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The role of experienced teachers in the development of pre-service language teachers' professional identity: revisiting school memories and constructing future teacher selves

Abstract

This paper examines how student teachers perceive the role of more experienced teachers in fostering their pedagogical cultural identities (Burgess, 2016). It reports on a project within 'Programa Institucional de Bolsas de Iniciação à Docência' (PIBID), a national programme in Brazil to promote teacher recruitment and encourage undergraduates to pursue a career in teaching. The study investigated in-school experiences of four Portuguese language student teachers working in state schools located in peripheral urban areas in São Paulo. Specifically, it examined the ways these student teachers conceptualised their pedagogical contexts and related them to the concrete or symbolic presence of other experienced professionals. The findings are expected to support professional development and inform the revision of teacher education programmes in Brazil.

Keywords

Language Teacher Cognition; Teacher Identity; Preservice Teacher Education; Critical Perspective.

Highlights

- Negative experiences may have a positive effect on student teachers' development.
- Facing contextual contradictions allows for critical agency.
- Tensions between experienced and student teachers may lead to professional development.
- Temporality is a major reference to teachers' identity construction.

1. Introduction

Teacher identity studies have attempted to grasp how becoming a teacher involves making sense of past and present experiences (Lee & Schallertb, 2016), accounting for the relationships between agency and teacher development (Ruohotie-Lyhty & Moate, 2016) and, more broadly, problematising the practical and political dimensions of teachers' actions (Mockler, 2011). Despite this, teacher education is still mostly adherent to models that fail to address fluidity, hybridity, agency and network collaboration as qualities that influence who we are and how we act in contemporary society.

This paper reports on research findings that characterise the ways in which four Portuguese language student teachers conceptualised their experiences in public schools in peripheral areas of São Paulo, Brazil. The representations constructed by these participants in their direct interactions with more experienced teachers were analysed as well as their conceptualisations of how material and symbolic aspects that were constitutive of the contexts result from experienced teachers' conceptions, values, decisions and actions. The formative process under scrutiny occurred within a national programme for teacher education called PIBID¹ that aims at promoting

¹ PIBID is the abbreviation for 'Programa Institucional de Bolsa de Iniciação à Docência', a national programme in Brazil to promote teacher recruitment and encourage undergraduate students to pursue a career in teaching. The programme involves funding the student-teacher to remain in one single school for practicum activities during at least one year under the supervision of a single school-teacher, who is also the recipient of monetary compensation for undertaking such a role.

cooperation among agents in educational contexts – schools and universities – as an attempt to break with individualistic methodological traditions that prevail in the country. In this sense, the formative process adopts a perspective that addresses teacher education from a social and political standpoint, in tune with more recent approaches to teacher knowledge, development and identity.

In this paper, we examine how these student teachers perceived the role of more experienced teachers (and other school professionals) in the process of constructing their own pedagogical cultural identities (Burgess, 2016). The assumption is that active participation of student teachers in the construction of the curriculum within real, complex and unpredictable contexts of teaching creates opportunities to develop critical reflections on existing theories and practices. In this process, the interaction between student teachers and more experienced teachers promotes opportunities for the emergence of tensions and clashes between how these agents represent and conceptualise teaching and learning, and how student teachers dynamically relate past and present experiences as well as project future images of self in their own identity construction processes.

2. Theoretical Framework

The study is theoretically framed within teacher education studies, more specifically teacher situated cognition. Burns et al (2015) characterize historically produced perspectives on teacher knowledge in conceptual generations that shift from an individual to a social ontology. The technicism from the 1970's disregarded teachers' cognitive work, aiming at the development of standardized behaviour rather than thinking processes. The subsequent development towards innovative methodologies established the ground for addressing teacher knowledge and teacher cognition, since each methodology would promote different ways of thinking. Teachers began to be seen as decision-makers, individuals that chose how to teach, informed by their cognitive capacity (Borg, 2001; Burns, 1992; Freeman & Richards, 1993 Richards & Nunan, 1990; Woods, 1996). In this sense, teachers not only acted but also reflected on their actions. This individual ontology was, however, problematised when studies began to reveal that one's cognitive capacity develops in constant interactions between the individuals and their sociocultural context (Burns & Richards, 2009; Crookes, 2010; Freeman & Richards, 1996; Golombek, 1998; Kubanyiova, 2006, 2012; Yuan & Lee, 2014). Further developments led to a sociohistorical ontology based on the premise that teaching occurs as a social activity that responds to the demands of a given historical moment and involves both doing and thinking (Breen et al., 2001; Feryok, 2012; Golombek & Johnson, 2004; Golombek & Doran, 2014; Johnson & Golombek, 2011; Tsui, 2007, 2003). Teaching and learning are then constructed in social interactions and thinking is conceived of as a function of the place and time in which these interactions occur.

Under this sociohistorical framework, the notions of fixity, stability and linearity that are embedded in most formative perspectives seem to be insufficient to understand the complexity that characterize the process of teacher knowledge construction, which occurs amidst a multiplicity of reference marks and identity positionings. The importance of temporality for the sociohistorical ontology gains more prominence in studies that align with the ontology of complexity and chaotic systems (Burns & Knox, 2011; Feryok, 2010; Finch, 2010; Kiss, 2012). Temporality is then seen as diversity instead of linearity, and references to past, present or future, as observed in the current study, co-occur to construct the teacher's identity as an emerging self-organization, unpredictable in its development within a system of non-hierarchical relations (Burns et al., 2015).

To understand the shift from an individual-based towards a sociocultural perspective, Lee & Schallertb (2016) consider the existence of three different traditions in the field of teacher education: a positivistic tradition, a progressive tradition and the social critique tradition. The positivistic tradition is founded on the need to provide student teachers with a body of knowledge so that they can make their methodological decisions on the premise that teacher knowledge, due to its general nature, could be properly applied in different educational realities. The progressive tradition considers the transformations of teacher knowledge in face of teachers' existing knowledge. In this sense, teacher knowledge is not static, but processual, and develops with the

incorporation of new knowledge in an ongoing process. The social critique tradition considers the characteristics of the contexts in which pedagogical practice occurs, which includes cultural and linguistic heterogeneity. Becoming sensitive to social diversity is part of a teacher's education, for teachers always respond to the pedagogical needs that spring from the context in which they work. It is in this third tradition, within which the present study is positioned, that Lea & Schallertb (2016) point out the rise of a situative perspective to break with the existing traditions in the field of teacher education, emphasizing contexts, social interactions and learning communities (Belland, 2011; Engle, 2006; Greeno, 1997; van de Sande & Greeno, 2012).

Since teaching is a social, cultural, moral and political practice, Crookes (2015) discusses the importance of addressing not only instrumental aspects of pedagogical practice but also those that are beyond the immediate classroom interaction. Educating critical teachers who are sensitive to democratic values in both their practice and their reasoning requires reflexivity and a principled approach that accounts for student teachers' existing school experiences, personal values and life experience.

The instrumental nature of most teacher education programmes prevents us from acknowledging and emphasising the ethical and moral aspects of teaching, which results in insufficient understanding of the broader social and political nature of the profession. As Crookes (2015) points out, these programs fail to consider issues such as power relations within social class, ethnicity and gender. To Crookes, educating critical teachers who are sensitive to the political consequences of their practice requires more than the introduction of critical theory in an education programme. It can only be achieved through teacher participation in political and social actions. Back in the 70's, Freire (1973) had already claimed that critical consciousness cannot be achieved if teachers are provided only with theoretical and methodological resources. Political socialization is essential for the constitution of a teacher's critical identity, and is achieved through participation in social contexts, community life and collaborative work.

Other researchers in the field of language teacher education argue that teachers are transformative intellectuals (Kubanyiova, 2016; Kumaravadivelu, 2012) who theorise their practice as a social activity, striving "not only for academic advancement but also for personal transformation, both for themselves and for their learners (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). Problematizing the political and ethical bases that underlie identity processes and the development of teacher cognition is essential to respond to the moral dimension of a professional activity that has social and pedagogical implications. Kubanyiova (2016) brings together the political, social and personal dimensions of teaching into what she calls *moral visions*. According to Kubanyiova, addressing these dimensions in an integrated way opens possibilities for teachers to transform the contexts in which they develop their practice:

In addition to cultivating teachers' critical pedagogies, therefore, it seems crucial to begin to think of the core task of language teacher education in terms of facilitating the development of the kinds of moral visions that will enable language teachers to adapt, innovate, and survive in the face of political, economic, and other realities they must face in order to enhance language learning experiences for diverse language learners, users, and persons in their classrooms. (Kubanyiova, 2016, p. 126)

In this sense, language teacher education that is sensitive to cultural and linguistic diversity, as well as to social and economic inequalities ought to account for the particularities of different contexts and the subjects that construct them, as observed in the present study. Therefore, it is imperative to move away from the so-called neoliberal discourses produced in the early XXI century that suggest that teacher education should equip professionals who are able to adapt to the working conditions and respond to the demands of productivity.

Acknowledgment of the complexity of contemporary globalised societies represents an invitation to (re)signify the meaning of quality language teacher education. Multicultural settings marked by geopolitical displacements of individuals and collectives, the increase of social and economic disparities between the poor and the rich, the need to promote cultural inclusion and address

diversity are social and sociological issues that are present in classrooms all over the world (Goodwin, 2010). As Goodwin suggests, a more integrative, holistic and context-sensitive perspective in teacher education would, then, seek to respond to five different knowledge domains:

- (1) personal knowledge/autobiography and philosophy of teaching;
- (2) contextual knowledge/understanding children, schools, and society;
- (3) pedagogical knowledge/content, theories, methods of teaching, and curriculum development;
- (4) sociological knowledge/diversity, cultural relevance, and social justice; and
- (5) social knowledge/cooperative, democratic group process, and conflict resolution. (Goodwin, 2010, p. 22).

The study reported in this paper occurred within a teacher education programme that values both academic experience and the experience in schools situated in socio-political contexts that are subjugated by the political and economic hegemonic power. The research design allowed us to capture how the four participants conceptualised the roles of more experienced professionals who worked within these contexts, and how they impacted in the participants' processes of identity construction.

3. The study

This study was exploratory-interpretive and took the form of a multi-site, multiple-case design, making an ecological use of methods which were an integral part of the PIBID programme. Four case studies of individual pre-service teachers² were conducted in three different peripheral state schools in São Paulo where these student teachers had their initial teaching experiences as interns. The PIBID programme operates on a continuous entry and exit process, meaning that if student teachers leave the programme, new interns may start every month. When the research project started, six new interns had been admitted, and only four of them agreed to participate both in the programme and in the study. It is worth pointing out that other interns who were already participating in the programme were also willing to join the project, but were not accepted because the data collection design included an interview to be held prior to the entry to the school, as described below.

The study involved a multimodal approach to data collection, including three primary methods, all of them based on researcher-participant interviews. The first method was called 'Tree of Life' (TOL) (Merryfield, 1993) and involved an autobiographical account in which, prior to the interview, the participants were asked to draw a tree highlighting three of its parts: the roots, where participants named the people, events and ideas that had given shape to their decision to become a teacher; the trunk, where participants identified their skills, interests, people and events that had contributed or supported their decision; and, finally, the branches, where participants indicated expectations, trends and future developments they could anticipate for their careers. This first set of data was collected before the participants had been to the school where their internships would take place.

The second method, a photo-driven interview (PDI), occurred within a two-week period after the participants had been to the school. They were asked to photograph people, places or situations which caught their attention. Then, using these photos as a recall tool, they were invited to explain why they had taken each photo and what they wanted to communicate about the context through them. The interpretive nature of these photographs allowed the researchers to see the context through the eyes of the participants, and was very helpful to understand how each of them combined symbolic and material aspects in their construction of the context.

² The four cases were tagged using codenames to safeguard the real identity of the subjects in compliance with the Code of Ethics of the two universities that supported the research. The codenames are Carmen, Edna, Gisele and Rafael.

The third method, called Teaching Experience Recollection (TER), consisted of retrospective interviews that took place three to four months after the participants' internship activities had started. During these months, they went to the school at least once a week to observe their teacher supervisor and to implement the teaching plans they had devised – individually or with a partner intern – during the PIBID discussion meetings at the university. In these teaching plans, all PIBID interns, including the research participants, were asked to adopt teaching practices they perceived as important and necessary, but missing in the context. For the research interviews, participants were asked to share their lesson plans and journal entries and account for their intentions and practices, referring to the perceived success and failure in their enterprise of beginning teaching.

Each interview lasted between 30 and 50 minutes. Collectively, these three methods produced a substantive amount of data, as illustrated in the table below.

	TOL	PDI	TER
CARMEN	5967	9837	6527
EDNA	5192	5767	7738
GISELE	4932	4854	6572
RAFAEL	7284	5609	7985

Table 1: Number of transcribed words for each data collection tool and participant

Once transcribed and coded, the data were examined in order to locate themes that were underlying the four student-teacher narratives in each separate case. These themes were then cross-examined and the separate cases were re-grouped forming new categories: access to pedagogical resources, school environment (physical and psychological), use of school facilities, power relations, educational culture and practices, teacher-student relations, learning environment, teaching-learning culture and practices, becoming a teacher and being a teacher. As a final procedure, further examination of the categories led to the identification of two major units of analysis: *critiques*, defined as perceptions that reveal attempts to problematise educational contexts, discourse and practices; and *educational insights*, defined as perceptions that indicate enhanced understandings of educational contexts, discourse and practices generated during the participants' activities within the schools.

4. Findings and discussion

Due to the nature of data collection, the four student teachers' perceptions on the role of more experienced teachers can be organized in three distinctive ways. In one set of perceptions, there is no concrete presence of or direct interaction with more experienced teachers and other school professionals, but their presence was grasped by three of the participants as imprints in the context. Another set of perceptions derives from relations established by two participants through direct interaction with experienced professionals. Finally, the third set of perceptions allowed us to interpret how the four participants constructed images of self by revisiting biographical knowledge, including school memories and present experiences, to construct their future experienced teacher selves.

These three sets of perceptions enabled us to identify the following different identity positionings of the participants and their perspectives on the transformation of their teacher selves.

	Perception of context	Major reference for identity positioning	Perspective on transformation of teacher self
Carmen	Mostly negative	Her own school memories	Replace interpersonal relations based on disbelief and mistrust to construct relations based on affect, respect, understanding, dialogue and negotiation
Rafael	Considerate and	His own personal	Improve the quality of education through

	open to consider how structural and personal conditions impact on the context	knowledge and biography	responsivity and individual accountability
Edna/Gisele	Negative, but willing to understand the structure behind school practices	Their knowledge of current trends in language education and schooling	Oppose the established school culture and practices to achieve transformation

Table 2: Participants' identity positionings and their perspectives on teacher-self transformation

In the interest of clarity, each set of perceptions is presented and discussed separately.

4.1 RELATIONS ESTABLISHED WITH EXPERIENCED PROFESSIONALS THROUGH INTERACTION WITH THE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

The school environment – both its psychological and physical aspects – reflects the conceptualisations of education of teachers and school managers. In this sense, when the student teachers build critiques that focus on the environment, they are also criticizing those whose ideas and actions – or omissions – have tailored the way things are in that specific context.

The excerpts in this section reveal that three student teachers expected more experienced professionals to be agentive in the creation of a school environment which is conducive to learning. This evidence points to an understanding of how the physical and psychological school contexts intertwine and create a shared perception of education.

4.1.1 Carmen: omission and control

Carmen identified contradictions within the school environment and of those who construct it through the embedded figures of more experienced professionals. For her, these professionals have different, but all negative and strong roles associated with omission, control, resignation and, ultimately, hypocrisy.

She reported on how she perceived the impoverishment of the physical environment and how this resulted from the actions of the teachers and the school administrators. In the excerpt below, Carmen describes one of the photographs she took of the school. She portrays how the physical environment and the architectural characteristics of the building functioned as a means of control and maintenance of the *status quo*, operating as a barrier to innovation and change.

The sockets are all fixed high up on the wall. It's for them [the students] not to charge their cell phones. So whenever we [student teachers] think about bringing a song or maybe the computer to show them a movie, we remember that it's impossible because there are no sockets. The only one is this one [points to the picture] and there's no way for us to climb up to connect any device. That's why whenever we have a different idea, we have to consider, 'will it be feasible?' (Carmen, PDI)

Carmen also describes a fixture in the classroom that functioned as a reminder of how things used to be different in the school when they had another headmaster.

Some of the classrooms have this small locker, just above the blackboard. And we asked the teacher what that was and she explained that some of the rooms used to have a TV set and a stereo system. They used to have a school radio project, and the students would announce, for example, the meal of the day, or the names of students whose birthday was on a particular day, or put some music on. But then the headteacher left the school, something like five years ago, and the new headteacher discontinued this project. The equipment was removed but the lockers remained. (Carmen, PDI)

When describing another picture, Carmen explained that students' productions were displayed on the wall that led from the visitors' entrance to the administrative area of the school, an area exclusively used by staff and teachers as well as parents or other visitors who came to the school.

There is a gate that separates this corridor. So these posters are put up on the wall only there. Not on the other corridors. (...) Only there. Because to this side is the Deputy Headteacher's office, the place that is most visited by parents. And here [pointing at the photograph] is the teachers' office. So it is where these people walk by, not where the students stay, because they are not allowed to be in this corridor. (Carmen, PDI)

For Carmen, interpersonal relations based on mistrust and domination hindered the constitution of an effective educational context. These negative elements became evident for her due to the strong contrast they offered when compared to her positive views and personal memories of school and teaching.

4.1.2 Edna: the need to revise and change

Edna, another participant, constructed her conceptualisation of the environment in a more positive way, valuing school facilities in the sense that they provided open areas for students to freely circulate and socialize.

One thing I really like about the school is that the children have a lot of freedom. There are schools where the children are surrounded by bars and are not allowed to circulate. In this school they can, they have that mobility, and I find it beautiful. (Edna, PDI)

However, as she continued to explain her interpretation, she was caught within a dilemma. In a more philosophical and moral dimension, she was concerned about the lack of structure and purpose this freedom may entail. In a more practical and pragmatic dimension, she was concerned about what the poor maintenance of the school facilities may represent.

I believe that you need to value this open space to develop activities because I see that during the break children only run from side to side, there is no organization of the break. I believe that the school is valued by students when you consider the facilities the children can use. But I believe that this school lacks care and maintenance. (Edna, PDI)

For Edna, the givens and restraints of the context took on considerable importance due to her comprehension that better planning and management could represent an improvement.

4.1.3 Rafael: understanding constraints and searching for means to transform them

Another research participant, Rafael, reported on the lack of access to or poor use of educational resources. In the excerpt below, he refers to a photograph of a room piled up with textbooks bought by the government but not distributed to the students in that school. In face of this, Rafael attempted to search for an explanation, something that would justify this decision, and considered that what drove teachers and school managers not to use these textbooks may not be negligence.

The teachers can fight for putting them [the books] to use. But maybe the teachers' actions lack understanding of what can be used or, maybe, the materials are overdue or, pedagogically, they have lost their value. Then maybe these materials can have a different use. Or maybe, the question isn't the investment [from the government] but the instructions for using them. (Rafael, PDI)

In these excerpts, we can identify three different ways through which the participants made sense of the embedded presence of experienced professionals in the school environment. The first represents impossibility, through which the student teacher saw the physical imprints as reminders that one's agency had ground to a halt in that context. The second represents critical openness, in the sense that the student teacher acknowledged the existing school practices but found in it room for improvement. The third movement represents possibility, in the sense that moral value conflicts

drove the participant to search for an explanation for existing practices and a means to transform them.

4.2 RELATIONS ESTABLISHED WITH EXPERIENCED PROFESSIONALS THROUGH DIRECT INTERACTION

The data that show direct interaction with other school professionals are also very rich in terms of how two of the student teachers perceived the role of experience. The issues of hierarchy and power become very prominent and take different forms of manifestation.

4.2.1 Edna's relations with experienced teachers: authority and domination

Edna's direct interactions with the school teacher who was assigned as her supervisor led her to an understanding that the role of experience in teaching may be overrated, and that the mentoring system adopted in most school-based teacher education activities used in the PIBID programme was flawed.

The teacher supervisor interfered in the class where we revised the notion of short story. (...) She wrote key ideas on the board, what defines a short story, the dramatic intensity, things like that. The students had built up their own interpretations with us in a previous lesson, but now they were simply copying from the board because it was what their teacher was saying, and we are only interns. So our role was weakened. (...) The teacher supervisor acted as if she knew better, 'you want to explain what a short story is, but I know what they have to learn'. She stuck to her own idea of teaching, and did not open up to our ideas, we wanted to reinvent this approach to teaching based on the genre, how they understood this genre. But we are not so experienced and we allowed the teacher to take over. (Edna, TER)

In this excerpt, Edna questions the relationship between experience, power and knowledge. For her, the experienced teacher tended to take shortcuts to facilitate learning. This facilitation was embedded in power in the sense that students responded to it as the truth, and it maintained them within the role of non-knowers as they ended up memorizing and copying more than constructing their own knowledge. In order to revert this, Edna claimed that her supervisor should be more open to inexperienced teachers, giving them the space they need to construct their own professional expertise, instead of offering models of what to do and how to do things, for these models perpetuate vicious relations between knowledge and power.

Edna reported another strategy used by the school teacher in a writing activity with which she did not agree: assessment being used as a coin to trade, bargain and control students' participation.

Several students did not want to write. So the teacher supervisor had to say that the writing was part of the assessment, and they had to write to get the grade. This changed our expectation somehow because we thought that the students would want to write. (...) Then they had to write and show to the teacher to check. Sometimes we would ask students, 'so, how is your writing progressing?' and they would answer, 'I'm just about to finish' and we felt they just wanted to finish to show to the teacher. So we ended up not establishing a real dialogue with them. (Edna, TER)

Moreover, in constructing her identity, Edna was caught in another dilemma. The stories she and the other intern had asked students to write would be later compiled for publication. However, when she read what students had written, she realized that there were very sensitive personal issues, thoughts that maybe the writers would not wish to make public. She wanted to discuss this ethical dilemma with students, but disseminating students' works was part of the educational practices within the school. To her, publishing should not be mandatory but a choice, and the teacher should respect students as authors.

Some stories were very deep, they had a huge impact on us. We did not know how to deal with what they said. Several students approached us to ask what we were going to do with their stories, they were concerned. We were in a dilemma: to publish or not to publish. Then the teacher-supervisor said that everything would be published, anyhow. We had organized a list to

ask students if they wanted their texts to be published or not, but the supervisor did not use it. We gave her the list, but she refused to ask the students, so all the texts were published in the end. (Edna, TER)

The relationship between the student teacher and the experienced teacher was here defined hierarchically rather than cooperatively, since it was experience that dictated what was and what was not to be done, despite the fact that what was actually done lacked meaning and purpose. From Edna's perspective, the supervisor, as a representative of well-established school practices, functioned as a barrier that prevented the adoption of the strategy she had devised to include students in the decision-making process that would allow them to face the ethical dilemma. Based on this experience, Edna questioned the teaching and learning culture of that particular school context, but ended up dominated by it.

4.2.2. Carmen's relations with other school professionals: social roles, power and mistrust

Carmen pointed out how the relationships established within the school context were entangled in power relations. In the excerpt below, she shows her discomfort with the coordinator's suspicious attitude towards student teachers and the existing social divide between school agents.

She [the school coordinator] always follows us, like, if we go to the hall where the cafeteria is, she will follow, as if saying 'what is going on here?'. She keeps a certain distance, something like three steps behind us. (...) I see her [the school coordinator] talking to teachers or staff rather than with students. Or locked inside her room which has air-conditioning. I believe it does because when you pass by her room you can feel the fresh air. (Carmen, PDI)

Carmen perceived that unbalanced relations were determined by the social roles of different school agents and that these social roles set a clear divide when combined with social status and social privilege.

The mistrust towards certain students and the lack of belief in the possibility of educating all students also seemed, to Carmen, to result from experience, and she was at a loss about what might be done once this sense of hopelessness and helplessness was established.

One day there wasn't class and we stayed in the teachers' room talking to the teachers. The teachers were supporting the idea of maintaining only the high schoolers (...) "oh! the eighth graders aren't worth it. They'll fail the SARESP [an external assessment] anyway, studying with them isn't worth it, they're not going to make it, they won't even stay here for high school. So the teachers were already kind of indifferent to them. (Carmen, PDI)

Carmen's comments reveal how hard it was for her to become a member of the professional community within the boundaries of that particular school. Initially, the coordinator cast her in the role of an outsider, someone not to be trusted – and Carmen was troubled by this. As her presence in the school context continued, she began to position herself as an observer who could not – and possibly did not want to – participate in a context where interactions were determined by the social role of agents whose moral judgements of others seemed to determine who deserved and who did not deserve to be educated.

4.3 CONSTRUCTING FUTURE EXPERIENCED TEACHER SELVES

Data reveal that the four participants attempted to construct their identity by searching for meaning and establishing a purposeful participation within the context. In building their own responses to what it meant to become a teacher through the socialization process that unfolded in the different schools, their identity construction processes were driven by the constitutive contradictions and tensions between these individuals and the contexts where they attempted to engage in.

4.3.1 Becoming a teacher: meaningful actions and interactions

In the excerpts that follow, insights of the four participants are presented. Rafael found in his personal biographical experience a founding principle for the profession: individual responsibility. Carmen, based on her school memories, related affection and personality traits to the definition of her own teacher identity. Gisele and Edna found in their own initial teaching experiences the path to construct their pedagogical knowledge in a more dialogical and effective way.

To Rafael, meaningfulness and purpose in any pedagogical relationship may be achieved by sharing his own school experience and goals with students. In order to humanise the relationship and achieve recognition, he sought to narrow the distance between himself and students.

So I give them [the students] this example, it is a distant school for me. It takes me 1h20 to 2 hours to go there. (...) I believe that this time is an investment, I do it because I have an objective. So I believe it represents my attempt to, all through my education as a teacher, to establish this, so that all my actions have a meaning, a purpose. Or maybe I tell them about my education because I have a purpose that assigns meaning to my actions. So it is not something mechanical. (...) I think it has this purpose, to show that things have to be meaningful. (Rafael, TER)

Even when criticising what he perceived as lack of purpose and meaning in the actions of his supervisor, Rafael saw teachers as capable of changing.

When she steps in the class, she must do it in order to establish a learning environment, to have that interaction as a teacher. I believe that I, if I were in her position, I would revise my practices to try to regain, to renew that. (Rafael, TER)

And to him, changing was not so complicated. It required making the right decisions based on the assumption that the moments teachers had with their students were precious, and should always be given priority. He came to this conclusion after having been in a lesson observing a more experienced teacher who left the room to talk to someone who had knocked on the door. To him, her decision was wrong, and making the right decision would have been easy, a matter of choice.

So it is one of my reflections. She [the teacher] should have told that person [the teacher by the classroom door] something like, 'when my class finishes, we'll talk' or 'during the break we will talk'. It is a reflection for my own teacher education. You have to commit to the students in class. Time is short, it flies by. (Rafael, PDI)

In these excerpts, Rafael seems to place the responsibility of doing things differently on the individual. Becoming a teacher involved, then, accepting this responsibility and acting accordingly.

Carmen went back to her school memories in her attempt to conceptualise what was at the core of a student-teacher relationship based on respect and mutual understanding of the different social roles of the agents. She recalled her own experience to state that a teacher's personality traits had an impact on students' attitudes and their connection with the content.

It was more associated with her personality (Carmen's former school teacher), she was a little old lady, super cute, it was not really about her classes per se because her classes were not that different. (Carmen, TOL)

In another excerpt, still recalling her own school memories, she revealed that, to her, proximity, affection, dialogue and negotiation were crucial to create a supportive and effective learning environment.

The relationship with teachers was not so distant. We saw the teacher as a friend rather than as a hangman or an executioner. There were teachers who were stricter, usually the Math or Chemistry teachers, but even with them the relationship had a close nature, marked by proximity. There was no disrespect in class. There was no squabble. (...) And also there were deals, negotiations, like 'if you behave properly, I'll finish the class ten minutes earlier!'. (Carmen, TER)

To Gisele, being a teacher was placing herself on the other side. It meant accepting the responsibility of looking after all the students. In this sense, it involved adopting teacherly behaviour, even scolding, sometimes. This is revealed in an episode she described in one of her practicum classes. A student was voluntarily answering a question and the rest of the class started making fun of what he had said. She scolded the class to interrupt such behaviour.

I really felt like a teacher. I believe it was effective, I don't know. But it was that moment of scolding, a moment that from the student perspective he would think, 'wow, how boring this teacher is, scolding us like this, we are only having fun because of somebody else's mistakes'. So I think it was a moment when I clicked, 'Wow, I'm really on the other end of the classroom.' (Gisele, TER)

As for teachers' practices, Gisele highlighted the importance of supporting students in developing critical thinking. Yet she pondered on the conflicts that arose from being teacherly and respecting the students' individuality. For her, dialogical participatory processes imply interacting with students and recognizing them as individuals who have their own voice, positioning herself in opposition to the experienced teacher she was working with.

A few students manifested their opinions in a very biased way, especially concerning non-Christian religions. We didn't know what to do in face of these manifestations. We understand we can't ignore them. Also we know that when the class teacher interferes, she simply tells them not to say these things, and this does not help the student reflect. Only telling them to be quiet does not problematise what is going on, it only silences the students. And that's something that made us reflect on the issue of how to establish critical attitudes, how to teach them to examine things more thoroughly instead of simply reproducing discourses they hear. (Gisele, TER)

Gisele seems to have learned that dealing with uncertainty and a degree of uneasiness for not knowing exactly what to do or how to do it is constitutive of teaching.

Edna found out in her own teaching experience that school facilities could foster more dialogic teaching practices and help address the issue of student motivation. Using technological devices to support learning helped involve the students and made the process more meaningful. This became evident when she described one of her teaching activities, in which she asked the students to write a short story adopting a process writing approach.

Instead of doing the rewriting phase in class, we went to the computer lab. A student she said that she believed all writing should be done in the computer, that it was very good and she had really liked it. In the computer lab, there was a moment we looked around and all the students were working, all, really, even the ones who hadn't written the story before. (Edna, TER)

In this activity, she also discovered the role of feedback in sustaining students' motivation, especially when feedback was open to negotiation.

We inserted comments, little yellow boxes, so the students got their feedback on the computer. (...) In our case, we only indicated aspects that required revision, and we explained that to them. Some students said, 'but I think my story is horrible, can I write something else?', and we said it was all right, so students felt free to approach the rewriting phase. (...) So it was a process in which there was more dialogue, more negotiation, and the supervisor was not there. This made things easier, because students relied on us, and not on the teacher. (Edna, TER)

In this process, Edna reveals how the possibility of breaking with assessment-based hierarchical relations allowed her to establish a dialogical context of negotiation in which social roles were less unbalanced and more democratic and respectful.

The role of more experienced teachers in how these four student teachers found their ways about constructing their own teacher identities was significantly different. Rafael's insight was triggered by the direct interaction he had with his supervisor and how he tried to perceive himself if he were in her shoes. Carmen relied on the images of teachers she had had in her school experience,

constructed in her subjective appreciation of their personality. Edna and Gisele performed their teaching initiatives in the void left by the supervisors, who despite the fact that they were not physically present in the scenes, functioned symbolically as counter-models from which they wanted to distance themselves.

4.3.2 The nature of teacher knowledge

Three of the participants (Rafael, Carmen and Gisele) directly addressed issues concerning the nature of teachers' procedural, theoretical and experiential.

Rafael recognized the complexities of both the school context and the teaching activity that unfolded therein, and advocated for more practicum activities so that student teachers could fully develop their teaching skills.

So I believe that it is a reflection that if I had more classes to teach, I could improve more before I complete my teaching degree. So my learning from this situation is that you have to be seriously committed to planning because the level of complexity of teaching is very high, and you have a great responsibility. (Rafael, TER)

Gisele reflected upon a perceived paradox: precarious public school conditions represent at the same time a stimulus and a hindrance for future teachers. She was caught in the complexities of making sense of how educational culture was founded in the conflict between perpetuation and change. On the one hand, she valued education and the social relevance of being a teacher. On the other hand, she was impelled to see challenges as opportunities for development. In this scenario, she problematised the role of theory in teacher education, as she saw teaching as a heavily contextualized activity. In this sense, she established a distinction between studying to be a teacher and actually becoming a teacher.

It is obvious that the theory will provide the structure, it will provide some safe ground, but what I mean is that you cannot become a teacher only with theory. You need to step into the classroom and become a teacher. (Gisele, TOL)

In an attempt to find what she needed to establish her own identity as a teacher, Carmen searched for meaningful relations between theory and practice, teaching skills and experience, based on the premise that having pedagogical repertoire was important to develop her own pedagogical knowledge. To her, identifying ways in which teachers could engage students in learning was the key.

Something new to help teenagers and kids to be interested in studying. Something that will encourage them, I want to learn more about this. (...) I need a teacher repertoire. To have experience and methods and teaching skills, things that can be applied. (...) And then I steal ideas from all my teachers – and I apply them with my students. (Carmen, TOL)

Carmen thus created the image of herself as a “thief of ideas”, since, to her, becoming a teacher implied sharing practices and a repertoire without too much attachment to authorship or ownership.

In these excerpts, we see these student teachers' understandings of how shared professional knowledge is deeply rooted in situated, contextualized in-school experiences. This shared knowledge was constructed dialogically and supported the socialization process of these novice teachers, thus representing to them, we would argue, a gateway to develop their sense of belonging to a professional community.

In forging their teacher selves, the four participants responded and interacted with the particularities of the context in their own singular ways, moving about past and present experiences and envisioning their future as teachers. In this sense, temporality in its non-chronological and non-fixed assertion was a major reference to these teachers' identity construction processes.

5. Conclusions and final remarks

Student teachers' conceptualisations tend to follow two distinct paths. In one, student teachers retrieve past school memories in an attempt to find in the past the counter-evidence for how things could be different. In the other, they project their future selves in an attempt to bring together the knowledge they gain in the context and the knowledge about quality teaching gained through academic study. In both, student-teacher perceptions of more experienced teachers have a considerable impact on the development of their identity, an ever-changing, fluid, hybrid identity that embodies the political, pedagogical, technical and ethical dimensions of teaching, and responds to social and cultural diversity in a situative perspective (Lea & Schallertb, 2016).

In section 4.1, student teachers revealed how they dealt with the conflict generated from the interpretation that experienced professionals who were part of the school staff did not face up to their responsibilities as active agents in the creation of an educational environment that could benefit all students. This perceived lack of responsibility, an indicator of the morality of the profession, prevented them from establishing spaces in which social and pedagogical relations were educational and conducive to learning. The participants' critiques show that commitment and social responsibility are essential moral constructs of the profession in the sense proposed by Kubanyiova (2016).

In section 4.2, participants argue that power and judgement underlie all relations established within the school, creating a culture of mistrust. Hierarchy plays a pivotal role in this, since the higher the rank, the more mistrust is bestowed. In this sense, responsiveness - in a Bakhtinian perspective in which response and responsibility, dialogicity and ethics are conceived as interconstitutive principles (Bakhtin, 1993) - barely exists. In other words, there is no room for the dialogical relationship between the need to respond to others and the responsibility that this act presupposes.

In section 4.3, we witness the emergence of the participants' future experienced teacher selves as a response to what they learned from the experience in social and cultural contexts which demand more sensitive responses to diversity, inequality and cultural inclusion, as suggested by Goodwin (2010). These experienced teacher selves can be characterised as: (a) fluid and in constant search for dialogicity, negotiation and interaction; (b). knowledgeable of the particularities and possibilities of the context; (c) agentive in the collaborative construction of the context; and (d) driven by the moral and ethical dilemmas of daily school life.

In all three sections, we have the concrete or symbolic presence of experienced teachers within the immediate realities where the participants' practicum activities occurred. This triggers student teachers to conceptualise their own history and knowledge in an attempt to understand their situated identity and construct their future selves through a process in which temporality is a major reference to teachers' identity construction as an emerging self-organization, as remarked by Burns et al. (2015).

This evidence challenges the idea behind PIBID that in-school teacher education activities provide a kind of sheltered initiation practice in which the collaboration of more experienced professionals (both in the school and at the university) will function as a safeguard. This idea derives from the culture of nurturing best practices as a basis for novice teachers' learning, as if the attempt to mirror good professional practices would contribute to the quality of initial teacher education. The findings reported in this article reveal this relationship as both much more complex and much more human. It is more complex because experience may entail a bit of impatience and reproduction of standardized practices that are built around a rather fixed image constructed by the professional community of who the students are and what the school represents. It is more human in the sense that it reveals our own contradictions and partial views of different realities.

The assumption that more experienced professionals will provide guidance and support during school-based teacher education activities may be overrated if interpreted simplistically. Experience may be perceived negatively, and yet have a positive effect in the sense that even if by setting counter examples, roles and relations established with more experienced professionals may create the necessary tension that will, in turn, engage student teachers agentive roles as transformative intellectuals (Freire, 1973; Crookes, 2015) who act based on self-constructed knowledge and are critically conscious of this knowledge.

The different identity positionings of the four participants throughout their in-school activities illustrate the multiple themes that may arise in the process of gaining membership to a professional community, for developing a teacher self is “the result of individuals’ continual critical engagement with others who share their personal and professional space” (Kumaravadivelu, 2012, p.59).

Considering this, apprenticeship based on the relationship between student teachers and more experienced teachers is relevant not because it inspires and sets examples of good practices, but because it creates the necessary tensions that will allow teachers to put in motion their knowledge of self, of procedures, of the profession and, ultimately, of education at large.

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