

## PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AS CONFLICTIVE NEGOTIATION OF SUBJECT POSITIONS ALONG THE PRACTICUM

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**Abstract:** This study offers an interpretation of the process of professional identity construction of a student-teacher of English throughout her experiences in the supervised teaching practicum at Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC). Understanding this practicum as a community of practice (WENGER, 1998) involving student-teachers, schoolteachers, teacher educators, and school students, we look into the professional trajectory of a student-teacher through her relationship with her supervisor (teacher educator). The data was gathered by means of semi-structured private interviews with the student-teacher and her supervisor, in which they told their personal stories, career plans and reflected about their whole practicum experience. The analysis of data shows conflictive negotiation of subject positions among the participants regarding their expectations about the practicum and their beliefs about teaching. We also show how student and teacher identities worked simultaneously in the student-teacher trajectory along the practicum. Based on the research, we can conclude that experiences in that context enabled the student-teacher to change her story of teaching to include a new identification as a reflective teacher, which can be considered a sign of learning (SFARD & PRUSAK, 2005), of aligning with the practices of that community of teachers, and thus of belonging to it (WENGER, 1998).

**Key-words:** Identity construction. Student-teacher of English. Practicum.

## A CONSTRUÇÃO DA IDENTIDADE PROFISSIONAL COMO NEGOCIAÇÃO CONFLITUOSA DE POSIÇÕES DO SUJEITO DURANTE O ESTÁGIO

**Resumo:** Este estudo oferece uma possibilidade de interpretação sobre o processo de construção da identidade profissional de uma aluna-professora de inglês por meio de suas experiências no estágio curricular supervisionado na UFSC. Entendendo este estágio como uma comunidade de prática (WENGER, 1998) envolvendo alunos-professores, professores da escola, professores formadores e alunos da escola, nós olhamos para a trajetória profissional de uma aluna-professora através de sua relação com sua supervisora (professora formadora). Os dados foram gerados através de entrevistas privadas semi-estruturadas com a aluna-professora e sua supervisora, nas quais elas contaram suas histórias pessoais, planos profissionais e refletiram sobre toda sua experiência no estágio. A análise dos dados revela negociações conflituosas de posições de sujeito entre as participantes em relação às suas expectativas sobre o estágio e

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suas crenças em relação ao ensino. Nós também procuramos demonstrar como identidades de aluna e professora estavam simultaneamente presentes na construção da identidade da aluna-professora como professora de inglês no estágio. A partir desta pesquisa, podemos concluir que as experiências naquele contexto possibilitaram uma mudança na história de ensino da aluna-professora a fim de incluir uma nova identificação como professora reflexiva, o que pode ser considerado um sinal de aprendizagem (SFARD; PRUSAK, 2005), de alinhamento às práticas daquela comunidade de professores e sendo assim, de pertencimento à comunidade (WENGER, 1998).

**Palavras-chave:** Construção identitária. Aluna-professora de inglês. Estágio.

## LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DE LA IDENTIDAD DOCENTE COMO NEGOCIACIÓN CONFLICTIVA DE POSICIONES IDENTITARIAS DURANTE LA PRÁCTICA DE LA ENSEÑANZA

**Resumen:** Este estudio ofrece una interpretación del proceso de construcción de identidad docente de una profesora practicante de inglés como lengua adicional a través de sus experiencias en la disciplina de Práctica de la Enseñanza (practicum) de la Universidad Federal de Santa Catarina - UFSC. Entendiendo que los participantes de esa disciplina, los profesores practicantes, los profesores supervisores y los profesores y los alumnos de la escuela donde se realiza el practicum, constituyen una comunidad de práctica (Wenger, 1998), investigamos la trayectoria docente de una profesora practicante a través de su relación la profesora supervisora. Los datos se generaron a través de entrevistas semi-estructuradas con la profesora practicante y con su supervisora, en las que ambas contaron sus historias personales y sus planes profesionales, y reflexionaron sobre sus experiencias durante el practicum. El análisis de los datos reveló negociaciones conflictivas de posiciones de sujeto entre las participantes con respecto a sus expectativas en relación al practicum y a sus creencias sobre la enseñanza de inglés. También, en este trabajo, mostramos como las identidades de estudiante y de profesora estaban simultáneamente presentes en la trayectoria de la profesora practicante durante el practicum. Finalmente, podemos concluir que las experiencias en las prácticas de la enseñanza posibilitaron un cambio identitario importante de la profesora practicante que comenzó a adoptar una postura reflexiva, que constituye una señal de aprendizaje (Sfard y Prusak, 2005), de alineamiento con las prácticas de esa comunidad y de pertenencia a la misma (Wenger, 1998).

**Palavras Clave:** Construcción de la identidad. Profesora Practicante de Inglés. Practicum.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

How does someone become a teacher? Although we would not deny the fact that going through a teacher education program in a higher education institution is primordial to educate teachers, we now know that there is more involved in becoming a teacher than

completing all the requirements of a teaching program. This is because underneath the visible aspects of becoming a teacher, such as going through a teacher education program, lie intricate processes of professional identity construction. These processes of identification with the teaching profession relate to the way student-teachers go about recognizing themselves as teachers and the way they are recognized as teachers by other members of their community of practice (LAVE; WENGER, 1991; WENGER, 1998). According to Wenger (1998), when we discuss matters of belonging to a certain community of practice (in this case, the community of English teachers), of imagining oneself within and beyond this community and of aligning one's actions and values to the ones of the community itself, we are discussing processes of identity formation (see WENGER, 1998). This is the topic that we will approach in this study, the process of professional identity formation of a student-teacher of English taking her practicum in a public school in the south of Brazil.

The broader context of this study is the undergraduate program in English at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC) where this student-teacher is pursuing a teaching degree in English. The immediate context is the federal public school where she is taking her supervised teaching practice (practicum) as a requirement to complete her program. In teacher education programs such as the one we will present in this paper, the practicum is commonly the location where student-teachers can experience the teaching profession more thoroughly. In this study, the practicum is believed to constitute a community of practice, involving student-teachers and teacher educators from UFSC and English teachers and students from the public school. The practicum is thus a site in which all these actors negotiate meaning and identities regarding different aspects of their personal and professional lives, among them the teaching profession. Thus, the research questions that motivated a study such as this one are: a) How does a student-teacher of English go about (re)constructing her professional identity as an English teacher in her practicum? b) How does she negotiate student/teacher identities with her supervisor (teacher educator) during the practicum? Before coming to that, we will start by explaining the frameworks on identity underlying this study.

## 2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS TO IDENTITY AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

According to Gee (2000, p. 99), many researchers nowadays have found it useful to employ identity as an analytic tool to understand schools and society. He argues that what he means by identity is related to someone “being recognized as a ‘certain kind of person’ in a given context” and that this recognition depends on people’s performances in society. Similarly, Buzzelli and Johnston (2002, apud VARGHESE et al, 2005) stress the importance of the interaction between the identity we claim for ourselves – our claimed identity – and the identity imposed on us by others – the assigned identity. More often than not, this assigned identity is the one which we have not claimed for ourselves and may be an unfavorable representation to our understanding of who we are.

Discussing language teacher identity, Varghese et al (2005), summarize three recent understandings of identity they find appropriate to investigate language teacher identity. The most obvious aspect is the one mentioned above, that identity is crucially related to the social, cultural and political context, that is, the interlocutors with whom we engage in interactions and the institutional settings where we are (even momentarily) located. The second aspect is that identity is constructed, maintained, and negotiated through language and discourse – the way we tell stories of ourselves and the way people tell stories of us construct who we are. Finally, the last aspect reminds us that although these stories constitute ourselves, they can be, and many times they are, multiple, shifting and even contradictory as opposed to stable, harmonious and coherent (HALL, 1996). This instability of identities would be a feature of the postmodern world we are living in, where discourses (dominant or alternative) construct our social worlds and thus can constrain as well as allow some kind of agency from individuals.

In this study, identities are understood as “socially constructed, self-conscious, ongoing narratives that individuals perform, interpret and project in dress, bodily movements, actions and language” (BLOCK, 2007, p. 27). In other words, identities are the narratives that we construct about ourselves and about others, and as Sfard and Prusak (2005) argue, they are not represented in narratives, identities are these very narratives. What happens very often, according to Connelly and Clandinin (1999, p. 95) is that these narrative constructions may “solidify into a fixed entity” and individuals tend to believe that some aspect of their identity

narrative is unchangeable. However, theoreticians of postmodernity such as Hall (1996) argue that this solidification is only illusory, associated with individuals' desire to construct a comforting and coherent story of who they are, so they can tell others. In reality, our identities are contradictory, multiple, and ever changing.

If identities are narratives, how do we construct these narratives? Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) argue that we do that through our participation in communities of practice. This is also the way they define learning, arguing that there is an intrinsic relationship between learning and identity. Lave and Wenger (1991)<sup>1</sup> explain that when learners are newcomers to the practices of the community to which they wish to belong—in our study, the community of English language teachers—they hold a peripheral position in the community. However, as they are given access to the practices of the community by oldtimers, they may move towards more participation in these practices, full-participation and thus learning. Learners construct new identities as they learn the practices of the community, in that learning “implies becoming a full participant, a member, a kind of person” (LAVE; WENGER, 1991, p. 53), in other words, learning implies identity construction.

In his work from 1998, Wenger further developed the idea of learning as participation in communities of practice and thus as identity formation in the community. Wenger (1998, p. 153) argues that for learners to form identities within a community, they have to be able to play a part in the relations of engagement that constitute the community, contribute to the enterprise of the community, and make use of the repertoire of the specific practice. This way, learners build an identity of participation in the practices of the community that can lead them towards learning. However, Wenger (1998) explains that learners can also build an identity of non-participation that is as important for identity formation as an identity of participation, in the sense that people tend to define themselves not only through the practices they engage in, but also through the ones they do not. In this case, learners may move towards less participation in the community, maybe because they were not provided enough access to the practices of the community or because the asymmetry in power relations were too great to

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<sup>1</sup> Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 48-49) argue that their theory of learning was influenced by Vygotsky's social theory of learning, especially its contemporary developments in activity theory and critical psychology for their societal interpretations of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), concentrating on processes of social transformation.

enable action. When this happens, learners may present identities of marginality and exclusion instead of participation (WENGER, 1998). From these insights, identity is not an object on itself, but a process of becoming, a way of being in the world through participation and non-participation that can define the way we identify or avoid identification.

Thus, in this study we will bring one possibility of interpretation – our own – of the identity construction of a student-teacher of English during her practicum in a public school in Florianópolis. As we know, the practicum is a context of learning to teach for students pursuing a teaching degree in different areas who may or may not have had previous teaching experiences. Through learning in the context of the teaching practicum, the participants of such a community of practice (WENGER, 1998) – student-teachers, teacher educators, schoolteachers – can construct or reconstruct their identities as teachers. We discussed in this section how learning and identity construction can be intrinsically connected (LAVE; WENGER, 1991; WENGER, 1998). Other authors as Sfard and Prusak (2005) also discuss learning as identity construction for its capacity to change the story of a person, to close the gap between actual identity and projected identity through successful or unsuccessful learning stories. Therefore, getting to know the learning story of a student-teacher in her practicum can shed us light on her process of identity construction as an English teacher and make us reflect on other learning to teach experiences we have been through as teachers or teacher educators, and specially on the practicum as this important context of professional identity (re)construction.

### 3. THE STUDY

This study is part of a broader qualitative study that analyzes and interprets the processes of professional identity construction of five student-teachers during their practicum in a public school in Brazil. In this broader study, one of the authors of this article (Luis) played the role of a participant observer during the one-year teaching practice (Practicum I and II) of these student-teachers, observing their classes, interviewing them and their supervisors, participating in meetings, among other activities. For the specific study presented in this paper, we will look into two interviews (pre-teaching and post-teaching) of a student-teacher and one interview with her supervisor in an attempt to see how the experience of the practicum may

have influenced the professional identity construction of this student-teacher. Therefore, we will present next the research setting and the participants of our study.

### *3.1. RESEARCH SETTING: THE ENGLISH TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM AT UFSC.*

The English teacher education program at UFSC is part of the undergraduate program in English at UFSC, created in 1959. This undergraduate program is not entirely focused on educating English teachers, since it also offers students the possibility of getting a Bachelor degree (BA) to work as researchers or translators of English. The Teaching degree offered by the undergraduate program in English at UFSC interests students who want to teach in primary and secondary education, or in language schools. There are 8 phases/ terms in this program (equivalent to 8 semesters), and students take mandatory modules until they finish the fourth phase of the program, when they must choose between getting a BA or a Teaching degree. The modules in the first four phases are mostly introductions to literature, translation, and language studies or modules in which the focus is to provide students with competence in oral and written English. In the last four phases of the course, students who chose to follow the teaching career take the following disciplines concerned with teaching: Didactics; Educational Psychology (5<sup>th</sup> phase); School Organization; Teaching Methodology (6<sup>th</sup> phase); Supervised Teaching Practicum I (7<sup>th</sup> phase) and Supervised Teaching Practicum II (8<sup>th</sup> phase).

The Teaching Degree has a duration time of 3360 hours, from which 480 hours must be completed in complementary academic activities, 480 hours in Supervised Teaching practice (the practicum), and 480 hours in 'Practice as a curricular component (PCC)'<sup>2</sup>. The Supervised Teaching Practicum I and II are supposed to offer student-teachers the possibility to be inserted in their potential context of work and to enable them to develop their teaching practices. These courses are also a prerequisite for these students to graduate in English teaching from UFSC, functioning as a space to connect the world of the university and the world of the school. In order to carry out the practicum, each student must discuss with his/her supervisor in which school he/she wants to do it. Sometimes the professors already work with a specific school and

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<sup>2</sup> Following the resolutions of the National Counsel of Education 1 and 2 (CNE/ CP), the 'Practice as a curricular component' are activities aiming at approximating theory and practice and stimulating the intellectual and professional autonomy of the students. The CNE/CP 1/2 requires at least 400 hours to be reserved for activities of the 'practice as curricular component' (PCC).

then student-teachers take their practicum in the school advised by their supervisor. This is the case with the student-teachers from our study – they all took their practicum in the same public school run by the university – Colégio de Aplicação.

### 3.2. COLÉGIO DE APLICAÇÃO

The school 'Colégio de Aplicação', in which the practicum was carried out, is a public institution integrated to the Center of Educational Sciences (CED)<sup>3</sup> of UFSC, and it is located at the university campus. This school is part of the university and it has a good infrastructure. According to the Political Pedagogic Project (PPP)<sup>4</sup> of the School, there currently are 38 classes in the school from primary to secondary school. The school is also considered to have high quality professionals, with teachers holding masters' and/or PhD degrees, given that the salary for the staff (teachers, psychologists, principals) follows the base salary of federal public servants. The school is defined, in its political pedagogic project, as an experimental school aimed at the development of teaching experience and supervised practicum for undergraduate courses, according to the requirements of the Law 9394, from December 20, 1996 (Lei de Diretrizes e Bases) and specific resolutions postulated by the National Council of Education (CNE)<sup>5</sup>. Thus, this school has a dual function of offering primary/secondary education and initial/in-service teacher education.

### 3.3. THE ORGANIZATION OF THE TEACHING PRACTICUM

The two teacher educators from UFSC who taught the classes of this teaching practicum claimed that the main objective of their course was that student-teachers had an experience of immersion in the school, experiencing all of its aspects. With that objective in mind, they planned their four-hour weekly classes to happen in one of the school classrooms and not in the center of languages at the university, as it was usually the case with other professors. In the beginning of the first semester, the student-teachers formed teams to teach together and chose the specific groups/ grades they wanted to work with throughout the year. In the first semester, the student-teachers observed the classes of the English teacher

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<sup>3</sup> Centro de Ciências da Educação

<sup>4</sup> Projeto político-pedagógico

<sup>5</sup> Conselho Nacional de Educação

responsible for the group chosen and in the second semester, they taught that group of students. The activities carried out by the student-teachers during the first semester included participating in the practicum classes, observing English classes, team-teaching three classes to their group, elaborating their intention plan for the second semester, participating in extra-class activities in the school, among others. As part of the practicum classes, the teacher educators created what they called “Impertinent dialogues in Education”, a series of talks related to the teaching profession, delivered by invited speakers. The themes approached in these talks were The Nacional Plan of Education, Education of Youth and Adults, Language Policies, Learning Assessment, Teacher Identity, among others.

In the second semester, the student-teachers taught the classes planned in their ‘intentions plan’. In order to teach these classes, they met once a week for lesson planning, usually with their supervisor and sometimes with the presence of the English teacher of their class. Most of the contact student-teachers had with the English teacher of the school was through observing her classes, talking for some time before and after these classes, and at a few meetings. At the same time, they had a lot of contact with their supervisor (teacher educator) at weekly meetings for lesson planning and feedback from their supervisor about their classes. Thus, in this paper we will offer an analysis into the process of identity construction of one of these student-teachers, Deise, taken from two interviews carried out with her before and after her teaching experience as well as one interview with her supervisor, Vanda. Understanding this practicum as a community of practice (Wenger, 1998), we consider that teacher identities were being (re)constructed and negotiated among the participants of the community. In this paper, we will refer specifically to the negotiation of teacher identities between Deise and Vanda<sup>6</sup>. Before coming to that, we will contextualize the activities of the working group of which Deise was a member.

#### 3.4. DEISE’S GROUP: HER BFFS<sup>7</sup>.

Deise was a member of a group of three student-teachers together with Bia and Marisa, who were the same age as Deise and were her best friends at college. Hers was a very cohesive

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<sup>6</sup> In order to protect the identity of the participants, we have used pseudonyms.

<sup>7</sup> Among teenagers, BFF is a much-used acronym meaning ‘best friends forever’.

group both inside and outside the university context. In the practicum, together they prepared the project to be applied in the second semester, planned classes, participated in school events and taught the same group of students. Their project aimed at making students enjoy reading and writing in English by reading and adapting some short theatrical stories. As Bia and Marisa loved literature, they wanted to awake in the students the pleasure for reading literature. Even though Deise was not such a big fan of literature as her group mates, she agreed upon putting this project into practice with their group of students. Thus, Deise, Bia and Marisa decided to work with the short story 'Little Snow' by the Grimm brothers, with Disney's adaptations of this short story to cinema, through the films 'Snow White and the seven dwarfs' and 'Snow White and the huntsman', and also with the short story 'The fund they had' by Isaac Asimov. Most students had a very good rapport with the student-teachers and, in general, seemed to be enjoying their classes. In the next subsections, we will present the participants of this study, the student-teacher Deise and her supervisor Vanda.

### 3.5. THE STUDENT-TEACHER DEISE

Deise is a white, upper middle-class, 23 year-old girl from São Paulo. She moved to Florianópolis when she was 6 years-old, she has an older brother whom she argued not to get along very well because "he is a spoilt paulista" and "she is rice and beans"<sup>8</sup>. She has some tattoos over her body, and she explained that they are to honor her grandparents, whom she loves, and an owl to symbolize the profession she chose and loves, teaching. At the time of the interview, Deise had one year of teaching experience in a private school teaching three-year-old kids and giving private classes in her house. Her decision to pursue a teaching degree in English was influenced by a private English teacher that she had in the past – she loved her classes and thought she could do the same and make money with teaching private classes. However, most members of her family, with the exception of her mother and her father, were very much against her decision and questioned her choice of professional career. Even with all the controversy over this issue, she decided to go on with her dream and started her undergraduate course in English – which she loves. Next, we will learn something about Vanda, the supervisor of Deise's practicum.

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<sup>8</sup> Being rice and beans means to be simple, easygoing, unpretentious. Deise echoes her mother: "My mother says – I have a noble son and a poor daughter" (Eu tenho um filho nobre e uma filha pobre").

### 3.6. *THE SUPERVISOR VANDA*

Vanda is a white, upper middle-class, 65 year-old woman from a small city in Santa Catarina. She is divorced, has two children and one grandchild. Her mother was a teacher and she reported to have had a very rich cultural environment at home when she was growing up. She has a history of academic success in school and at the university and has always been associated with leftist political groups since she was an undergraduate student at a federal university in Santa Catarina. Vanda holds a master's in English and a PhD in Education from federal universities in Brazil and has always participated in teachers' unions. She has been working at UFSC for 40 years, first as an English teacher at Colégio de Aplicação (the school where this practicum is taking place) and later as a professor of the department of Education, working mainly with the teaching practicum of student-teachers. In the next section, we will present and analyze the data regarding Deise's identity construction as a teacher during the practicum.

## 4. DATA ANALYSIS

The questions asked to the student-teachers in the interviews dealt with topics such as: family stories, pedagogic stories, additional language learning stories and professionalization stories (TELLES, 2004). The participants were also asked to reflect about their whole experience in the practicum. While telling their stories, the student-teachers demonstrated how they saw themselves at one specific period of their lives and many times their more personal stories seemed to have had a strong influence on their teaching stories. Obviously, student-teachers told many stories, but the ones we decided to analyze in this paper are the ones that seemed to have influenced the identity construction of Deise as an English teacher. For that, we are going to weave some narrative vignettes to show the (possible) trajectory of the process of teacher identification of Deise and her identity struggle with Vanda.

### 4.1. *DEISE'S GRAMMAR CLASS, HER NARRATIVE OF DYSLEXIA AND IDEOLOGICAL STRUGGLES*

In the post-teaching interview with Deise, she was asked to analyze her teaching/learning experiences at the practicum. When asked to think about the difficult moments she went through, the conflicts she had to face, she quickly recalled a class in which

she prepared a PowerPoint presentation to teach students conjugation rules of the past simple in English. This class triggered an argument with her supervisor regarding how to teach grammar in an English class. Deise says:

**It was the class that I taught grammar** [...] I said like “man, how I am going to teach the past if I don’t teach grammar” [...] and then when the class was over, three students came to talk to me “Uau, I loved the class today, I understood everything you were saying, so on!” and then **Vanda came with an angry look, a long face, like that, and looked at me: “What class was this?” and I was like: “My God, what do you mean?” like, it hurt inside, you know?** And she said “no, because we don’t teach grammar like that anymore, [...] the grammar of usage, not grammar for grammar. [...] **I understand that grammar should be inside a context** and all, but if they understand better this way, why not, you know?”<sup>9</sup>

When Deise tells the story about this class, she emphasizes how her students seemed to have enjoyed it and learned. Nevertheless, she reports having to deal with an explicit disapproval of her class by her supervisor, Vanda. One of the reasons for this mismatch can be connected to the different views regarding language and language learning at play on the occasion. Deise seemed to share with some of her students an atomistic view on language as a code, a system to be grasped for use and better taught explicitly. On the other hand, Vanda appeared to understand language as communication and language learning as involving active interaction in real life situations, inductively taught. These different ideological positions generated conflictual moments in Deise’s teaching practice, influencing her identity construction as an English teacher. Regarding this episode, Deise continues to explain her preference for explicit grammar making use of identity talk (Sfard; Prusak, 2005). She says:

I learned grammar [...] with context, but like **word by word** “you do this, this and this because of that, that and that” and **for me it is easier,**

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<sup>9</sup> Foi a aula que eu dei de gramática. [...] E eu falei, tipo, “meu, como é que eu vou ensinar o passado se eu não der gramática” [...] E aí quando acabou a aula vieram três alunos falar comigo “nossa, adorei a aula de hoje, entendi tudo o que ce tava falando, tal!”. E a Vanda veio com uma cara brava, uma cara fechada, assim, e olhou pra mim: “que aula foi essa?”. E eu tipo: “meu deus, como assim? Tipo, doeu lá dentro sabe?” E ela “não, porque a gente não dá aula mais assim de gramática, [...] a gramática no uso, não a gramática pela gramática [...] Eu entendo que a gramática tem que ser dentro de um contexto e tal. Mas se eles entendem melhor daquele jeito, por que não, sabe?”

**because well, you know that I am dyslexic. So like if things are not on my face, I don't get them.**<sup>10</sup>

In this excerpt, Deise reasons about her choice of teaching grammar deductively in her classes at the practicum. For her, this choice had to do with her particular characteristic as dyslexic, something she could not change about herself. Deise seemed to be using identity talk (I am dyslexic) to endorse her ideological position as a teacher of traditional grammar, something she not only could not change about herself, but also maybe did not want to change. The story of Deise's dyslexia seemed to be a recurrent and important story for Deise. She had talked a lot about it during our first interview with her (pre-teaching phase), when she was recalling her childhood and school memories, as we show below.

**I found out, like, at college, that I am dyslexic. Then it is all explained why I wasn't a good student [...] But the dyslexic are very smart.** It is because we think about too many things at a time; we ended up not focusing a lot on language. [...] **But I like grammar a lot, then...the dyslexic are very good at logic, right? [...] the mathematics of the language** I like, like, what is the rule, the rules, something like that. So I do very well in grammar. Even when we did grammar tests here in college, I helped the girls and when it is a test, like, of literature I get "My God, what are they saying?" you know.<sup>11</sup>

In this interview, Deise explains her apparent school failure as having to do with her diagnosis as a dyslexic person, which she only found out at the university. When she discovered her dyslexia in college, a completely new world opened up to her and instead of influencing Deise negatively, the identity of a 'dyslexic person' seemed to have added positively to her personal identity, as we can see in her comments "but the dyslexic are very smart" or "the dyslexic are very good at logic". As a student of English at UFSC, Deise soon associated her disorder with her good performance in traditional grammar activities "the dyslexic are very

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<sup>10</sup> E eu, sei lá, eu aprendi gramática [...] com contexto, mas tipo ao pé da letra, "cê faz isso, isso e isso por causa disso, disso e disso". E pra mim é mais fácil, porque tipo bom, cê sabe que eu sou disléxica. Então tipo se as coisas não tiverem, tipo, na minha cara, eu não entendo.

<sup>11</sup> eu descobri, tipo, na faculdade, que eu sou disléxica. Ai tudo está explicado porque eu não era uma boa aluna. [...] Mas os disléxicos são muito espertos. É porque a gente pensa em muita coisa ao mesmo tempo, a gente acaba não focando muito na linguagem. [...] Mas eu gosto muito de gramática, então... os disléxicos são muito bons em lógica, né. Então a parte Matemática da língua eu gosto. Tipo, o que é a regra, as regras, assim. Então eu mando muito bem com gramática. Até quando a gente fazia prova de gramática aqui na faculdade, eu ajudava as meninas e quando é prova, tipo, de Literatura eu fico: "meu deus, que que eles tão falando", sabe?

good at logic, right? [...] so I do very well in grammar” and her poor performance in text interpretation “when it is a test, like, of literature I get: My God, what are they saying?” Once again, we can visualize the way Deise understands grammar as a system reflecting on the words she associated with it, “the mathematics of language, the rules, logic”. Thus, Deise constructed a narrative of herself as a dyslexic but successful grammar student and it became clear that this narrativization influenced her story of teaching.

The narrativization of Deise as dyslexic seemed to have largely solidified into a fixed and unchanging entity. As already mentioned in Section 2, Connelly and Clandinin (1999) argue that narrative constructions have this tendency to solidify and it may appear that identities are indeed fixed. However, these authors also argue that, as life goes by our stories change and new experiences can add to the previous ones. Sfard and Prusak (2005, p. 11) also discuss this reifying<sup>12</sup> quality of identification, that is, the use of “I am-sentences” like Deise’s “I am dyslexic”, arguing that it does the job of ‘freezing the picture’, of turning “properties of actions into properties of actors”. Sfard and Prusak (2005, p. 11) argue that our relation with the world and with other people are obviously fluid, but that we use identity talk (I am this way, she is like this, etc), in an attempt to “cope with new situations in terms of our past experiences, also giving us tools to plan for the future”. This is exactly what Deise does in relation to her dyslexia as connected to learning and teaching grammar. However, we can argue that Deise’s new story of teaching grammar in the practicum, as it showed to be a significant story, can now add to her repertoire of stories about her dyslexia and about grammar teaching, maybe changing parts of the story or the story altogether. These new experiences in the practicum have the potential to change her narrativization and so her identification.

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<sup>12</sup> Reifying means to regard or treat (an abstraction) as if it had concrete or material existence. <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/reification>

#### 4.2. MICRO AND MACRO ASPECTS OF TEACHING: DEISE'S AND VANDA'S IMAGINED IDENTITIES<sup>13</sup>.

As explained in Section 3, Practicum I consisted mainly of student-teachers observing English classes at the school and participating in the practicum classes. In at least seven of these practicum classes, the teacher educators invited special guests to give talks on topics in Education that they found vital for student-teachers' future work, what they called "Impertinent dialogues in Education". These encounters were supposed to make students aware of educational policies, language policies, different teaching contexts (i.e. Adult education), and language assessment, among others topics. Deise questions this format of work chosen by the teacher educators in her pre-teaching interview (beginning of Practicum II) for, according to her, not focusing on the small steps of her teaching experience. She argues:

I loved the lectures, but from this aspect, I think **we missed some baby steps**, you know, because the practicum is something completely different from the other disciplines, right? It is, like, **you there, you taking care of yourself**, you know? Then you need a little support, like "look, **when you take care of yourself, you brush your teeth, wash your hands**".<sup>14</sup>

In this excerpt, when Deise says "we missed some baby steps", we can notice her strong identification as a student who needs to learn gradually and systematically the practices of the teaching profession. She contrasts the baby steps she was interested in with the lectures provided, mostly focused on more macro discussions in Education, such as The National Plan of Education, which had just been approved by the Brazilian congress. During this period, Deise's group was also upset because they disagreed with the grade they got for Practicum I and believed they deserved the highest grade for the work they had done during the first semester. We can also perceive Deise's identification as a student in the next excerpt, in which she

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<sup>13</sup> Based on Wenger's (1998) arguments about the importance of imagination to identity formation, we have created the term "imagined identities" to show how Deise and Vanda pictured the position of themselves and each other as participants of that community of practice. For Wenger (1998), imagination can "make a big difference for our experience of identity and the potential for learning inherent in our activities" (p. 176).

<sup>14</sup> Amei as palestras, mas por esse lado eu acho que faltou um *baby steps* pra gente, sabe, porque estágio é uma coisa completamente diferente das outras matérias, né. É, tipo, você lá, você cuidando de você, sabe. Então cê precisa de um apoiozinho, tipo "olha, quando você vai cuidar de você, escova o dente, lava a mão"

mentions the evaluation process of her teaching practice as one to be carried out by her supervisor.

And there is...**your advisor, right, looking at you**. Then, not that Vanda is, like, mean, but you know that there is someone there evaluating you, it is a bit [...] **she gave us a lot of freedom. But at the same time we know she is evaluating us**, you know?<sup>15</sup>

In the two excerpts above, we can see how the supervisor is put on the position of knowledge transmitter with the use of the expression “baby steps” as well as the one responsible for student-teachers’ assessment “we know she is evaluating us”, while Deise does not consider her role in her own learning assessment. For Deise, there are downsides to having “a lot of freedom” to work at the practicum and she seemed to be asking for more control, maybe even more ready-made formulas of teaching. Thus, we can see how the practicum is a complex environment in which many times student-teachers position themselves in fixed identities as students, passive receivers of knowledge. This finding corroborates a study by Bühner (2012), which also demonstrated student-teachers’ difficulties in destabilizing traditional meanings of learning and teaching during their practicum. Bühner (2012) argues that in order for us to subvert these traditional positions at the practicum, we should understand the condition of student-teachers during the practicum as a hybrid one (as learners and teachers) and encourage them to be constructors of their own knowledge. We can speculate that the “freedom” provided by the teacher educators in our study was an attempt to accomplish just such a thing.

We saw that, at least until the beginning of Practicum II, Deise identified strongly with her role as student who was seeking to learn micro aspects of teaching. It is interesting for us to contrast Deise’s concerns over her learning at the practicum with that of her supervisor’s. In an interview with Vanda at the end of Practicum II, she was asked what she had in mind when she planned Practicum I and II and how she thought her planning developed, especially regarding her advisees’ work. She explains:

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<sup>15</sup> E ainda tem... sua orientadora, né, te olhando. Então, não que a Vanda seja, tipo, malvada, mas cê sabe que tem alguém te avaliando, já é meio [...] Ela dava muita liberdade pra gente. Mas ao mesmo tempo a gente sabe que ela tá avaliando a gente, sabe?

[on the principles that move her in the practicum] **To make education something broader, not only to know how to teach English, you know? To live the school, the education [...] I thought it was very little, like, teacher of, right? It is teacher, the 'of' is a circumstance, a choice, you know? [...] You have to have an immersion in the school. First, in the themes, in the country, and it narrows down until it gets to the school and knowing that the school is a microcosm of everything you saw in the macro. [...] I look today at Deise, Bia. Two little girls. But they are already women [...] fighting with their family to have a political position, right?**<sup>16</sup>

In the excerpt above, Vanda discusses her main objectives to plan the practicum of the student-teachers. She reports that her main goal was to educate teachers politically so they could understand the school as inserted in a macro context of political struggles and not only to teach them how “to teach English”. The objective Vanda wanted to pursue is present in the document ‘Parecer CNE/CP 9/2001’, which proposes guidelines for initial and continuing teacher education in Brazil. These guidelines propose that an important type of knowledge to be encouraged in teacher education is the knowledge about the cultural, social, political and economic dimension of education, which deals with teachers’ social role and questions of power associated to these issues. It seems like Vanda envisions an identity for the student-teachers who go through the practicum in her context – the identity of a politically engaged teacher, who is not alienated to what happens outside the walls of the school. In that respect, Wenger (1998) discusses the power of imagination to identity formation. He argues that there are other modes of belonging in identity formation than just engagement in practice – our imagination and alignment. Wenger (1998, p. 173) explains that imagination has to do with “creating images of the world and seeing connections through time and space by extrapolating from our own experience”. In the case of Vanda, we perceive how imagination was important in the way she pictured the student-teacher she wanted to educate, in the way she constructed the identity for them as autonomous, politically engaged teachers. However, this may not be the way some student-teachers, such as Deise, envisioned their learning at the practicum and themselves as teachers.

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<sup>16</sup> Fazer da formação uma coisa ampla, não só saber dar aula de inglês, sabe? Viver a escola, a educação. [...] Achava muito pouco, assim, professor de. Né? É professor, o “de” é uma circunstância, uma escolha, assim. [...] Cê tem que ter uma imersão na escola. Primeiro nos temas, no país, e aí vai afunilando até chegar na escola e saber que a escola é um microcosmo, de tudo aquilo que se viu no macro. [...] Eu olho hoje a Deise, a Bia. Duas guriinhas. Mas já são umas mulheres [...] brigaram até com a família pra ter posição política, né.

It is important to mention that these data were generated in a moment in which Brazil was starting to manifest a decline in its economy after years of growth. Associated with this economic scenario you can add a nervous political landscape in a year of presidential election. Vanda seems proud of her student-teachers for, as she argues, their capacity to take a political position, at least in discussions with their families. Nevertheless, Vanda admits having missed micro aspects of teaching in her supervision at the practicum. She gives the example of an exam that the student-teachers had prepared for their students, which, according to her, was outdated, focusing only on translation and not giving opportunities for students to reflect and position themselves. She explains it below:

I said “my God, what did I do with these girls, right? [...] when I saw that exam, [...] I felt, like, very guilty. I wonder if we missed...**we were going crazy, right, on the big things that we like, right? On the macro things and... forgot the micro.**<sup>17</sup>

Vanda agrees with Deise that she should have focused more on micro aspects of teaching, such as helping student-teachers prepare assessment activities for their students. It is clear that Vanda holds ideological positions that influenced her to focus on student-teacher education as reflective individuals who are able to see the broader picture and context of teaching this language in Brazil. However, Deise was more interested in a sort of English teacher training, in which she could learn to prepare lesson plans, activities, and exams. Thus, we can see a conflict of interests between Deise and Vanda regarding the practices of the community they participated in and the imagined identities they projected for that enterprise. Deise expected Vanda to perform the identity of a caretaker who would provide micro-methodological instructions for her, viewed as a “toddler” student of teaching. On the other hand, Vanda viewed herself as a mentor who mediated autonomous and politically engaged teachers. Thus, Deise’s and Vanda’s identities as participants of the community were affected by their imagination, by the picture they built of their position in the community (WENGER, 1998). This conflict was crucial to the identity reconstruction of both Vanda and Deise as teachers.

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<sup>17</sup> Eu disse “meu deus, o que é que eu fiz com essas gurias”, né? [...] quando eu vi aquela prova, [...] eu me senti, assim, muito culpada. Será que faltou...a gente ficou louqueando, né, nas coisas grande que a gente gosta, né. Nas coisas mais macro e....esqueceu [do] micro.

#### 4.3. DEISE AND VANDA'S SHARED VIEWS: THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHER RESPONSIBILITY AND COMMITTED ACTION.

Thus, conflict seems to be at the heart of identity construction and it is supposed to be like that, as individuals are complex subjects, socioculturally and politically constructed. Even with these conflicts and perhaps because of them, the participants of the community, represented here by Deise and Vanda, were able to perceive learning and growth. Vanda, in the excerpt below, expresses her opinions regarding student-teachers' learning in the practicum. Although Vanda had some criticisms regarding the theme chosen<sup>18</sup> by student-teachers and some activities/ classes they prepared, she considers that they had grown a lot throughout their one-year teaching practicum. She explains what this learning meant for her in the following excerpt.

I think they have grown a lot. A lot. [...] at the same time serene, accepting...they realize they have flaws and will learn a lot. **But they have responsibility, they already have, they are already contaminated, already know what it is to be a teacher, the pain and joy of this profession they already know;** and they get sad and happy regarding what they could do, how students responded and so on. **Then they are already teachers. I think that in this sense, the objective was completely achieved and their grade is 10.** [...] they will know what to do. They will make mistakes as we do all the time. But they will...**they won't be teachers like...these ones who only go [to school] to meet the schedule, always looking for a doctor's note not to go, you know? No.**<sup>19</sup>

Talking about student-teachers' learning in the practicum, Vanda emphasizes how she believes her main objective was to make student-teachers have responsibility towards their students and care for them. Thus, we can now perceive Vanda's projected identity for them also as committed and responsible teachers and how these imagined identities influence

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<sup>18</sup> As seen in section 3, Deise's group decided to work with adaptation of short stories, especially Snow White's story.

<sup>19</sup> Eu acho que elas cresceram muito. Muito [...] ao mesmo tempo serenas, aceitam... percebem que tem falhas e ainda vão aprender muito. Mas tem responsabilidade, elas já tem.. elas já tão contaminadas, já sabem o que é ser professor, a dor e a alegria dessa profissão elas já conhecem. E ficam tristes e ficam alegres em função daquilo que conseguiram fazer, que os alunos responderam e tal. Então elas já são professoras. Eu acho que nesse sentido o objetivo foi completamente atingido. E a nota delas é 10. [...] Elas saberão o que fazer. Vão bater cabeça como nós todos batemos o tempo todo. Mas elas vão... elas não vão ser professoras....sabe....dessas assim que só vão lá cumprir tabela, procurar sempre ter um atestado médico pra não ir. Sabe? Não.

Vanda's interaction with student-teachers and the activities she proposes for them. This fact makes us wonder whether these interactions, activities and identity negotiations would have any impact on the way student-teachers constructed their own identities as teachers. As far as stories make up identities, we can see in the next excerpts from Deise's post-teaching interview that apparently the practicum – and the negotiation of identities that happens in this context – did have an impact on the way Deise saw herself after the experience.

I think that, like, **in the practicum you don't learn to teach classes, you learn to reflect about your class. And I think before I simply taught, closed the book and walked away. And now I think like "hum, but why did I do that while I was teaching? You know? You start...I think I learned to reflect on what I do and what I will do, why I did, why I am going to do stuff. It is a bit crazy [...] you start reflecting about everything in your life [laughs]. My father says "ugh, you think about everything, all the circumstances now, like, I don't know [...] and my father goes: "Stop thinking". You take that to life, right? You get...I think you get much more critical of the things that happen around you.**<sup>20</sup>

The excerpt shows that Deise, in the practicum, believes to have learned to reflect about her class, even though she thinks she did not learn how to teach. Thus, Deise argues to have become a much more critical and reflective teacher after the practicum, no longer a teacher who just follows the book sacredly and goes home, but someone who is always questioning her decisions inside the classroom. Deise even suggests that her new identity has surpassed the walls of the classroom and she became overall a critical individual, who questions everything around her. At this moment, Deise reconstructs her identity as a teacher, adding new possibilities and competences to her story of teaching. According to Sfard and Prusak (2005) and Wenger (1998) this is exactly what learning can do to somebody's identity – it can change that identity – in this case, it was a positive change that enhanced Deise's experience with the world inside and outside the classroom.

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<sup>20</sup> Eu acho que, tipo, no estágio cê não aprende a dar aula, cê aprende a refletir sobre a sua aula. E eu acho que antes eu simplesmente dava aula, fechava o livro e ia embora. E agora eu penso tipo "ã, mas por quê que eu fiz isso quando eu tava dando aula?", sabe? Cê começa... eu acho que eu aprendi a refletir o que eu faço e o que eu vou fazer, por que eu fiz, por quê que eu vou fazer as coisas. É meio maluco [...] Cê começa a refletir de tudo na sua vida (*risos*). Meu pai fala "nossa, cê pensa tudo, em todas as circunstâncias agora, tipo, sei lá... [...] E meu pai tipo "para de pensar". Cê leva isso pra vida né, cê fica... acho que cê fica muito mais crítica das coisas que acontecem em volta de você.

In the following excerpt from the post-teaching Deise even seems to resonate her supervisor's words regarding the English teacher's job as not only teaching English, but having an ampler educational objective:

Now you think more at...everything you do to the student has an effect. The way you teach has an effect for the student [...] I think you have to prepare the student **not only to learn English, but to learn like...to solve his conflicts...like, solve the problems in his life and learn to live in society too, you know.**<sup>21</sup>

Deise's words, thus, are evidences of her belonging to Vanda's community of practice, resembling very much what Vanda suggested to be the objective of the practicum: "To make education something broader, not only to know how to teach English ...". Therefore, we can see how Deise has incorporated the repertoire of the community of practice of which she was, at first, a peripheral member, and now seems to have moved towards more engagement with the practices of the community, at least as far as we can tell from her discourse. Wenger (1998) argues that sharing a collective repertoire is one of the dimensions of practice that make up a community of practitioners, in this case, the community of teachers. For Wenger (1998, p. 173) a shared repertoire involves similar stories, artifacts, styles, historical events, actions, tools, concepts, and discourses. As we have seen, learning is defined by Wenger (1998) as participation in communities of practice necessarily involving the construction of identities for the participants of the community.

## 5. FINAL REMARKS

In this paper, we offered some possibilities of interpretations to the trajectory of a student-teacher in her learning-to-teach experiences at the practicum. Firstly, we showed moments of conflicts between the student-teacher Deise and her supervisor Vanda regarding ways of teaching grammar in the English classes at Colégio de Aplicação. Secondly, we showed Deise's and Vanda's different expectations about the learning-to-teach experiences at the

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<sup>21</sup> Agora cê pensa mais no... tudo o que você faz pro aluno tem um efeito. O jeito que você dá aula tem um efeito pro aluno. [...] Eu acho que cê tem que preparar o aluno não só pra aprender inglês, mas pra aprender a tipo...cê resolver os conflitos dele... tipo, resolver problemas na vida dele e aprender a viver em sociedade, também, sabe.

practicum, which also generated struggles. Finally, we demonstrated their shared views regarding the practicum experiences.

Throughout our study, we have attempted to demonstrate how student and teacher identities were simultaneously present in Deise's construction of her professional identity as an English teacher in the practicum. First, her apparently solidified learner identity as a dyslexic person seemed to have influenced her story of teaching at the practicum, as a teacher of traditional grammar. Then, the different imagined identities of Deise and Vanda about themselves and each other in the community generated struggles regarding the practices and learning objectives of the practicum. Lastly, the experiences in this practicum seem to have influenced both Deise's and Vanda's teacher identities in important ways. For Vanda, it meant reaffirming the educational values she holds, but also reassessing her teaching objectives not to exclude micro aspects of teaching. For Deise, the experiences in this practicum enabled her to (re)construct an identity as a reflective teacher, who is critical towards her life and her classes.

By analyzing these narratives, we can perceive how identity construction and negotiation is, in fact, a conflictive, fluid and ever changing process, influenced by different interlocutors and discourses or by what Wenger (1998) calls communities of practice. Conflict is inherent to identity construction (BLOCK, 2007) and may be used as learning opportunities for the participants of the communities of practice. Individuals may feel that one aspect of their identity is unchangeable, such as Deise's narrative of dyslexia, but as identities are stories we compose about ourselves (SFARD; PRUSAK, 2005), they are subject to shifts, deconstructions and reconstructions. The practicum can be considered, thus, a space in which student-teachers can construct their original stories of teaching, but also a site in which other participants of this community of practice, such as school teachers and teacher educators, can reconstruct teaching stories of their own.

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