



ENGLISH TEACHER IDENTITY: EXPERIENCES INTO THE SUPERVISED INTERNSHIP¹

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ABSTRACT: This article presents perceptions about the concepts of teacher identity and reflections on how the supervised internship is one of the main elements for this identity construction. To this end, it relies on the theoretical framework composed by Hall (2006) with regard to understanding the construction of identity in a globalized context. It also draws on the analyses of authors such as Flores (2015), Gaignoux (2020), Reis, Van Veen and Gimenez (2011) on the fundamental elements for the construction of teacher identity. Likewise, discussions on supervised internships will be guided by Pimenta and Lima (2011). Next, based on the studies of the aforementioned authors, I share personal accounts of my experiences and reflections on how the internship played an important role in my construction and reconstruction as an English teacher. Firstly, I discuss concepts related to the construction of teacher identity and its main constituent elements, as well as the importance of the internship and its relevance to the training of future teachers. Finally, I present my accounts of my internship experiences and how they have contributed to my development as a teacher. This is a qualitative study based on bibliography and documents. Considering all the concepts and discussions covered in this work, we concluded that the supervised internship is one of the main elements in the formation, construction and reconstruction of the teacher's identity.

Keywords: English Teacher Identity. Supervised Internship. Teachers' experiences.

RESUMO: Este artigo apresenta percepções acerca dos conceitos de identidade docente e reflexões sobre como o estágio supervisionado constitui um dos principais elementos para essa construção de identidade. Para tanto, conta com o referencial teórico composto por Hall (2006)

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no que tange à compreensão de construção de identidade em um contexto globalizado. O trabalho também recorre às análises de autores como Flores (2015), Gaignoux (2023), Reis, Van Veen e Gimenez (2011) sobre os elementos fundamentais para a construção da identidade docente. Do mesmo modo, as discussões sobre estágio supervisionado serão norteadas por Pimenta e Lima (2011). Em seguida, com base nos estudos dos autores mencionados, compartilho relatos pessoais sobre minhas experiências e reflexões de como o estágio teve um papel importante para minha construção e reconstrução como educadora. Desta forma, inicialmente, são discutidos conceitos relacionados à construção de identidade docente e seus principais elementos constitutivos, bem como a importância do estágio e sua relevância para a formação dos futuros professores. Por fim, são apresentados meus relatos de experiência nos estágios e de que forma estes contribuíram para a minha construção como docente. Esta é uma pesquisa qualitativa com base bibliográfica e documental. Considerando todos os conceitos e discussões abordadas no presente trabalho, conclui-se que o estágio supervisionado é um dos principais elementos para a formação, construção e reconstrução da identidade docente.

Palavras-chave: Identidade de professor de inglês. Estágio supervisionado. Experiências de professores.

INTRODUÇÃO

It is common knowledge that an individual's identity is permeated by multiple elements that weave it throughout their life journey, providing support for its construction and reconstruction in an infinite cycle, making it ever-changing. Teacher identity is no different. It is intertwined with both personal and professional life and bears the marks of a long process, especially when it comes to future teachers in training. In this sense, during my process of building my teaching identity, what caught my attention most were the reflections I had during my supervised internship, which were fundamental to recognize myself as a teacher.

A number of questions emerged from these reflections, such as: how did the supervised internship impact on the construction of my teaching identity? When were these reflections made? In addition to these questions, it was possible to observe that despite knowing and studying countless theories and studies on teaching and learning English during my undergraduate studies, when we take on the practice, the obstacles encountered can be devastating, making us question our ability to teach, especially when it comes to teaching a

non-native language, because emotions such as insecurity, fear and doubts about their own performance as a professional end up negatively disrupting the lives of beginning teachers. Permeated by doubts and uncertainties, this teacher, who is in the process of training and construction, may find it difficult to relate theory to classroom practice.

This research has a qualitative approach with an exploratory objective based on a bibliographical review that seeks to understand definitions of the concept of teacher identity. In order to better understand the construction of identity, the concept of identity addressed by Hall (2006) was mentioned, which analyzes the identity arising from the social context of globalization, followed by multiple fragmented identities in which at some point it will be part of the individual's life, even if only momentarily. One of the main authors that will be used as a theoretical basis for my experience reports are Farias et al (2011) who suggests the construction of teacher identity based on three elements, Aragão and Cajazeira (2017) who suggest emotions as a strong element for the construction and reconstruction of teachers and Gaignoux (2023) who works on this construction from a complex adaptive system, thinking of the different interactions that contribute to this development taking into accounts the role of beliefs as a fundamental element for this construction.

In order to answer questions about the subject as well as working with and presenting the concepts of identity from the point of view of the above authors, this work consists of an experience report in which I intend to analyze my own trajectory as a future teacher, drawing parallels with my personal life, emotions, beliefs and training as a basis for understanding how my teaching construction took place.

The purpose of this work is also to carry out a study with the aim of understanding the influence and importance of the supervised internship for the construction of teaching identity, bearing in mind that it is during the internship that future teachers put into practice their pedagogical tools and face their first challenges in the classroom, where they try to apply their theoretical knowledge in a real context, given that "the internship is the locus where teaching identity is generated, constructed and referred to" (Pimenta e Lima, 2008 p. 62).

The study is extremely important for beginner teachers and especially for academics who are in the process of training, looking at the importance of critical reflections during the supervised internship in order to use this time to greater advantage and as a great tool for their professional development.

To sum up, in the following sections I will discuss identity and its concepts. Then, I will try to find interconnections between teacher identity and supervised internship. Next, I will seek

to understand how the internship becomes one of the main tools for the construction and reconstruction of an individual's personal and professional identity.

1 IDENTITY AND ITS CONCEPTS

Teacher identity is a concept that includes various characteristics, beliefs, values and precepts that represent the teaching professional, which involves not only academic training, but also practical experiences in the classroom, relationships with students, views on education, the ability to create and adapt, ethical direction, initial training, continuing training, personal life experiences and other factors (Iza *et al* 2014, Farias *et al* 2011). This identity is constantly changing and evolving, being negotiated over the years individually and socially (Gagnoux, 2020). Firstly, we will look at the concept of identity according to the studies of Hall (2006), and then we will look at the concept of teacher identity from the perspectives of Flores (2015), Reis, Van Veen and Gimenez (2011) and, finally, Gagnoux (2023), as well as other authors who contribute to the theoretical enrichment of this work.

From Hall's perspective (2006), the concept of identity appears as a historical construction and not a biological one, being shaped, transformed and formed from the cultural system in which the individual is inserted. Hall (2006) discusses identity in a post-modern context, in which old identities are in decline due to the emergence of new identities, making the modern individual fragmented (Hall, 2006). This notion brought up by the author is linked to the changes of late modernity, directly linked to globalization, the media, the internet, etc. As a result, the new media allow complete immersion at the click of a mouse, bringing with them a flood of new ways of life, new concepts, new customs, new thoughts, causing the individual to absorb infinities of multiple identities. Hall (2006) comments on the very concept of identity being too complex, and in the post-modern perspective, this identity is collapsing:

"[...] the more life becomes mediated by the global marketplace of styles, places, and images, by international travel, media images, and globally interconnected communication systems, the more identities become detached - dislodged - from specific times, places, histories, and traditions and seem to 'float freely'. We are confronted by a range of different identities (each of which appeals to us, or rather appeals to different parts of us) from which it seems possible to make a choice." (Hall, 2006, P. 75)

Reflecting on Hall's quote, we can understand how post-modern life has imposed an overlapping of multiple identities, whether they are part of the culture of a place, or belonging to beliefs, religion, knowledge and so on, all of which will make sense at some point in the individual's life, be it in a prolonged or fleeting way. According to Hall (2006), overlapping

identities lead individuals to identify with each one of them, even if only momentarily, which, in the author's view, makes identity something decentralized and constantly changing, and therefore in line with social transformations. If we think in this direction, then identity is far from being something homogenous, unified and stable, as it is constantly shifting.

Farias *et al* (2011) state that identity is not only linked to the social or professional construction of the individual, but also to the humanization of man. The work of a teacher requires specialized knowledge and expertise, formed by various relationships developed throughout the educator's life, which continues to be forged on a daily basis. It is possible to make a small connection between Hall's concept of identity and the research by Iza *et al.* (2014), where identity is understood as a process of social construction of a historically situated subject. According to Izar *et al* (2014), teacher identity is constructed on the basis of social relations, traditions and the historical flow of contradictions. In other words, it is part of a long process that involves the understanding and awareness of the teacher in training.

When the term Teacher Identity is mentioned, numerous concepts are thought up to define it. Flores (2015) talks about the importance of training as an essential element in the construction of the teacher's identity, as well as being strongly influenced by social and personal conceptions and expectations, which often conflict with the idea of the role of the "good teacher". According to the author, teacher identity is surrounded by countless elements, such as personal experiences, beliefs, pedagogical practices, initial and continuing training, contexts in which they work, among others, which combine to guide and shape the way in which the teaching professional sees themselves, how they find themselves in their role as an educator.

Reis, Van Veen and Gimenez (2011) talk a little more about the identity of teachers, specifically language teachers, which is also constantly being altered due to the demands made by the market, society and institutions. It is extremely difficult for teachers to have decision-making power in the classroom, being held hostage to the rules imposed on them, causing these professionals to have an identity crisis, resulting in insecurity when it comes to teaching, anxiety and fear. In addition to concerns about teaching practices, there is also "[...] the idealization that the teacher himself has of having the fluency of the native speaker [...]" (Reis, Van Veen; Gimenez, 2011, p. 218). The authors define this identity as something mutable, which depends on the moment, place and situation in which the teacher is inserted, requiring constant adaptations on the part of the professional, in which it is essential to know in what situations and at what times he or she should give an opinion and exercise what he or she believes to be the right decision to make in a given condition.

According to Gagnoux (2023), teacher identity emerges as a complex adaptive system, influenced by the dialog between student and teacher identity. This adaptive system is the combination of numerous interconnected elements that adapt, change and evolve as a result of internal or external factors linked to the environment in which the individual is inserted. And when we think of teacher identity, this complex adaptive system refers to the different interactions that influence teacher education. In the case of English teachers, there is the challenge of forming two identities that are not opposed, but complementary, in this case, language learner and teacher (Gagnoux, 2023). The interaction between these two identities generates a conflict in the education of the future teachers, which leads these systems to self-organize themselves in order to deal with these different aspects.

Among all the speeches quoted above, we can see that there are positions in common between the discourses on teacher identity, all of which treat it as something that is constantly changing, being structured and shaped day by day through social, cultural, personal, professional, academic, historical and political contexts, with several variables that are combined with each other for a final, or partially final, result and these multiple experiences of the teacher - personal, social and professional - make up an interweaving of meanings. In The next section, I will discuss more about it.

2 TEACHER IDENTITY AND THE INTERNSHIP

Teacher identity is a multidimensional concept that encompasses numerous elements of the teacher's training, construction, experiences and pedagogical practices (Gagnoux, 2020). This identity is under constant construction, permeated by cultural aspects, beliefs, educational policies, the affective relationship with the profession and other factors that are linked throughout the teacher's career. During their undergraduate studies, future teachers have access to theoretical pedagogical knowledge and the possibility of applying it in practice during supervised internships, in which their perceptions of becoming a teacher are broadened in a way that enables critical thinking.

Farias *et al.* (2011) mention three elements that make up teacher identity - life history, training and pedagogical practice - which are linked to the socialization process in which the teacher learns to become a teacher. These elements are linked to the individual's personal and professional spaces, the first element is their life story, which is strongly linked to the individual's first socialization process, the family, for example, from which may come part of

the principles, cultural traits such as customs, beliefs, values and practices, based on which the person structures their behavior, way of life and self-image. (Farias *et al.* 2011).

Although this life trajectory is unique to each individual, it exposes fragments of approximation. In addition to family influences, we can highlight the school trajectory, a former teacher who made a mark in some way, either positively or negatively and created the desire to follow the teaching profession, or this influence can be a dream of becoming a teacher from an early age, which takes into account affective aspects, emotions constitute an essential element of the work and identity of teachers (Flores, 2015).

The second element that makes up the teacher identity mentioned by Farias *et al.* (2011) is training, which provides teachers the possibility of recognizing and finding themselves as a professional where they establish a theoretical framework and correlate it with the pedagogical knowledge of teaching. The third element mentioned by Farias *et al.* (2011) is teaching practice, which can be called one of the main components for the formation of identity, the school space, the social space in which the teacher carries out their role as an educator. It is in the school space, in the classroom, where teachers are faced with making decisions that draw on the teacher's existing values, beliefs, habits, as well as their way of thinking, their relationship with the students, their ability to mold themselves to the environment in which they are inserted. Therefore, it is in the school environment, through supervised internships, that undergraduate students realize the significance of constructing this identity.

According to Law No. 11.788, "Internship is a supervised school educational act, [...] aimed at preparing students who are attending regular education in higher education institutions for productive work [...]" (Brasil, 2008, p. 3). Pimenta (2008) states that the internship is a fundamental stage in teacher training, a moment of interaction between theory and practice, providing future teachers with real experiences in the classroom context. The internship ends up being understood as a privileged space for training and for understanding the school and the educational system beyond the classroom (Pimenta, 2008 p. 182).

Pimenta and Lima (2012) add that the supervised internship is also a space that promotes critical thinking and that research can be a viable way of doing this. The authors agree that the internship is one of the main contributors to the construction of the teacher's identity, which provides students with a reflection based on reality, providing critical training, as well as correlating theoretical and practical knowledge, making the future teacher improve their professional practices based on the experiences lived in the internship, not only aiming at

development in the classroom, but also in the institutional, cultural and social practices involved in teaching.

In short, we see the importance of the relationship between the supervised internship and teacher identity, pointing out that the role of internships in the curriculum of undergraduate courses needs to be more highly valued, as it is at this time that new teachers are brought closer to their future workplace. In addition, it offers a space for interaction and exchange of experiences and knowledge between the supervising teacher and the trainees, and it is during the internship that teachers have the opportunity to put into practice everything they have seen and been taught throughout their degree course. This is the moment when students begin to construct and reconstruct, in classroom practice, their identities as teaching subjects, reformulating their perceptions and developing their critical vision.

In the next section, I will report on my experiences with supervised internships and how this interaction contributed to the construction of my teaching identity.

3 REFLECTIONS ON EXPERIENCES WITH SUPERVISED INTERNSHIPS

In the light of the discussions about teacher identity and the supervised internship, we seek to understand how the internship becomes one of the main tools for the construction and reconstruction of an individual's personal and professional identity. As Flores (2015) mentions, teaching identity is also shaped by individual perceptions and expectations, and it is possible to say that part of these perceptions begin during the internship, where expectations are met or not. As for the professional aspect, it is during the internship that this future teacher has their first contact with their future work environment, where they have the chance to analyze relationships in the school environment, as well as questioning whether or not they want to pursue a career as a teacher.

In this section, I will give personal accounts of my experiences during the internship and how this moment contributed to the construction of my identity as a teacher and what reflections and aspects were fundamental in my career. To deal with the subject, I have chosen to base my account on the three elements previously presented by Farias *et al* (2011).

The first element mentioned by Farias *et al* (2011) concerns **life history**, the first social contact that takes place primarily in the family environment. In my case, because I was born and grew up in a family where my father, uncles, aunts, grandfather, grandmother are/were teachers, I was exposed to this educational world very early on, so I built up the image of a

teacher as something very distant, almost genuine, a gift. In my view, being a teacher required a lot of patience, a lot of knowledge, I needed to be a full-time teacher and have excellence, no mistakes. This thought of perfection in becoming a teacher came about because I saw my family members practicing the profession with mastery and for me it was impossible to reach such a high level, I didn't feel I had enough ability to take on such an important role in someone's life and education.

The first social contact led me to build up beliefs about being a teacher, which were linked to superficial contact with the profession, just because I was surrounded by teachers, I still didn't have the theoretical framework to understand what being a teacher actually was/is. Still following this perspective, it is important to take into account the lack of maturity and life experience. Later on, during basic education, and now as a student, I didn't have good experiences with English teachers. Lessons were basically limited to grammar, interactions with the language were minimal, the didactics chosen by the teacher were based only on writing on the board and reading what was written and translating words using a dictionary, which made me demystify the vision I had of the teacher as an almost genuine being who always did his job with excellence.

The contact I had with English teachers throughout basic education had a negative impact on my school life, making me believe that it was not possible to have a language class that was fun, interesting and dynamic. These experiences made me reconstruct the belief that teachers were always good, because until then being a teacher was still intertwined with my family and consequently an emotional perception, so I came to believe that not all teachers were genuinely good, because part of the contact I had as a student showed me teachers who were frustrated, afraid and unsure of their fluency in English. I then realized that unprepared teachers frustrate and negatively affect students, but the relevance of this reflection made a lot more sense during my teacher training.

With regard to the second and third aspects proposed by Farias *et al* (2011), referring to **teacher training and practice**, both are intertwined in the construction of teacher identity, so when I talk about training I will also briefly discuss practice. During my training in English language teaching, I came across situations that led me to rebuild my belief about what it means to be a teacher. An example of this was the subjects on the course curriculum, including English Teaching Methodologies, Educational Psychology, Practice of teaching Literature in English, Supervised Internships, Phonetics and Phonology, among others, which made me realize that

becoming and being a teacher is a constant construction, requiring effort, dedication and study. Training prepares you with the theoretical tools to become a good teacher.

The internship is undoubtedly one of the most enriching elements in the process of building a teacher's identity, where the undergraduate student is crossed by reflections, doubts, certainties and uncertainties, reformulation of their beliefs, questions about their role as a teacher and discoveries about how to integrate theory into practice. During my internship experience, there were many aspects that influenced and were fundamental to the (re)construction of my teaching identity. In the following paragraphs, I will mention three of these aspects, which I believe have been the most impactful and of great value to my professional development.

The first aspect was recognizing myself as a teacher. Before the internship, as much as I was studying and preparing to be a teacher, I still could not see myself as one. My vision was limited to the idea of being a language learner and theoretically studying how to be a teacher. When the internship began and I realized that I would have to teach real students, I felt challenged, afraid, nervous and, above all, insecure, because as well as teaching, I would have to teach a language that was not my first language, which was undoubtedly the biggest challenge of the whole process.

Despite the nervousness and insecurity, and especially the fear of how the class would receive me, the first lesson was a success. My biggest fear was explaining the subject and not being able to get the students to understand it. Before actually starting the lessons, I had a brief chat with the teacher in charge of the class to try to understand the dynamics of the class and, based on this information, draw up a lesson plan that would be coherent with the class. According to the teacher's reports, I was faced with a class that was extremely difficult and had no interest in learning English, and I have to confess that it was a little discouraging to hear this, which made me feel more insecure.

However, the first lesson was a success. During my lesson planning, I tried to approach the subject in a simple way, as I didn't have many teaching resources. I opted to use the blackboard, but with different colors, making it visibly more attractive to the students. As I was a trainee, it was something new, a different approach to what they were used to on a day-to-day basis. From the students' own reports, I could see that they were afraid to ask questions when they had doubts, so I tried to create a safe and non-judgmental environment so that they felt comfortable asking questions and giving feedback on the lessons. As the days went by, the affective bond with the class only increased and consequently the exchange between

teacher/student and student/teacher, I believe that one of the greatest achievements was being able to create a bond of security and this made the students create an affective bond with the classes for the simple fact that they felt safe and comfortable in learning and making mistakes too.

The internship made me realize that I am capable of being a teacher, and this greater feeling was largely due to the reaction that the students had in accepting and understanding the subject, the positive comments I received throughout the lessons, when correcting the activities and the enthusiasm of the class in answering all the questions that were asked. The recognition of the class was a fundamental element in this process, it was gratifying to see how happy they were to be able to understand a subject, I realized how much validation is a great fuel for building an educator, positive feedback shows that we are going in the right direction and ends up giving us security to follow, as if it were a guiding compass.

The second aspect has to do with autonomy. From the moment we enter a classroom, some decisions must and should be made exclusively by the teacher, and when I asked myself about this, I wondered: "Will I be able to find quick and effective solutions to any problems that may arise?" It was during my internship that I found the answer to this question. My undergraduate degree in English Language Teaching prepared me very well with pedagogical tools, critical development and language teaching strategies, and although the theory couldn't make me experience all the possible interventions, problems and decisions I would need to make in the classroom, all the subjects taught on the course gave me enough theoretical support to be able to deal with the possible problems that arose during the internship and later throughout my professional life. This perception of being prepared to exercise my role as a teacher came about through the classes taught in the internship, and according to the research carried out by Aragão and Cajazeira (2017), as teachers reflect on their training, this gives them security and consequently they end up noticing positive changes as they recognize that they are capable and feel more confident as teachers. Reflecting on my training has made me feel safe and capable of dealing with teaching difficulties.

The third aspect is much more personal, the emotional one, because it's about how I felt during this long journey. The internship was a time when I was able to connect with myself, where I learned to love the profession, it was the moment when I fell in love with the art of teaching and reflected on my training. According to Aragão and Cajazeira (2017), emotions play a fundamental role in the construction of a teacher's identity because they are interconnected with beliefs, which consequently influence an individual's actions. Emotions

such as recognition, appreciation and self-confidence cause identity transformations, thus giving rise to new beliefs and possible changes in the professional sphere.

The perceptions and reflections based on the internship, together with my training and personal experiences, were of the utmost importance to my construction as a teacher, permeated by new and old beliefs, intertwined with the emotions of personal trust, the encounters and disagreements of being a teacher, and the happiness of seeing students learning something new. The internship was one of the main elements in the construction of my teaching identity, always taking into account that the transformation of a professional's identity construction is linked to their first social contacts, school life, training, emotions, beliefs, historical and cultural context, and many others (Flores 2015; Gagnoux 2023; Pimenta 2010; Aragão and Cajazeira 2017).

Therefore, in addition to contributing to teaching practice, the internship allows trainees to experience the day-to-day life of their future profession, having contact with their work colleagues, with the pedagogical policies adopted by the school, being actually inserted into the school environment, being exposed to the webs of relationships in this space. It is interesting to visualize the internship as a field of research in which not only theoretical knowledge will be related to practice, but also the creation of analyses of school reality, critical reflection, self-analysis, knowledge of the reality of the profession (Pimenta e Lima, 2012), so that better use is made of it and consequently.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to the discussions made throughout this work, teacher identity is initially, first and foremost, social and constituted in a process of socialization. Consequently, it is followed by the interactions of the individual's emotions and beliefs, with training as one of these building blocks. In turn, the internship ends up being a locus for developing theory in practice, providing future teachers with a laboratory for research, reflection, recognition and self-analysis for their professional growth.

As a teacher in training during the construction and research of this study, one of my main concerns was to think about how this work would be relevant to the academic environment. Throughout the reflections, bibliographical readings that were used as a theoretical basis, I realized how valid it is to bring research that helps beginning undergraduate students to create reflections on their own identities as teachers. It is up to the student to understand which are the main elements that help in this construction, how their training as a

teacher takes place and, above all, to reflect and analyze in a concise way how their beliefs, emotions, training, personal and social experiences impact on their process of constructing their teaching identity. As well as being aware that the supervised internship is a great ally for professional transformation, this will help future teachers to make the most of their internship experiences.

Based on a brief account of my experiences in the supervised internship, I realized how relevant and impactful it was to have lived the internship. It was during this process that I was able to reflect and apply all the theoretical framework and pedagogical knowledge learned during my training. The internship was a laboratory for answering many questions that arose throughout this journey, such as whether I was ready for the classroom, and the answer was yes, because experiencing the internship allowed me to realize that I was ready, I was/am very well prepared theoretically and in practice too, just by starting my professional life I ended up developing the awareness that the classroom is a constant journey and that the teacher will always be in constant training and constantly in constant identity construction.

Considering all the reflections made on the construction of teacher identity, I can confirm that understanding how this construction takes place and what its main elements have guided me in a positive way. Together with the supervised internship, which has made a significant contribution to my construction as a teacher and to my recognition as a being a person who educates. In summary, the final results show that my experiences with the supervised internship, together with my beliefs, emotions, training, personal and social life, have made up this construction of professional identity in a fluid, constant and moldable way, which has helped to enrich my teaching and the search for my best version as a teacher.

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