About projected narratives: the voice of a language teacher in a context of collaborative learning

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Based on a narrative and biographic approach (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), we present in this study the case of an in-service language teacher and her professional trajectory in the context of the project "Languages and education: constructing and sharing training", which aimed at the construction a collaborative teacher education context, as a locus for learning and transformation of experiences, views and practices in language education, involving teachers, teacher educators and researchers. The analysis tries to disclose discursive displacements as hints of transformation while the teacher reorganises the learning that occurred during the education process. These signs of change are visible in the personal interpretation process of her professional identity development as she redesigns her professional project. Finally, we reflect upon reflective accounts in the context of research on teacher education.

Keywords: autobiographic documents; collaborative learning; in-service teachers; language education; professional development

Introduction

As a result of increasing migrations and contacts both real and virtual, the human diversity of the current social landscapes, in linguistic and cultural terms, is becoming more and more prominent. This is requiring language education to look towards a more humane approach, through the construction of other frameworks of thought and action, of new references, attitudes and skills. These frameworks are hoped to lead to a communication that is respectful and mindful of diversities, seeing them rather as an enriching and creative factor in their everyday existence. The construction of a citizenship based on dialogue relies on the development of multi-literacies (Imbernón *et al.*, 2002), in particular at the level of a "cultural capital" powered by personal plurilingualism and competences in reading and writing, which are keys for better integration in today's society.

In the context of the development of a plurilingual and intercultural education (Beacco & Byram, 2007), teacher education contexts need to foster more meaningful learning environments for teachers, which are also more appropriate to their work contexts and to the challenges they face. The re-invention of new educational paths which are more multidimensional and take into account the *person* in articulation with the construction of new ways of relating with the world, with others and with oneself, is at stake (Pinho *et al.*, 2009: 2). This requires of language teachers the ability to revise their epistemologies and modes of action. Moreover, language teachers are challenged to reinterpret their professional identities, i.e. their self-image as teachers

and their professional mission or project as educational actors (Pinho, 2008). Considering teachers as curriculum makers or interpreters, teachers' identities are seen as the basis for meaning-making and decision-making and, consequently, for curriculum development and contextual change (Craig, 2011).

Against this background, some authors advocate for teacher education scenarios based on collaborative dynamics, such as professional learning communities (Wenger, 1998; Westheimer, 2008). Such collective learning contexts are considered to be crucial to the development of new ways of thinking and acting, since they become catalysts for the generation of new understanding, professional risk-taking and innovation, particularly when these dynamics are situated in the individuals' work contexts, which open up the possibility of a more real contextual side-effect. Yet, other authors pinpoint the relevance of articulating such collective dimension of reflection and sense-making with personal ways of knowing, in particular in the scope of biographic and narrative approaches to professional learning (Clandinin & Connelly 2000; Craig, 2011). It is believed that teacher education strategies based on life stories, narratives and accounts allow for the personal meaning-making of experience and self-awareness, which is important within broader processes of collaborative professional learning and identity construction. According to this, teachers' personal and professional knowledge is narrative and depends on teachers' conceptualising, constructing explanations and sharing meanings with themselves and others, trying to link past, present and future through narration. Moreover, the access to such personal trajectories can help to understand social or collective narratives, contextual landscapes, and the effect of professional learning experiences to individuals (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995).

In this article, we intend to give a qualitative picture of an in-service language teacher's experience in the context of a collaborative learning scenario by focusing on the meanings given by her to that same experience. Particularly, based on the use of reflective written accounts, the study depicts the teacher's reinterpretations of her professional identity, project and mission as language teacher as she constructs professional knowledge in the scope of plurilingual and intercultural education. Based on such situated professional learning trajectory, we conclude with a reflection about how such teacher's narratives can help us look critically to the collaborative teacher education scenario in which such reflective accounts were written.

1. Narrative-based professional identity in collaborative learning

The present study in inscribed in the narrative and biographic approaches to teachers' professional identity, and values the power of (self-)reflective practices and accounts about life to teachers' professional learning (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As explained by Søreide, "To understand identity construction as a process of narrative positioning is useful, because it opens up an understanding of teachers as active agents in their own lives and the construction of teacher identity as a dynamic and changing activity" (2006: 529). This idea of identity being narratively constructed was already put forward by Ricoeur (1990), in his notion of narrative identity. The author emphasizes the interpretative role of storytelling, and considers that identity is an incessant work of interpretation of action and oneself. The author considers that the accounts individuals tell about themselves over time play an educative role in the meaning-making process, which is essential to one's self-knowledge and understanding.

Josso (2002) states that identity is a life project whose development is founded in the knowledge teachers have of what they are, think, value and wish in a dialogic and reflective process with themselves, the others, and their milieu. Gohier & Anádon (2000) also state that teachers' professional identity is narratively and reflectively constructed, and add that it is in this process that teachers elaborate a representation of themselves with regard to their work, responsibilities, learners and peers, and other educational actors involved in school as a social institution. The narrative dimension of identity construction is clearly stated in the following words:

> teachers personal identity can be brought to self-awareness through narrative self-reflection. [...] Self-knowledge not only assumes that one can establish one's own personal identity by means of stories, but also assumes that one can be accountable narratively for how one has developed as a person, as a teacher – for how one has become what one has become. [...] by means of stories, teachers justify the manner in which their character, whishes and interests have grown and changed as a result of past circumstances, decisions, and formative experiences in specific circumstances" (Withrell & Noddings, 1991, in Leitch, 2006: 550).

This process of self-knowledge is fundamental to the synergy of experiences and to self-directing processes, revision of feelings, sometimes antagonistic or conflicting. It is also linked to the belonging to the discursive professional communities, and is essential for the restructuring of the imagined professional identity. In these dynamics, temporality and the "biographical plurality" (Dominicé, 2006) become a grounding axis of professional learning and identity construction and can be mirrored in the teachers' reflective narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Josso, 2002). Considering the transformations imposed by today's society, particularly in language education, the breaks in terms of continuity of professional identity, which are associated with ruptures and moments of destabilisation need to be taken into account. As Nóvoa puts forward

> "Identity is a place of struggles and conflicts, it is a place for construction of ways of being and acting in the profession. [...] It is a process that requires *time*. A time to re-establish identities, to accommodate innovations, to assimilate changes", in which the subjects "take ownership of their personal and professional history" (1992: 16).

We can assume that in such process there is a reflective interplay between the ideal self (the aspirations of the individual and of others towards oneself), the ought self (the sense of duty and responsibility resulting from the norms of the professional culture) and the actual, situational self (the self-image and the representation of others about oneself at a given point in time) (Lauriala & Kukkonen, 2003). Yet, the spread of the narrative approach in teacher education also highlights the interplay between teachers' (self-)knowledge, teachers' identities, and the context in which teachers come to know (their professional knowledge landscapes) (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Craig, 2011). This would mean that one needs to consider both the psychological and sociological dimensions of identity construction (Dubar, 1996; Gohier & Anádon, 2000).

Therefore, our perspective of the narrative-based professional identity is also set in the context of collaborative professional learning scenarios. In this viewpoint, collaborative learning or education is understood as a cognitive and relational process in which the individuals (teachers, teacher educators and researchers) bring together their personal and professional identities and mobilize around a common commitment to their professional learning. They value the mutual benefits of this process and

recognize the differentiation of roles and functions in the joint construction of professional and research knowledge in language education (Pinho & Andrade, 2010).

Implying "the art of sociability", which means living by connecting and sharing with others (Josso, 2002), collaborative learning dynamics can be valuable to the generation of "the stories to live by" and consequently to teachers' identity construction (Clandinin, 2006; Craig, 2011). In other words, according to Dubar (1996), identity is a result of a double transaction with others and oneself. It is understood as a social/relational and biographic construction, which occurs in a complex communicational and negotiation process. The inter-subjective or relational context becomes not only a place for teachers' cognitive construction in terms of propositional and practical professional knowledge, but also a *locus* of meaning-making about oneself, of reshaping of one's self-image as teacher with regard to the design of new directions and references in language education (Pinho, 2008). Thus, professional learning being first of all an individual work of identity management and reflective organisation of experience, such process of meaning-making cannot be separated from the socio-educational, linguistic contexts and interpersonal relationships.

The present study draws on a hermeneutical perspective whereby teachers build up an image of themselves and reveal their history in the writing of the text (Coracini, 2008; Momberger, 2006). It is thus possible to find fragments of themselves as professionals in written narratives. Our perspective is that as reflexive "actor-writers", teachers favour their own sense of self exploration based on their self perceptions and self observations (Josso, 2002: 70-71). In doing so, they evoke significant moments in a time continuum of past, present and future, all of which happens in a dialogue with the world of language education and their projected professional projects and perceived mission as language teachers.

2. The study

The study presented here intends to understand the professional learning path of an in-service language teacher in the context of a collaborative teacher education scenario, which involved language teachers, teacher educators and researchers in dynamics of sharing experiences, visions and practices in language education. Particularly, our interest is in a teacher's (re)construction of professional identity and project.

In this section we refer to the particular learning context – the "Languages and Education" project - where the study was carried out and the methodological procedures on which it is based.

Research and contextual background: The "Languages and Education" project

The project "Languages and education: constructing and sharing professional knowledge" was a research project about teacher education[1] developed between 2007 and 2010, and assumed that collaborative research and professional development in language education are powerful means of developing a working culture capable of transforming the work of teachers, teacher educators and researchers, as well as a prerequisite for environments and networks of innovation and creativity in (research in) language education. The project had three main fundamental theoretical axes, briefly explained (http://linguaseeducacao.web.ua.pt/):

(i) The qualitative transformation of language education practices is enhanced when those involved carry out research into their own activities and build new understandings based on the research they have done. Recognition is given to the role of research for decision-making in language education, and language education practices as a source of knowledge towards the construction of research know-how and knowledge.

(ii) The professional learning of teachers, teacher educators and researchers was seen as a priority, and it was thought that language education practices which are most able to transform participants, contexts and communities in general, depend on the ability of these educational actors to enter into dialogue with social changes, educational institutions, language learning contexts and then learn to integrate these new theories and practices into their own repertoires.

(iii) Communities, which function as spaces where collaborative relationships and sharing take place (Day, 1999), as well as *locus* of construction of new professional identities (Wenger, 1998), may become change environments around joint projects in language education.

In this context, the setting up of the project involved building a professional development community (PDC) consisting of teachers of various levels of education (from the early years of schooling to secondary education), teacher educators and researchers with the purpose of (i) promoting the development of a culture of collaboration between research, teacher education and the practices of language teaching; (ii) contributing to the personal and professional development of its members; and (iii) stimulating reflection on language education practices, with a view to its improvement/innovation.

This collaborative environment was organized around thematic working groups (WG), based around three topics on language education: reading, writing, and plurilingual and intercultural education. These courses took place during the academic year 2008/2009 and accounted for 75 hours of work (face-to-face and autonomous) and were adapted to the *blended learning* method using the Moodle platform. The face-to-face sessions ran for 7 sessions and were scheduled and distributed throughout the year. They were designed to be a sharing space not only within the WGs but also between the different groups.

In each WG, members were organized in small sub-groups focused on sub-themes, which they jointly considered relevant to their professional learning, i.e. to their research and language education practices. These sub-themes resulted in collaborative action-research projects which would be carried out in schools. The "Language and Education" project involved about 50 schoolteachers and 20 researchers/language educators, and developed 15 joint projects in the field of language education, which were implemented in the schools of the district.

In summary, the training and collaborative professional development was carried out in relation to the work (i) in PDC (a meeting place where groups gathered, among other activities, to give presentations of the work undertaken, attend conferences and engage in debates on topics of interest to the community members), and (ii) within the WG context (where the professional learning objectives and joint

work plan to be developed was defined, a process interspersed with moments of theoretical and practical reflection).

The in-service language teacher's context of training – the WGA

The in-service language teacher analysed in this study belonged to one of the working groups of the "Languages and Education" project, referred to as the WGA, which was organised around the workshop "Collaborating in practices of plurilingual and intercultural education and awareness*: opportunities for professional development*".

The group took the responsibility to engage in collaborative learning in the sense of contributing towards developing a culture of plurilingualism in school, promoting awareness of the diversity in its many aspects, particularly in the development of a plurilingual competence and intercultural dialogue (Coste, Moore & Zarate, 1997; Beacco & Byram, 2007). In this context, the group members together – in-service primary teachers and language teachers as well as teacher educators/researchers – chose the theme "Migrations and mixtures as movements and encounters" as a *joint project*, with different approaches depending on the various sub-groups.

Thus, the WGA was organized into four sub-groups, consisting of members of different educational institutions (from Primary to Higher Education), working in formal (classroom) and non-formal situations (language clubs), bringing together primary school teachers and specialized language teachers (Spanish, French, English and Portuguese). The work within these sub-groups was guided by specific research questions, but with shared theoretical frameworks, as systematised in the table 1.

Subgroup and project	Educational context	Research and pedagogical questions
1 – Sea of Languages and Cultures	Primary schooling	How to raise the pupils' awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity?
2 – Languages and Cultures: migrations and (dis)encounters	3rd Cycle of basic Education (7th to 9th graders) and Secondary Education	How to pedagogically work the theme of migrations in order to foster a treasuring culture of linguistic and cultural diversity?
3 – From my language one can see the ocean. And from the others?	3rd Cycle of Basic Education (7th to 9th graders) and Secondary Education	What representations do students have of their Mother Tongue(s) and of the studied Foreign Language (English) in different teaching levels? How do these representations evolve?
4 – Languages: pathways to the Other	Extra-curricular spaces (Schools' language clubs)	What strategies of awakening to languages and cultures and fostering of linguistic culture can be carried out in extra-curricular spaces?
Shared key-words: Awakening to languages and cultures; plurilingual competence; intercultural competence; migrations; exclusion/inclusion; representations.		

Table 1. Sub-groups and projects of WGA

The four sub-projects were structured according to a collaborative action-research methodology (Carr & Kemmis, 1986) and that of case studies (Stake, 2000). In general, the methodological and pedagogical procedures which were adopted were questionnaires, interviews, lesson recordings, worksheets and posters presenting the action-research projects.

The teacher reported in the present study belonged to sub-group/project 2 – "Languages and Cultures: migrations and (dis)encounters", which was made out of four language schoolteachers and two teacher educators/researchers. According to their common research and pedagogical interests, the group decided to develop the project with three classes: Spanish (8th grade), French (10th grade) and English (11th grade), which belonged to different school contexts. In order to design the project, they analysed and crisscrossed the language syllabi in order to find connections, and develop a cross-curricular project based on the theme of migrations. In order to theoretically sustain the project, all group members read about language policies, inclusive and intercultural education, inclusion and exclusion in migration dynamics, and stereotypes and social representations.

During the project's implementation in the different school contexts, data was collected to support joint post-action critical reflection. The analysis of the project's results and the conclusions were part of the group's final written report. Being part of WGA, this teacher's working group shared the project's progress with the other sub-groups over the year. In a final stage, it presented the project and the results to the whole "Language and Education" community in a final colloquium, followed by joint moments of debate. In order to disseminate the joint project and results in the event, the group also produced a poster, an abstract, and a paper to a publication. The group met in the 7 face-to-face sessions of the "Language and Education" project already referred to, and resorted to the Moodle platform and email exchange to foster the work dynamics.

Outline of data collection in the "Languages and Education" project

The data collection in the context of the "Language and Education" project varied according to the specific dynamics of the different thematic working groups (WG). Yet, the main common plan of data collection consisted in using questionnaires and interviews to characterise schoolteachers and researchers/language educators, and in the gathering of: the interactions of the working sessions (tape-recording) and of the forum of the Moodle platform; the groups' working documents (namely, projects' planning and power point presentations). Also, the portfolio was used as a fundamental formative and research instrument (Sá Chaves, 2000). It was made up of an *individual* component (teacher's personal characterization, individual reflections, reading modules with comments) and a *collective* component (intervention project and respective materials and final report of the sub-group).

Privileging a reflective dimension in teacher education processes, but also as a narrative inquiry instruments (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), teachers wrote three individual reflections, which were biographical and narrative in nature, at significant times during the education period (in the initial, intermediate and final phases). While the first one was a free-topic reflection, the last two were guided. All these reflections were characterized by collaborative and reflexive practices between teachers and teacher educators, the latter by adopting the role of "critical friend" and providing *dialogic feedback* (Alarcão, Leitão & Roldão, 2009), which would serve as a springboard for the following reflections, supporting teachers' learning in construction and new meaning-making of experience.

Methodological details of the study

As referred to, the study aims to contribute to the understanding of how the above mentioned professional development environment has become a time of transformation for teachers, leading to the reconstruction of their professional projects in terms of identity, that is, of other ways of be(com)ing in language education (Josso, 2007). Following Stake (2000), we present the case of one in-service language teacher with the purpose to disclose her professional learning path and identity (re)construction.

In order to do that, and bearing in mind the theoretical background to the study, we decided to draw on the analysis of the teacher's autobiographical documents, particularly the 2 personal characterizations (PC) and 3 written reflections (WR). Our interest in the teacher's *voice* intended to capture the personal meaning-making and the significance given to the professional learning experience fostered by the "Language and Education" project. We considered such documents powerfully rich to the identification of transformations and discursive shifts, since we would have access to reflective processes of (re) organisation of the learning constructed during the workshop period, which could be set in an interpretive process of identity construction that slowly gains shape in the accounts (Momberger, 2006).

While the personal characterizations were used to provide more specific information about the teacher, the analysis process of the written reflections resorted to the procedures of content analysis (Bardin, 2000). In this sense, we followed two processes. We read the documents looking for thematic patterns, in an emic perspective, which were codified, refined and ultimately categorised (see Table 2). As such, these categories depict the major topics of reflection by the in-service language teacher. But while doing this, we also paid attention to particular expressions or propositions that would indicate possible transitions or discursive shifts, and would denounce possible change in perspective with regard to the teacher's professional identity and mission as language teacher. In this case, we were guided by Ginzburg (1989) perspective, which states that at this level of inference and interpretation we can only identify clues and hints, since change is difficult to unveil and, consequently, statements about it need to be cautiously made.

Categories	Reference …
1. **Language(s)**	… to languages as objects to be analyzed, mastered, taught; to languages' dimensions, functions and status; to their place in the world and the diversity that characterizes them.
2. **Language learning process**	… to the specificity of the learning process/verbal acquisition – strategies; processes; theories.
3. **Pedagogical and didactic knowledge**	… to the educational and didactic theories; to the didactic repertoire; to knowledge necessary for the exercise of the profession.
4. **Close or distant contexts**	… to the contexts surrounding the subject, to the intervention community and the aspects that determine it
5. **School and educational functions**	… to the school as an institution and its role in the education of its citizens
6. **The others**	… to those who work in or determine the educational act – teacher educators, colleagues, parents…
7. **Teacher education**	… to the education process, aims, content, activities, assessment, qualities and capabilities required from the teachers-as-learners
8. **Oneself**	… (reflection about) oneself, revealing self-knowledge, awareness of own values, capacities, wishes...

Table 2. Categories of analysis (adapted from Andrade & Pinho, 2010)

4. The projected narrative

The in-service teacher reported in this paper is a language teacher (English and French) in a secondary school, with a lot of professional experience and with postgraduate education.

Calling to mind the micro-context which this teacher was part of, she was a member of sub-group 2 – "Languages and Cultures: migrations and (mis)encounters". Recognizing the relevance of this subject in the context of an inclusive intercultural education, this sub-group set itself the task to know how to approach, in the school context, the theme of migration in order to create an environment that values linguistic and cultural diversity. To this end, they considered it relevant to understand the pupils' representations of migration, and the concept that they reveal about different cultures and peoples and, finally, how they see language in the integration of migrants.

This sub-group developed didactic projects at different levels of education (8th and 10th grades) and in different language classes (French, Spanish and English). The aim of these intervention projects was educating for citizenship, diversity and solidarity, by promoting critical reflection on stereotypes and representations of migrants, languages and cultures. In addition, they sought to find out about the problems faced by migrants, the importance of inclusion policies and practices, as well as to help identify solutions to be adopted for inclusion within the school.

The teacher's involvement in the project "Languages and Education" comes from her constant search for opportunities for professional development: *"Professionally I have always tried to keep up to date with regard to scientific and teaching developments: reading, activities/workshops, participation and colloquia/conferences, a Master's. […]. I try to find strategies, resources, better/more understanding to be able to act in a more conscious and informed way"* (initial PC).

She participates in education processes "*always believing that I'll get to learn and share experiences and knowledge with others"* (initial PC). Let's see how the project's collaborative learning context influenced her professional learning processes and projection of identity.

Language(s)

The common global theme which was chosen for the work of the WGA causes this teacher to reflect on the role of the language teacher in relation to languages as object(s) of teaching/learning. The teacher becomes aware of the need to expand her fields of action, by providing greater articulation between the various language areas in the sense of finding alternative, more intercultural and plurilingual language teaching styles – "*Why specifically "Sensitization and Plurilingual and Intercultural Education" ? I believe, today, this is the great challenge for language teachers"* (2nd WR). On the basis of social and political challenges, to which she acknowledges the key role of languages, this teacher admits that there is little real contact between teachers, and looks critically at the school organization and its defining teaching objectives:

"In fact, within a framework of European integration and globalization, speaking of a languages educator today makes a great deal of sense. Yet it seems to me that, in what I have seen, we are still only a language teacher, despite research contributions in this area, the discursive trends of language policies, changes in discourse of the texts that regulate in theoretical and methodological terms the language programs, changes in schools at the level of curricular organization, which allows the existence of a language coordinator to bring together all the languages taught" (1st WR);

"we still have a tendency to pay little attention to our colleagues and other language teachers around us, and we continue to pursue our educational objectives, and, in the field of foreign languages, we still want to produce polyglots who can dominate all the skills of communication correctly" (1st WR).

This relationship with the subject matter – language(s) – becomes fundamental in processes of identity reconstruction, and provides this teacher with other benchmarks with which to analyze the role of the language teacher. There is, however, a distant discursive self-implication when referring to language teachers in general, although it is possible to sense her in this discourse.

Language learning process

During this learning period this teacher will expand her knowledge about the process of language learning, and assign other attributes – "*I recognize that learning languages is also learning about the other, it means learning to accept it and value it*" (3rd WR). The idea of greater articulation between languages conveyed in earlier passages is reinforced in a final moment of the education process, when mention is made of the integration of other modes of thinking about linguistic learning experiences and of fostering them in the classroom:

"I also know that languages are not watertight spaces, closed, hence the importance of turning to strategies which facilitate their understanding, their learning, such as the valuing of previous language learning experiences, the intercomprehension approach…" (3rd WR).

Pedagogical and didactic knowledge

Most instances of professional awareness can be witnessed when teachers are motivated by reflection related to the two previous categories. With regard to the subject of plurilingualism and with a view to her teaching practice, this teacher identifies areas of knowledge to be (re)constructed, and sees the need to learn more about how to organize an education for plurilingualism:

"I've been thinking about teaching practices in terms of a plurilingual education, wanting (not always successfully) students to enjoy languages, trying to explore languages' cultural and educational potential, trying to optimize resources that the proximity between them represents... However, I feel that I still have a long way to go to become a teacher that educates for languages. Tradition is a heavy weight; routine is a friend of conformism and change is slow, winding, full of "traps"... But I believe that the willingness to change is challenging and, so, here I am. I need more insight about plurilingual education, about linguistic and cultural diversity to be able to (re)construct knowledge and (re)think practices" (1st WR).

Aware of the fact that she still has a long way to go, this teacher is able to find a sense of direction in her professional development, and expresses a desire to take part in education programs that will help her to develop pedagogical and didactic

knowledge in relation to linguistic diversity, and to plurilingual and intercultural competence. In his context, she looks critically at the teaching she has done, recognizing the need to bring about change:

> "I feel responsible for not promoting more systematic work in the classroom. I am stuck between the awareness that we must act and an inability to react. Applying the words of Porcher to my everyday teaching, what sort of teaching do I do that involves plurilingualism and interculturality? A "passive" way of teaching, occasionally touching on the idea of the proximity/transparency between languages and/or on their potential in terms of cultural and developmental issues? Or an "active" teaching, thinking of lessons within projects, working on aspects of plurilingualism and interculturality in a planned and organized way? I categorize myself firmly as the first type" (2nd WR)

She seems to come to value professional knowledge constructed through research done in collaboration with teacher educators from university as a way to make transformations: "*this dialogue between research, teaching and practice is important for us to gain professional confidence, to find courage, to (re)think and to (re)construct our action*" (2nd WR).

The others

The relationship with others – in this case essentially within the collaborative education program – is mentioned quite a lot by this teacher, a process that seems to lead to a reconstruction process of self-image as a language teacher, but also towards more effective professional development. She is aware of the contribution of fellow teachers and teacher educators for the construction of her personal and professional know-how, within a work culture which is more shared, negotiated and dynamic, as this passage demonstrates:

> "I miss the WGA, the initial constraints, the participants, the different reasons why we had come together, the novelty factor, the organization, the work groups, the deviations, the corrections… the concern of a colleague as she looked forward to that everything was shared, discussed, negotiated, adjusted to the multiple interests… Life's journeys are like this, and missing all this is the first sign that it was worth it!" (3rd WR)

Teacher education

This teacher's reflection on her involvement in the education program mainly focuses on its inherent characteristics and how it was a comfort zone for joint experimentation with other modes of thinking and taking action with respect to language education. Throughout this period of time, she clearly demonstrates the value she assigns to a collaborative way of professional learning, perceived as a place of refuge to be able to speak, learn, reconstruct what is important – practices, improvements in the school: "*I don't want to stop this kind of training. I feel so* good *when I'm there!... working in the group!...*" (2nd WR). This was, as she states, one of the major reasons to get involved in collaborative practices:

> "I immediately liked the idea that it would be an opportunity to improve and develop my collaborative skills, my research and my self reflection. I liked the idea to think that sharing information and practices would be an asset for my personal growth. I liked the idea that the combination of different opinions and experiences concerning research and teaching practices (University and schools) is a positive contribution towards giving up habits and renewing practices" (1st WR).

She recognizes the importance of working in collaboration with others, *"the combination of everybody's tastes* [teachers, teacher educators, researchers], *who invest their knowledge, experiences, time, energies and wills in the project"* (3rd WR). This teacher identifies those education strategies that she values most for her professional development, and is very aware of the possibilities that can lead to different ways of be(com)ing a language teacher:

> "The methodology used in the WG sessions is intended to enhance and empower each and everyone of the participants, allowing us to express our opinions: brainstorming, work presentations, the critical friend approach, taking the minutes... Besides, the way the WGA was put together underlines the importance of working together collaboratively, "building and sharing information", accountability: transparency and objectivity in the process (what is aimed at, how to carry it out, how it is evaluated), the involvement of the group in the discussion of the criteria for the organization and evaluation of the portfolio, systematization of the work carried out on the part of the participants of the sessions, the teams made of teachers of different educational institutions, the constant use of *moodle* to retrieve information..." (1st WR).

Oneself

All along this education period, she has been taking stock of her personal and professional history, constructing other meanings, knowing that her own story is in permanent reconstruction:

> "Taking part in this education program despite my long period of time in teaching means that I consider my professional development is still unfinished and I always believe in the possibilities of improvement, of (re)constructing knowledge and practices" (2nd WR).

Furthermore, she acknowledges that the experience *per se* isn't enough in the processes of professional development and construction of identity: *"It is, therefore, with the belief that years of experience are not the necessary basis per se for learning and development of professional skills that I find myself here"* (2nd R).

She analyzes herself, identifying qualities to be developed in view of the type of education program she was getting involved in, such as, for example, capacity of time management and organization – *"Worries? Time! Time! Time! Or my (in)ability to manage my working life and personal life with that of teacher-as-learner. But I will improve!"* (1st WR). Or even the ability to reveal one's thoughts to another person (teacher, teacher educator, researcher), to be subject to others' questioning, and share experiences without fear:

> "I managed to overcome my inhibitions with regard to working online, although it was too late, when I decided to publish my opinions. I realize now that shyness about sharing intimate details of our professional life deprives us of feelings of safety, comfort, solidarity, because we are not alone! And this was another part of my learning!" (3rd WR).

In the "final" stage of the education program, the teacher identifies the kind of learning that has helped her define her *mission* as a teacher – *"I realized that the school has the primary responsibility of valuing the linguistic background of each individual"* (3rd WR). She now seems able to anticipate future scenarios, with a commitment to transform not only the classroom, but the school itself, in a process of reconstruction of her professional biography:

"My first challenge will be to try to go about things in a different way, based on sharing and participation, in our department of languages. If plurilingual education implies reconstituting the linguistic and cultural unity of individual speakers through the diversity of their repertoire of languages, we have to begin by working towards the idea of convergence […] My wish is to 'borrow' the dynamic methods used in the collaborative education program and try to adapt them to the school, since the departments come together to have meetings almost only because of organizational matters and also to comply with the calendar. It will be difficult to change, make transformations, I know! But we have to start somewhere, taking one step at a time…!" (3rd WR).

In short, this teacher shows a much more multi-dimensional identity construction process. This is based not only on her (re)constructed professional knowledge, but also on the way she reinterprets herself, in a process of a conscious analysis of her own biography, of her learning path. She has thus become able to map out her own project with regard to both her identity as well as her professional development.

5. Synopsis

Bearing in mind the case of this language teacher, the collaborative education context created within the "Languages and Education" project seems to have had potentialities as a time of transformation, albeit other teachers may evidence different aspects of their professional development. As such, the comparison with or the study of further cases is needed (see Andrade & Pinho, 2010; Pinho & Andrade, 2010).

In the teacher's narratives, her professional story is seen as the projection of a new and different story that "starts now", and has still to be written to include other professionals that work with her in the educational community, at school. In this sense, this teacher hopes to rewrite her professional story differently. The inter-subjective confrontation in the case of this teacher occurs as an arrangement with the school, with its actors, i.e. with those who she relates to and works with. Such dialogue with others seems to have become a way to reflect upon and figure out ways of managing the curriculum towards a more plurilingual and intercultural education in this teachers' future.

Keeping a line of continuity, she acknowledges other biographical possibilities, namely due to the use of other languages which she had previously had no experience of. She understands better how plurilingualism can be fostered in school context.

In sum, these results have to be seen in the timeline of the teacher's professional development project, and more particularly in the context of a situated learning. Moreover, the findings, which highlight the possibilities of new linguistic and professional biographies made possible by collaborative work towards more plurilingual educational environments, also show the need to go further in terms of research into professional development trajectories towards plurilingualism and plurilingual education, as well as in the creation of education opportunities to make these trajectories happen.

6. Conclusions

As already explored in this paper, reflective narratives or accounts can be formative tools in fostering self-knowledge, which in turn can give a sense of

empowerment, direction and help design new or desired professional projects and identities. But in the introductory part of this text we also mentioned that accessing to personal trajectories by means of narratives, in this case written reflections upon episodes of life experiences in the scope of collaborative professional learning about plurilingual and intercultural education, could be a tool to critically understand the effect of particular teacher education landscapes to teachers' professional learning. Some conclusions can be put forward with regard to the use of narrative inquiry and instruments in terms of: (a) research about teachers' professional identity and learning; (b) monitoring in context of supervision of teacher education.

In fact, autobiographical data can give a unique contribution to research on teacher education scenarios and dynamics, since it helps us to understand the complex personal and internal dynamics unleashed in such contexts and which are not always observable when analysing other kind of data, such as group interactions. As the findings indicate, it is also possible to gain insight about how the collectively developed professional learning impacts on the construction of the teachers' professional identities. Such written accounts can help both teachers and teacher educators to trace professional growth, new sense of professional direction, as well as dynamics of (non) identification with new discourses and practices about language education. As put in evidence in the findings, we can also elicit teachers' linguistic ideologies, representations

Multiple dimensions of professional identity construction and thinking can be illuminated when analysing narratives. It is possible to find dilemmas which are many times made perceptible to the individual teacher by means of self-reflection, but which may be difficult to uncover when not evoked by the individuals themselves. Important in teacher education scenarios which intend to construct more collaborative dynamics between different educational actors is the existence of a sense of convergence and commitment. This can be spotted by means of observing and measuring the involvement of individuals in the activities. But reflective accounts provide us with the inner sphere of such relational dimension.

It is therefore relevant to understand how a same collaborative learning scenario can lead to different identity paths, and how such personal trajectories can feed and recreate that same scenario. Conle (1996) uses the term "narrative resonance" to refer to strands of connections and correspondences that can be found in narratives. Considering the "social ecology of learning" (Alheit, 2009), such narrative knowledge of contexts can contribute to the mapping of learning scenarios, strategies, dynamics... which are simultaneously significant to the single teacher and the whole group. In other words, the challenge seems to be how to find room for unique personal development according to each ones' own projected professional identity within knowledge building social networks.

The challenge of the narrative and biographical dimension to teacher education takes expression in its importance for allowing the individuals to draw new paths, with personal, local and social meaning, based on their "biographical curricula" (the training/learning choices made throughout their journey) (Tadeu da Silva, 1999). In this sense, collaborative teacher education, punctuated by refection and critical observation, can give rise to the joint identification and individual awareness of professional learning processes, in particular with regard to the integration of new

theories and practices in the teaching and linguistic-communicative repertoire (knowing how to think and knowing how to act), but also of knowing how to be.

Narrative and autobiographic approaches in collaborative learning offer the opportunity to create spaces of discussion around its contents and can be the motive to bring together schoolteachers and researchers/teacher educators and engage them in more dialogic scenarios in language teacher education and research. Although there was the attempt to do this during the time span of the "Languages and Education" project, we must acknowledge that such dialogue around the written reflections was confined to the relationship between the schoolteacher and the researcher/teacher educator, which played the role of critical friend and provided feedback to guide the schoolteacher. It would have been interestingly richer to expand such dyadic forum, and create more collective reflection, discussion, commentaries of narrative extracts. As Smith (2011) explains, such route would open the way to more dialogic interactions and collective (self-)knowledge capital. In our perspective, it would also help to build a shared professional discourse, which may become more intelligible to all actors in the field of language education. Besides, in the context of the ideals of professional learning communities, such narrative sharing could foster more coalescence between its members, and help to build a common valued vision and mission.

To conclude, this study ultimately aims to be a contribution, as Alheit & Dausien (2006) say, towards the construction of "a careful and systematic theory of *biographical learning*", by extending our knowledge on teacher education for another type of language education, more plurilingual and intercultural. This is based on an awareness that it is necessary to move towards an understanding of what happens from the biographical point of view of those involved (teachers, teacher educators and researchers), and taking into account the conflicts that arise in terms of language choice, curriculum management and between cultures of thought and practice.

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