not say my brother and I received the same treatment from my parents just because we are siblings. The two big differences are our gender and age. The simple fact that he is older and male made the parenting style different. And my parents underwent their own changes between having my brother and then me. However, my parents tried to give us the same opportunities. My parents encouraged my brother and me to swim when we were young. I believe that taught me discipline, and though I never enjoyed the competitive aspect of swimming, nor going to swimming lessons, nowadays, I still have the desire to win and often get disappointed when I lose. In addition, learning English was also a constant practice when we were young. Learning English at that time was seen as a valuable skill for future opportunities, so my parents enrolled us in language courses. If my math is correct, I was an English student for 9 years; changing language schools and my lack of desire took a big toll on the total amount of time I spent learning the language.

I remember I often felt I was being compared to my brother, especially in relation to school because of our age difference. Our age gap is less than 2 years; besides, I was one year ahead in the school year, which made us one grade apart from one another. This situation made me choose differently in some aspects of my life to avoid the comparison. However, there were two decisions I did not choose just for the sake of being opposed to what my brother had decided, but because I wanted to (a) when the opportunity of an English exchange program came to me after my brother did his, I chose to travel independently, preferring to explore places on my own terms, choosing to go to Argentina and Japan; and (b) academically, I opted for architecture because of my passion for drawing, even though my mother viewed art as a hobby.

I pursued my architecture degree at a private university in my city, working hard to maintain a scholarship. During this time, I started my teaching career as a monitor at an English language school. This job became an important part of my life because it influenced the beginning of my teaching philosophy, which emphasized critical thinking and communicative competences. Both were taught by my boss during my time at that language school. In addition to teaching, I started practicing taiko, a Japanese dance with drums, and that made me appreciate cultural diversity and added to my personal growth. After graduating, I felt I had a deep connection to Japan, and because of that, I decided to save money for a year and travel to Japan for one month. After my return, I realized I wanted to go back there and work if possible. That decision made me plan alternatives to consider how I could be in Japan longer. Eventually, I was faced with the reality that my career did not match my diploma, nor my language knowledge. This realization led me to start my second degree in Language and Literature, since this

degree would match my career, and learn Japanese. While studying, I continued working as an English teacher. To understand why teaching became such an important part of my journey, I need to describe more about my professional life.

I started working at the age of 17. My first job was at an English language school, and I was a monitor, someone who would help students if they had questions about their classes. I call this school A. I was young and I didn't have any experience with teaching. That was the first time I taught someone. I remember the first time a student asked me the meaning of a word; I pointed to the dictionary. Would you hire someone like me if you saw what I did to the student? I believe my boss was clever because she hired an inexperienced person. With a person like me, a rock, she could polish and transform me the way she wanted. Was that a bad thing? No, it was not; because from what I remember, teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) wasn't only about giving the content and expecting students to learn and practice until they are fluent in English. For her, it was giving her teachers the ability to teach students about English and critical thinking. We were a branch of a larger institution nationwide, so we had to follow branch rules of course, but she made sure we were updated about the ESL world. I spent six years working there.

After I left language school A, I worked at another language school for the following 3 years. That school is language school B. They were not a branch; they had their own system as a school and there were a lot of languages being taught, not only English. The first thing I noticed was the freedom I had to teach. There were three English teachers and six for other languages; however, we did not have a structure to follow. The owners just wanted their students to learn the language, which was great,

until it was not. Eventually, the students who were basically private students now had to share their classes with more people. Many of them were teenagers whose parents wanted them to get high grades, because then they would know their children were learning a new language. Therefore, we had to create a system to evaluate the students' proficiency. The problem was, we did not have a coordinator; we were different teachers with different methodologies. I left language school B in 2021 when their rent contract was over. During those three years, I had worked at a language school C as well. It was for a brief period, less than six months. I decided to leave because I had a health problem which made me ill. I could not handle working at two schools at the same time, so I decided to stay at school B because of their flexibility.

The last three schools I worked at before coming to Canada overlapped with one another. By then I had divided my work schedule. In the mornings I was at school D, on Mondays and Wednesdays afternoons I was at school E, and on Tuesdays and Thursdays afternoons I was at school F. An important aspect of those last two years as an English teacher was that schools D and F were private K-12 schools. It was my first time venturing into school curriculum. I confess I thought it would have been worse because of the English content and different levels of English in the same class. However, for school F, I was given a lot of flexibility in terms of what to teach and how to teach. One of the main problems of school D was the way the school's leadership values shaped the school environment. Certain moral and religious norms were strongly presented and that led me to filter parts of myself, not only my personal beliefs, but how I interacted with my students and co-workers.

I noticed ESL teachers from schools B, C, D, and E (I was the only ESL teacher at school F) were often regarded as tools that should focus only on teaching English language skills and ignore their identity (beliefs, values, and professional experiences for example). And to avoid such actions, I separated my personal and professional lives. And this separation may or may not have caused identity shifts throughout the twelve years I taught English. The problem is that I never questioned what this separation was doing to me as a teacher. If identity is shaped through experience, then separating personal and professional life might also shape the way teachers understand themselves. And yet, these effects might remain unnoticed because they become part of everyday teaching.

As I went through those different teaching environments over the years, I filtered parts of myself based on where I was, thinking that my professional life as an English teacher had nothing to do with my personal experiences. The question is, what if those choices were not about maintaining professionalism, but about self-protection? For example, I had always told people I wasn't interested in dating, that relationships were simply not a priority for me. At the time, I believed it and I was proud of it. Right now, I wonder if I was truly uninterested, or if I was just avoiding the reality of my own identity. Because I think the way I was representing myself and behaving with co-workers, students, families and friends was shaped by how I thought people wanted me to be.

The irony is that I believed my personal life had no relevance to my teaching. But now, thanks to my brother, I see that the way I taught, how I spoke to the students, how structured my classes were, and how I was in the school environments were deeply influenced by the parts of myself I was willing to share, and the parts I felt there was no

need to share. This realization made me start questioning my own role in the classroom; to understand the extent to which my personal identity shapes my teaching; and to ask why I am here asking these questions now. Which brings me to the next step in my journey: the West.

Why am I here? (West – purpose)

All these questions arose out of my master's program. I left Brazil at the end of 2023 to pursue this master's program in Canada and when I left Brazil, I also left my life. I had built my professional life since 2012. I created a name for myself at the schools I worked at. Outside of work, I played taiko and the violin and did yoga. I made friends and enjoyed the nuances of life. I had my own life going on. Moving to Canada meant leaving everything behind and starting over. It was as if I was playing a video game and my whole campaign was deleted and I had to start at level 1.

Even knowing that I was leaving everything behind, I still thought I had something to offer. But the parts of me that stayed with me, for example how I taught, and the structure and methodologies of a classroom I was familiar with, did not apply to anything I was learning in Canada. It felt like a rupture instead of the growth I was promised. I did not know what to do, I questioned myself if I should be here or if I was taking the place from someone who would do a better job than what I was doing. It took me months to figure things out. I was not a teacher anymore, and I had no idea what to do with my life if I was not a teacher. I felt the displacement inside classrooms with my peers having so many more experiences than I did, and I felt the displacement culturally because I was not in Brazil anymore. Sure I was still speaking Portuguese at home and my friend cooked Brazilian food, but it was not the same.

During my second bachelor's degree, I had only focused on building a curriculum to go to Japan. Although I was studying language and teaching, I didn't feel I was actually studying education. And in Canada, I was only a student learning about education and how to teach instead of practicing, learning theories I already learned about and new ones. I learned ideas I had never encountered such as teaching philosophy and teacher identity. I also learned about methodologies I never thought would be possible such as arts-based educational research. The exposure was intense and I pity the people around me for having me near while I was lost. For someone who enjoyed structure and plans, not having one was hard. And this thesis emerged from this fracture in my life.

Writing an autoethnography is still unfamiliar. I am used to doing things because other people told me to do them. I remember in one of the readings about situating oneself in research, Steinhauer (2001) explained the hardship of coming back to her community as an educator, how she learned about the First Nations Graduate Education Program and decided to enroll in the program. Then she wrote that her first professor asked her group what they wanted to learn. She mentioned it was difficult because they had to "take responsibility for [their] own learning" (p.184). I feel the same struggles now because I am used to a structured class with a syllabus and explanations of what to expect, just like I was used to accepting the structure of what to teach and just go with it.

I believe this is my West. The reason I am here is connected to the moments that forced me to confront the relationship between my personal and professional lives. I am here because I am still trying to make sense of the bridge between the personal and

professional, between who I thought I was and who I am becoming. I am here because I now recognize that teaching is not just about sharing knowledge, but also about navigating the questions of identity, power, and positionality that I struggled with myself.

Therefore, in this autoethnography I explore how my personal and professional experiences have shaped my teaching practices and identity as an ESL teacher. Through critical self-reflection, I examine how my identity, personal history, beliefs, and professional experiences shaped the ways I understood teaching, interpreted classroom experiences, and made pedagogical decisions. Critical self-reflection in this study is informed by the concept of reflexivity. Tsang (2021) explains reflexivity as an intentional process of examining one's own experiences, assumptions, and actions in order to better understand how they shape interpretations and decisions. Throughout this thesis, reflexivity provides a way of revisiting my experiences as an ESL teacher and examining how they influenced my identity, beliefs, teaching philosophy, and practices. I also examine whether my role in the classroom was centered on supporting students in their learning journey or whether I was unconsciously using teaching as a means of self-discovery. This autoethnography is guided by the following questions:

1. How have my personal and professional experiences shaped my identity and teaching practices as an ESL teacher?
2. To what extent has teaching been a way for me to understand myself?

Where am I going? (North – hope)

With the West representing the reason I am asking questions, the North represents what I am doing with them. The *where am I going?* is the direction of this thesis. It is where I wrote about the literature that helped me understand my

experiences and the data that helped me make sense of what I have described. For the literature, I explored key research, concepts, and theories that guide my research foundation, including postmodernism theory (Foucault, 1982; Lyotard, 1984; Norton, 2013; Zembylas, 2003, 2005), the KARDS model (Knowing, Analyzing, Recognizing, Doing, and Seeing) (Kumaravadivelu, 2012), teaching philosophy, teacher identity (Britzman, 2012; Kelchtermans, 2009), autoethnography, and arts-based educational research (ABER) (Leavy, 2025).

Chapter 2 – Theoretical Framework

In qualitative research, the researcher does not work with only a topic, a question, and an explanation of why such a study is important. There is a necessity to consider and articulate the worldviews and ways of knowing and being that ground the research. When researchers approach a study, they need to look at it using a lens that explains and justifies what they want to achieve. Researchers cannot look at the world from nowhere. They have to approach a study with ideas about knowledge, meaning, and experience to create ideas. And sometimes, these ideas are not very visible yet. In qualitative research, these ideas become important because the goal of research is to describe what happened and to interpret how what happened is understood. For such actions to happen, researchers need a theory to ground their study. A theory that helps shape the way they see the study.

Creswell and Poth (2023) describe qualitative research as a methodology informed by interpretive perspectives and the use of theory as the lens. Based on this, a theoretical framework in this thesis is understood as the set of perspectives and concepts that are the foundation of my study. These theories guide how my experiences

and identity are approached, and how they are analyzed. Because I wanted to understand the different layers of my identity and its multiple meanings, this thesis is informed by postmodern perspectives that question the fixed truths and open spaces to discuss ideas about complexity, multiple interpretations, and fragmentation.

In addition, this thesis is also informed by the KARDS model, proposed by Kumaravadivelu in 2012, as a conceptual tool to connect the theoretical perspectives to teaching practices. KARDS is about the role of teacher knowledge and agency and how this knowledge and agency, connected to context, can give a critical and reflective understanding of teaching practices. To me, KARDS, particularly the Recognizing component, helps explain how teachers examine their own identities, experiences, and assumptions in relation to their teaching. This aligns with the focus of this thesis, which explores how my personal and professional experiences shaped my identity, beliefs, teaching philosophy, and practices as an ESL teacher.

Postmodernism

When thinking about identity, I often assumed that it was built through layers that accumulated over time without changing what had already been formed. However, the more I read and the more I had to actually think about identity since I started this master's program, I noticed that as contexts change, and as experiences and interactions evolve, these layers that I once thought to be stable, actually feel rather unstable and uncertain. The ways people understand themselves are not fixed. They are shaped by the places they go, the people they interact with, and all the new meanings they build along the way. Acting on that thought, identity cannot be reduced to

a single definition, because it is something complex, with layers, and constantly in transformation. And postmodernism offers such an understanding of identity.

Postmodern perspectives offer lenses for understanding identity in this thesis because rather than assuming that knowledge is fixed, like modern perspectives did, postmodernism challenges the idea of singular truths and that knowledge is shaped by context, experience, and society. In his work, Jean-François Lyotard (1984) described the postmodern condition as a challenge to the universal forms of knowledge that are considered absolute. While the metanarratives, as he described, usually explain knowledge as neutral and universally valid, a postmodern perspective argues that those claims are not valid, because they tend to ignore the complexity and diversity of human experience. So, within this perspective, meaning is not seen as something stable, like I thought it was; it is continuously produced and re-interpreted based on contexts. And postmodernism then repositions truths as dependent on perspective, language, and context.

In addition, there are other theorists, for example Foucault (1982), whose work focused on how knowledge and truth were produced when power was involved. To him, what is accepted as true has a close connection to social and institutional structures, because knowledge is inseparable from power. So, systems of power shape the production and circulation of knowledge, and this shift moves the focus from understanding knowledge as something objective to examining knowledge in the context where certain knowledge becomes important. He also uses the concept of subjectivity, when a person becomes who they are, to describe how individuals are historically and socially built, and that people become subjects through the way they are

positioned in the discourse (Foucault, 1982). Identity then, is continuously shaped through interactions, institutions, and systems of power.

In sum, Lyotard (1984) explains the phenomenon of multiple truths, and Foucault (1982) explains that knowledge and power are closely connected, and what is considered true emerges within social and institutional contexts. What these ideas offer my thesis is that what is understood as true about being a good teacher or a good person is shaped within social and institutional contexts. And these understandings are produced through the discourses that define what is considered appropriate, professional, or acceptable. And because of that, they influence how I understand and position myself in the classroom and in other areas of my life. In this sense, these truths are learned, internalized, and often taken for granted. When actions or ways of being do not align with these expectations, they may be considered as inappropriate or unprofessional, usually in school environments.

Building on these ideas and following Foucault's works, Zembylas (2003, 2005) brings postmodern perspectives to education. He explained an understanding of identity in education by analyzing the link between emotion, identity, and power from institutions. To him, emotions are discursive practices, the way we use language to give meaning, shaped by language, culture, and social norms. This idea means that emotions cannot be simply private and internal states of a person. The way teachers experience, express, and when they can, name their emotions, are influenced by a group that defines truths and what is considered acceptable or not in the educational contexts.

Power relations are rooted in emotional practices, regulating what teachers can do, what teachers are allowed to do, to feel, and to express. For example, there were expectations around professionalism at all the schools I worked at as a teacher. These expectations required me to show certain neutrality and self-control, because what was happening outside of the four walls of the classroom could not interfere with my self-expression within the four walls. There were certain emotional expressions that were not considered appropriate in the school environment. According to Zembylas (2003), these expectations are socially constructed and maintained using institutional norms that are meant to shape how teachers come to understand themselves and their roles. Emotions, then, become as performative as putting a mask on, because the ways teachers talk about emotions and how they experience emotions are tied to the construction of their professional identities that were based on the definitions of truths created.

From a postmodernism perspective, teacher identity is continuously shaped through expectations and experiences. Zembylas (2003) also mentioned that identity is both emotional and relational because the ways that teachers make sense of their experiences in social and in institutional contexts are usually different from one another. This difference can be explained by teachers' need to perform particular versions of themselves that align with institutional definitions of professionalism and appropriate conduct (Zembylas, 2005). To me, teachers may find it hard to navigate between who they are expected to be in the school environment and how they are expected to understand themselves outside of the school environment. And these tensions end up highlighting the fragmentation of identity, since different versions of one single person

are built across different contexts. The situation may get to a point where even outside of the school, these institutional expectations remain rooted in the teacher's identity, creating internalized conflicts on how teachers understand and regulate themselves.

In this sense, these conflicts point to the idea that identity is constantly being negotiated and shaped depending on the contexts. For Norton (2013), identity can be understood as the relationship between the person and the social world where they position themselves in different contexts. Most importantly, that identity is shaped by both the expectations and the way the person responds to these expectations, either accepting, negotiating, or resisting them. And this understanding is important for my thesis because it allows me to examine identity as a process of ongoing negotiation. Instead of assuming a stable idea of identity, this theoretical lens makes it possible to explore how the different versions of my identity come out based on the interactions, experiences, and context I am integrated into.

For my thesis, postmodernism functions as a theoretical lens that guides how identity is understood and interpreted. Lyotard (1984), Foucault (1982), Zembylas (2003, 2005), and Norton (2013) support examining my experiences as part of a bigger picture, including social and professional contexts, that shape how I come to understand myself as a teacher. And while postmodernism helps understand identity as fragmented, negotiated, and shaped by context, I believe it is also important to think about how these understandings influence and reflect my teaching practices, which brings me to the KARDS model.

Knowing, Analyzing, Recognizing, Doing, and Seeing (KARDS)

Kumaravadivelu (2012) proposed the KARDS model to create what he described as a “pattern that connects” (p. 2) different dimensions of teacher education. This idea came from a response to the fragmented way that teacher education tends to separate knowledge, practice, identity, and context. To him, teachers are often taught theory distinct from practice, and with not a lot of attention to how their own experiences, beliefs, and teaching contexts shape what they do in the classroom. So, Kumaravadivelu (2012) brought these ideas together and organized his framework based on globalizing perspectives, which puts teaching within the complexities of the world, and operating principles, which guide how the teachers can act within this world. Kumaravadivelu (2012) used many post- perspectives, one of them being postmodernism. He grounded his approach in the principles of particularity, practicality, and possibility, which is about the importance of context, and the connection between theory and practice to education. All these elements then form the KARDS model.

KARDS is structured in five interconnected processes that are not linear steps: Knowing, Analyzing, Recognizing, Doing, and Seeing. Knowing is focused on how teachers use knowledge in practice. Teachers bring different types of knowledge, for example theoretical, practical, and their own experiences, and these different knowledges are connected to one another. Analyzing is about understanding learners and their context. Learners are influenced by social and cultural factors. And their needs, motivation, and autonomy shape the learners’ goals and interests. So, analyzing means being able to reflect on learning and understanding learners as whole individuals.

The next process, recognizing, is closely related to my thesis because it focuses on teachers' identity, beliefs, and values. Recognizing emphasizes that teaching cannot be separated from who the teacher is. Understanding teaching and learners is not enough on their own, since teachers also need to understand themselves and what influences their decisions as well. Doing is about what teachers do in practice. Teaching is about creating meaningful learning opportunities. It involves interaction and supporting the students' growth. But it is also about teachers learning from their own experiences and creating their own ideas about teaching. Seeing focuses on developing the ability to observe and understand teaching in a critical way. Understanding teaching has different viewpoints: the learner, the teacher, and the external observer. Each viewpoint shows a different part of teaching, and they need to be considered together to have a whole understanding, like puzzles.

The Recognizing aspect of the KARDS model was most appropriate for helping me to understand how my experiences and identity are reflected in my teaching practices. I sought to analyze how teaching becomes a way to understand myself. To unpack this better, I believe the KARDS model allows teaching to be understood depending on the context and teachers' experiences. Teachers' experiences, knowledge, and identity play a role in shaping their teaching practices, and the model makes it possible to explore how these elements are reflected in pedagogical decisions and classroom practices, for example.

The KARDS model connects to postmodernism perspectives because both understand identity and knowledge as something constantly changing and shaped by experience and context. For my thesis, postmodernism helps me understand that

identity is continuously built through interactions, experiences, and social contexts. However, in my case, understanding identity in this way is not enough, because I am also a teacher. Therefore, it is important to see how these changes in identity show up in teaching practices. And Seeing is also important to my thesis because it supports critical reflection on teaching over time. I can examine how my beliefs, experiences, and practices have changed across different stages of my life. Seeing allows me to identify the shifts and continuities in my teaching, helping me to understand teacher identity as something that is continuously shaped and reshaped based on experiences and reflections.

Teacher Identity

What I have noticed while reading about teacher identity is how abstract and personal the concept is. I tried reading authors that I thought could bring me some resonance, connecting teacher identity and ESL or autoethnography. I sought a definition of teacher identity in Portuguese, to be completely sure of its meaning. Teacher identity is defined as the way the teacher sees themselves and their roles in education, but this definition did not help me to understand my teacher identity. I know it might seem straightforward to understand teacher identity for others, but what I have difficulty with is the fact that I do not know how to see myself nor my role as an ESL teacher. I had never thought of it to a point where I needed to explain my actions or explain my feelings. And now I had to.

I noticed from the literature that teacher identity is often discussed based on different understandings of identity. Norton (2013) describes identity as the way a person understands their relationship to the world and how it connects to possibilities for

the future. In relation to teaching, Olsen (2008) defines teacher identity as “the collection of influence and effects from immediate contexts, prior constructs of self, social positioning, and meaning systems [...] an ever-changing construct” (p.139). This idea means that teacher identity is shaped by personal experiences, social contexts, and recurrent interactions in teaching. In addition to that, Zembylas (2023) defines teacher identity as something shaped by context, relationships, and emotions. And although Britzman (2012) does not explain a direct definition of teacher identity, she describes how teacher identity is formed through experience and negotiation, and that over time, teachers move through different contexts and situations. Based on these perspectives, my definition is that teacher identity is defined as the way the teacher sees themselves and their roles in education.

I noticed that my life as an ESL teacher was built because of circumstances and I adapted to the role. I was not a teacher because I *heard the call*. I was a teacher because of an opportunity that then became my comfort zone. When I made a list of why I was a teacher, how I taught, and why I kept teaching, I noticed that many of the answers were related to me dividing aspects of my life and trying not to merge them. I had tried to separate my professional and personal lives. I used that division as a shield; being professional meant following rules that would protect my life outside of the school. Speaking of rules, I also noticed that I prefer structures in class, which I feel contradicted the way I invited students to use their creativity in class to do projects and assignments. I also noticed opposite ideas in the same context. For example, is neutrality possible as a teacher in class? I came to the conclusion that it was not possible; however, I always tried to be neutral whenever possible in class. It was as the

saying goes “do as I say, but not as I do.” But after all that, I still found it difficult to explain my teacher identity.

During one of my meetings with my advisor, she said identity should not be a single word that is going to describe me. But I feel the need to at least find something that I can relate to. To find words or descriptions that I could read and say that they describe me as a teacher. One of my friends told me that just because I was not a teacher anymore, I still had a teacher identity even now. With input from my brother, both also said that my identity is who I am and because of who I am. I use that inside the classroom, even if it is a hypothetical scenario now. It is the verb to be, literally.

So, I decided to consider my identity from four perspectives. The first is that my identity is fragmented. I protected myself behind the mask of professionalism, even though I was revealing my personal life without realizing it (Britzman, 2012; Foucault, 1982; Zembylas, 2003; 2005). The second point is that my identity is not fixed. I changed myself depending on the school I was teaching at because of the students I had and the rules of the school (Clutterbuck, 2022; Norton, 2013; Vygotsky, 1986; Yazan, 2019). Third, my identity is polished and maintained by power and the institution. To be employable as a teacher, I had to follow the institutional rules; directors, coordinators, and parents had the power (Benoit, 2022; Britzman, 2012; Clutterbuck, 2022; Foucault, 1982; Zembylas, 2005). Fourth, my identity is also creativity. I feel most authentic when I am able to use arts-based practices in my classroom. It is important to understand that these four elements are not separate categories. They interact with one another and although I divided them into four parts, I did that for my own need for order.

These four perspectives shape how I understand my role in the classroom and are the practical examples of how my identity has been formed based on my experiences.

Something I have known about myself for a long time is that I am a rational and practical person. I recently learned that I was not taught to understand emotions. I was taught to show the results, that is, a good grade or good behavior. I was always expecting judgment and critiques of my performance. I functioned based on performance. I was not taught to deal with emotions, to name them. And because of that, I have a hard time showing myself to others, because unconsciously, I am expecting to be judged, and I am afraid of failure. And finding out about my identity is a hard path to drive, because I am simply not used to naming feelings as a person. Finding out about my identity feels like being blindfolded inside a dark room trying to find the door to leave.

This urge to expect critiques of my performance made me always opt to listen to others' opinions rather than my own. Because if I did what was told, I would not be in trouble and they (people I was listening to) would be happy. I believe that aspect of my life is what made me fit well in the different schools in which I have taught. I knew that if I followed the rules, everything would be okay. Therefore, I think I adapt well to new working environments. I noticed that when it comes to decision making related to my own personal life, I fail to come up with solutions, and I am always relying on someone else's opinion. And that is part of me. I was always being told what to do. So having to deal with my own choices is hard, when all I am expecting is someone to tell me what to do.

I also need to clarify that, although I will always try to follow the rules, that does not mean I will close my eyes when I see something is not right. Contrary to popular belief about me, I am a caring person, and I want the well-being of people, if I see they deserve my care at all. Translating this to my teacher identity, I believe I care for my students, and I try to notice their own needs as humans first, and then as learners. And that is something that I started working on as years went by, because during my first years as a teacher, I only cared about the book being finished and the lessons being taught. But then again, understanding that will not make me show any parts of me that I do not consider professional. I am a teacher, and even though I care for the students as people, I still wear my teacher mask and do not let any of my personal life leak into the school. At least I tried. Because when it comes to art, it is impossible not to merge my personal and professional lives together, since art is part of me.

There are many areas of learning, and I understand some people deal better with conventional methods, in this case, the usual course material, mock tests, and exams every bimester. However, school coordinators also understand that English is not at the top of the list of favorite subjects to learn among students. So, I was often given a free card to make classes as entertaining as possible, and of course, still facilitating students' learning at the end. Unfortunately, this is something that I was able to better understand and develop later in my teaching years. And once I did, I tried my best to take advantage of the different ways I could make my classes interesting for students. Which is why I said that part of my identity is creativity. Depending on what the students wanted, I would try to find a compromise to teach them based on their preferences. For example, using sports, photography, music, or storytelling.

The ideas discussed helped me understand my own experiences as an ESL teacher. I recognized the beliefs that guided my decisions in the classroom even when I was not aware of them. Reading about teacher identity helped me see how my actions, choices, and ways of thinking were shaped by my personal experiences, work environment, and the roles I performed as a teacher. All these reflections connect to the purpose of this thesis, which is to explore how my personal and professional experiences have shaped my teaching practices and identity as an ESL teacher.

As I reflected on teacher identity, I also started to think more about how these experiences appeared through the beliefs and values that guided my classroom practices. These beliefs and values are connected to teaching philosophy, making teacher identity and teaching philosophy interconnected in this thesis.

Teaching Philosophy

Before starting my master's program, I had never consciously thought about my teaching philosophy. During my coursework in 2024, I was asked to describe it. Until then, I had never reflected on the values, beliefs, and experiences that guided how I prepared lessons or taught my students. They were not things I had ever consciously thought about. I never thought about the reasons behind my lesson plans. During my coursework in 2024, I was asked about my teaching philosophy. My answers were based on what I learned during my first job back in 2012. I thought that because I was not aware of how to teach, my boss had to shape my teaching philosophy. That worked in parts, but I was also not aware that as time passed and the more I taught, and learned from my students' experiences, or the more I traveled and shaped my own beliefs, that I would also use that to teach.

I then got to a point where I had an idea of my teaching philosophy, but with colloquial language. I had to figure out how my ways of teaching could be translated to academic vocabulary. One of the first things that I noticed was that I wanted to show my students that everything around them shaped how they think. But that having the environment shaping them did not mean that it could be a reason to act without conscience or use that as a reason to act improperly. They needed to somewhat filter out what was important to them. Based on that description, I learned that this is also something I do for myself as a teacher. I need to filter the input I receive but keeping in mind that what I gather becomes a part of who I am and that transfers to my teaching practices. This idea translates to reflexivity (Tsang, 2021). Reflexivity is one of my core values as a teacher because a teacher should continuously reflect on themselves and about themselves. Based on Tsang's (2021) work, reflexivity is a way of thinking about myself and my actions. It involves intentionally turning my attention *in* and reflecting on how I relate to the world around me. The teacher is who I am and that influences how I teach. Teaching and identity cannot be separated.

I mentioned before my connection with drawing. I have always tried to involve the arts when teaching, either in class while I taught, or in a project the students needed to complete. I was also aware of the students that were not art-oriented and I tried to find something that could work for everybody. There is a chapter in Eisner's (2002) book *The Arts and the Creation of Mind* in which he mentioned how arts can be a model to teach other subjects. I had a connection to that chapter because I tended to use arts while teaching English and I used arts to structure my learning during my classes. Based on the chapter, there are many examples of how arts can be used in teaching,

but my focus was on four aspects that I prioritized in my classroom, even if it was unconsciously at the time: 1) variability of outcome is okay; 2) the way something is formed matters, i.e., the *what* and the *how* are not separated; 3) arts teach imagination and the refinement of sensibility; and 4) taking one's time is important, the experience is something that you make (Eisner, 2002).

For the 'variability of outcome is okay' aspect, Eisner meant that being a good teacher does not mean making the class arrive at one single correct answer, not often at least. This issue was present in my projects when I used creative activities where I encouraged students to respond in different ways and get an answer, rather than following one single path to get to the answer.

When Eisner (2002) indicated that "the way something is formed matters," (p. 197) he meant that the *what* and *how* are not separated. The way something is spoken shapes its meaning. Understanding that, for the students, matters because it helps them understand where their understandings and experiences come from, and how the ways those experiences are represented influence the meanings they make from them, and how they relate to what they pay attention to. One example is when I asked students to focus on tone, word choice, and structure when writing dialogues. Students could express the same idea in different ways, as well as express different ideas using one single sentence.

For the criterion, *the arts teach imagination and the refinement of sensibility*, Eisner (2002) meant that the arts help people think beyond what already exists and become more aware of their experiences. Imagination is the ability to see possibilities and new ideas. And the refinement is about paying close attention to details and subtle

aspects of what they see and feel. This increased awareness was present in my classroom when I used prompts to support the students in expressing their ideas in different ways. I encouraged them to imagine possibilities and to pay attention to how they felt and what they noticed.

For the point about *taking one's time is important*, Eisner meant that it is important to go slow and really enjoy the experience instead of doing something fast just to finish with it. He said that experience is something people create depending on how they observe, feel, and participate in what they are doing. This connects to the idea that variability of outcome is okay, because when a student is given time to explore the activity, they are more likely to arrive at different responses.

Eisner (2002) explained that the arts can be used as a model for other subjects on how to value some aspects in classroom such as process, perception, and experience. I value multiple interpretations, I value how students' learning processes differ from one another, I value imagination, and I encourage students to see other possibilities beyond their book. These are important beliefs that I tried to apply in class.

Eisner (2002) also wrote about the things students can learn in art classes. Although I did not teach art, I used art a lot in class. And based on that chapter, the main goal for a person working in arts is to create meaningful relationships in the parts that make up the whole work. For example, art enables meaningful connections to be made with the pieces of the puzzle individuals construct.

Using arts to teach is about helping students learn to notice how their qualities, such as their thoughts, emotions, creativity, and skills, work together as a whole and not in isolation. I aim to help them see how these different aspects interacted with and

influenced one another. I found this objective hard to achieve at times because most of my students focused on completing individual tasks rather than understanding how different experiences contributed to their learning process as a group. That is also part of my teaching philosophy because learning is intellectual and emotional, and because students learn with seeing, feeling, adjusting, and responding. Learning happens with experimentations and working together. It is safe to say that because the arts transformed my life, I have used them as a tool to try and transform my students' lives. And there is a passage in Eisner's (2002) book that matches my line of thought: "when the arts genuinely move us, we discover what it is that we are capable of experiencing" (p. 11).

Chapter 3 – Methodology

This thesis consists of a self-study using autoethnography and arts-based educational research (ABER) as interconnected approaches. Since I was both the researcher and the subject, the data came from my personal and professional experiences, and the analysis involved not only academic interpretation but also emotional and artistic sense-making. This research is meaningful because it highlights the emotional and relational aspects of language teaching and learning. It offers insights into how personal histories, migration, and creative practices shape teacher identity.

Autoethnography

To write an autoethnography, first, I needed to understand the meaning of it. During the classes I took, my professors mentioned the definition of ethnography and its variations. Ethnography is viewed as both a process and a product in research. Within ethnography, there are many categories that try to challenge the conventional ideas of

objectivity in research. It is a method rooted in observing, documenting, and interpreting cultural life (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Autoethnography is one of those approaches, and the one I used in this research.

From the readings I explored, I understand autoethnography as a qualitative research approach that connects personal stories with cultural, institutional, or educational contexts. Authors like Kuby et al. (2022), Mead (2022), and Benoit (2022) show how autoethnography creates space to reflect on the personal life while also making visible the social and pedagogical characteristics that shape teaching and learning. Kuby et al. (2022), for example, describe autoethnography as “a process of meaning-making where the self is situated in relationship to others and institutions” (p. 3), while Mead (2022) uses art and narrative to reconnect with her identity as a teacher. These readings helped me see that my own teaching story can have room for questions, and that looking inward can also reveal what is around me.

An autoethnography positions the researcher as the subject and the analyst of everything they want to analyze, from their lived experiences to emotions and identities, transforming them into a form of knowledge and using theory to support it (Kuby et al., 2022; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To picture it more simply, I think of autoethnography as a layered cake. The base layer is storytelling, where the researcher describes their lived experiences; the next layer is the data, which for an autoethnography can be anything meaningful that helps with making sense of the experience; and the last layer is the topping, and in my analogy it is the hot melted chocolate my mother uses for her famous carrot cake with chocolate on top. The chocolate does not stay on the top; she makes little holes in the cake so when she adds the hot chocolate, it can sink into the

layers below. In autoethnography, that top layer is theory. It doesn't just sit on the surface; it permeates the whole thing.

In education research, this method becomes a way to explore how teacher identity is shaped over time. In addition, in the context of language education, an autoethnography can encourage language teachers to reflect critically on how they learned, used, and taught the language, and how those experiences relate to ideologies and belonging (Yazan, 2019).

An example might be a teacher analyzing how their identities have been shaped by the dominant language ideologies in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), for example: what is a *native speaker* or a *correct pronunciation*? In theory, the teacher would tell their personal stories and analyze how the systems of power, culture, and language shape those stories. As a language teacher, I also felt the pressure between who I am and the expectations of what English should sound like. These are things an autoethnography can explore. I wrote *in theory* because it is easier said than done. There are numerous examples of teachers analyzing their identities. One example is the learning experience called *Critical Autoethnography Narrative* that Yazan (2019) described as a “critical teacher learning tool” (p. 5) for language teachers. The learning experience involved a semester-long reflection and narrative analysis to help teachers understand how language ideologies and personal histories shape their development of teacher identities. According to Yazan (2019), this learning experience positions teachers as active knowledge-makers and supports equal and reflective language education practices.

Even with the example above, I still find it hard to grasp the analysis and how the teachers were able to understand themselves by just writing and analyzing what they wrote. But what I started to realize through the readings is that autoethnography is a way of exploring who we are, what we became, and how we navigate the spaces where we live and work. There are authors like Godsey (2017) who show that identity work in autoethnography is not always clear and comfortable. His chapter shows how this approach can be used to confront the self, to allow a deeper and a more honest connection with identity, even when understanding is difficult. In addition, Briggs (2017) is able to show with her autoethnography how institutional contexts shape a teacher's sense of self and belonging. In her case, writing functioned as a way to reclaim that lost identity. These authors used autoethnography as a way to express themselves. These examples show how autoethnography can be used to examine identity, in both professional and personal aspects. I know I express myself best through drawing. It is how I slow down and listen to what I am feeling. That is why I decided to use arts-based educational research (ABER) and autoethnography in this thesis. But to understand ABER, it is important to briefly explain the idea of arts-based research (ABR).

Arts-Based Research

Arts-based research is also a form of qualitative research that centers creativity as a method of knowing (Leavy, 2025). So rather than starting from a hypothesis and collecting objective data, ABR allows the research to emerge through artistic processes. In relation to the creative and artistic elements, researchers use drawings, performances, music, visual arts, and writing, to name a few, as ways to represent data and to generate, process, and analyze them. When using ABR, the art is the research

itself, giving more space to experiences and emotions that are not always easy to be captured with only traditional literacy (e.g., writing) (Bridges, 2020; Rowe, 2017).

Both ABR and autoethnography approaches take personal experience seriously, and both also welcome emotion as part of the research process. They challenge the idea that research knowledge must be produced from a detached or neutral position. And they offer space for vulnerability, imagination, and the messy process of making meaning.

As I read more about ABR, I realized that it reflects the way I think. When something does not make sense to me, I often draw it. If I am overwhelmed, I paint or listen to music. When I miss home, I look at pictures that help me hold the moment and draw them. These are ways I process the world. That is why I chose to include drawing, painting, music, and mosaic in this research. And following ABR, these methods are how I arrive at meaning. Because through the arts as forms of literacy, I can access emotions and memories that academic writing alone might not be able to achieve (Bridges, 2020; Hannigan et al., 2023; Rowe, 2017).

Arts-Based Educational Research (ABER)

Like I mentioned before, ABR and autoethnography complement each other because both try to center human experiences as powerful sources of knowledge, using subjectivity, creativity, and emotion. Based on my understanding of ABR, arts-based educational research (ABER) is artistic research situated within the educational contexts (Leavy, 2025). ABER understands the arts as ways of representing experience, as ways of exploring knowledge, all in relation to teaching and learning, as well as identity. Leavy (2025) explains ABER expands what counts as knowledge because it includes

imaginative, sensory, and emotional ways of knowing. Camargo-Borges (2025) offers a similar definition, adding that it is also a process where creativity and imagination shape how one comes to understand personal experiences and oneself.

For my thesis, ABER allowed me to explore the aspects of my teaching identity that are not accessible using written reflections only. For example, ABER provides a way to examine how institutional expectations shape teacher identity. Briggs (2017) and Benoit (2022) show how teachers had to negotiate what they could express within the educational environment. And I believe they both used arts-based approaches to create a space where these experiences could be explored.

As I mentioned before, my experiences as an ESL teacher were partially shaped by schools' expectations that positioned the teachers as just the transmitters of English language knowledge. This transmission orientation prompted said teachers, in this case myself because I do not want to assume all the teachers went through that, to ignore their personal beliefs and experiences. Therefore, I separated my personal and professional life, and this might have contributed to the changes in how I understood myself as a teacher over time. So, ABER is a way to return to these experiences, the same way Briggs (2017) and Benoit (2022) did, but using artwork because it is the way I can express myself better and examine them. Through creative processes, such as artwork, it is possible to explore how different aspects of my identity emerge, overlap with one another, and/or remain next to one another without being fully connected. These processes also enable me to explore moments where there is a gap between each identity, or between what I feel, what I experience, and what is expected of me.

In this thesis, I use artwork to express my experiences and how my identity and teaching practices were shaped between contexts. I use artwork to engage with moments in my life that were not always fully understood at the time they happened. Through artwork, I revisit these moments and explore what they reveal about my decisions, my relationships at school and outside of school, as well as the tensions between what I feel and what is expected of me. And research in educational contexts supports this understanding. Hannigan et al. (2023) show how visual work can express identity and emotions that are difficult to express through language; Bridges (2020) and Mead (2022) show how artistic processes can access emotional layers that were not immediately shown. In the same way, Playsted (2022) shows how visual methods can make the complex layers in the classroom become visible.

In addition, teaching can also be understood as a space for self-understanding, which connects to KARDS. Creativity and reflective practices allow teachers to engage with their experiences in a personal way (Bartleet, 2021; Mead, 2022; Pelias, 2021) to either improve their teaching skills, or in my case, to explore how far my teaching practices have functioned as a way to understand myself. All these studies support the idea that art can function as a form of inquiry that allows me to examine my own experiences in a more meaningful way.

Collection of Personal Artifacts

I gathered materials that already carry pieces of my teaching story. These are things that I have created, saved, or taken pictures of over time. They are instructional processes I have done with my students that hold memory, emotion, and meaning. These include: (a) photographs of places or moments that feel connected to my

teaching life, for example when I had to create projects for my students based on what they needed to learn and that had connection to my teaching philosophy, e.g., hands-on direct experiences; (b) assignments and notes I wrote during my courses in 2024; (c) sketches, drawings, and paintings I created during the past years; (d) assignments and projects I prepared for my students during my last two years of work in Brazil. These artifacts became the source material for the mosaic I created as part of my data, described below.

Art-Making as Data Generation

Throughout the research process, I created new artworks, including: (a) drawings and paintings about teaching experiences; (b) sculpture representing emotions, identity, or memory; (c) music excerpt connected to my teaching journey; and (d) a mosaic piece as a symbolic representation of my layered identity. I chose to represent my body in separate parts to explore teaching as something that involves my whole body. Teaching, to me, happens through how I listen, observe, and interact with the students. Each part of the body helped me focus on a different aspect of that interaction. For example, the ears represent listening, and the eyes represent observation. Some parts are connected more directly to students, while others relate to my own experiences as a student. For example, the foot represents my journey and experiences I carried with me into teaching. These pieces are the data; they helped me process meaning and bring to the surface emotional and lived experiences that are often hard to express in words.

For example, during the creation of the musical pieces, the process brought forward emotional experiences that I was not fully planning to represent. Even though I started from a more structural approach, the composition ended up reflecting a moment

of emotional intensity connected to a personal situation. In a different way, the face cast carved lived experiences through the body. When I saw the final result, the asymmetry caused by Bell's Palsy, an acute peripheral facial nerve disorder that causes sudden weakness or paralysis on one side of the face and its usually temporary (Singh and Deshmukh, 2022), became very visible. This was difficult for me because it directly affected how I see myself. See Table 1 below, which shows the process followed for each artwork.

Table 1

Overview of Artistic Works and Creative Processes

Artistic Medium	Artwork	Focus	Symbolism	Technique and Material
Drawing Painting	Face portrait	Professional vs. personal identity	Tension between roles	Mixed styles. Mirror. Graffiti. Paper
	Full body	Physical presence	How I carry myself as a teacher	3D silhouette. Marker. Paper
	Ears	Listening in teaching	Receptivity	Charcoal. Paper
	Eyes	Classroom awareness	Observation. Care. Paying attention	Rice paper. Chalk
	Metaphorical self	Identity representation	Fragmentation and connection	Crayons. Paper. Color exploration
	Teaching self	Teaching experiences	Emotional dimension of teaching practices	Abstract composition. Color-based expression
	Migration self	Identity across contexts	Contrast between Brazil and Canada	Abstract composition. Color-based expression
	Identity in motion	Identity development	Overlap of the past, present, and future	Abstract composition. Layered
Sculpture	Face	Identity variation	Stability vs. fragmentation	Plaster

	Foot	Identity journey	Movement. Growth	Plaster
Mosaic	Photographic face	Personal and professional memories	Reconstruction of identity	300 photographs. Mosaic assembly
Music	Composition 1	Emotional state during thesis	Internal experience of research process	Digital composition using Cubase
	Composition 2	Personal and professional journey	Tension. Continuity and transformation	Digital composition using Cubase

Choice of Artistic Mediums

I mentioned in the beginning that I am very good at drawing. When I told this to my advisor, she encouraged me to step outside my comfort zone and try other forms of art and materials. This suggestion became one of the first turning points in my process. The artistic materials I used are part of what I created and part of what I wanted to question. Each one opens a different way of thinking, feeling, and reflecting. In arts-based educational research (ABER), art itself becomes a way of knowing. Leavy (2025) explains that ABER brings together the creative arts and social inquiry, giving imagination, emotion, and sensory experience the same importance as analytical reasoning. Through the act of creating, I interpreted my own experiences, emotions, and contexts. In this thesis I worked with drawing and painting, sculpture, photography, and music to explore who I am as a teacher and as a person. Each artistic medium served as a companion in the search, inviting me to reflect through color, texture, form, and sound. And using each artistic medium made me think about which materials to use.

McNiff (2025) describes artistic inquiry as a practice grounded in its own theory, and I see knowledge as something produced through making. The artifacts that surface

during creation come from within the art process itself as well as the materials needed to capture them. Camargo-Borges (2025) expands this view by describing research as world-making. She explains that creativity in research encourages imagination and the construction of new ways of knowing. To me, every artistic choice in this project was done to shape understanding and open possibilities for learning about my life. In addition, Leavy (2025) highlights the value of multimodality in ABER. Engaging different senses shows emotional, relational, and embodied layers of experience. Graphite, charcoal, colored pencils, crayons, acrylic paint, plaster, photography, and music each brought a particular type of knowing, and these materials generated living data that hold feelings related to my identities.

Drawing and Painting

Drawing and painting hold a central place in this thesis. First, they are the media I am most comfortable with, and second, they give shape to reflection through line, movement, and color. Fish (2025) describes these acts as forms of reflective practice where thinking becomes visible. To me, they invite quiet observation, patience, and imagination.

Graphite and charcoal allowed me to create depth through black and white shades and shadow and light. These materials are simple to use and to handle. The pencil glides smoothly, and the charcoal moves softly across the paper. The lines appear quickly, and any mark can be changed or erased without effort. I focused only on light and shadow, without needing to consider color theory or tone variation. Their simplicity allowed for direct engagement with the material. I believe the process mirrors McNiff's (2025) view of art as an empirical form of learning, where knowledge grows

through action. When I work with graphite and charcoal, my hands become darkened, and the marks record my gestures. These marks that eventually go to my own hand show me that reflection is embodied in me.

Colored pencils, crayons, and pastels introduced a more complex and deliberate layer. They seem easier because of their brightness and playfulness, but they demand more precision. Working with color requires attention to harmony, tone, and transitions. What appears spontaneous often requires deliberate choices; this was something I learned from my Theory of Colors coursework in Architecture. Camargo-Borges (2025) describes creativity as the act of joining reason and intuition in the same space. I think that in the same way light and shadow balance one another, colors hold this balance within themselves as well. Colors express knowledge that appears before language, and this process is how imagination and memory merge.

Painting, especially with acrylic, followed the same pattern, but I added texture and movement. Acrylic dries fast, which required presence and determination, as well as the conscious knowledge that it might not look the way I planned. McNiff (2025) sees this physical interaction with material as a direct form of inquiry. The surface of the painting becomes a record of thought and feeling, each layer holding traces of decision and change, either the ones I wanted or not. In addition, Fish (2025) notes that painting creates visual narratives where color and shape communicate meanings that words cannot. My paintings follow that path, especially considering that they are the result of the abstract section of my artwork, showing the transformation of lived experience into visual reflection.

Sculpture

Sculpture brought the research closer to the body, literally. Working with alginate and plaster to mold my face and foot connected knowing with touch, and expressions to past experiences. McNiff (2025) writes that direct contact with materials allows learning through experience. The act of molding parts of my body became a dialogue between the body and matter. The softness of the alginate, the waiting time, though short, and the hardening of plaster formed a sequence that mirrors how identity takes shape through contact and time. And most importantly, it is not possible to hide your true self. Leavy (2025) explains that embodied practices generate knowledge that links the sensory, emotional, and intellectual. The plaster casts in this project carry that kind of knowledge because their texture and weight represent my physical presence. The small cracks and imperfections hold meaning as well, expressing the changes in my life and how identity shifts and evolves.

Fish (2025) writes that sculptural processes can contain emotion in form, allowing the person to see and hold inner experience. The process of casting my face and foot transformed introspection into visible evidence of transformation, transformed my fears from the past, into reality. Camargo-Borges (2025) understands research as an act of creation. I understand my research as an act of self understanding, and sculpture aligns with this perspective because it builds new understandings about the body, transformation, and memory. Whether I like it or not.

Mosaic and Photography

Mosaic and photography pieces brought together fragments of my life and teaching journey. Scotti and Chilton (2025) describe collage as a way of creating

dialogue among fragments. The process of mosaic followed that principle. It allowed relationships to form among separate pieces, producing a new kind of meaning, with little parts of myself creating who I am at the moment. I assembled photographs of myself, classrooms, projects, materials, and daily gestures that hold memory and emotion. When combined, they formed a composition of my face, symbolizing identity as layered and dynamic.

Leavy (2025) describes visual research as relational, where images gain meaning through their connections and contrasts. The mosaic reflects that process by linking my past and present experiences in teaching. Adding to that, Camargo-Borges (2025) writes that creative and imaginative research invites participation and interaction. Building a mosaic also follows this idea because meaning appears through the relationship among the pieces. The mosaic becomes a visual conversation about belonging, transformation, and continuity.

Photography complements the mosaic. Holm, Sahlström, and Zilliacus (2025) explain that photographs in ABER are co-creations between the maker, the subject, and the viewer. They express relationships rather than record facts. I wanted to capture an environment that showed memory and emotion with my photographs. When I put them together, they formed patterns of my face, but they also tell a visual story of identity and movement. Scotti and Chilton (2025) suggest that collage can serve as both reflection and resistance. Putting together images of personal history is a way of reclaiming one's narrative. The mosaic stands as a shared space where my identities coexist and continue to change. It becomes the final piece.

Music

Composing pieces added sound to this study. It brought rhythm, tone, and silence into the process of reflection. In ABER, music invites relational and affective knowing. Gouzouasis (2025) describes musicking as a practice that unites artist, researcher, and teacher in one flow of creation. Through a/r/tographic inquiry, these roles move together while composing, listening, and responding. The act of making music becomes a conversation with experience where every sound and pause contributes to understanding.

My musical process involved attentive listening and simple improvisation on a minor scale and melody. Gouzouasis (2025) writes that a/r/tography in a new tonality unfolds through rhythm and resonance. I planned for one piece to mirror the rhythm of teaching itself, and for the other piece to express the tension between my identities. The crescendos reflect energy, and the pauses allow stillness, thoughts, internal inquiry. Music expressed aspects of my experiences that were difficult to communicate through words alone, particularly the emotional dimensions of teaching and the tensions between different aspects of my identity.

Leavy (2025) writes that arts-based inquiry creates knowledge that is sensory and emotional. Through music, I express feelings and movements that words cannot convey. Creating short excerpts allows reflection to flow through rhythm, melody, variation, and pattern. It represents thought as movement, the same way as Gouzouasis (2025) introduces the concept of music as a living curriculum. So, each note becomes a learning moment that invites response and awareness, even though they are constantly circling the tonic or the pitch center of the music.

Through melody and rhythm, I see my identity as an educator forming through repetition, variation, and change. I create my soundtrack. Gouzouasis (2025) also emphasizes listening as a way of knowing grounded in empathy and attentiveness. Composing, even if briefly, taught me to listen to tone, to mood, and to myself; mostly to myself. The balance between harmony and dissonance mirrors the complexity of classroom life and research practice, especially during the first piece. Camargo-Borges (2025) observes that creative inquiry values multiplicity. In a similar way, music brings together different tones and tempos that coexist in dialogue. Music in this thesis also expresses rhythm as a form of becoming. It links emotion, memory, and imagination in motion, as well as future.

Journaling and Reflection

Alongside the artwork, I kept a research journal where I wrote: (a) what I felt while creating each piece; (b) why I chose the form, material, or symbol; (c) what memories were triggered during the process; and (d) how each piece connects to my teaching and identity. After generating and organizing my data, I wrote short narratives that captured key moments or turning points in my teaching journey, and these narratives integrated the journal reflections, artworks, and personal memories.

Visuo-Textual Analysis

I analyzed the data using a visuo-textual approach informed by ABER and autoethnography. Visuo-textual analysis is an approach that checks visual and written data both independently and in relation to one another. Instead of positioning visual material as a complement to written data, this method understands both forms of expression and how they work through different logics. Brown and Collins (2021)

designed the Systematic Visuo-Textual Analysis because of the limitation in qualitative research, where visual and textual data were often collected together, but not analyzed together. While there are frameworks that provide clear strategies on how to analyze either visual or textual data, there are fewer approaches explaining how both forms can be analyzed together. To create this framework, they argued that visual data should not be translated into text, because it risks losing the characteristics images can hold. At the same time, they add that texts are not simply an explanation that gives meaning to the visual data. Texts work as another layer of expression that might align or not with the visual data.

This analysis method is organized in three connected parts. First, the visual data is examined by looking at elements such as color, shape, form, tone, composition, texture, and perspective. Second, the textual data is analyzed by looking at elements such as language, words, structure, repeated ideas, emotional tone, and changes in voice. Third, both forms are brought together to explore how meaning is created through their relationship. Sometimes, the visual and textual data support each other. Other times, they differ, creating tensions.

This systematic approach is relevant to my thesis because the data consists of artwork and written reflections developed through ABER and the autoethnographic process. Because the artworks are treated as data with their own meaningful forms of expression, the visuo-textual analysis makes it possible to analyze and explore how meaning is expressed.

The visuo-textual analysis is a guide on how to systematically connect visual and textual data, while the actual interpretation of the data is still dependent on my

theoretical framework lens. So the interpretation, then, was informed by the postmodernism understanding of identity as multiple, shifting, and in need of context. This perspective supported the recognition of contradictions, fragmented representations, and the overlapping experiences across the data.

Finally, the interpretations developed in this process were connected to my teaching practices through the KARDS model. This approach allowed me to consider how my personal and professional experiences shaped my beliefs, values, and pedagogical decisions. In this way, the analysis moved to an understanding of how identity is reflected in teaching.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Because this autoethnography is based on my own experiences, memories, artworks, and reflections, credibility and trustworthiness required an ongoing reflexive process. Reflexivity involves examining experiences, assumptions, and actions and considering how they influence interpretation and decision-making (Tsang, 2021). In this study, I used my research journal as part of this process. During or immediately after creating each artwork, I recorded my plans, decisions, emotions, memories, and reactions.

Trustworthiness was also supported through corroboration between different forms of data. Following Brown and Collins' (2021) visuo-textual approach, I first examined the artworks and written reflections separately and then looked at them together. They did not always communicate the same meanings. In some cases, the differences and tensions between them became important parts of the analysis. I then compared the patterns that emerged across the artworks and reflections and connected

them to my teaching experiences and the theoretical literature. Corroboration, therefore, did not mean that all the data had to agree. Instead, it allowed me to examine an interpretation through different forms of data rather than relying on one artwork or reflection alone.

Authenticity was supported by keeping contradictions, uncertainty, discomfort, and changes in interpretation as part of the research instead of trying to create a completely consistent story of my teaching journey. I also used thick description by describing the contexts, experiences, artistic processes, decisions, and emotional responses connected to the data. These details help readers understand the context in which the interpretations were developed, which can support trustworthiness in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Together, self-reflexivity, corroboration, authenticity, and thick description helped create a rigorous and transparent process that remained consistent with the subjective and reflexive nature of autoethnographic and arts-based research.

Chapter 4 – Data Generation and Analysis

After developing the methodological plan described in the previous section, I began the process of data collection by creating the artworks and reflections. This stage involved producing visual and audio pieces, keeping a research journal, and gathering documentation about each creation. The collection process extended from June 2025 to November 2025, during which I worked with the four chosen mediums: drawing and painting, sculpture, photography, and music. It is important to clarify that although the collection of the materials—mainly the photographs—was made during those six months, because of the nature of my research, some of these pictures are from the time

I was a teacher back in Brazil from 2022 to 2023. In addition to that, all my pieces for the thesis were made from September 2025 to November 2025. Each creation session was accompanied by notes about decisions, challenges, and emotional responses that emerged through artmaking. These records became part of the data themselves, complementing the visual and auditory pieces.

The artistic data generated throughout this research included:

1. *Eyes Set* (Figure 3). Drawing
2. *Ear* (Figure 4). Drawing
3. *Face Portrait* (Figure 5). Drawing
4. *Mirror Reflection* (Figure 6). Drawing
5. *Face Cast* (Figure 7). Sculpture
6. *Foot Cast* (Figure 8). Sculpture
7. *Silhouette* (Figure 9). Sculpture
8. *Abstracts* (Figure 10). Painting
9. *Mosaic* (Figure 11). Mosaic
10. *Music Piece 1 and 2*. Music

Journaling and Reflexive Documentation

During the creation of each artwork, I kept a research journal to record plans, thoughts, decisions, emotions, and memories that emerged during the process. The plan was mainly to determine what could be done with each medium, and what and how they could be represented. This journal functioned as part of the data collection. It was a space to capture what could not be fully seen in each artwork. Each entry was written during or right after the artwork was completed because it was a way to keep the

sensations that were still present. Following ABER and autoethnography approaches (Leavy, 2025; Mead, 2022; Schön, 1983; Tsang, 2021), journaling in this study served as a way of thinking in action. It allowed me to document the creative process as a lived experience.

Each entry includes short notes responding to a set of prompts (see Table 2). These prompts guided reflection without forcing interpretation, keeping the focus on what happened rather than what it means. Each entry remained brief and followed an informal narrative tone. Sometimes I included sketches beside the writing to maintain the link between the visual and textual parts. All journal entries were labeled with the title of the corresponding artwork, date, and medium. They were treated as part of the raw data, to be reviewed later during analysis alongside the visual and musical pieces. They were also compared to new thoughts and sensations as the analysis unfolded, since the meaning of artwork can change from the time of creation to the time of analysis.

Table 2

Prompts Answered for Each Artwork

Focus	Guiding questions	Reason
Context	Where was I? What was happening around me that day?	To document the practical setting.
Emotion	What did I feel during the process? What sensations (physical/emotional) were present?	To capture affect and personification.
Decision	What choices did I make (color, shape, composition, sound)? Why did I choose them?	To record creative reasoning.
Memory	Did this process remind me of a past experience, student, or teaching moment?	To link art-making with personal/professional memory.
Flow and Resistance	When did I feel “stuck”? When did the piece seem to guide itself?	To notice rhythm and self-awareness.

Immediate reaction	How do I feel looking at it now, right after finishing?	To capture first impressions before analysis.
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Data analysis

After documenting the creative process through the artworks and written reflections, I analyzed the visual and textual data using the visuo-textual approach described in the previous section.

I began my analysis by articulating a close connection with each artwork and its written reflection. At this point, I focused on noticing and describing what was present in both forms. For the visual elements, I examined the use of color, form, composition, and space. For example, in the eye series, the repetition of the same eye structure and the use of contrasting warm and cool colors became noticeable, alongside the unstable blending of materials. For the written data, I paid attention to language, recurring words, and shifts in voice, such as repeated references to lack of control, disappointment, and feeling *not on track*, which appeared across the reflections connected to that piece.

As the analysis developed, I moved toward analysis drawing on literature and the theory informing the research, and beyond to the interpretative level, where meanings were constructed across the visual and textual data together. So instead of using the artworks as the illustration of the written data, I used them as forms of expression. Following Hannigan et al. (2023), meaning was understood as emerging from the artistic process itself, the materials, and emotional expression. For example, in the *Face Portrait* (see Figure 5), the inability to blend colors and the visibility of marks reflected the resistance of the material, which directly contrasted with the intention of creating a unified image. I also allowed time between the creation of each piece and the analysis,

to be able to notice the shifts in meanings. During this stage of the process, I wrote visual comments for each artwork, focusing on what the pieces communicated.

The connections between visual and textual data were explored in the analysis. When the two aligned, they helped reinforce a meaning. For example, in the *Ear* (see Figure 4), the gesture of the hand behind the ear visually supported the written reflections about listening and being attentive in teaching. When they differed, they helped understand points of tension. In the eye series, although each drawing was intended to represent different emotions, all of them appeared to share the same gaze, which contrasted with the intention of variation and instead suggested a dominant emotional state. In some cases, a written reflection expressed clarity, while the artwork appeared fragmented. These tensions were explored as part of the complexity of my identity shifts, which aligns with ABER practices because it allows space for ambiguity and contradiction as meaningful aspects of experience.

Analysis of Individual Artwork

The following section presents each artwork together with the reflection documented after its creative process and the analysis that followed. Presenting the reflection and analysis together maintains a close connection between the data and its interpretation and shows how meanings emerged from the relationship between the visual and written data.

Eyes Set

Figure 3

Eyes Set



Title of artwork:	<i>Eyes Set</i>
Date of creation:	September 2 – September 28, 2025
Medium/Materials:	Colorful chalk on rice (wahi) paper. (24cmx33cm)
Where was I?	I was in my bedroom in the basement and for the second half, the kitchen of the house.
What was happening around me that day?	Because of what was happening in my personal life, I was not feeling completely on track. But I knew I had to start on my artwork. I decided to stay in my room because it would give me a sense of control. I decided to listen to music to keep my mind wondering, to keep the flow, and possibly, to be able to control the environment. I did the sketches at night after 9pm. I kept them there for some days, until I could feel in me the urge to finish them. I had to wait for a specific moment. This is how I work. Sometimes the feeling comes out of nowhere and it flows. Other times the feeling doesn't come, so I need to concentrate enough in small moments to get the feeling. That was why I tried to create an environment to make me draw. Music often helps.
What did I feel during the process?	I felt conflicted. When I decided to create such artwork at the beginning of the month, I had a plan on what to do and why to do them. But by the time I started the eyes, even though I tried to convey what my plan was, I didn't feel I

was in my right mind; unconsciously I felt that I ended up showing my personal pain instead of what I planned to.

Each pair of eyes should represent a feeling. I don't think I was able to show them that well as I planned. Each pair of eyes had their meaning for my thesis.

**What sensations
(physical/emotional)
were present?**

I was feeling pain and sadness. It was in my chest. I felt out of place, which makes sense considering I couldn't entirely focus enough to show what I wanted with the eyes. Half of the eyes I drew in my room. The other half I went up in the kitchen to be around people, even though I wasn't really talking to any of them. I was there thinking that maybe if I was around people I like, I could still save my plan for this piece.

**What choices did I
make (color, shape,
composition, sound)?**

I chose the colors based on the selection I had. I had 12 different colors. They were analogous colors at most. I tried to make the color wheel but I couldn't complete it.

Therefore, I decided to divide them into two main groups: warm and cool colors. I then decided to have the background color of each pair of eyes matching the main groups: purple and blue for cool colors, and orange and red for warm colors. I then decided to use their complementary colors for light. When I noticed that wouldn't work, I decided to use yellow and white for light and kept complementary

for shadowing. My composition plan was to use the L arrangement (a composition style in which the elements are arranged in an L shape) even though eyes are close to circular shape. However, my L arrangement was reversed. Instead of using the sides to draw, I used the sides to link. The reason for choosing the L arrangement was because I decided to draw one eye on each paper. And a way to connect them indirectly was to use the L to bring them close.

Why did I choose them?

I chose eyes as a way to represent me as a teacher in the classroom. I often hear that I am an observant person. And I was always looking around the room for anything that would feel out of the ordinary regarding my students. In theory, the feelings I was planning to represent were: being observant, attentive, concerned, and happy. For each pair of eyes, my plan was to show these emotions.

When did I feel “stuck”?

I felt stuck before I started the actual drawing and painting.

It was days after I have created the sketches.

When did the piece seem to guide itself?

The piece guided itself after the second or third layer of each eye. It was when I was getting more comfortable with each choice of color and when the music kept moving me.

How do I feel looking at it now, right after finishing? Right now, I feel disappointed. I don't think I was able to represent what I wanted. I feel that although each pair of eyes are in different positions, all of them share the same gaze. I can't help but wonder how much of what I am feeling right now is what unconsciously drove me while I was making them.

The *Eyes Set* (see Figure 3) was composed of four pairs of eyes that repeat the same structure while varying the use of color and expression. Visually, the pieces showed a consistent form, with the use of similar proportions and composition across the drawings. The main variation was the use of contrasting warm and cool colors. In the written reflections, recurring expressions pointed to feelings of lack of control, disappointment, and a sense of not being on track. These ideas appeared consistently in the reflections associated with the eye drawings, which suggested an emotional continuity that follows the visual repetition. When the visual and textual data were considered together, there was both alignment and tension. The repetition of the same eye structure suggested stability or consistency, while the written reflections emphasized uncertainty and emotional instability. At the same time, the difficulty in expressing different emotions within the drawings suggested the struggle described in the text, which created a point of connection between the two forms.

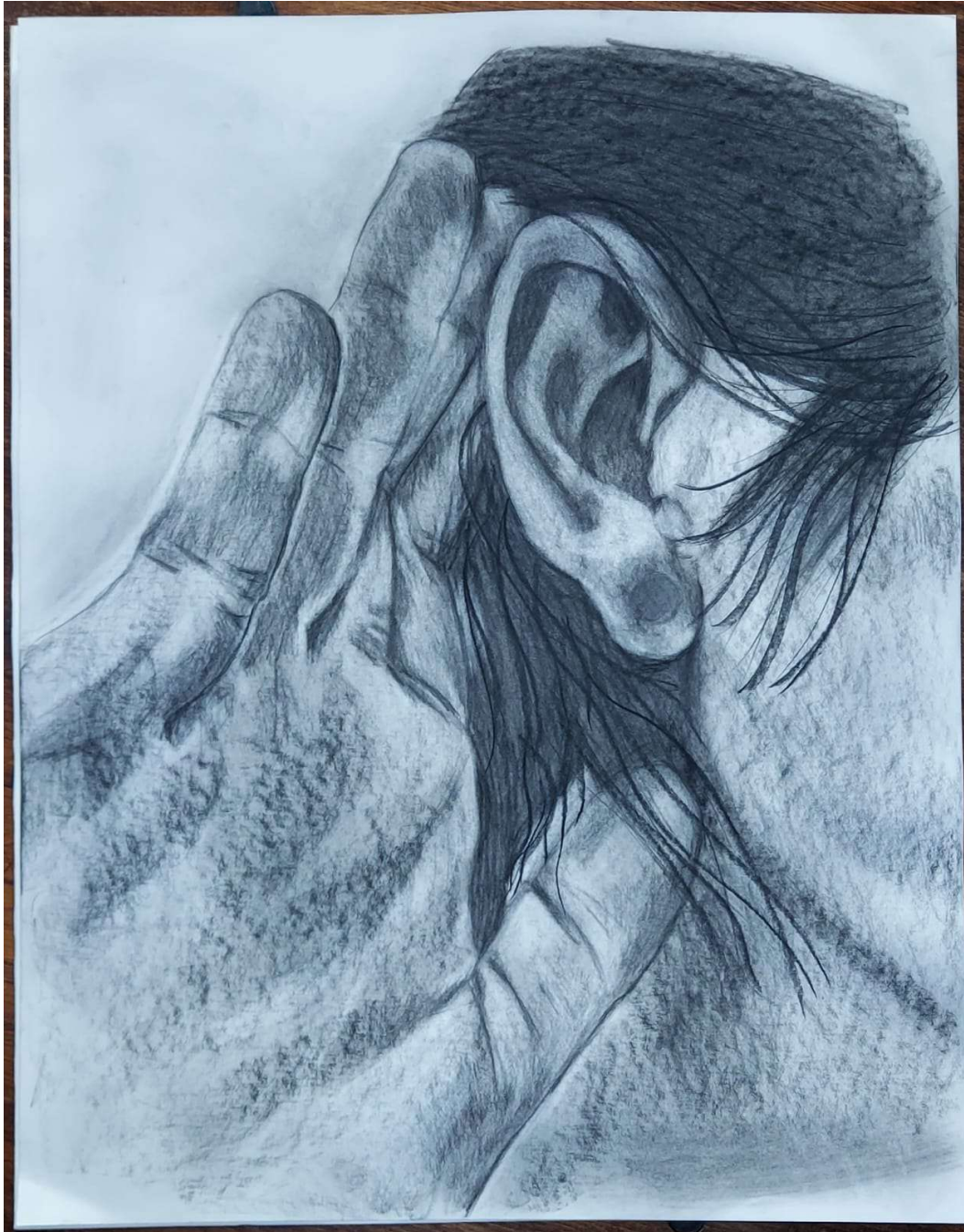
This combination of repetition and instability suggested that, although there was an attempt to maintain control and consistency, there was also an underlying difficulty in sustaining that control. The repeated eye represents parts of my identity in the

classroom, while the variations in color and attempted expressions reveal shifts that were harder to manage or contain. The tension between intention and outcome became very significant in this piece. While each drawing was meant to represent different emotions, the visual similarity between them suggested the presence of a dominant emotional state that overtook the supposed individual variations. This recurring pattern indicates that some aspects of experience might not be easily separated or categorized, even when there was an intention to do so.

Ear

Figure 4

Ear



Title of artwork: *Ear*

Date of creation:	September 2 – September 25, 2025
Medium/Materials:	Charcoal on Canson (watercolor) paper. (60cmx80cm)
Where was I?	I was in my room in the basement of the house. I chose that place because charcoal is messy material to draw with. I used my desk.
What was happening around me that day?	I was busy with my work and sleep deprived. I decided to use my energy to draw, since I couldn't rest enough to sleep. I decided on this piece because I can have "carefree" movements while drawing with charcoal. It is also a big piece, and I could have fun while making it without having to care for details.
What did I feel during the process?	Because I couldn't slow my mind, I felt energized. I worked on this piece for some days. I think it is important to understand that each of the sketches of all the pieces were done on the same day. And through the month, sometimes I would work on one piece, and sometimes another piece. Because I started this piece one night when I couldn't sleep, I decided to only work on it during the nights I couldn't sleep. I felt it would have the same environment and then, the piece wouldn't differ much from the beginning to its end.

What sensations (physical/emotional) were present?	I think most of the emotional sensation was the sense of freedom. Because I decided to draw the ear only when I couldn't sleep, and maybe because I am familiar with the medium as well, I felt free to move my hands the way I wanted. I wasn't really caring for wrong strokes or wrong shading. I was listening to music as well, so I think that also helped me feel at ease while drawing the ear. As for physical sensations, because I couldn't sleep, my body was tired. But even though I was tired, I was still able to work well.
What choices did I make (color, shape, composition, sound)?	I chose to work on shade and light for this one. Like I said, I wanted to use charcoal because it is a medium I am comfortable with. But I also didn't want to make this a black and white picture. I wanted it to look like a drawing still. Because of that, I didn't use any tools except for an eraser to work on lights. My composition plan was initially the rule of thirds (a type of composition in which the elements are positioned on a 3x3 grid), but later I decided to use a variation of the golden spiral, the spiral section. Starting with the hands, part of the face, and ear.
Why did I choose them?	I chose them because I wanted to show that as a teacher and also a person, I need to learn how to receive things. I need to be receptive and listen to what is being said. I

wanted to show that part of growing in life means listening to everything, knowing how to separate the things you've listened to, and perhaps also using what you heard.

Did this process remind me of a past experience, student, or teaching moment?

This process reminded me of me as a student, back when I had to think of all the details I needed to add for drawings. It was an interesting thought, especially because for this specific artwork, I did everything but pay attention to details while drawing.

When did I feel "stuck"?

I didn't. But I felt I could be stuck after the first night, when I thought about continuing to draw the following day and thinking that if I did, I would mess up the drawing. That was when I decided to work on the piece only when I couldn't sleep at night.

When did the piece seem to guide itself?

It guided itself during the entire time. Like I said, I was at ease and comfortable with the medium, so that helped a lot with the flow of the piece, even though I didn't finish it in one night.

How do I feel looking at it now, right after finishing?

I feel proud. I did a good job at doing something without really thinking. Right now, I am also thinking that I should have added thicker lines to the hair, but I don't plan to add them because I feel that it would be against what I created: a piece done during sleepless nights without thinking about details.

The *Ear* (see Figure 4) presented a large-scale composition focused on my ear, partially framed by my hand and surrounding facial elements. The use of charcoal created strong contrast between light and shadow, while the strokes remained relaxed and expressive. The absence of color turned the attention to form. The composition had a curved flow that guided the attention from the ear to the hand or vice versa. In the written reflection, the process was described as intuitive. The drawing was produced during sleepless nights, with a sense of freedom and no concern for precision or control. The text emphasized comfort with the medium, movement without overthinking, and a lack of resistance during the process.

Different from the other pieces, this artwork had a strong alignment between the visual and textual data. The looseness (or *soltura* in Portuguese) of the charcoal strokes and the absence of rigid structure visually reflected the sense of freedom described in the written reflection. The process appeared guided more by movement and sensation than by planning or control. At the same time, the focus on the ear gave the idea of listening as a central element. The gesture of the hand behind the ear reinforced this meaning, suggesting attention and openness to external input. This piece presented a sense of coherence between what I intended, what I felt, and what I produced. However, this apparent coherence was also a concern. The freedom in the process was directly connected to specific conditions (working at night, being sleep deprived, and choosing a familiar medium). This way of working suggested that the sense of ease might not be stable, but dependent on particular conditions that allowed the process to proceed without resistance.

Face Portrait

Figure 5

Face Portrait



Title of artwork:	<i>Face Portrait</i>
Date of creation:	September 2 – September 29, 2025
Medium/Materials:	Crayon on a Canson paper. (16cmx32cm)
Where was I?	I was outside of the house on the back deck.
What was happening around me that day?	It was a sunny day, after work, and because crayons are not messy, I decided to stay outside. The crayon package is small with eight colors and it is easy to handle.
What did I feel during the process?	I was a little bit concerned because I don't enjoy working with crayons. Maybe it is because I don't know how to work with crayons. The oil of the crayon, the texture, they do not appeal to me. I noticed I should have studied crayons when I was doing the piece because with graffiti, I usually trace the important parts and then start with the shading. When I realized I couldn't remove or hide those strokes with the crayon, I was already midway in the drawing. It was hard. I thought about doing it again from scratch, but I eventually decided against it. I thought of when we make mistakes in life and even when we try to fix them with actions of apologies, the "scars" are still there. <i>Não adianta chorar pelo leite derramado</i> (Don't cry over spilled milk.). That's why I decided to keep going even with the mistakes I made with the crayon. It's interesting to see that I don't really care

that much when I make mistakes with my pieces, especially considering that I think of them as sacred.

What choices did I make (color, shape, composition, sound)?

My first idea for this piece was to make the face a mix of colors like a used palette. It was supposed to be something metaphorical representing me stepping into the abstract pieces later on. My glasses and the shape of my face were the only things that could be seen, and the rest of my face was just a blur of colors. I decided to be in the center of the paper with a white background on purpose. For me, the white background represented the place where all the different parts of my identity could eventually come together. My plan was to have my face as the beginning of the combination of all colors, because eventually, after mixing the colors enough, I get to be the white, which is the background. Rather than representing emptiness, the white symbolized the possibility of bringing together the different experiences and identities.

Why did I choose them?

I chose this as a plan because I wanted to find a bridge between concrete and abstract. I am not very good at giving meanings to my pieces. I tried to come up with a plan to explain the broken line between my past life back in Brazil and this new life I am currently living now. To show that even though both lives looked completely different from

one another, they are part of me and if I mixed them enough, I will be back to the white. And I wanted to use the theory of colors to help me explain that.

Did this process remind me of a past experience, student, or teaching moment?

No. It reminded me of myself as a person. About how I thought I had my life planned four years ago and how completely different it is right now. It made me wonder if there is any point in planning at all. I grew up Catholic, and I used to be an altar girl, spending a lot of time in church. I often heard that God already knows what is prepared for us because He planned everything before we were even born. I've never really enjoyed that idea. Because it meant that whatever I wanted, then I could not achieve it because God decided before I was born that "no, Giu is not getting that when she is that age because that's not what I have planned".

When did I feel "stuck"?

When I realized I couldn't remove my mouth, nose and eyes of the picture.

When did the piece seem to guide itself?

It didn't. I had to fight for it.

How do I feel looking at it now, right after finishing?

I don't like it at all. Because it is not what I wanted it to be like. The colors are not mixed to one another, and I don't think it will show what I have planned to show. Despite that,

I will not change anything. I think it is part of the process when things don't go the way one expects.

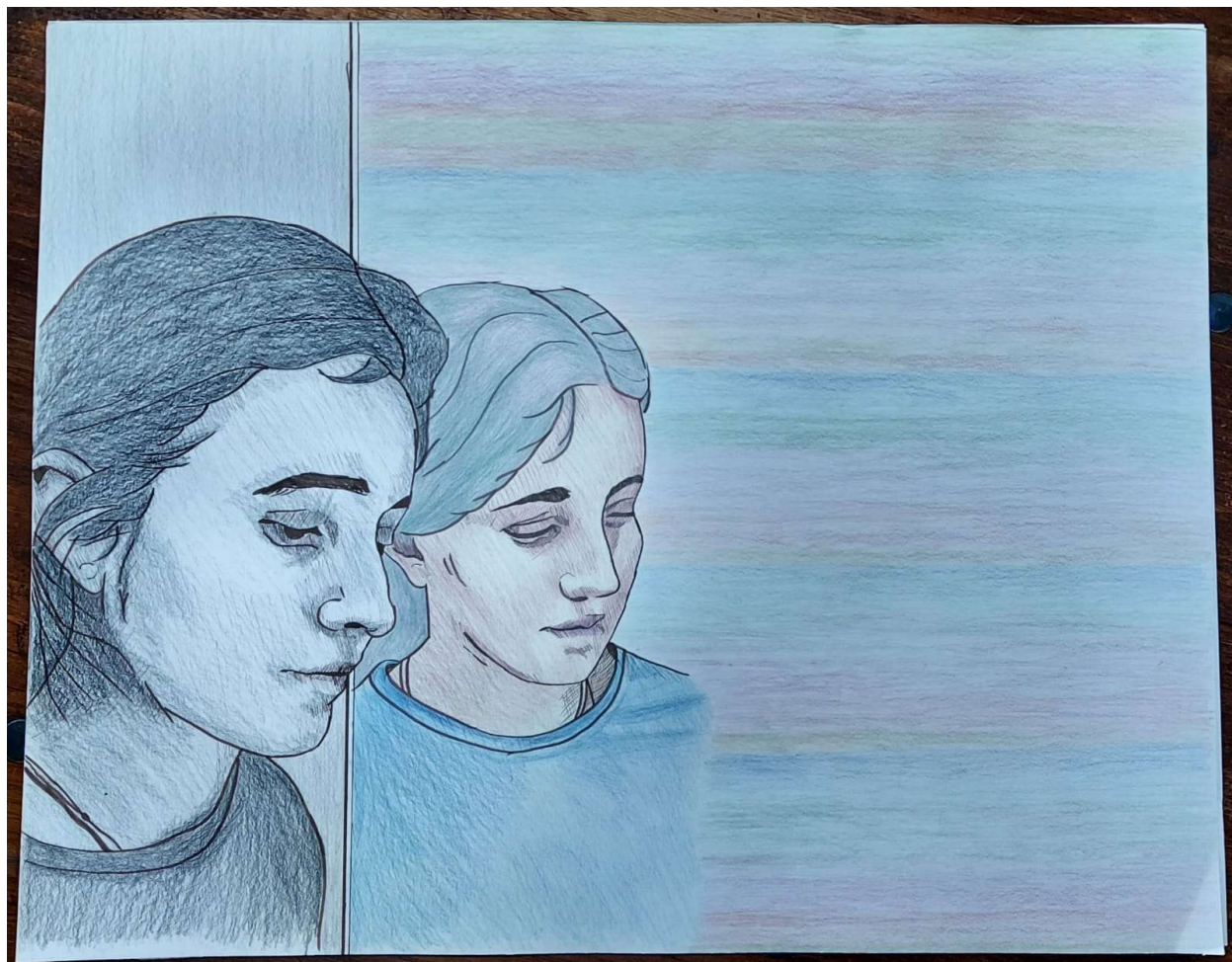
The *Face Portrait* (see Figure 5) presented a frontal face composition centered on the page with a white background and visible crayon strokes. The colors were not fully blended, and the individual marks remained visible, creating a fragmented and uneven (or *desigual* in Portuguese) texture. The initial plan to create a smooth transition of colors across the face was not achieved visually, instead, the drawing showed layers that resist integration. In the written reflection, the process was described as challenging and uncomfortable. The material was unfamiliar, and the inability to erase or adjust marks became the main difficulty. The text highlighted frustration with crayon, along with a decision to continue the piece despite the perceived mistakes. The reflection introduced the idea that once something is done, it cannot be undone. That connected the artistic process to expectations of my life experiences.

This artwork presented a strong tension between intention and outcome. While my initial goal was to create a unified and blended image, the material properties of the crayon prevented this from happening. The visible marks and lack of blending created a fragmented visual result that contrasted with my original plan. This tension became a part of the meaning of the piece. My decision to continue working despite my dissatisfaction reflected a shift from control to acceptance. The presence of visible mistakes gave the idea that imperfection was unavoidable but meaningful. The artwork reflected a process where resistance was integrated into the final outcome.

Mirror Reflection

Figure 6

Mirror Reflection



Title of artwork:	<i>Mirror Reflection</i>
Date of creation:	September 2 – September 29, 2025
Medium/Materials:	Graffiti/nanquim (ink) and colored pencils on Canson paper (23cmx32cm)
Where was I?	I was in my room in the basement of the house.

- What was happening around me that day?** I was tired and had a busy week at work. I asked for some time off when it wasn't my shift so I could work on the pieces. For this one, I was working during the mornings and afternoons when I didn't have to go to work.
- What did I feel during the process?** I was feeling unsettled. This work was the hardest piece of art from this segment. It was hard because I couldn't get the reflection right and because of my choice of medium. I felt the pressure of doing something and constantly getting it wrong. I made mistakes on my lips, and the reflection looked more like my mother than me. People constantly say I am the spitting image of my mother, but even being a copy of her, there are differences between us, enough that I should be able to draw me instead of her.
- What sensations (physical/emotional) were present?** Because of the pressure, I was also feeling physically drained. I took longer to finish this piece compared to the other paintings and drawings. There weren't great sensations. I just felt the need to pay attention and finish the piece the best I could. I remember I wasn't listening to music while painting the reflection. I felt that music was going to be a distraction and as I had already messed up the black and white part, I couldn't get the reflection wrong as well. When I draw or paint, I often take pictures during the process to check how my work is going. I do that

because I might think something is working when I am at a 40cm distance from the piece. But as soon as I move away, it turns out that it is not. I use the pictures I take to see how close to reality I am. I use them to try to find mistakes I can correct. I think that is also why I felt drained. I was paying too much attention.

What choices did I make (color, shape, composition, sound)?

I chose the rule of thirds for the composition, a type of composition in which the elements are positioned on a 3x3 grid. Mainly used for photographs, though I wanted to use this type of composition to have 1/3 of the paper blank. First part would be me, second part my reflection, and the last part would be blank but not really blank. I planned to be the idea of showing tensions. The black and white represented my professional side, the colored reflection was my personal life, and the blank space after my reflection invoked the possibilities of what I could become. I chose color to represent my personal life because I am artistic and creative. The black and white conveyed my professional life simply because I often need to tone down parts of me to fit in whatever professional scenario I am in at the moment. I chose to have my eyes looking down because I wanted to show introspection; I wanted to show humbleness. The horizontal lines in the reflection's

background were planned to show continuity, the same way the vertical lines in the black and white background were planned to show structure.

Why did I choose them?

I chose to represent meaning in detail because part of being a teacher is paying attention to the details around me. When I am a teacher, I am a person who has authority but that doesn't mean not being humble towards the students. I chose to make the vertical lines in the background of my professional life to show that for my professional life, structure is important. It helps with growth and the idea of reaching up. I chose to make the horizontal lines in the background of my personal life to show that my artistic and creative side will always ground me because it is who I am, even when I sometimes have to hide that part of me.

Did this process remind me of a past experience, student, or teaching moment?

The experience I was reminded of was not one in particular, but all of the times I could use my creativity in class and the times I couldn't. Because of the way the educational curriculum works in Brazil, it is not often that I could do something and just be creative. Creativity is something that comes easily to me, and it often involves art creation. Not all the students are able to do such a thing. The fact that I was the English teacher was also an obstacle because

there were expectations from the school and parents/guardians on what learning English should look like.

**When did I feel
“stuck”?**

I felt stuck right in the beginning when I was doing the sketch of the piece. When I sketch something, I usually make the outline and the main parts I want to show in the drawing. The outline of my face was not working out. It was hard to get the shape of my nose, the fine line of my lips, and the way my eyes could be down to express a thinking pose instead of just looking down. I wanted to show deep thinking, and I find it hard to express such feelings when drawing.

**When did the piece
seem to guide itself?**

It never did. I felt like a rider trying to get the horse to follow. I want the horse to turn left, the horse wants to turn right and in the middle of this trying, we end up going straight forward.

**How do I feel looking
at it now, right after
finishing?**

I had two thoughts. I don't know if they can be described as feelings or if I can find a feeling to describe both thoughts. The first thought was, the reflection does look like my mother. The second thought was, maybe I should start practicing faces expressing feelings instead of looking at the technicalities of drawing. When I used to draw back in Brazil, my thoughts were on how to make my drawing

better. I would choose a picture to practice. For example, I would choose something with wood, so I could draw the wood and practice drawing wood surfaces. Or I would find Yuzuru faces in different angles to practice shading. Yuzuru Hanyu was my model most of the time. Having a hard time drawing feelings made me want to practice drawing them.

The *Mirror Reflection* (see Figure 6) represented two figures of me, divided vertically across the composition. On the left side, I was shown in black and white, with more controlled shading and vertical background lines. My face is slightly tilted downward, and the overall composition appears more structured and contained. On the right side, I represented my figure in color, with softer tones and horizontal lines in the background. The strokes appeared more fluid, and the features slightly differ from the left figure, although it was supposed to be a reflection. A third section was on the right, consisting of an open space with the horizontal lines and no defined figures. In the written reflection, I described the process as mentally demanding and emotionally draining. I strongly emphasized pressure, control, and the difficulty of representing myself. The text highlighted repeated attempts to correct the image through observation and reference, as well as my frustration when the reflection did not match my intended outcome. My reflection also introduced the unexpected resemblance to my mother. I also mentioned professional expectations, and the tension between structure and creativity.

This artwork presented a central tension between control and representation. While the composition was carefully planned and structured, the process revealed a difficulty in achieving my intended result. The division between black and white and color reflected an attempt to differentiate aspects of myself, and the outcome complicates this separation. The most significant tension was the relationship between myself and my reflection. Although the second figure was intended to represent the same person, it began to resemble my mother. This shift introduced a disruption in self-representation, where my reflection no longer functioned as a mirror, but as a transformation. The more effort I placed on controlling the image, the less stable the representation became.

At the same time, the presence of the open space reflected a movement beyond my fixed identity because the area did not contain a defined figure, which contrasts with the structured attempts to represent myself in the first two sections of the composition. This element indicated that my identity could not be fully captured through controlled representation, and that attempts to fix it visually might result in distortion instead of clarity.

Face Cast**Figure 7*****Face Cast***

Title of artwork: *Face Cast*

Date of creation: Sep 24, 2025

Medium/Materials:	Alginate and plaster.
Where was I?	I was outside the house. On the deck.
What was happening around me that day?	I was happy because it was a good weekend. It was my birthday and my brother was in town. It was nice weather and I decided to do the messy work because of the warm and clear weather.
What did I feel during the process?	I enjoyed it a lot. I spent a lot of weeks trying to find the best way to do the sculpture of my face. It was challenging because I don't have experience with clay or any other materials to sculpt. I tried doing a sculpture of myself but I was having a hard time. I then decided it was time to find an alternative, either to the medium or the art form. I still wanted to try sculpture, because my plan B was going to be to do something with cloth, and I was less confident with textile work than with sculpture. It was a long month because I needed to study possible materials, and check their availability and process to make the artwork. I was overwhelmed with the number of options and learning I had to do, but overall I really enjoyed it.
What sensations (physical/emotional) were present?	I think it is important to say I had practical help for this piece. I needed help doing it because of the alginate. I needed someone to put the alginate on my face and also cover it with plaster later to have the mold of my face. My

friend did not enjoy this at all. I was faceless and she was scared I wasn't breathing. I thought the experience was funny and oddly relaxing while I had to wait for the whole thing to dry on my face. I had tested the alginate with my hand first, a couple of days earlier to understand the process and feelings of it on my skin. I watched videos to know what I was supposed to do and then be able to explain the process to my friend. It was a tryout and I was actually planning on doing it again for the real piece of art. But I had changed my mind after seeing my friend in distress.

What choices did I make (color, shape, composition, sound)?

I wanted my face to be smiling. That was the plan I had. In the beginning I wanted my face to be divided in half. The first half with my regular features, and the other part with distorted part. The regular feature was supposed to mean me and the distorted part was supposed to symbolize identity shifts. I then decided it was better to just smile. Nowadays, when I smile, half of my face doesn't follow my nerve system commands to smile. I had Bell's Palsy in 2019, and although I recovered most of my facial movements, some will never return fully. The two that bother me the most are the movements in my right eye and the right side of my mouth. So, when I smile, my mouth on

the right side doesn't go all the way up like my left side. And my right eye closes instead of being open and closing on the sides only.

Why did I choose them?

I chose alginate and clay because they were the materials I decided were the easiest for an inexperienced person to handle. My plan was to re-create my face with clay, but I couldn't do it without proper training and that would take a long time. For a comparison, it would be like me trying to play Chopin or Rachmaninoff on my first piano lesson without even knowing how to position my hands on the keys.

Did this process remind me of a past experience, student, or teaching moment?

It reminded me of a personal experience, which was back in 2019 when I had Bell's Palsy and my recovery over the following months.

When did I feel "stuck"?

I didn't feel stuck during the process. I felt stuck when trying to figure out which medium to use when the clay failed.

When did the piece seem to guide itself?

When I realized I could just smile and get the idea of my project.

How do I feel looking at it now, right after finishing?

I don't like looking at it. I just see imperfections. This piece is currently upside down on the top shelf, so I don't have to look at it. I don't like the way my face is now.

The *Face Cast* (see Figure 7) represented a full mold of my face with my eyes closed and minimal expression. The surface appeared smooth in some areas and broken or incomplete in others. My mouth showed slight asymmetry, and the overall form resembled a mask rather than a full face. Although my eyes were closed for protection, they showed a removed sense of gaze or interaction, giving the piece a still and quiet presence. In the written reflection, the initial plan involved creating a smiling face and possibly dividing it to represent identity shifts. However, the focus shifted toward my experience of Bell's Palsy and its lasting effects on my facial expression. The reflection highlighted that some aspects of my face did not fully respond, especially the right side of my mouth and eye. Although I described the process as enjoyable and even relaxing at times, my final reaction to the piece was discomfort, including my dislike of how my face looks now.

This artwork represented a shift from symbolic representation to consolidated reality. While my initial intention was to create a conceptual representation of identity through distortion, the final piece reflected the physical condition of my body itself. The asymmetry was not constructed through artistic choice, creating a strong tension between control and exposure. Unlike other pieces, where distortion was explored through composition, here my body became the source of difference. My closed eyes also intensified this effect since they removed the possibility of interaction or control through expression. Another important tension happened between the process and the outcome. I described my experience of creating the piece as positive, including moments of humor and relaxation. However, my final reaction was rejection. This contrast underscored that the act of making and the act of seeing were not aligned,

since what felt manageable during the process became difficult to confront once it was done.

Foot Cast

Figure 8

Foot Cast



Title of artwork: *Foot Cast*

Date of creation:	September 23, 2025
Medium/Materials:	Alginate and plaster
Where was I?	I was outside the house. On the deck.
What was happening around me that day?	It was my birthday. I was back from work and I was going to do the mold of my foot. I didn't need help for this process, so I was alone outside enjoying the warm weather. We were going to have a small supper party with a couple of friends <i>pra não passar o dia em branco</i> (expression that means when you may not accomplish everything you wanted, but you still do something small just so the day doesn't pass blank). I remember my "niece" (not blood related) asking me if making a mold of my foot was what I wanted to be doing on my birthday. I don't remember what I answered, but now that I am writing this here, I believe I was doing what I wanted to be doing on my birthday. Not the idea of working on my thesis, but the idea of making art.
What did I feel during the process?	I was happy overall. Mainly because of the environment surrounding me. I confess I was also concerned in case the alginate didn't work. I didn't want to buy a lot, so I was working with the bare minimum. I had a feeling of "let's get this thing over with," but in a sense of it is taking too long. I have never done such artwork and between trying to find what to use and actually making it, it was already the end of

September. I was also concerned because although the day was warm, the days were getting colder. I didn't have any guarantee of warm days and for how much longer. And I definitely didn't want to be covered in alginate and plaster in the cold.

What choices did I make (color, shape, composition, sound)?

I chose the foot because I wanted it to be related to my journey as a teacher. Always moving. My initial plan was to make both feet in a walking position. But I didn't have the space nor that amount of alginate and plaster. They are expensive mediums. Expensive in the eyes of an international student.

Why did I choose them?

I decided to have only one foot then. And I chose the left one because I have a dominant left side. I often take my first step with my left foot, and I put on my left shoe first, among other things. So, using my left foot would reflect more personal traits as well.

When did I feel "stuck"?

I didn't feel stuck during the process.

How do I feel looking at it now, right after finishing?

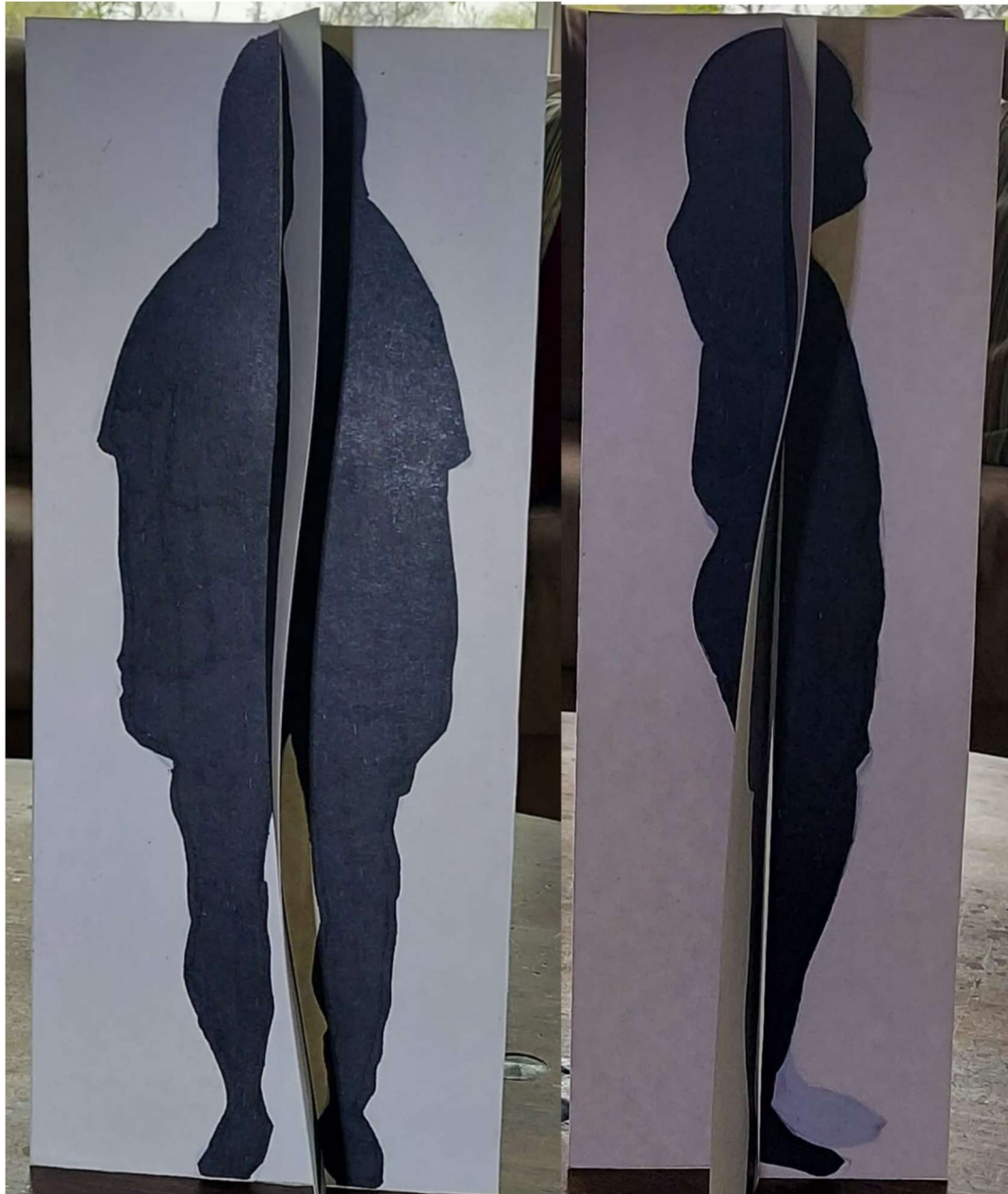
I am a bit concerned with the instep. I didn't use enough plaster to cover that area of my foot. So right now I am thinking of what I can use to cover that part. Maybe pants? 90% of my days I'm in pants. I only wear shorts during Summer, not even all the time though. The tricky part is that

I didn't think of adding anything else to the foot. So, adding something without a proper meaning doesn't seem authentic. Although, leaving my foot like that can also have its own charm and meaning. It gives a raw and unfinished sensation that actually makes sense for my thesis.

The *Foot Cast* (see Figure 8) presented a plaster mold of my left foot, with clearly defined toes and the overall shape of the foot. The surface was white and matte (or fosco in Portuguese), with multiple air bubbles and small holes distributed around it. The texture appeared uneven, and some areas were more detailed than others. While the form was there, it was not anatomically complete, and the process of making the cast remained visible in the final object. In my written reflection, I described the experience as positive and connected to a meaningful moment, my birthday. At the same time, the reflection highlighted the limitations related to time, weather, and material sources. My initial plan was to create two feet in a walking position; I then adjusted it to a single foot because of these limitations. The choice of constructing a representation of my left foot was connected to personal habits and preference, since I am left-handed. My reflection also showed concern with the incomplete project, followed by a reconsideration of whether this unfinished aspect could carry its own meaning.

This artwork introduced the idea of movement shaped by limitation. The foot suggested direction, progression, and journey. However, the incomplete and uneven surface interrupted the idea of a clear or ideal path. The missing instep and visible imperfections indicated that movement was shaped by external conditions and

limitations. A key tension that I noted was between the complete and incomplete. While the piece appeared unfinished, my reflection interpreted this lack of completion as meaningful. I moved from concern toward acceptance, where I no longer saw imperfection as a flaw; the imperfection was now part of the process. Another important aspect was the transition from planning to adaptation. The change from two feet to one foot reflected my practical response to limited materials. However, it also altered the conceptual meaning of the piece. The one foot suggested a moment within the journey, that might emphasize presence rather than progression.

Silhouette**Figure 9*****Silhouette***

Title of artwork: *Silhouette*

Date of creation: September 28 – September 30, 2025

Medium/Materials:	Canson paper and black marker.
Where was I?	The first part, taking the picture, I was in the exercise room upstairs in the house I live at. For the second part, sketching and painting the silhouette, I was at work. And for the third part, cutting and assembling, I was in my room in the basement of the house.
What was happening around me that day?	I did this piece on different days. I will focus more on the second and third days because nothing really happened on the day the pictures were taken apart from asking my friend for help. As for the day I was making the silhouette, I was at work. I had to cover for one of my co-workers and I had planned beforehand to make this piece that day. I did it during the short windows of time I had when I was not working. The job I do is to collect data. I collect information from four participants every day. They come in at specific times and if I am fast collecting the information and they are not late, I can get around 15 minutes between participants. In addition to that, there are some windows (a 7-minute window, and a 3-5-minute window) that I need to leave the participants alone. Those were the moments I got to work on my silhouette.
What did I feel during the process?	I had a lot on my mind, mainly because of my job. I had to track the time, so it was a rushed process.

What sensations (physical/emotional) were present?	My sensations were not related to the piece itself. I was focused on my work rather than the piece. But my plan was to finish the art pieces in September. It was already the 30th and I was behind schedule. My emotional sensation was to rush, which was what I did. And it helped that I did this piece at work, because then I had to be fast.
What choices did I make (color, shape, composition, sound)?	I had chosen to do a silhouette since the beginning of this process, and I also knew I wanted it to be 3D. During the days prior to making it, I kept thinking about how to make that happen. And one day I came up with the idea of using papercraft. It is a simple method, and I was sketching possible outcomes of the 3D silhouette when I came up with that.
Why did I choose them?	I chose to do papercraft for the simplicity of the composition. It is an easy way to keep paper upright and standing using only a cut in the middle of the paper to hold both sheets together.
Did this process remind me of a past experience, student, or teaching moment?	I thought of my first job. I was working at a school helping students when they had questions about class, but apart of my job was to help with school events. And I often use papercrafts because paper sheets were cheaper. That was a time where my DIY abilities flourished. I liked doing that.

When did I feel “stuck”?	I don't think I felt stuck. I took a while to come up with an idea for the 3D silhouette, but thinking is also part of the process. Once I came up with the idea, it was okay.
How do I feel looking at it now, right after finishing?	I am actually very pleased with how it turned out. I thought of what to do and I was able to deliver exactly what I had planned.

The *Silhouette* artwork (see Figure 9) consisted of two full bodies representing me cut from paper and assembled through a central vertical intersection line that created a 3D structure. Each silhouette was completely filled in black, with no details. I presented the images on a white background. One figure represented my frontal and back view, while the other presented my side. The intersection of the two shapes produced the volumetric/ 3D effect. The composition was minimalist and relied on the contrast between black and light. The absence of facial details or internal elements emphasized the outline, structure, and position. In my written reflection, I described the process as fast due to time pressure and my divided attention between work and the artistic process. The piece was completed during short windows at work that required efficiency more than planning. The use of papercraft was connected to practicality and inexpensive material. Despite the process, I was satisfied with the final outcome. The result matched my original intention.

The silhouette introduced a different relationship between restriction and outcome. The restriction contributed to clarity and precision. The simplicity of the form allowed the work to be completed successfully within a short time. The absence of

details became significant. By reducing my body to the outline only, the artwork removed expressive and emotional elements. Also, my use of the 3D element expanded the representation, allowing my figure to be seen from different perspectives. This arrangement created a movement of reduction and expansion. My figure was simplified to its most basic form. However, it was also multiplied through perspective. The result was a representation that was minimalist and complex, suggesting that identity does not require detailed expression to be understood as multiple. In addition, my process being fragmented and rushed and the final piece appearing controlled and complete suggested that coherence in the outcome does not always reflect coherence in the process.

Abstracts Paintings

Figure 10

Abstracts



Title of artwork: *Abstracts*

Date of creation: September 30 – October 01, 2025

Medium/Materials: Acrylic on canvas

Where was I?	I was outside the house. On the deck.
What was happening around me that day?	Warm weather. I was happy because of it. I was well rested and in a good mood. Everything was planned to be that way—the way I acted at work, the way I interacted with people.
What did I feel during the process?	I was uncomfortable, but mainly because this medium was new to me. Acrylic is not my usual choice of medium. I would rather use pencil than ink. And using acrylic and abstract was another step into being uncomfortable. I decided to make three pieces at the same time. So that made me feel overwhelmed. But the choice was mine.
What sensations (physical/emotional) were present?	I felt good in the sense of things going according to plan. I had a plan of what I needed to be like in terms of my feelings and mood when I made the pieces. So, the moment I woke up in the morning, I noticed I could achieve the mindset I needed to complete them. All I had to do was to go to work and keep minimal interactions with my co-workers and the participants. I told myself to do the minimal requirements and don't spend energy. Then I could focus on the artwork in the afternoon after work. Which was exactly what I did. I felt proud of me.

**What choices did I
make (color, shape,
composition, sound)?**

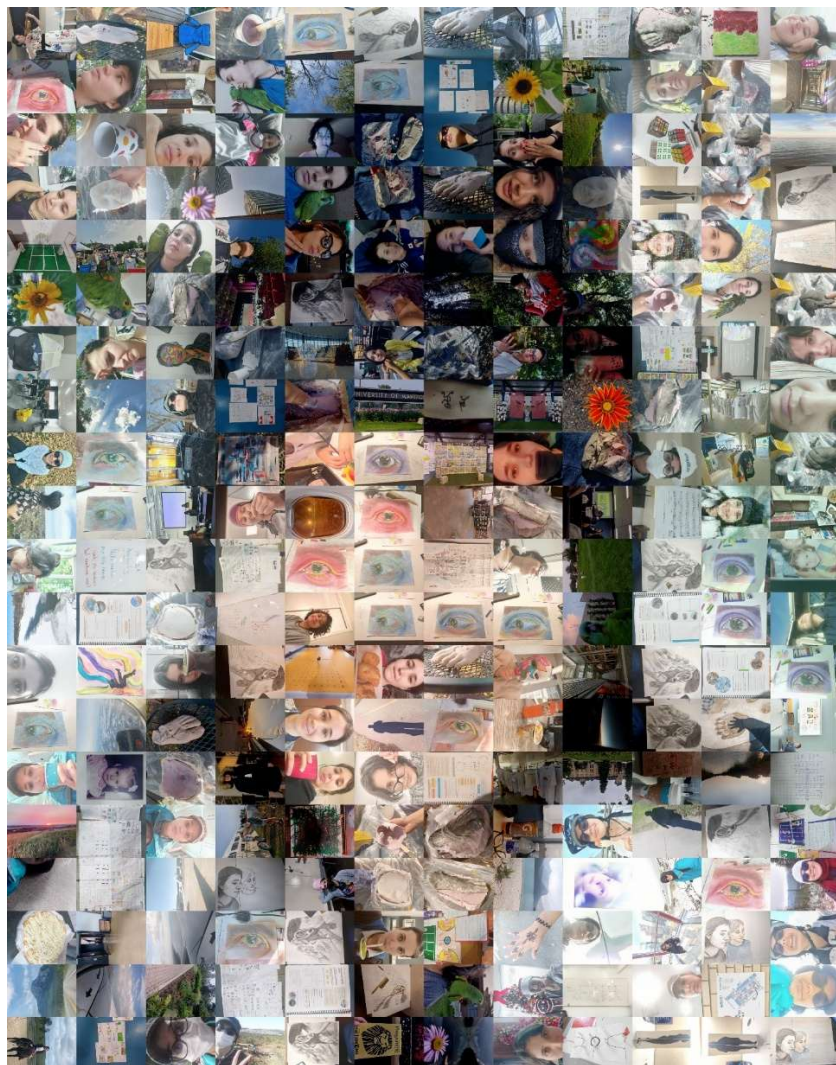
I had everything planned for these pieces. They were abstract ones and I am not good at abstract pieces. I studied abstract pieces and how to create meaning through layers. I have also watched tons of videos where people paint abstract work, to see the process in reality. What I did might not be pragmatic, but I decided to base myself on one of the videos I watched. The lady mentioned the importance of background, layers, and the choice of colors, not only the idea of knowing at least the wheel color, but also what each color would represent. Everything needed to have meaning. I felt like the process was close to silent movies. Silent movies are not supposed to be watched, they have to be read, in all senses. There are signs everywhere, in the light and shadows, in the movement, the rhythm of the characters, frames, everything. I felt like abstract work would also be like this type of movie. I chose colors to represent the schools where I taught, colors that could represent movement and stillness, and colors that could also represent artistic liberation. For shapes, my teaching self was made using the circle and waves, my identity was made with vertical and horizontal strokes, and the aspect of migration in my experiences was made without order, with chaos.

Why did I choose them?	Like I said, everything needed to have meaning. So my choices were made to represent my teaching experiences, my migration life, and my identity shifts throughout my life.
Did this process remind me of a past experience, student, or teaching moment?	It reminded me of everything. These three pieces are the abstract form of what I was, and what I am trying to become.
How do I feel looking at it now, right after finishing?	I feel order and I feel chaos. I feel like my life is divided in two parts and I am not sure if both parts can be connected as a whole, which is concerning to say the least. Maybe it is because of them that I often feel conflicted in life and choices. The rational part of me and the emotional part of me.

The *Abstracts Paintings* set (see Figure 10) consisted of three square acrylic paintings (30cm x 30cm), each presenting a distinct composition. The first painting was characterized by bright, saturated colors, and curved forms, with a sense of circular movement and a combination of smooth transitions and splashed (or *respingo* in Portuguese) marks. The second painting was dominated by blue tones, with horizontal layering and more controlled brushstrokes, sometimes interrupted by red lines. The third painting presented a denser composition. There were darker colors such as green, red, and black, along with vertical drips and heavier application of paint. It created a more chaotic and textured surface. Although each piece differed visually, I presented them as

a set. The overall impression was one of contrast between movement, structure, and chaos, with each painting emphasizing a different visual logic. In the written reflection, I described the process as highly intentional and carefully planned. I was mentally and emotionally prepared to complete the works, controlling interactions and conserving energy for the painting process. I assigned each piece symbolic meaning representing different aspects of identity, including teaching, personal identity, and migration. Despite the structured planning, my reflection highlighted a sense of division and internal conflict after the pieces were completed.

This set introduced a tension between constructed meaning and lived experience. The process was highly controlled from emotional preparation to symbolic planning; however, the outcome revealed separation, not integration. Each painting represented its intended concept, yet the relationship between them remained unresolved. The difference between the three pieces became significant as they appeared as separated expressions that coexist without fully connecting. The contrast between movement, structure, and chaos suggested that different aspects of identity operate under different logic, since each composition organized form, color, and movement in different ways. In addition, although my process reflected a strong effort to regulate emotions and guide meaning, my final reflection revealed a sense of division, particularly between rational and emotional aspects of myself. This separation suggested that control over process did not necessarily lead to coherence in experience, since the outcome revealed separation between the pieces, meaning the different aspects of identity did not fully connect despite the structured process.

Mosaic**Figure 11*****Mosaic***

Title of artwork: *Mosaic*

Date of creation: June 17, 2025 – September 22, 2025

Medium/Materials: 250 pictures from my personal and professional life in 2022 and 2023 and my personal and academic life in 2024 and 2025.

Where was I?

I don't have a regular place for this one. I collected pictures using my phone most of the time. I would be at home, in the living room or in my bedroom; I would be at the park or somewhere else; or I would be at work during a window where a participant had canceled. I spent quite some time digging through the pictures and selecting the ones I could use for a mosaic. I had to think about the composition I wanted as well.

What did I feel during the process?

I felt excited. I was looking forward to the mosaic. It seemed big and I wanted it to be big. The process of choosing the pictures was hard. Mainly because my initial thoughts would be pictures of me and the projects I did as a teacher back in Brazil. The problem was that most of those pictures were taken with my students included which I could not use. That limitation made the process a lot slower.

What choices did I make (color, shape, composition, sound)?

I chose the main picture of me smiling in the winter. I chose that because it is something that would bring Canada to my mind. If I had chosen a landscape or me on a t-shirt, it wouldn't have brought the idea of Canada to my mosaic. I wanted it to express Canada because it is where I am right now.

When did I feel “stuck”?	I felt stuck when I realised my pictures from the schools where I worked had students in them. I didn’t want to have students in them.
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The *Mosaic* (see Figure 11) was composed of 250 small square images arranged in a grid structure. At the center, there was a photograph of me in a winter setting, which was the focal point of the composition. Surrounding this central image were photographs from different contexts, including selfies, artworks produced during the thesis, everyday life moments, nature scenes, and professional and academic materials. The images varied in color, light, and orientation. Certain elements repeated throughout the composition, mainly my face and my artworks, which appeared in many parts. The overall structure was organized yet still complex, with many moments existing simultaneously rather than forming a single linear narrative. In my written reflection, I described the process as exciting and challenging, particularly in the selection of the images. I expressed my desire to create something comprehensive, while also facing limitations, especially related to the presence of students in photographs, which led to their exclusion for ethical reasons. The central image was intentionally chosen to represent Canada, to reflect the current context of my life. The images’ timeline went from 2022 to 2025, bringing together images from different periods and experiences.

This artwork built identity through accumulation. Instead of presenting a single image of myself, the mosaic gathered multiple moments, roles, and contexts into one composition. Each image functioned as a fragment, and they created a broader

representation of my current self. An important tension happened between unity and fragmentation. The grid structure brought the images together into a cohesive form, while the variation of images reflected different moments and contexts. Identity was built through this accumulation, where each fragment contributed to how I represented myself. Another important tension was between inclusion and exclusion. My intention to represent my professional life was limited by ethical considerations, resulting in the absence of certain images. Therefore, what is visible in the artwork was shaped by what cannot be shown. The process of selection also became significant. The act of choosing which images to include and exclude reflected a form of healing, where identity was built through decisions about visibility. This creative work suggested that representation was always selective, even when my intention was to be comprehensive.

Music Piece 1 and Music Piece 2

Music Piece 1 - [Music 1 completa](#)

Music Piece 2 - [Music 2 completa](#)

Title of artwork:	<i>Music Piece 1 & Music Piece 2</i>
Date of creation:	October 6 – October 28
Medium/Materials:	Cubase (digital audio workstation) and a laptop
Where was I?	I was in my room in the basement of the house.
What was happening around me that day?	I spent almost a month composing both pieces of music. The whole process was painful. Music is an important aspect of my life and has always been. I needed help with some theory. I studied music back in Brazil, but only for three years. I had a basic level of music theory, and I asked

a person for help. This person used to be my violin teacher and she has knowledge of music, so it felt right to ask her for help. Last year, one of my final assignments was open and I decided to make a composition. I told myself I would do it just for fun without thinking much about things. Then I decided to make a music composition for my thesis, and when I decided that, I asked for her help in case I needed it. In the end, I asked for help to analyze some songs and understand the process of composing something, it was easier to analyze because my style of music composition is relatively simple. The problem was the consequences of having to ask for help. We were close, and when I asked for help the first time in the Spring, we were still close. But by the time October came, we had drifted apart. It was painful and this part of my personal life and played a big role in the interpretation of my composition.

**What did I feel during
the process?**

I think I had hoped that asking for help wouldn't be weird and we would be okay with each other. My thoughts and hopes failed me. During the one single Monday I asked for help, we had to reschedule because of her. I didn't like it at all. Then, the following Monday we were able to "have class". I tend to focus 100% on the topic I am learning if, and only if, it interests me. Music does, and because I was

the one who actually asked for this class, I was 100% focused on it. So, I asked questions, I wrote things down and she, as an instructor, was also focused on teaching me. The problem was after. After this one class was over, I was given the opportunity to send messages if I needed help. Because I felt like we could be friends, but we weren't. It was painful and I was crushed during the whole month. My friends noticed and I just wanted to push this feeling away to focus on what I wanted the pieces to feel like. The problem is that even when one wants to express something through art, one's feelings will always come up unconsciously. Which I think is what happened. And that didn't help me at all.

**What sensations
(physical/emotional)
were present?**

During the process of actually creating the pieces, I felt drained and distressed. I felt too much and that emotional roller coaster was causing my pieces to crumble. I realized the longer I took to make them, the worse I would get. So, I worked nonstop for three weeks. Did it work? I am not sure.

**What choices did I
make (color, shape,
composition, sound)?**

After the analysis of the songs, I wanted my own composition to be based in terms of choices of instruments and voices. I decided to make the first piece adding voices after each bar to grow in intensity. And for the second piece, I decided to use only one instrument, the piano, and

work on the idea of circling the tone. Both are simple ideas. I selected the voices because I could choose three or four chords and play with the notes in them. I added the voices either using the higher or lower notes of the chords or adding a new layer of notes still following the chord structure. For example, the tone is A minor (Am). The first chord is a triad (A C E). When I wanted to add voices, I could add the cello using only E, which is in the triad already, or I could use G, which is the next note of Am chord to make it a tetrad (ACEG). The second piece is also simple because I played around with the notes but always returned to the keynote (*tônica*). For example, in Am, I would create a small motif and theme that would have the notes always coming back to A (A B D E A B C F A), then I based on the notes I added, I would play around with the chords. The first piece was made based on chords, and the second piece was made based on the melody.

Why did I choose them?

I wanted to create pieces that could show how I was feeling during the process of making my thesis and my journey. I wanted to show continuity, something that didn't just end because learning about myself will not end after I finish this autoethnography. So that is what I wanted.

Did this process remind me of a past experience, student, or teaching moment? I didn't. It reminded me of personal matters.

When did the piece seem to guide itself? I never did. I had to fight for them, and I guess I lost the battle.

How do I feel looking at it now, right after finishing? What I feel when I listen to them does not resemble what my plan was. I can feel my anguish in the melody and the harmony, especially with the second piece.

Music Piece 1 presented a layered composition, in which notes were progressively added across measures. The beat was established early and continued throughout the piece. The density of the notes increased over time. I built harmonic structure through the stacking of voices and chords. The overall structure suggested expansion as the piece grew in dynamics. *Music Piece 2* was written for a single instrument, the piano, and it was characterized by repetitive melodic patterns, and the consistent use of a subdivision of the beat. I frequently returned to the tonic in the composition, creating a circular sense of movement. I repeated the motifs with slight variations, and the harmony supported the melody. The overall structure suggested limitation, with limited movement away from the tonic.

In my written reflection, I described the process in relation to emotional pain, relational rupture, and exhaustion. The text highlighted a sense of persistence despite difficulty, alongside my need for external help during the process. The emotional

experience was marked by instability, disappointment, and a loss of connection, even as the work continued to develop structurally. I also described my emotional experience as intense and unresolved, including feelings of anguish and frustration. The text highlighted a sense of losing control and an inability to resolve my emotional state. It was overwhelming with a strong emphasis on a lack of closure.

This first piece presented a tension between structural growth and emotional instability. The layering of musical voices suggested development and accumulation. The emotional context described in the reflection complicated this sense of progression. The increasing density of the composition can be understood as an accumulation of emotional weight. The repetition of rhythmic patterns contributed to a sense of continuity, but not stability. The structure remained organized, but the emotional experience I described was strained (or *tenso/esticado* in Portuguese). This approach created a separation between the logic of the composition and the lived experience of creating the composition. *Music Piece 2* reflected a pattern of emotional looping and lack of resolution. The repetition of melodic motifs and the constant return to the tonic created a sense of being unable to move forward. While the structure was controlled, it did not lead to progression. The circular nature of the composition suggested an ongoing attempt to stabilize or resolve the musical idea; however, it was never fully achieved. This result mirrors the emotional experience described in the reflection, where efforts to regain control did not lead to closure. Another important tension appeared between simplicity and intensity. The musical structure is relatively minimal, but it did carry heavy emotional weight. This heaviness suggested that complexity of experience

did not require complexity of form, and that repetition itself could become a place of tension.

Chapter 5 — Theoretical Interpretation and Findings

Following this descriptive stage, the analysis moved to an analytical and interpretative level, where the meanings identified across the visuo-textual data were examined in relation to the literature and theoretical framework. The connections with postmodernism, the KARDS model, and ABER were developed through the patterns, relationships, and tensions that appeared from the data. Theory functioned as a lens to deepen the understanding of how identity was built and represented in the artworks and the written reflections. It included analysis focused on connecting the findings to discussions in the literature, mainly in relation to multiple identities, shifting identity depending on contexts, and the role of artistic processes in generating knowledge. The interpretation also considered how these findings related to my teaching practices, making possible an exploration of how personal and professional experiences informed my identity as a teacher.

This stage of analysis was also organized around important moments in my personal and professional lives. The data was examined in relation to three main timeframes:

1. earlier stages of teaching (ages 17–23), which included my first teaching experience, my background in architecture, and my trip to Japan;
2. the period which included my work in different schools, my second degree in Languages and Literature, and my plan to pursue graduate studies in Japan (ages 24–28); and

3. the period which included my transition from Brazil to Canada and my experience in the master's program, including this thesis (ages 29–31).

These timeframes supported the identification of patterns and important themes in different stages of my life, allowing the analysis to connect with personal, professional, and academic experiences.

Timeframe 1 (17–23)

My start in teaching emerged from circumstances. I began teaching through an opportunity at the school where my brother worked while I was pursuing a degree in architecture. At that time, I understood teaching as temporary, and I expected to move to working in architecture after graduation. This expectation shaped how I positioned myself in the classroom, since I did not see teaching as part of my long-term identity. During this period, my teaching practice was strongly guided by external structure and expectations. I relied heavily on guidance from my boss and followed established plans closely. I did not feel confident in my own decisions, and teaching often felt like performing a role, the role of a teacher. I described this experience as wearing a mask, where I separated who I was from who I needed to be in the classroom. Over time, this separation became less clear, and the difference between the teacher and the self began to blur.

A pattern that appears across the data is related to how I managed situations that could not be changed, both in the artworks and in my teaching practice. In the face portrait for example, once the mark was made, it could not be erased or blended. This required me to continue the drawing from what was already there, even when the result did not match my initial intention. The process involved adjusting to the existing marks.

This experience suggested that the outcome was not determined by my original intention. Although I started the drawing with a particular image in mind, the process required me to work with what had already emerged on the paper. The existing marks became part of the decisions that followed, influencing the direction of the artwork. So, this pattern is consistent with views of teacher identity as something that develops through experience and interaction with teaching contexts. Pennington and Richards (2016) explain that teacher identity is continuously shaped through experience and through interactions with different contexts. Rather than developing separately from practice, identity happens through the ways teachers interpret and respond to their experiences. In addition, Kelchtermans (2009) argues that teachers build understandings of themselves through their professional experiences and the meanings they attach to them. Looking back, my tendency to continue working from what was already planned was also part of how I understood teaching to be.

A similar process appeared in the *Mirror Reflection*, in which I made repeated attempts to adjust the image to match what I wanted. These adjustments shaped the drawing, but the image did not become clear or with a consistent representation. This way of continuing from what was already done matches how I approached teaching during this period. I followed lesson plans closely and focused on completing what had been prepared. When something did not go as expected, I continued with the plan rather than changing directions. My sense of being effective was connected to finishing the lesson as planned, which then structured how I engaged with the classroom. This understanding of being effective is also connected to how teachers develop professional identities in the early stages of their careers. Pennington and Richards (2016) explain

that new teachers often rely on established structures and institutional expectations as they learn how to position themselves within the classroom. It is possible to notice that for all my artwork, I have always focused on finishing them, even when the work did not go as planned. From a postmodernism perspective, identity is built through context and positioning (Norton, 2013). In this case, the conditions of following plans, completing tasks, and continuing from what could not be changed were what I understood teaching to be. These works shaped how I understood myself as a teacher.

Another pattern is related to how emotional experiences appear in the data. In the *Eyes Set*, each drawing was supposed to represent a different emotion. However, the final images showed the same gaze across all drawings. The differences between emotions did not become visible in the visual outcomes. The emotions should have been present, but they were not clearly separated or expressed in distinct ways. This pattern connected with how I experienced teaching at that time. I did not actively engage with my emotions in the classroom. I focused on following the lesson plan, completing tasks, and maintaining structure. My attention was directed toward what needed to be done instead of toward identifying and processing how I felt at each moment. Because of this, different emotional experiences were not separated or named as being distinct. They were present as one. This pattern may also be understood through literature that views emotions as an integral part of teaching. Zembylas (2003, 2005) and Song and Miller (2025) explain that emotions are part of the teachers' everyday experiences and cannot be separated from how they understand themselves as teachers. Emotions were present, but they were not something I was paying attention to. My focus was on maintaining structures in the classroom.

Zembylas (2003) also helps me understand this pattern beyond emotions as individual feelings. He explains that emotions are connected to how teachers understand themselves as their professional identities. Looking back at this period, maintaining structure and continuing with the lesson were also connected to my own understanding of appropriate professional behavior. I believed that being a professional teacher meant remaining in control and continuing to teach regardless of what I was experiencing emotionally. In this sense, keeping emotions in the background became part of the professional identity I was constructing at that time.

This finding is consistent with how I described functioning like a robot, where completing the tasks guided my actions. Emotional experiences were part of the process, but they did not become the focus of reflection or decision-making, so they appeared simply as a repeated pattern in the background. Through Zembylas (2003, 2005), this pattern can also be understood as emotional regulation connected to teacher identity. The way I manage emotions was related to the kind of teacher I believed needed to be in the classroom. The *mask* I described earlier involved an emotional dimension, performing the role of the teacher also involved regulating which parts of my emotional experience entered the classroom. A postmodernist understanding of identity helps explain this phenomenon. Identity is shaped through ongoing experiences, not fixed categories (Norton, 2013). In this case, emotions did not appear as clearly defined categories. The repeated gaze in the eyes reflects the process of showing how one emotional tone remained present across different moments, and how other possible emotions were not expressed.

Another pattern appears in how I represent myself visually. In the mirror reflection, the figures do not fully match each other, and the resemblance to my mother emerged. In the *Eyes Set*, the gaze remained consistent even when variation was intended. These two examples showed that the image of self shifted depending on the process, the material, and the interaction between intention and outcome. Drawing produced a representation that changed through the process, just as identity develops through repetition, continuation, and adjustments (Foucault, 1982). In addition, Pennington and Richards (2016) and Britzman (2012) argue that becoming a teacher is a matter of acquiring knowledge and skills, and a process of becoming a particular kind of teacher through practice, particularly in the sense of a person's specific ideal. Teaching was one of the spaces where these processes took place. Following the lesson plan, continuing it despite changes, and focusing on creating tasks created a structure in which experiences were organized. This process is also consistent with what Kelchtermans (2009) discusses. He explains that teachers develop understandings of themselves through their professional experiences and through the meanings they attach to those experiences. I came to understand that my early teaching identity was shaped through repeated actions, where consistency in doing with a focus on always finishing became central to how I understood my role.

In relation to teaching practices, the KARDS model helps explain how these patterns became part of my development as a teacher by making visible how my actions, perceptions, and decisions were organized at that time. The strong focus on following lesson plans and completing tasks reflects the dimension of *Doing*, where the teaching was structured through action and repetition (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). In my

case, this meant relying on prepared material, avoiding deviation from the plan, and measuring success through completion. Teaching for me was carried out through consistency in execution, where I maintained control by continuing with what had already been established. At the same time, the way emotional experiences appeared in the data connects to *Recognizing*, which refers to awareness of the teacher self, including emotions, beliefs, and values (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). During this period, this awareness was limited. Emotional experiences from the written reflection of the artwork such as frustration or lack of control were identified. These experiences did not match the past because they were not part of my decision-making in the classroom. They were managed through continuation and task completion. *Recognizing* was developing through experience, where emotions were lived, but not yet identified as part of teaching practices.

Reading this finding through both KARDS and Zembylas (2003, 2005) also show a relationship between recognizing the teaching self and recognizing emotions as part of that self. The emotions I can identify from the past were already part of my teaching experiences, but at that time, my understanding of the teacher role gave greater attention to control, consistency, and task completion. Recognizing these emotions now changes how I understand those earlier practices and the professional identity I was developing through them.

These patterns somehow also connect to *Knowing*, particularly in how I relied on procedural (i.e., how to perform specific tasks) knowledge. I followed instructions, used given materials, and applied what was expected in the classroom. My teaching was guided more by what I had been shown to do. Over time, these repeated actions

contributed to how I began to understand teaching at that time. Kumaravadivelu (2012) describes *Knowing* as involving different forms of teacher knowledge, including procedural knowledge. Looking back at this period, this type of knowledge was central to how I engaged with teaching, since I would rather focus on applying strategies and following what was expected in the classroom, than questioning practices or reflecting on the aspects of teaching. This connection to KARDS is important because it shows that my teaching identity was formed through repeated engagement with practice. The way I acted, the decisions I made, and the aspects I focused on became part of how I positioned myself as a teacher. So, in this sense, identity developed through doing, even when at that time, the other aspects of reflection were still limited.

This period also included a trip to Japan when I was 22 years old. That trip became an important personal experience. At that moment, it was not directly related to my teaching practice or professional plans, because it was a vacation trip. However, being in a different cultural context changed how I saw my own context and the world around me, so I developed a strong interest in the country and the idea of returning for a longer period of time stayed with me after the trip. Although I did not act on this immediately, this experience remained present in the background of my decisions. Right now, when I look back, the trip to Japan can be understood as a seed that later influenced my academic choices. This reflects how identity can be shaped through experiences that do not produce immediate change but continue to inform future directions over time. This interpretation is consistent with Norton's (2013) idea of identity as something that develops over time through experiences and through the ways individuals understand and respond to future possibilities. Although the trip did not

immediately alter my academic or professional plans, it influenced how I understood future possibilities.

Timeframe 2 (24–28)

During this second period, my relationship with teaching began to shift to something more specific. I was actively building a plan; I worked at different schools, started a second degree in language and literature, and began to consider the possibility of pursuing a graduate program in Japan. Unlike timeframe 1, when I followed structure without questioning it and creating a rapport with teaching, this period involved more intentional decisions about my academic and professional lives.

A pattern that appeared in the data was an effort to organize experiences through control, especially for situations where the outcome did not align with the intention. As mentioned in timeframe 1, this can be observed in the *Face Portrait* created with crayon and the *Mirror Reflection*, in which continuation and repeated adjustments shaped the process. However, for this stage, this pattern extends and becomes part of how I approached broader decisions in my academic and professional lives. This pattern also appears in how I approached the decisions I made during this period. Choosing to pursue a second degree in language and literature was an attempt to reorganize my path, moving from architecture toward teaching. This decision was developed through a need to create coherence between my experiences and my future plans. Now I see that the decision to pursue a second degree was not only related to teaching itself; it was also connected to how I was trying to understand where I was going and how different experiences could fit together. Tsang (2021) argues that reflexivity involves examining experiences to better understand the self and the decisions one makes. From this

perspective, choosing language and literature was not only an academic decision. It was also part of a process of making sense of my trajectory. In addition, Pennington and Richards (2016) explain that professional identity develops through experiences and choices that gradually shape how individuals understand their place in their profession. Choosing a second degree became one of the choices that reinforced my commitment to teaching and contributed to how I began to understand myself in the profession. Unlike timeframe 1, where control was about managing tasks, control in this timeframe was now actively shaping the direction of my future.

At the same time, the data showed an increasing effort to structure identity in a more defined way. Mead (2022) discusses teacher identity as something that continues to develop and be interpreted over time as teachers make sense of their experiences. In addition, Pennington and Richards (2016) explain that professional identity is shaped through experiences and choices that influence how teachers understand themselves and their place within the teaching profession. These perspectives help explain why my identity in this period appeared more intentional and more clearly organized. In the silhouette for example, my body was represented through clear lines and in multiple perspectives, creating a structured representation without details. This form showed an attempt to organize how the self is seen and where identity is shaped through position and perspective in the same way Norton's (2013) view of identity is relational and built through context. The clean and controlled execution of this artwork contrasts with other artworks because now, the construction is intentional. This desire to organize identity also appeared in *Abstract Paintings*. Each canvas was planned to represent a specific context (teaching, identity, migration), with defined use of colors and forms. The process

involved preparation and control of materials, but mainly, intentional decisions about meaning. However, the final works showed a separation between the pieces. They each had different visual logics that did not merge into a single composition set. This trio reflected how I was organizing my identity in parts, where different aspects were defined and developed; however, they were not fully integrated. This set of paintings reflects and aligns with postmodernist theory because it does not assume coherence between identities, and multiplicity does not mean harmony.

From a postmodernist perspective, identity is built through context and experience, and it can develop through multiple or sometimes contrasting forms (Norton, 2013). For this timeframe, identity appeared structured through decisions, academic choices, and intentional representation. The separation between the three abstract paintings showed how I organized different aspects of experience as different elements within the same set of paintings. This differentiation reflects an effort to understand my experience by separating it into distinct parts, where each painting focused on a specific aspect of experience. Tsang (2021) explains that reflexivity involves examining experiences in ways that support a deeper understanding of the self and one's actions. Organizing experiences in separate artworks created a structure in which I could examine different aspects individually, which then allowed me to develop meaning through focused attention on each experience. As I mentioned before, each piece was developed with a clear intention, so by working with one aspect at a time, it became possible to focus on how that experience was structured and what it represented. This process allowed me to explore each dimension in depth, in which meaning was developed through attention to the specific characteristics of each piece.

The organization into separate paintings created a space to position each aspect (teaching, identity, migration) more clearly. In this sense, meaning emerged through the act of separating, identifying, and developing each part individually.

This organization of identity into separate parts can also be considered in relation to the emotional dimension of teacher identity. Zembylas (2003, 2005) argues that emotions are connected to teachers' understandings of themselves and to the identities they construct through their experiences. During this timeframe, I was becoming more intentional about teaching as part of my professional future, but the different aspects of my experience were still represented separately. Looking back, the separation between teaching, identity, and migration in the *Abstract Paintings* also shows that becoming more intentional about my professional identity did not necessarily mean that I understood all aspects of myself as integrated. My emotional experiences remained part of this process of making sense of who I was becoming as a teacher.

In relation to teaching practices, the process of choosing a second degree in language and literature and planning to pursue a Master of Education program connects to the dimension of *Knowing*. The desire to acquire additional personal and experiential knowledge informed my decisions. In my case, this pursuit of a graduate degree involved using my own experiences to guide my academic and professional direction, where decisions reflected how I understood my future goals. At the same time, my continuing focus on planning, structure, and planned action connects to *Doing*, in which teaching and learning were organized through preparation and execution. In my practice, this meant designing lessons with specific goals, thinking ahead about possible outcomes, and organizing my work through structures that I created. So

teaching was carried out through actions, and these actions reflected choices that guided how I approached my work.

The data also shows an increase in the relationship between intention and outcome, which connects to *Recognizing*. This increase can be seen in the *Mirror Reflection* and the *Abstract Paintings* artworks, where I became aware of differences between what I planned to produce and what emerged in the process instead. This awareness (i.e., the ability to become aware or conscious of events, ideas, or feelings) became part of how I understood my work, where reflection allowed aspects of my identity to become visible through practice. This development in *Recognizing* can also be connected to Zembylas' (2003, 2005) understanding of emotions as part of teacher identity. Compared with timeframe 1, where emotions were experienced but largely remained in the background, this period involved greater attention to my experiences and to what they meant for the teacher I was becoming. Emotional awareness was therefore connected to a broader process of recognizing and interpreting myself through my professional experiences. These patterns showed that my teaching identity during timeframe 2 developed through action, decision-making, and awareness. My experiences helped to define my direction and goals. Identity in this case was shaped through the interaction between what I did, the choices I made and eventually, what I came to understand about my own practice over time.

Timeframe 3 (29–31)

During this timeframe, my relationship with teaching shifted in a way that made it difficult to position myself as a teacher. Being away from the classroom while in the master's program created a distance from my past practices, and this distance changed

how I understood what I had done before. Schön's (2016) discussion of reflective practice explains that the distance from daily classroom routines creates an opportunity to examine previous actions from a different perspective. Experiences that once appeared normal in practice became objects of reflection, allowing new questions to emerge about the decisions I had made and the assumptions that had guided them. Many of the decisions that once felt normal began to feel uncomfortable when I checked them. I focused on completing content, following deadlines, and moving students through the material. Looking back at those practices created questions about what teaching meant, since finishing the content did not necessarily guarantee that the students had learned.

Looking back also produced a sense of shame about how I had approached teaching, particularly because I had understood completing the content as something I needed to accomplish, rather than focusing on whether students were learning it. This realization created a sense of uncertainty about how I understood myself in relation to teaching, since the way I had acted in the classroom no longer matched what I now believe teaching should involve. I now understand teaching as creating conditions for students to learn, which may require patience, different ways of explaining the same content, opportunities for students to make and understand mistakes, and space for them to actively engage in the learning process. This interpretation is also consistent with Kelchtermans' (2009) discussion of teacher self-understanding. As teachers reflect on their experiences, they may develop different understandings of themselves and of their work. In this sense, checking my previous practices created a shift in how I understood my role as a teacher and the values that informed my teaching.

Zembylas (2003, 2005) helps me understand the shame that emerged through this process as connected to teacher identity rather than as separate from it. Revisiting my previous practices created an emotional tension between the teacher I had been and what I now understood teaching and professionalism to involve. In timeframe 1, professionalism was connected to maintaining control, following the lesson, and completing what had been planned. From my current perspective, professionalism became more connected to understanding students, responding to their learning, and adapting my teaching when necessary. The shame I experienced when looking back therefore became part of recognizing this shift in how I understood myself as a teacher.

This discomfort became central to how I engaged with the data. The process required me to revisit who I was in the classroom and how I made decisions. Revisiting those experiences brought moments of recognition, especially when I began to see how much of what I did was shaped by structure and the need to complete tasks. I began to see that my understanding of teaching had been shaped by specific conditions, such as expectations about progress, timing, and control. Identity in this sense had been shaped by repetition and expectations that I was only able to understand now. Looking back made those patterns visible in a way that was not when I was still in that environment. The emotional response to these realizations became part of the process of recognizing and interpreting the teacher self. Rather than functioning only as a reaction to the past, the shame and discomfort helped make visible the difference between how I understood teaching then and how I understand it now.

Another pattern that emerged in the data was related to how identity was experienced through the body. This idea appeared in the *Face Cast*, where the visibility

of the asymmetry caused by Bell's Palsy brought attention to aspects of my face that I struggle to accept. The reaction was immediate and emotional because it was connected to how I see myself, literally. The plaster did not reinterpret or soften those features. It simply presented my face as it is. This experience gives attention to how identity is understood through thoughts, reflections, and experienced through the body. The *Face Cast* made visible aspects of myself that are present, but I choose to ignore, and therefore, not examine. Zembylas (2003) explains that emotions are closely connected to identity and to the ways individuals understand themselves in relation to their experiences. In this case, my emotional response involved rejection of my own image, anger toward the asymmetry of my face, and a physical awareness of something that I perceived as not being right. The reaction was therefore experienced emotionally and through my body. The vulnerability of the process emerged from having to confront an image of myself that I would normally prefer not to examine. In this sense, the emotional response to the *Face Cast* was a confrontation with a representation of myself that I could not easily alter or reinterpret. The artwork created a moment in which identity, emotion, and self-perception became visible at the same time.

This awareness of the limits of control continued in how I engaged with adaptation. In the *Foot Cast*, the process was shaped by humidity, material limitations, and time. These conditions required adjustments, and the final outcome reflected these conditions. In this sense, adaptation became the way that lack of control was experienced in practice. The foot became connected to how I experienced movement in life, when plans do not work as expected and require adaptation. This interpretation is consistent with Kelchtermans' (2009) discussion of vulnerability in teaching. Teachers

work within conditions that cannot be fully controlled and often need to respond to situations as they emerge. So, adaptation was not related to the *Foot Cast* itself; it also related to how I approached teaching, because both experiences required adjustments in response to changing conditions. This metaphor also connected to how I approached teaching and the lack of control in teaching. Lesson plans often needed to be adjusted in response to what happened in the classroom. The experience of adapting becomes part of how I understand myself, where responding to conditions shaped how I move forward.

The *Mosaic* introduced another way of engaging with identity through processes of selection and adaptation. The intention was to show different parts of my life, but ethical considerations shaped what could be included. Many moments that involve other people and that are important to who I am could not be directly represented. This lack of control influenced the final composition. In several cases, I had to replace images that included people with images that could suggest those moments without showing them. While these substitutions carried meaning to me, they might not be immediately understood or not be completely understood by someone viewing the *Mosaic* without access to my reflections. When I look at the *Mosaic*, I recognize myself through the central image, and I also see a collection of moments that are mostly positive. However, the absence of certain relationships changed how identity was represented, showing how what is visible is shaped by both personal decisions and contextual limitations (Lyotard, 1984), which means that meaning is built through these choices, where what is included and what remains outside the image both contribute to how identity is understood.

Time became another important element in how the data is interpreted. *Music Piece 1 and Music Piece 2* were created during moments of emotional intensity and a sense of lack of resolution, which reflected how I was feeling at that time. The emotional experience included longing for something that was no longer present and anguish connected to wanting the compositions to be perfect while being uncertain about whether I had achieved what I intended. When I listen to them now, I recognize that version of myself, even though those emotions no longer represent my current state. My emotional response to that version of myself has also changed. Looking back, I feel a sense of pity for myself and for the intensity of what I was experiencing at that moment. The music holds that moment in time, allowing that experience to remain present without needing to match how I feel now. The compositions became records of a specific period of my life, where they captured emotions and experiences as they were lived. In this sense, the music created a connection between past and present, where different versions of myself could be recognized through the same piece.

Zembylas' (2003, 2005) understanding of the relationship between emotion and identity helps explain this change in emotional meaning. The compositions did not only preserve what I experienced at the time of their creation; returning to them also made visible how my relationship with those emotions had changed. The longing and anguish connected to the original experience can now coexist with my present response toward the person I was at that moment. In this way, the emotional meaning of the artwork is also shaped by the point in time from which I return to it.

Meaning did not remain tied to the moment at which the music was created. It shifted as I returned to the pieces from a different point in my life, and consequently, it

brought new understandings to the same experience. This interpretation matches Mead's (2022) discussion of teacher identity as something that continues to develop and be reinterpreted over time. Going back to the music did not change the original experience, but it changed how I understood it. Benoit (2022) also suggested that autoethnographic relations can create opportunities to reconsider experiences and understand them differently as the circumstances change. The music preserved a specific moment, and the interpretation allowed the meaning to evolve. When I listen to the pieces now, I recognize that version of myself in the repetitive patterns and constant return to the tonic that reflected a sense of being unable to move forward at that time. And although my relationship with those experiences has changed, they remain part of how I understand myself and my journey.

What changed during this timeframe was how I understood teaching and myself in relation to my experiences. Revisiting past practices, artworks, and memories created opportunities to recognize patterns that were not visible before. Experiences that once felt complete or self-explanatory became open to new interpretations. Emotions became part of this process of reinterpretation. Shame and discomfort helped me recognize the distance between my past and current understandings of teaching, while the *Face Cast* and the music made visible how emotional meanings were connected to self-perception and could also be reinterpreted over time. In this sense, identity was also an ongoing process of revisiting and making meaning of them over time.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

This research began with questions about how my personal and professional experiences shaped my identity and teaching practices as an ESL teacher and whether

teaching had also become a way of understanding myself. Looking across the three timeframes for this thesis allowed me to revisit experiences that at the time they happened, they felt disconnected, ordinary, or simply part of the routine of teaching. Through autoethnography and ABER, these experiences became connected in ways I had not previously recognized.

In timeframe 1, teaching was closely connected to repetition, structure, and task completion. I followed lesson plans carefully, focused on maintaining control in the classroom, and separated who I was personally from the version of myself I believed a teacher should be. At that time, I understood professionalism through consistency, organization, and the ability to continue even when situations did not go as expected. Looking back now, I can see how much of my teaching identity during that period developed through repetition and adaptation. Emotional experiences were present, but they remained in the background of my practice. I focused more on completing what needed to be done than on understanding how those experiences were shaping me. Keeping emotions in the background was also connected to my understanding of professionalism at that time, in which being a teacher meant remaining in control and continuing with what had been planned.

In timeframe 2, my relationship with teaching became more intentional. Beginning a second degree and planning for graduate studies reflected an attempt to reorganize my future around teaching and language education. This period was marked by planning, structure, and attempts to create coherence between different parts of my life. That movement also appeared in the artworks. The *Abstract Paintings*, for example, separated teaching, identity, and migration into different visual compositions rather than

bringing them together into a single image. Looking back, I understand this period as an attempt to organize experiences that still felt divided internally. Teaching was no longer temporary, but I was still trying to understand what kind of teacher I was becoming.

Timeframe 3 changed the way I understood the earlier stages of my teaching career. Being away from the classroom during the master's program created distance from my previous practices and allowed me to revisit them differently. Many actions that once felt normal began to feel uncomfortable when I returned to them through reflection, writing, and artistic inquiry. I experienced shame when I recognized that I had often prioritized completing content rather than considering whether students were learning. I began to recognize how much of my teaching had been shaped by my understanding of professionalism, including the importance I had placed on productivity, control, timing, and task completion. My understanding of professionalism also changed through this process. I came to understand teaching as being attentive to students and their learning, having patience, finding different ways to explain when students do not understand, and creating space for students to make mistakes and actively participate in learning. The research process also changed how I understood adaptation. In the artworks, asymmetry, repetition, fragmentation, and material limitations became meaningful because they reflected experiences that could not be fully controlled or resolved. Revisiting these artworks showed me how meaning changes over time depending on where we stand when we return to an experience.

Looking across the three timeframes, I realized that my teaching practices were deeply connected to how I understood professionalism, control, and myself throughout different stages of my life. The research also showed me that many of the things I

believed were only pedagogical decisions were actually connected to emotions, insecurities, expectations, and attempts to adapt to the environments where I worked. Teaching gradually became more than professional practice. Teaching became one of the spaces where I learned how I responded to pressure, instability, emotion, and change. Revisiting these experiences also showed that my relationship with emotions changed over time, as experiences that were not fully recognized when they occurred could later be named, understood, and reinterpreted. One of the most important understandings that emerged from this research was that my identity as a teacher never remained fixed. Different contexts produced different versions of myself, and many of these changes happened quietly through routines, expectations, and forms of adaptation that I only recognized when revisiting these experiences through art and reflection.

Taken together, the findings provide answers to the two research questions that guided this study.

1. How have my personal and professional experiences shaped my identity and teaching practices as an ESL teacher?

The findings suggest that my personal and professional experiences were deeply interconnected and could not be separated from one another. Experiences related to teaching, education, migration, relationships, emotions, and artistic creation all contributed to how I understood teaching and how I positioned myself as a teacher. Across the three timeframes, my beliefs and practices were shaped by different experiences and contexts, showing that teacher identity developed through ongoing

interactions between personal experiences, professional responsibilities, and changing understandings of myself.

2. To what extent has teaching been a way for me to understand myself?

The findings suggest that teaching became one of the main spaces through which I interpreted and made sense of my experiences. Through teaching, I came to recognize patterns related to control, adaptation, emotion, and identity that were not fully visible when originally lived. The process of revisiting these experiences through autoethnography and arts-based inquiry showed that teaching was not only a professional practice, but also a way of understanding who I was and how I responded to different situations throughout my life.

Rather than leading to a final understanding of who I am as a teacher, this research helped me recognize teaching identity as something shaped continuously through repetition, reinterpretation, and changing contexts across time.

Recommendations

This thesis suggests the importance of creating more intentional spaces for identity reflection for teachers, in a variety of spaces that may include teacher education programs. Throughout my teaching journey, many tensions connected to professionalism, belonging, and emotional experience remained unexamined until I revisited them through reflection and artistic inquiry. For example, the *Eyes Set* revealed how emotions were present in my experiences but were not consciously identified or differentiated at the time, while the analysis of my early teaching experiences showed how I separated my personal identity from the version of myself I believed a teacher should be. In timeframe 3, revisiting my classroom practices also revealed how

institutional expectations related to productivity had shaped my understanding of teaching. Because of this, teacher education programs could incorporate discussions about teacher identity, emotional experiences, and institutional expectations alongside pedagogical preparation.

The findings also highlight the need for broader discussions about professionalism in education contexts. Professional expectations influenced how I behaved, communicated, and positioned myself across different schools and institutions. This recommendation emerged from findings in timeframe 1, where professionalism became associated with consistency, task completion, self-regulation, and maintaining structure in the classroom. Revisiting those experiences revealed how professional expectations influenced not only my teaching practices, but also how I understood myself as a teacher. Creating opportunities for teachers to discuss emotional labor, self-regulation, and institutional pressures may help future teachers navigate professional environments with better awareness of how these expectations shape teaching practices and identity over time.

For ESL teacher education, this research reinforces the importance of recognizing language teaching as relational (respecting human relationships with trust and respect), emotional, and related to identity. Throughout the three timeframes, teaching was closely connected to emotions, professional expectations, adaptation, and the ways I understood myself in different contexts. Creating opportunities for teachers to reflect on these ideas may help them understand better how personal and professional experiences influence their teaching practices, relationships, and professional development over time.

This thesis highlights the value of arts-based reflective practices within teacher education. Drawing, painting, music, and mosaic created opportunities to revisit experiences in another way and recognize meanings that did not emerge immediately with writing alone. For example, the *Face Cast* brought attention to aspects of identity and self-perception that had remained largely unexamined, while the *Mosaic* and *Music Piece 1 and Music Piece 2* revealed how meaning changed when experiences were revisited from a different point in time. These understandings did not emerge as clearly through writing alone. ABER may support deeper forms of reflection and self-understanding, especially when teachers are working through emotionally complex experiences.

Finally, for future research I could build on this study to explore similar questions with other ESL teachers. Because this research was based on a single autoethnographic experience, there could be more studies to examine how other teachers from the same schools I worked with understand and experience identity, emotions, professionalism, and institutional expectations in their careers. In addition, I could also explore teacher identity across different career stages. The three timeframes in this study showed that my understanding of teaching, professionalism, and identity changed over time. So, studies involving teachers at different points in their professional journeys could provide more insight into how identity develops and shifts in their teaching career.

This study also points to another direction for future research. Throughout the research process, revisiting experiences through autoethnography and ABER reshaped the meanings I attributed to past experiences. Future research could examine how the

reconstruction and reinterpretation of memories and emotions influence teachers' understandings of identity, teaching, and professional practice over time. This direction emerged through the research process itself and reflects the potential of autoethnography and ABER to generate new questions as experiences are revisited.

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