



# **BENEMÉRITA UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE PUEBLA**

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FACULTAD DE LENGUAS

Thesis

## **Analyzing the construction of an EFL teacher's identity in central Mexico**

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Maestría en la Enseñanza del Inglés  
(MEI)

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# **Analyzing the construction of an EFL teacher's identity in central Mexico**

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## **Abstract**

The main purpose of this research was to deepen the understanding of how the English language teacher professional role identity (TPRI) is constructed in a public high school in central Mexico. The study integrated into this understanding the way in which English language teacher's identity is influenced through personal, professional, and stakeholders' beliefs. The methodology of the research took the form of a case study, where data was gathered from a single teacher through interviews and a questionnaire that conveyed the story of her professional life. Findings revealed that this English language teacher has been in a constant struggle to gain the recognition of the educational stakeholders to be considered a 'real' teacher in her professional context. This, in turn, leads her reflect on her own teacher's identity where a high teaching commitment is identified. The research concludes by providing a general panorama of the situation that the participant has faced over two years, which reflects the needs of the teaching context. The study concludes that continuous engagement with teachers through reflection is desirable in order to foster better teaching practices that benefit students.

## **Dedications**

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## Table of contents

<b>CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION</b>	
1.0 Introduction	1
1.1 Significance of the study	1
1.2 The research Niche	2
1.3 Background of the researcher	4
1.4 Aims of the research	4
1.5 Research questions	5
1.6 Conclusion	5
<b>CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	
2.0 Introduction	7
2.1 English language globalization	7
2.2 English language teaching	8
2.3 The concept of identity	8
2.4 Social identity	10
2.5 Teacher professional identity	11
2.6 Teacher professional role identity (TPRI)	12
2.6.1 Roles	14
2.7 Construction of teacher's identity	15
2.8 Actors and elements in the teacher's identity construction.	16
2.9 Negotiating teacher identity	19
2.10 Teacher's commitment	21
2.10.1 Reflection process for better teaching practices	22
2.11 English language teachers in Mexico	23
2.11.1 Upper secondary education in Mexico: A complex system	25
2.12 Conclusions	28
<b>CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHOD</b>	
3.0 Introduction	29
3.1 Methodological Framework	29
3.2 Description of the context	31
3.3 Description of the research participant	32
3.4 Data collection	32
3.5 Conclusion	34
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS</b>	
4.0 Introduction	35
4.1 The self-identity	35
4.2 Social identity	36
4.3 Teacher Professional/ Institutional identity	38
4.3.1 Influence of past mentors	39
4.3.2 Institutional policies	41
4.3.3 Professional training	43
4.4 Educational stakeholders' behaviors influence on the construction of the English language teacher's identity	44
4.5 Teacher's commitment	48
4.6 Conclusion	51

<b>CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS</b>	
5.0 Introduction	52
5.1 Discussion of key findings	52
5.2 Limitations of the study	55
5.3 Directions for further research	56
5.4 Conclusion	56
<b>REFERENCES</b>	59
APPENDIX A	74
APPENDIX B	78
APPENDIX C	79

## **CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.0 Introduction**

During the past decades, the significance of teachers' personal accounts and characteristics has attracted much attention from educational researchers (Kelchtermans, 2005). Moreover, investigating identity has become a rich and promising area of research (Hogg, 2006). Thus, the study of teachers' identities began to gradually gain importance in educational research from the early nineties as they were considered important factors that determined to a great extent teachers' professional development pathways. With this, identity, as a generic term, is defined as the type of persons people perceive themselves to be or how they are perceived in a certain context (Joseph, 2004), a self-constructed process which is modified by a number of factors. Teacher identity, likewise, tries to capture teachers' definition of themselves in relation to their profession (Morita, 2004). More recently, Day, Elliot & Kington (2005) have claimed that teachers' emotional or personal identities have not received sufficient attention from educational researchers which leads to an incomplete understanding of issues such as teacher motivation, satisfaction or commitment to the profession. In response to this paucity of research on teacher identity, the current research analyzes the institutional identity that an English language teacher developed as she was inducted into a public high school context in central México, surrounded by the attitudes and beliefs of the more established participants and educational stakeholders within that context.

### **1.1 Significance of the study**

According to Hansen (2008), identity is shaped and reshaped relative to those around us. Others influence us regarding those elements we share, particularly in a communal context. However, this process is reciprocal when it comes to identity formation, individuals influence

and are at the same time influenced by others. Thus, the study of teachers' professional identity also emphasizes the role of other people, which is important in teacher identity. Teachers are involved with many people who have expectations towards them. Furthermore, they have to mold their role depending on whom they are working with at (Vesanto, 2011). In sum, identity is projected in the practices of group members, teachers mediate their stories of self with the cultural and institutional expectations of what it means to be a teacher (Cheung, Ben & Park, 2015). In addition to being constructed as particular types of professionals, teachers must locate their process of "becoming" within a specific context, time, place, and negotiate this identity within multiple learning spaces (Danielewicz, 2001).

This study intends to reach a better understanding of the issues that English language teachers face collectively within the profession. It is an attempt to explore a space that we might collectively occupy as well as how educational stakeholders define or redefine our professional identity. Such a reflection may eventually lead to an increased awareness about our professional commitment in larger terms.

The study intends to make a contribution to the state of knowledge related to the Mexican public high school context, which has not been the focus of many investigations. Also, little inquiry has focused on the stakeholders' attitudes or beliefs towards the English teacher and how they influence on the construction of teacher identity. In addition, this study contributes to the understanding of the way in which the English language teacher perceives herself and how that perception influences her teaching practices.

## **1.2 The research Niche**

Investigation into teacher self and teacher identity is fairly recent, spanning only about the last two decades in educational research. In second language teacher education, the development of teacher identity is a new and emerging research field (Gao, 2010; Pavlenko, 2003; Zacharias, 2010)<sup>a</sup>. Furthermore, the roots of teacher identity research originate in a variety of research interests in applied linguistics and general educational research, such as teacher knowledge/teacher cognition, teacher beliefs, professional development, and reflective practice. These research areas can be considered precursors of teacher identity research because they have investigated important aspects that influence the development of teacher identity.

Therefore, teachers' professional identity is influenced by many factors and conditions inside and outside the classroom. Scholars in this area of research (Doecke, Locke, & Petrosky, 2004) have referred to at least four views on teachers' professional identity. A psychosocial view which perceives the development of teachers' professional identity in the same pace as the growth of the teacher himself. In a discursive view, the teacher's past, present and future are the factors that control his or her identity formation. Based on a third interpretation, the narrative view, a teacher takes on different identities in different situations and becomes a father at home, a colleague at work, a teacher in the class, a friend with teammates, and so on. Finally, in a dialogic view, a teacher defines his role and others' roles depending on each interactional situation (Doecke, Locke, & Petrosky, 2004 p. 105). Also, according to a dialogic view, a teacher defines his role in various interactional situations. Thus, teachers shape their identity in order to act on themselves, on others or on their practice. This study is situated in the dialogic view, which fits in the area of professional development of EFL teachers.

### **1.3 Background of the researcher**

In my teaching experience, I have mainly collaborated with the high school level in the private and public sector where meaningful differences can be found. Thus, in the public sector, I have found that there are distinct expectations of the English language teachers than in private institutions. These expectations tend to focus on the teacher's performance; however, the role that the teacher plays in the school and the attitude that the stakeholders have towards the teacher that contribute to the construction and reconstruction of the teacher's identity are not taken into account. In public high schools in central Mexico, English language teachers are sometimes asked to teach different subjects that may or may not be related to the English language. In other high schools, the English teachers may have the opportunity to teach the foreign language, but also teach content courses. Furthermore, I have observed that the actions that more established stakeholders take towards the new English teachers influence the ways in which they perceive themselves within the institution. Thus, stakeholder perceptions influence the teachers' sense of self-value, which might affect their professional practice and commitment.

### **1.4 Aims of the research**

This study aims to identify whether the English language teacher perceives herself to be valued by stakeholders within her institutional context. It further aims to analyze how the stakeholders' behaviors towards the English language teacher influence the manner in which she constructs or reconstructs her professional identity. The last step is to explore how the (co)construction of her professional identity may influence her conceptions of professional practice, which may lead to increase teacher commitment and better teaching practices.

## **1.5 Research questions**

This study intends to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How does the participant (an English language teacher) conceptualize her professional identity within a public high school context in central Mexico?

RQ2: How do the educational stakeholders' behaviors influence the construction of the participant's identity?

RQ3: How does the manner in which the participant perceives herself, as being positively or negatively viewed within the context, influence her teaching practices?

## **1.6 Conclusion**

Becoming a teacher is often considered a constantly moving and developing process, just as teacher identity is (Goodson, 2008, Aaltonen and UusiRajasalo, 2010). This means that teacher identity is often seen to be an everlasting process; one that needs to develop constantly and adapt to new situations, developments and changes in the area of education. Already within their teaching contexts, English language teachers need to form their teaching philosophies in order to be conscious of the values that they will later transmit and on which their teaching strongly relies. Also, the manner in which teachers perceive themselves impacts their educational aims and thus, advantages or disadvantages their students on a wide range of educational aspects (Day & Gu, 2007). Analyses of teacher identity lead to better understandings of educational theories and practice in teaching EFL.

This chapter provided the reader with an overview of the research project. The second chapter presents the literature review, which describes topics relevant to the research such as: English language teachers in México, teacher identities and teacher commitment.

The third chapter deals with methodological issues such as data gathering, the participants, the context and data analysis. In the fourth chapter, a description of the results of the analysis and its interpretation is presented. Finally, chapter five presents the conclusions of the investigation, where the answer to the research questions, the limitations of the study and the conclusions from the analysis are presented.

## **CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter aims to provide the literature review that supports this research. The information that is provided may help the reader to better understand the issues surrounding a study of this nature as well as support the analyses and findings.

### **2.1 English language globalization**

The English language has spread over the world, and has been used for several purposes. A lot of research has been conducted on the study of the worldwide spread of English, and nowadays English is taught worldwide either as a second or foreign language in fields such as government, health, law and education. Furthermore, the concept World Englishes (WES), which refers to the description and analysis of English (es) around the world, has become an increasingly relevant issue in the field of ELT (Jenkins 2006; Kirkpatrick, 2007). Kirkpatrick (2007) is in favor with Kachru (1985, p.15) and the three circle model of English speakers, mentioning that the Inner Circle brings up the traditional cultural and linguistic bases of English in contexts such as the USA and the UK. The Outer Circle includes institutionalized countries with nonnative varieties. The Expanding Circle includes countries such as México where English has taken on new importance, yet is neither an official language nor used in daily interactions. Kirkpatrick (2007) also sees the spread of English in a sociocultural perspective referring to Widdowson (2003), who makes a distinction between the spread and distribution of English. Finally, Kirkpatrick (2007) agrees that all varieties of English develop from similar stimuli and through similar processes, that all varieties reflect the cultural realities of their speakers, and that all varieties must permit international communication. Meanwhile, Jenkins (2006) also refers

to Kachru's model of English speakers (2005), yet places greater emphasis on the importance of teaching and learning of English in the outer and expanding circles where there is a growing body of research and publications. Despite the fact that these authors have different perspectives, Kirkpatrick (2007) and Jenkins (2006) agree on the need to study 'global' English and finding ways of bringing WES and ELT studies together.

## **2.2 English language teaching**

The history of language teaching has been characterized by a search for more effective ways of teaching second or foreign languages. For more than a hundred years, debate and discussion within the teaching profession have often centered on issues such as second language acquisition, the development of accuracy and fluency in teaching, teaching productive and receptive skills, learning theories and their application in teaching, the role of materials and technology and so forth (Shafaei & Nejati, 2008, p.99). Although much has been done to clarify these and other important questions surrounding language teaching, the teaching profession is continually exploring new issues that range from the increasing importance of ELT in a globalized world to exploring teacher's identities (Miller, 2009).

## **2.3 The concept of identity**

There is evidence of increasing interest in identity over the last two decades; for example, Vignoles, Schwartz & Luyckx (2011), alluded that an internet search including the word identify in publication titles generated 44,557 results in the 1990s. These results increased to, 98,933 in the 2000s (p.2). Nevertheless, the field is far from reaching a consensus as to what the concept means. Identity is a term that has historically evolved from the interpretation of human behavior. It has also been represented as an external or internal phenomenon. Sociologists claim that identity is 'the result of external, social, political, and

economic forces (Côté & Levine, 2002, p. 9). On the other hand, psychologists argue that it concerns ‘the self’, “internal, individual, willful potentials” (ibid.) Thus, both fields have contributed to the understanding and principles of identity.

Furthermore, identity is very closely related to a term that Cooley (1902) introduced, the concept of the ‘looking glass’, seeing the formation of the self as “part of a reflexive, learning process by which values, attitudes, behaviour, roles and identities are accumulated over time” (cited in Day and Kington, Alison and Stobart and Sammons, 2006, p. 602). This interpretation highlights the claim that identity is a process linked to social interactions in which language and experience play a significant role. To substantiate this claim, Mead (1934) introduced three core principles: personality (mind), interaction (self) and social structure (society). Cooley and Mead’s concepts of identity sparked a great deal of scholarly interest.

Moreover, Goffman (1963) gave rise to a new debate by proposing that each person has a number of ‘selves’, where each one behaves according to a particular situation at any given time. Goffman (1963) agreed with Mead (1934) that there are structural levels of identity, namely ego, personality and social identity. Nevertheless, the notion of multiple selves generated a new debate inside and outside of the sociological field.

The impact of new forms of interaction and communication is part of a recent debate concerning what identity is. There is no doubt that this mutating reality shapes new images of the self, as well as social interactions of a person who has to adapt according to certain scenarios. The perception of a more malleable representation of who I am, how I see myself, and how others acknowledge or recognize me links the self and the social and have now gained recognition as being essential dimensions in the definition of identity (Fajardo, 2011).

## 2.4 Social identity

Abrams and Hogg (1988) claimed that in social identity theory (SIT), a social identity is a person's knowledge that he or she belongs to a social category or group (as cited in Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 225). In addition, Tajfel & Turner, (1985) mentioned that, according to SIT, people tend to classify themselves and others into various social categories, such as organizational membership, religious affiliation, gender, and age cohort (as quoted by Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 20).

Once in society, people derive their identity or sense of self largely from the social categories to which they belong. Each person, however, over the course of his or her personal history, is a member of a unique combination of social categories; therefore, the set of social identities that make up that person's self-concept is unique. Persons acting in the context of social structure name one another and themselves in the sense of recognizing one another as occupants of roles or positions (Stets & Burke, 2000). In other words, one's identities are composed of the self-views that emerge from the reflexive activity of self-categorization or identification in terms of membership in particular *groups* or *roles*. Having a particular social identity means being like others in the group and seeing things from the group's perspective. Likewise, having a particular role identity means acting to fulfill the expectations of that role, negotiating interaction with role partners and manipulating the environment to control the resources for which the role has responsibility.

Research on role identity started some decades ago. Burke (1980) focused on the match between the individual meanings of occupying a particular role and the behaviors that a person enacts in that role while interacting with others. Given the number of groups to which an individual might belong, his or her social identity is likely to consist of an amalgam of identities, identities that could impose inconsistent demands upon that person.

Further, these demands also may conflict with those of the individual's personal identity (Leary, Wheeler, & Jenkins, 1986).

An analysis of the group, the role, and the person may help to understand more clearly the motivational processes, self-esteem and self-efficacy of an individual. It is considered possible that people feel *good* about themselves when they associate with particular groups, feel *confident* about themselves when enacting particular roles and feel *authentic* when their person identities are verified. Yet, although the group, role, and person identities provide different sources of meaning, sometimes, they may reinforce who one is and other times they may constrain the self (Stets & Burke, 2000).

## **2.5 Teacher professional identity**

Much of the current research on teaching encompasses craft knowledge, practical knowledge, personal practical knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge (Hoyle & John, 1995, p. 37). Research on teacher knowledge in practice focuses on many topics. This study concentrates on teachers' awareness of their professional identity, how they perceive themselves as teachers and what factors contribute to these perceptions.

Professional identity is defined in many different ways within teaching and teacher education (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004). Professional identity is generally concerned with how teachers see themselves as teachers, based on their interpretations of their continuing interactions with other actors within their context (ibid). Additionally, Kelchtermans (2009) states that teachers develop an interpretative framework during their career and that this framework is shaped and re-shaped through interaction between individual teachers and the social, cultural and structural working conditions of their working context. Finally, Day and Kington, Alison and Stobart, and Sammons, (2006), found that teachers balance three relevant dimensions in their work: a personal dimension

(their life outside school), a professional dimension (social and policy expectations of what constitutes a good teacher and a teacher's own educational ideals) and a situational dimension (the teacher's immediate working environment). Different professional identities are formed through the ways these dimensions interact.

Being part of a group means that there is a certain amount of uniformity in the group members' thoughts and actions (Burk & Stets, 2009). Furthermore, Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, (2004), have mentioned that: "A teacher's professional identity is not entirely unique", (p. 122). By sharing a profession, teachers share specific knowledge and professional skills. Thus, to a certain extent teachers may have a shared identity. Applying this perspective to a teacher's sense of professional identity means, teachers will have a shared identity in their profession, but at the same time will differ as a result of their personal perspectives on their context and their personally held beliefs. Teachers may feel that they differ from other teachers in terms of level of motivation, job satisfaction and commitment. Professional identity cannot be viewed as attributable to all teachers in the same manner, moreover, we may expect teacher perceptions of these relevant indicators of their professional identity to show different identity profiles in reality.

One focus of teacher professional identity is the one Day (2002) gave by claiming, based on deductive reasoning and his personal theories, that professional identity is related to how teachers respond to educational reforms. He mentioned the lack of attention being paid to teacher professional identity in educational reforms worldwide, thereby challenging professionalism among teachers.

## **2.6 Teacher professional role identity (TPRI)**

Teacher role is the set of understandings of what it means to be a teacher in a given context. It is sociohistorically constructed, institutionally maintained and contextualized at the

school level in response to the needs of the community (Bullough, Gitlin, & Goldstein, 1984, p. 348). In a basic sense, teachers' professional role identity (TPRI) refers to the person's self-description as a teacher; that is, the extent to which the person has established a personal commitment to the teaching profession and considers being a teacher an important aspect of who he or she is (Beijaard et al., 2004). In addition, to the level of commitment to the profession, TPRI also refers to the content and structure of that identity, the self-perceptions, beliefs and actions that are held as central to the role of being a teacher (Sachs, 2005). Consequently, two teachers may have similar levels of commitment to being a teacher and hold a similar conception about the role they perform within a particular context, yet hold quite different beliefs, goals, and perceptions about teaching, resulting in the representation of different instructional strategies.

Teachers' professional role identity (TPRI) is influenced by many factors and conditions inside and outside the classroom. Factors and conditions inside the classroom include issues such as how successful the teacher thinks he is, or how successful students think he is. Factors and conditions outside the classroom refer to issues such as whether the teacher has a family or a second job, etc. The other factors and conditions refer to teacher's attitudes, beliefs, mindsets and so on. These factors affect the way his identity as a professional is formed. Additionally, there are societal pressures and conditions such as others' expectations that shape a teacher's identity (Nias, 1987). Thus, TPRI provides teachers with a framework that implicitly guides them in interpreting and evaluating experiences and events related to teaching and in making decisions about action (Horn, Nolen, Ward & Campbell, 2008). The central role of teachers' professional identities in their learning, motivation, and reflection has been the subject of increasing scholarly attention in the past decade (Jenlink, 2014). Moreover, lack of focus in TPRI constitutes a

significant barrier to teachers' change of practices (Gunersel, Kaplan, Barnett, Etienne & Ponnock, 2014). From this, TPRI is a legitimate area of research that can contribute to a better understanding of the conditions under which teachers work as the complexities of the dimensions of TPRI and the nature of its effective factors have not been fully explored (Zare-ee & Ghasedi, 2014).

### **2.6.1 Roles**

Roles are often considered to be constructions of identity, particularly regarding professional identity (Wright, 1987). Role is a concept through which it is easier to conceive the items from which identity is built. Roles and their emphasis vary also according to the school level (Förbom, 2003 as quoted by Vesanto, 2011). Teachers can have various roles but each situation may highlight a different role. For instance, in elementary or secondary school, the roles of discipline keeper and authority become emphasized, while in adult education, the teacher's professionalism and expertise tend to be in focus.

Furthermore, Wright (1987, p.3) defines roles to be social. They are constructed of factors that together produce certain social behaviour. Some roles can be avoided, some fall on us randomly and some are chosen. Wright (1987, p. 9) mentioned that contradictions appear if

- The teacher is not certain of the role behavior expected from her/him,
- The teacher's own expectations differ from other people's,
- The teacher's other roles are overlapping,
- The teacher's personality does not fit into the role or,
- The teacher simply does not believe in what s/he is conveying.

Factors that may cause role contradictions can also arise from (teacher) education, society, colleagues and one's own personality (Rintala and Elovainio 1997, p. 312, as cited by Vesanto, 2011).

Considering all of the above, it seems that many of these factors influencing problems could be avoided if more were known about the role behaviour expected from English language teachers as well as other people's expectations. Knowing more about the expectations involved in the teaching profession would diminish collision with one's own expectations. Furthermore, one would feel more confident with the roles that one would already have been introduced to (Vesanto, 2011).

## **2.7 Construction of teacher's identity**

Erickson's (1968) definition of identity emphasized the notion of identity as 'a subjective sense of an invigorating sameness and continuity' (p. 19). Identity formation, according to Erickson, is a process that people pass through. It is constituted by eight stages that are marked by a conflict and change in chronological order due to biological and psychological maturation (Erickson, 1968).

Erickson's identity theory has a slight constructionist influence. The environment played an important role in identity formation, according to him; the interaction between the individual and the environment was considered a key factor that enabled the individual to resolve or not each stage's conflict. A successfully resolved conflict facilitated the individual's transition to the following maturation stage; unresolved conflicts, however, would lead to further identity crisis in the future. Agency thus seems to play a very subtle role in identity formation, since he conceives individuals as capable of acting upon their environment in order to resolve each stage's conflict.

On the contrary, Giddens (1991) claims that modern society confronts the self with four different dilemmas, whose successful resolution enable the individual to develop a coherent identity. This aspect of Giddens' self and identity theory resembles in many ways the identity theory proposed by Erickson. In both theories the successful resolution of a conflict by the individual leads them to develop their identity in positive ways. Both theories also share the adverse consequences for self and identity development, when a conflict is not favorably resolved. Giddens, however, is less influenced by structuralism and does not assume that identity develops in a mechanical order. Thus, there is no chronological order in the four dilemmas he presents. There is, in fact, even a suggestion that individuals are continuously confronted with these dilemmas and that continuous confrontation enables them to "preserve a coherent narrative of self-identity" (Giddens, 1991, p. 187) which seems to convey a moderate influence.

Agency plays a more important role in modernist identity theories. Identity formation is no longer perceived as a process that happens independently of people's lived experiences. Giddens (1976) contends that, although context and society may be a constraining force for self-identity development, every person actively incorporates distinct elements of mediated experiences into their identities. Consequently, constructivism and dialogical interaction give a focus of modern conceptions of self and identity since it takes shape through social exchanges with the phenomenal world and not as a direct consequence of natural or evolutionary processes, as traditional identity theories claimed.

### **2.8 Actors and elements in the teacher's identity construction.**

From a socio-cultural perspective, a teacher's professional identity is an ongoing, dynamic state of 'being and becoming' process which involves constantly questioning oneself: "who am I as a teacher at this moment and who do I want to become as a teacher"

(Schepens, Aelterman & Vlerick, 2009). From this perspective, a teacher's professional identity is therefore not a stable entity, but rather a state of 'being and becoming' often shaped by contextual factors such as the teachers' interactions with students and colleagues in their social contexts as well as their professional experiences and learning over time (Beijaard et al., 2004). Fundamentally, many scholars argued that a teacher's identity can be formed through interaction with others and with the environment (Beijaard et al., 2004; Korthagen 2004; Van Veen, Slegers, & Van de Ven, 2005). This thus means that identity development for teachers involves an understanding of the self and a notion of that self within an outside context, such as the classroom, necessitating an examination of the self in relation to others (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

From an extensive review of existing literature, it was found that four core dimensions of professional identity could generally be identified across educational settings that may constitute teachers' professional identity. These four core dimensions are: teaching beliefs, professional competence, professional socialization, and career progression (Lee, Kwok & Goh, 2016).

Firstly, teachers' perceptions of themselves as teachers are colored by their personal educational beliefs (Lee, Kwok & Goh, 2016). From the perspective of professional self, a teacher's beliefs and values in education can play a critical role in a teacher's identity formation in the sense that it is believed to strongly determine how teachers teach, how they develop professionally and how they approach educational changes (Beijaard et al., 2004; de Vries, van de Grift, & Jansen, (2014). In other words, the uniqueness of every teacher's approach to teaching is often shaped by their personal beliefs and values about teaching, and in this sense, reflection on one's own perceptions, beliefs, experiences and practices is a core activity for all teachers (Walkington, 2005). In essence, a focus on self is central to

teacher identity as it shapes what he or she will be as a teacher, what and how he or she will teach, and how he or she will respond to the changing context of teaching.

Secondly, from the perspective of professional roles, Enyedy, Goldberg, & Welsh (2006), state that teacher professional identity can be seen in terms of teachers' professional practices or actions (what they do) and professional roles (who they are). This notion is also supported by Andrzejewski (2009) who examined the relationships among teacher identity, knowledge, and teacher practices in a study which suggested that teachers' professional identity is a combination of what they know (curriculum expertise) and the pedagogy they use to put it into practice.

Thirdly, professional socialization is an essential process of learning skills, attitudes and behaviors necessary to fulfill one's professional role (Browne-Ferrigno, & Muth, 2004). Particularly, Olsen (2008) views teacher identity as both a product (a result of influences on the teacher) and a process (a form of ongoing interaction within teacher development). According to Olsen (2008), "I view identity as a label, really, for the collection of influences and effects from immediate contexts, prior constructs of self, social positioning, and meaning systems that become intertwined inside the flow of activity as a teacher simultaneously reacts to and negotiates given contexts and human relationships at given moments (p. 139)". In a similar manner, Ibarra (1999), refers to professional identity as one's sense of his or her professional role, and the message he or she conveys about one's self to others. Thus, the formation of professional identity is an ongoing process of integration of the personal and the professional sides of becoming and being a teacher (Beijaard et al., 2004). Essentially, teachers' professional identity can easily be influenced by personal, social and cognitive responses such that the co-construction of professional identity takes place within interpersonal communication (Flores & Day, 2006)

Fourthly, career progression may be defined in terms of the level and type of positions which teachers move through in the teaching profession which can be associated with an increase in salary or in a level of responsibility, promotions or professional status (Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001). From an organizational perspective, the continual support for teachers' development and growth in their teaching career may include more formalized ranks within the teaching profession, such as in the provision of career advancement and professional development opportunities to teachers as well as matching teachers' abilities with ranks and responsibilities within the organization (Day & Gu, 2007). Keeping teachers motivated can make them move forward with their career objectives within their profession and institution.

## **2.9 Negotiating teacher identity**

Professional identities are constructed in the course of negotiation processes, through the interaction between personal agency and social suggestion (van Oers, 2002). Having agency is defined by Fenwick (2006), as being able to make occupational choices concerning one's core work, based on one's own interests and motivations. This means that in relation to social suggestions, one is able to act in a way that corresponds to personal values and expectations. Among this, the relationship between the personal and the social has been examined from different theoretical viewpoints. Billett (2006) has distinguished between humanist, structuralist, late modernity and post-structural approaches.

The *humanist* tradition assumes that social suggestion is weak, or that it is not present in identity negotiations. This is because individuals are held to be able to exercise autonomy in realizing their goals, almost independently of social structures. They can freely express their subjectivity and negotiate their identity based on self-actualization and agency (Mansfield, 2000).

The *structuralist* approach assumes that individuals are subjected to social structures and pressures. Professional identity is thought to be strongly shaped by the sociocultural context of work organizations. The self is developed most fully when the individual adopts the community's norms and values (Foucault, 1979). Subjects are thought to be self-reflexive, formulating and maintaining their identity agentially within a transforming social system. Furthermore, subjects both self-regulate and self-subjugate themselves while performing particular roles within and through their working life (du Gay 1996). In terms of individual orientations towards a profession, individuals will try to achieve a fit between social suggestion and individual values.

In the *post-structural* theoretical framework, identity is presumed to be created via ongoing changes in relations, and in response to cultural practices and discourses. The subject selectively engages and negotiates with social suggestions that are directed at him/her, and the subject's intention is to secure, develop and maintain identity (Fenwick, 2006). The subject is formed within specific sociocultural practices and relationships and as it emerges so too does the subject's capacity to exercise political and moral agency. The subject can thus resist social structures, avoiding strong social suggestions (Billett, 2006).

Little is known about how teachers' professional identities are negotiated via the interaction between, for example, individual agency, the professional community and the work organization. Wenger (1998) has suggested that communities of practice are the place for constructing professional identities, meaning that identities are constructed through participation, and through becoming a member of a professional community. However, Wenger (ibid.) has not thermalized the relationships between the individual worker (the teacher), the professional community and the work organization (school) or the allusion to teachers' professional roles.

## **2.10 Teacher's commitment**

Commitment to the organization is strengthened if teachers are able to see the relationship between their professional identity and the strategic directions of their school. Day, Elliot & Kington (2005), found that the factors that most sustained teachers' commitment include: (a) sharing with and giving support to colleagues, (b) positive feedback from colleagues, and (c) shared educational values within the organization. On the contrary, the factors that most diminished teachers' commitment include: (a) the imposition of time-related innovations together with the steep learning curves involved, (b) department initiatives that increased bureaucratic tasks, (c) cuts in resources, and (d) a reduction in classroom autonomy and sense of agency.

Furthermore, in a reform context, Little and Bartlett (2002) alluded that teachers have been found to experience disappointments that can weaken their commitment to teaching and work, rooted in: (a) frustration with shifting levels of endorsement or support from school leaders, (b) dismay over conflicts with colleagues and/or a failure of support from colleagues, (c) emotional and physical exhaustion associated with extra and unfamiliar responsibilities, (d) disagreement over the interpretation of broadly defined reform goals, and (e) tensions over the balance between teacher autonomy and institutional demands.

Baruch and Cohen (2007), have suggested a number of conditions necessary for subjects' commitments. At the organizational level, it includes issues such as justice and trust, together with the absence of role conflict or ambiguity. At the individual level, a subject's commitment is influenced by self-efficacy, satisfaction, involvement and a variety of emotions (ibid). Related with this, research reveals that the identity of teachers is associated with teachers' commitment (Day, Elliot & Kington, 2005). When teachers

develop satisfaction from their commitment, they derive a sense of pride in their profession. Other studies point to the fact that teacher identity affects pedagogy and teaching. To a large extent, teacher identity determines the way that teachers teach, the way they develop as teachers and their attitudes towards educational changes (Beijaard et al. 2004).

### **2.10.1 Reflection process for better teaching practices**

Research has demonstrated that teachers' sense of professional and personal identity is a key variable in their motivation and commitment to change (Day, 2002; van Veen & Slegers, 2005). In a similar manner, it has been agreed that teacher professional identity is considered a critical component in language teaching and classroom practice (Tsui, 2007; Varghese, Morgan, Johnston & Johnson, 2005). If teachers are not aware of the identities they bring with them into their classroom, they will be unaware of the harmful and helpful contributions it brings to the learning dynamic and the interpersonal interactions in the classroom environment (Zacharias, 2010)<sup>b</sup>.

In studying eight ESL NNES teachers, Amin (2005) found that teacher participants became more effective in the classroom when they were aware of their NNES identities and built on them, rather than following the native English speaker (NES) norms (Zacharias, 2010)<sup>a</sup>. Furthermore, study on personal narratives by Liu (2004) illustrates that teacher's own identities can be rich teaching resources to draw upon and enhance a closer relationship with their students. Moreover, Giddens (1991) places special emphasis on the role that reflectivity plays in identity construction. It is through a reflective process that individuals become capable of taking certain elements from their lived experiences in the real world and incorporating them into the biographical narratives that constitute their identities.

Vygotsky, who is considered the founder of cultural-historical psychology, has provided a useful framework for understanding how identity formation processes evolve according to the modernist tradition (Zembylas, 2003). Vygotsky (1978) does not talk specifically about identity; however, his sociological and anthropological view of human development assigns an important role to the interaction between individuals and culture. Vygotsky inspired the socio-cultural understanding of identity formation which has been applied in education by Wertsch (1985) and Van der Veer (2007) among others.

It is important to mention that Vygotsky's theory does not disregard the role of genetically inherited factors in identity formation but he assigns them a lower order status, while socially and culturally mediated actions are assigned a higher order status where language is perceived as central in the development of the self. According to Vygotsky it is through language that we are able to interact with our reality and make sense of our selves (Van der Veer, 2007). This is, in fact, similar to what Giddens (1976) has claimed with respect to the role of language and biographical narratives in identity construction.

### **2.11 English language teachers in Mexico**

One of the things that language teachers must learn is what it means to be a language teacher. One sociocultural perspective on teacher learning theorizes a central aspect of this process as the reshaping of identity and identities within the social interaction and teaching practices in the classroom (Norton and Toohey, 2011). These roles are not static but emerge through a whole process. As such, identity may be shaped by many factors, including personal biography, culture, working conditions, age, gender, school and classroom culture (Burns and Richards, 2012, p.49). There are multiple programs from which a future practitioner may choose in order to become an English language teacher in Mexico, each offering different approaches. There are the public universities, the *Normal Superior*

schools (Institutions for future secondary and high school teachers) and the private institutions that are registered in the ANUIES (Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educación Superior) [National association of Universities and higher education Institutions]. The average amount of time that one must study in order to get the degree is between three and four and a half years. Once a student successfully finishes one of these programs, they have the opportunity to choose their preferred educational sector and educational level in the field. The majority of these graduates look for an opportunity to get a job in a public school with all the accompanying benefits.

The Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) established the ‘English in Primary School Program’ with the clear understanding that in a global market, English competency provides fluent speakers with economic benefits. While, in Mexico, English has been taught in secondary schools since 1926 (O’Donoghue & Calderón Martín del Campo, 2015), it began to appear in elementary school curricula as well in 2009 with the launching of the Programa Nacional de Inglés en Educación Básica (PNIEB) by the Mexican Ministry of Education (SEP), (Sayer, 2015, p.1). This program was very ambitious from its beginning and represented the largest expansion of English language instruction in the country’s history. The PNIEB entailed the hiring of about 98,000 new English teachers to fully implement the program. This innovation made Mexico the first country in Latin America to include English throughout all thirteen years of the public school curriculum (Sayer, 2015).

By 2016, the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) had created many full-time employment opportunities for English language teachers; however, little research has been conducted on English teachers in public high schools where teachers must take the test of “Idoneidad” [suitability] in order to demonstrate their aptitude to be a teacher. Once the

teacher passes, they are assigned to a school, and the adventure starts. The teacher may be asked to teach subjects other than English or perform duties other than teaching. Identity here takes on one of its most important roles. What is the teacher expected to be or perform? What are the teacher's identity changes based on the roles he or she performs? What is the way in which the stakeholders influence the construction or reconstruction of his or her identity? Analyses of teacher identity may allow researchers to acquire new insights into these questions and lead to better understandings of educational theories and practices as well as their impacts on teacher commitment (Day & Gu, 2007).

### **2.11.1 Upper secondary education in Mexico: A complex system**

Mexico has recently approved legislation to make upper secondary compulsory from the school year 2013 and to provide universal coverage by 2022 (Cámara de Diputados, 2012 as quoted by OECD, 2013). Puebla has been very active in improving access to upper secondary education. A decade ago, this state took the lead in expanding the number of upper secondary schools in response to increasing student numbers, and is now piloting an innovative type of provision to expand access in rural areas.

In Mexico, upper secondary education has not traditionally been given the same political and budgetary importance of basic and higher education. The federation only began to look into increasing upper secondary provisions in the early 2000<sup>s</sup> but allocated few resources to achieve the goal (Proyecto Educativo, 2012); nevertheless, Puebla took a very active role. The state created new schools, Bachilleratos Generales (General Upper Secondary Schools), co-financed by the municipalities: the state would pay the teachers, and the municipality would provide the infrastructure and maintenance (ibid).

Adding to the problems that upper secondary education faces in Mexico is the large number of educational providers that often lack effective leadership, a collective vision, a

common identity, clear objectives and effective co-ordination mechanisms. Each provider is responsible for a number of schools, has its own logic and objectives, and constitutes itself as a separate educational entity (OECD, 2013). Thus, the states in Mexico directly co-ordinate and supervises all the local providers, including private institutions. Furthermore, public providers may be financed by federal sources (DGETI, DGETA), mixed federal state sources (COBAEP, CECyTE) or state sources (General and Digital Upper Secondary Schools). Private providers are fully funded by private sources, yet they cater to a significant proportion of upper secondary students (SEP-Puebla, 2012).

It is important to mention that most providers offer programs oriented to prepare students for higher education and the labor market. Also, some institutions of higher education provide academically-oriented upper secondary education, such as the BUAP in Puebla. Additionally, in central Mexico, Bachilleratos Generales account for the majority of the upper secondary students, while the rest of providers are very small such as a new modality of digital upper secondary, which can account for 2% of enrolment, has recently been introduced OECD (2013).

Self is an extent term. Chen, Boucher & Tapias, (2006), mentioned that the *Self* reflects who a person is in relation to his or her significant others. This concept has been used in many different ways referring to many parts of a whole set of experiences and thoughts. A very related term is *identity*. The self is the totality of a person. Her body, her sense of identity, her reputation (how others see her) and so forth. Accordingly, Baumeister (1999), refers to three concepts closely related with the self.

1. Self-concept involves one's idea(s) about oneself. Self-concept may include many things that might not be part of one's identity. For example, the self-concept of a person might include many personality attributes, such as friendly or outgoing. In other

words, self-concept includes the totality of beliefs that an individual holds about himself or herself.

2. Self-esteem involves how an individual evaluates oneself. Self-esteem is concerned with perceptions of the self as good or bad at something within specific domains, like being an excellent teacher or a poor cook. This concept refers to the person's broader evaluation of herself.

3. Identity is a concept involving an individual's knowledge of 'who he or she is'. The previous concepts may provide insights into the questions like 'what kind of person are you?' or 'How good are you?.'

Conceptions of identity may go beyond self-concept because identity is not fully contained inside the individual's own mind. Furthermore, identity not only means being the same person you were yesterday, but it also means being different from someone else. Examples of identity components include being an employee of a certain company, a lawyer, a student or a teacher. Thereby, Baumeister (1999) named two major defining criteria of identity: *continuity* and *differentiation*. He mentions that part of having an identity is being the same person today, yesterday, last week and last year. Furthermore, that people do change in various ways but they retain some continuity of identity as signified by having the same name and other things. On the contrary, *differentiation* refers to the things that distinguish someone from others. Then, being identified with a certain organization is an example that marks an individual as distinct from non- members. Baumeister (1999) alludes that the makeup of each individual identity is different and concludes that identity seems to include at least three major types of things. First, it includes the individual's personal self (one's reputation). Second, it includes some concept

of potentiality (what one may become). Third, it includes one's general values (principles and priorities).

## **2.12 Conclusions**

The current chapter named some research that has been conducted in relation to teacher identity and teacher professional role identity (TPRI). However, a gap is identified in the research conducted in the systems of public upper secondary schools in central Mexico where the English language teacher plays an important role. The following chapter describes the methodological procedures that were followed in order to collect and analyze data in relation to this study.

## **CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHOD**

### **3.0 Introduction**

The present chapter will provide the reader with a detailed description of the methodological framework which guided the data collection and analysis for the current study. Furthermore, the research context will be described as well as the research participant in order to present a general picture of her professional characteristics. Finally, the procedures that were followed in order to collect data from the participant will be provided.

### **3.1 Methodological Framework**

Van Lier (2005) defines case study as “a form of qualitative and interpretive research” that is “a key method for researching changes in complex phenomena over time” (p. 195). Furthermore, case study research, through reports of past studies, allows the exploration and understanding of complex issues (Zainal, 2007). Since the findings of case studies are not generalizable, van Lier (2005) points out that “insights from case study can inform, be adapted to, and provide comparative information to a wide variety of other cases, so long as one is careful to take contextual differences into account” (p. 198). Recognized as a tool in many social science studies, the role of case study method in research becomes more prominent with issues related to education (Gulsecen & Kubat, 2006). One of the reasons for the recognition of case study as a research method is that researchers were becoming more concerned about the limitations of quantitative method in providing holistic and in-depth explanations of the social and behavioral problems in question (Zainal, 2007 p.1). Thus, the present study adopts this method of inquiry because it seems appropriate for a research that examines a single participant with the objective to explore a complex phenomenon: teacher’s identity.

In order to explore the identity construction of the participant, a questionnaire and two interviews were applied. Semi-structured interviews were considered to be appropriate (Kvale, 1996). According to Seidman (1998, P. 7), the interview is "a powerful way to gain insight into educational issues through understanding the experience of the individuals whose lives constitute education" (Kvale, 1996; Tierney & Dilley, 2002). Furthermore, the interview data was augmented with a written document to improve interpretation. Once the researcher had the transcripts of the interview recordings, they were examined through an in-depth analysis in order to find emerging themes. The framework of analysis was focused on four main categories which are: the self-identity, social identity, institutional identity and teacher professional role identity.

Nonetheless, before reaching that stage, it is important to define the terms 'narrative' and 'story' which are sometimes considered equivalent terms and used interchangeably (Wiltshire, 1995), although a narrative can be taken to be greater than, and more structured than, a story. A narrative may, thus, be 'any extended segment of talk in which an interviewee is telling a story' (Lucas, 1997). However, narrative analysis can be applied to any form of textual data, such as that provided by diaries, journals, or written accounts of critical incidents, in addition to data generated from interviews (Priest, Roberts & Woods, 2002).

In 1993, for example, Carter highlights that story and narrative were beginning to be used in the field of education, particularly in relation with understanding teacher knowledge. Considering what it means to be human through studying experience narratively allowed for much more expansive and compelling entry points into educational studies than did a traditionally narrow, technical approach. Focused on Noddings's (1991) sense that "stories have the power to direct and change our lives" (p. 157), Carter (1993) expresses the excitement of bringing teachers' storied knowledge to bear on research in teaching and

teacher education. At the same time, however, Carter points out that in acknowledging teachers' voices a different world for teacher educators might need to take shape, perhaps a world shaped by "helping teachers come to know their own stories" (p. 8).

Along similar lines, Creswell (2005) provides a fuller account of the different types of stories that narrative research uses to make sense of individuals' experience. He mentions life writing, personal accounts, personal narratives, narrative interviews, personal documents, documents of life, life histories, ethnohistories, ethnobiographies, ethnopsychologies, person-centered ethnographies, popular memories, Latin American *testimonios* and Polish memoirs in his list (ibid.).

### **3.2 Description of the context**

COBAT (Colegio de Bachilleres del Estado de Tlaxcala) is one of the SEP sub systems for upper- secondary level. The participant works in one of these schools since she obtained a job as an English language teacher in the "competitive examination" in 2015. She officially started the school year period in November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015. This school is divided in two schedules, the morning and the afternoon sessions. The participant works in both schedules. She teaches 22 hours per week. There are about 551 students in both shifts. They have 31 teachers, the principal, vice principal and 6 administrative assistants (secretaries, librarian, and office-holder). This school is close to Puebla City and in 2016, this COBAT celebrated 30 years since its foundation.

### **3.3 Description of the research participant**

The participant of this research will be referred to from here out as "Valentina". She did a BA in English language teaching in a public university in Puebla. At that time, she was an outstanding student and finished the program with '*honors*'. Once Valentina finished the

major, she competed to participate in a program called *Enseña por México*, whose main objective is to provide quality of education in low- benefited communities in the state of Puebla. Later, this program grew and covered other states such as: Chihuahua, Guanajuato, Monterrey. This non- profit organization assigned Valentina with a tutor who was a guide in her teaching practices for two years, the time that her collaboration lasted as an English teacher in a public high school in Puebla. During this two- years school period, she was never the titular of the English courses because the school already had its ‘official’ English Language teacher. As such, Valentina taught other related courses, and, in the last semester, she gave an extra- curriculum English language course.

Once Valentina finished her collaboration with *Enseña por México*, she did the “competitive examination” in order to get a permanent job in the SEP’s system. She placed third in the priority list. She obtained a teacher’s position with six teaching-hours, however, she teaches 22 hours per week. Among the classes she teaches, she was assigned one of the three groups in the afternoon shift to teach English as a foreign language.

Valentina considers that the English language subject is very important and equally relevant as Mathematics, Sciences and the Reading and Writing courses. However, she is involved in a context where she believes that none of the other participants give the subject the importance that it deserves.

### **3.4 Data collection**

Communication through telling stories is a natural human impulse (White, 1981). Through telling their stories, people can express their identity, relationships and emotions. Furthermore, they can order and orientate life events, in some cases gaining a sense of perspective upon these events, and may solve problems (McLeod, 1997). Bruner (1986)

claimed that narrative knowledge (that is, knowledge derived from stories) was as essential as paradigmatic knowledge (knowledge gained from science) in enabling people to make sense of the world. Despite this, the use of narrative had, until the 1970s, been little regarded by researchers (Priest, Roberts & Woods, 2002). Since that time, an increase in popularity in using narratives as sources of research data has led to the conclusion that ‘narrative has rapidly become an extraordinarily rich site of interdisciplinary study’ (DeVault, 1994).

Thus, in order to find answers to the research questions that are the guide for the present research there was the need to first gather data from which to gain knowledge. It was necessary to locate texts that depicted the participants’ views of reality. The primary data source or “field text” (Creswell, 2005 p. 476) that was utilized to accomplish this goal was narrative interview. These field text became the primary data source for the current investigation.

Nevertheless, there was the need to obtain more information to triangulate the initial evidence that was obtained through the analysis of the interviewing narrative. Triangulation is necessary in any type of research, yet it is especially important in a research such as this one where a single participant receives in-depth study (van Lier, 2005).

Due to this need to triangulate, it was necessary to conduct two semi- structured interviews with Valentina, aiming to explore deeper on the teacher’s identities between semi-structured interviews and the written field text (a questionnaire). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were also carried out because through the interviews, valuable information was obtained which described the participant’s personal, professional and institutional life, assisting the researcher in filling the gaps and answer questions that arose from the initial field hypothesis.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

This section has provided a description of the methodological framework that was followed in order to gather and analyze the data for the current research study. It has presented a discussion of the research approach and orientation that the study followed. The research instruments and the participant were also described. Having provided the methodological procedures that the study utilizes, the following chapter will present the results obtained from the data analysis procedures.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter will provide the results that represent the analysis and understanding of the construction and co-construction of an English language teacher's identity (Valentina.) The order of the data follows the organization established in the previous second and third chapter. In the first part the results obtained from the analysis of the personal, social, professional and institutional identity are described. In the following sections the most meaningful data obtained from the interviews and journal entries are presented and are categorized in: a) actors that influence on the construction of the participant's identity and b) teacher's commitment. Finally, a brief conclusion of the analysis presented is conveyed.

### 4.1 The *self*-identity

As mentioned in chapter II, identity is a process linked to social interactions in which language and experience play a significant role. Baumeister (1999), refers to identity as a concept involving an individual's knowledge of 'who he or she is'. Identity is very closely related to a term that Cooley (1902) introduced, the concept of the 'looking glass', seeing the formation of the self as "part of a reflexive, learning process by which values, attitudes, behaviour, roles and identities are accumulated over time (cited in Day and Kington, Alison and Stobart and Sammons, 2006, p. 602). With this, it is found that Valentina reflects into her 'looking glass' and identifies herself within the following frame:

*"I always try to get along with everybody but my personality is not, is....I am an introverted person and that has given some problems but, in general, I get along well with all the stakeholders in my school..."*

Moreover, Chen, Boucher & Tapias (2006), mentioned that the *Self* reflects who a person is in relation to his or her significant others. It also seems that Valentina has a perception of who is she in relation to her colleagues. She provided specific details about the

relation that she has with her significant others, in this case, the educational stakeholders and explains this in depth:

*“...Well, I think that but some teachers have told me that there are other teachers that make some bad comments about me. And the relationship with my principal is good. He has demonstrated that he can support me in every situation and that’s real! He has been supportive in some cases, especially when I have to gain more teaching-hours but there is also some influence from other teachers. But in general, I think that I have a good relationship with everyone at that school. Well, they pretend to be ‘your friends’ and I also...well, I don’t pretend, I am a good person and they know that they can count on me! So far I haven’t have problems with someone so, I consider it is a nice relationship. It is better to work individually (laugh) each one with their own business but when it’s something related to work, in teams, I do my best and they do their best too. It is just a work relationship!”*

In relation to this, Baumeister’s interpretation highlights the claim that identity is a process linked to social interactions in which language and experience play a significant role. To substantiate this claim, Mead (1934) introduced three core principles: personality (mind), interaction (self) and social structure (society). Cooley and Mead’s concepts of identity sparked a great deal of scholarly interest. Thus, Valentina gave the following description of herself when asking in an interview *who are you?*

*“I consider myself a persistent person. I am patience (self), I am creative (mind). Also I consider myself a hardworking person (self). I like to learn many things (mind) and I also like to enjoy life and enjoy people’s company” (society).*

However, conceptions of identity may go beyond self-concept because identity is not fully contained inside the individual's own mind. Furthermore, identity not only means being the same person you were yesterday, but it also means being different from someone else. These identities will be further explained.

## **4.2 Social identity**

Another category where a human being can be identified is within the social identity. Thus, once in society, people derive their identity or sense of self largely from the

social categories to which they belong. Valentina relates the “A teacher may be seen by the society” statement as:

*“An honorable, upstanding and professional person who has contributed to the people’s professional and personal development in sometime”.*

Each person, over the course of his or her personal history, is a member of a unique combination of social categories; therefore, the set of social identities that make up that person's self-concept is unique. Persons acting in the context of social structure name one another and themselves in the sense of recognizing one another as occupants of roles or positions (Stets & Burke, 2000). The participant of this study provided the following information when asking: and as a professional, who are you? Who do you consider to be so far?

*“I consider I am a good English teacher. I am a teacher. I try to do the best to improve and give my students the best way to teach”*

With this, it is important to mention that, one's identities are composed of the self-views that emerge from the reflexive activity of self- categorization or identification in terms of membership in particular *groups* or *roles*. This description that Valentina gave is also related to what Baumeister (1999) referred to the *self* and the concepts closely linked, that is *Self-esteem*, and which involves how an individual evaluates oneself. Self-esteem is concerned with perceptions of the self as good or bad at something within specific domains, like being an excellent teacher or a poor cook. This concept refers to the person's broader evaluation of herself, in this case, as being *a good English teacher* and which is related with the self, the social and the professional identity.

Having a particular social identity means being like others in the group and seeing things from the group's perspective. Nevertheless, Valentina seems to feel in conflict with her self-identity and her social identity when she alludes:

*“Sometimes when you realize that they are not your friends (colleagues), you feel unmotivated and I have had that feeling because you give everything to them, you work in a good manner, you try to be a volunteer for many activities, you try to be a good teacher, to have a good relationship with everybody and sometimes that attitudes that they have towards me, for example...”*

Consequently, Social Identity Theory (SIT) can well be traced in teacher identity.

Teachers, in the course of their practice in educational institutions, grow a sense of attachment to their affiliated institutions. This sense of belonging is the result of several manipulating variables many of which are informed by SIT, for instance teachers’ categorization of themselves and others as in-groups and out-groups as well as their tendency towards in-group connections (Brewer, 1991).

#### **4.3 Teacher Professional/ Institutional identity**

A relevant juncture of the concepts of Social Identity (SIT) and teacher identity results in the concept of institutional identity, which can generally be described as a teacher’s state of identification with the institution wherein he/she teaches (Hogg, 2006). Institutional identity is actually the realization of major SIT notions in teacher identity. SIT, however, is not alone in feeding the idea of institutional identity which may be interchanged with the term professional identity.

Similarly, having a particular role identity in the institution means acting to fulfill the expectations of that role, negotiating interaction with role partners and manipulating the environment to control the resources for which the role has responsibility. However, Valentina seems to have difficulties to understand certain working environment situations when continued:

*...that lack of confidence, the way they try to pretend to be your friend, their prejudices, also the way they share information because sometimes they do not let you know everything about the system, about some activities and that affects me! Well, I feel that I am not part of that community but I always try to be conscious about that process, maybe those teachers felt that way at the beginning when they entered to the community”.*

It was noticed that she is performing more roles than being just *a good English teacher* in order to negotiate the interaction with her colleagues and have a good relationship. Thus, to give a ‘temporal’ solution to this situation, the participant seems to do what Burke (1980) some decades ago referred in research on role identity and focused on the match between the individual meanings of occupying a particular role and the behaviors that a person enacts in that role while interacting with others. Given the number of groups to which an individual might belong, her professional identity is likely to consist of an amalgam of identities, identities that could impose inconsistent demands upon that person. This is clearly seen with the following participant’s statements:

*“You have to be friendly and get along with others because you are new and you have to gain the confidence of others, to gain some status. You need to do many things so that others can see that you are a good participant”.*

In a similar manner, certain demands may conflict with those of the individual's personal identity (Leary, Wheeler, & Jenkins, 1986). For this, it can be noticed another struggle in Valentina’s personal, social and professional role identity because despite the fact she is introverted, she enjoys other’s company and likes to work based on the school’s goals and expectations. She also tries to be a friend for her colleagues but at the end she finds that:

*“sometimes I feel alone in that community because they have another expectations and perspectives, another way to think”*

#### **4.3.1 Influence of past mentors**

As previously stated Professional identity is defined in many different ways within teaching and teacher education (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004). Professional identity is generally concerned with how teachers see themselves as teachers, based on their interpretations of their continuing interactions with other actors within their context (ibid).

Construction of professional identity in the EFL context is also influenced by language teachers 'colleagues as well as their previous teachers.

Exploring the professional identity of Valentina in a public high school context has also brought about some conceptions. For example, self-efficacy, professional development, and intrinsic job motivation which shape EFL teachers professional identity positively (Tajeddin & Khodarahmi, 2013). These conceptions are seen in Valentina when showing the following memories:

*"I remember one teacher in high school that I like so much because...it was a man and he was so strict but you could enjoy the learning process and also I liked that he shared his experiences with the language and in another countries, with the university and he did many activities in order that students could learn. His activities were dynamic and also students could exchange knowledge actively"*

For her, that teacher reflected self- efficacy, professional development and seems to have an intrinsic high job motivation that revealed a positive and well-constructed professional identity that Valentina liked. In addition, it has been revealed that language teachers follow and imitate some characteristics of their teachers who taught them in the past (Ghasedi, 2013). Valentina had significant and inspiring teachers when she was an English language learner:

*"The teacher in my first course was so nice, so passionate and I like that! There were teachers who were impressive for me! Their teaching methodology was different and you could learn effectively and also the knowledge they transmitted was so clear; the values that they teach you too"*

The studies previously mentioned show that identity development and its influence on professional development is as important as language skills for language teachers. Nevertheless, it is believed that Valentina was positively influenced on the idea of being a good English language teacher but, that has not created a real impact in a way of applying

those teaching methodologies and any proof has been found as a factor on the construction of her actual professional identity.

#### **4.3.2 Institutional policies**

As stated in the second chapter: literature review, one focus of teacher professional identity is the one Day (2002) gave by claiming that professional identity is related to how teachers respond to educational reforms. He mentioned the lack of attention being paid to teacher professional identity in educational reforms worldwide, thereby challenging professionalism among teachers.

Also, Kelchtermans (2009) states that teachers develop an interpretative framework during their career and that this framework is shaped and re-shaped through interaction between individual teachers and the social, cultural and structural working conditions of their working context. Day and Kington, Alison and Stobart, and Sammons (2006), found that teachers balance three relevant dimensions in their work: a personal dimension (their life outside school), a professional dimension (social and policy expectations of what constitutes a good teacher and a teacher's own educational ideals) and a situational dimension (the teacher's immediate working environment). Different professional identities are formed through the ways these dimensions interact.

Accordingly, the professional development and a "good teaching" is: "as an art, teaching calls for vision, intuition, talent, commitment, and creativity – very little of which can actually be taught (Woolfolk, 1996, p. 7). For this referent, Valentina agrees since she expressed:

*"Teaching is not as easy as it seems, it is a complex art"*

Nonetheless, research seems to highlight that teachers' vulnerability rarely comes from feeling not up-to-date or bad at teaching. Jeffrey and Woods (1996), instead,

explained that when teachers are challenged in educational reform processes they may experience a “loss of self” (p. 331). From the very beginning, Valentina has been in a constant attempt of being a good English language teacher, however she went through a rigorous process where emotionally felt lost and here it is stated:

*“I had to study a lot for the exam (the proficiency test) and then, when I got the results it was a little frustrating because it was not related with my profile and I was sad at the first because I thought that I would never be in charge of the English classes where I can develop my professional career. Then, I had to study more about the reading and writing workshop, it was a new subject for me. Well, it is related but it is not the one that I competed for”*

Close related with this “loss of self”, Lasky (2000) studied the interactions between secondary teachers’ identity, agency, and professional vulnerability in a reform climate, finding that external mediation systems may have greater impact on identity formation for teachers of younger professional status than for those whose identities were securely formed before the onset of reforms (when she was a student). This is confirmed with the following expressions, Valentina had a considerable impact as a young teacher, and definitely her professional identity was having significant interferences:

*“We that are new, we can just demand the teaching- hours that are free. I have the worst schedule and that’s so frustrating! The last semester I had to wait about three hours between each class and that was so exhausting, so tiring! Because sometimes there wasn’t anything to do. There’s no internet, there’s no a library, well, there’s a library but it’s not so good so you spend your time doing nothing and that is so exhausting and so frustrating for me!”*

Thus, teachers are expected to respond to greater pressures and comply with multiplying innovations under conditions that are at best stable and at worst deteriorating (Hargreaves, 2001) but this is not her case. As a consequence of this, Valentina is thinking about increasing her professional development in order to have a better status in her school and comply with innovations:

*“I am planning other things like maybe studying a master’s degree. Applying for another projects and programs”*

### **4.3.3 Professional training**

Other studies shows how the effort to meet needs of varied interests often evokes teachers’ emotions (Godar, 1990; Lortie, 1977; Nias, 1989). In this case, Valentina has taken certain professional training in order to better develop English language teaching strategies and, as mentioned in the previous section, increase her professional development. However, emotions of sadness are outstanding when she notices it is difficult to put them in practice with her students:

*“I miss English! Even when I take some extra courses I can imagine myself with my students applying some strategies and I start to think of some activities that I can do but in my real context I don’t have that opportunity to put them in practice!”*

The participant of this study cannot get more English language teaching hours because of reforms and educative policies. Just to exemplify, Canadian and UK perspectives on teachers’ emotions during educational reform highlight the importance of caring in classroom. Teachers need to control their emotions that become more intense when they perceive an intrusion by institutional policies (Hargreaves, 2001; Lasky, 2000) (the last section of this chapter presents the influences on the construction of the participant’s identity and how it impacts in her classroom and teaching practices)

Nonetheless, because of this interference of institutional and governmental policies, the participant thinks the following for her near future:

*“So far I’m thinking about many things because I’m not sure to continue in this system. I want to try new things and I also want to try in another system, in another context”*

Hence, with this information is confirmed what Jeffrey and Woods (1996) found when saying that teachers subject to scrutiny experience sense of professional inadequacy, reduction of positive emotions and loss of self, pedagogical values, and harmony.

Furthermore, Darby (2008) shows that teachers experience fear and intimidation when their professional self-understandings is challenged.

*“...because I have to apply for the competitive examination again so, it’s not sure that I get a good opportunity. I’m going to study hard but it’s not taken for granted, I’m not so sure, so I’m going to try in other context” (educative level or system)*

The researcher thinks that only with adequate support by the educational stakeholders and authorities, teachers would be able to reconstruct their self- identities, self-esteem and professional identity leading to improvements in student achievement, instructional practices, and positive changes conveyed to emotions of pride and excitement.

#### **4.4 Educational stakeholders’ behaviors influence on the construction of the English language teacher’s identity**

Teacher identity refers to how teachers define themselves in relation to their professional tasks and particularly in relation to educational and teaching relationships (Avalos, 2010). From a social perspective, using Castells’ words identity may be defined as “a construction of meaning on the basis of a cultural attribute , or related set of cultural attributes, that is/are given priority over other sources of meaning” (1997, p. 6). Teachers are entrusted with the task of educating in social contexts, and on the basis of this essential task they construct and reconstruct their identities over time. To a large extent identity has to do with meanings that individuals make about themselves and with the meanings that others make about them (Beijard, Verloop & Vermunt, 2000). Therefore, identity is a co-construction involving one teacher and other significant agents or teachers as well as the broader society to which they belong. Thus, it is necessary to relate back this process with the social identity. Valentina gives as reference the society and how they see teachers with the following extract which has been previously stated:

*“A teacher may be seen by the society as an honorable, upstanding and professional person who has contributed to the people’s professional and personal development in sometime”*

Nevertheless, in considering how teachers identify as professionals or how teachers define their responsibilities and work, there are four key elements that stand out: (a) the understanding and degree of commitment to a role and a task, or the degree of motivation which keeps them going; (b) the definition of their sphere of work and the degree to which they feel satisfied with it; (c) confidence in their ability to do the work, or the degree of self-efficacy feelings; and (d) the perception of acceptance and respect awarded to teachers by those close to their work as well as by those in the wider society (Avalos, 2010). Based on this, a) the understanding and degree of commitment to a role and a task, Valentina finds the following in her teaching community:

*“Yes, you are a volunteer and that is how then, the stakeholders take advantage of that! They tell you: please, help me with this, help me with that! And I have participated in many activities at that school and I can know when they want something”*

Furthermore, according to the previous author when mentioning b) the definition of their sphere of work and the degree to which they feel satisfied with it, it is clear that the participant’s professional identity has been affected:

*“There’s an established agreement since the beginning. So, they know (the other English teachers) how many teaching- hours they have and they take all the English language courses. They could give me some English classes but they don’t want it! because they have been teaching there for years and also because those teaching-hours belong to them!... I asked the principal to help me with that aspect and he said: yes! But at the end he didn’t respect that agreement. His reasons were that the coordinator didn’t want that I haven’t apply for the diagnostic exam and I think that there are many excuses and that affects me as a person, as a teacher because that is not my professional profile!”*

With all of the above, to many researchers, the significance of the people in educational context on teachers’ professional identity and, as a rational consequence, on their institutional identity, is taken for granted. Forde, McMahon & Patrick, (2006) and Weber and Mitchell (1995) confirmed the influence of individuals in educational settings. Gohier,

Chevrier & Anadón (2007) believe that “students, colleagues, and all other actors of the school system as a social institution” have impact on teachers’ institutional identity. Hence, it is find how since the very beginning, because of policies or personal interests, the main stakeholders of Valentina’s school made a significant contribution on the construction of her institutional identity:

*“According to the priority list is the way that they will call you. It is supposed that you would teach in the area where you enrolled and you competed but, in my case, they offered me just the “reading and writing workshop” and they (principal and main authorities in the school) told me that it was the only area they had and that it was my decision if took it or leave it but I decided to take it and that’s the way I started in the system. Teaching another subject that was not English.”*

Consequently, according to Hansen (2008), identity is shaped and reshaped relative to those around us. The procedure is not holistic though in that the acquisition of identity is by no means all-inclusive, accurate, and permanent. Others influence us regarding those elements we share, particularly in a communal context (Ellemers, Spear, & Doosje, 2002). Yet, this process is reciprocal: when it comes to identity formation, individuals influence and are at the same time influenced by others (Nascimento-Schulze, 1993). To be brief, identity is projected in the practices of group members. Shared context provides the setting for group members’ ‘observing’ and then taking up each other’s’ practices. If we tend to combine the two theories, having in mind the question of identity formation within groups, it can be claimed that group members adopt from each other identity-related practices, i.e. contextual (institutional) practices of identity are observed, learned, and employed by colleagues. We can find this explicitly in the following Valentina’s statement:

*“You need to do many things so that others can see that you are a good participant”*

However, there has been no study reported in literature as to how these two concepts, institutional identity and teacher efficacy, are correlated (Ghafar, Kiany, Akbari & Azimi,

2011). More precisely, it is hypothesized that teachers with the highest scores on teacher efficacy scale, which shows their high motivation and confidence (Stets, 2006), tend to strengthen institutional identity of the group. To put it differently, it is claimed that teachers with higher institutional identity are more efficacious than those with lower institutional identity and vice versa, i.e., vicarious learning (or Modeling Process) of teachers with high teacher efficacy indices helps them boost their institutional identity (Ghafar et al 2011). Teacher efficacy is therefore claimed to be in direct relationship with teachers' institutional identity. This is linked to the participant and is mirrored when she is asked to reflect and write about what means to her: *to be a teacher*:

*“In my own experience it has been a hard task because nowadays education systems and rules ask to prepare students to be qualified and it is also asked not to fail students, that is not a problem, the problem that we face as teachers is that we sometimes take the parents' role, there is a lack of values and most of the students feel unmotivated and that is the work of a teacher to involve, to motivate, to create, to encourage, to help, to lead, to guide students in the learning process and to do this learning be meaningful. All this work involves time, effort and will”*

It is clearly seen that Valentina is really committed with her students and, besides this, according to literature, members' voluntary choosing to become involved in an institution is an indispensable factor of institutional identity, too (Enyedy, Goldberg & Welsh, 2006) This is also present when the participant talks about her voluntary activities in the school but sometimes, educational stakeholders take advantage of that:

*“when the principal of the school says that they need a volunteer for a program or an extra activity you have to volunteer because that helps you to gain more teaching- hours and to have a good status in the school....I have participated in many activities at that school and I can know when they want something. I have been in the Construyete program; it is a program that help students with social... with emotions! Also, I have been a mentor for students, asesor, in Spanish. This is, you are the leader of the group and you coordinate students to do different activities and that's all. I have collaborated in almost all the activities at that school”.*

Even though only a part of Teacher Professional Identity (TPI) is considered to be worthy subject for discussion, research demonstrate that many teachers define themselves through the roles they play in professional live (Barber, 2002; Nias, 1989) and this is how Valentina describes her professional identity according to the roles she performs besides the stakeholders' bad attitudes and behaviors:

*“when you take different roles and different activities, it can help you to gain more confidence with the stakeholders but it has some advantages and also some disadvantages. In my experience, at the beginning, it was good because my stakeholders could realize that I like to work, to participate and help with many activities and that is good because you can demonstrate that you really like your job and really want to take part of that community. With this, you can also gain some friends and close some people in order to gain important information about the system. They can share with you because you have had the confidence with them. But some disadvantages because some people are really envious. They do not want to share anything with you. They think that you are an unexperienced teacher...And also because there are new teaching methodologies. Well, we have another way of teaching and also that is something that they have realized, in my case. So, they start to give me some problems, some comments; they do not like that I teach well. They do not like that students give good comments about me. Because they think that I do things wrong but I always do the best and that has been helpful for me. In general it is the prejudice and envy!”*

#### **4.5 Teacher's commitment**

Developing a sense of professional commitment can be explained as an active process of participation in a teacher community. Student teachers portray themselves as young and dynamic prospective professionals whose transformative experiences of teaching are part of their professional commitment (Fajardo, 2011). Part of the initial preparation of teachers is centered on developing in them a sense of the importance of the tasks that will be entrusted to them. They are made aware to an extent of their future sphere of work and of the demands that will be placed upon themselves. At that stage, future teachers may see only a worthwhile task and feel theoretically motivated, depending on the degree to which they are faced with practical situations. As they begin to teach and progress through their career,

their motivation and commitment may be strengthened or may be tested in critical situations. For example, Valentina expresses the way she feels since she teaches other subjects apart from the English language course:

*“I consider it affects a lot because you concentrate just in a specific course and you do the best in that course. In the English area, I just had one class and I think that I did not do my best in that course even when that’s my professional profile, I think I...I have more students in the other courses than the English class and I think I have lost some practice and to be in contact with the language and methodologies and all those things and that affects a lot when you are not in your area and you lose experience...”*

It is well known that new teachers are more likely to engage in identity-conflicts while entering the profession since they need to address new and demanding tasks. Furthermore, as stated in 4.3.2. Institutional policies, teachers may experience identity conflicts as educational reforms request them to modify proven practices. Also, young teachers need to expose their work and expertise to deep inspection or examination. So, not only reform initiatives seek to redefine professional practice, but also certain attitudes in the working environment that represent a threat to the motivation and commitment that teachers have built over time, this is represented in the following Valentina’s lines:

*“...you face many barriers with students and also you are not supported by the principal, neither the other teachers. At least in that school or in this system, you face your own problems, that’s your own business!”*

Florio-Ruane (2002) maintained that teaching is not just observable patterns; the observable “norms [of teaching] are not determinative. Teachers retain sufficient agency to act in new, creative ways ... teaching is both ordered and responsive to norms and standards and also improvisational and responsive to other participants” (p. 209-210). In service teachers, embodying specific identities, understandings, and early enactments of teaching, engage with the systems of teacher education to create a professional identity. Having presented this background, Valentina was asked about the upper- secondary public

system in central Mexico, the one where she works, and she surprisingly expressed the following:

*“Well, that it’s a system that lacks many rights. It’s a system where you cannot get a high promotion easily. It is a difficult stage for students and it is a difficult experience about teaching because it’s not easy to teach teenagers. It’s difficult to be part of this system! You need to know someone important or get the first place in the priority list. You face many situations, many challenges. It’s good to earn money but it’s not well paid”*

Furthermore, in a reform context, which has been also previously mentioned, Little and Bartlett (2002) alluded that teachers have been found to experience disappointments that can weaken their commitment to teaching and work, rooted in: (a) frustration with shifting levels of endorsement or support from school leaders, (b) dismay over conflicts with colleagues and/or a failure of support from colleagues, (c) emotional and physical exhaustion associated with extra and unfamiliar responsibilities, (d) disagreement over the interpretation of broadly defined reform goals, and (e) tensions over the balance between teacher autonomy and institutional demands.

Thus, Baruch and Cohen (2007), have suggested a number of conditions necessary for subjects’ commitments. At the organizational level, it includes issues such as justice and trust, together with the absence of role conflict. Related with this, research reveals that the identity of teachers is associated with teachers’ commitment (Day, Elliot & Kington, 2005). When teachers develop satisfaction from their commitment, they derive a sense of pride in their profession. Other studies point to the fact that teacher identity affects pedagogy and teaching. To a large extent, teacher identity determines the way that teachers teach, the way they develop as teachers and their attitudes towards educational changes (Beijaard et al. 2004). However, despite the fact Valentina find herself negatively viewed within her context, she considers to have a good relationship with her students and, as she previously

stated: *“students give good comments about me”*. Furthermore, she gave details about the relationship she has created with the pupils:

*“the relationship is good, I always try to be a friend for them. I like they can find different ways to learn. I like them and I think they like me. They feel comfortable in the classroom. I try to make a good environment in order that they can participate, they can learn, they can do the activities but the guys who I work with are, in general, relaxed and quiet students”*.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

The current chapter provided an analysis of the data that was collected to address the research questions posited for the present investigation. It examined and explained particular issues which shed light on the construction and co- construction of the participant’s institutional identity. Having illustrated the data analysis and provided such an explanation of the data collected, the following chapter will answer the research questions and the significance of the study is presented.

## CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS

### 5.0 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide the conclusions of the investigation while presenting the answers to the research questions (see chapter I) and the limitations of the present research project. As previously stated, this study was intended to analyze the construction of an English language teacher's identity in a sub-system of a public high school in Central México. Therefore, a discussion of the key findings in relation to the research questions of the study will be addressed. These conclusions are drawn from an analyses of the emerging frames of the interviews and the questionnaire focusing on the construction of the participant's professional identity. The limitations of the study, directions for further research and a brief conclusion will be presented.

### 5.1 Discussion of key findings

As we have seen previously, the first RQ of the study was:

*How does an English language teacher conceptualize her professional identity within a public high school context in central Mexico?*

It can be concluded that the participant has a stable personal and professional identity. She considers herself to be a 'real' teacher. She insists that her students learn the foreign language, providing them with the best "way" (in the participant's terms) to learn. On the other hand, the data reflects how Valentina is in a constant struggle to earn the recognition of the educational stakeholders within her professional context, validating her participation within her community of practice.

We see examples of these tendencies surfacing within the data, as we previously discussed in Chapter IV, when the participant comments that “*I consider I am a good English teacher. **I am a teacher** (my emphasis). I try to do the best to improve and give my students **the best way to teach**” (my emphasis) and the statement: “*You need to do many things so that **others can see that you are a good participant** (my emphasis)*” (see section 4.3 of Chapter IV, for additional analyses).*

The second RQ of the study was:

*How do the educational stakeholders’ behaviors influence on the construction of the English language teacher’s identity?*

The answer that I find most appropriate, which is supported by the data and the scholarly literature, simply states that others influence us. As Gohier, Chevrier & Anadón (2007) mentioned, “students, colleagues, and all other actors of the school system as a social institution” have impact on teachers’ institutional identity. Thus, the data clearly demonstrates that Valentina is influenced in the construction of her professional identity by the stakeholders’ attitudes and behaviors. We see this influence manifesting as Valentina enthusiastically takes on new, non-academic roles and volunteers to participate in extracurricular activities within her professional context. The participant makes clear that she is willing to take on these additional responsibilities in order to be accepted within her community of practice. She exerts effort in order to show that she is “good participant” within her professional context and show that she really wants to be part of that community.

Thus, despite the fact that Valentina has a stable personal and professional identity, the evidence suggests that her institutional identity is dynamic as she engages in a process of negotiation with the educational stakeholders within her professional context.

Valentina's insecurities about her status within her community motivates her to engage in these kinds of activities in order to validate her membership. As such, the stakeholder's attitudes have an important impact on her identity that can provoke her to struggle between the distinct options of continuing with her strategies to fit in or resign and begin to search for different academic opportunities. The following participant's statements within the data support the above conclusions: "*sometimes **I feel alone in that community** (my emphasis) because they have another expectations and perspectives, another way to think*" and "*So far I'm thinking about many things because **I'm not sure to continue in this system** (my emphasis). I want to try new things and I also want to try in another system, in another context*"

The third RQ is:

*How does the manner in which the English language teacher perceives herself, as being positively or negatively viewed within the context, influence her teaching practices?*

It would not be unreasonable to assume that Valentina's professional identity may have been affected in a negative way and this could have impacted her teaching practices. Surprisingly, this does not seem to be true. The clearest evidence of this is that Valentina's students evaluate her courses positively. As Valentina says: "*the students and the Principal of the school evaluate me and I also have the opportunity to evaluate myself; the principal gives you a format which you have to fill in and then you hand in it.*" This evaluation happens at the end of every school year. The students leave favorable comments about her courses, of which her colleagues are aware, and this could be the reason why Valentina

believes that her colleagues “put up barriers” in order to prevent her from getting more English language teaching hours. In fact, during the first interview, the participant mentioned several times that: **‘they’** [*teacher colleagues*] **do not like that students give good comments about me** because they think that I do things wrong.

Additionally, the data reveals that Valentina believes that she is highly committed to her teaching as she comments: *“I think the commitment of a teacher is to assure students become better human beings, with better skills and better opportunities. Teachers have to offer these opportunities and have to guide students to get them and become always better.”* In fact, Valentina arrives at the conclusion that she has a good relationship with her students because: *“I always **try to be a friend** for them”*.

Closely related with teacher commitment, it is important to mention that Valentina was asked to present the competitive examination again, and she passed it. According to the SEP and its ‘new’ educational reforms, teachers are constantly evaluated in order to keep their jobs and continue in the system. Based on the results she obtained, she now has the opportunity to start a new school year. However, since Valentina started to look for more opportunities that could help in her professional development, she applied to enter into a Master’s in English Language Teaching program, and she was accepted. Thus, her priority now is to continue with her education in order to become a better teacher.

Nevertheless, the data from the second interview shows her willingness to return: *“yes, I would like to come back. It is interesting and also there are many things that we can do as English teachers!”* Hence, the data reveals that the participant is highly committed to her profession and even to public schooling.

## **5.2 Limitations of the study**

The majority of research studies present limitations, and this investigation is not the exception. As a case study where the identity of only one participant is analyzed, results cannot be generalized beyond the case presented in the current research. Furthermore, when performing research it is not always easy to establish the causes of behaviors. The stakeholder's attitudes and behaviors that were present towards the participant cannot have a completely accurate explanation where cultural aspects may be involved. Finally, all the analyses of the participant's identity is based solely on Valentina's perceptions. There is not another participant's voice present in the current investigation.

### **5.3 Directions for further research**

Based on interpretations of the literature, teacher identity has been viewed and defined as identification with one or many things. For example, some researchers have defined identity as knowledge or as beliefs. Others have explained it through language learning and language teaching. More recently, researchers have explained teacher identity through the role of emotions and personal values. It is important to consider all these components together if we want to understand identity from a holistic perspective. Accordingly, I would like to include more participants that are facing the situation that Valentina has to deal with but also, I would go into a deeper analysis of the knowledge, emotions and personal values.

### **5.4 Conclusion**

To sum up, this chapter presented the closing discussion to data previously analyzed in chapter four. The key findings described how educational stakeholders have a significant impact in the construction of the participant's identity of the present study. Also, despite the fact that she is negatively viewed in her context, this does not affect in a negative way her

teaching practices. More than that, she shows a high and constant teaching commitment. Finally, this thesis project can be concluded with an emphasis on teacher's reflection for better professional development. Furthermore, it is important to explore the process of how we come to terms with ourselves and with the world in general by analyzing the influences we encounter along the path of becoming who we are as teachers (Smith, 2006). Frank Smith (2006) provided the following explanation of the influences on identity formation:

Personal identity is not something that we find by looking at ourselves in the mirror, nor is it given to us by the efforts and opinions of others. Identity is constructed from the way others influence the way we behave and see ourselves. We learn from the company we keep, and the greatest learning is generated by our perception of the way other people see us. We expect to be like our friends and other close acquaintances – and expect to be different from those with whom we don't affiliate. (p. 91)

The above models of teacher development, in light of the evolution of teacher identity, present a gradual progression and shift in focus from the professional to the more personal dimensions of teacher development. Clarke and Hollingsworth's (2002) "interconnected model" focused on teacher growth primarily in the professional field. Freeman (1990), more than a decade earlier, went in fact further by addressing aspects of influences on teacher development in addition to the professional factors, e.g., the experience of humanness leading up to the experience of balance. The notions of self and critical self-awareness within the microcosm of an individual teacher are core ideas in Diamond's (1991) work, which helps to transform teachers' perspectives on themselves and their work in the classroom (as outlined in Chapter 2). The notions of self and identity take

a prominent place in Palmer's (1998) work by highlighting the integration of teacher identity through joining thinking and feeling, the personal and the professional aspects of being a teacher.

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## APPENDIX A

### **Narrative interview**

Researcher: Ok, here we are with our magnificent participant, Valentina...How are you? How are you doing today?

Valentina:

Researcher: Can you please tell me how when was your first contact with the English language?

Valentina:

Researcher: Great! And, did you have an outstanding English teacher who was like a teacher-model for you when you were a learner of EFL? They could be from these courses that you have already mentioned or the ones that you have in secondary or high school.

Valentina:

Researcher: I see... and, at that moment, did you imagine that you would be an English teacher?

Valentina:

Researcher: Awesome! And now, can you please tell me who are you?

Valentina:

Researcher: ...and as a professional, who are you? Who do you consider to be so far?

Valentina:

Researcher: ok! And why did you decide to become an English language teacher?

Valentina:

Researcher: I see...and who made you to take this decision?

Valentina:

Researcher: Which is your first or more meaningful teaching experience apart from the teaching position that you have now?

Valentina:

Researcher: What is the process to become an English language teacher at the SEP?

Valentina:

Researcher: Were you evaluated in your teaching practices?

Valentina:

Researcher: What is the level of English in the common European framework that you need to have?

Valentina:

Researcher: and what about the results, the so called “priority list”? The final results of the proficiency examination to get a permanent job in the SEP?

Valentina:

Researcher: and emotionally, how was this process that you went through to get a permanent job in the SEP?

Valentina:

Researcher: And now that you are, let’s say, officially an English teacher at the SEP, which are the roles that you perform apart from being a teacher?

Valentina:

Researcher: ok, and what are the courses or the classes that you are already teaching this semester?

Valentina:

Researcher: And do you expect to gain more English language teaching hours in the future?

Valentina:

Researcher: And, how much time do you think it will take for you that one teacher retires, so that you can gain more rights?

Valentina:

Researcher: about how many years of experience do those teachers have?

Valentina:

Researcher: and getting back to the roles that you perform, these activities that you volunteer to do. What is the importance that you give to the roles that you perform in your context?

Valentina:

Researcher: and now that you are talking about that aspect... how is the relationship that you have with the principal, the colleagues, the administratives of your school, these stakeholders. How is your relationship with these participants in this context?

Valentina:

Researcher: I see, and how is your personality, are you introverted or extroverted?

Valentina:

Researcher: ok...how does the matter in which some of your co-workers behave towards you influence on the way you feel within your context?

Valentina:

Researcher: which are those expectations? Do you mean personal or professional goals?

Valentina:

Researcher: So that is why you don't share this way of thinking, you have different goals than them!

Valentina:

Researcher: and, which are the specific stakeholders' attitudes or behaviors that make you feel unmotivated or uncommitted with your teaching profession?

Valentina:

Researcher: and with the rest of the stakeholders? Are there some attitudes that make you feel unmotivated or uncommitted with your teaching profession?

Valentina:

Researcher: what about the attitudes of the other English teachers?

Valentina:

Researcher: do they have a problem with the arrangement of the courses? Does someone want more English language teaching-hours than the other? Have they come with an agreement about the total teaching hours that each teacher will have?

Valentina:

Researcher: and what are the arguments to don't let you...

Valentina:

Researcher: but have you talked with them or with the principal?

Valentina:

Researcher: how does this affect your teaching practices, this specific situation?

Valentina:

Researcher: Yes...and how are the attitudes of the rest of the stakeholders, for example, the administratives. Have you found an attitude that has make you feel that you are not part of that community?

Valentina:

Researcher: and do you enjoy these courses? The other related English- courses that you are teaching? Do you enjoy to teach that classes?

Valentina:

Researcher: do you miss your English courses?

Valentina:

Researcher: so very related with that...can you tell me what do you think about the upper-secondary public system at least here in central Mexico?

Valentina:

Researcher: could you please tell me, why did you decided to start in this system?

Valentina:

Researcher: and what are you plans for the future? Do you want to stay in this system? Are you going to try to change your school?

Valentina:

Researcher: so, you are about of giving up at that school?

Researcher: okay, how is the relationship that you have created with your students?

Valentina:

Researcher: well, thank you! You have given very meaningful answers. Do you want to add any comments?

Valentina:

Researcher: thanks to you!

## APPENDIX B

### Questionnaire

Hi again!

Thank you so much for cooperating with this Project. Your collaboration is very helpful. I would like to ask you to perform a small reflective task that is based on our last interview when you said,

“I am a teacher”

And that made me wonder...What does it mean to “be a teacher”? Would you reflect on that question and write **one paragraph** that explains what it means to you when you say, “I am a teacher” Perhaps following the two phase process below will assist in the reflection.

#### **Phase I: finish these starters**

A teacher is

A teacher must

A teacher should

A teacher serves

The qualities that a teacher must have are

A teacher must be prepared

A teacher may be seen by the society as

A teacher is

The activities that a teacher must perform

A teacher sacrifices

#### **Phase II: Articulate in your own words what it means “to be a teacher”.**

## APPENDIX C

### **Second interview**

1. Last time you were telling me about the process of becoming an English language teacher in the SEP. Can you tell me about the institutional policies that your school follows for the new teachers?
2. Are you familiarized with the new educational reforms in México?
3. How does these reforms change your commitment with your school, mainly with your students?
4. In the previous interview you told me about some diplomados and courses that you take related to English language teaching. Does your school ask you/demand you to take these extra professional training?
5. Can you explain with your own words what is teacher's commitment?
6. How is your performance as an English language teacher in your school?
7. How is your performance as a teacher in your school measured? Did you receive results or comments for the academic improvements of your students?
8. Can you please share with me the personal, academic and professional plans that you have in your school?
9. What do you think about the institutional policies and decisions that the sub systems of high school in the public context take towards the process of recruiting English language teachers?
10. What do you think will happen with these sub systems in the near future? (new teachers are giving different classes than their professional profile, mainly with English teachers)
11. Are you thinking/ have you thought about coming back to the public high school context?

Thank you so much!