



Research paper

Becoming a secondary school teacher: Keys to a meaningful professional identity

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the construction of teachers' identities during their pre-service training and their initial period of professional induction. Thirteen life stories of novice teachers of differing characteristics attending the Master's Degree in Secondary Education Teaching at the University of Barcelona (Spain) are analysed. Findings identify four dimensions in identity construction (attribution, projection, development and transformation) and analyze their key components. The implications of the findings are discussed in terms of the dialectic between the professionalizing models in the training programme and the professional communities and teachers' specific personal processes of professional self-determination.

1. Introduction

Recent studies have shown that a major factor in educational systems, and one that most influences student outcomes, is the quality of teachers (Churchward & Willis, 2023; Cochran-Smith, 2021). For example, since the launch of the OECD Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), teacher education has been at the forefront as means of improving the quality of educational outcomes (Graham et al., 2020; Scholes et al., 2017). However, teacher quality is a product of collective awareness, discussion and negotiation among political actors at global, national and local levels. It is a relatively ambiguous concept framed by the history, cultural values and socioeconomic situation of each country, with differing interpretations in the fields of teacher education, professional development and general education policy (Akiba & LeTendre, 2018). Therefore we should investigate the diversity of teachers we have and how they shape their professional identity. If we add the accelerating pace of social and cultural change in advanced societies and the concomitantly increasing demands on education systems and the teaching profession, it becomes clear that it is essential to explore who teachers are and what they do in their work.

The concept of identity is controversial in contemporary society and has a wide range of interpretations, amongst them a number of competing meanings that represent differing models of the subject and society (Gergen, 2019). On the one hand, positions that can be called

essentialist see identity as a personal characteristic acquired in the course of a life, especially with maturity. Identity thus defines the person and is understood as a constant throughout the varying manifestations of that person. On the other hand, the concept can be seen as a social construction, depending on the manifold contexts in which people develop and having different manifestations stemming from these. Thus we may be parents, teachers, believers, members of a sports club, etc.; and in each of these identities we develop different ways of being and behaving as we play different roles and occupy different social and political positions. In the context of this debate between essentialism and constructivism, the different ways of understanding the teacher's identity can be divergent and present many different nuances (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011).

From the perspective of this paper, we take identity to be a dynamic, biographical and relational concept that develops throughout life (Erikson, 1968). Thus, as MacLure and Stronach (1993) put it, our biographies are above all what we learn from the contexts in which we live, while at the same time being linked to the narrative of our personal histories and professional lives. Thus in this case they evidence a process of identification that can lead us to a better understanding of how teachers' identities are formed (Amott, 2018, 2021).

If there is a key point in this process of shaping teachers' professional identity, however, it is pre-service training. This is the key stage at which, depending on the identity they build, trainee teachers may aspire

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to becoming more engaged and motivated educators, or merely to forming part of the system but with no particular project of an identity with commitment to the profession (Gewerc, 2011; Marcelo & Vaillant, 2009).

The study presented here focused on analysing the ways in which the pre-service training of secondary school teachers and their first years of professional practice in Spanish schools affected the shaping of their professional teaching identities. Thus we aimed to gain a deeper understanding of what these identities were and how these teachers defined themselves at the beginning of their careers. At the same time, our research allowed us to explore the impact of the university master's degree program set up in 2009 as a requirement for access to the profession (Royal Decree 1834/2008).

The aim of the study was to understand how the professional identities of new secondary education teachers take shape. Thus the study was interested in answering three key questions: (1) how previous personal and educational experiences contributed to the construction of professional identity; (2) how professionalization processes were experienced and how they altered professional identity; and (3) how professional initiation processes were being experienced and how they were affecting professional identity. To address these questions, the following objectives were set (Llanes et al., 2023; Llanes et al., 2024, Chapter 2): (1) to describe and understand the process of professional identity construction among neophyte secondary school teachers; (2) to analyze these processes from the standpoint of their learning opportunities in their first contacts with the profession and from the perspective of the different agents involved; and (3) to develop guidelines for improving pre-service teacher education and support in the first stages of professional practice through an explicit thematization of professional identity.

2. Context and theoretical underpinnings

2.1. Context

Secondary school teacher training in Spain is organized through a master's degree qualification, launched in 2010 and combining theoretical and practical training for graduates of bachelors' degrees. Aspiring teachers, then, specialize in their chosen field for four years and subsequently take the more pedagogically-oriented course in teacher education. This is a consecutive model of teacher training, in contrast to the concurrent or simultaneous model that is more frequent in Europe and Latin America (Imbernón, 2019). The master's program is divided into three blocks: a common block of subjects that provides across-the-board social, psychological and pedagogical knowledge; a subject-oriented block in which the specific didactics of each specialization are studied and further training in the field is given; and, lastly, a practical block that includes a few weeks' teaching practice in a school and the completion of a final master's dissertation (Sánchez-Tarazaga, 2019).

Given this structure, it is inevitable that trainees will identify with their specialization, having opted for teaching, in many cases, as one amongst many professional opportunities in the field (Esteve, 2009; Llanes et al., 2022; Marcelo, 2009). This consecutive model of pre-service training (Musset, 2010) has the advantage of offering flexible entry into the profession, while at the same time being weaker in specifically professional training and featuring a more fragmented learning process.

2.2. Theoretical underpinnings

Many well-known prior studies have explored teacher identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijjaard et al., 2004; Bolívar, 2007; Bukor, 2015; Day et al., 2006; Li, 2022; Martínez de la Hídalga & Villardón-Gallego, 2016; Rivas et al., 2005; Rodgers & Scott, 2008; Yuan et al., 2020). The process of teacher identity construction is often

described as a moment of struggle, of negotiation, of clash, of crisis, of rethinking oneself (one's beliefs, expectations and practices), and as a tension-charged process involving intensive learning in unfamiliar contexts (Barak & Shoshana, 2022; Scales et al., 2017). It is a time of confrontation between trainees' teacher images and the practical realities they encounter in schools (Cobb, 2022), producing constant emotional tensions (Golzar, 2020).

According to Hanna (2020), the relationship between teacher identity and professional identity is in its early stages of conceptual development. The conceptual ambiguity of both terms and their interconnections are the subject of debate among scholars (Bolívar, 2016b). For Hanna (2020), teacher identity involves what it means to be a teacher, and is linked to specific meanings and behavioral expectations that emerge from countless interactions within the social system. In the present study, therefore, teacher identity is seen as the part of the person that aspires to be a teacher and that takes on, develops into and retains in specific ways the role of teacher in relation to the person's real experience of schools. Also, one of the most prominent approaches to supporting teacher identity development is to teach trainees to identify and reflect on the tensions within their professional identity that they experience in their process of becoming teachers. These tensions translate into cognitive dissonance between their perceptions and understanding of teaching and education on the one hand and their actual practices on the other. This paper, then, identifies professional identity within novice teachers' pre-service training and experiences of professional induction. Effectively managing tensions in professional identity has been recognized as the key to developing a strong and stable teacher identity (Suarez & McGrath, 2022).

Research suggests that the origins of these tensions can be traced to various sources. A first set of studies identifies factors linked to the teacher education course itself. Serrano and Pontes (2016) argue that the master's degree itself lacks opportunities for reflection on the nature of the teaching profession through which to elaborate teacher identity. The idea of vocation is often used to underpin the design of teachers' identity. However, given the diversity of backgrounds and motivations for taking the master's degree (Llanes et al., 2023) and the different definitions given to the concept of vocation (Serrano & Pontes, 2016), this factor has lost ground as a driving force in shaping identity. Cobb (2022) also centres on the issue of identity during the pre-service period, stressing the need to strengthen it in order to provide a solid, effective foundation that can promote both resilience and pro-activity during the transition period. The tensions referred to above are perceived as learning opportunities if prior work on identity has been done; without this, however, it is impossible to encourage such resilience. A lack of connection between theory and practice has also been noted (López & Blázquez, 2012; Marcelo, 2009; Nilsson-Lindström, 2008; Valle & Manso, 2010). In order to develop one's own teaching style, it is necessary to pose practical problems linked to current educational contexts, and the process of learning should take place in schools during the practicum, in cooperation with other teachers and the school administration. It is important to collect information from practical contexts, from trainees' own experience of their teaching, so that they can reflect on and develop their practice (Postholm, 2012).

A second set of factors are those linked to the trainee's biography and prior academic career (Knowles, 2004). The teacher's professional identity constitutes a multidimensional, complex construct composed of a wide range of components identified by previous studies: self-image, motivation, commitment, self-efficacy, beliefs and job satisfaction (Hanna et al., 2018). Teachers students develop specific mental patterns and beliefs about teaching from their long period of observation as learners. This is how they build their identity; gradually and not particularly reflectively, through informal learning, by observing the teaching models they have received, with identification influenced more by emotional than rational models (Baillauquès, 2005). Trainee teachers come to the master's degree with personal beliefs about teaching, with images of the good teacher and the memory of themselves as students.

Moreover, these images and convictions generally remain unchanged throughout the program and accompany them during their internships. In addition, these preconceptions act as filters through which they make sense of the knowledge and experiences they accumulate (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Zembylas (2003), for example, argues that the emotional component can often become a source either of resistance or of transformation in identity shaping. Making these emotions visible affords clues as to how the potentials of trainees' teaching practice can be developed or limited.

Another set of variables affecting the shaping of teacher identity are those related to the transition from being a student on the master's program to being a professional in a school and the first years of initiation into the profession. In fact, little attention has been paid to this transition process, although it is a turning point in which both intensive learning and the first tensions around teaching tasks in hitherto unknown contexts are manifested (Vonk, 1996). Trainees on the master's degree have two aims: to teach and to learn how to teach. In this latter process they need support, guidance and advice. To provide this, each country has a different approach, adopting different support and tutoring mechanisms. In Spain, trainee teachers often have the same functions and responsibilities as all other members of the teaching staff, and are tutored by a university lecturer who often does not interact with the school. For this reason, the Sensei project,¹ which aims to improve these issues by creating closer liaison between universities and schools, will begin in Catalonia in the 2023–2024 academic year. Under its aegis a pilot teaching residency program has been created, constituting a third internship period that gives newly qualified teachers support in the form of mentoring, training and advice during their first years of professional practice.

Flores and Day (2006) stress the importance of the educational contexts that trainee teachers are immersed in during this transition. There is a close connection between the person's biography and the configuration of their teacher identity, but in the end the latter is often reshaped by the school where the internship is carried out. It is therefore important to ensure that the schools do not present resistance, offer the necessary conditions for developing teacher identity, and provide ample opportunities for sharing and discussing it. A number of studies have emphasized such factors as the roles of teaching colleagues, trainee peers and other training actors (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009); the importance of providing activities for teacher support (e.g., reflective practices) and teaching community support such as mentoring or promoting learning communities (Izadinia, 2014); giving attention to how trainees create bonds (Chan & Lo, 2017); and creating opportunities for exchanges among peers (Farrell, 2013).

Regarding the features of the context and how they influence the construction of teacher identity, Barak and Shoshana (2022) focus on how certain teacher identities can reproduce patterns of inequality. They observed that in vocational training, some teachers constructed an identity closely linked to the discourse of care (Bergal et al., 2024). This was in highly disadvantaged educational contexts, which may be described here as extremely complex schools with students who are poorly motivated, at risk of exclusion, with little ambition, and from families with multiple problems or difficulties. In these cases, there was an explicit renunciation of academic content in favour of other types of competencies relevant to creating appropriate guidance and counselling and a safe and caring space for students.

All the above has led us to reassess and discard the view, prevalent until recently, that novice teachers have of their activity as solitary and isolated from the rest of the community (Kardos & Johnson, 2007). It is important that in the process of constructing one's professional identity there should be observation among teachers, collaborative work and reflection on and discussion of practice (Clandinin & Husu, 2017).

¹ For more information see: <https://web.gencat.cat/es/actualitat/detall/Comenca-el-programa-pilot-de-residencia-docent-Sensei>.

Lindqvist et al. (2017) found that when trainee teachers were faced with stressful situations in their professional practice, they perceived themselves as insufficiently prepared and assumed that they would learn more when they were working full-time in the school and had acquired more experience. According to Golombek and Doran (2014), however, experience alone cannot be considered a professional way of approaching such cases. In order to solve a problematic situation professionally, it is important to reflect on it through both theory and acquired knowledge, not only through practical experience.

3. Method

This is a qualitative study based on biographical-narrative methods, with the aim of understanding the subjective and discursive complexity of professional identity formation in pre-service teacher training and in novice teachers' first experiences (Arraiz et al., 2019; Bolívar, 2016b). Using narratives enabled us to explore the teachers' subjective experiences of their key moments of biographical and educational learning and to understand how they interpreted their training and professional transitions. The study did not work with life stories in all their complexity, but with those that thematized moments and delineated specific issues in the lives of the participants that were relevant here (educational/school experience, pre-service teacher education and professional induction). Their stories also facilitated an understanding of how their interpretations of these experiences shaped their current professional identities in a unique and original way over time (Connelly & Clandinin, 1995; Delory-Momberger, 2009; Rivas, 2009). In-depth interviews were used to complement the teachers' biographical narratives and to explore the structural, cultural and personal dialectics occurring in the process of identity construction (Arraiz et al., 2016; Bolívar, 2016a; Cortés et al., 2014; McMahon & Watson, 2013). The reflexivity inherent in this process also showed the educational potential of the narrative approach by placing participants in a critical position towards their practice of the teaching profession (Huber et al., 2014; Marín et al., 2021; Rivas, 2014). The study was carried out over a period of one year. In the first three months, the interviews were designed, the theoretical sampling was defined and access to the participants was negotiated. The in-depth interviews took place over the following three to six months, with a minimum of two sessions for inquiry and feedback. Between sessions there were meetings among participants and researchers for further collaborative analysis and the life stories were drawn up. The analytical procedures were conducted over the following three to six months.

3.1. Setting and informants

The study was conducted in the context of the Master's Degree in Secondary Education Teaching at the University of Barcelona (Spain). To meet the aim of researching both processes of pre-service training and novice teachers' first in-service experiences, it was decided that participants should have completed the master's degree in the years 2019–2021 and should have been teaching in secondary education for a maximum of two years. In order to capture the widest possible diversity of the teachers' experiences and current positions, the theoretical sampling encompassed the following criteria: age, gender, previous education, academic career, master's degree specialization, year of graduation from the master's degree, professional and occupational background, and first teaching experience in different settings and with differing degrees of permanence. Participants, chosen according to the sampling criteria, were contacted through their tutors and trainers and the managers of the university teacher education program, taking into account essentially their quality as informants (reflexivity) and the feasibility of their participation (accessibility). The total number of teachers participating was thirteen. Table 1 below shows some of their characteristics.

All but two participants had previous teaching experiences in both formal and non-formal settings. In addition to these experiences, which

Table 1
General information on participants.

Nº	Code	Gender	First degree	Master's degree specialization	Master's degree graduation	Professional teaching experience
1	CS	F	Industrial engineering	Physics and Chemistry	2020	2 years
2	MG1	F	Fine arts	Art education	2021	1 year
3	XO	M	Philosophy	Philosophy	2020	1 year
4	AV	F	Biology	Biology	2019	2 years
5	SN	F	IT engineering	Technology	2020	2 years
6	SP	F	Journalism	Classical studies	2020	2 years
7	DT	M	Classical languages	Vocational training: health	2020	1 year
8	MM	F	Occupational therapy	Geography and History	2020	1 year
9	ED	F	Fashion	Language and literature	2021	<1 year
10	AG	F	Cultural Communication	Technology	2020	<1 year
11	BM	F	MA Art history	Vocational training: health	2021	<1 year
12	MG2	F	Nutritional science	Language and literature	2020	2 years
13	JW	F	Nursing	English	2020	2 years
			Spanish language and literature			
			MA graphic design			
			English language and literature			

were relevant to their projects of becoming teachers, nine participants had previously worked in fields unrelated to education.

The study adhered to the ethical code of good research practices of the University of Barcelona Policy and Quality Agency (*Agència de Polítiques i de Qualitat, 2010*) and was approved by the University of Barcelona Bioethics Commission on November 5th 2021. All participants signed an informed consent form before taking part in the research.

3.2. Data collection

Data collection was carried out via the composition of participants' life narratives. Firstly, an in-depth interview of approximately of 50 min was conducted with each teacher. These interviews were transcribed and subsequently rewritten as life stories, stressing the unique aspects of each narrative. The life stories were drawn up by the researchers who carried out the in-depth interviews and were subsequently shared within the research team in order to develop rewriting criteria before returning them to their original protagonists. Lastly, this account was returned to the participant so that they could validate and revise it. The three phases of this process were performed with varying degrees of openness and depth, adjusting both to the nature of each informant's discourse and to the conditions enabling a greater or lesser degree of in-depth investigation. Thus, the life stories were approached from a socio-constructivist perspective that prioritized working together in a safe space of communication and saw the informant as the privileged bearer of the knowledge of interest (*Rivas, 2007*).

The interviews were semi-structured and implemented flexibly, adapting to the specific way each interviewee told their story. A team composed of teacher trainers, secondary education teachers, researchers and advisors participated in the fieldwork. A timeline was constructed adopting the period of professional training on the master's degree as a reference, and nuclei of interest with discursive potential were defined. The design of the interviews was the result of several work sessions attended by the interdisciplinary fieldwork team. These sessions included specialized training courses given by research consultants, and monographs on the criteria for theoretical sampling, the identification of nuclei of interest and the presentation and analysis of the stories (*Llanes et al., 2024, Chapter 3*). The relevance of the nuclei of interest was debated from all perspectives (trainers, teachers, technicians and research advisors). Furthermore, and in keeping with the social constructivist approach adopted, the events narrated were continuously negotiated with the protagonists themselves (*Llanes et al., 2024, Chapter 2*). *Table 2* shows the details serving as references for the interview script.

As previously noted, interviewees gave written informed consent.

Table 2
Nuclei of interest in the interviews.

Timeline in relation to master's degree	Nuclei of interest
Before	Critical incidents Educational career Non-formal and informal experiences influences from participants' backgrounds Type and point in time of initial professional project Presuppositions/prejudices on the teaching profession
During	Main professional models Keys to current professional identity construction Assessment of the training programme Point in time of the professional teaching project
After	Entry to the profession Initial moments and processes of professional induction experiences Changes to presuppositions/prejudices Reassessments of first evaluations Current teaching experience Point in time of professional project

They had access to the transcribed interviews and validated their accounts. They were also invited to the official presentation of the results of the study at the university.

Although the nuclei of interest were developed collaboratively by the research team in the specific context of secondary school teacher education at the University of Barcelona and its affiliated schools, the link between an approach to teacher education that works on professional self-determination as the key to identity and its effects on the consequent development of professional competencies responds to a perspective that draws on seminal research projects and teaching innovation experiences (*Arraiz & Sabirón, 2012; Berbegal, 2020; ETNOEDU, 2007*). This approach addresses three main lines of work that are currently the basis of advances recommended in teachers' educational culture and the guidance and support provided for their professional induction (*Berbegal et al., 2024*): (1) a dialogical understanding of teacher identity and professional competencies (*Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Holman, 2000*); (2) the reflective paradigm applied to teacher professionalization (*Manen, 1995; Perrenoud, 2004*); and (3) the life design paradigm in career construction (*Savickas, 2012*). *Table 3* illustrates the bases of this model, currently in the process of development and consolidation.

This approach is explained in more detail in the specific context of this study in a separate article (*Llanes et al., 2024, Chapter 4*).

3.3. Data analysis

The data analysis took the form of a thematic and structural narrative

Table 3
Identity and professional competencies.

Dimensions of identity	Reflective education	Macro competencies	Competencies	
			Cross-curricular	Specific
Projection	From life experience to reflection	Dialectical thinking Project	Critical thinking Systemic thinking	Research and innovation to enhance teaching practices
Attribution	From opinion to dialogical knowledge	Dialogical behavior Openness	Emotional Intelligence Leadership Communication	Personal interaction in building educational relationships and putting teaching teams' educational actions into practice
Development	From the regulation of practice to critical pluralism in professional action	Problem-solving approaches Patterns of action	Teamwork Strategic and innovative thinking	Working together with the educational community and its milieu Design, implementation and management of learning environments Guided digitalization
Transformation	From the theoretical model to modelling practice	Self-determination World view	Lifelong self-learning Ethics	Professional decision-making (principles and values) and professional development

analysis (Riessman, 2008). Different types of documents and formats were used for the analysis and the information was processed using collaborative tools and the NVivo program (Berbegal et al., 2021). The documents, drawn up in the form of tables, registers and narratives and stored in a common digital work space, comprised: introductory profiles of the participants; transcriptions of in-depth interviews; the interviews remodeled in the form of life stories; revisions made after returning the story to the original interviewees; reflections and observations made by the interviewers in the course of the study; and the final, definitive life stories.

Participants' stories were analysed via both specific and across-the-board approaches (Cornejo, 2008). Firstly, each individual's story was analysed (specific approach). This process consisted of three phases: (1) interrogation of the meanings arising from the interview (strategic analysis); (2) identification of other possible meanings, attributed by informants, that were critical in the construction of their stories (investigatory analysis); and (3) definition of any reconstructed or residual meanings that had emerged (reconstructive analysis). Also, attention was paid to the structure of the story in order to understand the informant's overall intentionality and her/his positioning and repositioning in the narrative (style, plot development, voices and arguments, etc.). Secondly, a comparative analysis of all the narratives was undertaken (across-the-board approach), identifying themes common to all participants and interpreting convergent and divergent meanings with respect to the settings and scenes recorded. The credibility, consistency and confirmability of the data were reinforced in two ways: (1) negotiation of the narratives and joint analysis of them with the participants themselves; and (2) triangulation of the specific analyses of each narrative and the across-the-board analyses of the whole set of narratives with an interdisciplinary research team.

4. Results

The responses to our research questions and the evidence gathered from the life stories indicated that each person's teacher identity was configured through personal experiences, the criteria and demands of the cultures and professional communities of reference, and the professionalizing images deriving from these and affecting the way participants conducted their professional project (Berbegal et al., 2024). Thus, professional identity was found to have a dialogic and polyphonic character (Meijers & Hermans, 2017) and an unstable, provisional and constantly reconstructed nature in the form of fragments or discursive biographical lines (Gergen, 2005). Our findings in terms of the three core research questions and the objectives presented in the introduction to this paper yielded a diversity of positionings and repositionings of participants with respect to four key processes of identity construction: professional attribution, projection, development and transformation. Each of these processes and their critical components are explained below.

Likewise, it should be noted that the extracts accompanying the presentation of results come from a later and more significant selection of the analyses made within the stories themselves. Thus, they are not literal quotations from the in-depth interview transcripts, but evidence cited from the final accounts, i.e., extracts from the interviews reconstructed in life story format, subsequently returned to and validated by the original interviewees.

MG1's story has been selected to illustrate our explanation of the dimensions of teacher identity and to show the latter's complex, dynamic nature in its various aspects. This account was chosen because it serves as standardized representation of the majority of novice teachers in their formative educational and professional experiences. MG1 introduces herself in the following terms:

She is 24 years old, lives in a town in the province of Barcelona and studied Fine Arts at the University of Barcelona. She took a master's degree in teaching last year also at the University of Barcelona. She did her teaching practice in a religious state-subsidized private school, due to its closeness to her home. She started work in a state high school as a third-year visual arts teacher with three groups aged 14–15, totaling six hours of class per week. Her contract is for one third of the teaching day.

4.1. Attribution

This refers to the interactions between the person and her/his context, to a continuous negotiation of meanings, perceptions and individual and collective images. It involves understanding situated models of professional attribution and answers the following question: how are professional knowledge, emotions and attitudes assimilated through the belief system that each person has built up through their personal and educational experience? (Zembylas, 2018).

The analysis of this issue in the teachers' accounts identified four central categories representing the diversity of their interpretations: (1) overall meanings given to their previous pathways; (2) implicit theories associated with the professional functions that they prioritized; (3) expectations about the teaching profession derived from (1) and (2); and (4) their prevailing value systems.

4.1.1. Pathways

Two important types of pathways were found: the reconstructive and the linear. The reconstructive paths embodied a dialectic between the previous academic and professional career and current professionalizing models. The linear ones were shaped by the institutional itinerary of professional training (typified by specialized degrees and the subsequent master's degree in teaching), with nuances in the form of tendencies mediated by specific experiences (social influences, experiences in non-formal and informal education, specific responsibilities in non-regulated educational settings). Trainees with reconstructive trajectories and

tendencies of a vocational and professionalizing nature reflected more on their profession than those with linear trajectories and tendencies of a technical and instrumental nature (see Table 4).

In MG1’s case, we see a linear trajectory in her transition to the master’s degree, with very uneven progress through the preceding educational levels.

She was initially attracted to science, wanted to pursue a career in marine biology and took a science baccalaureate at school with that in mind. Although she enjoyed arts subjects more, due to her initial idea she started a biology degree. But what she was really passionate about was the humanities. She finally switched to fine arts because she had always enjoyed drawing and saw herself as very creative, though she could have studied any arts degree. She says that she had two teachers, one of Catalan (pre-baccalaureate) and the other of philosophy (baccalaureate) that influenced her a lot as a student. In her family, she had always been surrounded by teachers as she was growing up. Early on, she ruled out the option of pursuing art as a profession because she saw it as difficult to handle criticism of her work and thought that professional artists were highly vulnerable.

A high degree of reflection on the career path indicated an identity that was more receptive to professional training and more open to potential change or transformation. A low degree of reflection made the identity more dependent on the subject studied in the teacher’s first degree (specialization) and less open to extending the teacher’s role beyond the simple transmission of curricular content.

4.1.2. *Implicit theories*

Clearly, enquiring into the social function of teaching and the educational significance deriving from it is a complex task. The teachers’ accounts varied across a continuum that went from one definition of teaching to another: from non-representative to representative (Biesta & Osberg, 2007). In the non-representative definition, new professional knowledge was seen as mediating between life and education, with no distinctions between educational theory and practice. In their work, teachers took into account their students’ agency in the construction of new knowledge. The representative definition, on the other hand, limited new professional knowledge to the subject field and its specific forms and saw this knowledge as an instrumental mediator of specialized learning. Knowledge was understood as passive and static, adjusted to a pre-existing reality. The continuum revealed did not respond so much to what type of teacher assimilated one concept or another, or how

Table 4
Professional attribution: pathways.

Extract	Pathway
In fact she wanted to do Engineering, she wanted to work on projects [...]. She followed her professional career for 25 years [but] shifted to education because she wanted to. It was a decision that she’d wanted to make for years but had always put off [...]. She’d always had the idea of going back to the classroom. [1(CS)]	Reconstructive
When she finished Classical Philosophy she had another big period of confusion and doubt about what she wanted to do after that. The typical professional outlet for the degree, although this didn’t particularly excite her interest, was teaching. [6(SP)]	Linear
It was something she’d always known, since childhood the subject of education had always interested her, she read a lot about it [...]. In the future she’d like to be a teacher, but [...] she doesn’t know what the future will hold. [4(AV)]	Vocational/ professionalizing tendency
Becoming a teacher was never her first choice, it wasn’t a vocational choice. Although she didn’t dislike it, it wasn’t what she’d planned from her teenage years onwards. [9(ED)].	Technical/instrumental tendency

they did so in order to reach a certain balance, but instead to different periods and ways of assimilation by teachers of the dialectic between discourses on the shift to a non-representational epistemology and institutionalized school practices that reproduced a representational epistemology (see Table 5).

Our example teacher tended towards a non-representational conception of teaching. As her account puts it:

The subject she teaches is highly practical, but she is adamant in linking theory and practice. She does not see herself as an art teacher, but as a teacher of visual culture. She believes that her subject should not be limited to technical issues. She thinks that students appreciate working manually because they spend a lot of time in front of the computer, but in her view it should not stop there, because art has much more potential than just that.

These implicit definitions predisposed teachers towards a particular way of filtering the professional training received and integrating it into the performance of certain preferred roles and functions. This attribution has implications for a view of the profession that is limited to an educational action to be identified and defined in professional performance itself, and a type of educational action articulated essentially through specific operational processes of an instructional and didactic nature.

4.1.3. *Expectations*

Participants’ expectations conformed with the specific tendencies that were indicated in their academic and professional pathways. They were spread across a spectrum of occupational, professional and vocational expectations. In an overall sense, the teachers’ accounts clearly identified with one of these three motivations. Occupational expectations were driven by the search for employment, taking advantage of education sector opportunities to achieve more effective insertion into the labor market. This expectation was shaped by a current global need for teachers, which is especially pressing in the Catalan context (UNESCO, 2023; USTEC, 2023). Professional expectations involved a sense of self-determination in the teaching project, taking on the responsibilities necessary to achieving excellence. Vocational expectations were connected to self-realization, including a commitment to high-quality performance that particularly involved personal satisfaction. However, some narratives were less clear in the stance they took up towards the precarity, discontinuity and uncertainty experienced at the beginning of the professional teaching project. Also, the accounts revealed a polarization between the vocational tendency and professional opportunity (see Table 6).

In MG1’s account a sense of professionalism prevails. Although it is true that she had not initially intended to become a teacher, her environment, her trajectory and her first teaching experiences led her to make the following comment:

She had no preconceived ideas about what it meant to be a teacher, but before she started teaching it was clear to her that she would like

Table 5
Professional attribution: implicit theories.

Extract	Implicit theories
We can’t do classes simply by reeling off what we know as if we were talking to a friend. Adolescents are delicate and an inappropriate model can be really damaging. You have to know how to guide them [...]. Teachers should have a critical eye on a personal and social level, and towards the curriculum. [11(BM)]	Non-representative
The links between the syllabus and the content are always present [...] He feels like a teacher particularly in the task of conveying knowledge, a way of knowing about reality and a perspective and a way of living in the world [...] Conveying the content is very important and, to a large extent, defines his vision of teaching. [3(XO)]	Representative

Table 6
Professional attribution: expectations.

Extract	Expectations
She insists that being a teacher, in her case, is vocational, not influenced by any specific critical incident [...]. The topic of occupational security or better working conditions has never influenced her. In fact, she experienced becoming a teacher as a loss of stability and security in her work. [5 (SN)]	Vocational tendency
Once she had made up her mind to take classical languages, the work opportunities weren't particularly good. That's what made her decide to do the master's degree in education. Being a teacher wasn't something she'd wanted to do since she was a child, but it had always been a profession she'd admired. [6(SP)]	Professional opportunity
She didn't really know which path to follow; the people who did Catalan told her that a master's in secondary education was a good option, so she started to think about it and decided to do it. Being a teacher had never been her first choice; it was not a vocational decision, but rather the need to work and the ease of finding a job [9(ED)]	Occupational option

it. She feels very fulfilled and considers that starting work with not many teaching hours has given her the opportunity to begin gradually.

Participants' quest for professional recognition from students and colleagues was a generalized, common factor that gave form to professional expectations in two main senses: (1) their mastery and competence in the subject taught; and (2) the value of their performance within their educational communities under the conditions of uncertainty inherent to the profession.

4.1.4. Value systems

Our analysis of participants' narratives identified certain common, recurrent values that fostered particular types of adherence to the professional teaching project and, as a result, specific ways of identifying themselves as teachers. In some cases, there was a philanthropic view that saw teaching as helping others to grow and develop, which was also seen as highly rewarding in terms of professional self-realization. Another way towards self-realization was experienced through a soteriological view. This perspective emphasized that teaching could "save" the person, contributing to students' discovery of discovering the unknown, the hidden, the veiled, and offering them an opportunity to understand their complex reality in more depth. Professional performance stressed "enlightening" students' lives and its implications for both advocacy and the transformation of their living conditions and opportunities. In other teachers' narratives, a culturalist view emerged. This perspective stressed values of respect, love and responsibility for an intellectual and cultural heritage, with the work of teaching involving making connections, establishing dialogues, preserving the cultural legacy and developing it for future generations. Where preparation for the social integration of citizens in current and future societies was emphasized, a systemic view prevailed. Professional performance was recognized in terms of its effectiveness in terms of these priorities. Lastly, values centring more on the care of people and the transmission of ethical and moral values relating to citizenship also emerged. This was identified as a personalist view that was distinct from the others (see Table 7).

MG1's understanding of educational action dialogues between a personalist and a soteriological system:

She cited as an example the fact that her students made a lot of homophobic comments. She was very shocked by this language. On one occasion, she decided not to let these comments pass and devoted a session to LGBTBI people. It was an individual initiative. She sees herself as qualified to talk about these issues because she studied gender studies in depth as part of her teacher education. From that moment on, she decided to send a note to the families every time a

Table 7
Professional attribution: value systems.

Extract	Value systems
Through education, apart from the vocational part, there's an altruistic sense to what she does [...]. She designed a series of classes on energy (her subject) at secondary level and offered it to her children's school. She did it for the three years she was in that school [1(CS)]	Philanthropic
The love his teachers instilled in him wasn't general love of knowledge; nor was it a general tendency towards guiding and helping others [...]. It was a love linked to a knowledge, a way of understanding reality and even of experiencing and living in the world. [3(XO)]	Soteriological
She thinks that often we have too much importance in society. That a family, with all the work they have to do, can't educate their children [...] Sometimes she feels overfaced by the role of educator [...] We have a very important role, that of educating citizens. We need to take into account that the family model changes and often kids spend more time at school than with their parents. [8(MM)]	Systemic
Guidance becomes more important, even though you're not a tutor [...] Where she is at the moment there are also teachers that do this task of guiding students' growth [...]. The essence of the teacher's work is helping future citizens [...]. [5(SN)]	Personalist

student made homophobic comments. This was a personal decision that was not agreed with the rest of the teaching staff.

The novice teachers' axiological models were important in determining their propensities and attitudes towards training and professional development. These models were closely bound up with their pathways, with the significance of particular cultural contexts (e.g., the social recognition of the profession) and with their experience (e.g., imitation and role-modelling of mentors, tutors and other teachers of reference).

4.2. Projection

This refers to the vision participants had of their professional futures, which was rooted in their pathways (past) and related to their way of assimilating and consolidating current professionalizing experiences (present). Professional projection requires assimilation, updating and foresight for solidly-based self-determination, and involves the following question: what kind of professional do we want to become? (Vaughn et al., 2021).

Our analysis of this aspect of participants' narratives identified four core categories of interpretation: (1) associations with professional images; (2); definitions of professional excellence; (3) persistent professional meanings; and (4) definitions of professional functions.

4.2.1. Professional image

Participants' narratives yielded three key associations: guiding, cultural and institutional.

The image of the guide and counsellor privileged a philosophy of educational assistance, with professional associations such as the facilitator, mentor and advocate when faced with threats from the surroundings. From this perspective the professional image went beyond a limited meaning of teaching to be projected as a specialized and highly-skilled professional, as a constructive agent of change in the lives of students, families and the educational community as a whole. The cultural image, on the other hand, stressed the mediation of intergenerational and heritage-related knowledge, offering students opportunities to gain access to and discover knowledge, skills and attitudes that would otherwise not be available to them. It also highlighted a socially critical role related to the promotion of social justice. Educational institutions and their professionals were seen as agents of the conservation and transformation of culture. Lastly, the institutional image saw the professional as responsible for giving educational services and aid within the educational institutions, with the prevailing image of the

professional who ensures educational quality as a specialist in methodology, organization and didactics (see Table 8).

MG1’s account reveals strong dialectical tension between a cultural image, derived from both the educational purpose associated with her subject and her non-representational concept of teaching, and the image of the guide-tutor:

She says that one of her students had anorexia nervosa. As she had also gone through a similar stage, her reaction was to tell the tutor that she would be available if the student needed help. She thinks that other teachers might not have been willing to share things from their private life. She does not know if this willingness will change through her teaching career. The students’ difficult personal and family situations affect her a lot; she says that she is very fond of her students, that she loves them and wishes them all the very best in their lives.

Here there is a link with the *implicit theories* and *value systems* of the previous category. For example, the guide-tutor and cultural images tend more towards the non-representational view of teaching. The guide-tutor image connects to a philanthropic and/or personalist value system, and the cultural image to a soteriological one. The institutional image, on the other hand, is closer to representational notions of teaching and to normative values associated with educating people.

4.2.2. Professional excellence

This category involved inquiry into the criteria implicit in participants’ definitions of a good teacher. For some, professionalism should revolve around a substantive moral criterion. Teaching was a moral job and was often associated with a vocational performance that went beyond the instrumental functions of the profession. Other informants viewed excellence as an ethical criterion, in terms of ensuring competent professional performance, from a predominantly deontological perspective. Excellence implied a professional maturity capable of facing the constant difficult choices and conflicting issues involved in teaching (see Table 9).

Some accounts identified good professional practice with academic strength; i.e., mastery of the field and the subject matter. Teachers should be experts in their subjects and able to transcend the common-places of the curricular contents and exams. This academic strength, however, sometimes also involved ethical and moral aspects, since it was seen as enabling the teacher to convey knowledge in such a way that it could empower and emancipate their students. In some cases,

Table 8
Professional projection: professional image.

Extract	Professional image
The personal side of the teacher is the most important [...] We’ve got information everywhere, but the teacher should be a model for the students, he needs to have a lot of skills and know a lot about his students [...]. A teacher should be a guide, a facilitator, he should be empathetic and be able to get close to adolescents, and for that he needs to know how to do that. [11 (BM)]	Guide-tutor
Our role is to teach them to reflect on the things that happen around them. A lot of things have been happening lately and students should be able to reflect and apply what they learn in their lives and, above all, be able to think critically, be able to go out of school and think about what’s happening [...] For example, literature, a play [...] how do you think this applies to today’s society, the vision that the author had [...] Provide the tools [...] We have the responsibility of educating people and then these people will have a future [13(JW)].	Cultural
Suddenly she finds herself in a classroom with 25 teenagers and she has to explain a syllabus that they’ve just been given and make them listen, so that the classroom doesn’t get out of hand. A lot of things that she still finds difficult to manage [10 (AG)].	Institutional

Table 9
Professional projection: professional excellence.

Extract	Professional excellence
The only mark she could make in her country was through education. She also saw that in the classes her children had, the explanations, the understanding, the scientific and technical thinking, was only based on computer applications [...] Technology and engineering are more than just the application. But the physical and mathematical base, which has to exist, is done through very difficult codes [...] A base is needed, but the way it’s presented in the classes generates rejection, unease and disinterest [...] It shouldn’t be that way [1(CS)].	Moral
We have to be sensitive towards students’ lives, but we can’t save the world. We’re not our students’ parents, we can’t cover everything [...] She wonders if she has done well or could have done better [...] She doesn’t feel totally responsible for students’ results, but she does feel responsible for the task carried out, how she spoke and explained things. [9(ED)]	Ethical
She thinks that the teacher should be a professional in the subject, but doing it through a range of different skills, through guiding students [6(SP)].	Academic
One thing is the teacher as a specialist and another is teaching as an art [...] The art he’s talking about is related to knowing how to conduct Socratic dialogue in the classroom, having the ability to ask the students questions [...] He stressed the personal dimension of his teachers with respect to this. [3 (XO)]	Personal
The subject matter has to be mastered, but above all the personal relationships with the students and, especially, with the families [...] You have to know how to deal with people, with adolescents. It’s a complex job [8(MM)].	Social

participants linked excellence to personal qualities that were inherent in teachers’ personalities and enabled them to enthuse, stimulate and motivate their students (e.g., credibility, authenticity, commitment and charisma). In some accounts, teachers’ social and communicative competences were prioritized, and the profession was seen as an intensely relational activity. The key to excellence depended on the ability to connect with others, to build authentic educational relationships.

Our example presents the aspiration to achieve academic mastery with significant ethical and moral connotations:

In ten years she would like to be capable of putting into practice methodologies that make it easier to connect theory and practice, to make students reflect more and to make them see the relationship between art, culture, thought and their daily lives. She also explained that she would like to be able to make changes in the current educational system and to rise to the challenge of making her approach excite and motivate all students.

4.2.3. Professional meaning

Professional meaning responds to the question of the purposes of we do what we do as teachers. On the one hand, there was a sense of mission. While professional and technical competences were not underplayed, the effects of the teaching practices on people took precedence in this area. A sense of transmission was also identified, driven by the leading role of teaching-learning processes and spread across a continuum of different levels and degrees of complexity. Lastly, the sense of service was also highlighted, through which the teacher was defined from the perspective of the service she/he performed for society within the educational institutions. This sense of service was more nuanced than the purpose of assistance, with social responsibility (ethical) or good professional performance (technical) predominating (see Table 10).

MG1’s account includes a comment that seems to articulate a professional sense of mission and service:

Table 10
Professional projection: professional meaning.

Extract	Professional meaning
We talked [...] about how being pregnant affects her professionally [...] The thought of bringing a life into the world makes her think even more about the fact that teaching goes beyond the transmission of knowledge. [11(BM)]	Mission
The good teacher cares about individual students and tries to get something across to everyone, tries to work on and convey a good attitude [...] Trying to transmit something. [9(ED)]	Transmission
Being a good teacher who connects well with the students, who makes them perform well, who makes the students work and work happily and, at the same time, not getting too stressed [...] Having a clear, attractive approach. [7(DT)]	Service

The teaching profession is one in which you have power, you have control and your position is superior to the students, even if you are a very approachable teacher. She finds this position psychologically satisfying and comments that other teachers may also be attracted to this. Positioning yourself as the leader of a group, being a model, being asked for advice, and so on; perhaps those of us who like teaching have these characteristics. In the end, relations of power and dominance are inevitable. The question is how to use that power to help, to make students grow, to guide, to pass on her own learning, which often goes beyond her subject.

These meanings originated from and were constituted via participants' affinities with the above-mentioned *images of the profession* and of *professionalism*.

4.2.4. Professional functions

With respect to the identification of teachers' functions, two differing tendencies emerged. In these two tendencies there persisted the latent idea of the actor or author of the professional project and of the conditions for its development. The concept of the actor was nourished by the "external locus" of professional functions. From this perspective, it was the government and the educational institutions that defined the professional functions, defined teachers' rights and responsibilities and marked the scope and limits of their actions. These functions, then, were defined by an external demand to which a professional response must be given, and the professional meaning of this demand was analysed accordingly. By contrast, the concept of the author was based on an "internal locus", in which professional functions were evaluated in terms of a dialectic between the personal and social models of the profession. In this case, external demands were analysed through relational, socio-educational and social modes and forms of transference, and professional competence was interrogated throughout the process of professional development (see Table 11).

One of the excerpts in Table 11, in fact, comes from MG1's account. It shows her awareness that institutional demands need to be reconstructed in educational terms. In her view this reconstruction is also key:

She stresses that what you want to teach should never be imposed, but should be approached through the desire to share. We need to

Table 11
Professional projection: professional functions.

Extract	Professional functions
Has the impression (endorsed by peers, superiors and students) that she does the job well. [5(SN)]	External locus
Believes that it is important that there are limits to the teacher-student bond and that she is still looking for them. She does not yet know exactly where this limit is. She's aware that it's important to find this balance and now it's somewhat clearer to her than when she started out. [2(MG1)]	Internal locus

find that balance. Perhaps every teacher finds it on one level or another, or it may also depend on the teacher's specific life situation at the time. She thinks that this is how teaching currently works: there is a very marked teacher-student hierarchy, but this should develop and its inherent verticality should be mitigated. Teachers and students have different roles, but they can attain a more horizontal relationship.

These tendencies were nurtured by a broader overarching interpretation defining the criteria that gave meaning to current professionalization processes.

4.3. Development

This process led to different ways of assessing pre- and in-service teacher training. Becoming a good teacher of a particular type requires giving attention to a corresponding way of developing professionally. It demands agency and elaboration and addresses the following question: what do we do to become that professional? (Postholm, 2012).

The teachers' narratives revealed four key issues that illustrated how they experienced the professionalization process: (1) realizations; (2) needs; (3) contradictions; and (4) hopes.

4.3.1. Realizations

In general, these were detailed in a dispersed and ambiguous manner in the teachers' narratives. Analysis of informants' comments showed that the professionalization process was in some cases seen as an opportunity to reassess the profession, adolescence and the educational institutions. Some teachers recognized the impact of in-school tutoring in their professional initiation, highlighting professional complicity and empathy at critical moments. In other cases, they emphasized that their pre-service training and professional initiation had revealed that the profession was more complex than they had initially thought. Lastly, some commented that the new combined or interactive knowledge deriving from their professionalization had made them reconsider their

Table 12
Professional development: realizations.

Extract	Realizations
In comparison to her previous beliefs, she has completely changed her view of students. She's discovered that teenagers are not so terrible, that they have many abilities and good ideas. She's discovered [...] the quality of work involved in teaching. There's much more work than she thought. The practice of teaching involves a lot more work than people see from the outside. She had no idea how much work was coming her way. [9(ED)]	Rethinking the profession
[...] He highlights the importance of the model projected by the teachers he's observing during his teaching practice at the school [...] He attaches great importance to the support he's receiving and to the opportunity to ask questions and build a dialogue with the tutors who are guiding him: being able to ask questions, to reflect together and to receive support and guidance in analysing his own and others' teaching practices. [3(XO)]	Mediation of authentic settings
[There are] many things that she still finds difficult to handle today [...] She feels very far from the initial image she had of teachers, especially because of the issue of job insecurity. [10(AG)]	Discovering the complexity of the profession
It's true that some of her colleagues identify more with the degree they studied (even when they've never worked in that field) than with being a teacher. She identifies herself as a teacher, not as a computer scientist [...] The pre-service training [in the specialization] influences the way you teach the subject, especially when the teacher feels insecure about the content. [5(SN)]	Questioning initial subject knowledge

initial models in their fields of reference (see Table 12).

For MG1, her first contacts with the profession during her teaching practice involved a major reconceptualization of the profession:

She sees her practicum as the most useful part of her pre-service teacher education. She learnt many important lessons from it, especially from experiencing how a school works from the teacher’s perspective; informal factors such as the relationships amongst teachers; more formal features such as meetings, departmental co-ordination, etc. She was surprised that teachers have a lot of information about their students’ lives and by how much they care about their students’ personal situations and welfare. Before her teaching practice, MG1 thought that there were two groups in a high school, teachers and students, with different objectives and interests that sometimes clashed. She has learned that we should not lose sight of the fact that we all have to work together with the same goal in mind.

4.3.2. Needs

Participants’ testimonies with regard to vocational training revealed an ambivalent assessment of the general pedagogical modules. While some informants did not find them useful (linear pathways), others showed a particular interest in their going into greater depth (reconstructive or linear pathways with an identified professional project). There tended to be substantive agreement in two areas: (1) the demand for a closer connection between universities and schools, in the form of joint learning communities; and (2) greater explicitness and better fit between practical and theoretical models. Finally, the need to improve the quality of academic tutoring at the university and to create mechanisms and agents for guidance in the transition to professional life was stressed (see Table 13).

Table 13 shows an excerpt from MG1’s account, identifying the main shortcoming of her pre-service teacher education as a lack of theory-practice dialectic. As she explains:

She states that the theoretical part of the master’s degree may have the same problems that we often attribute to the secondary education we work in: there are many unrelated subjects and many relatively meaningless assignments. She would like to work in a different way, to work through research and personal interests.

4.3.3. Contradictions

The teachers’ assessment of their training was to a certain extent contradictory. On the one hand, a feeling of confusion around the assumptions behind inclusive education and their practical consequences was evident. Some participants stressed the lack of fit between the theory presented in training and the real professional practice. Others accepted that this was problematic and saw it as a professional issue to be addressed. Also, contradictions were identified regarding the content of the specializations. While for some, the professional training was redundant, others gave value to revisiting it from a didactic perspective. The master’s degree end-of-course dissertation aroused disparate and opposed views. Some informants considered that it should be the culmination of pre-service training and the foundation of the professional project. However, others saw it as merely a bureaucratic formality that was necessary for access to the job. Another factor that generated controversy was the impact that pre-service training had on teachers’ current professional competences. For some participants, this was nonexistent or uneven. Others, however, saw its effect as latent; i.e., that they were not aware of it until they had been working as teachers for some time. Further, the instability and uncertainty of the teachers’ work was viewed in different ways. For some informants, this was interpreted as a dysfunction that needed to be compensated by developing their professional qualities. For others, it was seen as an inherent feature of the profession that had to be managed through professional competence. Lastly, there was a range of differing opinions regarding the entry process to the professional. Some accounts stressed the need for flexibility

Table 13
Professional development: needs.

Extract	Needs
She thinks that the master’s degree is important because there’s no pedagogical training in the first degree. You get very good training in the subject, but none in teaching [...] But you had to do things superficially and very quickly to be able to cope with everything [13(JW)] She finished the master’s degree with the feeling that she was ignorant in programming, didactics and attention to diversity. She was disappointed in the content of the theoretical subjects. Her professional identity comes afloat in teaching practice, she feels that this is her place. She experiences and enjoys it intensely [2(MG1)] She thought that training in educational guidance and tutoring was lacking: conflict resolution, group dynamics [...] [11(BM)]	General pedagogical modules
[...] Extending the practical training: more hours, more meaningful training, taking great care of this area of professional construction, improving the process of integration in the schools, carefully selecting tutors to guide trainees from the university and in schools [...] Improving the networks of teachers of ancient languages and cultivating training in cross-curricular topics. [6 (SP)]	Learning communities
[...] She would like to have been able to put into practice methodologies that make it easier to connect theory and practice, to make students reflect more and to make them see the relationship between art, culture, thought and their everyday lives. She also comments that she would have liked [...] to embrace the challenge of methodologies that address the emotions and motivations of all students. [2(MG1)].	Theory-practice dialectic
She would have liked tuition in all the aspects of how to get into job listings and what to do in this whole process. There should be a day that would be announced as compulsory [...]. It would be a training and job orientation day for secondary school teachers [...], as part of a module. Also [in terms of professional development], the whole issue of marking, applications, tasks that you have to do when you start in the profession and that no one explains to you; you have to find it out on the job [...] Making a road map of the profession that would help both in your entry to it and your first years. [1(CS)]	Academic tutoring and professional guidance

and openness in mentoring and tutoring. Others interpreted these characteristics as laxity and disorganization, and required a greater degree of control and leadership (see Table 14).

Table 14 shows that MG1 had some issues with her master’s dissertation. As she explains in her life story:

The topic of her master’s dissertation was chosen according to her personal preferences and the needs of the school where she did her teaching practice. She decided to undertake a project aimed at fostering critical thinking and bringing students into contact with ideas and realities different from those they were used to. However, the dissertation was not returned to the institute where she did her practicum. Neither her mentor nor the rest of the staff had the opportunity to evaluate it or to put any of her proposals into practice.

4.3.4. Hopes

Four important hopes were identified during the professional development process. First, there was the aspiration to acquire skills enabling the teacher to build authentic educational relationships (i.e., personal ties fostering students’ overall development). Secondly, there was the desire to achieve a high degree of responsibility in guiding and transforming students’ lives and in aiding their educational careers (protecting them against failing or dropping out and helping them

Table 14
Professional development: contradictions.

Extract	Contradictions
The constraints of the context should be explained in the master's degree: that all the groups in the different lines at the school have to go at the same pace, that the class hours are what they are and can't be changed. They should give a more realistic vision of what you're going to come across: explaining the ideal situation, but also saying what you're going to find and how you can manage things without giving up on the ideal. [4(AV)]	Inclusive education
The whole theoretical part was propaganda about new methodologies that in the end aren't applied. The course has many shortcomings [...] Although you work on competencies, everything ended up in a numerical average. It paints a rosy picture of reality. [12(MG2)]	Specialized content
The master's degree final project was just a formality [...], a task which she couldn't apply to the classroom [...] Her motivation was zero. She realized that what mattered on the master's degree was to put in your hours and write [10(AG)] [...] It should be a research paper, but she explains that she didn't have much time and had to start from the references she already had; therefore, it wasn't an opportunity to do research and expand our knowledge [2(MG1)].	Master's degree dissertation
She has some gaps from her master's degree. She doesn't remember the tutor; she did her job well and tutored the students adequately, but she didn't leave any mark. She didn't influence her much. [9(ED)] She thinks she was well prepared to do all the substitutions she did during the last year because of all her previous experience, not because of the master's degree. [4(AV)] The master's degree opened the door for her to begin to question what it means to be a teacher and what kind of teacher she wanted to be. It didn't answer those questions, but it opened a door that until then had been closed or that she didn't even know was there. [11(BM)]	Effects of pre-service training
When she came out of class, there were good days but also bad days. She was shaken up by some things, she didn't know if she should be more assertive or "blase", or maybe more experienced, or tougher; at the moment she's not coming out of any teaching experience with flying colours. [6(SP)] I felt comfortable knowing that things might not go well, that's one of the most valuable lessons for me, knowing that things can go wrong, that they might not even pay attention to you. It's the most valuable tool I have [4(AV)].	Interpretation of uncertainty
It would be nice to have a support teacher (especially in your first steps as a teacher) [...]; it would be a bit like a companion; a person who would be close to you and who'd try to guide you on the best possible way. [7(DT)] I think it's very useful to do substitutions, to see a lot of schools, to have a lot of diverse experiences. [...] I find that the learning I did is very unstructured, but valuable because you get to know different situations. [4(AV)] She doesn't deal very well with the subject or the whole process behind the substitutions, that is, being at the mercy of other people [...]. She longs for the moment when she can create her own project, decide on her own teaching style and work in a more autonomous way [6(SP)].	Entry into the professional

achieve progress both socially and academically). Thirdly, some participants stressed that they would like to maintain a distanced posture with regard to the teaching process throughout their professional careers; i.e., not losing the ability to be surprised, not yielding to institutional inertia and therefore remaining open to their professional development being influenced and shaped by the students' continually developing needs (learning by teaching). Lastly, there were strong hopes in general relating to how participants' professional communities (peers, colleagues, teaching teams) could support and strengthen their process of learning the profession (see Table 15).

Table 15 shows that our example teacher hoped to grow professionally within a teaching community. Although initially she tended to experience teaching more as an individual task, her first contacts with

Table 15
Professional development: hopes.

Extract	Hopes
She talks about the importance of interaction with students. She's found that she's very good at it: making them "yours" a bit (although the possessive sounds strange, it's about experiencing the students as "yours"), bonding with them, caring about and taking care of them. The relationship with the students as a driving force that makes them grow and move forward. [5(SN)]	Building authentic educational relationships
[...] The responsibility of educating people who'll have a future [...] accompanying students in their real lives, which are sometimes dramatic outside school, is an area that requires a great deal of reflection. [13(JW)]	Impact on students' lives
The feeling that the line separating the act of teaching and the act of learning is very thin [...]. The passion for helping his students understand things, related to a certain self-satisfaction, in the sense of satisfying this need to communicate, to explain in order to understand [...], is a kind of love that's linked to knowledge, to a way of understanding reality and even of experiencing and living in the world. [3(XO)]	Estrangement in the act of teaching
She sees herself as part of a community. She's now at a point where she's absorbing things, observing, receiving advice from other teachers. She's becoming more and more integrated. She sees the support teachers give each other as key. [2(MG1)]	Development in professional communities

the profession not only made her modify this view, but she also hoped to structure her professional development through the learning community represented by her colleagues:

She works in a school that has just undergone many changes, and where there are many interim and substitute teachers and a high teacher turnover. The principal is new this year and all this makes it difficult to develop a cohesive educational project. However, she finds that the teachers are very supportive of each other [...] MG1 is aware that she is part of a team.

4.4. Transformation

This process includes both constant and shifting factors in the relationship between the initial professional models and the foundations of participants' current view of the profession. Their narratives contributed to analysis of this issue through their reflections on their pathways, professional training, the profession in general and their identification with a professional teaching project.

In terms of their previous pathways, the potentials of the learning and knowledge acquired throughout them in formal, non-formal and informal settings and the impact of this on their teaching worldview was identified. Whether there was greater or lesser openness to change in their initial assumptions depended on the nature of their personal and professional trajectories and the ongoing process of constructing and reconstructing their expectations.

With regard to their teacher education, participants' testimonies revealed a change of register or concept around the (transdisciplinary) knowledge needed to carry out their professional tasks well, and an identification of the know-how necessary for conveying knowledge.

With regard to the profession, there was recurrent mention of the leap from the content of the subject and the field itself to the educational meanings potentially emerging. The reconstructive and vocational pathways assume that the profession inherently involves contradictions and difficult choices, in the sense of an ambivalence between teachers' official functions and professional (trans)missions, between the management of technical, organizational and administrative factors and the construction of situated and motivating educational meanings (see

Table 16
Professional transformation: identification.

N° narratives	Informant	Identification with the professional project
7	1(CS), 2(MG1), 4(AV), 5(SN), 7(DT), 8(MM), 13(JW)	Positive
2	3(XO), 6(SP)	Negative
3	9(ED), 11(BM), 12(MG2)	Ambivalent
1	10(AG)	Neutral

Table 16).

In MG1's case, her account reflects a positive identification in the following terms:

She sees herself as part of a community. At the moment she is at a point where she is observing and assimilating things and seeking advice from other teachers. She is becoming more and more integrated. She finds that the teachers are very supportive of each other. She thinks that in society there is a widespread idea that teaching is a stable job, too well paid and with too many vacations. She believes that it should be a more valued profession because teachers have considerable social responsibility.

Lastly, with respect to participants' professional projects, their accounts showed that the construction of identity was an ongoing process that required different actions depending on each individual and their professional pathway and project. In these processes, four modes of identification with the teaching project were found (Hogg & Terry, 2001): (1) positive identification (congruence between personal models and those of the professional community); (2) negative identification (lack of congruence or dissociation with respect to external or self-referential values, critical or opposed to the professional community); (3) ambivalent identification (without polarization, congruence with the values and associated meanings of the profession in internal and personal elements, but dissonance with or opposition to external negative elements); and (4) non-identification or neutral identification (no clear link or a dissociation as a consequence of a crisis or lacuna in the professional project). Further, the meaning given to the construction of the teaching project was equivocal and highly situated and contextualized in each case. The teaching project was subject to conversions (2), dialogues (4), scaffolding (1), structuring (1), incorporations (2), assimilations (1) and discoveries and explorations (2), stemming from participants' previous careers and throughout their professional development (see Table 17).

In the case of our example, her story shows that her professional teaching project was based on a model educational culture (art, expression, iconic literacy); hence the teaching function and professional meaning were articulated from the standpoint of the potential of a primarily artistic identity. Art was sublimated in the educational field and education was re-signified through the critical posture inherent to artistic perception and thought. In this way, the aesthetic dimension of the subject matter was shifted towards an ethical terrain via a new, deeply researched form of professional action. A non-deterministic exploration of her professional project as a teacher was observed, in addition to a gradual change throughout her initial training and her professional induction, moving from an affective and ideological adherence to the profession to a questioning posture that had become stalled in indeterminacy. These processes represent a dialogue between models that assume with certain familiarity and conviction that the construction of individualized educational initiatives is of the order of creation and not of reproduction.

5. Discussion

The aim of this study was to understand how the professional identities of novice teachers were given shape. It took into account the

Table 17
Professional transformation: project.

Informant	Meaning projected	
1(CS), 5(SN)	Conversion	Autonomous reconstruction of the previous career in order to achieve a professional teaching project.
2(MG1), 7(DT), 11(BM), 13(JW)	Dialogue	Integration of teacher education into previous professional models, defining a professional teaching project.
4(AV)	Scaffolding	Progressive definition of the professional teaching project on the basis of professionalizing models.
9(ED)	Structuring	Comprehensive questioning of the professional project due to the possibility or opportunity to see it from a teaching point of view.
6(SP), 12(MG2)	Incorporation	Complementing a prior structuring professional project with new professionalizing teaching models.
3(XO)	Assimilation	Impermeability of the professional project to the professionalizing models, maintained by initial personal and cultural presuppositions.
8(MM), 10(AG)	Discovery Exploration	Superficial questioning of the professional teaching project and investigation of some key factors spurring its reorganization.

teachers' educational and training pathways, their transitions to pre-service training and their first experiences of working as professional educators. As Fig. 1 shows, and by way of a summary of our discussion of results, teacher identity encompasses a series of dimensions that are subject to the dialectical interplay of certain core factors during pre-service teacher education and in the first experiences of professional practice.

The analysis of novice teachers' life stories, then, yielded a series of critical factors that enriched our interrogation of the teacher training model or approach and the way in which it was put into practice in the process of becoming a professional teacher.

Addressing the first research question of how prior personal and educational experiences shape the teaching identity, and the second research question of how education contributes to the constitution of the specific professional teaching identity, we observed that the identity of teachers emerges from an intense dialectic between personal and professional experiences, contextualized in specific pathways and open to unique interpretations of professional reconstruction and repositioning. The way that novice teachers question and evaluate themselves clearly reflects what analysts such as Scales et al. (2017) and Barak and Shoshana (2022) identify as a period of tension and reassessment of the initial image of what it is to be a teaching professional and what the teacher's work entails. How to redesign training programs in order to contribute positively to this dialectic is a key issue (Fernández, 2010). Explicitly addressing professional identity and working on self-determination throughout pre- and in-service teacher education should be taken encompassed in the training programme itself and its delivery. The theory-practice dialectic in the process of teacher professionalization should aim to address the dialogue between teachers' personal models, the collective models of their professional communities, and the cultural models in their first-degree subject fields (Perrenoud, 2004). Professional identity is subject to a process of negotiation among these issues that should be interrogated from the standpoint of the professionalizing models proposed in teacher education. Participants' processes of developing teacher identity in the contexts analysed also evidenced needs found in previous studies, precisely in the salience of this dialectic as a privileged arena for the questioning that occurs in the individual's own value system as a result of their immersion in professional practice (López & Blázquez, 2012; Marcelo, 2009; Nilsson-Lindström, 2008; Valle & Manso, 2010) and the accompanying processes of guidance and mentoring (Izadinia, 2014). The key point

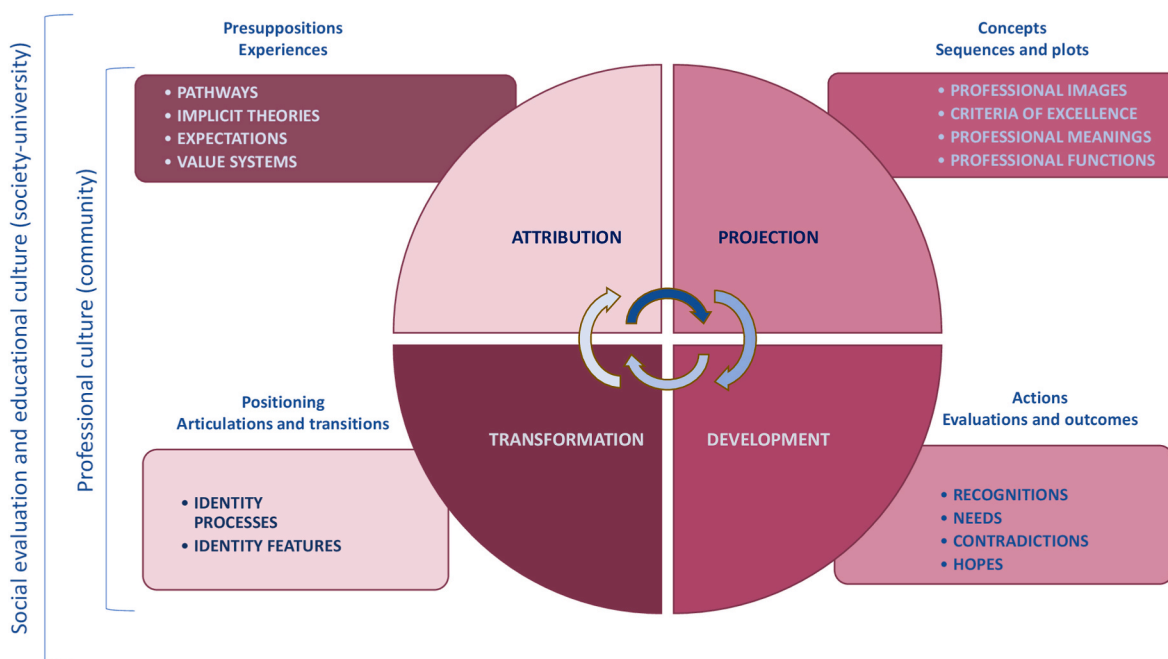


Fig. 1. Processes of identity construction.

here is that adherence to a value system did not appear in a pure state, but instead was shaped by preferences associated with each novice teacher's trajectory and by the starting point of their professional teaching project. We found a dialogue between philanthropic and soteriological systems, for example in stories 1(CS), 2(MG1) and 3(XO), and between systemic and personalist systems, as in 4(AV), 5(SN) and 7(DT). From the standpoint of certain value systems, such as the personalist and the soteriological, the feeling of support for what was yet to come in educational relationships was already assumed, thus producing attitudes and dispositions of openness to others. The most significant contradictions were found between the systemic and personalist value systems, and also in the balance novice teachers had to find between the organizational management and institutional control of students' lives and school careers. These contradictions were particularly evident in participants' professional cultures and manifested themselves in a highly individual ways in the processes of induction and professional self-determination. This tension was particularly evident in the accounts of 1(CS), 2(MG1, our specific example), 4(AV) and 11(BM). Understanding the ongoing dynamic, multi-referential complexity of teachers' professional identities particularly responded to this study's first objective.

It should be noted that this dialectic, at the core of the processes of professional self-determination during pre-service teacher education (second research question) and the first experiences as novice teachers (third research question), was threatened by other processes of socialization and cultural assimilation that affected informants' personal belief-systems and values, or that were derived uncritically from social groups and professional cultures. Also, the teachers' first degrees and their pre- and in-service teacher education had common cultural features that mediated their processes of professional identification. Our analysis of the dimensions of their identities revealed cultural, social, corporate and academic patterns that teacher education should call into question from a professionalizing perspective. These findings reflect the importance of paying close attention to the professional initiation process, since the strong impact that teachers' previous experience has on their identity configuration is proven (see for example [Feiman-Nemser, 2001](#)). New learning is filtered through previous learning, and we should therefore take note of [Cobb's \(2022\)](#) argument in favour of reinforcing training prior to entry into professional practice. This would

help improve teachers' transitions, while at the same time enhancing their assimilation of new learning and their capacity for reflection on and adaptation to the learning process. Thus the identification of these training possibilities and the need to make the relevant adjustments with respect to the professional cultures involved addressed the second research objective of this work. It is essential to understand the communicative and critical processes that are necessary to the teacher's work, and which vary according to individuals and their situations. The lack of control and accompanying anxiety sometimes associated with professional performance is triggered by erroneous expectations or insufficient training content, and fed by stereotypes found in the profession and those that society as a whole associates with the teachers, and which are not subjected to deconstruction in professional terms. Accepting the normality of uncertainty, instability, and unpredictability should encourage a form of training that manages and reformulates this in terms of the quality of professional practice and of professional life. As can be seen from the stories, the central question is of how the uncertainty inherent to professional performance is assimilated. The novice teachers reacted in very different ways not only because they started from very different assumptions about professional identity, but also because the deconstructive effect of their initial training and first experiences of professionalization affected and altered their assumptions in very disparate ways. The need to follow and regulate the emergent nature of the educational meaning of teaching was more evident in the accounts with characteristics such as the following: (a) linear trajectories, such as 6(SP); (b) initially occupational expectations, such as 9(ED); (c) representational assumptions about teaching, associated with systemic values and personal and academic criteria of excellence, as in the case of 3(XO) and 8(MM); (d) institutional images of the profession, such as 10(AG); (e) professional meanings related to transmission and/or service, such as 7(DT); and (f) organization in accordance with external and conjunctural demands, as in the case of 5(SN). Rather than intending to polarize the aspects of identity, to correlate them with each other or to organize them in a hermeneutically closed matrix, the narratives that intuitively identified, assimilated or consolidated this emergent character of teaching were those that problematized in a certain way their previous meanings, and experienced issues and contradictions in their pre-service training and first contacts with the profession. This was the case of novice teachers who initially showed a

positive identification with the profession, such as our example 2(MG1) and 13(JW), or an ambivalent identification, like 11(BM) and 12(MG2). The processes of professionalization were played out within a range of opportunities for problematizing them and of open dispositions that submitted assumptions about teaching identity to revision. Schools hosting trainee and novice teachers can help them to give shape to one or the other projection of the profession (Wenger, 2010). For example, extremely complex contexts where it is difficult to achieve regular student attendance or teachers are faced with highly vulnerable personal and social situations should be seen as inherent to professional performance, and the educational communities, as social systems, should habitually question the priority functions and roles of teachers in each case (Barak & Shoshana, 2022).

These issues should be reconsidered on the basis of the current cultural and institutional situations of teacher education (Escudero et al., 2019). This study was conducted in the context of the Master's Degree in Secondary Education Teaching at the University of Barcelona (Spain), and as a result, specific evaluations of this program emerged from the research (Llanes et al., 2024). Our analysis raises interesting issues that should be progressively incorporated into the culture of teacher training programs. On the one hand, starting from the current master's degree structure, this would mean advancing towards a training approach articulated from the standpoint of personalization; authentic evaluation; the reflective and theorizing guidance of practice; academic tutoring as the modelling of problematic dialectical processes up to and including professional induction; the development of professional competencies from a dialogic perspective; and the design of the teaching career based on an individualized professional project. On the other hand, these approaches should consider their degree of sustainability at the time of their implementation. The needs and contradictions expressed in the professionalization of new teachers point to this major issue and question the political and educational architecture of teacher education. The argument for improving these training ecosystems informs this study and we have tried to question these ecosystems via our third objective. The critical appraisals of teacher education in our participants' narratives were not particularly indulgent. Comments by of our specific example, 2(MG1), and 12(MG2) on the shortcomings in the theory-practice dialectic were notable, as were those of 1(CS), 4(AV), 6(SP) and 7(DT) on the need for this dialectic to be supported by meaningful tutoring, mentoring and professional guidance.

One of the main strengths of this study is its "polyphonic" perspective on secondary education teachers' accounts of their initial training and professional induction. The interdisciplinary team conducting the research fomented a diversity of encounters with and views of the novice teachers and their schools. Likewise, all those involved were directly affected by the research outcomes and, consequently, by the latent need for a cultural modification of the training model of which they form a part. Thus, the group involved was implicitly or explicitly called upon to take on responsibility as agents of change. Paradoxically, this strength also gave rise to important difficulties and to one of the study's main limitations: in maintaining the social constructivist perspective in the elaboration of the accounts within a research macrostructure that featured a plurality of methodological standpoints, and consequently, in ensuring that the deep understanding of the uniqueness of each account was not dominated by an evaluative and critical approach to the educational model in question.

Secondary education teacher training programs in Spain are complex courses in which a plurality of teacher education discourses and practices and social values and expectations regarding the profession coexist. They are courses that call for coordination among universities, schools and professional communities; that require balancing the workload between training and qualification purposes; and whose reforms have a marked political and social impact. Consequently, putting this study's findings into practice would be a way of directing cultural changes in the training model by basing it on medium- and long-term strategic lines of innovation and building it on the basis of current best practices. This

would mean structuring training from the standpoint of the meaning of the profession (as opposed to a constantly reiterated technical and instrumental sense) and promoting an innovative, transformative and educational culture of the teaching profession that would transcend the curricular and disciplinary specializations in teachers' professional identities.

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CRedit authorship contribution statement

Alfredo Berbegal Vázquez: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Methodology, Supervision, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Lidia Daza Pérez:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Lara Carapeto Pacheco:** Investigation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Ignacio Rivas Flores:** Methodology, Resources, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of competing interest

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Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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