

## **EFL Student-Teachers' Identity Construction: A Case Study in Chile**

### **Construcción de la identidad de profesores de inglés: un estudio de caso en Chile\***

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The objective of this study is to explore the process of professional identity construction of two English as a foreign language student-teachers from a sociocultural theoretical lens. A qualitative case study was conducted through personal narratives, semi-structured interviews, and a focus group. The data were analyzed using a grounded theory approach. The results show that the process of student-teachers' professional identity construction is unstable and dynamic, and is shaped by inter-related personal and external factors such as self-image, learning environment, and practicum experiences.

*Key words:* English as a foreign language pre-service teachers, identity construction, sociocultural theory, undergraduate experience.

El objetivo del presente estudio es explorar, desde una perspectiva sociocultural, el proceso de construcción de la identidad profesional de dos estudiantes de pedagogía en inglés como lengua extranjera. Se utilizó un estudio de caso de índole cualitativo a través de narrativas, entrevistas semi-estructuradas y grupo focal. Los resultados muestran que el proceso de construcción de la identidad de los

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estudiantes de pedagogía es cambiante y dinámico, y se va formando a través de factores personales y externos tales como la auto-imagen, experiencias de aprendizaje y de prácticas profesionales que están interrelacionados.

*Palabras clave:* construcción identidad, estudiantes de pedagogía de inglés, experiencias en pregrado, teoría sociocultural.

## Introduction

Teacher identity is a construct within the field of teacher education and has received considerable attention in language teaching education (LTE) in the last decades. Research in the field has explored “questions about the sociocultural contexts of learning and learners, pedagogy, language, ideologies, and the ways in which language and discourses work” (Miller, 2009, p. 172).

From the beginning of their teaching careers, student-teachers experience change in their identities, which develop through their educational process as they start assuming more responsibilities and positions as actual teachers in their study program and practicums (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Coldron & Smith, 1999). This process of identity construction has been reported to be influenced by a variety of factors, such as the social relationships and interactions with others within a sociocultural, historical, and institutional context; emotions; values; beliefs; traditions; educational background; discourses; and job and life experiences; among many others (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Coldron & Smith, 1999; Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons, 2006; Johnston, 2012; Lamote & Engels, 2010; Palmer, 1997; Zembylas, 2003).

Since the construction of teacher identity is a dynamic and complex process in which individuals experience constant struggle and change due to internal and external factors (Bloomfield, 2010; Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999; Lamote & Engels, 2010; Trent, 2013; Zare-ee & Ghasedi, 2014), the present study attempts to explore two undergraduate English as a foreign language (EFL) female student-teachers’ identity construction processes at a Chilean university, adopting a sociocultural perspective based on Vygotsky’s theory. The data collection tools, used in this case study research, comprise narratives, semi-structured interviews, and a focus group session.

The relevance of studying teachers’ identity construction relies on the argument that “teacher identity—what beginning teachers believe about teaching and learning as self-as-teacher—is of vital concern to teacher education” (Bullough, 1997, p. 21). In the Chilean curriculum of second language teacher education, there is a tendency to achieve proficiency in the English language rather than practical pedagogical knowledge (Barahona, 2014).

Thus, the findings in the present research might provide knowledge to make decisions in terms of the knowledge base necessary for pre-service teachers' curricular models or practicum and, consequently, be incorporated into teacher education programs (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Lamote & Engels, 2010).

The present study pretends to answer the following question: How do two EFL student-teachers construct their professional identity throughout their undergraduate teacher training program and practicums?

## Teacher Identity

### *Sociocultural Theory and Identity*

The term *identity* was not directly discussed in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory; however, he was concerned with individuals' developmental processes of what today we refer to as the study of identity. Sociocultural theory concepts such as higher-order mental functions, mediation, internalization, and symbols are often discussed in relation to identity (Vygotsky, 1978).

Higher-order mental functions have a social origin and refer to abilities such as memory control, problem solving, or interpreting, which are developed and acquired through mediation and social interactions. These functions are culturally mediated and internalized which result in the individual's personal behavior, emotions, and self-control. The individual develops his or her inner self by giving meaning and internalizing the symbols present in the social, cultural, and political environment that shape his/her identity (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995). Thus, identity is constructed through the meaning the person gives to symbols in society when interacting with the cultural and social contexts; these meanings are internalized by the individual by means of the mental functioning process (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995). Thus, personal and contextual factors are involved in teacher identity construction.

### *Teacher Identity Construction*

Within the sociocultural process, the identities of teachers are constructed from a social and personal perspective (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Johnston, 2012; Miller, 2009; Richards, 2009). From a personal perspective, teacher identity (TI) construction involves agency, emotions, meaning systems, and the self (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004); and from a social perspective, it involves influences of the context, traditions, experiences, social interactions, and positioning (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Coldron & Smith, 1999; Kelly, 2006; Miller, 2009). All these personal and social factors are intertwined and result in a process where teachers have the possibility of constantly negotiating and reshaping their identities in communities through social interactions and experiences.

Influencing factors in shaping teachers' identities relate to personal biography, gender, culture, social relationships, working conditions, age, school culture, curriculum, policies, teaching resources, and access to professional development (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Johnston; 2012; Miller, 2009; Richards, 2009), among others. Besides, there is also an emotional component of identity that shapes it; after all, teaching involves an intellectual and emotional component (Coldron & Smith, 1999; Day, 2012; Day et al., 2006; Zembylas, 2003).

Language is also an important factor in TI since identity can be narrated. Through language, the individuals' accounts of themselves, their practices, and discourses in which they engage can give an idea of the process of identification of the person. Stories are conceived to express and construct identity through discourse (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Norton, 2006; Trent, 2013).

Professional identities have also said to be difficult to separate from teachers' personal identities since teaching requires personal involvement with students, colleagues, and the community. Being a teacher is closely connected to teachers' personal lives because the teacher invests his or her self and values in their work and creates social relationships with the community (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Day et al., 2006; Lamote & Engels, 2010; Palmer, 1997).

### *Language Teacher Identity*

Teachers enact their teaching practices, beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions through their identity which has an impact on students' learning through the classroom atmosphere and types of methods teachers promote (Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005). Teacher identity construction has been reported to be an emerging topic in the field of LTE in the last two decades and has a vast literature with different foci such as social recognition, how teachers learn to perform as professionals, how they apply theory in their teaching practices, how they theorize their practice, or how they teach. Research in LTE provides insight regarding the educational development of pre-service, novice, and in-service teachers from a variety of perspectives.

Considering social contextual factors, Fierro and Martínez (2012) found that a group of EFL teachers in Mexico perceive a lack of social recognition for their profession from their micro and macro social contextual factors (school and society). The authors conclude that the heterogeneous teachers' professional profile is the main source of this identity crisis. From a micro contextual factor, a group of EFL student-teachers in Argentina goes through an intense negotiation process not only with its undergraduate program but also with the "selves" (Sarasa, 2016).

In the line of how teachers learn, Antonek, McCormick, and Donato (1997) studied the development of two teachers' professional identities in the context of a foreign language

education program through a Vygotskian sociocultural lens. The main claim of these researchers is that greater focus needs to be given to portfolios as data collection tools since not only they have the potential to document and mediate teachers' development, but also to promote reflective teaching practice and an awareness of the process itself within the teachers' specific context.

Duff and Uchida's (1997) ethnographic case study research studied the negotiation of four Japanese EFL teachers' identities and teaching practices, the relationship between language and culture, and how they dealt with institutional and curricular expectations in the context of a postsecondary institution. The study discovered two influential dimensions in the construction of teachers' identities: personal histories and contextual factors, such as the institution, the textbook, timetable, gender, the expectations of society, and the curriculum. The findings show that collaborative inquiry and self-reflection were necessary instances for teachers to understand their sociocultural roles and solve conflicts.

A more recent study (Kanno & Stuart, 2011) examined how two novice EFL teachers learn to teach and how that learning-in-practice experience shapes their identities through a situated learning lens using a variety of data collection tools: interviews, teaching journals, stimulated recalls, classroom observations, recording of classes, and documents. Results revealed that there was a relationship between the teachers' identity shaping and their developing teaching practices.

## Method

The research methodology is framed in a qualitative paradigm since it explores a complex, dynamic, and immeasurable process such as the construction of identity (Norton & McKinney, 2010) and is a case study. Case studies concentrate on one thing and do not seek to generalize from it (Thomas, 2011); "researchers generally select a case study methodology if they believe that contextual conditions are highly relevant to their research focus" (McKay, 2006, p. 71). Contextual factors are prominent in the present research which, combined with personal factors, constitutes the basic features in identity construction within the sociocultural theory as stated previously.

### *Context and Participants*

The participants of this study are two EFL female student-teachers from an undergraduate program in Viña del Mar, Chile. Both participants were in their last academic semester, finishing their professional practicum, when the data were collected.

The student-teachers were selected randomly out of around 20 student-teachers from the same graduation class and contacted by the director of the study program. The criterion

followed for this selection was that student-teachers had to be in their final practicum. Before collecting the data, they were asked to sign a consent form. To keep their anonymity, the participants were given pseudonyms: Molly and Carol.

Molly is a 23-year-old Chilean female student-teacher. She studied in a subsidized school and was an average student. She has not been to an English-speaking country. She did not like her English classes at school because teachers did not encourage speaking the language, but she always liked English. She was raised in a middle-class family. Before entering the program, she had studied translation and interpretation for one semester in another university where she did not feel comfortable. She perceives herself as a timid and introverted person.

Carol is a 22-year-old Chilean female student-teacher. She studied in a public school and was raised in a low-income family environment. She was one of the best students in her class. She had excellent academic records in school and obtained a high score on the national standardized test to enter the university. She was granted a scholarship for her undergraduate education. She was always interested in learning English and in visiting an English-speaking country. After finishing high school, she entered the EFL teaching program, but she was mainly more interested in learning English than in becoming a teacher.

### ***Data Collection Tools and Procedures***

Case studies are characterized by using multiple data collection tools, such as discussions, conversations, interviews, autobiographies, journals, and letters, among others (Creswell, 2012). Semi-structured interviews, personal narratives, and a focus group interview were used to collect data in the present study.

A chronology of events was followed throughout the course of data collection. Participants were asked about their past and present experiences in the study program. This procedure is typical of case study research designs in which the main purpose is to study “a single person, gathering data through the collection of stories, reporting individual experiences, and discussing the meaning of those experiences for the individual” (Creswell, 2012, p. 502).

The semi-structured interview sessions comprised the first instances in which the participants provided information. For reliability purposes (Mackey & Gass, 2005), three individual interviews were carried out for each participant. Before each interview, they were given the option of speaking either English or Spanish. Both opted to answer in English. In the first interview, the participants were informed about the general research guidelines and procedures. The three interview sessions, which lasted approximately forty-five minutes each, were audio recorded, and the researcher wrote some notes as the interviews progressed. Open-ended discussions were encouraged, and by the end of the participants’ responses,

they were usually asked if there was something else they would add. The guiding topic of the first interview was their experiences learning the language in the study program; the second interview was focused on their experiences learning to teach in the study program and practicums, and the last one on their reflections about the factors involved in their process of becoming language teachers.

Student-teachers were also asked to write personal narratives about their experiences in the study program and practicums through a Google-Docs account online. The requirement was to write the stories in English. A total of three narratives were written by each participant during the semester based on their experiences in their undergraduate program.

The focus group interview session was the last instance in which the two participants together provided information. The same guidelines from previous interviews were discussed, but this time the student-teachers decided to discuss the questions in their mother tongue (Spanish), which allowed them to express their emotions more accurately and freely. The focus group interview consisted of a small set of six questions regarding the main findings that emerged from the two participants' previous semi-structured interviews and narratives and clarified some information given by them. This final session lasted one hour.

### ***Data Analysis Procedure***

Firstly, all data from the semi-structured interview sessions were transcribed. Then, the researcher coded the data and, as categories emerged, some questions arose that were clarified in the focus group session. To analyze such data, the researcher used a grounded theory approach. Although the name may be suggestive, grounded theory does not consist of a theory but is a method for data analysis (Dörnyei, 2007). Grounded theory methods refer to a procedure in which researchers interpret and analyze data by first assigning codes and building more abstract categories (Charmaz, 1996). Corbin and Strauss (1990) explain that grounded theory procedures consist of three stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The open coding stage is the first attempt to analyze data, where it is segmented. Phrases, lines, and sentences are assigned codes which are more abstract and conceptual than descriptive. The focus for the researcher in this first stage is to read through the data and question the meaning of what is being read (Dörnyei, 2007). The next step, axial coding, consists of a more abstract coding process in which the researcher makes connections between categories to integrate them into more general concepts. The final step in data analysis is selective coding, in which core categories are identified to integrate the processed data (Dörnyei, 2007). The same procedures presented above were followed when analyzing the data from the interviews and narratives and, in the end, three main inter-related categories emerged: learning experience, practicum experience, and self-image.

## Results

The repeated patterns that have shaped the two student teachers' identity through interactions during their teaching formation process are framed in three main categories: self-image, learning environment, and practicum experiences; these last two categories have two dimensions and they are gratifications and obstacles, and both have consequences on Carol's and Molly's self-image.

### *Carol's Teacher Identity Construction*

**Learning environment.** Regarding her experiences during her permanence in the study program, Carol went through gratifications, obstacles, and consequences.

Her first gratifications are related to her feelings and beliefs in relation to pedagogy and becoming a teacher of English. During her first year in the teaching program, she developed a feeling of belonging to the career she had chosen and came to believe in the idea of becoming a teacher. Regarding the development of her linguistic skills in the foreign language, the favorable interactions with her teachers in her teaching formation program had an impact on Carol's language development.

However, she also went through some obstacles, such as time management difficulty, sitting for standardized tests, and working with less capable peers. By the end of her undergraduate program, she started having more responsibilities, along with her regular tasks as a student; she also started with her practicums which demanded extra time to prepare material, classes, and going to schools. The second difficult experience in the study program for Carol was sitting for standardized tests. She did not feel confident enough when she was assessed. "I had to sit for a standardized test, the FCE test . . . I get nervous easily, so I was already frustrated . . . I got a terrible mark, and I felt like that, terrible . . . it was the worst experience". The third obstacle for Carol was the fact that she had some peers who had some disabilities or a lower language competence level. Working with less capable peers was a situation which made her feel uncomfortable because she felt she would have advanced even further in her language development if those students had not been in the class.

The gratifications and obstacles Carol went through in the interactions with her teachers and peers in the study program brought consequences. The improvement in her language competence and teaching skills made her change one of her personality traits, e.g. becoming more self-confident. On the other hand, having "irresponsible" peers who did poor academic work is a drawback that also contributed to the shaping of Carol's identity by reaffirming the benefits of "working hard".

**Practicum experiences.** In the practicums, Carol had three types of experiences: gratifications, obstacles, and consequences.

Her gratifications were related to the effects of the interactions she had with her supervisory teacher (university teacher who guides students in their practicums), her students in the practicum, and her peer student-teacher, Molly. When Carol's supervisory teacher visited her, she would always give her positive feedback and suggestions for improving. As she reported in one of her interviews: "The first time she visited me, I remember I cried a lot because I received good comments from her. I was so happy because I couldn't believe my job was good". This situation made her feel emotional due to the reason that she would experience constant self-doubt when teaching. However, being validated by her supervisor helped her reinforce her self-image as a teacher. Also, throughout her practicums, Carol experienced gratifications with some of her students who responded well to her classes, a fact that helped her develop and reinforce her teaching style. These experiences, as she reports, made her feel like she was part of the school community: "everyone was so welcoming with me, specially my students, [they] were extremely clever and sweet with me as well as my mentor teacher . . . I was so involved in the community that I enjoyed every single minute during my stay".

Obstacles were also part of her experiences in the practicums. Carol's worst obstacle was dealing with the teaching style of her mentor teachers in the schools where she was doing her practicum and not receiving feedback after teaching. This made her feel insecure since she was "kind of scared to ask her if I'm doing OK or not. . . Am I doing the right thing? Am I doing horrible? I don't know". Overall, having to adapt to her mentor teacher's styles and lack of feedback made Carol feel frustrated and insecure throughout this process. Another major obstacle reported by Carol was managing large classes. In her words: "My classroom management skills were in the garbage, everything I knew about it was not useful when I was actually there, in the classroom". This experience was particularly difficult because she realized all she had learned was not useful for that class; she had the sensation that there was big difference between "theory and real practice". She recognized that managing the classroom was a big challenge during her practicums.

The consequences these obstacles and gratifications brought to Carol in her practicums are mainly related to the development of problem-solving strategies and her teacher roles. Managing large classes was a challenge for her. However, one of the strategies she used was adapting her teaching style to the needs and likes of her students. It is assumed that adopting this strategy helped her improve her relationship with her students, who, as she mentions, started enjoying her lessons. Carol recalled: "Students have different personalities and learning styles . . . I started asking about my students' likes before teaching them . . . I also tried to switch my methodology. What I did was to make them work on a project for the whole semester in groups". Through the project, she implemented group work and communicative activities based on students' interests as strategies to manage such a big group of students. These strategies might have helped her manage this large class, but at the

same time students enjoyed the activities, which had a rewarding impact on Carol: “When my students are willing to participate in my class or tell me they appreciate all the things we learn together, they make my day and make me feel I’m doing a good job. That feeling is the best thing a teacher can have”. She then started adopting a more professional role assuming a more teacher-like attitude in the classroom, as she stated: “I have realized that now, I have not been static the whole year. I have changed . . . how I deal with certain students, how I enter the classroom, how I act and introduce myself as a teacher, my classroom procedures, my methodology, among other things”. Her role as a teacher has changed and so have some aspects of her self-image, as we describe now.

**Self-image.** This third category refers to how the student-teacher perceives herself as a pre-service language teacher. Carol reported a variety of current personal and professional strengths and weaknesses.

Carol’s strengths could be characterized as hard-working, responsible, creative, and committed to students. She perceives herself as a teacher who is involved with the learning process of her students (committed), someone who motivates her students to learn the language (creative) and is aware of their likes and needs (responsible). She is always willing to try different EFL teaching methods, prepare varied didactic materials, and adopt different classroom management approaches to foster students’ learning process (hard-working). Her self-confidence considerably changed as she reports she has been gaining confidence due to her teachers’ support in the study program and her success with students in the practicums.

On the other hand, her weaknesses are related to her extreme self-demanding approach: “I think my will to be better than before, because I can be very self-demanding...but that is not only in my personal aspect; that is in every aspect of my life”. Carol seems to have a challenging attitude to improve on both her personal and professional aspects of her life. She used to be the best in her class in high school and she also has excellent academic records in her undergraduate study program.

### ***Molly’s Teacher Identity Construction***

**Learning environment.** Similar to Carol, Molly went through gratifications, obstacles, and consequences during her stay in the undergraduate study program.

One of the most significant learning experiences for Molly was the impact teachers had on her student-teacher formation from two different perspectives, the discipline (English) and pedagogy: “Regarding vocabulary or speaking skills, I wasn’t very good...but now I think I have learned those things throughout the years, about speaking mainly . . . My professors taught us those tips and they were very useful”. The fact of having English-native speaker teachers was also meaningful for Molly as she “could get used to different accents”. Having

a semi-immersion type of program (24 hours of English classes a week) with three different teachers was also a gratification for her to develop the language. On the other hand, from the pedagogical perspective, Molly stated: "My professor from university told me that I needed to believe more in myself in order to help [future] students as well. I needed more attitude". Molly realized she moved on and became more self-confident, as will be described later in the self-image category.

However, she had to deal with obstacles like attending classes with traditional instruction, working with uninvolved students and the increase of responsibilities by the end of her studies. In her first year, Molly had an elective class in which the teacher taught the contents using a traditional type of instruction; the teacher would just talk and talk about a topic, delivering information that they could easily find in the web and/or books. Another obstacle Molly reported was that she disliked working with less capable or uninterested students because she would get lower grades than usual. She mentioned that when they had to form groups in which to work, at the beginning she always had to work with these students. One of the reasons might be due to her shyness and calm personality; she did not have the chance to work with more "pro-active" students. She stated: "I don't want to be mean and it's not that I think my classmates don't deserve to be here, but it shows when there are people who have a lower level of English, and it's not only about the language, it's about the level of commitment". Finally, another obstacle she experienced throughout the study program was managing her time due to the increasing responsibilities she had.

Consequently, the development of Molly's communicative skills, mainly her speaking abilities, and her self-confidence (despite her shyness) as a teacher and as a person give evidence of how she moved on from being passive in oral interactions to finally develop her communicative skills, and from an insecure to a more self-assured student. As she stated: "I'm still very shy, but I think I can communicate well with other people, it's difficult for me to speak in public or to speak to people who I don't know".

**Practicum experiences.** From Molly's interactions in the practicums, she had gratifications, obstacles, and consequences.

In regard to gratifications, she explains some of her classes in the practicum were good since she could create and maintain favorable relationships with her students. Beginning her practicum, she noticed her students did not like using textbooks all the time, as Molly's mentor teacher did. Thus, she started using "worksheets, games, or speaking activities". Teaching was not an easy task. Students would have "a negative attitude in the beginning, but in the end, they worked a lot and, most importantly, they learned, and that was great for me". During her learning process in the practicum, she realized she had to consider students' needs, learning styles, likes, and interests, among other factors. By doing this, Molly ensured her learners would have a richer experience learning the language.

Regarding obstacles, Molly had difficult times with her mentor teacher, who was a history teacher but was about to get her EFL teaching degree. Molly mentions that the mentor teacher was always busy and would not establish a relationship with her; she would neither be present in Molly's classes nor give her feedback regarding her performance, which made her experience loneliness and insecurity in her practicum. Molly comments: "My mentor teacher was not really kind to me. I had to do it all by myself, the whole semester. She could've been more helpful. I never got feedback from her. I didn't know if I was doing well". Molly also experienced challenging situations with students. One of the most difficult aspects of the practicums for her was dealing with students' misbehavior and attitudes towards the subject. Molly reported that she "had to stop a student. He hit another boy and threw his chair. I was alone in the classroom and I had to react very quickly, it was something that I had never expected to do in a classroom". Another obstacle was trying to get her students' attention. She would be forced to shout to be heard. Parents also acted as an obstacle in Molly's practicum. One parent in particular was not satisfied with how she had assessed them in class. As she reported: "she wanted to know why he didn't get a seven, and I told her 'I'm sorry, but [your son] made some mistakes'". In terms of teaching, she also had some difficulties due to the previous teaching style her students were exposed to. In her case, students were used to being taught the grammar rules explicitly. However, she tried not to do it that way, "but the kids would ask for it, and that was difficult for me. I am more practical. I work with handouts, I let them work on their own, we play games".

The consequences of her practicum experiences were (a) increasing awareness of her students' learning process, (b) applications of specific problem-solving strategies, (c) gaining self-confidence, and (d) relevance of peer support. Molly developed a sense of satisfaction and achievement after she applied successful teaching approaches based on students' likes and dislikes. Besides, being able to solve unexpected problems with students in the classroom made her feel self-confident. She had a difficult time teaching a group of seventh graders. These students would misbehave in class and not pay attention to her lessons. Thus, Molly had to negotiate with them by using incentives such as playing a game at the end of the class or using computers in the following class if they behaved and worked properly. Although it did not work immediately, she noticed her students started to respect her more and would follow her class. By the end of the semester, students did not want her to leave.

**Self-image.** Molly's interactions with teachers in the study program and with the students in the practicum influenced her self-image and the shaping of her professional identity: "I learned to trust in myself, because my first thought was 'I can't do this', but then I realized I could. The process was not easy". Blended contextual and personal factors changed Molly's perception of herself from becoming a teacher to being a teacher.

Molly recognized that the interactions with teachers helped her move from being a shy and low confidence level student-teacher to being an expressive and self-confident student-

teacher. As she remarked, “I think that I am more confident now than when I started the program. I am shy, but now I think I have learned to deal with that problem well. Now, I trust myself, I know I can do it even though it can be difficult sometimes...It was mainly because of my professors”.

Gaining her students' trust during her practicum fostered her self-confidence as a teacher and as a person, as she stated: “I think one change I experienced in the practicums was increasing my self-confidence. I think this change was not only professional, but also personal”.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this case study was to explore how two EFL student-teachers constructed their professional identity throughout their teacher formation program. The findings revealed that three factors are intertwined in the process of identity construction: (a) self-image, (b) learning environment, and (c) practicum experience. Molly's and Carol's self-image changed through the process as a consequence of their learning environment and practicum experiences depending on the interactions in their contextual environment—namely, teachers in the study program, mentor school teachers, and students in the practicum. The dimensions (gratifications or obstacles) of these experiences and the meaning they gave to them, shaped Molly's and Carol's professional identities.

Most of the gratifications are linked to validation from teachers, supervisors, and students in the practicum (teachers' and supervisors' feedback and students' positive response to method adaptation). Obstacles are linked to unfavorable interactions in the undergraduate program, mentor teachers in the practicum, and classroom management strategies (uninvolved pre-service peers, mentors' lack of support, some students' misbehavior, and class size in practicums). These gratifications and obstacles renewed Molly's and Carol's self-image through problem solving, adaptation, and negotiation. This process concurred with the sociocultural view of teacher identity in the sense that it is complex, and teachers must negotiate and reshape their identities through social interactions and experiences (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Coldron & Smith, 1999; Johnston, 2012; Kelly, 2006; Miller, 2009; Richards, 2009).

The activity of becoming a teacher does not only involve the professional, but also the personal dimension (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Day et al., 2006; Lamote & Engels, 2010; Palmer, 1997). Accordingly, Molly's and Carol's process revealed favorable changes in their personalities: confidence, tolerance to frustration, and commitment to students. They also developed an awareness of their students' learning process and themselves as professionals, as Molly stated: “I didn't feel prepared at all, but now I think I have gone through the process

of knowing myself and knowing my students". From the professional perspective, they developed their language competence in the foreign language, teaching skills, and problem-solving strategies through their interactions within the academic environment and practicum.

Aligning with a contemporary conception of identity (Lee & Schallert, 2016) from a sociocultural perspective, we can see that both pre-service teachers' identities had meaningful and constant changes, responsive to contextual and cultural interactions. Carol, at the beginning, was insecure and did not want to become a teacher; she just wanted to develop her language competences, but their teachers' support and the learning environment gave her confidence and promptly changed her mind and she then wanted to become a teacher. For Molly, however, the learning environment and teachers' support helped her develop her oral communicative language competence despite her shyness.

Professional environments may affect teachers' identities both positively and negatively (Day et al., 2006). Considering the practicum as professional environments, Molly and Carol had some rewarding experiences. The positive feedback the supervisor gave Carol made her feel a sense of success; for Molly, the improved relation developed with the students because of her efforts to change teaching approaches gave her a sense of satisfaction and achievement. Similarly, James-Wilson (2001) states that teachers' identities formation is directly influenced by students as teachers make appropriate and effective adjustments in their practice and their beliefs to engage with students. On the other hand, Molly and Carol also experienced conflict in their practicum. They perceived lack of support (no feedback) and an apathetic attitude from their mentor teachers which caused feelings of isolation and frustration in the student-teachers. Regarding the students, Carol's class had too many students and Molly's students misbehaved at the beginning of her practicum. These findings are aligned with various research findings which concluded that novice teachers' interactions have an impact on their identity construction, mainly due to adaptation actions that make the process manifold and sometimes complicated (Bloomfield, 2010; Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999; Lamote & Engels, 2010; Zare-ee & Ghasedi, 2014) because they construct and reconstruct new discourses and knowledge in practice to solve the problems related to their profession (Johnson, 2006; Kelly, 2006; Richards, 2009; Singh & Richards, 2006).

Even though observational data in the practicums should have been collected (a limitation of the study), the findings provide some promising results for a better understanding on how EFL pre-service teachers develop their professional identity. Attention should be paid to the role of context in professional identity formation and to what counts as professional in teachers' formation (Beijaard et al., 2004). The findings suggest that the academic context and the role of mentor and supervisory teachers during the practicum merit exploration in teachers' education programs. Understanding the factors involved in the process of shaping pre-service teachers' identities will help to better prepare teachers to face their first actual teaching activities (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Both processes, learning to teach and then

actually teaching (practicum) solidified pre-service teachers' self-images. Teacher educators' guidance to give pre-service students opportunities to evaluate their conceptions of teaching and teachers would help them consciously shape their identities. On the other hand, mentor teachers in the school practicum have a prominent role in teacher formation and educational policies should include robust programs in schools with mentor teachers.

Exploring the role of supervisory teachers and mentor teachers as a contextual factor in language teacher formation, together with reflection on their first teaching practices, are topics for further research in Chile due to the relevant position the teaching of English has reached in Chile.

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