Routledge
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The construction of teachers' professional identity: An analysis of subjective learning experiences

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the construction of teachers' professional identity through analysis of subjective learning experiences. In order to report on the progress of our work, we present a discourse analysis of three experiences considered to be of particular relevance by a final-year pedagogy student. The analysis yielded four important conclusions: i) The process of teachers' professional identity construction is based on comparing and contrasting different experiences and culminates in the construction of new identity positions; ii) this process must involve experiences that call into question existing meanings of self; iii) future teachers must engage in productive dialogue with other significant actors in order to identify and recognise the value of certain positional objects; and iv) certain subjective learning experiences have a greater impact on the reconstruction of identity positions. Finally, we propose an analysis model based on subjective learning experiences for the construction of teachers' professional identity.

Introduction

In recent decades there has been considerable discussion in the field of initial teacher training regarding the nature and characteristics of teacher training curricula (Darling-Hammond 2006; 2017; Grossman et al. 2009; Lara, Foster, and Gorichon 2007; Hökkä, Vähäsantanen, and Mahlakaarto 2017; Jonker, März, and Voogt 2018; Deng 2018). Among other things, the debate has focused on the need to move away from models that prioritise teachers' knowledge and towards the implementation of curricular structures that involve participation in practical classroom teaching activities, otherwise known as the *practicum* (De Mora and Wood 2014; Vetter, Hartman, and Reynolds 2016; Nickel and Zimmer 2018; Schauer 2018). However, there is general uncertainty as to the best form for such activities to take, and even less is known about their contribution to teachers' professional identity, considered one of the most important indicators of teacher behaviour and a key element in the transition to teaching (Akkerman and Meijer 2012; Andreasen, Bjørndal, and Kovač 2019; Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop 2004; Fomunyam 2016).

In this context, the notion of identity plays a key role in teacher training as, in general terms, it 'provides a framework for teachers to construct their own ideas of "how to be", "how to act"' (Sachs 2005, 15). However, in a recent review of 22 articles published over the last 10 years on the importance of identity in teacher training, Rodrigues and Mogarro (2019) highlight the difficulty of establishing a clear and precise definition of the concept given its broad, complex and general nature (Beauchamp and Thomas 2009; Trede, Macklin, and Bridges 2012), proposing that future research should focus on understanding and development of professional identity. The work addresses identity from a cultural-historical theoretical perspective through which it is possible to examine the various situations to which future teachers are exposed and upon which they base the construction of meanings of teaching, school culture, school practices and, most importantly, themselves within a community of practice (Assen et al. 2018; Caires, Almeida, and Vieira 2012; Meijer, De Graaf, and Meirink 2011; Schepens, Aelterman, and Vlerick 2009; Han 2016).

Our work considers that the construction of meanings is based on diverse subjective learning experiences and that these are key to the construction of a teacher's identity (Veresov and Fleer 2016; Vygotsky 2018). We understand these subjective learning experiences as complex and interconnected social situations (Roth and Erstad 2016; Erstad, Gilje, and Arnseth 2013; Ligorio and Ritella 2010) that are closely linked to multiple and varied actions that people constantly reconstruct within their autobiography and which provide semiotic material for processes of identity construction (Tsybulsky et al. 2020). These processes are never experienced in isolation, and indeed a variety of actors may be involved, such as parents, mentors, course directors and other students. All of these play important roles in identity formation and their voices are internalised by the future teacher (Morgan 2016; Taylor 2017; Yazan 2018). It could therefore be said that teachers' professional identity is formed socially through the interplay of the subject's internal voice and those of others, a process which eventually yields a consensus regarding a set of personal meanings about him or herself (Beynon, Ilieva, and Dichupa 2001; Vangrieken et al. 2015).

Based on this background, we use discourse analysis to explore the way in which the subjective learning experiences of future teachers contribute to the construction of their professional identity. We consider that these experiences gained during the transition between the university context and the early years of teaching are critical, as it is here that trainee teachers gain their first practical insights into teaching approaches and become familiar with the professional context (Birkeland and Feiman-Nemser 2012; Feiman-Nemser 2001). There are a number of works which suggest that continuity or a lack thereof between activity contexts may be of particular relevance to the learning process, as these contexts provide the opportunity to connect and contrast different subjective learning experiences and thus develop meanings regarding oneself as a teacher (Akkerman and Meijer 2012; Edwards and Edwards 2016; Garner and Kaplan 2018; Van Lankveld et al. 2016).

The present study's main contribution to the field is our proposal to use subjective learning experiences to identify and understand the positional changes that teachers undergo as they participate in experiences that they identify as key to the construction of their professional identity. Although the literature already includes a number of works that address teachers' professional identity (Androusou and Tsafos 2018;

Leeferink et al. 2019; Mesker et al. 2018; Schepens, Aelterman, and Vlerick 2009), the majority of these focus on emotional components or on associated processes of reflection, with less attention being paid to the actual construction of teachers' professional identity. As such, the central contribution of the present work is a tightly focused theoretical and methodological perspective of the way in which trainee teachers use discussion to construct and develop their own identities as teachers.

Theoretical background

Given its complex nature, there are various notions of teachers' professional identity. However, there is general consensus that, for example, professional identity can be associated with meanings, but also with perceptions, images, knowledge of self, and even beliefs (for example, Chong and Low 2009; Gaudelli and Ousley 2009; Lim 2011). Some works have addressed the notion of identity in terms of interpretation, reinterpretation, negotiation and integration of personal (individual) and professional (educational) relationships (for example, Mahmoudi-Gahrouei, Tavakoli, and Hamman 2016; Schepens, Aelterman, and Vlerick 2009). Others are more similar to ours, proposing that identity construction is a process involving past, present and future experiences, historical and cultural factors, and personal and psychological characteristics (for example, Beauchamp and Thomas 2010; Dang 2013; Lamote and Engels 2010; Lim 2011). As such, teachers' professional identity is a fragmented, dynamic, multidimensional, changing and inter-subjective phenomenon (see, for example, Melville, Bartley, and Fazio 2013; Sutherland and Markauskaite 2012).

In light of this multidimensionality to which a number of recent studies refer, we propose that the notion of teacher identity can be summarised as comprising three elements: multiplicity, discontinuity, and sociability. Multiplicity refers to the way in which each teacher develops multiple identities: a teacher develops a set of general meanings pertaining to him or herself and to his or her role, but these meanings have contextual nuances and are negotiated in each unique situation, giving rise to multiple situated positions (Akkerman and Meijer 2012; Arvaja 2016; Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop 2004; Geijsels and Meijers 2005; Van Veen, Sleegers, and Van De Ven 2005). This means, for example, that a teacher may simultaneously hold the roles of mathematics specialist, school band director, and professional development leader.

The second element – discontinuity – refers to the notion that teachers' professional identity is not static, and in fact changes frequently. This means that a future teacher's identity positions may be transformed by the activities in which they participate during their training, and their very identity may change as a result (Arvaja 2016; Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop 2004). In other words, previously established meanings are renegotiated in each new situation, with the potential for profound changes to the teacher's identity in different contexts (Kayi-Aydar and Miller 2018). For example, a mathematics teacher may be open and understanding with his or her pupils in the classroom, yet brusque and uncooperative with colleagues during staff meetings.

The third element – sociability – alludes to the aforementioned notion that while teachers' professional identity constitutes a set of personal meanings developed with regard to oneself, it is also shaped by the voices of others. By 'others' we refer not only to

those individuals who are to a greater or lesser extent significant to the future teacher, but also to educational policies and the rules of participation of the teaching programmes in which the trainee is involved (Vangrieken et al. 2015). Perhaps the best examples of other actors include teacher trainers, university tutors, and the peers and pupils with whom a trainee teacher interacts constantly.

There is general consensus among researchers that these elements are essential to understanding teachers' professional identity. However, there is a need to explain why, how, where and when these processes of identity construction take place, and the majority of the works reviewed call for research to collect evidence relating to actual experiences as a raw material for the examination of identity (see Edwards and Edwards 2016; Androusou and Tsafos 2018; Leeferink et al. 2019; Kılıç and Cinkara 2020).

From the cultural-historical perspective proposed in the present study (Vygotsky 2018; Veresov and Fleer 2016), identity construction is a complex process that involves the continuous reconstruction of a 'voice' with which to define, express and understand oneself, and that this takes place in specific situations that we revisit through discursive mechanisms that give meaning to the world and to objects within it (Wortham, Kim, and May 2017). It is through our identity that we manage our relationship with the world and our own psychological processes. In Vygotskian terms, identity can be seen as a conceptual cultural artefact that gives colour and process to the experience.

## Subjective experience as a unit of analysis in the study of professional teacher identity

In order to explain why, how, where and when processes of identity construction take place, we must first appreciate that these are closely linked to the way in which people incorporate into their autobiography those subjective learning experiences that they consider relevant . In other words, identity is shaped not only by the physical movement of trainee teachers through different contexts, but also according to the way in which they interpret and ascribe personal meaning to that movement (Erstad, Gilje, and Arnseth 2013; Engel, Fauré, Membrive, Merino & Coll, 2019 Ludvigsen et al. ; Ritella and Ligorio 2016). This notion of personal meaning implies positions based on experiences which are always subjective, and which call into question even the most established meanings that people construct in relation to themselves and the world (Rosa and Valsiner 2018).

We define a subjective learning experience as a discursive reconstruction that people conduct based on the learning process that they have undergone through participation in one or more situations. The term 'situation' refers to the spatial and temporal configuration of a set of historically, culturally and socially situated circumstances and events (Clarà 2013). More specifically, by engaging in a subjective learning experience, the future teacher ascribes personal meaning to the situation(s) in which he or she participates, and these do not always have the emotional weight or subject relevance generally attributed to, for example, critical incidents (Shapira-Lishchinsky 2011). This attribution of meaning is achieved through the creation of stories in which the trainee positions him or herself and others (Bruner 1990; Connelly and Clandinin 1999; Hall et al. 2010; Kozulin 2003; Li et al. 2009; Wortham 2004).

For this reason, in order to understand the nature of the identity construction process, one must first identify the positions that people use when they engage in subjective learning experiences. More specifically, we propose that in every subjective learning experience, teachers' professional identity is manifested and constructed according to the relationship that a teacher establishes between an initial identity position, a positional object, and an assessment of the value of that object (see Figure 1). By engaging in an experience, the person positions him or herself in a role, creating links with objects within that context (Norton 2006, 2013) and culturally assessing their value or ascribing meaning to them (Vågan 2011), an exercise which may ultimately lead to the construction of a new position. In practical terms, the trainee teacher arrives in the situation with a pre-formed idea of their role (initial identity position), observes a person, event or other element within that situation (positional object), assesses the value of that person, event or other element (evaluation of positional object), and develops a new or reconstructed position as a result of this process.

Put simply, our model focuses on analysing the meanings that teachers construct during the various experiences in which they participate (Holland and Leander 2004; Salen 2008). These meanings are the positions which subjects assume (Holquist and Clark 1984; Wortham, Kim, and May 2017) and which motivate them to negotiate language and knowledge from a particular point of view (Bakhtin 1991) in response to what we refer to as the initial identity position. This idea is attributed to the work of Leontiev (1978) and assumes that identity and positions are always bound to an 'objective' object or motive that provokes them. In other words, the initial position is always established by means of the question 'who is speaking?' and the positional object by the question 'what are they talking about?' For this reason, the initial position and the positional object are always interlinked within human activity, including discursive activity. Furthermore, determination of the value of the positional object depends on both the initial position and the positional object itself, meaning that there are situations and artefacts that may be assessed differently depending on the initial position. Determination of value always occurs through the question 'what is the value of that which is being talked about?'

This leads us to a point at which we must establish whether or not a decision regarding the value of a given positional object permits a modification or transformation of the initial position of the person who is reconstructing their subjective learning experience. If
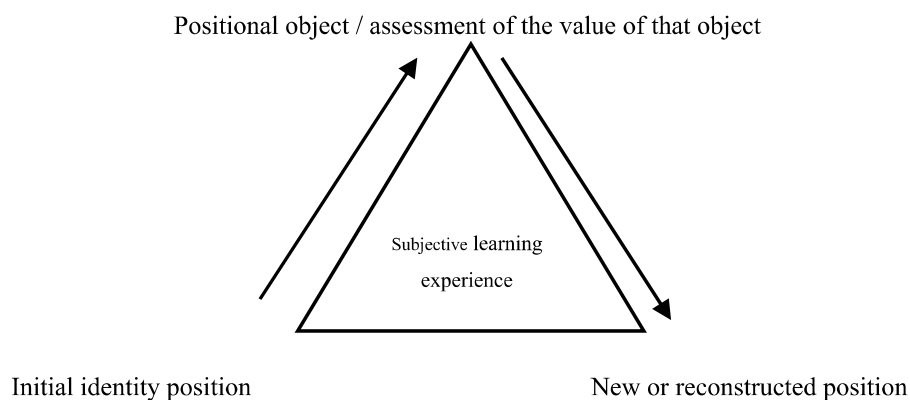
Figure 1. Change of identity during a subjective learning experience.

a change occurs, we are able to say that the process has produced a new position or a reconstruction of identity. It is this reconstruction that we refer to as teachers' professional identity. In the case of future teachers, it involves a change in the initial position as a consequence of the assessment of a given object as relevant to the teaching role. This new or reconstructed position represents the acquisition of certain meanings that support professional performance.

Methodological considerations

The present work is part of a larger research project whose objective is to explore professional identity construction processes in different groups of teachers. However, in order to report on the progress of our work to date, we have decided to focus on the case of one final-year pedagogy student. This particular case involves a rich training trajectory that includes multiple experiences in which positional changes are clearly apparent, and these are particularly useful in terms of demonstrating our analysis proposal. The single case approach enables us to present insights gleaned from our research so far (Bazeley 2018; Eisenhardt 1989; Yin 2013). As little is known about the internal dynamics of teachers' professional identity construction processes (De Fina 2015; Van Rijswijk, Akkerman, and Koster 2013), we consider that the study of a single case constitutes a productive first step along this research path. A number of works have used single case studies to explore relevant aspects from a theoretical (for example, Wilson and Deaney 2010; Rostami, Yousefi, and Amini 2020; Nguyen 2017) or methodological point of view (for example, Forrest et al. 2019). Researchers choose this design not only for its usefulness in providing an in-depth explanation of the research objects in question, but also because it permits the testing of theoretical and analytical hypotheses in socially, culturally and historically situated activity contexts (Harrison et al. 2017; Yin 2014).

Context of the study

Over the past 20 years, there has been extensive discussion in Chile and around the world of the initial teacher training curriculum (Ávalos 2014; Darling-Hammond 2006; Grossman et al. 2009). One aspect that is central to this discussion is the connection between training in the university context and training in the context of school-based practice. In the Chilean education system, each university has the freedom to establish its own practicum format, to decide on the school-based activities in which future teachers must engage, and to specify the number of days and hours that future teachers must dedicate to these activities (Ávalos 2014; Cisternas 2013; Hirmas and Cortés 2015; Turra-Diaz and Flores-Lueg 2019). This has led to a variety of problems, including (i) the use of schools as a space for observation rather than as a training space in which to promote participation in activities specific to the profession; (ii) a diversity of contradictory meanings regarding the concept of practice; and (iii) a strong focus on the teaching of theory rather than on practical activities (Contreras et al. 2010).

In light of the above, our work points to the importance of including alongside these activities the construction and development of teachers' professional identity through the use of the subjective learning experiences that future teachers undergo during their

practicum. As such, we present the case of Mauren, a final-year pedagogy student who is actively engaged in the final phase of her teacher training. In fact, Mauren also engages in a variety of other activities which are not necessarily related to her initial teacher training, and her critical approach to the tasks involved in her practicum sets her apart from her peers. These tasks have included observation and preparation of classes, direct teaching of pupils, and participation in meetings with parents and school staff. Mauren had originally been studying theatre but dropped out after a year and moved to pedagogy. She also has experience as a teaching assistant on a linguistics course, after which she took part in a university exchange. She describes herself as a disorganised and undisciplined person and considers that her attitude in the classroom has more to do with a made-up persona than with her true personality, and that this is due to her general interest in the theatre and particularly in acting. At the time of the interview, Mauren was writing her thesis on linguistics and also giving private tuition.

Data production and analysis

Within the cultural-historical framework that we are using to explore identity (see De Fina, Schiffrin, and Bamberg 2006), discourse forms the basis upon which we are able to access past, present and imagined situations that affect personal history. Our discourse analysis takes into consideration the context of what has been said, how it has been said, and why it may have been said at a given moment and in a certain place. A semi-structured interview was conducted (Benwell and Stokoe 2006; McAdams 1993) which lasted approximately an hour and fifteen minutes. The objective of the interview was for the participant to recount subjective learning experiences which provide evidence of changes in identity positions. We began our analysis by selecting those interview excerpts in which subjective learning experiences are recounted, then proceeded to identify changes in identity positions according to the four main elements around which our analysis was structured: (a) initial position; (b) positional object; (c) assessment of the value of that object; and (d) new position. Three researchers independently read through and codified all of the material, discussing any particularly contentious cases with a fourth until a consensus was reached. The categorisations presented for each of the excerpts should be taken as an example of the analysis being carried out within the ongoing work. Participation by trainee teachers was voluntary and all interviewees were informed as to the purpose of the study and the ethical implications of their involvement. All participants were free to withdraw from the study at any point.

Results

In this section we provide a detailed description of the analysis procedure and the preliminary results obtained. We identified three key subjective learning experiences from Mauren's interview, deciding to focus on these in order to demonstrate our approach to analysis of the information and because, from a conceptual point of view, they are particularly rich in terms of positional changes. The first experience concerns the rejection of Mauren's request to undertake the first part of her teaching practicum at a particular school (see Excerpt 1). The activities took place during the second year of her degree course and consisted primarily of classroom observation. The school at which

Excerpt 1. 'When you're a teacher you have to open your mind.'

1	I studied at a very good school, so there's a lot of . . . I wasn't at all familiar
2	with the system in general, personally, and I was really scared. So, in fact,
3	when it was my turn to do the pre-practicum, I said to the teacher in charge
4	at university 'miss, please don't send me to a school I don't know;
5	I don't want to go there. Send me to the school where I studied', and she said
6	'no, I'm not going to send you to your old school because you won't learn
7	anything there'. I didn't feel prepared; even now I don't know whether I feel
8	prepared to go into that type of school [. . .] perhaps I am, I don't know, but at that
9	moment it seemed impossible . . . like, forget it. I was very scared. I was scared
10	to face this new system that I wasn't familiar with. Now I'm grateful to my
11	practicum director for not letting me do the practicum at my old school
12	because I'd still be there today, totally comfortable, and when you're a teacher
13	you have to keep an open mind. If I hadn't spoken to her about how I felt during
14	that practicum, it wouldn't have been of such benefit to me as it ultimately has.

Mauren received her primary and secondary education is of a high socio-economic level, while the school to which she was assigned for the first part of her practicum is of a low socio-economic level and located on the outskirts of the city. This information goes some way towards explaining Mauren's negative response to the decision of the practicum coordinator.

A change in Mauren's identity position can be seen as a result of an experience involving the practicum coordinator at her university (other significant actor). The purpose of the experience was to specify the location of Mauren's first teaching practicum. At the beginning of her account, Mauren positions herself as a fairly sheltered student (lines 1–2) who is fearful at the prospect of entering scenarios that differ from those to which she is accustomed (lines 7–10). More specifically, she attempts to refuse to do her practicum anywhere other than the school at which she herself had studied. However, the practicum coordinator is convinced of the benefit that the experience of a new context would have for Mauren as a future teacher and insists (lines 6–7).

We can identify three events that occur as part of this experience: an initial conversation with the practicum coordinator during which Mauren is made to participate in a context other than that requested by her; secondly, the practicum itself; and finally, a third event associated with the experience she ultimately gained at the school. The initial event serves to illustrate the change in Mauren's identity position, allowing us to distinguish the positional object (namely, the place in which the practicum will take place) through the link between two events (the practicum itself and her teaching experience at the school), which in turn suggests that the subjective experience had a positive impact on her training as a teacher (lines 10–13).

This subjective learning experience illustrates Mauren's move from the position of a student who is unfamiliar with and nervous of new realities to one of a future teacher who is free from fear and appreciates the importance of keeping an 'open mind' or having new experiences as a teacher. This is consistent with our interpretative framework. In fact, this subjective learning experience shows that formation of teachers' professional identity is a reconstructive process in which appreciation of the value of lived events has the potential to shape new positions. As such, it is crucial that future teachers not only participate in a variety of contexts, but that they engage in reflective

dialogue with other significant actors about the meaning of the experience that they gain.

The second subjective learning experience took place during the third year of Mauren's degree course and revolved around standard teaching activities (see Excerpt 2).

Mauren begins by positioning herself as a student who is motivated by the prospect of engaging in her teaching role (lines 1–3). The initial event that Mauren recounts in this subjective learning experience is a conversation with the classroom teacher about two difficult students (lines 4–5). It is this event that triggers identity construction: the teacher embodies precisely the kind of professional that Mauren does not want to become and illustrates the implications of a teacher's behaviour in certain situations (lines 8–12).

As with the first subjective learning experience, this one shows that in order to analyse the change in identity position, the event that triggers that change must be taken into consideration. However, in contrast to the first experience, the importance of the value put on the positional object is also made clear. While in the first experience the positional object is the place in which the practicum must take place and the final evaluation is positive, in this instance the positional object is the teacher's statements (line 8) and the value ascribed to it is negative (lines 9–11). This excerpt shows that identity construction takes place through experiences that trigger a questioning of personal meaning, i.e., 'I want to be like her' versus 'I don't want to be like her'. This questioning provokes certain proximity or distance in terms of identity, and this appears to be fundamental to the construction of teachers' professional identity.

A third subjective learning experience took place in the fifth year of Mauren's degree, during her final practicum. The experience offers valuable evidence of the role played by the links between subjective learning experiences in the construction of teachers' professional identity (see Excerpt 3).

Here we can see how Mauren constructs an initial identity position through the relationship that she establishes with Ceci, a teacher whose classes she observed during the fifth year of her course and whom she considered to be 'a good role model' (lines 9–10). Mauren compares this positive experience with Ceci against the event recounted in Excerpt 2 from the third year of her degree (lines 3–5).

Excerpt 2. 'Why are we even bothering to study what we're studying?'

1	It happened during my pre-practicum, I think, which was a very short practical
2	exercise that required me to give three classes. I ended up asking to give more
3	classes because I was really motivated, and of course the teacher was thrilled.
4	There were several children with problems in that class. I remember one boy
5	and one girl. I asked the teacher, 'what can we do with her? It's such
6	a shame . . . I mean, the girl's in year 9 and she doesn't want to study . . . like,
7	what's up with her? There's something we don't know', and the teacher's
8	answer was 'leave her be, we've already lost her', and I put my head in my
9	hands and thought 'it cannot be that this woman . . . ' We're talking about a girl in
10	year 9 . . . I mean, she's 13 or 14 years old. How can we just give up on her like
11	that? What are we talking about? I mean, I don't know . . . why are we even
12	bothering to study what we're studying? I don't know . . . I asked the teacher
13	'what can we do about him?' He had problems with hyperactivity . . . and her
14	response was 'ugh, he's just totally unbearable'. How can you talk like that
15	about your pupils?

Excerpt 3. 'I can see a bit of myself in her.'

1	I've had a really, really good experience here. During the first semester I was
2	*doing … well, I was observing Ceci's classes, and I was here at the school*
3	*doing a project, so I'm definitely a bit more familiar now … Well, the*
4	*same thing that happened with the previous teacher, I mean, from my*
5	*pre-practicum, which makes me realise what I don't want. I don't want that*
6	*to happen to me; it'd be such a shame. It would be awful to end up being*
7	*a teacher who doesn't care about her pupils, because at the end of the day,*
8	*as a student teacher, that's what matters to me: the pupils … more so than*
9	*the course content and all that … I think that Ceci has been a good role model*
10	*for me; like, we've had some really great conversations and I feel like I can see*
11	*a bit of myself in her, and I like that … I like working with her now because I*
12	*feel that both of us are learning a lot.*

By arranging the events in time order we can see that an identity is constructed as a result of the rejection of the statements made by the teacher from her year-three practicum. This identity is then reinforced by her identification with Ceci (lines 9–12). As with the other excerpts, here we observe the way in which the initial identity position changes as a consequence of a lived event. On this occasion, the event is more complex as it involves the creation of a connection to a past experience. Specifically, we see how Mauren constructs two positional objects, namely (a) the statements of the first teacher and (b) the good role model, and in doing so conducts two evaluations of those objects, the first being negative and the second positive. The positive value she ascribes to Ceci is due primarily to the fact that she was able to establish a productive dialogue with her, which we see as the point at which Mauren begins to articulate new identity positions. In simple terms, her relationship with another significant actor enhances the construction of her professional identity as a teacher.

Discussion

In the present work, we have reported on the progress made to date in our ongoing research project by exploring the case of Mauren, a trainee teacher who is attempting to construct her professional identity based on subjective learning experiences. A number of works have proposed the need to study the experiences of trainee teachers, asserting that these experiences form the basic framework of professional identity (Tsybulsky et al. 2020; Androusou and Tsafos 2018; Leeferink et al. 2019). Our study of the case of Mauren constitutes a productive first step in the collection of empirical evidence regarding the shaping of positions and, ultimately, the construction of teachers' professional identity through subjective learning experiences.

Our results suggest that the study of subjective learning experiences has enabled us to empirically identify the meanings established by Mauren about herself as a teacher, about others, and about certain key events. When future teachers engage in an educational activity, they contrast a number of identity positions, enabling the identification of certain positional objects. Evaluation of these positional objects leads to the transformation of initial positions, thus facilitating changes in identity (Bukor 2015; Edwards and Edwards 2016; Schepens, Aelterman, and Vlerick 2009). This transformation depends considerably on interactions with other significant actors, as these help the future teacher to recognise,

differentiate and transform their own positions (Beauchamp 2019; Hökkä, Vähäsantanen, and Mahlakaarto 2017). Ultimately, our study highlights the need for in-depth exploration of the dynamics and definitions of positions and the distinctions between them, as these are considered key aspects in the construction of a teacher's professional identity.

Our study leads us to four conclusions that we believe to be of value with regard to teacher training and our overall understanding of the phenomena of identity construction and reconstruction. The first is that construction of teachers' professional identity is a process by which each person articulates their position within specific events. This articulation involves a comparison between past, present and imagined experiences and results in the construction of new identity positions or the transformation of a previous identity position. As such, we believe that it is vital for future teachers to have the opportunity to participate in multiple and varied activity contexts during their training. A number of researchers suggest that participation in a wide range of contexts during their training allows future teachers to acquire diverse personal resources which will be vital to resolving the dilemmas they will face during their professional careers (Beauchamp and Thomas 2009; Hong, Greene, and Lowery 2016; Mesker et al. 2018). However, it is not enough for teachers simply to participate in multiple and varied activity contexts. From the moment they enter university, it is vital that trainee teachers participate in systematic and ongoing reflexive activities based on the use of conversational resources that allow them to identify the different positions that they assume in each of the subjective learning experiences that they undergo over the course of their practice. This could be achieved through participation in guided conversations during which the future teacher, helped by a mentor, identifies their different positions within a story and gradually succeeds in distinguishing and realising the potential value of those positions for dealing with dilemmas during their professional lives.

The above is closely linked to the second conclusion, which is that future teachers not only need to participate in a large number and diversity of activity contexts, but that within these activity contexts they must come into contact and successfully interact with other people in relation to certain elements. In short, our work shows that future teachers construct richer and more meaningful subjective learning experiences when they engage in interactions that are oriented towards specific positional objects. When this occurs, these positional objects are converted into cultural artefacts that future teachers can appreciate the value of for use in one or many situations (Cole 1996). These cultural artefacts may be considered as theoretical knowledge or practical knowledge that is valued in terms of the teaching profession, thus triggering the process of identity construction, reinforcement or change. We believe that identification of a positional object simultaneously implies appreciation of a certain value that must be achieved by means of a training process. This appreciation of value implies the use of the profession's own theoretical resources and practices, in which the mentor plays a leading role (Clark 2020). In light of this, it is vital that future research focus on the search for positional objects that could be of particular relevance to identity construction.

A third conclusion of our study is that the identity construction process requires that subjective learning experiences pose dilemmas; in other words, these experiences must call into question previously constructed meanings. This occurs, for example, when Mauren says 'I want to be like her' or 'I don't want to be like her'. The questioning of positions assumed by other people in a particular situation

provokes a degree of proximity or distance in terms of identification with the other, and this appears to play an important role in the construction of teachers' professional identity. In Bakhtinian terms, we could suggest that identity construction assumes a collision between the subject's own voice and the voices of others (Bakhtin 1991). As such, we assert the importance of interaction between future teachers and other significant actors in regard to certain positional objects in order for the former to construct their professional identity (Chien 2018; Han 2016). The benefit of such interaction depends strongly upon this collision of voices within a given subjective learning experience prompting the future teacher to use professional resources that ultimately result in new forms of behaviour (Ursin et al. 2020). To put it another way, the change in position is not sufficient in itself; what is needed is the agency produced as a consequence of the construction of teachers' professional identity.

Finally, we have succeeded in identifying a subjective learning experience that resulted in a profound change in Mauren's position. Specifically, we analysed an experience during which Mauren formed a link between two or more events, a process which involved recognition of two positional objects and her appreciation of the value of each of them. We are uncertain as to the precise meaning of this conclusion; however, it seems consistent with a prominent line of research in the field of education that addresses the connections between experiences (Edwards and Edwards 2016; Chavez 2020). These connections reveal the importance of assessing not only each lived experience, but also the relationship between past experiences and experiences imagined in the future which could be considered useful when it comes to resolving the dilemmas that arise during a teacher's career. We are hopeful that our ongoing analysis of other similar cases will shed light on the specific nature of these connections (Roth and Erstad 2016).

In summary, a key contribution of our study is the validation of a proposal for the analysis of subjective learning experiences and the construction of professional teacher identity. Exploration of positional objects and assessment of their value (see Figure 1) appears to constitute a promising means by which to address specific situations experienced by teachers that might be considered particularly relevant to their identity construction. We therefore propose that future teachers should focus not only on what takes place in the classroom or on the way in which they impart the teaching material (aspects that are commonly prioritised by teacher training processes), but also on other objectives such as improving the curriculum or their own professional development needs (Louws et al. 2017).

Our conclusions pave the way for a line of research in the field of teacher training relating to the development of conversational structures that promote the construction and reconstruction of teachers' professional identity, taking into consideration the composition of subjective experiences and the need to clarify their constituent components. Although mentoring processes are considered particularly helpful for future teachers, we believe that they must involve specific forms of support regarding certain subjective objects that the trainee teacher constructs within his or her practice, and that appreciation of the value of these objects always requires the mediation of another actor. We are hopeful that our work in progress will shed further light on the role played by these experiences in the construction of teachers' professional identity and

serve to facilitate more fluid integration of the training received in the university context with the practical training needed in order to ensure good performance in the classroom.

Disclosure statement

Funding

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