


## An Attempt to Understand the Negotiation of Teachers' Identities in the Context of School Reform

Elementos para la discusión sobre los procesos  
de construcción de la identidad docente  
en contextos de cambio y reforma educativa

Paul Neira Del Ben

Consejo Nacional de Educación, Lima, Perú

[paulneira@gmail.com](mailto:paulneira@gmail.com)

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6819-4436>

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### **Abstract**

Political discourses that state that the quality of an educational system relies on the quality of its teachers are frequent nowadays. This approach remarks the importance of teacher's identity. However, how many times is this issue actually taken into consideration by the educational reform processes? This question turns relevant when we realize that many of the reforms seek to penetrate the classroom, and the teachers' own practices. The following essay is an exploration of the elements that interact to shape the teacher's identity in the context of constant change and school reform. How do educational policies and their discourses shape these new teachers' identities? How do these identities interact with reforms? Do these reforms match the identities of teachers or not? The importance of addressing these issues is greater when we consider that they may have an important impact—whether positive or negative—on the educational change processes.

Key words: teacher identity, educational reform, institutionalism, teacher policy

### **Resumen**

En un tiempo en el que es común escuchar discursos políticos que sostienen que la calidad de un sistema educativo se basa en la calidad de sus maestros, cobra vital importancia el tema de la identidad docente. Sin embargo, ¿cuántos de los procesos de cambio educativo toman en cuenta realmente este factor? La pregunta cobra relevancia cuando se tiene en cuenta que muchas de las ansiadas reformas buscan penetrar cada vez más el salón de clases y la práctica del propio maestro. El presente estudio es una exploración de los elementos que interactúan para dar forma a una identidad docente en constante cambio y situación de reforma: ¿cómo las políticas y sus discursos dan forma a estas nuevas identidades docentes?; ¿cómo dialogan estas con las reformas?; ¿existe sincronía o asincronía entre la reforma y la identidad del maestro? La importancia de abordar estas cuestiones queda en evidencia cuando consideramos que pueden tener un impacto importante —favorable o desfavorable— sobre los propios procesos de cambio educativo.

Palabras clave: identidad docente, reforma educativa, institucionalismo, política docente

Schools serve as recipient of the often complex and dynamic implementation of the requirements produced through processes of educational reform. It is at this level where continuous negotiation defines the tone of reform within these school settings. Within these micro-processes the school context can be defined as a particular and unique locus that is led by teachers. This setting provides teachers with a set of discourses, norms, and rules that create a physical as well as symbolic space for pedagogical interaction. Teachers base their approaches and identity on their ongoing interaction with students, and this is where they develop a consciousness of themselves as teachers.

In today's educational and political context standards, accountability, co-participation, decentralization, parents' engagement, and a myriad of other mechanisms that seek to improve the outcomes or learning results at the school level are a common theme. These aspects are part of a large wave of educational reform (Menter, 2008) that is taking place across the world and creating new teaching and learning norms (Ozga, 2005). One of the consequences of this recent shift has been the reconstitution or redefinition of classroom instruction and learning styles, which were considered entirely the teachers' domain just a few years ago. This environment of reform, then, proposes a new context to teacher's awareness and self-identification.

Recent research has begun to identify how policy (Achinstein, Ogawa, & Speigman, 2004), at various levels, acts as a mediator to (re)construct teachers' identity and sense of agency. The central question that drives this paper, then, is what happens to teachers' identities after a process of educational reform, particularly when it targets teaching practices.

The following questions will serve as a blueprint or guide for this paper:

- How does the larger educational reform context influence or mediate core aspects of teacher identity?
- What happens when policy changes long-held ideas about teaching? Especially in regards to educators who have been in the profession for many years and have firmly rooted beliefs.

- What is the role of the school as a space where teachers develop their own identity, especially when the school undergoes comprehensive reform?
- How are teachers' identities shaped, formed, or constructed in the midst of educational reform at the local level?

This paper will attempt to examine and reflect aspects of the complex teaching dynamics using analytical tools based on the intersection of institutional and sociocultural theory. While the latter will unveil various processes in the identity formation of teachers, the former will expose the importance of school settings and the school environment as defined through macro-processes of institutionalization. In this way, this intersection of theory seeks to connect the identity of teachers and the spaces that influence them. This space is not only physical, but also cultural, historical, and institutional. Additionally, this interaction becomes more complex when considered through the lens of large comprehensive reform. This unique situation, then, is formed by the ongoing interaction between the process of educational reform, the context of the school institution, and changes that occur within individual teachers.

### **Reform Context and Implications**

Little is understood about the ways in which teacher identity interacts with reform mandates to affect teachers' experiences... particularly when policies are accompanied with new tools (e.g. curricula or accountability practices) and expectations for teachers.

(Lasky, 2005, p. 899).

Beginning in the 1990's the educational jargon started to incorporate words such as "standards," "accountability," "stakeholders," "high stakes," "co-participation," and "decentralization," among others. Similarly, the phenomenon of "traveling reforms" has become a common phrase that represents omnipresent nature of globalization, particularly in the field of educational reform.

Within this process of reform, it is especially important to consider concerns about the inevitable transformation of teachers and their work. The assumption behind this concern is rooted in the idea that because teachers are the most important predictors of learning outcomes, pedagogical practices must be changed in order to have better

educational results. In regards to this idea, Jenny Ozga (2005) compares the cases of the United Kingdom and Scotland to describe how one product of global pressures for education modernization has been intense policy talks (Cuban & Tyack, 1995; Tyack, 1991), and policies leading to the transformation of the teaching profession.

Today, the understanding of schools as “tight coupled” organizations has gained traction as opposed to the idea of schools as “loosely coupled” (Weick, 1976) organizations. The majority of the efforts related to this initiative are based on the premise that teacher’s work needs to be more guided or controlled in order to achieve better outcomes. The basis of this idea rests on the presumption that a tighter control over teaching will lead to better results. The major characteristic of this movement is controlling two different, but closely related, school elements. The first is controlling the processes and conditions of teaching, particularly issues related to curriculum and textbooks. The second is controlling the different types of pedagogical and instructional practices of teachers at the classroom level. Together, this leads to the close control of teachers, especially in regards to technical knowledge (Nias, 1996). As a part of this increasing managerialism there is a subtle and unspoken attempt to standardize teacher activity.

Whenever educational reform takes place, multiple discourses develop. Normally these are the formal, sanctioned, and validated texts that are intended to normalize the different behaviors, beliefs, and even the interactions among the different actors in the school organization. An example of this practice is the standards movement that entails a process of normalization among multiple school realities, which largely involves proposing a single and basic set of knowledge, ability, and skills for teachers to use. Along with this came the idea of an assessment that measures to what extent the students learn this material. This group of texts, norms, or discourses presented by the reform, either intentionally or unintentionally, looks to drive the personal ideologies, behaviors, beliefs, and practices of those involved in the process of change.

There is a growing awareness that simple reforms will not effectively change the educational realm, and rather it is assumed that the system needs comprehensive school reforms. These comprehensive reforms are complex systems of changes that aim to address one problem from multiple approaches. This can be seen in the

problem of education inequity, a paradigm of which is the bipartisan educational initiative No Child Left Behind. However, applying the multitude of different actions encompassed in these kinds of reforms requires a large time scale, and the larger the time scale, the greater the chance that different actors involved in the process will experience a set of transformations. This underlines the importance of having strong discourses to sustain the change effort.

Another characteristic of the wave of reforms is the expectation of the teachers' roles in this scenario. The belief that teachers have to "lead the reform process" (World Bank, 1995, p. 17) continues to grow. This idea is based on the assumption that teachers are the single most important factor that explains learning outcomes. Because of this, and based on the idea that "quality of learning mostly depends on teachers," most of these reform initiatives are revolving around this particular group of educational actors. Specifically, the efforts are centered on changing the pedagogical practices of teachers at the classroom level.

At this point, the question that remains is if the multiple sets of discourses, texts, or norms are consistent with the teachers' discourses, beliefs, and understanding. Research into this question has established that there is a wide difference between teachers' own images of being a teacher and the images presented or upheld by new initiatives. Furthermore, this research has established that there is a basic disjuncture between the discourses, cultural myths, and ideals presented by the reforms and the reality of classroom teachers' identities. This disjuncture tends to explain the mismatch between "teachers perceptions of the teaching act and their role as teachers, and the demands of the reform movement" (George, Mohammed, & Quamina-Aiyejina, 2003, p. 191). Implicit cultural myths or metaphors that are propagated by the reform clash with the actual teachers' identities that are enacted on a day-to-day basis. Therefore, there is a genuine cause for concern about the possible stresses that may result from this kind of reform. Consequently, as George et al. (2003) implies, the success of any reform will depend almost entirely on the degree of match between these two beliefs, perceptions, and discourses.

Coming from a more pessimistic approach, Day, Elliot, and Kingston (2005) assert that in the reform agendas pushed by different governments “there is no evidence that these core [teacher] identities are acknowledged or valued” (p. 575). Moreover,

Day et al. affirm that the problems lie in the management and implementation of reforms. The authors mention that reforms applied at a national level in England and Australia have produced crises of identity among teachers:

There is mounting evidence in England that rapid changes in the external and internal conditions of schools and the changing nature of teaching, similar to those articulated for the Australian context, have produced conditions of extreme uncertainty and identity crises within what historically has been for many teachers a stable profession. (George et al. 2005, p. 565).

According to this understanding, policy changes have created a state of confusion for teachers in regards to their professional identity. The gap that teachers experience between their own discourses and the outside reform discourses has challenged many deep and long held beliefs about personal and professional practices. The new identities proposed by the reformers have created an element of discomfort, insecurity, and vulnerability (Lasky, 2005) that directly affects the core of teachers' work (Darby, 2008; Diniz-Pereira, 2002).

In the context of this open disjuncture between the expectations of the new reform mandates and teacher identities, Lasky (2005) describes how teacher agency is constrained. Lasky provides a provocative argument about the resources presented by the reform efforts, arguing that “along with being the resources necessary to sustain teaching and learning activities, the stuff of reform also serves as a mediating system that affects teacher identity, while also creating the conditions for the ways teachers can teach in schools.” (Lasky, 2005, p. 900).

What is most notable is how Lasky understands the resources available to teachers as tools that mediate teachers' experiences and create conditions that promote a particular discourse about teaching. In a sense, this process involves a reduction in teachers' agency, and this is a very subtle form of standardization of the teachers themselves.

As Datnow (2005) suggests, “very unstructured reforms left little opportunity for teachers to grapple with meanings.” In other words, because reformers are looking to change the practice, the space left to reflect is reduced to a minimum, which directly affects teachers’ capacity to develop a strong sense of identity.

This situation is closely connected to Mary Henkel’s (2002) idea that the multiple “dislocations in the structures and processes of societies in the period of late modernity have undermined the conditions for individuals to acquire and sustain strong identities” (p. 13). This condition once again brings up ideas of new and global models of reform that have a particular vision of the modern teacher that is based on the reform contexts that were created through complex balances of power between stakeholders, control, accountability, and the specific history, culture, and traditions of educational institutions (Menter, 2008).

At this point, it should be clarified that the process of comprehensive school reform needs more local influence in order to become “real,” and, naturally, that should come from the schools themselves, as they are the spaces where reforms start to take a more tangible form. It is in these close spaces where the discourses of comprehensive reform become part of legitimized school norms, which have a powerful effect over teachers’ lives and work.

### **Micro–Institutional Processes: Bring the Reform into the School Context**

Recently, schools have become the main stage for reforms as the system has started to shift toward managerialism. This process is part of a larger macro level that is shifting away from an ideal of public schools that support democratic equity and towards social efficiency, goals, and managerialism (Cuban, 2004).

At the same time, schools often have to deal with multiple outside pressures to improve their institutional performance. As Michael Fullan describes:

The biggest problem facing schools is fragmentation and overload. It is worse for schools than for business firms. Both are facing turbulent, uncertain environments, but only schools are suffering the

additional burden of having a torrent of unwanted, uncoordinated policies and innovations raining down on them from external hierarchical bureaucracies. (Fullan, 1999).

Due to this situation, schools have to decide whether or not they should follow external requirements. Although schools have some choice, the reality is that schools are pressured into implementing requirements so that they can continue to be considered valid and legitimate schools. Schools have to juggle multiple outside demands, a process which Honig and Hatch (2004) describe as entailing “strategies of buffering and bridging of external demands.” Based on the assumption that schools are not passive recipients of external demands, the authors propose a continuum that goes from being open to changes and implementing them in the school (bridge external demands) to rejecting changes (buffer external demands). In this case, buffering means “not the blind dismissal of external demands but strategically deciding to engage external demands in limited ways” (p. 23). What is interesting here is that schools have to assume outside external demands.

In order to be considered institutions, schools need to create their own history, tradition, and set of rules that define them as an institution (Douglas, 1986). Within this framework it is important to understand that when schools enter a process of buffering and bridging they begin a process of dialogue that will require their own texts, discourses, and cultural traditions to change—in ways both overt and covert. The more open overt change will imply a symbolic exercise in which the institution assumes the words, terms, texts, and discourses from the new demands in order to fulfill the legitimacy requirement and other bureaucratic demands. On the other, more covert, side is the process of informal dialogue relating to the level of the beliefs, perceptions, and ideologies. It is at this level where the teachers themselves begin to get involved, especially when the external demand entails changing pedagogical practices in the classroom. Interestingly, this continuum of buffering and bridging functions as a mechanism for teachers to deal with those demands. These demands are no longer just from the outside of the school, but also from the inside, because at this point the schools start to create their own local version of the new outside texts.

There are two types of organizational structure: formal and informal. The latter arises from day-to-day interactions such as the (re)reading or comprehension of the formal set of rules

that govern the organization and the ongoing interaction that happens within individuals. These conditions normally interact, and sometimes clash, with the outside pressures that come from the formal authority or power structure. From this situation arise a multitude of situations that significantly affect teachers' identities.

### **The Interaction and the Construction of Teachers' Identities**

There is a general agreement among researchers that the 'self' is a crucial element in the way teachers construe and construct the nature of their work. (Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1994).

Teaching is the most basic and important activity through which teachers develop their professional identities. Through teaching, teachers develop their own sense of self-as-teacher. This is not to say that identity is an essential collection of characteristics or a fixed personal construct. Teacher identity is not a stable entity, fix or unitary (Coldron & Smith, 1999); rather, teachers' identity is a reflection of values and experiences that are in a constant flux of change marked by the interaction with a particular set of conditions. In this way, teachers' identity is a reflection of the landscapes of which the teacher is a part. This idea suggests that identity is specific to this moment.

Teachers' identity is an evolving discourse that is open to continuous redefinition rather than a set of essential characteristics that are common to all teachers (Sugrue, 1997). Due to this interactional element, teachers' identity arises from the ongoing interaction between the individual and his or her own particular socio-historical-cultural context. Beijaard (2004) sustains that teachers' identity is not something teachers perform, "but something they use in order to make sense of themselves as teachers" (p. 123).

Additionally, identity can be viewed as an open set of meanings developed in the continuous and ongoing interaction between the person and his or her own experience with other people and the socio-historical-cultural environment. This concept is constructed based on a personal perspective, but as Wortham (2006) posits, the social surroundings of the individual can be taken into consideration, which adds a layer of complexity to these ideas. In this sense, there is a kind of dialogic continuum

between these two perspectives. This two-folded reality is composed on one hand by the personal experience based on a reality from a particular point of view, and on the other hand it is composed by the socio-cultural-historical environment that contributes conditions and settings. Both facets are essentially intertwined, and the result of that interaction goes beyond the influence of any one individual factor. The negotiation and definition of teacher identity is always a difficult process, and to some extent, the development of teacher identity entails a lifetime of experience. However, that work does not imply a solitary work, rather it is more of a collective enterprise of blurred boundaries between “me” and “others.” In that sense, teachers’ identity is socially constructed by personally enacted (Miller Marsh, 2002).

### **Teaching as a Situated Activity**

Every effort to examine the nature of the human condition will necessarily have to deal with the fact that the human experience, by definition, is constrained. This restraint is, first and foremost, imposed by time and space. However, although situation is a condition of the human experience, inside of the human experience exists the possibility of openness—the promise of an encounter and interaction with others. In that sense, any quest or attempt to understand the process of identity construction must rely heavily on one crucial assumption: individuals do not exist outside of their historical, sociological, and cultural environment.

Lave and Wenger (1991) propose that one of the defining features of learning is the situated activity. A situation, according to these authors, has a particular feature which is the “negotiated character of meaning” (p. 33). This is a key concept to understand the process of teachers’ identity construction within the context of an educational reform.

Pedagogical practices of teachers constitutes something bigger that allows the teacher to express him or herself as an educator. Based on the activity and through it, teachers materialize their own ideas of what it means to be a teacher. Through the continuous interactions between the teacher and his or her situated context, teachers develop their own sense of who they are and learn why they act, react, and set up their own pedagogical practice as they do. As a consequence, the context in which the particular activity takes place has a significant influence. Context is conformed

by a mix of persons, cultures, and artifacts that have a continuous and multifaceted interaction with an individual, and this helps to create meaning.

The teaching profession is characterized by the varied situations that can be found in the school as well as in the classroom. There are many different contexts and settings in which teachers engage that force him or her to develop or expand his or her understanding of the profession. Lave and Wenger (1991) affirm that “abstract representations are meaningless unless they can be made specific to the situation at hand” (p. 33), and that is why it is so important to make the proper connection between the context and the experience; otherwise the experience will not lead to a strong abstraction or idea. This collection of abstract meanings informs a teacher’s identity. The success or failure in creating a strong teacher identity should be defined by how well these meanings are consistently connected to context without being overwhelmed by the changing outside reality.

As was mentioned before, the constructed meaning is intimately related with the activity and the setting in which the activity occurs. There is an intrinsic connection between one’s self and one’s circumstance. These aspects, defined by one’s situation in terms of social, cultural, and even geographical environments, produce the individual’s identity. It is even possible to say that it would create a reality, or even better recreates the individual through his or her continual interaction with others and the political-historical-socio-cultural context. Identity is an open set of meanings developed in the ongoing interaction between the person and his or her unique experience with other people and with the socio-historical-cultural milieu. However, is it necessary to understand that a teacher’s ability to interact is constrained. Limitations come not only from the classroom, but also from the school environment as well as the larger socio-political and cultural settings. The educational reform initiatives can be found within these last two features.

The practical core of this process is dictated by the negotiation of meaning. In a sense, teachers have to renegotiate meaning every day because their context changes every day. Varied situations assure that the teacher must participate in a continuous process of identity negotiation. Some situations may be related to casual situations within a particular class, but at the same time there is a large group of contextual elements that also contribute to the teachers’ work. Those conditions constitute the norms, text, and discourses accepted by teachers within a particular school setting.

This essential idea is supported by Reynolds (1996, as cited in Beijaard, 2004), who emphasizes that the persons' surroundings, others' expectations, and his or her space have an enormous effect on a person's identity as a teacher.

### **Teaching as a Tool for Constructing a Teachers' Identity**

Similar to context, teaching, as a performed activity, can be one of the most powerful tools to help teachers construct their own identity.

Our world and our consciousness of the world are based on a system of ideas that are mediated by language and experience (Gomez, Black, & Allen, 2007). Through the intricacies of words we learn to navigate, negotiate, and balance the different point approaches, agendas, or views that take place within the particular context of an individual within a community of practice. Nevertheless, words have another important role in their connection to an individual's consciousness. What is noteworthy here is not a word in and of itself, but the meaning or value assigned to that particular word. The assignation of value to words is a collective process, and one that involves the participation of factors such as culture or history, among others. Words, however, and their appreciation are not separated from constructed and unique spaces, defined environments, or communities of practice.

The construction of an identity concept with these theoretical frameworks relies heavily on language and words as mediated forms of socialization. According to the Cultural Historical Activity Theory perspective, the interpersonal interaction and the concurrent process of socialization comes with participation within the community, but it is most important when the person is aligned with that particular language (Gomez, Black, & Allen, 2007). In the case of Socio Cultural Theory, the participation of the community of practice comes when the words have personal significance expressed within the concept of consciousness (Cook et al., 2002). Both of these theoretical approaches describe two of the single most important features of social life: first, that every activity implies a relational setting or environment, and second, that we, as humans, live surrounded by an ideological world.

Elaborating on Bakhtin's ideas, Gomez et al. (2007) explain that "individual[s] are ideological selves, socially determined persons who view the world in which we live through a system of ideas mediated by language and experience" (p. 2109). A person

who chooses to enter the teaching profession by default will cross the threshold to an ideological world that constitutes the teachers' community of practice. This "ideological becoming" (p. 210) moves over the meaning that is provided by the word and language.

Teaching provides a context in which each interaction could potentially end up having personal meaning. Cook et al. (2002) sustain that "through the meanings that they attribute to words, people [teachers] reveal the degrees of abstraction that they have achieved in their thinking" (p. 391). When teachers enter a given classroom, they already have accumulated a set of meanings based on their past personal experiences. Because of the varied situations through which this process can take place, personal meanings can be very different from one another, but at the same time there is a simple thread that connects each of the personal experiences.

In each of these experiences the subject is involved in a teaching activity. Consequently, teachers have to determine for themselves what it means to teach. This process entails a continuous application, correction, or modification of behavioral patterns on a daily basis that, in the end, will become a significant force that shapes the perception of who the teacher is, and ultimately redefines the teacher's own personal identity. Every day, teachers have to reevaluate their previous understanding of their role within an activity.

This is where the idea of relational context intersects with the idea of teacher's identity construction. Teachers' identities are constructed from a wide variety of meanings, most of which are intimately connected with the act of teaching in one way or another. This collection of meaning arises from each of the activities performed within a particular space – such as teaching in a classroom. Along this same line, the boundaries within a context situate a person within an activity. This intersection is described by Rivera and Tharp (2004) as the "basic unit analysis of sociocultural theory" (p. 206). Every situation mediates a person's experience and perspective based on that unique context.

### **Teaching as Both a Social and Individual Activity**

Wortham's (2006) concept of "models of identity" can be understood as a "tacit account that analysts can infer based on people's systematic behavior toward others" (p. 6). This idea relates to a collective meaning, in which the meaning of the self is

constructed through the interaction between the environment and the individual. Furthermore, this implies that because an interaction happens within a group of individuals, models of identity have been developed historically. In a sense, these are the same groups whose interaction institutionalized those “models of identity.” This is a process that is closely aligned with the idea of social identification that happens as “societies ‘make up people’ as they develop models, categories, and technologies for social identification” (Hacking, as cited by Wortham, 2006).

The construction of teachers' identities is mediated by their different circumstances. Similarly, one is continuously recreated through his or her context. In that sense, when Wortham (2006) asserts that “the process of social identification happens only in actual events” (p. 36), he is constraining identity formation to only an event. At this point, one could ask how he might identify an individual through a certain amount of events—a question that is now based on the point of view of others rather than the individual.

In this context, Coldron and Smith (1999) describe the tension that is present between the social structures that provide meaning to the individual (in this case, every actor or technology or discourse) and the sense of personal agency (or the personal dimension in teaching.) The idea of teachers' identities as socially constructed but personally enacted could be considered a matter of “the teacher being seen as a teacher by himself or herself and by others; it is a matter of arguing and then redefining an identity that is socially legitimated” (Beijaard, 2004, p. 113). The current conditions of teachers' lives and work are intricate and varied, but that is due to the “long history of interplay between cultural, social, economic” (Menter, 2008, p. 58) and political forces, and the individual's personal understandings, decisions, and actions.

### **Reform, School, and Teacher Identities**

An important part of this discussion is the intersection of the three key elements: educational reform, schools, and teachers' identities. Lasky (2005) suggests that little is understood about the ways in which teachers' identities interact in contexts of educational reform. It is known, with certainty, that these situations affect teachers' sense of commitment and vulnerability. However, it is still unclear how it can be

inferred that teacher identity is affected by comprehensive school reform. The following section will address this question.

On one hand, most reform initiatives are closely related or entirely focused on changing teachers' classroom practices. It is assumed that teachers should be leading the processes of reform, especially when they are closely connected to improving system outcomes. Following this logic, the solution should involve changing teachers' pedagogical practices. These kinds of reforms, then, are seeking to change the activity of teachers through the multiple discourses, texts, and norms created in order to standardize teaching activities.

On the other hand, schools have an active role in translating and implementing new texts proposed by educational reforms. They become key environments when the reforms start to become local. However, as Honig and Hatch (2004) described, this process leads to buffering or bridging. Specifically related to the teacher are levels of implementation or engagement with the reform process. It is important to note that all schools are involved in the process of assuming educational reform since their legitimacy depends on it. Therefore, schools should be engaged in the process of educational reform, and as a consequence, teachers will experience the resulting effects.

Local versions of educational reform that are present at the individual school level will help define a new set of terms, words, concepts, and practices. This new discourse will trigger a set of micro-processes between the individual teacher and mediational tools, for example a new set of assessment rubrics that are present in the specific context. Within this reality, the teacher is left with three possible scenarios from which he or she can choose: adaptation, adoption, or rejection (Lasky, 2005). In the first possibility, the reform is adapted to the teachers' practices so that new norms are blended with old norms. The second possibility requires that teachers completely abandon their previous position to assume the new one presented by the reform initiative. Finally, the third possibility involves teachers simply ignoring any changes brought by the reform. These three positions are related to Honig and Hatch's (2004) strategy that is used to deal with external pressures to implement school reforms. Despite these three options, teachers' identities do change. This change happens because teachers have to take a position in regards to this external demand, regardless of what position it is that they take. This is especially significant when the demand is seeking to change his or her practice and enforce greater accountability.

Laskey (2005) establishes the connection between the political, social, and economic meditational systems and the reality of a teacher's work. She asserts that "the analysis in this paper indicates that external meditational systems may have a deeper or more enduring effect on the formation of teacher identity, than on reshaping professional identity that is securely establish" (Lasky, 2005, p. 914).

### **Implications and Further Questions**

Lasky (2005) presents evidence that teacher education programs and the process of reform at school levels are the two elements that most affect the development of teachers' professional identity. However, this does not dismiss the fact that teachers, at least symbolically, tend to gain legitimacy by satisfying others' definitions of their work. In other words, within the context of reform, teachers have to accept the intended chance, because if they do not, they may lose professional status. Symbolism, in this way, sustains many of the practices involved in implementing a reform within a school institution.

This research suggests that the challenge for policy-makers and school leaders in regards to recruitment, retention, and maintenance of high-quality teachers and teaching is to create contexts in which teachers can make connections between the priorities of the school and their individual, professional, and collective identity (Day et al., 2005, p. 575).

Today, the educational milieu is full of initiatives for reform, change, reconstitution, and transformation, and because of this, it is a time of turmoil and extreme stress for many. Teachers are actors that deal with multiple demands on a daily basis. This situation defines a particular moment in the teachers' lives and work, as the reforms are specifically aimed at these areas. Within this environment it is important to understand the processes, dynamics, and experiences that teachers are going through since it involves their own understandings of themselves, and, as a consequence, affects the way they teach. There is so much at stake here, and it is of the utmost importance that there is further research into this issue.

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