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If Profesorado de Inglés at IES N°28 were a person...
Mentors and influences
Si el Profesorado de Inglés del IES N°28 fuera una persona...
Mentores e influencias

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Abstract

This article serves as a tribute to the generations of educators who have shaped the identity of the EFL Teacher Education Programme at IES N° 28 since its founding in 1935. It employs narrative personification, using the metaphor of a biography to recount the institution's history as if it were a person celebrating their 90th anniversary, reflecting on mentors and significant influences. The article incorporates testimonies from teacher educators recorded in previous anniversaries and shares current memories from retired teachers who actively participated in institutional life for decades. It acknowledges the political influences that defined initial Foreign Language Teacher Education curricula, as well as the pedagogical and didactic approaches that have evolved over time, guided by international and national frameworks. It concludes with a reflection on the impact of AI on academic life and a call for the definition of linguistic policies that promote a situated curricular design for initial Foreign Language Teacher Education, language programmes, and critical thinking at all educational levels and for the general citizenry.

Key words: History, Testimonies, Approaches, AI.

Resumen

Este artículo es un homenaje a las generaciones de docentes que dieron identidad al Profesorado de Inglés en el IES N° 28 desde su fundación en 1935. Apela a la personificación narrativa mediante la metáfora de recorrer la biografía escolar del Profesorado como si fuera una persona en su noventa aniversario recordando a sus mentores e influencias significativas. Se recuperan los testimonios de docentes que dejaron sus voces en aniversarios anteriores y se comparten memorias actuales de docentes jubiladas que participaron activamente en la vida institucional por décadas. Se reconocen las influencias

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políticas que definieron los planes de formación inicial de docentes de Lenguas Extranjeras, así como los enfoques pedagógico-didácticos que fueron cambiando a lo largo del tiempo guiados por marcos de referencia internacionales y nacionales. Concluye con una reflexión sobre los cambios que la IA está causando en la vida académica y un llamado a definir políticas lingüísticas que propicien un diseño curricular situado para la formación docente inicial en LE, programas de fortalecimiento de lenguas y pensamiento crítico en todos los niveles educativos y para la ciudadanía en general.

Palabras clave: Historia, Testimonios, Enfoques, IA.

If Profesorado de Inglés at IES N°28 were a person…

Mentors and influences

Turning 90 is a milestone and a multi-generational moment. If Profesorado de Inglés [the EFL Teaching Education Programme] at Instituto de Educación Superior N°28 [Higher Education Institute](IES N°28) were a person, it would be the time for a 90th birthday speech. In my imagination, this institution stands as a resilient woman shaped by years of history and commitment. She has carried the legacy of women's education in her voice since the 19th century in Rosario. What follows is my humble tribute to her 90 years: chapters written through long conversations between generations who have passed the torch through the shadows of uncertain language policies.

The groundwork

In April 1879, President Avellaneda's message travelled via telegraph wires to be read at the official inaugural ceremony of a teacher education programme established as an affiliated branch of Colegio Nacional de Rosario [Rosario National School]. His words bore the weight of the intellectual frameworks that were guiding Argentina's Generation of '80: Liberalism and Positivism.

> To found a school is to issue a call to all the powers of good; and being the most charitable of acts, it is, at the same time, the most solemn, for it requires us to place ourselves—as never before—in the presence of the future. Who can say how much the fate of humanity will be influenced by a single educated child, if, upon becoming a man, he thinks like Newton, governs like Washington, or invents like Fulton? (Normal N°1, 2026; translated verbatim from the original, Spanish web).

Dressed in a high-collared gown and listening to the president's message, there stood the first headmistress, Mrs Elizabeth Boyer Coolidge, one of the "75 brave and enthusiastic North American teachers brought by Sarmiento to carry out his magnificent educational plan" (Bergnia de Córdoba Ludges,1964; translated verbatim). They had come to be role models primarily as teachers; however, with their Argentine colleagues, they were the blueprints for a new social and professional identity for women. In their reports (Rodriguez, 2022), there is evidence of how they struggled to navigate bureaucracy: they advocated for

the improvement of working conditions, complained about insufficient buildings and delayed payments, requested higher salaries, and demanded that scholarships be granted to the most vulnerable students, particularly the daughters of immigrants and girls from rural areas.

This social environment laid the groundwork for the Teacher Education Programmes in Modern Languages established by the Ministry of Justice and Instruction on December 13th, 1935. Profesorado en Lenguas Vivas (Francés e Inglés) [Teaching Education Programme in Modern Languages (French and English)] was created as part of Normal School N° 1 for female teachers, "Dr Nicolás Avellaneda". Her birth record is revealing. When reading the curriculum content and organization, it feels as if conjoined twins were being gestated to be born in 1936. I invite you to read the official Act of Congress signed by Manuel de Yriondo, Minister of Justice during Justo´s presidency (Ministerio de Justicia [Ministry of Justice], 1935, pp. 115-117). It was originally a three-year programme with 14 subjects, covering 24 pedagogical periods a week. In her genes, subjects developed in foreign languages and Spanish seemed smoothly intertwined. The inaugural year of each programme was launched and conducted by teachers appointed from Profesorado "Dr Juan Fernández" [Teaching Programme] in Bs As (p. 117). Arlette Battier de Imbert (2001), the head of the English Programme at IES N°28 for almost twenty years, mentions that most of these first teachers soon returned to Bs As, and local graduates were then in charge of the subjects. She recounts vivid memories of cultural events in which teachers and students gathered around the piano or performed plays for celebrations (pp.41-42).

Growing alliances…

In 1953, the twins received their separate names, Profesorado de Francés and Profesorado de Inglés, by decree N°11/03/53 (Martino, 2001, p. 20). By that time, Teaching Programmes at Normal N°1 had gained prestige through the meticulous selection of their teaching staff, the community influence of their graduates, and a robust offering of professional development and postgraduate courses. Furthermore, recognition from the host countries of the languages and cultures studied granted these programmes international status (p.20).

Those teacher educators had been trained in the principles of the Direct Method (Berlitz, 1909; Price,1913): not a single word of the student´s native language, primacy of oral communication with immediate correction to foster native-like pronunciation and intonation; inductive grammar teaching, and a question/answer pattern for teacher/ class interaction to encourage associations with realia. This target language-only approach was inextricably rooted in their beliefs and practices.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, there was a vast infusion of British funding to foster the development of English Language Teaching as a profession worldwide. Language policies were agreed at a Commonwealth Conference on the Teaching of English as a Second Language (Commonwealth Education Liaison Committee, 1961). The Makerere Conference,

held in Uganda, is known as the birthplace of linguistic imperialism and "the native speaker fallacy": priority should be given to native speakers, and the use of students' first languages should be forbidden in the classroom (Phillipson, 1992). The target-language-only approach turned into the English-only policy worldwide. At that conference, the American term "Audio lingual method" (Fries, 1941) merged with the British "Aural-Oral approach", also called "Situational-structural approach" (Firth, 1957; Hornby, 1954; Palmer, 1921). It was mandated that English be taught entirely monolingually, introducing new structures embedded in realistic situations (inside a shop, at the doctor's, at the office).

Leaving the mother ship…

In the early 1960', the authorities at Normal N°1 strived to achieve structural autonomy for Teacher Education Programmes. Eventually, in 1969, Instituto Nacional Superior del Profesorado [National Institute for Teaching Programmes] (INSP) was established as a higher education organisation in the evening session. Normal N°1 and INSP shared the same building for the rest of the century.

The EFL Teaching Programme had a sibling in 1972. Traductorado [Translation Programme] was born as a three-year degree in Literary and Technical-Scientific English Translation (RM N°815). They shared years of sociopolitical instability, ideological battles and the transition towards democracy. Mrs Battier de Imbert (2001), head of the English Teaching Programme, was also responsible for organising the Translation Programme. She recalls how, driven by the urgent need for space, the authorities reached out to the dean at Universidad Tecnológica Nacional [National Technological University] (UTN), securing an agreement to offer morning classes at the UTN premises (p.43).

The turmoil of the 1970s and 1980s is meticulously narrated by Magdalena Calvo de De la Vega (2018) in a historical chronicle for the institution's 50th anniversary. Her account is a must-read for anyone interested in the origins. De la Vega highlights the academic standards of the teacher educators, who persevered in their pursuit of educational excellence. They attended and delivered courses, lectures, and seminars on updated pedagogical theories, new management approaches and innovative experiences.

One of those teacher educators is Mrs Magdalena Prinster de Boto, who warmly narrated her memoirs for the EFL teaching programme's 70th anniversary. Graduated in 1963, she was a "witness and a protagonist" of institutional transformations for 43 years (2006, p.11). She proudly recalls how she became a lecturer in Language III and Language IV, appointed through a competitive selection process in Bs As. This process involved a thorough review of academic background and the development of an open, public lecture on subject content (Magdalena Prinster de Boto, personal communication, March 20th, 2026). In the 50th anniversary book, Mrs P. de Botto expounds upon the intricacies of concursos públicos [public selection process] for higher education chairs (2018, pp.23 to 27).

De la Vega (2018) also underscores the institution's commitment to curricular debates. In a national study on the curriculum for non-university higher education (D.I.E.P.E, 1982), three teaching programmes are described as experimental. The archival records suggest persistent debates over the subjects' labelling (pp. 27-33). Subjects originally named "History", "History of the language" and "Foreign Literature" were later renamed "History of the English/ North American civilisations", "English Literature" and "Linguistics". The increasing attention to the teaching process is present in subjects like "Educational Psychology"," Methodology" and "Ethics". By decree Y259/76, "Civic Education" was added.

To contribute to debates, EFL teacher educators were challenged by Widdowson´s Teaching Language as Communication (1978). The 168-page book with its dark green cover, featuring the title and author's name in light green, became a staple in the libraries of generations of teachers. Its back blurb promotes the text as "a rational approach to teaching language as communication, promising to stimulate teachers to investigate the ideas that inform their own practices". Widdowson´s framework guided a compelled shift away from situational drills towards meaningful language use. In 1980, Dr Henry Widdowson led a seminar titled "Teaching English for Specific Purposes" at the Department of Modern Languages, Faculty of Humanities and Arts, National University of Rosario (Lavagna, Ana María, personal communication, May 20th, 2026). Professor Ana Lavagna has generously shared her memories of that seminar and the courses that the EFL teaching programme organised and offered to secondary school teachers in Santa Fe province. These courses were mandated by Dirección Nacional de Educación Media y Superior [National Office of Secondary and Higher Education] (D.I.N.E.M.S). They reveal in their titles the shifts towards the communicative approach: "Let's analyse some Grammar Points together" (1980); "Teaching English Through the Functional Approach: Methodological and Linguistic Aspects"(1982); "Latest Trends in Reading Comprehension"(1988).

In the 1980s and early 1990s, there was great interest in language learning strategies and skills with new approaches to EFL teaching, such as Task-based learning and Project-based learning. In 1992, the fourth National Congress on English Language Teaching was held in Rosario, organised by the Argentine Chapter of the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL). The main topic was "English Language teaching for the turn of the century", and teacher educators and students from the EFL teaching programme were there as part of the event (Lavagna, Ana María, personal communication, May 20th, 2026).

In the 1990s, more than a century had passed since Sarmiento´s North American teachers, and Europe had become a generative hub for the EFL field, with the Council of Europe active since 1949. Intergovernmental symposia were organised to move towards a common framework of language objectives, and many projects were recommended to introduce communicative language teaching in state school sectors. Between 1994 and 1996, the first versions of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) were produced, and after a piloting phase, the final version was published in French and English in 2001, the European Year of Languages (North, 2016, p.17).

Scholars who participated in its design (North & Panthier, 2016) state that the CEFR aimed "to stimulate educational reform by re-orienting language teaching and learning to real-life needs" (p.18). However, they admit that the action-oriented perspective has sometimes been interpreted as commercial and instrumental. On the contrary, they claim that the CEFR aimed at "promoting the European dream of creating an informed, plurilingual population able to accept otherness, to empathise and to communicate across linguistic and cultural barriers" (p.18). Since its first publication, the CEFR principles have shifted from competences to plurilingual and intercultural education to support education in all languages of schooling. This change had a great impact on our region.

Emergence of a National Project for Initial Foreign Language (IFL) Teacher Education, times of curriculum revision…

In Argentina, 35 scholars from universities and teacher educators from IFL teaching education programmes gathered and agreed on a Proyecto de Mejora para la Formación Inicial de Profesorados de Lengua Extranjeras [Project to improve Initial Foreign Language Teaching Education for Secondary schools] (PM,2011). They adopted the CEFR plurilingual and intercultural perspective, with emphasis on mediation strategies to define formative goals for secondary school language teachers.

The curriculum innovation process in Santa Fe province intended to improve upon the National Guidelines (PM, 2011) while remaining responsive to local traditions. In those years, I was head of the English Programme at IES N°28, so I became part of the plurilingual team formed in 2013 with teachers of English, French and Italian. In 2014, we conducted baseline research by critically reviewing existing curriculum guidelines. Questionnaires about the proposed innovations were designed and sent to colleagues to gauge levels of agreement and potential commitment. In team discussions, we identified key concepts in the four foci offered by PM (Learning, Citizenship, Interculturality and Discursive Practices), and we found PM deeply challenges the subject-specific component of Initial Foreign Language Teacher Education, which has traditionally focused on FL proficiency, understanding language systems and how languages are learnt.

We sought to interpret the nature of PM to agree on a common perspective and agreed to adopt a sociocultural perspective to reconceptualise IFL teacher education. Johnson (2009:14) defines the professional development of L2 teachers as "a process of building on teacher´s everyday concepts about language, language learning and language teaching to enable them to understand the scientific concepts (…)that are produced, accepted and adapted in the profession". The new role of FL teachers as "cultural mediators" calls for more complex ideas of language, citizenship and culture. We realised that we needed to redefine a knowledge base for the three languages in the province, broad enough to help student teachers gain understanding within and across curricular components to become intercultural mediators. Ten years have passed since those discussions; two draft designs were written, but never implemented.

Back to the future

While the curriculum drafts faced a significant setback due to the lack of linguistic policies in Santa Fe, in retrospect, this period provided the necessary time for a profound AI-driven paradigm shift.

If the EFL Teaching Education Programme were a 90-year-old woman recalling her mentors and influences, it would be a great challenge to approach a conversation with her about the weird future ahead. A recent study (Dehghani et al., 2026) claims that most large language models are made by Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic societies (WEIRD), fed by data pulled from social media, websites and digitised materials that come from North America and Europe. They conclude that more diverse AI training is urgently needed. In a teachers' plenary meeting in February 2024, we first discussed the use of AI and shared APA Style recommendations on how to cite ChatGPT (MacAdoo, 2025). The landscape has changed since then, and now scholars are saying that "there are many potentially legitimate ways to use AI tools within the context of academic writing (...) to search for information, summarize literature while reading it, edit or analyze your own writing, brainstorm ideas, translate text, proofread for consistency and style, generate tables and figures, create and refine code, and much more (Denneny, et al. 2025).

In this scenario, it is imperative to agree on local policies for a culturally responsive curriculum for Initial FL Teacher Education as well as long-term programmes to enhance language learning and critical thinking at all educational levels and society as a whole.

As we navigate this period of unsettling changes, let us trust that all the past efforts have laid a foundation for what comes next. To all the generations tied to Profesorado de Ingles, these lines from Robert Browning:

"Grow old along with me!

The best is yet to be,

The last of life, for which the first was made:

Our times are in His hand

Who saith, A whole I planned,

Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid!"

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