

## A Narrative Inquiry about Teachers' Professional Identity – Stories of Lived Experiences

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### Abstract

This research study aims to understand teachers' professional identity based on autobiographical narratives. The study falls into the qualitative research paradigm, based upon social constructionist practices, where the narratives help to understand how people have understood events and experiences, including their hopes and plans. The participants were fourteen secondary school teachers with five to eleven years of teaching experience. The data collection method was storytelling, and the data analysis was based on a thematic analysis procedure.<sup>1</sup> Three themes emerged from the data analysis, and we can conclude that the desire to be a teacher starts before one's University days; the internships taken during the bachelor course constitute one of the main factors in developing teachers' professional identity; and being a teacher means availability to lifelong learning.

**Keywords:** narrative inquiry, teacher's professional identity, qualitative research methodology, thematic analysis, continuous professional development

### Introduction

A narrative and holistic orientation to teacher education is grounded in Dewey's philosophy of education and his belief that we learn from experience and reflection on our practice.<sup>2</sup> This paper offers a view of a narrative approach as a form of narrative inquiry based upon social constructionist, constructivist ideas and practices to describe the characteristics of an educational phenomenon – the teacher's professional identity. In this perspective, stories of lived experiences are co-constructed and negotiated by the people involved as a means of capturing complex, intertwined, and nuanced understandings of their experiences so that we can learn from them.<sup>3</sup> Narrative inquiry is a means by which we systematically gather, analyse, and represent people's stories as told by them.<sup>4</sup> Subjective meanings and sense of self and identity are negotiated as the stories unfold, and these stories are no more than a restoration of the person's experiences, as they were

1 Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 2/2006: 77–101.

2 Dewey stated, 'the educational process is one of continual reorganizing, reconstructing, transforming experience'. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: The Free Press, 1966), 50.

3 Cf. Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner, Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject, in *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), eds. Norma K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000), 739.

4 Cf. Elliot Mishler, 'Representing discourses: the rhetoric of transcription', *Journal of Narrative and Life History* 4/1991: 255–280.

remembered and told, at a particular point in their lives, for a specific purpose. Clandinin advocates that narrative inquiry is a 'profoundly relational form of inquiry'.<sup>5</sup>

Dewey emphasised reflective inquiry in learning and teaching in his work on conceptions of time, space, experience, and sociality.<sup>6 7 8</sup> Reflection on teacher education, development, and professional knowledge is central to the work of Donald Schön.<sup>9 10</sup> The notions of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action are at the core of Donald Schön's purposes. Reflection-in-action is described as 'thinking on our feet'. It involves looking into the experiences, connecting with the feelings, and attending to the theories in use. It entails building new understandings to inform actions in the situation that is unfolding. On the other hand, reflecting-on-action enables the person to spend time exploring why he acted as he did, what was happening in a group, and so on. In this reflective process, individuals develop sets of questions and ideas about their activities and practice.<sup>11</sup> During this reflective period, the reflective practitioner could experience some puzzlement and disorientation, which can serve to generate a new understanding of the phenomenon and/or a change in the situation.

Moon suggests that reflection is a form of mental processing that we use to accomplish a purpose or to achieve an estimated outcome. It is applied to gain a better understanding of relatively intricate or unstructured ideas and is largely based on the reprocessing of information or knowledge, understanding and emotions that we already possess.<sup>12</sup> It is within this reflective dynamic and in a school context that the teacher learns to build up and transform his professional knowledge essential to the development of both teaching practices and well-being. Working in a group, sharing experiences, and establishing rewarding relationships are fundamental references for promoting meaningful and motivating moments and concomitantly personal well-being.<sup>13</sup>

Practices of reflective inquiry in teacher education and professional development have been also emphasised in the work of several researchers.<sup>14 15</sup> Reflective practice is a process that facilitates teaching, learning, and understanding, and it plays a central role in teachers' professional development. When teachers carry out a systematic enquiry into themselves, they understand themselves and their practices. By constantly looking into their actions and experiences, they professionally grow on their own. According to Pennington, teacher identity is '...a mental image or model' of what being a teacher means that guides teachers' practices as they aim to enact 'being a teacher through specific acts of teacher's identity'.<sup>16</sup>

The complexity of teaching requires teachers to question their practices for their professional development to improve and increase learner performance. Reflective practice is the ability to reflect on an action to engage in a process of continuous learning. A key rationale for reflective practice is that experience alone does not necessarily lead to learning; deliberate reflection on

5 Jean Clandinin, *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology* (Sage Publications, Inc., 2007), xv.

6 John DEWEY, *Experience and Education* (New York: Collier), 1938.

7 John DEWEY, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (New York: Henry Holt), 1938.

8 John DEWEY, *Democracy and Education*.

9 Donald Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

10 Donald Schön, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* (London: Jossey-Bass, 1987).

11 Donald Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner*.

12 Jennifer Moon, *A handbook of reflective and experiential learning – Theory and practice* (New York: Routledge Falmer, 2004).

13 Cf. Melody Shank, 'Common Space, Common Time, Common Work', *Supporting New Educators* 8/2005: 16–19.

14 Mary Beattie, 'Fostering reflective practice in teacher education: Inquiry as a framework for the construction of a professional knowledge in teaching', *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education* 2/1997: 111–128.

15 Robert Bullough and Andrew Gitlin, *Becoming a Student of Teaching* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1995).

16 Cf. Martha Pennington, 'Teacher identity in TESOL: A frames perspective', in *Advances and current trends in language teacher identity research*, eds. Yin L. Cheung, Selim B. Said, and Kwanghyun Park (New York: Routledge, 2015), 17.

experience is essential.<sup>17</sup>

Current conceptualisations of professional identity as an ongoing process of interpretation and re-interpretation of experiences demonstrate that it is dynamic and subject to a continuing learning process. Teachers' job satisfaction, self-efficacy, occupational commitment, and change in level of motivation were perceived as indicators of teachers' sense of their professional identity.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, identity is essentially viewed as a fluid, recursive, and discursive process in which statements about actions are translated into statements about states, and vice versa.<sup>19</sup>

Teaching involves and has to do with self-efficacy, self-awareness, and mediation between ideals, aims and school realities. Fundamental attitudes, which link skills and intentions, guiding teachers to courses of action, include teachers' dispositions towards democratic values, towards collaboration with colleagues for shared educational aims, and towards maximising the learning potential of every student (through individualised teaching, high expectations, etc.).<sup>20</sup> Quality teaching requires adaptive skills and a systematic assessment and reflection of professional knowledge and actions.

A body of literature has emerged in recent years which considers teachers' perspectives/narratives on learning and teaching in their continuous training.<sup>21 22 23</sup> Ojanen developed a study on how student teachers develop the skills necessary for reflective teaching during their field experiences. The author stated that teacher educators can most effectively coach student teachers in reflective practice by using students' personal histories, dialogue journals, and small- and large-group discussions about their experiences to help students reflect upon and improve their practices.<sup>24</sup>

An important part of teachers' professional competence is rooted in their own academic life story. Thus, the use of narratives as a formative strategy for teachers could bring an important dimension and knowledge for teachers' continuous professional development, placing the teacher as the main protagonist of its training, highlighting their voices as they speak and reflecting on learning and teaching routines and challenges.<sup>25</sup>

## Methodology

Autobiographical narratives are the stories people remember about events in their lives. An autobiographical narrative is a selective reconstruction of the cogitative past and an account that explains, for the self and others, how the person came to be, who he is at present,<sup>26</sup> and thus can provide a rich basis of data for analysis in the studies of identity construction processes.

17 Monica Jacobs, Ntombizolile Vakalisa, and Nqabomzi Gawe, *Teaching-Learning Dynamics* (Cape Town: Pearson, 2011).

18 Cf. Esther Canrinus, Michelle Helms-Lorenz, Douwe Beijaard, Jaap Buitink, and Adriaan Hofman, 'Profiling teachers' sense of professional identity', *Educational Studies* 37/ 2011: 593.

19 Cf. Afsaneh Ghanizadeh and Shima Ostad, 'The Dynamism of Teachers' Identity: The Case of Iranian EFL Teachers', *Sino-US English Teaching* 11/2016: 832.

20 Sharon Feiman-Nemser, 'Teacher Learning. How do Teachers learn to teach?', in *Handbook of research on Teacher Education. Enduring Questions in Changing Contexts* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), eds. Marilyn Cochran-Smith, Sharon Feiman-Nemser, and D. John McIntyre (New York/ Abingdon: Routledge/ Taylor & Francis, 2008): 697–705.

21 Anne Brockbank and Ian McGill, *Facilitating reflective learning in higher education* (London: Open University Press, 2007).

22 Carl Glickman, Stephen Gordon, and Jovita Ross-Gordon, *The Basic Guide to Supervision and Instructional Leadership* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2008).

23 Anne Martin, Mirja Tarnanen, and Päivi Tynjälä, 'Exploring teachers' stories of writing: a narrative perspective', *Teachers and Teaching* 6/2018: 690–705.

24 Cf. Sinikka Ojanen, (1993). 'A process in which personal pedagogical knowledge is created through the teacher education experience', in International Conference on Teacher Education, Tel-Aviv, Israel, 1993, ED 398 200.

25 Cf. Maurice Tardif, *Saberes docentes e formação profissional* (5th ed.) (Petrópolis, R.J.: Editora Vozes, 2005), 60.

26 Dan McAdams, 'Narrative identity', in *Handbook of identity theory and research*, eds. Seth. J. Schwartz, Koen Luyckx, and Vivian L. Vignoles (Springer: New York, 2011), 99–115.

The primary aim of this study is to understand teachers' professional identity and, secondly to use those narratives on teachers' continuous professional development. To achieve that, we conducted a qualitative study based upon social constructionist and constructivist practices, where the autobiographical narratives help to understand how participants have interpreted events, values, beliefs, and experiences regarding their academic and professional experiences.

Narrative analysis treats stories as knowledge *per se*, which constitutes the social reality of the narrator<sup>27</sup> and conveys a sense of that person's experience in its depth, messiness, richness, and texture, by using the actual words as spoken by the participants. This analysis includes some of the researcher's part in that conversation because of the relational nature of the study. These stories are shaped through dialogue and co-construction, as well as providing a reflexive layer regarding the researcher's positioning.

Each participant has the freedom to construct his narrative. However, the narrative should include, among other things, answers about the emergence of the desire to be a teacher, the persons who may have influenced/contributed to the decision, the importance of university training for the development of learning and teaching competencies, and the challenges of being a teacher.

## Participants

The participants were fourteen secondary teachers, teaching different subjects in public schools in the Lisbon area. The participants were five male and nine female teachers, with five to eleven years of teaching experience, aged between 29 to 38 years old. For anonymity and confidentiality, the participants were assigned codes (T1 to T14), which will be used in this article for data evidence presentation.

## Data Collection and Procedures

The data collection was through narrative inquiry, more specifically, written storytelling with high levels of mutual critical engagement and sincere collaboration between participants and researcher. The data collection was made in one meeting in a teacher's training centre, following the steps described below.

1. Each participant constructs in 45 minutes a writing timeline, containing lived and meaningful events related to their teacher's identity construction and practice taking into consideration the questions highlighted above.
2. The participants received a colleague's timeline and wrote down questions they would like to see clarified.
3. Each timeline is returned to the author.
4. Each participant builds up a definitive autobiographical narrative.
5. Delivery of the autobiographical narrative to the researcher.

Each narrative was transcribed verbatim, and the participants were asked to read their respective transcripts as a means of confirming their testimonials. This procedure also served to validate the data collected.<sup>28</sup>

27 Kim Etherington, 'Ethical research in reflexive relationships', *Qualitative Inquiry* 5/2007: 599–616.

28 Irit Mero-Jaffe, "Is that what I said?" Interview transcript approval by participants: An aspect of ethics in qualitative research', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 3/2011: 231–247.

The data analysis was based on Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis procedure.<sup>29</sup> This is a method capable of guaranteeing richness and detail of analysis and thus particularly appropriate for understanding the participants' perceptions and uncovering their experiences.<sup>30</sup> At first, the transcriptions were read for the researchers to become familiar with the data collected. Then the coding phase involved the identification of the initial categories and themes, which were subsequently revised leading to the construction of an initial thematic map of analysis.

In the second stage, the comparison of the results of the individual analysis allowed some adjustments and the elaboration of a final thematic map. This analysis strategy, described by Denzin as a 'researcher triangulation' strategy, was a way of validating the analysis and the findings.<sup>31</sup>

To preserve the originality of each autobiographical narrative, each narrative constituted a unit of meaning. For the analysis, the narratives were transcribed verbatim, and a thematic analysis was performed following an inductive approach. Stage 1 of the data analysis involved creating transcripts of the narratives and reading them several times to become familiar with the data. This involved reading and re-reading the transcriptions and then noting any 'significant statements'. This familiarisation with the data allowed the first initial coding followed by the search for themes. Reviewing repeatedly permitted the definition and naming of the themes and the organisation of the presentation of the findings.

## Findings

From the data analysis, we can conclude that the desire to be a teacher starts before one's University days; the internships undergone during the bachelor course constitute one of the main factors in developing teachers' professional identity; and being a teacher means availability to lifelong learning (continuous professional development) and to be open to new practices. The three emergent themes are: Theme 1 – good memories and academic path supports the decision 'I want to be a teacher'; Theme 2 – the relevance of the University training programme to learn how to teach; Theme 3 – teacher effectiveness and challenges of being a teacher. Table 1 shows the emergent themes and relevant meaning units, derived from the participants' narratives.

29 Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, 'Using thematic analysis', 77–101.

30 Nela Brown and Tony Stockman, 'Examining the use of thematic analysis as a tool for informing design of new family communication technologies', in *Proceedings of the 27th International BCS Human Computer Interaction Conference*, eds. Steve Love, Kate Hone, and Tom McEwan (Swindon, UK: BCS Learning & Development Ltd, 2013), 1–6.

31 Norman Denzin, *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods* (New York, NY: Aldine Transaction, 2009).



Table 1. Emergent themes and relevant meaning units

Themes	Meaning units
<b>Theme 1 –</b> Good memories and academic path support the decision “I want to be a teacher”	<p>The desire to be a teacher manifested since childhood or at least adolescence (T1; T2; T4; T6; T10; T11; T14).</p> <p>The good memories of their teachers helped in the decision to be a teacher (T2; T3; T5; T7; T9; T12; T13).</p> <p>For all participants in this study, the desire to become a teacher emerges along the scholarly path, before starting the bachelor’s degree.</p> <p>These participants, when choosing the bachelor’s degree, already have beforehand made the decision to be a teacher.</p>
<b>Theme 2 –</b> The relevance of the University training programme to learning how to teach	<p>The bachelor’s degree allows significant experiences to the teachers’ training and consequently to learn about ‘the teaching’ (T1; T4; T8; T10; T14).</p> <p>For all participants in this study, the one-year internships taken during the bachelor course allow familiarisation with the future teaching and learning environment.</p> <p>The future teacher learns how to be an effective teacher through the experiences acquired in the school environment, namely, through the moments of exchange of knowledge with the classroom teachers (T1; T3; T6; T7; T9; T12; T13).</p> <p>The beginning of the career is accompanied by a critical phase because it is from the certainties and constraints of practical experience that teachers judge their own teaching and learning competencies (T4; T6; T12; T14).</p>
<b>Theme 3 –</b> Teacher effectiveness and challenges of being a teacher	<p>The initial teaching process is a shock regarding the reality. There is a confrontation with the complex and diverse reality experienced in the exercise of the profession (T2; T3; T7; T11, T14).</p> <p>Being a teacher indicates the need to be in constant learning and rethinking of the practice itself (T1; T2; T4; T6; T7; T9; T11; T12).</p> <p>Daily classroom experiences should be continually reflected upon and incorporated into later practices (T1; T3; T4; T7; T10).</p>

## Discussion

From a theoretical point of view, our findings are in line with other research studies. Previous academic experiences influence the decision to become a teacher and consciously affect teaching

practice.<sup>32</sup> Students and teachers were introduced to a unique set of values, codes of conduct, and epistemological views that impact the decision to be a teacher<sup>33</sup> and imprint a particular way of thinking about teaching and learning.<sup>34</sup>

Our participants' testimonials mentioned that good memories and the academic path supported the decision to be a teacher. T3 stated, 'My eighth-grade Math teacher was responsible for my decision to be a math teacher.' T7 highlighted in her narrative that 'since childhood, I had the teacher's role with my younger brother, but it was in adolescence that there manifested my motivation to embark on teaching'. Teachers come from different contexts: educational, personal, and social, and thus they have different values and beliefs concerning teaching and learning processes. Hennessy and Lynch in their study highlighted that prior teaching and learning experiences, as well as perceived ability, were found to be the strongest influential factors in participants' decision to become a teacher. The authors also found that a desire to work with children was found to be a significant positive predictor of becoming a teacher.<sup>35</sup>

Learning to act as a teacher entails integrating thoughts, knowledge and dispositions in practices that are informed by consistent principles. Our participants also emphasised the relevance of the internships taken during the bachelor's degree in their training. T8 wrote, 'The internship in my third year allowed me significant experiences and to learn about teaching'. T14 stated, 'The daily reflections during the internships with the classroom teacher changed my views and perspectives on teaching'. In line with our participants' narratives, Kosnik and Beck emphasised the relevance of internships in the initial training of teachers.<sup>36</sup> The authors highlighted that interns could: go more deeply into a specific teaching area; gain greater knowledge of school culture; become more familiar with school-wide programs and activities; and learn more about their distinctive interests and abilities as teachers. In our participants' words, internship 'represents a unique educational approach' (T3) and 'is based on experiential learning that is challenging' (T7), and has proven to be "an effective and efficacious approach to develop teaching competencies" (T11).

Kettle and Sellars studied the development of third-year teaching students.<sup>37</sup> The authors analysed the students' reflective writings and found that the use of peer reflective groups encouraged student teachers to challenge existing theories and their preconceived views of teaching. Freidus describes a case study of one teacher / graduate student struggling to make sense of her beliefs and practices about what constitutes good teaching.<sup>38</sup> Her initial pedagogy for teaching was based on the traditions and practices of direct teaching. Coaching and peer involvement using reflective practices have shown great relevance for her professional development.

The beginning of the career is accompanied by a critical phase because it is from the certainties and constraints of practical experience that teachers judge their own teaching and learning competencies. T3 stated, 'My first days/weeks of teaching were a shock with the reality (...) I felt so alone.' T11 wrote, 'I felt so insecure and with so many doubts, but I knew that was the thing that

32 Cf. Amanda Oleson and Matthew Hora, 'Teaching the way they were taught? Revisiting the sources of teaching knowledge and the role of prior experience in shaping faculty teaching practices', *Higher Education* 1/2013: 30.

33 Tony Becher and Paul Trowler, *Academic tribes and territories*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001).

34 Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo academicus* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).

35 Cf. Jennifer Hennessy and Raymond Lynch, "I chose to become a teacher because". Exploring the factors influencing teaching choice amongst pre-service teachers in Ireland', *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 2/2017: 106.

36 Cf. Clare Kosnik and Clive Beck, 'The internship component of a teacher education program: Opportunities for learning', *The Teacher Educator* 1/2003: 18–34.

37 Brenda Kettle and Neal Sellars, 'The Development of Student Teachers Practical Theory of Teaching', *Teaching and Teacher Education* 1/1996: 1–24.

38 Cf. Helen Freidus, 'The Telling of Story: Teachers Knowing What They Know'. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), Chicago, IL, 1997.

I want to do for my entire life. It wasn't easy those initial weeks' Teaching is, of course, much more than a 'task'. As Conway and colleagues point out, discussions about the competencies needed, how they develop over time, and how they are evidenced and recorded, could lead to wider and relevant discussions between teachers, including among others, commitment, confidence, flexibility, passion for learning, and the broader societal context in which teaching and teacher education occur.<sup>39</sup>

Teachers are individuals with their own enthusiasms and specific interests. They do not come without preconceptions to their classrooms.<sup>40</sup> Teaching must be a lifelong learning process and teachers are individually different. What they bring along to their classrooms are important variables in how they see themselves in the role of teachers during their professional journey.

Participants also emphasised that being a teacher indicates the need to be in constant learning and rethinking the practice itself. For this purpose, T2 wrote, 'As a teacher, I need to constantly innovate and adapt; this includes responding to students' outcomes, to new evidence from inside and outside the classroom, and professional dialogue, to adapt my practices'. T11 highlighted, 'being a teacher one needs to reflect on the experiences or activities one is doing for one's growth'. The roles of teachers and schools are changing, and so are expectations about them: teachers are asked to teach in increasingly multicultural classrooms, integrate students with special needs, use ICT for teaching effectively, engage in evaluation and accountability processes, and involve parents in schools.<sup>41</sup>

Finally, participants accentuated that daily classroom experiences should be continually reflected upon and incorporated into later practices. T3 stated, 'Teachers can deal with the needs and different issues of the learners and demand of time if they reflect on their daily teaching-learning activities'. T10 wrote, "As a result of reflection, the teacher may decide to do something differently or may just decide that what she/he has been doing is the best way". To deal with and survive in their professional field, teachers need to grow and bring changes in their behaviour and style. Reflection is a flashback that teachers need to mediate for their development.<sup>42</sup>

The difficulty in incorporating into teachers' weekly/monthly routines a plan for continuing personal reflection on teaching methods can lead teachers to forget, among other things, why they chose to be teachers. This forgetfulness leads to professional demotivation, increased stress, and a systematic appearance of resistance to change.

Demands and continuous changes in the teaching context by schools affect all teachers, but these confrontations are experienced with more intensity by novice teachers.<sup>43</sup> In our study, the participants also raised the matter that the beginning of the career is accompanied by uncertainties, limitations, and fears and the initial teaching process could be very demanding and tense.

39 The authors elaborated an international report that includes two separate parts: 1. a narrative review of recent and relevant literature on teacher education; and 2. a cross-national review of teacher education policies in nine countries, namely, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland, England, Finland, USA, Poland, Singapore, and New Zealand. Paul Conway, Rosaleen Murphy, Anne Rath, and Kathy Hall, *Learning to Teach and its Implications for the Continuum of Teacher Education: A Nine-Country Cross-National Study*. Report Commissioned by the Teaching Council. (University College Cork and Teaching Council of Ireland, 2009).

40 Cf. Danuta Gabrys-Barker, 'On teacher beliefs, self-identity and the Stages of professional development', *Lingvarvm arena* 1/2010: 25.

41 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) provides the first internationally comparative perspective on the conditions of teaching and learning, based on data from over 70,000 teachers and school principals who represent lower secondary teachers in the 23 participating countries. TALIS examines important aspects of professional development; teacher beliefs, attitudes and practices; teacher appraisal and feedback; and school leadership. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Creating Effective Teaching and Learning Environments*, First Results from TALIS. Paris: OECD Publications, 2009.

42 Cf. Jukka Husu, Auli Toom, and Sanna Patrikainen, 'Guided reflection as a means to demonstrate and develop student teachers' reflective competencies', *Reflective Practice* 1/2008: 39.

43 Cf. Robert Fantilli and Douglas McDougall, A study of novice teacher: challenges and supports in the first years, *Teaching and Teacher Education* 6/2009, 817.



New problems emerge in the schools regarding the uncertain context of ongoing change in today's education arena. Teachers need to deploy extensive repertoires of skills, strategies, and action patterns eclectically, with the ability to judge and act in situations.<sup>44</sup> Our participants highlighted that 'being a teacher indicates the need to be in constant learning' (T3), the need 'to rethink the practice itself' (T6), and 'daily classroom experiences should be continually reflected and incorporated into later practices' T11. The narratives are illustrative of how these teachers have learned in their teaching lives, to find patterns and connections, and to think critically and creatively. Teaching involves the whole person and narratives are primary ways of thinking, knowing, and representing what is known.<sup>45</sup>

## Conclusions

This research, within the framework of sociocultural theory, allowed the researcher to examine how human actions are related to the social context in which they occur and how and where they occur through growth. Narrative inquiry has proved useful in revealing some interesting aspects concerned with the phenomenon under analysis in this research study. Following some overall questions, participants wrote a narrative, writing a story about how they have built their professional identity. They also provided some hints about how their values, beliefs, and experiences influence their teaching practice. We found patterns, descriptions of identity construction and reconstruction, and evidence of social discourses that impact a person's knowledge creation from a specific cultural standpoint. The individual narrative shows that the creation of a professional identity is a unique process for each teacher and that process involves the examination and transformation of existing knowledge and the adaptation of such knowledge, skills, and attitudes to professional demands.

Clandinin and Connelly conceptualised what they call teachers' professional knowledge landscapes, personal practical knowledge, and teacher identity, as well as discussed the role of stories in shaping the professional identity of teachers.<sup>46</sup> After Clandinin and Connelly's conceptualisation of teachers' professional knowledge landscapes, teachers' questions such as 'Who am I in my story of teaching?' and 'Who am I in my place in the school?' started to be highlighted in some studies.<sup>47</sup> Developing a teaching identity requires that teachers engage in the practices of the school, in collaboration with other members of their community of practice and share the common repertoire. A fundamental aspect of teacher socialisation and development is the re-establishment and maintenance of a vivid and strong professional identity. As a multi-layered and dynamic phenomenon, teacher identity is affected by a diverse range of social and institutional factors.<sup>48</sup> Professional identity is unstable and multiple, is formed in relationships with others, and involves emotions and the construction and reconstruction of meaning through stories over time.<sup>49</sup> Kegan clearly

44 Hugh Sockett, 'The moral and epistemic purposes of teacher education', in *Handbook of research on Teacher Education. Enduring Questions in Changing Contexts* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), eds. Marilyn Cochran-Smith, Sharon Feiman-Nemser, and D. John McIntyre (New York/Abingdon: Routledge/ Taylor & Francis, 2008), 45–65.

45 Cf. Mary Beattie, 'Narratives of Professional Learning: Becoming a Teacher and Learning to Teach', *Journal of Educational Enquiry*, 2/2000: 5.

46 Cf. Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly, 'Teachers' professional knowledge landscapes: teacher stories—stories of teachers—school stories—stories of schools', *Educational Researcher*, 3/1996: 24–30.

47 Cf. Cheryl Craig, 'Narrative inquiry in teaching and teacher education', *Advances in Research on Teaching*, 2011: 19–42.

48 Bahram Behin, Fatemeh Esmaeili, and Rsoul Assadollahi, 'An English Teacher's Professional Identity Development: The Effect of Educational Policies', *Journal of Modern Research in English Language Studies* 2/2018: 19–40.

49 Carol Rodgers and Katherine Scott, 'The development of the personal self and professional identity in learning to teach' in *Handbook of research on Teacher Education. Enduring Questions in Changing Contexts* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), eds. Marilyn Cochran-Smith, Sharon Feiman-Nemser, and D. John McIntyre (New York/Abingdon: Routledge/ Taylor & Francis, 2008), 732–755.

articulates a process of growth and change as well as distinct developmental stages in adulthood.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Kegan's conception of self suggests that the way the teacher self makes sense of his experience is, in fact, distinct at the different developmental stages and that it changes/evolves during the career. Building upon Schön's concept of 'reflect-on-action',<sup>52 53</sup> we suggest that teachers' reflection on their careers and own practices could be a relevant personal reconstruction activity. It is an effort to step back into the experience, retrieving what they remember for expressing and organising those fragmented elements to understand what has happened over time and drawing lessons from the experience for the development of skilled new practices. Teachers' reflection promotes critical approaches to teaching and, consequently, leads to better practice.<sup>54</sup>

Teachers' continuous professional development is highly relevant both for improving educational performance and effectiveness, and for enhancing teachers' commitment, identity, and job satisfaction. Although they are interconnected with the features and constraints of specific school contexts and national education systems, teachers' competencies and well-being have powerful effects on student achievement.<sup>55</sup>

The procedure of guided reflection gives us a pathway that can foster teachers' ability to reflect on teaching and thereby on their professional development both attitudinally and functionally. We believe that using teacher's narratives with a reflective disposition can be a powerful formative strategy for teachers' continuous professional development.

*'The most important aspects of teacher education are often ephemeral, passionate, shadowy and significant. For the most part, [they]... reflect teachers' lives ...'*<sup>56</sup>

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50 Robert Kegan, *The evolving self*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982.

51 Robert Kegan, *In over our heads*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994.

52 Donald Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner*.

53 Donald Schön, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*.

54 Cf. Clifford Mayes, A transpersonal model for teacher reflectivity, *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 4/2001: 490.

55 Considerable controversy surrounds the impact of schools and teachers on students' academic achievement. Rivkin and Hanusek detach the factors influencing academic achievement with special attention given to the role of teacher differences and other aspects of schools. The data analysis permitted the correlation between total effects and specific factors, measuring components related to teachers and schools. Steven Rivkin, Eric Hanushek, and John Kain, 'Teachers, Schools, and Academic Achievement', *Econometrica*, 2/2005: 417–458.

56 Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly, 'Knowledge, narrative, and self-study' in *International handbook of self-study of teaching and teacher education practices*, eds. Jeffrey Loughran, Mary Lynn Hamilton, Vicky La Boskey and Tom Russell (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishing, 2004), 42.