



## TEACHER IDENTITY: AN ANALYSIS OF THE PERSONAL POSITION REPERTOIRE IN UNIVERSITY TEACHING

### IDENTIDAD DOCENTE: UN ANÁLISIS DEL REPERTORIO DE POSICIONES PERSONALES EN LA DOCENCIA UNIVERSITARIA

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#### ABSTRACT

This study examines how university professors construct their identities, emphasizing the significance of the various contexts in which they fulfill their roles, along with the psychological and social factors that influence their identity and interpersonal relationships. The objective was to identify the main positions held by university professors in relation to their teaching practices. To accomplish this, a qualitative approach with a narrative design was utilized, enabling professors to articulate their identities dynamically and objectively. By sharing their narratives, they were able to address issues that were previously unclear or unconscious concerning their teaching practices. To explore significant events in the construction of teaching identity, a questionnaire was administered based on the Personal Position Repertoire method and the self-confrontation approach developed by Hermans. The research involved 20 professors from Universidad Técnica del Norte. The findings reveal that the position repertoire within this group includes internal, external, and institutional perspectives, which have helped identify discourses related to their teaching methods and the dialogical interactions that have promoted the development and expression of their identities as university professors within their educational context. In summary, teacher identity is shaped by experiences within educational environments, pedagogical perspectives, personal beliefs, and attitudes toward students.

#### Keywords:

Continuous Professional Development, Dialogical Self Theory, Teacher Identity, Teaching Practice.

#### RESUMEN

Este estudio se centra en el análisis de la construcción identitaria del profesorado universitario, enfatizando la importancia de considerar de manera integral los diversos contextos en los que desempeñan sus funciones, así como los aspectos psicológicos y sociales que configuran su identidad y relaciones interpersonales. El objetivo del estudio fue identificar el repertorio de posiciones predominantes entre los profesores universitarios respecto a su práctica docente; para ello, se aplicó un enfoque cualitativo, con un diseño narrativo, permitiendo que los docentes se describieran de manera dinámica y objetiva, ya que al contar sus historias ayudó a procesar cuestiones que no estaban claras o consientes respecto a su práctica docente. Con el propósito de indagar eventos relevantes en la construcción identitaria docente, se aplicó un cuestionario desarrollado en base a los métodos del Repertorio de Posiciones Personales y autoconfrontación de Hermans. El estudio involucró a 20 profesores de la Universidad Técnica del Norte. Los resultados indican, que el repertorio de posiciones dentro de este grupo, se conforma por posiciones internas, externas e institucionales, cuyas voces han facilitado la identificación de



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## INTRODUCTION

In higher education, teacher identity is a dynamic and multifaceted construct influenced by various psychological, social, and contextual factors. Despite its significance, there is a notable gap in understanding the elements that shape this identity, especially among university professors. This study aims to conduct a comprehensive analysis of how the personal and professional positions adopted by university professors affect their identities and teaching practices. By applying the Dialogical Self Theory, the research seeks to reveal the dialogical and evolving nature of this identity construction.

Previous studies on teacher identity have emphasized the need to consider various influential factors. On the other, the impact of psychological and social factors on the formation of their identities and teaching experiences is well-documented (Gee, 2000). This has led to the identification of distinct identity profiles among academics, including the innovative university professor, the pedagogy expert, the reflective educational developer, and the research-focused educator (Åkerlind, 2003; Korhonen & Törmä, 2016; Nevgi & Löfström, 2015).

### Dialogical Self Theory and Teacher Identity

Dialogical Self Theory has been employed to analyze how teachers construct their identities through the narratives they share. These narratives reveal a repertoire of personal positions that blend into coherent interpretations of their teaching experiences (Wortham, 2001). This approach offers a comprehensive view of the dialogical space that includes both the personal and professional dimensions, articulated through various positions (Arvaja, 2016; Kluger et al., 2008).

By recognizing the dialogical nature of identity, university professors can gain meaningful insights into their professional environments and roles from a subjective, dialogical perspective (Hermans, 2001). This internal dialogue, enriched by diverse voices, nurtures the professional identity, becoming active in interactive contexts and enabling the adoption of different stances based on contextual demands and personal dimensions (Arvaja, 2016).

Reflecting on Dialogical Self Theory and its application in education reveals a mutually enriching relationship between these research areas. This perspective has opened new pathways for exploration, moving beyond traditional cognitive approaches and highlighting the complex dynamics of educational settings. This is particularly relevant in contexts where schools are still seen primarily as institutions for conferring degrees within fixed periods, rather than as environments for the personal development of all stakeholders (Arvaja, 2016).

## Teacher Identity and Continuous Professional Development

Research consistently shows that teacher identity is shaped through social interactions and communicative exchanges with others (Alsup, 2006; Cohen, 2010; Flores & Day, 2006). This identity emerges from various factors, including professional status, interpersonal relationships, and personal perspectives, enhancing our understanding of the phenomena (Gee, 2000). Oleson & Hora (2014) emphasize the importance of understanding how teacher identity is constructed and evolves, highlighting the role of professional perception in enriching this process.

By adopting a dialogical approach, proposed by (Monereo & Badia, 2020), this study explores how educators position themselves within their teaching practice, aiming for coherence and diversity in their identity, particularly among university professors (Akkerman & Meijer, 2010). Consequently, ongoing professional development becomes a crucial factor in the evolution of teacher identity, as it continues to develop through educational practice and interaction (Caballero, 2013).

### Conclusions and Relevance in the Ecuadorian Context

Dialogical Self Theory bridges the concept of the self with its various positions and dialogues, connecting the individual with society. This theory suggests that both internal and external positions, arising from interactions between individuals and their environments, are fundamental in shaping identity. Internal positions reflect the individual's self-concept, while external positions are shaped by the voices of significant others, such as students, colleagues, and superiors. Additionally, institutional positions, influenced by the broader professional context, play a vital role in the construction of teacher identity (Akkerman y Meijer, 2010).

Despite the recognized importance of these factors, research on the development of teacher identity in Ecuador remains limited. This study offers a refreshing perspective on the processes of continuous professional development and identity formation, as well as the ongoing support provided to educators in higher education institutions.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research employs a qualitative approach (Hernández et al., 2010), allowing for a dynamic interaction between empirical data and its interpretation. By utilizing a narrative design, the study aims to identify the predominant position repertoire among university professors in relation to their teaching practice. Creswell (2005) highlights that such a design serves not only as a research framework but also as an intervention method, as storytelling helps

participants process unclear or unconscious issues from both individual and collective perspectives rooted in shared teaching experiences.

Participants

The study initially included 35 university professors, but the sample was narrowed down to 20 participants from Universidad Técnica del Norte in Ecuador, based on specific inclusion criteria: voluntary participation, either part-time or full-time teaching load. The average age of participants was 46 (SD = 7.6), with an equal gender distribution. Of the participants, 10 were full-time faculty members, and 10 were part-time. Half of the participants held tenured positions, while the others were on temporary contracts.

Instruments

A questionnaire was developed drawing on two narrative psychology methods: The Personal Position Repertoire (PPR) method by Hermans (2001). These tools were used to identify the dynamics of the personal positions within the group studied.

In the first section of the questionnaire, participants were asked to provide informative details about their teaching experience, including when they began teaching at the university, their faculty affiliation, and teaching load. The second section, based on the PPR method, requested participants to describe their journey to becoming university professors, how they perceive themselves in this role, and what motivates them to continue. They were also asked to select five statements from a provided list, which included randomly chosen internal positions. The third section presented open-ended questions using the self-confrontation method, allowing participants to describe their professional environment across their past, present, and future. The questionnaire concluded with a question about future training needs or relevant topics to be addressed.

The Personal Position Repertoire method was employed not only to identify internal positions through the questionnaire but also to reveal external and institutional positions during data analysis Krotofil (2013).

Data Collection Procedure

After securing the participation of the professors, a meeting was held to explain the data collection process. Informed consent was obtained, and interviews were conducted, with responses collected through a questionnaire titled “Teacher Identity.” The data were then entered into the MAXQDA 2022 qualitative analysis software.

Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis was conducted using MAXQDA Analytics Pro-2022 software, facilitating the processing and presentation of the gathered information. The coding technique followed Taylor and Bogdan’s (1987) three-stage process—discovery, coding, and relativization—allowing for a deep understanding of the data in relation to the contexts and individuals involved. The coding strategy combined predefined and emerging categories, resulting in the identification of 22 internal positions, 11 external positions, and 5 institutional positions, which were then presented as the study’s findings.

To ensure the reliability of the category system, an interrater reliability process was conducted, where two researchers independently analyzed the responses of 6 randomly selected participants (30% of the sample). The results indicated an agreement rate between 77% and 80% in the coding process, validating the consistency of the system. The category system used to identify internal, external, and institutional positions was based on a theoretical review of the Personal Position Repertoire method within the Dialogical Self Theory proposed by Hermans (2001), detailed in Table 1. Data management adhered to the UTN 2012 code of ethics.

Table 1. Personal Position Repertoire Categorization Framework

Criteria	Description	Subcode	Description
Internal Positions	They arise from person-world interactions, and they refer to the self. Examples: It's me being creative, it's me being flexible, it's me being professional, humanist, researcher, and educator.	Personal (PIP)	They originate from specific ways in which people organize their own lives, in some cases in opposition or protest against societal expectations. Example: It's me being creative, it's me being flexible, it's me being professional.
		Social (SIP)	They are guided by society's prescriptions and expectations. They can be compared to the traditional word 'role.' Example: Educator, Researcher, Humanist.



External Positions	They respond to the world-person interaction, in other words, the voices of others within oneself, significant people in the self. Example: my mother, my students, my colleagues.
Institutional Positions	They are related to discourses that cope with the needs of the institution, in this case, with the requirements demanded by the university. Example: professional development processes, virtual education, administrative processes.

Source: Authors' own elaboration

The categories used to identify the voices in the position repertoire of the participants according to Hermans' approach (2001) are detailed in Table 2. Internal positions are divided into personal internal positions (PIP) and social internal positions (SIP).

Table 2: Internal, External, and Institutional Positions and Voices

Internal Positions	External Positions	Institutional Positions
It's me as a researcher (PIP)	My students	Administrative processes
It's me being reliable (PIP)	My colleagues	University professor
It's me being supportive (PIP)	My teachers	Professional growth processes
It's me being optimistic (PIP)	My coordinator	Social responsibility
It's me being flexible (PIP)	My dean/subdean	Virtual education
It's me demonstrating commitment (PIP)	My parents	
It's me being critical (PIP)	My children	
It's me being responsible (PIP)	My spouse	
It's me being a role model (PIP)	My relatives	
It's me being creative (PIP)	My friends	
It's me as a mentor (PIP)	My grandparents	
It's me being motivating (PIP)		
It's me feeling vulnerable (PIP)		
It's me being understanding (PIP)		
It's me being strict (PIP)		
It's me having a vocation (PIP)		
It's me making decisions (PIP)		
It's me being concerned (PIP)		
Professional (SIP)		
Humanist (SIP)		
Educator (SIP)		
Researcher (SIP)		

Note. The positions in black are predefined categories, while those in orange correspond to emerging categories.

Source: Authors' own elaboration

## Findings

This section presents the study's findings on the prevalent personal positions among university professors concerning their teaching practices. Table 3 presents the pathways through which participants became university professors, their self-perception in this role, and their motivations for continuing in academia (see Figures 1 and 2). These data were obtained from the second section of the administered questionnaire.

Table 3: Teaching Career Trajectories – UTN

Background	Cases
Invited for professional trajectory	4
Scholarship	1
Required profile	1
Research professor	3
University teaching trajectory	8
Teaching assistant	3

Source: Authors' own elaboration

The data regarding pathways into university teaching reveal a variety of trajectories. Most of the surveyed professors (eight) indicated that their previous experience in university teaching was the primary factor for securing their current positions, highlighting the value of prior educational experience. Four additional professors stated that they were invited



to their roles based on their professional backgrounds, emphasizing the importance higher education institutions place on substantial field experience.

Additionally, three professors began their careers as research faculty, while another three started as teaching assistants, emphasizing the significance of these initial roles in shaping future educators. Less common pathways included entry through scholarships and meeting specific profile requirements, each mentioned by only one professor. These findings illustrate the diverse routes into academia and the critical role of experience and specific qualifications in academic careers Figure 1

Fig. 1. Teacher Perception.



Source: Authors' own elaboration

The word cloud displayed represents the responses of 20 university professors regarding their perceptions of the teaching role. The term “student” is notably prominent, indicating the professors’ focus on their students Figure 1. Words such as “responsible,” “professional,” and “educator” highlight the importance of responsibility and professionalism in their professional identity. The emphasis on continuous training and skill development is apparent in terms like “competence,” “training,” and “development.” Furthermore, terms such as “communication,” “trust,” and “supportive” underscore the significance of interpersonal relationships, while “creativity,” “innovative,” and “critical” suggest a dynamic and adaptable approach to teaching. Overall, this representation highlights a multifaceted view of the teaching role, integrating professional responsibility, personal growth, and a student-centered focus.

Fig. 2. Teaching Motivation

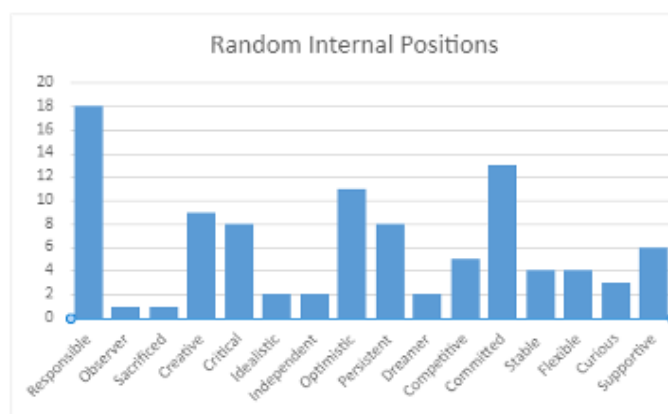


Source: Authors' own elaboration

Figure 2 reveals the motivations driving this group of university professors to pursue their teaching careers.

The professors identified knowledge as a primary motivator, given its foundational role in academia and its potential to impact the world Graph 1. Their commitment to teaching is fueled by the opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to student development. They perceive their professional roles as platforms for ongoing improvement, enhancing both their own skills and their students' learning experiences. Academic training is also a significant motivator, as it is essential for preparing future generations. The personal and professional growth they experience through this process further inspires their continued engagement in teaching.

### Graph 1. Internal Positions Selected at Random

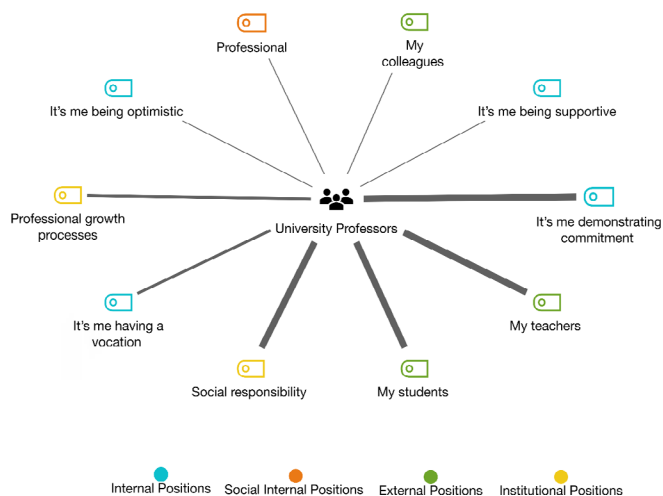


Source: Authors' own elaboration

Internal positions refer to the various voices, roles, or perspectives that an individual holds within their own mind, reflecting different aspects of the self (Hermans, 2001). Participants were asked to select five internal personal positions with which they identify as university professors. As shown in Figure 1, the most frequently identified

internal positions were responsibility, commitment, and optimism. These positions are closely linked to core values. Additionally, while mentioned less often, creativity, critical thinking, and persistence also emerged as significant. The first two positions have a substantial cognitive component, essential for academic competencies, whereas persistence is highlighted as a personal value. In summary, the development of teacher identity is enhanced by a combination of values and competencies, where the interplay between axiological and cognitive elements is crucial for cultivating a strong and effective teaching identity.

Fig. 3. Personal Position Repertoire (PPR) of the faculty



Source: Authors' own elaboration

Figure 3 illustrates a map showing the 10 most frequently identified positions among the participants, with the thickness of the lines indicating the most prevalent positions in teaching practice. From an initial number of 38 positions, 10 emerged as more common, with 6 being predominant based on the analyzed discourses, providing context for the teaching role. This repertoire includes internal, external, and institutional positions.

The following sections detail the voices of these predominant positions, starting with internal/personal ones. These positions arise from the interactions between individuals and their environments, reflecting the organization of their lives. The selected excerpts exemplify this organization and highlight the most significant findings.

### Internal Positions / Personal

"When I started to work at UTN, I had the feeling that it wouldn't last for many years, maybe two or three at most. But as time passed and I continued working for the fourth, fifth, sixth... and the tenth year, I started to have this sort of internal feeling, a sense of belonging and commitment that makes me contribute, behave, and cooperate with my modest contribution to the institution" (participant # 19).

"Within my role as faculty, once I found myself in a situation where a student had limited access to technology. I felt responsible and committed to my role as a university professor. I decided to conduct the class via a WhatsApp video call because it was the only way the student could connect. By doing this, we developed the class as usual, and after the class time was over, I stayed with her for a tutorial session to help her address any questions she might've had" (participant # 12).

As can be seen, the voice of "It's me demonstrating commitment" is the one that predominates, highlighting its importance in the role of the teacher and in teaching practice in general.

In the same perspective, the second most relevant voice in the following quotes is "It's me having vocation", strongly related to the idea of personal commitment as a central component of teaching.

"Since I started as a teaching assistant at the university, I knew I had found my profession. Today, after 46 years of experience, I feel that I was not mistaken, that I was right, and that every day I feel more in love with what I do" (participant # 16).

"Throughout my childhood, I used to play that I was a teacher. In school and during my student life, I was a person who learned quickly, and I easily found ways to teach my classmates when they asked for help" (participant # 2).

The interaction appears to be influenced by how the participants perceive teaching as a consciously chosen vocation. This guides their current teaching commitment and activity, as well as their future vision of themselves in this role.

The "It's me being supportive" position is emphasized, aligning with the predominant internal voices. This, in turn, reinforces the identity of committed and supportive professors within the group, who are guided by these values when positioning themselves in the classroom and making daily decisions.

#### External Positions

Just as the internal positions of faculty members condition the way in which they relate to their environment, the external voices reveal the sources that had the most influence on the construction of their identity. In this respect, the group identified the voices of "my teachers" and the voices of "my students" as the most influential.

The following quote presents the relevance of their own experience with their students and the influence of their own teachers who shaped them.

"I had excellent professors at Universidad Católica Andrés Bello (Caracas), not only of great professional quality but also human, who undoubtedly left a significant mark on my education. They not only addressed academic issues but also gave us guidance on existential and human matters that we, as young people, had. We were always opened to discuss and talk about these issues. Now, I try to do the same with my students" (participant # 8).

The quote above emphasizes the integral influence of teachers in education, transmitting both knowledge and values to educators. The voices of their teachers in the past influence their pedagogical identity, connecting with internal values such as commitment, vocation, and solidarity.

Other central voices that nurture the identity of the professors participating in the study are the voices of their students, as it is shown in the following quotes:

"Each student has their own identity, and on many occasions, I have treated them as if they were my own children, even though some of my students seem to be liberal,

rebellious, playful. Every day, I try to cultivate in them moral and ethical values and perhaps seek solutions; although I have the impression that they consider me a very demanding teacher" (participant # 14).

"I hope that my students can continue on the path of teaching, and I strive to help them have their own realities based on my experience and, who knows, perhaps, at some point, they too may choose to pursue this profession" (participant # 19).

The previous quotes reveal that the voices of "my students" are related to a conception of teaching, seen as parent, helper, moral guide, and role model for their students.

Although to a lesser extent, the professors also identified "my colleagues" in their repertoire of positions; that is, the voice of their coworkers, who are also included in the repertoire of positions of this group of professors.

The external voices that the faculty internalize highlight the influence of others in the construction of their identity. This identity is nourished by both internal and external voices, which emphasizes the social and contextual dimensions in the formation of identity and in teaching practice.

#### Institutional Position

Finally, we found a set of institutional voices that reflect the values of the institution, internalized to a greater extent by the participants in our study, and that also form part of their repertoire of positions.

Social responsibility and faculty professional growth were identified as the institutional voices with the greatest influence among the participants. It is evident that professors recover from the institution a strong sense of social responsibility, which they experience as an institutional duty.

"It is important to contribute, above all, to the development of future professionals as human beings, capable of contributing to others, advocating for justice, seeking common well-being—that is the essence—and applying technical knowledge effectively" (participant # 17).

"In my role as a professor, I'm in charge of all the areas of training for future nursing professionals, always making sure that they provide quality care to individuals, families, and the community. I'm always insisting that the care they provide should generate confidence in the patient. An error or any complication can cause lifelong consequences or, even worse, lead to a patient's death" (participant # 15)

As can be seen from the previous quotes, the institutional voice associated with social responsibility is quite consistent with internal and external voices.

The external voice of “professional growth” is evident in the range of positions within the group, connecting with the importance participants place on teacher training and updating.

“I consider that changes and transformations in education are fundamental pillars in higher education. This is a challenge that we have to overcome; we must innovate current processes and methodologies, which, in turn, requires us to be constantly prepared and updated” (participant # 20).

“Striving to improve myself and to be more prepared every day is a commitment I have towards my students to stay updated. I believe that studying an online postdoctoral program at a foreign university is a way of responding to this moral commitment to my students” (participant # 9)

The quotes above show how the institutional voice connects with internal voices, especially in relation to professional growth. Although the voice of “It’s me being a professional” is not dominant, it does relate to the internal voice of the professor as vocational, responsible, and committed.

In accordance with this positioning, we can also demonstrate how the identity of the teaching staff is far from being merely a professional concept. We observe how it is constructed and reconstructed through their personal and collective stories, making this process valuable and necessary to explore in order to provide the best support or continuous assistance to the teaching staff.

This methodology has allowed participants to recognize themselves as authors of their own stories and see themselves as experts in the meaning they give to events in their lives. This generates awareness of their own positions and reveals the strong influence these positions have on each of their decisions within the context of being university professors.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to identify the voices that enrich the position repertoire held by healthcare university professors regarding their teaching. As explained in the results section, these positions are shaped by internal, external, and institutional voices and are reflected in the discourses that professors use when addressing their teaching practice.

Coinciding with previous findings (Hockings, et al., 2009), it was found that teachers’ identity is shaped by experiences in educational settings, conceptions of teaching, and personal beliefs about students. In this group, prominent external voices stand out, as well as internal positions that reflect commitment and vocation, and institutional

positions that reinforce social responsibility and continuous professional development.

To promote the development of teaching identity, it is essential to consider a process of continuous formation and transformation within diverse cultural and institutional contexts. Educators should find meaning in their teaching and interactions with students, colleagues, and society, impacting their growth, as evidenced in previous research (Monereo y Badia, 2020; Pabón et al., 2021; Trautwein, 2018; Van Rijswijk et al., 2013).

In this context, therefore, it is crucial to promote reflective spaces among the teaching staff, allowing them to develop identities that align closely with their contexts and real needs, and to create innovative environments for continuous teacher training.

While this study offers valuable insights, it also has limitations. Although faculty positions regarding their teaching practice can be identified, it cannot be confirmed whether these positions, particularly the external and institutional ones, are perceived in the same way by those who generate these voices. Understanding this would enhance our comprehension of their true positioning within the educational interaction field. Thus, designing research processes that address these limitations could deepen our understanding of the factors contributing to faculty identity development.

## Limitations of the study

This study was conducted within a single university, which limits the extent to which the findings can be generalized to other institutions with different cultural, organizational, or pedagogical characteristics. The specific institutional dynamics of the selected university may have influenced the configuration and expression of the participants’ personal position repertoires.

Although qualitative rigor strategies—such as triangulation and participant validation—were employed, the interpretation of participants’ narratives is mediated by the researcher’s conceptual framework, in this case, the theory of the dialogical self. This theoretical perspective both guides and constrains the types of meanings that can be drawn from the data.

Personal positions, understood as dynamic constructions of the self in interaction, may vary over time.

## CONCLUSIONS

In summary, this study reveals that teacher identity extends beyond a professional construct; it also encompasses personal narratives that enrich our understanding of the organization and reorganization of the self as a university professor. The Personal Position Repertoire (PPR)



approach provides an enriching understanding of the multiplicity of existing positions, their influence on teaching practice and decision-making, as well as on the development of identity in educational contexts.

To conclude, the internal conflicts that professors experience throughout their teaching practice enable them to engage in an internal dialogue among the positions that shape their identity. This perspective enables faculty to construct and reconstruct their identities based on interactions both within and outside their teaching practices. This approach helps analyze how educators position themselves and reconsider their teaching routines, driving real changes in education. Each professor has unique narratives that connect their teaching identity with various perspectives that shape their sense of self.

Finally, we believe it is necessary to open new lines of research with this approach to uncover the subtler dynamics of meanings and implicit positions within educational contexts.

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### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have equal participation in the search and selection of information for the preparation of the article; there is no conflict.