

# The Language Teacher Identity Construction: A Case Study Involving TEFL Undergraduate Students

*A Construção da Identidade do Professor: Um Estudo de Caso Envolvendo Graduandos em Letras-Inglês*

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## Abstract

Becoming a teacher is a process that underlies different aspects and purposes of social interaction, and the construction of a professional identity. Student-teachers' perception of themselves and their emotional states might differ from their own goals or even from what is expected from them. Therefore, this research attempted to investigate the development of teacher identity construction in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) students through their own perception of their professional identity. It was conducted as a case study – and the participants were undergraduate students in their last term. An open-ended questionnaire was used to collect data. Practical activities related to teaching and contact with teaching contexts and with students had a positive evaluation on the part of student-teachers regarding the construction of their identity as teachers. This research demonstrates the importance of the practice in the context of teacher training for the establishment and maturation of teacher identity.

## Keywords

Teacher Education. Teaching practice. Language teaching. Identity. Emotions.

## Resumo


Tornar-se professor é um processo que perpassa diferentes aspectos da interação social e da construção de uma identidade profissional. A percepção dos alunos-professores sobre si e seus estados emocionais podem divergir das suas metas e objetivos, bem como das expectativas impostas a eles. Desta forma, objetivou-se estudar o desenvolvimento da identidade profissional em estudantes de licenciatura em Letras – Língua Inglesa a partir de seus próprios relatos e percepções de si. A pesquisa foi conduzida como um estudo de caso cujos participantes eram alunos da graduação em estágios finais do curso. Para a coleta de dados, utilizou-se um questionário com perguntas semiabertas. Atividades práticas relacionadas ao ensino e contato com contextos de docência e com alunos tiveram avaliação positiva por parte dos alunos-professores em relação à construção de sua identidade como professores. Essa pesquisa demonstra a importância da prática, ainda em contexto de formação, para o estabelecimento e maturação iden-

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Formação de professores. Prática docente. Ensino de línguas. Identidade. Emoções.

## Introduction

Deciding on which career to follow might be a very difficult mission. When taking a Teaching Programme, enrollees are expected to develop and become teachers throughout this period. When people join the course, they are seen as students, then student-teachers and in the final period of their studies, they might be seen as teachers. But, in which moment of their teaching education do they recognise themselves as teachers? How do these students feel about becoming a teacher? What are the tensions or enjoyments that they experience during this initial stage of their (possible) career? Likewise, how do these questionings happen in the context of a Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) course?

This curiosity on teacher identity emerged in the context of observing the role of the Language Teaching Laboratory<sup>1</sup> and the involvement of student-teachers at teaching and extension projects during their undergraduate programme. Besides, identity construction of teachers has been an emerging theme of research in Teacher Education (LI; COSTA, 2018; FLORES, 2015; BEAUCHAMP; THOMAS, 2009; TSUI, 2011; FLORES; DAY, 2006; DANIELEWICZ, 2001) and Language Teacher Psychology (MERCER; KOSTOULAS, 2018; BARCELOS, 2015; ARAGÃO; CAJAZEIRA, 2017).

In this paper, the following research question is proposed: How does the TEFL students' perception of their teaching identity influence the development of their professional identity? By reflecting on this topic, we might better understand how emotional factors and activities related to the professional practice influence the teacher identity construction. Therefore, the general objective of this work is to understand the development of teacher identity in TEFL students through their own perception of their professional identity. In order to achieve this goal, we considered the following specific objectives: 1) To identify what is the initial profile of students that joined the TEFL programme; 2) To identify their learning to teach experiences; 3) To identify the affective aspects that might influence their teacher identity construction.

1 The *Laboratório de Ensino de Línguas* (LAEL) coordinates actions and projects involving language teaching and teacher education at the Faculty of Modern Foreign Languages (FALEM- UFPA). Both authors of this of this article are involved at LAEL, one as its coordinator and the other as a former student-teacher who volunteered in the extension projects held at the lab.

The data of this investigation were collected by using a questionnaire answered by students in their final semester of TEFL studies about their experiences during the programme. Assuming this is a teaching programme, these students might aim to work in the educational field, which implies that throughout the course they have gathered enough experience to see themselves as teachers.

The results of this research might be useful to identify these students' profile and perceive the development of their teacher identity and also have a notion of the role of their emotions into the construction of their teacher identity during the undergraduate programme, as well as their desire on continuing teacher education. Thus, this research might be helpful when designing a new curriculum to meet the specificities of students' background: enhancing the development of new teaching projects, offering workshops on teaching skills and teachers' emotions, or creating an extra subject about the teacher identity construction. To a wider extent, this research can provide data on language teacher education, which can be continued and expanded.

## **1 Identity as a social construction**

As part of the concept of categorisation and identification in social groups, "identity is our understanding of who we are and of who we think other people are" (DANIELEWICZ, 2001, p.10). According to Dubar (2006), identities take place as a congruent action related to generalisation and differentiation as they aim to find a common point between different elements as well as to find a point to make the uniqueness of someone or something in relation to something else or someone else. The author defines identity as the difference and a common belonging. As an example, you might recognise someone because both of you speak—or not—the same language, or have —or not— the same profession. Thus, identities are socially constructed under people's awareness about others and themselves.

However, people can perform different identities depending on the context, objective and purpose of the interaction. They are not detached from a social relation constitution (including the power relations of communities and the relational forms of the I and the selves) and they are also ways of alterity, that is, they cannot exist without the relation of the self and the other (DUBAR, 2006). "No one has only a single identity. Every person is composed of multiple, often conflicting, identities" (DANIELEWICZ, 2001, p. 10). Yet, these identities can emerge in differ-

ent shades of interest and relevance, contributing to Dinkelman's (2011, p. 309 *apud* WARREN; PARK, 2018, p. 201) conceptualisation that identities are "shaped by a broad range of sociocultural power relationships". People are not passive in their relation with other people and the world.

Artuzo (2011), Danielewicz (2001), Flores and Day (2005) describe identity as a continuous and dynamic process of (re)construction "which entails the making sense and (re)interpretation of one's own values and experiences" (FLORES; DAY, 2005, p. 220). This change of value and understanding based on new experiences and interaction with others is known as Symbolic Interactionism (CÔTÊ; LEVINE, 2002, p. 33), in which "social reality is continually created by humans through the names and meanings (i.e., symbols) they attach to things when communicating with each other (i.e., during interactions)". Hence, identity can be modified through time according to one's experience and the community one is in. This idea of identity was endorsed by Silva (2005 *apud* ARTUZO, 2011) as being culturally and socially assigned meaning.

When it comes to professional identity construction, Artuzo (2011) states it happens through the appropriation of one's personal and professional history, which is rehashed over time, with the purpose of accommodating innovations and assimilating changes in the profession. Professional identity is not a stable or fixed entity or even a product (FLORES, 2015). It is "a place of struggles and conflicts"<sup>2</sup> and "a space for building ways of being and staying in the profession"<sup>3</sup> (NÓVOA, 1992, p. 16 *apud* FLORES, 2015, p.139). That is, the social reality being modified through interactions.

A key concept in these changes, embedded in the Social Theory of Learning (STL), is that of communities of practice (CoP), that is, "a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do, and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (WENGER, 2011). Machado Junior (2014, p. 37) explains and describes learning in the STL "as the social participation of people as active members in communities of practice, within it they construct identity as a form of action and belonging", and proposes these interactions, on a personal level, are one of the most transformative ways of learning how to do something. Social learning has four fundamental principles: Identity, Knowledge, Knowing and Meaning (WENGER, 2001 *apud* MACHADO JUNIOR, 2014, p. 37). They are presented in table 1.

2 "um lugar de lutas e de conflitos". This text excerpt and the following ones on this paper were translated by the authors.

3 "um espaço de construção de maneiras de ser e de estar na profissão"

**Table 1 - The four fundamental principles of social learning**

Identity	Knowledge	Knowing	Meaning
“is a way to talk about the change that produces learning, who we are, and how to create personal stories in the context of our communities”	“is a matter of competence with respect to valued enterprises - such as singing in tune, discovering scientific facts, fixing machines, writing poetry [...]”	“is a matter of participating in the pursuit of such enterprises, that is, of active engagement in the world”	“is our ability to experience the world and our engagement with it as meaningful - is ultimately what learning is to produce”

Source: Wenger (2001 *apud* MACHADO JUNIOR, 2014).

In summary, identities can be the categorization, related to interest and relevance, of active participants in a social reality and this process is in constant motion just like the interactions that spring up in that reality, including all the incongruity that might emerge in it. Additionally, it is important to highlight that as a human condition, identities are influenced by our experiences in different space-time contexts (BORGES, 2019). Through this conception, people can create temporal comparisons of themselves and identity can be seen as “how the person understands possibilities for the future” (NORTON, 2013, p. 45).

**2 Selves: identity and development bridge**

Fields, Cops and Kleimann (2006, p. 156) state that “a sense of self develops as people recognize that others in their society, culture, and subculture have particular expectations for and values attached to their actions, desires, and identities”. Intertwining the concepts of identity and self, Strahan and Wilson (2006, p. 2) utter that “a person’s identity involves more than the thoughts, feelings and behaviors of the current self; it also includes reflections of what a person was like in the past, and hopes and fears about what a person may become in the future”. One uses a cognitive timeline to settle their self in an identity (re)construction. So, in order to help developing what people might (want to or need to) become, they create images of themselves in a specific context.

Beyond that, knowing what people hope and fear helps refining the understanding of how people think about themselves currently (MARKUS, 2006). According to Frazier and Hooker (2006, p. 43), the self also “embodies human agency and directs volitional processes and goal-directed behaviors, especially

those that are central to itself". Therefore, the self is a way in which people can build up their actions in the world and have a perception over a space-time being; it is also the mean to reflect, analyse and change their attitudes based on willing, desires, hopes, fears, plans, experiences and people's interaction with the world around them and their own perspective of it.

Hereupon, the possibility of creating time-distant selves reinforces the role of selves in identity construction and professional identity construction, as they work like an internal gear of its development. Frazier and Hooker (2006, p. 43) use the term 'possible selves', describing it as "a lens that brings into focus salient developmental purposes in adulthood". They also state possible selves as being "the generative, dynamic, and contextually sensitive personal embodiment of self-development". In addition, Markus (2006) asserts that the possible selves' conception is powerful and can shape educational, career and health outcomes. According to the author, possible selves are used in the ongoing constitution of experience, they do not occur as frames after experience.

The reflection on the aspect of space-time existence is what incites the creation of an image for future possibilities of current self-image. In Dörnyei's (2005) studies on motivation, he discusses the concept of self-representations as stated by Markus and Ruvolo (1989), which describes a self-system mediating and controlling ongoing behaviour and other mechanisms in order to link self and action. He states that dynamic representations of the self-system integrate motivation and action. Thus, Dörnyei (2005, p. 98) alleges that "'possible selves' offer the most powerful [...] versatile, motivational self-mechanism, representing the individuals' ideas of what they *might* become, what they *would like* to become, and what they are *afraid of* becoming". Dörnyei (2005, p. 100) compares possible selves to Wenger's (1999) proposition of imagination, in which he refers it to "a process of expanding our self by transcending our time and space and creating new images of the world and ourselves. Imagination in this sense is looking at an apple seed and seeing a tree".

However, when it comes to the imagery that are previous to the current self-image, Ross and Wilson (2000 *apud* WILSON; ROSS, 2001) state that psychological factors lead people to retrospectively revise their evaluation of the past selves upward and downward in order to evaluate their past self in a manner that makes them feel good about themselves in the present. They suggest that people can maintain their typically positive views of themselves by criticising or enhancing their former selves. They named it the Temporal Self-Appraisal theory (TSA), which is based on "the psychological experience of temporal distance,

rather than on the actual passage of time” (WILSON; ROSS, 2001, p. 573). The TSA theory is about how much an experience has had an impact on a person and how she or he remembers it rather than how recent or distant a past experience has happened in a person’s life.

Strahan and Wilson (2006), in TSA theory research, utter three main types of selves: the former or past-self, the current or present-self, and the future possible-self (the latter can be divided into an ideal or hoped-for-self, and a feared-for possible self). The past-selves can be defined as “an interconnect chain of different individuals who vary in closeness to the current self” (WILSON; ROSS, 2001, 2000, p. 573). The current or present-self is how someone can see himself or herself in the present time. The future possible selves are the images and desires of what someone might want -or not- to be, to look-alike or to have. Also, balancing hoped-for selves and feared possible selves (MARKUS; RUVOLO, 1989 *apud* DÖRNYEI, 2005) is more effective in engaging motivation than any one of them in isolation.

This temporal self-appraisal can lead people to be more optimistic or pessimistic in their perception and their personal motivation (being what they want). While future possible selves can influence someone’s present identity, past selves have a further extent as they can influence both the present identity and the future identity. In general, possible selves are means to scaffold changes in the (re) construction of identities.

### **3 Affective aspects and the language teacher identity construction**

Winograd (2003 *apud* BARCELOS, 2015) says affections are what validate and provide evidence for beliefs and guide our attention towards information that is relevant to our goals. It is part of a professional career development and construction in the chosen profession. Thus, identities and selves are constituted by emotional processes<sup>4</sup>. The experiences one might live throughout the process of identity construction and self-appraisal are actively underlined by affection. According to Zembylas (2003, p. 222):

People organize their worlds partly in terms of the emotions experienced in events, and show enormous variability in their propensity to experience specific emotions. The same emotion may be associated with different events, and different emotions may be associated with the same event in different situations. Thus, not only is emotion central to the construction of identity, but our understanding of its role is complicated by the multiplicity of emotions likely to be experienced in any one event, and by the complex nature of the relationship between emotion and other



aspects of one's identity.

According to Aragão (2008), emotions are always present in our experiences, influencing and modulating the flow of our actions. They are active, interactive and processual; they are hierarchically, discursively and culturally constructed (BARCELOS, 2015). They are defined by So (2005 *apud* BARCELOS, 2015, p. 308) as “the psychological outcome of dynamic interactions between different layers of internal and external systems – physiological, cognitive, behavioural and social” and “constantly generated, unfolded, and changed through multiple recursive effects at any one moment”. Emotions are, in fact, “central to everyday interactions and motivate behaviour, shape agency, contribute to self-control and social control” (FIELDS; COPPS; KLEIMANN, 2006, p. 155).

In teacher education, emotions “find expressions in a series of multiple features, and they encounter other emotions and expressions that profoundly influence most aspects of a teacher's professional life and growth” (ZEMBYLAS, 2003, p. 223). Artuzo (2011, p. 19) asseverates that teacher identity “is constituted in a procedural and relational way, which undergoes significant transformations in view of the constant changes that are presented in the teaching-learning context”<sup>5</sup>.

Teaching involves a set of requirements and attitudes towards its practice. It is not only “passing down” knowledge and know-how; there is a commitment to someone who is in the purpose and process of learning. There is management going on before, during and afterwards the classroom. There is constantly emergence of emotional labour. Besides, mental connections of one's own experience through their theoretical and practical background happen in the immediate moment of teaching. Danielewicz (2001, p. 10) says that teaching is a complex and delicate act, and describes and synthesises what is to be a teacher and the demands involved in it:

It demands that teachers analyze the situation, consider the variables of students, texts, knowledge, abilities, and goals to formulate an approach to teaching, and then to carry it out — every day, minute to minute, within the ever-shifting context of the classroom. It requires having empathy for students, a knowledge of one's field, a sense of how learning occurs, the ability to generate a practice out of an idea, and the power to evaluate instantaneously whether it's going well or needs adjusting.

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5 “se constitui de forma processual e relacional, passa por transformações significativas frente às constantes mudanças que se apresentam no contexto de ensino-aprendizagem”.



However, language teachers and student-teachers experience the language learning either by the lens of their own learning process or by the lens of their future students. While learning to teach a language, one also has to deal with learning how to behave and to construct a way of incorporating this new information and change in one's former identity. To better understand the linkage of language, identity and emotions, Marion Williams (1994, *apud* Dörnyei, 2005, p. 68) asserts:

Language, after all, belongs to a person's whole social being: it is part of one's identity, and is used to convey this identity to other people. The learning of a foreign language involves far more than simply learning skills, or a system of rules, or a grammar; it involves an alteration in self-image, the adoption of new social and cultural behaviors and ways of being, and therefore has a significant impact on the social nature of the learner.

As the teaching environment permeates many other aspects of society and happens in a wide range of power relationships, it is imbued with a society's point of view on what is considered appropriate and what is not. Even what is being taught or how it should be taught is part of a real complex system that might be apart from teachers to decide on. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) draw attention to the factual dilemma that teachers cannot escape from identities imposed on them. In their studies about teacher's professional identity research, Beijaard, Meijer, Verloop (2004, p. 108) found out in Tickle (2000) that:

professional identity refers not only to the influence of the conceptions and expectations of other people, including broadly accepted images in society about what a teacher should know and do, but also to what teachers themselves find important in their professional work and lives based on both their experiences in practice and their personal backgrounds.

In TEFL, for example, people usually see the teacher as someone who is fluent and a grammar and Anglophone culture expert. However, those expectations might not be true (at least in a moment of one's career path), or teachers might not identify themselves with these characteristics nor feel what people (or themselves) expect them to feel. However, teachers' identity emerges within this social constitution and, according to Zembylas (2003, p. 230), "teaching may become a main source of teachers' self-esteem and fulfilment as well as of their vulnerability".

The basic aspects of identity construction, selves, emotions and acting in society are all interconnected. King and Ng (2018, p. 144) present emotions as

personally enacted ways of being that are socially constructed and “emerge from conscious and/or unconscious judgments regarding perceived successes at attaining goals or maintaining standards or beliefs during transactions as part of social-historical contexts”. In this sense, “teachers’ knowledge and beliefs are constructed through and by the normative ways of thinking, talking, and acting that have been historically and culturally embedded in the communities of practice in which they participate” (JOHNSON, 2009, p. 17). The author also asserts that teacher’s work is guided through their values and principles, personal and professional decisions, experiences, and emotional states. These aspects influence the teachers’ processes of self-awareness, reflection, and actions.

#### **4 Methodological Procedures**

In this paper the construction of teacher identity was investigated through a qualitative research, grounded in the methodological format of case study. According to Pronadov and Freitas (2013), in qualitative research the data collected are descriptive, portraying as many elements as possible in the studied reality, inductively. The process and its meaning are the foci of this approach. Referring to case study approach, Ludke and André (2013) state that it seeks to portray reality in a complete and profound way, emphasizing the natural complexity of situations and highlighting the interrelationship between its components. These definitions are in accordance to this research purpose.

The research took place in an English as Foreign Language Teaching Education Programme at the Federal University of Pará (UFPA). The instrument used in the survey was an online questionnaire containing an informed consent term, and its questions were related to teacher identity construction. The survey was conducted from June 2019 to August 2019. The participants were students in the last term of this Teaching programme. Therefore, they had taken and experienced all or almost all the subjects of the syllabus, including theoretical and practical subjects. An online questionnaire about their previous experiences, their experiences during the TEFL programme and their plans for the future was sent to students of two groups, the morning and the evening shift, which had about 20 students each. A total of 9 undergraduate students (7 women and 2 men) answered the questionnaires. Only one participant studied during the evening shift.

The questions – 8 in total – were written in English, though they could be answered in either English or Portuguese. Students were free to choose which language they felt more comfortable to tell their experiences. The authors of this

work translated the answers into Portuguese.

Therefore, as the content of the answers is interconnected and portrays experiences of the interviewees during their TEFL programme, the responses obtained were analysed holistically at first, seeking to observe the existence of patterns and coherence between the responses and the related themes.

During data analysis, the relation between questions and answers themselves was not the main focus of the analysis. Instead they were used to guide, organise and separate the information obtained into comparable units of categorization for thematic analysis, as proposed by content analysis (BARDIN, 2002).

## **5 Data Presentation and Analysis**

As the aim of this investigation is to understand the development of teacher identity construction in TEFL students through their own perception of their professional identity, in this section some excerpts of the data generated in this research will be discussed according to the three following categories: the profile of the participants; the role of practice in identity construction; and the affective aspects in teacher identity construction.

### *5.1 The profile of the participants*

One of this research's specific objectives is to identify participants' profile, taking into account student's objectives in joining the course and their previous learning to teach or teaching experiences. It was found that 5 of the 9 interviewees mentioned having as initial objective when choosing the TEFL Course to get a certification or qualification as an English teacher, as it can be seen in the following quotations:

[S1] "Learn English to be able to teach and then have opportunities to get a better job".<sup>6</sup>

[S2] "[I want to] get an official certification to teach English".

[S4] "To get a certification to teach in schools".

Among these 5 interviewees, 3 reported that they had already had experiences teaching English language before initiating the course, either in formal context, such as language schools, or informal ones, such as giving classes to schoolmates, family, or tutoring children. This demonstrates that usually, in order

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<sup>6</sup> The English excerpts were quoted in the original form, without revision.

to be fully recognised as teachers in their CoP, as indicated by Wenger's Social Theory of Learning, they needed to obtain a certification for their practice – that is, choosing the English language undergraduate programme.

The other students, 4 out of 9, chose the programme with the main objective of learning or improving their English language skills and competences. Their language learning motivations were related to their interest in Anglophone literature, travelling and other professional opportunities. Even though this group of students' decision was primarily not to join the teacher career, it was also part of their identity construction, since they have chosen the course considering their personal interests, desires and fears. They were seeking possibilities for their future and were willing to join the English speaking CoP. This is described by Norton (2013) as part of what identity means in a context of temporal comparisons, linking their actual knowledge when entering the course to the positive images of their future possible selves when graduating, even if these images are not directly related to an image of being a teacher.

When asking the participants if they identified themselves as pre-service teachers, other two categories emerged: in-service and not relating (yet) to teacher identity. The positive perceptions of informants, 6 out of 9, showed mainly when reporting their teaching experiences during the programme, which includes: self-confidence improvement; gaining ability to teach; feeling more qualified throughout the semesters, or after participating in a teaching project; feeling satisfied about choosing this profession as well as having support from friends and family.

Moreover, aside from joining a master's programme, a typically positive future plan to improve their teaching skills was also mentioned. As it can be seen in the following excerpts:

[S2] "There was a moment I didn't want to become a teacher anymore, but recently I started having interest again after participating in teaching projects".

[S4] "I also felt more qualified after each semester".

[S6] "After all, I started loving to teach English, Today I like it better and I want to be an English teacher as well".

[S7] "After some years in the undergraduation I could understand more about it and start to feel a little passionate about the profession".

However, not relating yet to teacher identity can be due to a negative and feared-for image of themselves as teachers, or even a lack of commitment join-

ing the community of practice as stated by the TSA theory (STRAHAN; WILSON, 2006). Negative affective reports are linked to moments of insecurity about teaching other people, having to have the approval of students to feel like a teacher, not having enough self-confidence, and lacking knowledge about the English language.

[S1] “No, I don’t [see myself as a teacher], because I don’t feel prepared to act in different learning contexts in the classroom. I see that students have some difficulty, but I don’t know what to do to overcome it. [...] I’m not prepared to teach, I’d need to practice more the language to be able to answer my students’ questions and help them learning, as I don’t master the language it reflects in other people learning [process]”.

[S2] “No, I don’t [see myself as a teacher], I still need to feel safe. Unfortunately, I’m anxious”.

In general, recognizing oneself as a teacher was closely linked to practical experiences, with fluency in the language being one of the main weakening factors within this practice. In the next subsection, the context of teaching practice will be expanded.

## 5.2 The role of practice in identity construction

One of the founding axes of the undergraduate programme in which the participants are enrolled is the teaching practice. It is expected that students can develop skills and abilities for a reflective teaching-learning practice, with an emphasis on observation procedures and reflection to act effectively in different situations of their professional routine. The other axes are the use of the language and reflection on the language. The syllabus is grounded on these three fundamentals.

The programme consists of 3234 hours of coursework and internship so one can earn the teaching degree<sup>7</sup>, and approximately 15% of these hours are related to extracurricular activities, divided into complementary and extension<sup>8</sup> activities. Students must complete these hours out of their own initiative, participating in projects, lectures, conferences, and others. It is also possible that they propose the creation of these activities or projects through the learning or the teaching laboratories, – *Base de Apoio à Aprendizagem Autônoma (BA<sup>3</sup>)* and

7 Grau de licenciado em Letras - Língua Inglesa pela Universidade Federal do Pará.

8 “Extension activities are configured as educational, cultural and scientific processes that enable the transforming relationship between the University and society and constitute interactive actions with the community outside the academy, aiming to contribute to their social, cultural, scientific, technological and material development” (RESOLUÇÃO N. 4399, UFPA, 2013). *Propaz* and *Cursos Livres* are examples of extension activities in this work.

*Laboratório de Ensino de Línguas (LAEL)* – that are part of the Faculty of Modern Foreign Languages.

Although being described in the pedagogical project of the programme (FALEM, 2009) that there must be an articulation between practice and theory, the contact with real actors of the teaching practice community is limited to a few subjects of the course and they usually occur during the final half of the course. Therefore, part of the contact with these real actors from the teaching practice communities is reported through participation in teaching projects. The practice emerged in this research as one of the important key points to a teacher identity construction.

The 4 interviewees who at first did not have as their main focus to become a teacher, often mentioned the desire of becoming a teacher or even considered themselves as teachers after participating in teaching experiences, whether curricular activities – methodology classes and supervised internship –, or extracurricular activities – such as extension projects and teaching activities outside the university. It was possibly through their practice experiences that their teacher identity emerged, since they were immersed in a CoP, understanding and acquiring the four fundamental principles of social learning: identity, knowledge, knowing and meaning (WENGER, 2001 *apud* MACHADO JUNIOR, 2014). From this vantage point, current-self and future-self-images of being a teacher started having relevance in their professional development, as shown in these excerpts:

[S6] “Then, I experienced all the theories I have studied in class [when participating teaching experiences during the course], and that’s how I discovered myself as a teacher. [...] I already consider myself as a teacher”.

[S8] “I was able to see that what we learn during the course and the classroom reality are very different. I had enough experience to consider myself as a teacher. I am working as a teacher already”.

In an overall view of all the interviewees, when asked about influential aspects that contribute to modifying the meaning of what it is to be a teacher, considering their initial perspective before joining the course, the participants came up with three main contributors: 1) Teaching skills, 2) Characteristics considered important for a teacher to be or to have, 3) Characteristics related to students and their respective learning processes and well-being. These aspects suggest that student-teachers were exploring the four fundamentals of CoP, as teaching activity had an impact on the students’ critical view about what is necessary to know and to be in the profession. It also meets Nóvoa’s (1992 *apud* FLORES, 2015) assertion about the professional identity as being a place of struggles and con-

flicts pertaining to accommodate innovations and to assimilate changes into the (perception of the) profession, as it can be seen bellow:

[S6] “Then I was a volunteer English teacher at *Propaz*, which was veery rewarding and have taught a lot. After that, I got into *Cursos Livres*, and without questions, it helped me a lot recognising myself as a teacher and what my teaching style was (methodology, didactics, etc)”.

[S7] “I could also see what works best for some people and learn how to handle different situations inside a classroom, all under the spectrum of a diverse set of students”.

[S8] “I dare to say that the experience I had with *Cursos Livres* was even more helpful than what I learned in the disciplines of the course”.

[S9] “I learned a lot with all those experiences. I learned about class management. I could improved my self confidence and my teaching abilities a lot. But I think the most important thing is that I learned to respect students learning time”.

The data presented showed how positive it was for their teacher identity construction to have had experiences in teaching projects and teaching-activities in the course’s syllabus. This is in accordance to Artuzo’s (2011) statement about the construction of professional identities, which has to be rearranged over time to accommodate innovations and assimilate changes in the profession. The relationship between student-teachers and real participants in the CoP was one of the main points for the emergence of a change in perspective on the teaching theory learned in the classroom and in the “real world”. In this process, the feelings of students-teachers about their choices for the course, about their interpersonal relationships and about their own professional future also played an important role in the construction of their identity as teachers.

These mentioned aspects can be seen in table 2 as a synthesis of students’ answer.



**Table 2 - Influential aspects that contribute to modifying the meaning of what is being a teacher**

Teaching skills	Teacher's characteristics	Student's related
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Learning about classroom management and preparation of content.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Being very attentive to students' learning needs;</li> <li>- Respecting student's time to learn;</li> <li>- Having a sense of responsibility and evaluation;</li> <li>- Knowing different methods and approaches of teaching.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Recognise each student is unique and has different learning processes;</li> <li>- The importance of helping students acknowledge the reason why it is important for them to learn another language.</li> </ul>

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on students' answers to the questionnaire.

### 5.3 Affective aspects in teacher identity construction

When analysing participants' descriptions of emotional states, both positive and negative mentions happened in the same event, the teaching act. Zembylas (2003) explains that a single event can cause different emotions and sensations and these are vital to identity construction. Besides, teaching is a complex act that involves a set of requirements and attitudes towards its practice. The emotional states mentioned were: enjoyment for giving classes; being recognised or feeling fulfilled about the professional choice; lack of security in teaching and in the language fluency; anxiety and problems with self-confidence.

It was noticed that fluency and language knowledge is also very important for believing and feeling able to be a teacher. This might be related to broadly accepted images in society of what a teacher should know and do (TICKLE, 2000 *apud* BEIJAARD; MEIJER; VERLOOP, 2004), including what teachers themselves think about it. These images include mastering all the language structures and features; being the main language resource or speaking like native speaker might still be strong among teachers, student-teachers and students. Two participants instancing their relation with their language learning process and their perception of language teacher identity have different points of view: one of them shows that the language barrier causes an uneasiness to become a teacher, and

the other one overcomes this feeling, even though it still exists:

[S1] “My goals were to teach English, because I think people are happy and feel amazing when they speak English, and my other goal was to learn English in order to be able to teach [...] Learning English is not easy, especially if we cannot practice with natives. Thus, I don’t feel safe to teach other people, so I don’t think I will teach. [...] it is necessary to master the language, and I don’t think I do, I still have many doubts and pronunciation difficulties [...] the students end up realizing that I have difficulties”.

[S6] “I already consider myself an English teacher, which doesn’t mean that I already know everything”.

Regarding the perception of being recognised as teachers, interviewees are broadly recognised by their families, friends, colleagues, teachers and students. However, their students can sometimes undermine their self-recognition, since a participant cited that one of her students had “a look of suspicion” into her teaching practice. Identity is attached to the social relation constitution, which includes the power relations and these are not reduced to relations of domination. It also includes the relational forms of the I and the selves (DUBAR, 2006). Nevertheless, a participant not only describes observance of others but of herself as well:

[S7] “[...] to be the subject of study and observation from both a supervisor teacher and/or students and/or even yourself is something stressful, humiliating and uncomfortable in general. I am aware that it’s something necessary to finish the syllabus of the major, but it’s just too uncomfortable to be under these circumstances”.

Having to deal with and visualising her actions and decision is part of Johnson’s (2009, p. 17) assertion that “teachers’ knowledge and beliefs are constructed through and by the normative ways of thinking, talking, and acting that have been historically and culturally embedded in the communities of practice in which they participate”.

Facing personal problems and/or conflicts is not insoluble to (re)construct teacher identity as it can be “a place of struggles and conflicts” (NÓVOA, 1992 *apud* FLORES, 2015). To this extent, what student-teachers feel might not be in accordance with what the CoP and others see and feel (at least in a period of time), including the teachers’ own perspective. An answer about not being recognised as a teacher mentions “they (people around her) know I’m not teaching yet”. However, in other responses this participant often mentions the need to feel safe, having anxiety and being pessimistic about herself as a teacher. Another

participant states that despite teaching at a language school, she has problems with self-confidence and it has affected her in recognising herself as a teacher:

[S8] "I confess that this last semester I have some problems with my self-confidence and it has affected me. Though my students and my boss like the way I have taught".

A minimum sense of teacher identity was developed throughout the teaching course, as none of the interviewees denied or ruled out the possibility of working as teachers. As for continuing in the profession, three levels of response in relation to the future as an English teacher emerged: 1) The ones who feel fulfilled with the acquisition of the diploma and do not intend to change their careers. 2) The ones who, besides wanting to continue in the teacher career, also intend to expand or specify their areas of expertise, such as becoming a teacher of Portuguese as a foreign language, graduating in English literature and including digital technologies in their teaching practice. 3) Those who, despite not being sure about pursuing a teaching career, do not rule out the possibility of practicing the profession, remarking as an obstacle the level of skill in English or the lack of confidence in themselves.

These results imply that despite existing any aspect that can weaken the self-recognition of the teacher identity, the participants were able to recognise themselves as apt to be in the teaching community of practice as they do not deny possibilities for the future as being a teacher. It was also observed that emotions and affection are very important for self-confidence development in teacher identity construction, as it can be seen that "teaching may become a main source of teachers' self-esteem and fulfilment as well as of their vulnerability" (ZEMBYLAS, 2003, p. 230).

## **Final Considerations**

TEFL students' perception of their own professional identity construction permeates different aspects of the teacher development. Answering to the research question "How the TEFL students' perception of their teacher identity influence the development of their professional identity?", the participants acknowledged both their practical experiences as teachers and as students as one the main factors that contributed to their teacher identity construction. They also acknowledged the influence others might have into the process, which either stimulates or discourages their self-recognition of being seen as a teacher.

In this context, it was important to highlight the role of emotional processes, as they regulate students' internal and external demands with their expectations and seem to work as a mediators for self-confidence. Then, becoming a teacher means dealing with the ups and downs of the process, and with the interactions arising from each decision a teacher to-be has to deal with.

The research revealed the role of practice in teacher's identity construction: practical teaching-related activities during the teaching education programme can promote better results in the development of self-confidence by the student-teachers and then contribute to the development and recognition of their teacher identity. The enrolment in teaching extension projects also contributed to the teacher identity construction. The reports refer to these projects as a propellant or catalyst to teaching identity construction, so it might be interesting if these kinds of teaching practices could be more stimulated or requested earlier during the teaching undergraduate programmes. Even if students do not work as teachers but as teacher assistants or monitors, having constant contact with real teaching scenarios might enrich the reflections and actions that are necessary to the teacher identity construction. Thereby, for such complex professional environment, the Social Theory of Learning was appropriate, since dealing with real actors of the teaching context can provide repertoire to manage real experiences, including leading with emotional labour.

Concerning some limitations of this work and notes for future research, extending the number of participants, and collecting data in different moments and through different instruments along the undergraduate programme could contribute to expanding our understanding of language teacher identity construction, including a wider view on the role of emotions in this process. Despite the limitations, it was possible to match the participants' perceptions of their teacher's identity and it is hoped that this work may contribute to promote a more frequent reflection on the construction of the professional identity of the language teacher during the TEFL programme.

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