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Heteronyms of a Teacher: Identity, Selves, and Teaching¹

Carles Monereo and Antoni Badia²

“The literary concept of heteronym, invented by Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa, refers to one or more imaginary character(s) created by a writer to write in different styles. Heteronyms [...] are characters having their own supposed physiques, biographies and writing styles.” *Wikipedia* [Retrieved 9/02/09]

Being a Teacher, One and Many

The good teacher is many teachers in one, someone who is able to adjust his/her concepts, strategies and feelings to every (discursive) educational context. This is the main thesis that we intend to defend in this chapter and that, somehow, challenges some of the most widespread assumptions about the role and characteristics traditionally ascribed not only to the teacher’s professional performance, but also to the very essence of “being a teacher.”

For instance, it conflicts with the idea that there is a monolithic, immutable professional identity. From this perspective, the coherence and consistency of teaching discourses and practice would show in the scant diversity of what one believes, does/says, and feels. As there is only one truth to be transmitted, a best way of doing so, and a feeling of confidence for doing the right thing, performing professionally implies acting always in a similar way, by explaining basically the same thing, with the same conviction, at all times and places. This stance is clearly objectivist concerning the content, “teacher-centred” concerning didactics, and individualistic concerning the psychological agent, that is the subject of the action (Postareff & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2008).

¹ Monereo, C., & Badía, A. (2011). Los heterónimos del docente: Identidad, *selves* y enseñanza. C. Monereo & J.I. Pozo, La Identidad en Psicología de la Educación: necesidad, utilidad y límites. Madrid: Narcea.

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In front of this vision, the constructivist approach to teaching and learning has definitely burst into the curricular rationale and into the creation of new syllabuses. Such concepts as competence development, autonomous learning, meaningful learning, significance of previous concepts and knowledge, cooperative learning, or authentic assessment have long been accepted as part of the educational debate, particularly in early childhood education, primary education and, more reluctantly, in secondary education (Monereo et al., 2005). In short, the point is to promote “the new culture of learning in the society of knowledge” (Pozo, 2006, p. 29 [translated by the authors]).

From this constructivist approach, some voices have emerged in higher education that disagree with the objectivist position, based on “teacher-centred” didactics, which are becoming legitimate as they are supported by the European Community and its commitment to create a European Higher Education Area within the so-called “Bologna process” (Margalef & Álvarez, 2005; ANECA, 2007).

The clearest evidence of such a pressure can be found in some angry statements published in mass media, such as one by the head of a Law department:

“it is even more false that there is some knowledge, which is neither physics, nor Latin, nor geography, the content of which is teaching in general for any of these disciplines. A teacher has to be able to gain the students’ attention by teaching them to love knowledge, and to do so there is no other guarantee than their own love for knowledge. (...), a teacher’s best weapon, actually their only weapon, is to know maths, history, or procedural law. Does knowing history not mean knowing how to teach history? Any experienced teacher would say that it is precisely the other way round: the best evidence that something one thought one knew one doesn’t really know is his/her failure in teaching it. If you don’t know how to teach something it is because you don’t know it well enough, and the consequence is that you should study it more and better” (Published in *El País*, 10/02/2009 [translated by the authors])

As opposed to this teacher, true –and restricted- to epistemological and disciplinary principles, who illustrates the previous quotation so eloquently, a flexible professional is wanted, able to adapt to different groups of students, but without betraying the “disciplinary” purity of their concepts and convictions and the security of proven facts in their subject matter. In other words, this teacher must have a sound professional identity in their disciplinary training but with high competence to adjust to the conditions of the new culture of current learning. But, is this possible? Can we human beings be at once one and many? Can what you

think be independent from what you do and say? Moreover, can what you feel be independent from what you think and do?

Uniqueness of a Teacher: Teaching Identity

In the last twenty years, following the trail of the movement called “strategic instruction” (e.g., Gaskins & Pressley, 2006), we thought it was possible to keep that professional identity of every teacher stable, and at the same time we could provide them with self-regulation and adjustment devices for those changes that could appear in their practice contexts. The issue was basically to train them –the phrase was to train “strategic teachers”-, by giving them different teaching methods that they could put into practice and analyze with experts, and more importantly, by helping them improve their decision-making process and construct some strategic knowledge that would allow them to decide when, how, and why to deploy what method or didactic procedure at every given moment (e.g., Monereo, Badia, Castelló et al., 2001).

Even though the acquisition of reflective planning, regulation and assessment processes can certainly produce remarkable improvements to modify some teaching and assessment practice (e.g., Monereo Castelló, [Durán & Gómez, 2009](#)), it does not seem to directly and immediately affect the teachers’ deepest concepts and related feelings (e.g., [Badia & Monereo, 2004](#); [Del Mastro & Monereo, 2008](#)). Consequently, as it does not affect the teacher’s identity, the possibility to sustain these changes over time is precarious; but, what is this identity?

Common sense leads us to think that the teacher is one, a person, an individual, a professional, and that this “way of being” is the cause for or greatly determines what the teacher does in the classroom. However, this statement, taken as an axiom, is easy to refute. We can see that if we ask “who is” a certain teacher to their colleagues or students. Very probably, we will see that, even those closest workmates, “those who know them well,” may have diverse opinions about “what that teacher *is* like.” This is not the case, though, if we ask the same teacher “who they are.” What the teacher answers will be based on the many representations that

they might have constructed of themselves, often interconnected with a high degree of coherence.

Considering the advantages of the second way of understanding the teacher's identity, our option is to define it, in line with Beijaard, Verloop and Vermunt (2000), as the set of teaching-related representations that a teacher has of him/herself, and that are quite stable over time and well defined in terms of content. As self-representations, they have a substantial significance because they are answers to existential questions that the teacher asks about him/herself, at a time when the profession one develops is one of the main activities with an influence on shaping personal identity. These are such questions as: Who am I as a teacher? Why do I have to do...? What do I have to do... for? What do I think is the right thing to do? The usual is that a teacher answers about him/herself, as a teaching professional, in a similar way, for a lengthy amount of time.

Common sense gives us some clues about what characterizes the teaching identity of a teacher. In other words, there is the need to give an account of the different components that the teacher's identity may have. Different studies, both by others (e.g., [Zembylas, 2005](#); Darby, 2008) and by ourselves (e.g., Monereo Badia, Bilbao, Cerrato & Weise, 2009; Álvarez & Badia, in this same work), highlight the close interrelation among the three components or dimensions of the teacher's self-representation, which we consider to be related to their teaching identity:

- (a) Representations about the professional role. In primary and secondary education, there is often the distinction among the role of the teacher with general pedagogical knowledge, the role of the teacher with expertise in specific pedagogical content, and the role of the teacher with expertise in the discipline of the subject (adapted from Putnam & Borko, 2000). In higher education, related literature (e.g., [Nixon, 1996](#); Gewerc & Montero, 2000) points at four possible professional roles: that of a teacher specialized in a theme, that of the researcher in a speciality, that of the professional in an area of competence (parallel to their activity as a teacher), and that of a manager with some individual post (degree coordinator, secretary, head, dean, vice-rector, etc.).

- (b) Representations about teaching and learning, as explicit or implicit knowledge that is part of the teacher's beliefs about educational concepts and principles, teaching procedures and strategies, and conditional or strategic knowledge about when, where and how to apply these teaching principles, procedures and strategies ([Pozo, 2006](#)).
- (c) Representations about teaching-related feelings or, if you like, the emotional dimension of teaching. It is, then, to do with the knowledge about the emotional associations a teacher makes between certain feelings and certain beliefs about teaching and learning. Some types of emotional adjectives that teachers associate to teaching mainly have to do with aspects concerning teaching assessment, with their preponderance or "power" as given by themselves, or with emotional traits associated with the teaching activity (e.g., see [Sutton & Wheatley, 2003](#)).

We understand that the core of this identity is conjugated precisely in the socio-cognitive representations that interrelate particularly cognition with affect (e.g., [Linnenbrink, 2006](#)) and in the discourses –public and mental- that these interrelations generate ([Yau-Fai et al., 2001](#)).

Considering this, now we are in a position to go back to the questions we posed before, resuming the essence of heteronyms: Can what one thinks be independent from what one does and says? Moreover, can what one feels be independent from what one thinks and does?

A teacher can certainly think that teaching in a significant and enduring manner is to help students to construct content in their minds, through educational dialogue, conflict and negotiation, and may nevertheless act in a directive way, giving classes as monologues. Or he/she may think that to achieve some "sound and scientific" learning, students have to accurately repeat the teacher's explanations and, nevertheless, in class allow them to give highly subjective interpretations. In both cases, there may be feelings of self-indulgence and self-justification, or on the

contrary a sensation of “being in a delicate situation,” of betraying one’s own principles.

In one case and the other, and their possible combinations, some research (Enyedy, Goldberg & Muir, 2005; [Day et al., 2006](#); [Roberts, 2007](#); Sockman & Sharma, 2008; Monereo, Badia, Bilbao, Cerrato & Weise, 2009) showed that, if changes do not harmonically affect the field of the teacher’s identity, that is, the field of the epistemological and disciplinary representations (what one thinks about what one teaches and learns), of teaching strategies (what one does and says to produce learning), and feelings and affects (what one feels with regard to these representations and actions), these changes will hardly go on and survive, and in front of a “critical,” destabilizing enough situation the teacher will go back to those concepts, strategies and feelings that provide them with security and spare them to fall into situations of vulnerability in front of students and colleagues.

The possibility to be one and many, or in other words to preserve an “identity” that offers stability and permanence to our way of “being a teacher” and at the same time allows us to develop versions of this being a teacher to adapt to changing requests in every educational context, is an option to be explored in this text. Similarly to Pessoa’s talking and writing through his heteronyms, extensions of his self with their own characteristics and itineraries, with whom he would reflect, feel and talk, we could think about teacher training based on the construction of heteronyms that, strategically, would adapt to the challenges of their teaching.

From Identity to Self in Teachers

As expressed above, until recently we have considered that a teacher was strategic if in condition to deliberately adjust their practice to the context in every subject (content, pupils, resources, personal competences, etc.) and, more particularly, if able to self-regulate their actions in front of controversial requests that could unexpectedly arise. For instance, in front of an unexpected or complex question, a strategic teacher would plan their answer and, according to the conditions of the context, they would decide when and how to express it.

Nevertheless, we all have seen in many occasions (even had “first-hand” experience) that, when the teacher perceives the conflict as being so big as to compromise their teaching role and undermine their professional identity (e.g., if someone casts doubt on their competence, professionalism, or knowledge), their answer cannot be strategic, in the sense of deliberate and adjusted, but it can trigger, spark, automatic reactions of self-protection, rejection, depression, aggressiveness, etc. Pilar [Benejam \(1993\)](#) expressed it very eloquently when referring to not very competent teachers:

“(...) they know many general theoretical principles, but they do not know how to put them into practice when they have to meet the needs of specific pupils in unique situations, so that, when they use up their scarce resources, they adopt traditional teaching models because they provide them with the confidence they need to survive” (p. 345 [translated by the authors]).

Therefore, we consider that it is essential to expand this notion of strategic teacher, and from this work we propose that a teacher is strategic when, in front of an emotionally awkward situation, when their role is put into question, they adopt a version of their own identity –a teaching self-, adjusted to that situation and its contextual conditions.

For us, a self would be an integral, cognitive-emotional action with an arrangement of concepts, emotions, and procedures (and, if appropriate, strategies) to give an answer to a requesting context. In other words, it would be a version of the teacher’s identity as a teacher, with identity being, in short, a self-referential representation made up by cognitive and emotional traits that a person perceives as his/hers and are relatively permanent and stable over time.

Whereas the usefulness of identity is to offer a structure of continuity to our existence (who I am, what I am like, what are my ambitions, etc.) that may arrange possible versions of “oneself” in competition and allows us to acknowledge that we are the same person and at the same time are changing over time, the main contribution of self would be its functionality, as it helps us to be “here and now” in a particular context.

In any case, this self, this action that gathers a set of concepts, feelings and procedures, may spark, as we said, in front of a destabilizing or threatening enough incident or, on the contrary, may follow some conscious planning –if there is time– about what to say, feel and do in these circumstances.

The reason why some people have acquired a greater conscious control over their selves could be explained in the argumentative line proposed by [Gergen \(1989\)](#). According to this author, we all try to make our discourses, our vision of the facts, prevail, and for this reason when we present a construction of ourselves we choose the one that has more possibilities to be listened to, to prevail. In this sense, he wrote “(...) to justify one’s own actions – that is, to offer an acceptable version within a certain social context – it is also essential to resort to different representations of the self”. In other words, the selves are built throughout the subject’s history as they are useful to handle social situations and gain areas where to exert influence.

The possibility of activating different selves in competition and establishing a dialogue among them leads us to a concept that seems particularly heuristic: The existence of a mental-cognitive context that, similarly to the public-social context, is made up by the interactions that there may be among the different “voices” and their texts. Some of these voices, as mentioned above, would come from selves as evoked by the subject himself, referring to previous actions in similar circumstances; however, other voices are also invoked as provided by close people (family, teachers, friends), but also voices with an origin in mass media, cinema, literature, etc. (e.g., fiction characters). This interactive, intramental richness, when it does happen (it would not be the same in different people and their cognitive contexts), besides enhancing the proactive and argued choice of a self, it would also promote the construction of new selves and the experimentation with different ways of conceiving, feeling and acting upon reality and, therefore, of getting to better understand similar ways how others conceive, feel and act in connection to an event; it would be a perspective of the alter-self, which would benefit processes of mutual empathy, comprehension, and tolerance ([Yau-Fai et al., 2001](#); [Monereo, 2007](#)).

In any case, as could be deduced from our position, it is not possible to build any self; there are restrictions due to: (1) one's own identity and the previous selves that we may evoke, talk to, and finally activate; (2) the cultural niche where we act and that determines the possible ways this "self" can acquire (in the sense of "selfways" as formulated by Markus, Mullaly & Kitayama, 1997). For instance, as mentioned previously, with regard to university teachers, these possible selves would be arranged around the teaching, research, management and professional functions, which would be close to the idea of professional role, that is, to an evoked self concerning social expectations and rules.

As explained above, the different modes of social interactivity would not be enough, on their own, to explain the nature of the self. Therefore, we also have to resort to those cognitive mechanisms that allow us to accede to and evoke some selves, which permit the confrontation within the intramental cognitive context and that can eventually help the subject to reflect and manage to re-describe this acting self, from metacognitive mechanisms, making them more "evocable" than others in the future.

Therefore, the concept of self we defend would encompass cognitive and social components, which would meet in the aforementioned cognitive context. The idea of intramental context as a polyphony of voices is coherent both with Vigotsky's mechanism of intersubjectivity-internalization (Vigotsky, 1995), through which we interiorize the social dialogue into the structure of the inner discourse, and with Batjin's mechanism of otherness-ventriloquation ([Bajtin, 1999](#)), a process through which other voices, statements by other people, are integrated in one's own discourse and which allows us to visit past experiences projected into the present that help us elaborate representations about the future, on the basis of, in our opinion, cognitive and metacognitive mechanisms that generate processes of evocation, updating and, if appropriate, re-description of these dialogued experiences (in the case of teachers, see: [McAlpine et al.,1999; 2006](#)). This possible state of conscious re-description would enhance the construction and development of strategic selves, in three coordinated phases, with different levels of coherence:

(a) A planned self: It would be the “anticipatory reading” of a context and its possible incidents, and the planning of discourses, emotional states, and action strategies to approach them. It would be based on evoked selves, on their internal dialogue, and on the production of an intentional plan of intentional action.

(b) A self-in-action: It would be the deployment, supervision, and self-regulation of this planned self.

(c) An acted self: It would be the reflection and conscious assessment of this performed self-in-action. It would increase the options to become a self available for future events (evoked self) and, depending on its emotional impact, it would contribute to the re-construction of identity.

The possibility that a change of self is produced through this conscious re-description requires that some sort of event unbalances or destabilizes the self-in-action and triggers the emergence of another self (strategic, if possible). There is already some significant research about this kind of events capable of triggering conflict or doubts that may challenge the teacher’s perception of self-efficiency (e.g., [Settlage et al., 2009](#)) and force them to rethink their concepts, strategies, and feelings with regard to their performance in that class (self) or even with regard to their wider and permanent professional role (identity). This kind of events has been generically called “critical incidents” and the next section is about them.

Critical Incidents as a Way of Analyzing Coherence between a Teacher’s Identity and Self

An incident is an event that, even though it may possibly occur during a certain activity, due to the effects it produces in some of the participants (whether positive or negative), becomes an outstanding moment or milestone in that context. In related literature, the adjective “critical” is used with two meanings:

(a) An incident is critical because it encompasses the essence of what one is trying to reach or significantly contributes to get a certain result. Therefore, they are

“critical” because they are indicative of intentions, motives, and implicit structures (Tripp, 1993; Woolsey, 1986; Bugum & Bridge, 1997). For instance, during a class a teacher does something usual, provoking the students’ interest in an issue by presenting an anecdote about a recent experience that they had in an excursion. These authors prefer to call this sort of incidents as typical (typical incident).

(b) On the contrary, from other approaches (e.g., the Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning³ or the Professional Development for Academics Involved in Teaching: ProDAIT⁴), an incident can be critical if it is problematic and puts the person receiving it into a situation of “crisis,” because it is lived as an injustice, nonsense or an obvious mistake that calls one’s own credibility into question or because it implies an unexpected, challenging, surprising situation, which may even be positive but which one was not ready for. In this case, the victim of the incident experiences unusually deep, destabilizing or traumatic emotions, which can defy the subject’s defence and self-control mechanisms.

It is essential to clarify that, in relation to this second interpretation of the notion, the incident is critical to the extent that the subject perceives it as controversial or unbalancing and, therefore, has a clearly subjective character and its impact can be only obvious for those receiving it. This could be an example: Let us imagine that a teacher explains again something that he already explained in the previous class, without noticing, and his students, after a long while, reproach him for this, provoking in him a clear sensation of ridicule and confusion.

This second meaning seems more interesting to us when the aim is, as in our case, to study relationships and changes between identity and selves. Thus, from our point of view, a critical incident would be an event that challenges or denies the self-in-action or a certain agent’s own identity, in our case the teacher’s (for example, “we didn’t understand a word you said,” “you can’t be a teacher”).

Critical incidents have already been used as techniques both to assess educational services (e.g., Chen, Lin & Kinshuk, 2008), and in psychoeducational research

³ Belonging to the University of Western Australia
(<http://www.catl.uwa.edu.au/publications/ITL/1996/8/critical>)

⁴ Belonging to the University of Birmingham, Great Britain
(http://www.prodait.org/resources/006_Critical%20Incident%20Analysis_artworked050107.pdf)

(e.g., [Gilstrap & Dupree, 2008](#)) or in teacher training (e.g., in Spain: [Fernández, Elórtogui & Medina, 2003](#)). In the first case, the assessment of how an institution or service handles the incidents that happen within a certain period of time is a good indicator that it works properly and a sign of the type and quality of attention offered to users. In the fields of research and training, it is usual to collect information about critical events or situations of crisis that happen in natural contexts, and then to analyze and discuss with the research team, or with those affected during their training, the effectiveness or not of decisions made in the resolution of the problem in question ([Farrell, 2008](#)). Another research and/or training strategy is to present students with very specific dramatized situations (written, video recorded, role-plays, etc.), and ask them to make a decision based on the information they are provided with. Again, the point is to analyze the participants' decision-making process and the kind of argumentation they use ([Fernández & Fernández, 1994](#)). In the next section, we will go deeply into the possibilities that critical incidents offer to construct multiple selves in teachers.

Teacher Training through Critical Incidents: In Search of the Teachers inside a Teacher

Some studies (e.g., [Burnard, 2005](#)) show that the transitions that occur in the teachers' professional careers would be marked by specific incidents and counter-incidents (positive or negative), which would have a forceful influence on the identity they eventually adopt. This influence of critical incidents to produce changes in the teacher's identity has already led to some initiatives in the field of teacher training, particularly in higher education.

For example, one of the first questions that had to be solved was the identification of the different types of incidents that teachers come across during the development of their functions at university. Without doubt, one of the most complete proposals of classification is the one carried out by the University of Victoria's Learning and Teaching Centre (Canada),⁵ which identified four major blocks of incidents that may be critical for university teachers:

⁵ University of Victoria's Learning & Teaching Centre: <http://www.tss.uoguelph.ca/id/critinc.html>

- (a) Incidents concerning the teaching role: These include problematic situations related to the lack of teaching skills and strategies to manage the quality of classes and possible complaints by students (for instance: to promote the students' level of reasoning; to transform a monotonous class; to approach students' criticism about classes or grades, and even situations of intimidation and harassment; to improve the use of technology in the classroom; to approach the students' negative comments about a colleague with the aim of winning our support; to improve uniformity of tests and exams, or to manage possible complaints by students from other cultures due to certain methods contrary to their customs or ideology).
- (b) Incidents concerning academic issues: Here we find conflicts related to decisions made outside class, but with an influence on their development (for instance: a student insists that she handed in a paper that the teacher has no record of; a teacher feels he has lost control of his class; a teacher from an ethnic or linguistic minority feels despised by a student; a teacher accepts to adjust a test for a student with a disability, but is afraid that this could lower the academic standards; a teacher mediates in the conflict of a group of students who want to throw out a group member due to his poor productivity; a student improves his grades with some help from a peer, but copying part of his peer's assignments; a senior faculty member encourages the need to research and publish in prestigious journals, rather than wasting time in preparing classes).
- (c) Incidents concerning frustrated expectations: In this case, these are conflicts that arise from the disappointment in front of one's own inability or that of others (for instance: a colleague's lack of responsibility; attention to first-year students with frustrated expectations; a colleague's reluctance to accommodate a student with a disability in his class; difficulty to make students participate in class; difficulties to control the constant interventions by a student that dominates discussions and holds up the class; indolence of a colleague that passes all his students without any kind of demand; or opposed opinions by some colleagues about the need and convenience of certain changes and innovations).

- (d) Incidents concerning situations of unfairness: Here incidents are produced due to a lack of impartiality in certain situations or decisions (for instance: impossibility to have access to Internet by some students due to economic reasons; the scarce dedication of tutors to the students' assignments; the lack of authority of a teacher that permits offensive remarks by some students towards others; unequal arrangement of resources among the teachers; unfair deflection of a mistake on to a junior teacher; the lack of clear assessment criteria; the lack of recognition for the authorship of an article for a senior teacher written by his assistant; abuse towards teachers that are computer literate by their own peers, etc.).

This university institution has developed a series of videotapes used in university teacher training, consisting of short (3-4 minutes) dramatized vignettes that refer to the blocks of incidents described above, and a discussion guidebook to promote subsequent debate among participants.

A second type of initiatives in teacher training correspond to the use of different instruments to select and analyze critical incidents, thus promoting a change in the teachers' concepts, strategies and/or feelings in relation to the event under study.

Among these instruments, there is the use of incident analysis patterns, the use of incident maps and figures, or the elaboration of portfolios about incidents. In the first example, we have such proposals as the pattern created by Martin (1996), who recommended following a detailed process of analysis using these seven phases:

1. Select the critical incident, that is, a situation that the teacher has experienced as controversial, confusing or with a difficult resolution.
2. Describe the context of this incident (time, day, educational context, speakers).
3. Relate, with all the possible details, everything that you remember about the incident (who did or said what).
4. Express what that person was thinking and feeling at the moment of the incident and right after it.
5. Analyze the reasons that could account for the incident, what should have happened to prevent the incident, what interpretation the other participants give to the incident, and what could be learnt from this situations in view of similar future situations.

6. Contrast different points of view about the interpretation of the incident and its possible solutions.
7. Point out positive and negative aspects of the alternatives or solutions proposed.

In a similar line, there is the “pattern to analyze assessment contexts” –PACA in Spanish- ([Monereo & Castelló, 2004](#)), a system of analysis suggesting that the person that can assess or recommend solutions in relation to an educational conflict, particularly in the case of primary and secondary education, should identify the characteristics and objectives of every actor in the conflict, so that then, with all the “pieces” on the game board and being aware of their strengths and weaknesses, they can make more grounded decisions about the moves that should be made next.

Training prospective teachers by having them elaborate incident maps –mazes- ([Kennedy, 1999](#)) means that they are asked to graphically structure the different alternative actions that the teacher can use to solve an incident. Every course of action, every chosen possibility, has some consequences and permits a different kind of reflection. [Burnard \(2005\)](#) also used a graphic way of representing incidents, but applied to significant events for music students. In Figure 1, we can see an example for the kind of graph used in the form of winding rivers, where every meander represents a critical incident in the teacher’s professional biography:

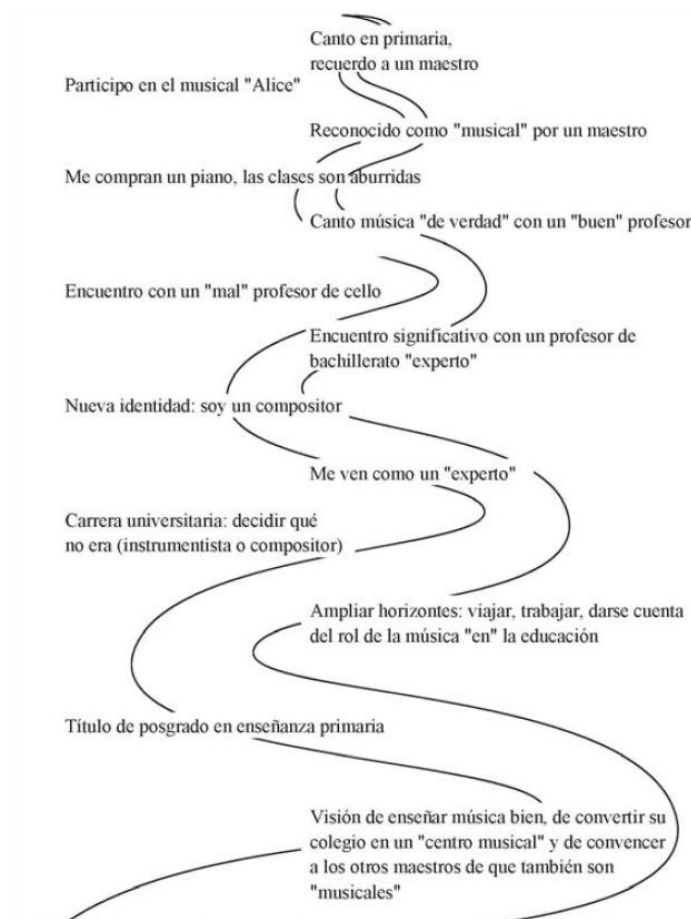


Figure 1. James's professional career. From [Burnard \(2005\)](#)

Finally, let us mention the elaboration of a teaching incident-based portfolio, which may have different shapes and objectives. It may be a collection of different samples (thoughts, dialogues, materials, messages, etc.) that illustrate the different critical moments of a certain project or training process (Sockman & Sharma, 2008); or it could be a collection of milestones and events as significant evidence of changes and relevant decisions in one's own professional career, or of influential facts, people, and readings in the current professional situation.

There would be a third type of use for critical incidents concerning research in the teaching of university teachers (Monereo, Badia, Bilbao, Cerrato & Weise, 2009). In these authors' work, the emergence of a set of critical incidents is induced in some classes of two university teachers. The analysis of these teachers' performance in front of every critical incident shows how the teachers change their performance to adjust in different degrees to the controversial situation, and is

useful to assess the coherence between the characteristics of the teacher's identity and their real teaching performance in front of these controversial situations.

So far we have defined and characterized the components of the teacher's professional identity, we have seen that this identity does not have a direct and mechanical correlation with the teaching performance, as the same teacher can deploy "different teaching selves," and we have shown that the "critical incident" is an appropriate device for research and teacher training, particularly in the search for coherence between the teacher's identity and different selves. All this conceptual development makes sense as we are trying to explain and understand the processes of change in the teacher's teaching, both at the level of cognitive representations and at the level of educational practice and performance. The following section deals with this idea in detail.

Consequences Regarding Teacher Training

Pamela Burnard (2005), in her work about itineraries of teachers in teaching and learning music, stated: "At present, in the United Kingdom, teachers are trained to think about our own practice, but not to act" (p. 10 [translated by the authors]).

Thinking about one's own practice has been, and still is, a stumbling block for many psychoeducational schools, from the reflection on and about practice in such authors as Schön (1983), through perspectives focused on the teacher's thoughts (e.g., [Marcelo, 1991](#)) or the construction of professional knowledge (e.g., [Porlán & Rivero, 1998](#)), to those that support that teachers become aware of their own epistemological, disciplinary and instructional concepts oriented towards a conceptual and even representational change (e.g., [Keiny, 1994](#); [Schulman, 1986](#); or in Spain [Pozo et al., 2006](#)), or that defend the elaboration of self-training projects (e.g., [Perrenoud, 2004](#)). It is also a key point in teacher assessment and training in most developed countries, including at the university level (e.g., [Brockbank & McGill, 2002](#)).

However, and admitting that thinking about one's own teaching behaviour is an essential element for change, this change does hardly ever show in a different way

of acting in the classroom. Actually, and in spite of indefatigable efforts by the administrations, trainers and researchers, teacher training, and particularly that of university teachers, this is still an unresolved issue difficult to approach, with not much published or under research ([Cano & Revuelta, 1999](#)).

Probably it would not be difficult to agree that, for this training to produce successful results, it would be necessary to act from different fronts in a coordinated and systemic manner. For example, by introducing new assessment ways to select new teachers; reinforcing promotion mechanisms in the teaching career focused on pedagogical innovation of subjects; encouraging pedagogical innovation projects through subsidies, recognized teaching periods, periods off work, etc.; promoting teaching teams in every department; making people aware of the importance of the teaching role, comparable to the research role, which has more prestige in the case of higher education; publicly recognizing some good teaching practice; encouraging exchange of successful innovations; promoting syllabuses based on modular and competence-based approaches, which require coordination of teachers, etc.

All these measures would certainly be relevant, and would contribute to reconsider teaching. In fact, some of them are already a reality in some of our educational institutions, although, in general, in a very fragmented and tepid way. However, are these measures enough to guarantee that the teacher is able to act in the best possible way so that all students find an appropriate answer to all their doubts, uncertainties, incomprehension, and motivations? We think that they are not, that such organizational-institutional measures, though necessary and positive, are not enough to modify the practice that takes place in the classroom, whether in person or online, where a teacher has to adjust to some curricular objectives and specific students, within a concrete academic culture.

As you can infer from the content of this chapter, we claim that, to reach high levels of quality in classroom practice, there must be teachers with a sound teaching identity and high competences, with many possibilities of performance, flexible and adjustable to varied educational contexts. From our perspective, a competent teacher in his/her professional teaching activity has to:

- (a) Have a multiple and complex set of available representations about their professional role, about teaching and learning, and about feelings concerning their teaching.
- (b) Be able to activate and resort to the three types of self strategically and, therefore, adjusted to the achievement of educational goals, particularly in front of critical incidents that, within problematic contexts, put the teacher's coherence to the test.

As a result, teacher training should focus on the construction of these selves, using incidents with a high degree of authenticity that allow the teacher to carry out a conscious analysis and review of the concepts, emotions and strategies they resort to. To help teachers construct alternative selves, there should be “authentic” activities, in the sense that they are realistic (fidelity with contextual conditions), relevant (useful in an immediate manner), and identifying (socializing) (Monereo, Badia, Bilbao, Cerrato & Weise, 2009).

In all these proposals, the key is the possibility to reflect about one's own action but, as we mentioned at the beginning of this text, we should do so on the basis of methodological devices that give us access to the moment when dramatic changes take place, in order to be able to visualize them, put them in context, in conflict, contrast them and finally re-describe them.

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