

Chapter 2

Still Building a Better World? Research Reflections on Teacher Education and Identity

Amélia Lopes

Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, University of Porto, Portugal;
Centre of Research and Intervention in Education (CIEE)

ABSTRACT: This paper aims to present the crucial contemporary challenges of teacher education, which are seen as tightly related with those of both the teaching profession and society. After a brief overview on some of the main successes in teacher education in the last decades, teachers' professional identity is identified as a concept that carries hope for the future. For the future I will then argue about this critical usage of the concept and the importance of an ecological version of it in teaching and teacher education, allowing us to go deeper into the individual and collective conditions of 'real change'. Afterwards, research findings and reflections demonstrating the role of identities and the ecological system in educational change will be emphasized, focusing on three key issues: teacher education environments and the main challenges of teaching profession; collective identity in the teaching profession and CPD; research in the teaching profession and the identity of teacher educators.

KEYWORDS: identity; identity of teacher educators; teaching profession

Introduction

It is my intention in this paper to stress the importance of relationships – individual, interindividual, organizational and interinstitutional – in the education of teachers and on how the use of the concept of identity has contributed to affirm such importance. I will begin by recalling how the professional model has inspired strong progress in teacher education,

accounting for a number of successful achievements in teacher education in the last decades, but also bringing light on some important dilemmas. In a second step, identity is identified as a concept that carries hope for the future. I will argue about the importance of an ecological version of it in teaching and teacher education, allowing us to go deeper into the individual and collective conditions of ‘real change’. It includes the subjective dimension (relational and communicational) of teachers’ professionalization processes. Afterwards, research findings and reflections demonstrating the role of relationships in teacher education processes will be emphasized, focusing on three key issues: teacher education environments and teachers’ identities; research, teaching and teacher educators’ identities; and the teaching profession and collective identity of teachers.

The professional model and successes in teacher education in the last decades

Education has always had a regulatory dimension and an emancipatory one (Santos, 1995). The two dimensions need each other, but it is the emancipatory dimension that moves education forward – through what it creates, invents, and proposes.

The model of a professional teacher (Bucherberger, Campos, Kallos, and Stephenson, 2000) has been one of the inspirational sources, working against the bureaucratic/conformist and/or technical vision of the teaching profession. A professional has the political and scientific autonomy to make decisions in the field of professional knowledge and about the profession in general. A professional is, with his/her peers, the author of his/her profession with respect for those he/she serves. Specifically, professional teachers, especially knowledgeable of the ethical and epistemological challenges of their profession, make decisions about it (in relation to other decision-makers) for the benefit of children, young people, families, regions and society.

Due to this relationship established with society as a whole (its past, present and future), the power of teachers is massive, which is why the teaching profession has been the subject of various forms of control throughout its history. Still, nowadays, after decades of deepening the professional model of a teacher, these attempts at control are felt and take on new and dangerous qualities. It is these dangers – of deprofessionalization and privatization – and how to deal with them that have concerned many authors (Ben-Peretz and

Flores, 2018). António Nóvoa, in a 2017 article entitled ‘To firm the position as a teacher, to affirm the teaching profession’, states that “[We are] facing a crucial moment in the history of teachers and the public school” [...] “We need to rethink our institutions and our practices with boldness and daring” (p. 1114).

In order to address this request, a sustained knowledge base already exists that allows us to affirm the professional model by demonstrating its efficiency/effectiveness. Linda Darling-Hammond, in an article entitled ‘Teacher Education Around the World: what we learn from international practice’, published in 2017 in *The European Journal of Teacher Education* (Darling-Hammond, 2017a) describes successful teacher education policies and practices in Australia (focusing on Victoria and New South Wales), Canada (focusing on Alberta and Ontario), Finland and Singapore. As the author herself (Darling-Hammond, 2017) proposes, identifying which characteristics teachers’ education and professional development systems judged as *quality* (regarding its results concerning students) is important because it broadens the perspective of the possible and because, in a comparative perspective, it shows how ideas work in practice.

In the comparison of the above-mentioned countries, two general characteristics were identified:

- on the one hand, in these countries or states, the professional ideal has a lot of strength, teachers have great value and teaching is an important profession – it has a knowledge base that must be acquired so that all students can learn;
- on the other hand, school education and training in these situations are effectively organized as systems, that is to say, they include various harmonizing components relating to: recruitment; initial education; induction, continuous education; and collective improvement of practice; its systemic quality implies balancing these components – one cannot be too demanding in recruitment or avoid investing in the symbolic value of the profession.

Specifically, in relation to initial education, the following characteristics were identified:

- the management and development of the curriculum is more important than its organization; in this, the importance of the relationship between theory and practice and the development of teachers’ capacity to teach diverse students is emphasized;

- special attention is given to the construction of pedagogical thinking capacities so that the teacher can manage the teaching process in a diagnostic way, using research as a basis and conducting action research;
- thorough knowledge is developed in the fields of child development, learning and pedagogy; the final assessment involves researching a problem of practice in a rigorous way;
- great emphasis is placed on the teaching of students who show difficulties, and once this has been considered it becomes an excellent way to learn how to teach all students;
- internship takes place in special teacher training schools run by universities with curricula and practices similar to those of public schools; these schools are run by teachers specially selected for their skills and it is part of their responsibility to train new teachers;
- the teacher (educators) are specially trained in supervision, teacher professional development and assessment strategies;
- schools develop research in liaison with the university's teacher training department.

From these topics it can be concluded that how to improve educational systems and students learning is already known; however, what to do to make it real in different contexts and cultures needs the consideration of the specificities of those contexts and cultures.

The relational and subjective dimension of teachers' professionalization: an ecological version of the construction of teachers' professional identities

In an article entitled 'Comparative Global Perspectives on European Teacher Education', also published in *The European Journal of Teacher Education*, in 2014, Francesca Caena analyses practices concerning the reform of teachers' education and Higher Education in Europe, more specifically in England, France, Spain and Italy. Regarding initial teacher education in the countries involved in her study, Francesca Caena (2014) refers to the following common tensions:

- between the academic and the professional requirements of the courses;
- among several axes of the professional profile of teachers – content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, management of interactions in the classroom;

- among emphasis on knowledge, values or skills;
- among modes of articulation between higher education institutions and schools;
- between cultures of collaboration or isolation;
- between formative or summative evaluation of students' learning;
- and between the functional and social roles of the teacher educator, that is, between developing and evaluating skills or building professional identities.

All of these tensions refer to current central challenges of teacher education, but the latter, to some extent, encompasses all the others in distinguishing between the acquisition of functional or social roles through initial teacher education.

This is also a good summary of the place of identity in teacher education. In fact, the use of the concept of identity is part of a critical approach to the teaching profession and to the teacher as a professional. Identity emerges as an antidote (or an alternative) confronting the technical and entrepreneurial vision of teachers and their education.

Several hopes of improving the teaching profession and teacher education are built around identity studies. In the article 'Trends in Teacher Education: a review of papers published in *The European Journal of Teacher Education* over 40 years', Livingston and Flores (2017, p. 560) state that "further research is needed in regard to preservice teachers' identity development during initial teacher education and career-long professional learning". And Kay Livingston (2016), in a way, explains why this is important: "Discussions inevitably led to further questions about the role of teacher education in the development of teachers' professional identity. In particular, how to support the development of professional identities that enable teachers to take an inquiring, reflective and collaborative approach to learning and teaching in school" (Livingston, 2016, p. 401).

Why is identity invoked when we wish teacher education to be more consistent and purposeful? Why is identity the answer? Identity is meaning and the meanings of being a teacher are changing because the meanings of *being*, themselves, are changing. And it is a big change. It is how we understand the world, the way we behave, individually and collectively, that are changing. The search for identity is the search of new subjectivities in new practices and it convenes all the levels of the ecological and social system.

The teaching profession was crucial in the construction of modern society and its subjectivities and, therefore, its change also impacts the whole of society today. Speaking about the crisis of modernity and the insistent appeal to the concept of identity, Kenneth Gergen (1987) affirms that this is a sign that the modern conceptions of knowledge and the individual are in transformation. Using several approaches, he says that the Cartesian maxim “I think, therefore I am” is replaced by the motto “I communicate, therefore I am”. This point of view synthesizes the depth of the (educational) change that the concept of identity construction intends to account for.

And as schooling has had a systemic structure and dynamic, the construction of new meanings of the teaching profession will have as well. The construction of professional teaching identities is necessarily an ecological construct.

In the conception of the construction of professional identity as an “ecological construct” (Lopes, 2007, 2009) three perspectives converge: that of the construction of professional identity as a double transaction “for real social change” (Dubar, 1995), the ecology of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and the social-psychology approach (Doise, 2002).

The double transaction includes the relational transaction – of the individual with others and their contexts – and the biographical transaction that takes place in the individual, between what he/she was, is and wants to be. The two transactions can match or not, giving place to processes of negotiation, adaptation or submission.

The ecological perspective emphasizes the historical, situated and systemic nature of the relational transaction. Along with Bronfenbrenner (1979), it is considered that the individual is active in the construction of her/his development scenarios, which are constituted by different subsystems in interaction – the micro, the meso, the exo and the macro. Social-psychology adds psychosocial content to these interactions, distinguishing between individual, interpersonal, institutional and societal levels. According to Blin (1997, p. 58), this approach of professional identity considers the professional to be “a socially inserted being [allowing] the construction of systems of explanation articulating the individual and the social [...] and opening room to propose answers to the recurrent question of the passage between the micro and the macro social levels”.

This approach is important to research and apply to teacher education – its main idea reports to the fact that whatever level of analysis or action is in focus, the other levels are present or should be analytically present,

since solutions at one level interfere at different levels. Also, in this sense, teachers, but also diverse stakeholders, policy makers, and the whole of society, are protagonists of the construction of a valued teaching identity.

Building professional identities and not just competencies through education implies this ecological vision, and, to be effective, it implies an ethics of communication as well. Dubar (1995; 2000) refers to the negotiation process which the double transaction calls for as the construction of identity ‘for real social change’. The systemic change that the concept of teacher identity intends to give account of has all its foundation in communicational processes. These processes of recognition and inclusion emerge as alternatives to the modern processes of hierarchization and exclusion that still characterize schools. As in the past, teachers have been craftspeople of modern society, which is now in crisis; they will be important to the renewal of society and school in the present.

To this end, the principles behind the modern school – social reproduction, conformity and exclusion – give way to those of social creativity, agency and solidarity. At a time of great attack on the professionalism of teachers, *democratic professionalism* (Sachs, 2001), as Ben Peretz and Flores (2018, p. 203) suggest, calls for the deepening of inclusive education, specifically through culturally responsive pedagogies and more demanding processes of academic inclusion. Darling-Hammond (2017b), in an article entitled ‘Teaching for Social Justice: Resources, Relationships, and Anti-Racist Practice’, published in *Multicultural Perspectives*, identifies four guiding principles for an inclusive education: equal resources leading to equitable opportunities; equal opportunity for a kind of deeper learning (calling for a curriculum that “supports critical thinking, problem solving, communication, collaboration, and applications of knowledge to real-world problems” p. 136); emphasis on social/emotional, as well as on academic skills; and personalization and relationships. Regarding the first, Linda Darling-Hammond says that “a common curriculum focused on 21st century skills [needs to be offered] to all of [the] students through ninth or tenth grade” (ibid, p. 136). The author goes on to say that “intensive teacher training is needed to offer a more challenging curriculum to heterogeneous groups of students, because this teaching demands sophisticated skills to scaffold and differentiate instruction (ibid, p. 137).

Promotion of diversity and inclusion are guiding principles that challenge the whole ecological system by calling for changes in the relationship of teachers with students in class, but also in the schools, communities,

educational policies and models of society. To educate supportive, creative and active identities, supportive, creative and active identities are needed. Identity compels the rethinking of the ends and processes of teacher education by calling for a profound change/renewal in the training environments.

Research findings and reflections demonstrating the role of relationships in teacher education processes

Regarding current educational discourses, Biesta (2012, p. 8) asserts that talking about learning is not enough, because “education always needs to engage with questions of purpose, content and relationships”. Of these three questions, which education (and identity) is always engaged with, relationships have been less considered and reflected on. However, as stated before in this chapter, the claims for identity in (teacher) education come from a main change in relationships now seen as a way of producing society – a communicational society.

The following research findings on teacher education and identities showing the importance of relationships and environments and with an ecological inspiration will be presented. These findings must be seen as ideal types (in a Weberian sense), and therefore independent of geographical or historical contexts in which the studies were conducted.

Three key issues will be focused upon: teacher education environments and teachers’ identities; research, teaching and teacher educators’ identities, and the teaching profession and collective identity of teachers.

Teacher education environments and teachers’ identities

In this first section of the research the relationship between preservice teacher education curricula and the professional identities formed in them was analysed. Four curricula corresponding to different historical periods in the same geographic context were studied. The research was supported by an ecological conception of curriculum integrating cultural, political, institutional and classroom contexts; also, the formal dimension of the curriculum and the informal (referring, in Pacheco’s terms, 1994, to aspects intentionally used, but not formalized) and the non-formal dimensions (coinciding with the hidden curriculum, which is unconscious and not formalized) were appreciated. The curricula were characterized mainly through document analysis and the respective identities (which were called *first professional identities*) were researched using interviews producing

biographical narratives, which covered the period of initial training and the periods before and after training. In the interviews, teachers' perspectives on the curriculum were also collected.

In this research study two conclusions must be highlighted. The first is a condition for proceeding to the second and concerns the fact that different curricula effectively correspond to different identities. The second conclusion involves the relation between certain dimensions of the curricula and certain dimensions of the professional identity formed in them.

The interactionist theories of professions and professionalism demonstrate that training climates are crucial in the first professional socialization; specifically, in the case of teachers, because we all have an experience with the profession from a very young age and for many years, and therefore initial training needs not only to help shape a possible model of a teacher but also to deconstruct the implicit model constructed over time. Hence, students should be offered opportunities and conditions of identity conversion, to which Berger and Luckman (1986) call "moving to a new house," and which translates into the expression "I used to think that ... and now I think ...". In teacher education, changes in the conceptions of authority and knowledge, and their respective practices, are the main concerns.

Of the four curricula studied, two of them as ideal types are especially useful to develop the argument about the importance of relationships and communication in building active, supportive and creative professional identities: the professional learning climate and the academic learning climate. From the contrasted analysis of the two curricula/climates, several important conclusions are drawn. One is general and concerns how the formal curriculum makes a difference. The existence of an explicit education project that includes the professional model to be formed, as well as objectives, contents and methodologies to be prioritized seems to be crucial for the collective mobilization (collective action) of educators and students around this project.

In the 'professional learning climate', the teacher is seen as a critical professional, a pedagogue and a transformative agent: to dignify the teacher status and role was the central aim. The formal curriculum includes interdisciplinary areas, optional seminars, specific times for curricular activities outside the classroom and the development of projects with the families and communities to which pupils belong. The curriculum development is based on professional tasks, team work and research topics, and on modalities of formative assessment.

In the ‘professional learning climate’, the informal curriculum is very important as well. The educators’ use of innovative methods and out-of-class activities are valued by student teachers, who, as young adults (Ribeiro, 2007), especially stress the importance of learning activities involving interpersonal relationships, participation and personal commitment.

In the ‘academic learning curriculum’ the formal curriculum is a set of programs of the different disciplines that make up the study plan. These programs mostly include the scientific content to be addressed and the bibliography – with no reference to the pedagogical methods to be adopted. The assessment is mostly summative, involving examinations. Apparently, this curriculum is concerned with deepening the scientific nature of teacher education but adopting, in that which concerns formative relationships and communication, the worst of the traditional higher education institutions.

The learning relationship with peers is an important means of analysis of these curricula. In the professional learning curriculum learning is connected with friendship and “took place both in peer group and collective activities” through which students negotiated their own curriculum development (Lopes and Pereira, 2012, p. 33).

In the ‘academic learning curriculum’, learning is separated from friendship. To live with colleagues and to learn with them are separated issues. The peer group is still a convivial place but students must also cope with the stress coming from the intensification of their academic work.

In abstracting and interpreting these results, it is worth saying that the disconnection between learning and participation, and between learning and user-friendliness reflects the academic nature of the curriculum. The life-world of teacher training seems to be an important part of its quality; in fact, the active involvement of students in the curriculum is of central importance to the formation of lifelong learning and a transformative professional identity.

Research, teaching and teacher educators’ identities

In the last decade the relationship between research and teacher educators’ identities has become a more and more recurrent issue. The possible academization of teacher education taking place in higher education institutions is not the unique reason for this. In fact, sometimes teacher education identities are under study for the opposite reason, as they tend to be excessively centered on practice and pedagogy only (see Ellis and McNicholl, 2015 regarding the UK situation). As stressed by Swennen, Jones and

Volman (2010) and by Zgaga (2015), the education systems and the systems of teacher education are very different between certain countries. The ‘pure academic’ and the ‘pure practitioner’ teacher educators’ identities could be two opposite poles between which a lot of other possibilities exist across countries and within them – notably according to the kind of teachers being trained and training institutions.

In the second section of the analysis, educators’ identities and education environments in teacher and nurse education were compared. A nurse educator and anthropologist, talking about his own experience of being a nurse educator and teacher educator, says:

[Ever, since I arrived] at nursing school, I always [felt] like a guest. Let’s say, like a guest. [...] it may be that we are very welcoming to a guest in our home, but a guest in our home is not a part of our household. Therefore, that person is a guest. [...] [At the teacher education school] I didn’t feel like a guest, I felt more like a teacher. There you go. Among many others who were there, I was just another teacher [...] I always felt like just another teacher who was part of an institution. [In this nursing school] there is an identity there and that predates, perhaps, the school itself, which characterizes nursing as a profession, and the nurses who are then at a nursing school [...]. As such, school has an identity that doesn’t overlap the profession, but it is an identity that bears very strong, very strong similarities [to the profession]. [...] teaching schools, [...] don’t have a very strong identity, or not as strong [...]. Because even the teachers themselves have a very dispersed identity (in Lopes, Pereira, and Mouraz, 2013).

This statement in a way sums up the main findings of the research under consideration in this analysis, in which differences between the case of teacher education and the case of nursing education are not important as such, but as two kinds of professional higher education.

One of the differences between these two kinds of professional higher education concerns whether the educator’s identity is of a dual nature (mediating or hybrid) or not (Pereira, Lopes and Marta, 2015); the other one concerns the links among professionalism, research and the professional field.

A dual identity (Boyd, 2010) consists of the way professional educators’ (precedent) identities as practitioners are present in their identities as higher professional educators. We call ‘pure academic’ those higher professional educators who only have an academic career and are not concerned with their professional relevance when educating professionals.

Dual identities appear then as something good in professional higher education. The findings show that they can emerge in three different ways.

They may emerge because of the educator's biography (if the educators have also been school teachers, a situation, for example, very common in England but rare in Portugal), or by function or position – even if they have not been school teachers, educators still perform the functions of supervision of the practical aspects of training. The third way is through institutional commitment (Lopes, 2014) – when the training climate is so strong that all educators feel obliged to be professionally relevant (as in the case of the professor of anthropology in the nursing course).

Concerning connections between research, teaching and their respective occupational fields, two different kinds of connection were found: one that is strong (in the case of nursing) and one that is weak (in the case of teaching): in the strong one, research is a means to empower the profession and, in the weak, research is a means to empower individual educators' academic identities (Lopes et al., 2014). Moreover, while teacher educators feel responsible for the professionalism of each individual future teacher, nurse educators feel responsible for the collective professionalism of nurses.

It is clear that teacher training will be all the more relevant for the teaching profession the more there are conditions for the emergence of dual identities and for the emergence of strong relationships between the profession, the educators' research and the training.

This emergence implies specific training relationships translated into training cultures strongly associated with the profession, integrating the pedagogical and scientific components into the same professional training framework, and with sustained, enlightened and potentially symmetrical communication among educators at the universities and educators at the schools.

The teaching profession and the collective identity of teachers

The teaching profession is weakly present in teacher education: teachers of different sectors do not see each other as belonging to the same profession; there is a strong division in teacher education between those who teach in university and those who teach in schools, those who are expert in History or Mathematics and those who are expert in Psychology or Sociology, as well as between those who teach theoretical issues and those who supervise practice, and so on. The result is that teacher educators are concerned with teachers' professionalism but they seem not to have a collective professional foundation to invoke.

These issues are also identified by Grossman and McDonald (2008), who boldly assert that “teacher education is somewhat of an orphan, connected to

neither of its natural parents [teaching and higher education] (Grossman and McDonald, 2008, p. 185) and by António Nóvoa (2007, p. 24), who claims that there is a need to foster the permeability and overlap between “the community of teacher educators” and the “community of school teachers”.

Although the teaching profession is a collective profession in its exercise mode, in its organization and in its purpose an approach to the collective identity of teachers is very rare. And yet the importance of this debate is high, especially when the collective nature of teaching can no longer be ensured by regulations only and actually needs a common vision and commitment.

In fact, continuous professional development includes the feeling of belonging to a collective network with a participatory nature in a joint process, and the investment in its corresponding communicative and relational processes.

Through running an action research study (Lopes, 2002) aimed at promoting creative processes in school education in two communities, each of them comprising a primary school and a kindergarten, it was quickly verified that in requiring creativity the research project was really dealing with deep individual and collective changes in teachers' identities.

As a means to follow teachers and start a joint process of change together with them, small groups of teachers with an advisor/researcher were created. At the beginning they meet weekly, and then fortnightly, to reflect on practices narrated by them in writing; the writings were about practices that teachers considered important to be shared and discussed, although teachers were free to write about them or not. At the beginning and at the end of the intervention, two questionnaires were carried out, one concerning the psychosocial identity of each teacher and another one related to the relational climate of the school. The group meetings were recorded.

The study concluded that all teachers want to participate in innovative dynamics (provided they are given adequate individual and organizational conditions), but change is blocked by recognition problems that are felt in communication.

Change implies the creation of a new culture in which everyone feels recognized. In this creation, the individual, the group and the organizational work combine. The group was the starting point of the work, welcoming and stimulating individuals from the first moment, so that later this could be projected to the school. At school level, change is reflected in the existence of

a convincing and relevant project of school functioning. To get there, communication cannot be taken for granted; it is rather a fundamental element of real change and focuses on decentralized innovation – the one that promotes openness to others and includes them (as opposed to the centralized one that closes itself to some and excludes others). It carries (communicational) individual changes (conversions) and must have material translation in the schools' organization: spaces, times, work groups, etc.

Therefore, the reconstruction of a collective identity for teachers addresses the construction of new interpretive communities and practices in schools, which continuous professional development must invest in.

Final reflections and purposes

As we have seen, in countries with good systems of teacher education, the image of the profession is strong and valued. These same countries have systems of continuous professional development that assure the collective improvement of teaching practices. Thinking about the impact of both initial education and continuous professional development on the improvement of teaching in action, and also on the strengthening of the teaching profession and teacher professionalism, António Nóvoa defends the creation of “a new place for the education of teachers” guided by the “imperative of professionalization” (Andrews, Bartell and Richmond, 2016 cited in Nóvoa, 2017, p. 1116). In this place, the profession of ‘teacher’ is produced, “not only in terms of education, but also in terms of its affirmation and public recognition, people committed to both university work and the future of the teaching profession” (ibid.) and it becomes united.

This is a crucial proposal. The intention is not to equalize all entities – theory and practice, university teachers and school teachers, etc.; the goal is to pursue another relationship, another dialogue, among the differences or the different instances. This is also the conclusion of research studies on the role of advanced education (PhD studies) into the professional activity of teachers (Kowalczyk-Wałędziak et al., 2017; Lopes and Menezes, 2018): it is from the dialogue between universities and schools, a dialogue that the teachers in advanced education themselves represent, that the development of teachers and the improvement of schools emerge.

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