

# Emotions and Sociocultural Context in Foreign Language Teacher Identity

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## Abstract

The present article analyses the influence of previous learning experiences, emotions, and socio-cultural context on the development of teacher identity. The life history of a Mexican language teacher in the middle of her career is explored, in order to understand how previous learning experiences, emotional events, and culture have shaped her teacher identity and professional development. It presents analysis undertaken on the autobiographical narrative of the subject, Renata, the results of which show the determining influence of culture and previous learning experiences in the construction of a teacher identity. This article aims to make professionals in foreign language teaching aware of the usefulness of personal narratives to understanding the teaching practice and supporting professional development.

## Keywords

Emotional experiences; foreign language teaching; socio-cultural context; professional development.

## **Emociones y contexto sociocultural en la identidad del profesor de lenguas extranjeras**

### **Resumen**

En este artículo se analiza la influencia de las experiencias de aprendizaje previas, las emociones y el contexto socio cultural en el desarrollo de la identidad docente. Este estudio explora la vida de una profesora mexicana de inglés como lengua extranjera, que se encuentra en la mitad de su carrera profesional, para comprender cómo sus experiencias de aprendizaje anteriores, ciertos eventos emocionales y la cultura han moldeado su identidad docente y desarrollo profesional. En este artículo, presentaré el análisis realizado a la narrativa autobiográfica de Renata. Los resultados muestran la determinante influencia de la cultura, y las experiencias de aprendizaje previas en la construcción de una identidad docente. Este artículo tiene como objetivo hacer conscientes a los profesionales del área de la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras de la utilidad de las narrativas personales para entender la práctica docente y apoyar el desarrollo profesional.

### **Palabras clave**

Experiencias emocionales; enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras; contexto sociocultural; identidad profesional.

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## 1. Introduction

Teacher identity has been recognized as a critical component in language teaching, as it shapes the entire classroom environment (Varghese et al., 2005). The concept of teacher identity has been studied from different perspectives ranging from its multifaceted nature (Beijaard et al., 2004) to the continuous construction and shaping of identity in different contexts and time periods (Han, 2016) and the narratives created by teachers to understand both themselves and their teaching (Teng, 2017).

Varghese et al. point out that “to understand language teaching and learning we need to understand teachers; and in order to understand teachers, we need to have a clearer sense of who they are” (2005: 22). A useful qualitative research method used to analyze people's lives is the autobiographical narrative, a tool that Ellis and Bochner define as “[...] an autobiographical genre of writing that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (2000: 739). These narratives create stories around puzzling, surprising, or frustrating events in life and comprise a natural human response involving the search for the meaning of different life events (Bruner, 1960), thus helping people shape the meaning of their own lives (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000).

Autobiographical narratives have been used in language education studies to explore the relationships between future teachers' self-concept and motivation (O'Connor, 2008; Masako, 2013; Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013), between self-concept and professional development (Lapidus et al., 2013; Wijayatilake, 2012), and among teacher identity, agency, authority, and vulnerability (Teng, 2020). Emotions provide the common language for the construction and reconstruction of teachers' identities. As Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) state, we need to include, among others, the self, discourse, reflection, agency, and emotions when trying to make sense of the concept of identity. Thus, the present article analyzes a Mexican teacher's personal story, from a holistic perspective including personal and professional aspects (Miller, 2009; Tran & Sanchez, 2016). Specifically, Renata's learning and teaching experiences are analyzed by means of her life history. Her life experiences during different stages (e.g. childhood and adulthood) of her personal life are intertwined with the struggles and conflicts of her professional life (e.g. family, friends, and significant others) that help her to construct and reconstruct her identity.

Using autobiographical narratives, the present study sets out Renata's emotional experiences while learning and teaching English in Mexico, experiences which contributed to both her teacher identity and professional development.

## 2. Identity in language teaching

The construction of language teacher identity has attracted research attention in recent decades (Méndez & Clavijo, 2017). Agreeing on a definition for identity has been not possible due to its multifarious nature (Alsup, 2006; Fomunyan, 2016) and the link

among the diverse aspects it comprises (Priestley et al., 2013; Tsui, 2007). As Barkhuizen states, identity is constructed “within social relationships between people; people with attitudes, beliefs, expectations and assumptions, in local communities, and in global communities” (2016: 30). Smit et al. (2010) assert that teachers’ professional identities are shaped not only during their interactions in formal education but also by the socio-cultural context in which they find themselves, given social expectations about learning and teaching. This concurs with Feiman-Nemser (2001), who emphasizes that identity is a result of the intertwining of both teachers’ learning experiences and their formal education with passages of their life history. Thus, identity construction is a complex, dynamic, and continuous process that cannot be framed in a specific timeframe and context, as teachers both are and act in different spaces at the same time. However, this concept can be understood better by analyzing the different components that shape it. For the purpose of the present article, I analyzed the relationship between previous learning experiences, emotions, and socio-cultural aspects in the construction of a Mexican language teacher’s identity.

Previous learning experiences have been found to be determinant in the identity of language teachers (Borg, 2003), who are influenced by their good and bad learning experiences and their peers or teachers over the course of their formation. Coşgun Ögeyik (2016) investigated the previous and current learning experiences of 24 Turkish student ELT teachers. Using a mixed-method design, the researcher found that student teachers characterized their previous teachers’ styles as traditional and that, during the first stage of practicum, their teaching practices were influenced by what was seen as an unfavorable teaching style. However, the researcher concluded that not all the decisions taken during the first year of teaching practice could have been influenced by past learning experiences. Thus, it is important to support student teachers in the development of their teacher identity in the early stages of their teaching career, as, while this does have a determining influence on their teaching practice, it can also be shaped in this period via reflection.

Song’s (2016) study, conducted in South Korea, indicates the unstable and vulnerable character of the concept of identity when mixed with socio-cultural influence. While teachers are authority figures in South Korea, the study shows the struggles and tensions undergone by experienced teachers via the diverse emotions they expressed when interacting with students who had studied in an English-speaking country. Song reports that the teachers featured in his study give no credit to the skills acquired by these returnee students, concluding that they did so to protect their face as knowledgeable and experienced English teachers. However, when asked about this in confidence, they were able to confront their emotions by recognizing how vulnerable they felt during their daily practice. Song concludes that recognition and reflection enabled these experienced teachers to understand and transform their identities and practice as teachers.

In Mexico, Trejo Guzmán and Mora Vázquez (2014) used autobiographical narratives to explore the influence of the social and professional context on the identity of language teachers at a state university. The study emphasizes the way in which family environment, the approach to professional development used by university authorities,

and participation in these programs interact to either facilitate or prevent the strengthening of teachers' professional identities and sense of agency. The authors consider that understanding the nature of teachers' agency is a determining factor in enhancing both their teaching practice and professional development, which raised their level of awareness about aspects of their professional lives and enabled them to establish a more active and reflective relationship with their past and present experiences.

Using life histories and narratives, Avalos-Rivera (2016) explored the identity of five experienced teachers in southern Mexico. Her participants' stories about their decision to become English teachers were full of accounts of hesitation and struggle. As in the present study, being a teacher was not something her participants decided on consciously. Three participants in the study revealed an inadequate level of English, which made them compare with non-native speakers, while all of them describe a lack of support for their professional development from either colleagues or the administration. Avalos-Rivera provides evidence of the feelings of insecurity and struggle experienced by Mexican teachers in negotiating their identity as English teachers, as a result of socio-cultural factors such as the exclusive hiring of either native speakers or white mestizos. Furthermore, the pervasive influence of prior learning experience on her participants' practice was present even when they were enrolled on graduate programs in order to legitimize their English language teacher identities. Avalos-Rivera concludes that current accountability policies in the Mexican education system negatively affect teaching practice and Mexican teachers' sense of identity.

As presented in the foregoing review of the literature, identity is a complex construct influenced by different and varied aspects, such as beliefs, emotions, previous learning experiences, and sociocultural factors. I argue that all these aspects should be considered when using autobiographical narratives to understand teachers' identities.

### 3. Methodology

The present study on the identity and professional growth of Renata, an English language teacher, was conducted by examining autobiographical narratives. Trejo Guzmán and Mora Vázquez refer to autobiographical narratives as "a methodological strategy of great help for understanding aspects related to the professional life of teachers" (2014: 1246). In the same vein, Connelly and Clandinin (1999) assert that narratives are stories that help teachers make sense of both their life experiences and themselves.

Renata, a colleague at the English language department where I worked, compiled her narrative over a period of ten months. While talking to her about our recent presentation of a paper we had written, she confessed to feeling uncomfortable while making presentations to colleagues from other universities. Having discussed these feelings with her, I proposed that we work together on understanding them, given that, like all teachers at Mexican state universities, she was required to give presentations at academic events. Once she agreed, I provided her with guidelines for writing that bear

ethical procedures in mind (Ellis, 2007). Renata wrote about specific events that had occurred during her experiences of both language learning and her life as a teacher. These narratives were further extended and enriched when I prompted her for more information. As Ellis points out, writing an autobiographical narrative “involves a back-and-forth movement between experiencing and examining a vulnerable self and observing and revealing the broader context of that experience” (2007: 14).

An autobiographical narrative has the advantage of contributing to other people’s lives by making them reflect on and empathize with the narratives presented. Telling her personal story made Renata realize that some of the fears she felt in her professional life were engendered by her upbringing. Realizing this made her see those fears in a different light and consciously face them in her professional life, a point emphasized by Barkhuizen and Wette “In telling their stories of experience teachers necessarily reflect on those experiences and thus make meaning of them; that is, they gain an understanding of their teaching knowledge and practice” (2008: 374).

For Renata, reflection was necessary in order to explore her emotional experiences. According to Boud et al. in a learning context, reflection can be characterized as “a generic term for those intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understandings and appreciations” (1985a: 19).

In order to analyze the emotional events experienced by my participant, it was necessary to return to her writing and undertake what Schön (1983) calls *reflection on action*, namely a retrospective analysis of an event. We learn through reflection by questioning actions we are doing or have done, with our answers to those questions providing us new knowledge and awareness that can be applied to new situations. Renata’s sense of understanding emerged while being asked questions about critical events occurring in her narrative. Given her experience as a teacher, Renata thought, prior to engaging in the writing process, that some teachers would emerge as having influenced her motivation during her foreign language learning process; however, what did emerge from her reflections was unexpected. As Boud et al. explain, reflection “[...]is an active process of exploration and discovery which often leads to very unexpected outcomes” (1985b: 7).

Reflection is considered a means of deepening our emotional understanding (Ellis, 1991). Some predominant themes emerged in Renata’s emotional struggle through her years as a foreign language learner in Mexico. Her memories took her to different periods of her childhood, spaces in her family environment, and her awareness of being different in character from most of the members of her family. She recognized that *fear* had been the most pervasive emotion in her personal and academic life, pertaining to the fear of feeling embarrassed, of being judged, of being evaluated, and of being of no worth. Reading a cultural or social account of an experience, some may become aware of realities to which they have not given prior thought, thus making autobiographical narrative a valuable form of inquiry.

The first phase of the data analysis employed by the present study involved organizing the data into chronological order and separating learning from teaching experiences. The analysis then focused on those sections, which located Renata in either

a learning or teaching event and depicted her relationships with students, teachers, or colleagues. The events evoked emotions that made her question her decision to study and teach English. The events selected provide insights into the processes involved in the construction of both her teacher identity and professional growth.

## 4. Results

The present article reports on Renata's emotional experiences, of both learning and teaching that contributed to the construction of her identity as a language teacher. The findings are written in narrative form, into which the analytical themes identified are inserted, while the pervasive role of Mexican culture in her personal and professional life is also highlighted. Her reflection led Renata to the realization that her professional development began as a result of critical incidents in her professional life that were related to events in her childhood. Writing the autobiographical narratives presented in the present paper helped give meaning to not only her professional but also her personal life. Quotes from Renata's narrative are included in the findings, while pseudonyms are used throughout to protect the identity of those involved.

### 4.1 Confusion, embarrassment, and fear while learning

Many language teachers enter the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) for diverse reasons. Renata decided to become a language teacher like her sister. She describes not having given it much prior thought, but that it had seemed a good idea.

I had not known what to study at university and I registered in the English degree because of a suggestion from my sister, not because I had really made a proper decision about what to do with my future. [R.N.]

Renata's choice of enrolling at university was an impulse and not inspired by teachers, peers, or family members. She found that life at university was not what she had expected as she struggled to learn English.

I found the study of the English language very difficult. I recall feeling lost in my first English courses at university since my classmates already knew the basics of the language. It was very difficult. I felt confused, stupid and fearful when being asked something I did not understand, most of all, I felt frustrated as a learner. [R.N.]  
Everything was new to me. In one of my crises, I called my father to tell him I was going to quit the major in English language teaching. [R.N.]

I asked Renata about not having chosen a specific undergraduate degree prior to applying to university. She described realizing that being constantly encouraged to study by relatives and parents was a common experience for many of her peers. However, in her case, she had to win the right to go to university, as her father thought that women should look after the home and men should go to work and had reinforced to her, since she was a child, that women were different to men. The choice chicken pieces were saved for her two brothers, while she and her sisters had to help her mother

clean the house and tidy their brothers' room. Although her brothers were free to do as they wished, she and her sisters had to ask permission for everything. Despite disagreeing with her husband's point of view, Renata's mother submitted to it. However, when the time came, her mother fought to ensure a university education for Renata and her sisters and, although her father was reluctant, he finally agreed.

Growing up in what is considered a developing country, Mexican children are told from early childhood that they have to work hard in order to achieve a better life, with the best way of doing so being to study hard and get the best grades possible in order to then get a well-paid job. I believe that the dream of most Mexican parents is for their sons and daughters to graduate from university, giving them the possibility of a good job and a better life. Humans are social entities who react to a specific stimulus with their entire social and cultural heritage, with Bochner and Ellis stating " [...] culture circulates through all of us [...] " (1996: 24). Renata describes having no idea what to study because she was not encouraged by family members to pursue university studies, which concurs with Avalos-Rivera (2016), who states that Mexican teachers lack the social scaffolding for taking an important decision, such as deciding what degree to study. Thus, Renata described having experienced fear and doubts during her first year at university because the English language was difficult for her to learn.

One difficult episode at university happened in Miss Marquez's class, which started with a vocabulary activity every day. After the activity, the teacher usually asked two students to read a dialogue aloud in order to correct their pronunciation in front of the whole class. Renata hated for her speaking and pronunciation to be evaluated, as she was struggling with vocabulary, the meaning of words, and grammar. Thus, having to perform dialogues in front of the whole class in order to be corrected by Miss Marquez was a stressful experience.

Doesn't the teacher know this is really embarrassing? Learners just know each other [...] Most of the students in this class have studied English for years so they are better prepared to speak than others, especially me. [R.N]

The day Renata was chosen by Miss Marquez to read in front of the class was a bad day. Her voice was quivering, her mind was blank, and she replied to her classmate's lines without thinking too much. She just wanted that moment to finish. While her partner was speaking fluidly and correctly pronouncing the words, Renata did not move because she was scared of both fainting in front of the class and the reaction to her reading.

Miss Marquez evaluation of my performance was not very good. Those remarks were made in front of the whole class and that made the moment a very humiliating one. To make it worse, my best friend approach me and whispered *Rose beat you*. [R.N]

Renata did not say a word. She already felt humiliated and now her best friend was rubbing her lack of speaking skills in her face. Given that the activities that made Renata anxious were speaking activities, this event discouraged her even more from talking. As she considered her friend a very intelligent person with good verbal expression, her friend's observation made her feel that she was not such a person. While she was able to



complete the grammar, reading, and listening activities with no problems (even enjoying them), if she had to talk, her voice would sound strange and her legs would start shaking.

Renata confessed that she has a problem with being heard, in general, which I think is because she does not like the spotlight. While she could manage being in a class with other students, having to make a presentation made her anxious. I asked Renata if she was afraid of being evaluated or judged: Why are you so afraid? Why do you not consider your words, your 'voice', to be valuable?

My mother is very proud to say that I was a very quiet and obedient child. She says that with a disapproving look she could stop me and my siblings from being naughty. When I read about self-determination theory and how controlling teachers hinder autonomy in learners, I thought about my mother. I related it to my upbringing. I am the eldest daughter in my house. I am supposed to be an example for my younger sisters. My eldest brother did not fit the model my parents expected so I think that the entire burden was placed on me and still is. I am the one everyone in my family calls as soon as a problem arises. My mother is always telling me how proud she is but sometimes I feel I would like to escape from being the one that can always be called on, I would like to be the irresponsible one. [R. N.]

Thus, since I was very young, I was not asked for opinions, nor asked to express my feelings either at home or at school. Besides, my personal characteristics did not help in making me more expressive and less fearful. I think the combination of my personal characteristics and my upbringing sparked that pervasive fear of talking or being heard in Spanish or English. [R.N]

Although her struggles with language made her think about withdrawing from university, her mother advised her to take private classes in order to deal with her feelings of insecurity.

These classes gave me confidence and, little by little, I started to feel more secure in my English language knowledge. I think of this particular moment as a turning point in my life since it was as if I was deciding that my future would be committed to finishing the degree in English and, from that moment, all my efforts were concentrated on obtaining the degree. [R.N]

Renata recognizes that the fear of being judged when speaking in English is still present and believes that this fear originates in her low sense of self-worth. While she considers herself a strong person who tries hard to achieve her goals, she is also a very insecure person. When I asked her what drove her, she replied as follows:

In spite of my low self-esteem and my perception of my lack of verbal skills? I do not know if it is a natural desire to be a better person, to be a better person has always been my main goal because I believe that personal improvement leads to improvement in all areas of your life. [R.N]

My fear has made me move in different directions to avoid things I do not want to experience. Fear as a negative feeling may be considered to hinder learning and improvement. I believe that in my case my fears have made me move and act. My fears

are the things that have made me go further, the things that have pushed me to try and try to accomplish my goals. Someone told me once that my quiet personality was something good. I do not know [...] sometimes I do not agree but I have started to accept my nature. I have also discovered that acting differently makes me feel uneasy and artificial. I believe that your feelings and emotions are the things that make you move. Although negative feelings can be considered to be bad for learning, my fear of talking has pushed me to do it; I have had some bad experiences, but they have not stopped me. I think that in spite of my personality features, I realized I needed to start facing my fears and trying to live with them. Thus, awareness helped me to accept that the negative feeling was there; however, my desire to be a good learner and a better teacher was as strong as that negative feeling, and so it may be that positive feelings or desires diminished my fear. [R.N]

Renata feels that her decision to continue trying to learn the language and finish her ELT degree was her way of finally making the decision that she had not been able to make, with regard to her choice of degree program, when initially considering going to university.

## 4.2 Confusion, embarrassment, and fear while teaching

Renata began her teaching career when an opportunity to teach in a public university in southern Mexico arose in 1992. One of the most frightening experiences in her teaching life was facing her first group of students, as she felt unprepared to do the job. Given that, from that first encounter with students onwards, she took training courses and attended workshops in order to be better prepared, Renata's professional development began, without her realizing it, the very first day she started teaching.

I started to teach English at university because of an opportunity, but once there I realized I was not really prepared to teach young adults. The first question I was asked was, what methodology are you going to use? I was shocked, I had no idea and I could not answer. That day, I decided to study for a diploma to become better prepared and trained. [R.N]

After having worked for ten months, Renata applied to study for an ELT diploma, moved to a different city, and found a job to support herself while completing her graduate studies. While studying for her diploma, she had to face unpleasant observations from her employer, the owner of the private school where she was working.

Rodrigo would come and sit at the back of the class, stay there observing and evaluating me, and then at some point he would stand up and start teaching the class. I felt like one of the children in class being shown how to do things. Rodrigo concentrated on my speaking, correcting me, or asking for different vocabulary to test me. I hated those moments and I felt so humiliated. I felt that he was telling me: You are not a well-prepared teacher. [R.N]

Speaking was the skill that made Renata feel uneasy and remains so. In her second teaching job, speaking emerged as the primary source of her negative emotions. She was receiving her employer's observations at the same time as she was undergoing formal

observation for her Diploma for Overseas Teachers of English (DOTE), although the focus and manner of both processes were very different. Every time Renata saw her employer approaching her classroom, she would start to feel nervous and frightened. After her coworkers noticed what was happening, they encouraged her to ask Rodrigo to stop his classroom observations, but she did not know how to.

I felt terrified when I heard him approaching my class. My voice would start to stutter and tremble. Fortunately, the children were not aware of what was happening. I used to cry after these observations. [R.N]

After six months, she found a new job in a private institute, giving classes to children, teenagers, and adults. The institute was new and Renata was happy teaching there, where she was assigned three different groups every afternoon. She enjoyed the classes, and the salary, which enabled her to support herself while studying for her diploma and was learning a great deal from her colleagues about aspects of teaching about which she was unsure. Given that, at the same time, she was also studying for her ELT Diploma, she began to feel more confident about her teaching skills.

Renata's emotional moments saw her motivation fluctuate, with the fear of not being considered a good student and teacher making her find ways to overcome her limitations. Firstly, as a student she had studied English for two years at a private institute, in the mornings, in order to attain the language level of most of her classmates. Then, after noting the limitations of her teacher training, she enrolled on different courses to become a better teacher. Although fear may be considered a negative emotion, it can have both positive and negative effects, where, in Renata's case, fear moved her to act. Firstly, it forced her to devise a strategy for completing her English language degree, which involved taking extracurricular courses. Secondly, it pushed her to take teacher training courses in her first year of teaching in order to overcome her lack of teaching skills. Today, Renata has already completed a master's degree and is currently in the middle of her doctorate.

## 5. Discussion

Analysis conducted on Renata's narrative and the emotional events presented above suggest an intricate relationship among family environment, learning experiences, and teaching experiences (Tran & Sanchez, 2016). Renata's emotions and language learning history combined with her family and socio-cultural environment, meaning that Mexican culture played a pivotal role in shaping Renata's performance as both a learner and later as a teacher (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

Renata had never been asked to express her opinions or to talk about herself before. The language learning approach used in her degree course, which involved performing dialogues in front of the class, was a completely different world for her. Thus, this approach combined with her personal characteristics made her feel that she was not a good learner and embarrassed about having to talk in front of people in a

different language, while failing to sound as expected. All these aspects combined to lower her self-concept and magnified her fears (Lapidus et al., 2013), as could be seen in her failure to respond to the behavior of her employer in her early years of teaching. Having internalized that men were more valuable than women, she did not know how to respond or address her employer behavior.

The traditional teaching to which she had been exposed in her schooling, allied to the fact that, in her family, women were supposed to work in the house and were not expected to study, may have instilled in her the introjection of being of no value, and her voice was silenced. As Varghese et al. (2005) note, it is only through these narrative accounts that we can understand why a teacher acts in a particular way.

Renata revealed that the language skill that makes her feel uneasy is speaking because she feels afraid of being misunderstood or of mispronouncing words. Although she always tells herself that the important thing is to communicate, the fear of being judged is always there, which may be related to her socio-cultural background as a student.

In Mexico, as in many other countries, school grades are very important. Having been a “very good” student before starting her degree in English language teaching, she never thought that being intelligent could be measured in any other way. In her primary, secondary, and high school education, all she was expected to do was memorize paragraphs or specific information by heart in order to then regurgitate it in exams or to the teacher, in order to obtain the best grade. She recalls being very good at this and the idea of not being able to repeat words with the same quality of pronunciation as a native speaker made her feel very bad, as she took this to mean that she was no longer intelligent. She felt stupid repeating words and phrases that did not sound like those produced by her teachers or in the audio material that was played in class. These learning experiences combined with her family environment increase her sense of insecurity. In literal terms, Renata’s voice expresses her insecurity, which then influences her teacher identity (Teng, 2020).

At university, Renata’s struggles led to the fear both of not being able to prove to her father that she was as capable as her brothers and of disappointing her mother, which made her persevere and obtain her university degree. Later, when faced with the demands of a group of students, she realized that she needed to be better prepared (Masako, 2013). In this second stage of her life, during which nobody pressured her to continue studying, it may be that her core values, shaped by the environment in which she was brought up, were so strongly rooted that they had become her own inner values. For Ryan and Deci, this process of internalization “refers to people’s ‘taking in’ a value or regulation and to the further transformation of that regulation into their own so that, subsequently, it will emanate from their sense of self” (2000: 71).

As a whole person, Renata cannot separate who she is from what she is (a Mexican English language teacher). Her language teacher identity is shaped by her personal, social, familial, academic, and professional experiences. As Biddulph puts it “[...] relationships and behaviours, values and attitudes are simultaneously separate and yet connected (no matter how distantly)” (2005:56). It is because of this interconnection between different aspects of her life that Renata cannot separate the Mexican girl

growing up in Mexico from the identities of a language learner or a language teacher that she has constructed for herself.

## 6. Conclusion

Teacher identity is shaped not only by previous learning experiences but also by the cultural context in which teachers are raised and work. The literature on teacher identity highlights the complexity involved in not only the construction of teacher identity by novice teachers but also the process of change experienced teachers may go through when changing jobs, vocation, or institutional context. I argue that emotional events, previous learning experiences, and socio-cultural context play a determining role in the construction and reconstruction of teacher identity.

The present study provides an explanation for some of the complex influences of Mexican culture combined with emotional events and previous learning experiences on the construction and reconstruction of teacher identity. These findings are in line with other studies that emphasize that teacher identity is a result of personal and professional experiences (Miller, 2009; Teng, 2017), presenting the narrative of a Mexican teacher, which shows that teacher identity is a complex and multi-faceted construct.

This study provides evidence that autobiographical narratives are an appropriate method for uncovering evidence of the pervasive influence of culture on teacher identity. I concur with Ellis and Bochner's statement "autobiographical narratives offer lessons for further conversation rather than undebatable conclusions" (2000: 744). My experience using this tool suggests that teachers should be prompted in their reflections via questions in order that they can deeply explore their personal experiences and the people, emotional events, and previous learning experiences that provide a rounded understanding of the complex shape of their teaching identity.

Renata's history has clear implications for both teacher education programs and teachers themselves. Renata reflected on these aspects, having internalized the introjection discussed above, which corroborates the process of internalization examined by Ryan and Deci (2000) in members of collectivist societies. As described in previous sections, we are social entities who react to a specific stimulus with our entire social and cultural heritage (Bochner & Ellis, 1996). Knowing how specific situations shaped Renata's professional growth can be used to educate other language learners and teachers. As Powell states, "[T]he reconstruction of educational history offers rich opportunities for gaining insights into the nature of teaching and learning and the effects of the environment in which these activities take place" (1985: 50). Teachers cannot separate who they are from what they are doing in the classroom, or as Clandinin and Huber have highlighted, "teachers teach who they are" (2005: 43). Those responsible for teacher training should encourage the exploration of teachers' personal experiences in order that they are able to understand themselves better, thus, promoting their professional development.

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