Learning Through Practice: A Study with Physical Education Pre-Service Teachers

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Abstract: The aim of this study was to examine how Physical Education pre-service teachers construct their Professional Identity [1, 2] through their daily practices. A non-participant observation was made, included field notes, videotaping of the daily practices and interviews. The findings show that the pre-service teachers: (i) make a set of tasks: planning, class management, reflecting, participation in school activities and meetings (ii) improve their teaching skills because they're working within a community of practice (iii) experience some anxiety in the beginning of the practicum, overcome with the raise of confidence and believe that their responsibility overflows the lessons context.

Keywords: Community of Practice, Physical Education, Pre-service Teachers, Professional Identity.

1. INTRODUCTION

What does it means to be a teacher? How does someone learn to be a teacher and how he or she constructs their professional identity (PI)? What roles do teachers play in the school? Many questions like these are present in a large number of studies concerning the process of the PI construction, which had been increasing through the past years. Some examples of the main themes and instruments identified in several studies include: the contributions of the team work for the edification of knowledge and for the construction of PI using team documents, direct observation of meetings, interviews and focus groups [3]; the factors that influence the construction of the PI among pre-service teachers (PSTs) during the practicum using Reflective Log Proforma [4]; discourse of PSTs concerning the development of their PI using interviews [5]; the PSTs perceptions of their initial training and classroom experience using questionnaires, focus groups and reflective journals [6]; PSTs perceptions about teaching and in what way these perceptions can influence the teacher preparation programmes using open-ended questionnaires [7]; the PI of teachers in the last year of their training using focus group and audio records shared on a website [8].

Nóvoa [9] states that the focus of these studies is the teachers' lives, their careers and career paths, their autobiographies and their personal development and the perspectives about PI had been changing over the time.

The complexity of the identity concept is recognized for different authors. PI is a complex and dynamic concept, continuous, not static, constructed in the relationship with the self in a community during one's professional path [4, 10-12].

Gee [13] also defines identity as a concept essentially dynamic, ambiguous and unstable, adding that the identity is related with the "kind of person" someone is, in a given context. In his words, *the "kind of person" someone is can change from context to context"* (p. 99). Gee [13] develops the concept of identity around four perspectives: nature-identity (N-identities), the source of this state is the "power" developed from the nature (genes); institution-identity (I-identities) that reflects the position in an institution; discourse-identity (D-identities), this is one way of recognizing in the discourse/dialogue of other people their identity; and finally, affinity-identity (A-identities) is characterized by the experiences shared in the practice with an "affinity group". These four perspectives are interrelated among themselves.

Clarke [14] identifies three different types of identities: "positional identities concerned with relations of power and position with regard to others; figurative identities concerned with envisioning the self in relation to social narratives and situations; and authored identities concerned with agency derived from inner conversations and practices of improvisation" (p. 40).

On the other hand, the evidences in the literature show that the PI can also be recognized through the discourse, history, experiences and daily practices. In fact, the discourse-based approaches tend to describe identity as a fluid, dynamic and shifting process, capable of both reproducing and destabilising the discursive order, but also one in which people's identity work is analysed in talk [15].

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Regarding this matter Benwell and Stokoe [15] state that in Foucault's perspective identities are intrinsically related to the discourse and ones practices, enhancing that person assume certain positions through their discourse.

The author explains that taking into account these three types of identity permits to think not only regarding the individuality of someone but also allows thinking in terms of the social constrains imposed to the individuals.

Based in this understanding, identity can be related to a social group, as teachers, and with whom someone is, resulting in what Dubar [16] defines as a process of differentiation and generalization. The same author claims that identity may differentiate someone from the others or that can represents a common point between a group of persons.

The process of PI construction arises in interaction with others and in teachers' case not only with the peers but also with the students, parents, school and norms that the school imposes to teachers. Rojo [17] states that these relationships are recreated and reproduced during educational practices especially through interaction.

Thinking about interaction and about learning through practice, take us to the concepts of community and community of practice. Lave and Wenger [18] believed that the construction of the PI takes place within a community of practice, defining community of practice as a group of persons who shares a common propose, that work together and that construct new knowledge together.

In that sense, Lave [19] suggests that the construction of the PI "*is a collective enterprise (…) Most of all, without participation with others, there may be no basis for lived identity*" (p. 28). Clarke [14] also says that the concepts of discourse, identity and community are inextricable. The same author explains that this relationship, depending on the practices of day-to-day life, is constantly reshaped, renegotiated and reworked. In this context it is possible to infer that "*identity arises from the co-construction of discourse and community*" (p. 39) [14].

Focusing on reflection and critical analysis of PE PSTs, Fletcher [20] showed the influence of previous experiences as PE students in PI development. In this process, the students contacting with different teaching PE styles, they acquired knowledge, skills and values for performing their duties in the school. However, the same author add the idea that at the PE teacher training is necessary not only to address the PE content and pedagogy, but also to help the PSTs to deconstruct some preconceptions and also to think critically about PE and their role as teachers. Thus, teachers PI construction is a process that begins before higher education (anticipatory socialization [2, 21]) followed by socialization during initial training (higher education and professional training) [22], and continuing along the career path.

Other studies, concerning PE [23, 24], emphasize some characteristics of the programs of Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE), which tend to have a normative nature and further underline the students' sport practice in teacher education ("what?" and "how?"), attributing less attention to the ability to observe in learning ("why"). These aspects highlight the deep influence of the cultural and institutional contexts regarding the PI construction.

Many researchers have emphasized the reality shock or abruptness, which confronts new teachers as they take on the full responsibility of their roles as school teachers [2, 22]. Recent studies [e.g. 1, 22, 25, 26] have been held on the construction of the PI in the context in which it happens - the school. Given the constant and continuous challenges of PE, Dowling [23] reinforces the idea that the PETE programs must prepare students to a diversity of tasks, in order to prepare them to answer different contexts demands. In this sense, PSTs need to deal with a large number of demands from the school and also from the faculty but at the same time, they trying to establish they own territory and to define their PI.

Thus, in this study the interest in examining the PSTs' experiences and reactions to teaching in a school leads us to consider the extent to which the social structure of the school can determine a teacher's behaviour in reaction to teaching expectations. This draws us to consider the relationship between "structure" and "agency" [27]. Structure refers to the rules and resources, which seem to influence or limit the choices and opportunities that individuals possess [28]. On the other hand, Giddens [27] admits that the use of the concept of 'structures' can be used "*to get at relations of transformation and moderation which are the 'circuit switches' underlying observed conditions of system reproduction*" (p. 24). "Structure" can also be related to the concept of I-Identity enunciated by Gee [13]. So, even the intervention of the PSTs in the school and classes is constrained by the traditional practices of a certain school. For instance, if in a specific school is mandatory to wear an uniform during physical education classes, the PSTs has no power to change this norm because this is a rule that everyone in the school should follow. In cases like this, the agency is often confined by the structure.

Agency refers to the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices [28]. Giddens [27] reinforces that agency refers not to the intentions people have in doing things but to their capacity of doing those things in the first place, acknowledging that what the agent 'does' is determined by the control that he/she has in terms of a particular phenomena. In the school context, is evident that opportunities for learning provided by work are governed as much by the position and disposition of the individual, as by the organization and practices of the workplace [29]. Related to the PSTs, the agency can be perceived based on their discourse (D-identity of Gee [13]), reporting, for instance, their own initiatives regarding unusual school activities.

Structure and agency is understood as inextricably linked, i.e., while social structures can be seen to influence human behaviour, humans are also capable of changing the social structures they inhabit [27]. Therefore, the workplace learning encourages revisiting the structure/agency dynamic,

illustrating how individuals and their learning contexts of work cannot be considered separately [28]. Workplace learning can refer to knowledge or skills gained through any interactions in the workplace that result in changes in the behaviour, understanding and/or attitude [28].

Although, we are interested in the discourse of the PSTs in order to better understand their daily life and the process of constructing their PI, in this way we should take into consideration that *"Discourses, of course, are not iron cages from which we cannot escape"* (p.311) [30]. According to Clarke [14] discourse implies a mode of acting.

In that sense, we would like to draw your attention to the fact that not only the discourse is important to perceive the PI construction process, but also the PSTs' tasks and daily practices.

The aim of this study was to examine how physical education PSTs constructed their PI [1-2] through their daily practices within the practicum group (as a community of practice) [18].

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Data Collection

The data collection resulted from a non-participant observation over a period of fifteen days at a practicum group constituted for three PSTs (two women and one man), made in April of the academic year of 2010/2011 in a secondary public school of Porto, Portugal.

This school was selected because the school and the group of PSTs access were guaranteed by the gatekeepers, which are important during the research because they can act as an intermediate between participants and researchers. Sugden [31], stated that "Once you have let key gatekeepers know that you are doing research this can act as an amnesty - a kind of 'get out of jail free' card (…)" (p. 205).

The practicum represents the final year in the Master degree of Teacher Physical Education Program. During this year, students are organised within groups, with 3 or 4 students, distributed by cooperating schools. A cooperating teacher, from the school, and a faculty supervisor, supervised the PSTs. At school, the cooperating teacher organizes the tasks of the main practicum areas (Organization and education management and learning; Participation in school and Community relations; professional development). Each PST is responsible for one class (from the cooperating teacher) during the entire academic year. They participated not only in the teaching tasks, but also in parents meetings, staff meetings, and school activities.

The observation comprises eight visits to the school, between 22nd March and 8th April, in the term of the 2nd school period. Since the PSTs had begun their practicum in September, the first impact with school was solved, so in the observed period they were fully aware of the school context and they easily recognized and dominates the spaces related to teachers, physical education and students. These visits have lasted the whole day and the observations include:

lessons, informal gatherings between the PSTs, the cooperating teacher and with their peers and others activities related to the practicum like the PSTs participation on the school sports club of gymnastics after the curricular period of lessons. During the observation period it was taken field notes; made informal interviews, focused in the PSTs daily activities; videotaped lessons; observing collective and individual seminars and other informal situations. Using different methods to collect data, we can triangulate them to increase their validity. Concerning the interviews, Hastie and Hay [32] said that *"some types of interviews allow us to obtain in-depth data about participants' thoughts, feelings and activities within the context under investigation"* (p. 84). In relation to class observation and others tasks and/or contexts allow us to deeply understand the dynamic established between PSTs, cooperating teacher, students and peers and also to understand the complexity of their tasks. Recording classes also lets us to confirm the field notes information and to identify behaviours that were not observed during the observational process. Concerning this matter, Öhman and Quennerstedt [33] affirmed, *"Another advantage is that observations, and especially video-recorded observations, facilitate our understanding of what is said and done when language use is put in context."* (p. 191).

Pseudonymous to each PSTs were attributed in order to guarantee the anonymity of the participants. To videotape the classes we have obtained an authorization from the PSTs and from all the students. At the time of this study, Isabel was 22 years old, Rita was 24 years old and Manuel was 22 years old.

The participants and the researchers had no personal relationship.

Although, when we refer to non-participant observation, we meant that the researcher tries to affect the situation as less as possible and do not interact or intervenes during the classes, meetings or others [33].

Taking into account the theoretical framework, the research questions, which served as a guide to the non-participant observation, were: (i) How is the daily living of the pre-service teachers during the practicum? What do they do, how do they do it and why? (ii) In what way working within a practicum group (community of practice) contributes to the process of becoming a teacher? and (iii) What are the main characteristics of the pre-service teachers as teachers?

2.1. Data Analysis

Data analysis was based on qualitative methods using constant comparative method to determine how the PSTs construct their PI [34, 35]. According to Merriam [36] *"the constant comparative method involves comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences"* (p. 18). The first step was reading and visualizes the data. As Bardin [37] refers, the initial reading is important to take contact with the documents under examination, in order to gathered impressions, meanings and orientations. The videos from the classes were visualized in

order to enumerate and to understand some of the PSTs tasks, to better comprehend the communication process and also as start points for the informal interviews. All the data (field notes, videos and interview contents) were analysed independently by two researchers using the NVivo 9 to better organize the data.

The themes used to present the data were defining in order to answer the research questions: i) the practicum tasks; and ii) the pre-service teachers – how they constructed their PI?

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Acknowledging that the school context and practicum tasks are the same for the three PSTs in this study, as well as providing a global vision of the practicum context, the results firstly focus on school and PST tasks. Considering that the construction of PI is a personal journal [38], we then present three individual PST cases.

3.1. The School Context

The characterization of the school context where the practicum took place was assumed as a key factor to better understand the daily life of the PSTs. As Gee [13] states, to be recognized as a certain 'kind of person' (identity) implies consider the personal history and the institutional and cultural elements.

The school where this study took place is a secondary public school in Porto district, Portugal. This school is located in a metropolitan and modern part of the city, right in the centre of it. The school has really good access ways, with buses, train and metro nearby.

This school teaches from 7th to 12th grade. This study was focused in the 3 PSTs that teach 3 classes from the 11th grade, one from sciences, another from arts and the last one from humanities.

This school has, approximately, 1400 students, 130 teachers and 46 employees. Additional this school is always ready to contribute to the teachers training process since this is a school that receives practicum groups of different areas, like Science and Biology.

During this study, the school was under reconstruction (Field Notes 1). The teachers only have a small pavilion to teach Physical Education, which need to be divided by two classes, allowing 2 teachers to work simultaneous. Some classes, namely secondary grade classes, need to be taught outside the school in a sports centre borrowed from a local club.

The changes in the physical space available to teach have required some capacity of adaptation from the PSTs and regulate, in part, the process of decision-making (I-identity). In fact, to understand the I-identity is important to understand the position that the PSTs occupy in the school, since this is one of the sources that regulates the construction process of their PI.

It is, then, important to understand that the PSTs are in a truly specific situation, since that in one hand they are teachers and responsible for a class but, on the other hand, they are still students. Concerning the position that the PSTs occupy in the school, they are not officially part of the school, they do not have a monthly income, they have a cooperating teacher who is the legal responsible for the classes and to whom they have to respond. In some cases, the power of structure tends to be very strong and could, sometimes, constrains the PSTs action, since they have to respect the school norms and rules. Their agency and their capability to propose some new activities and to use different methodologies are not only dependent on each PST but are also dependent on the school and to the cooperating teacher. So, the typology of activities that they propose and that they perform, the methodologies that they adopt and the extend to which they defend and apply the principles that they believe concerning teaching (agency) is strongly dependent of the practicum context and the practicum group.

3.2. The Practicum Tasks

Based on the concept of Community of Practice [18] the Faculty of Sport, University of Porto (FADEUP) organized the practicum in groups of 3 or 4 PSTs, one Cooperating Teacher and one Faculty Supervisor. Such, in the first period of the data collection, we were able to perceive some characteristics and common routines of the community of practice, in addition to a set of individual tasks institutionalized by the regulation of the professional practicum.

In this context, and as we have already stated, the PSTs assume both the role of teacher and student (double conditions); they were constantly subjected to a diverse set of tasks. As stated by Caires and Almeida [39] the PSTs is involved in a large number of roles, they have responsibilities and activities of diverse nature and they interact with different agents, having to face many challenges and demands, turning the practicum into a privileged space for the personal and professional development.

The multiple tasks and requirements laid down in the FADEUP practicum norms are specified in four areas of intervention (Organization and management of teaching and learning; School Participation, Relations with the community, and Professional Development), we realized that there are some tasks that had becoming increasingly significant for the PSTs throughout the training process. If initially the PSTs were felling some of these tasks as imposed, along the practicum they had began to realize these same tasks not as something obligatory, but as something necessary and fundamental to improve their skills – as we will see. In fact, over time the PSTs has won the capacity to act independently and to make their own free choices (agency) [28].

This set of tasks, specifically the production of documents required by the faculty, the planning and the reflection were the tasks most refereed by the PSTs. The PSTs perceive these tasks as very useful and, in this sense,

essential to teaching. In addition, the PSTs played various other tasks on their own initiative (agency). Their bigger investment was in their own lessons, because they feel the need to motivate their students and because they feel that they need to provide greater autonomy and the opportunity to make decisions to their students:

"(...) I have proposed some extra activities to my students." (Ref. Manuel 2).

Moreover, as we will see further on, the PSTs considered important to accomplish some activities that exceed the scope of the lessons and of the Physical Education curriculum (Field Notes 7).

We can, then, perceive, that the PSTs learn to teach, not only with the formal preparation of the lessons but also within the instructional action itself [40], through classroom observation [41] and through the interaction with their peers and with their cooperating teacher through communicative action [42].

Classroom observations from peers and from the cooperating teacher, was a common task to all of the PSTs. Sharing this task among the group was also a significant moment concerning the learning process to the PSTs, where they were able to discuss some methodologies, adopted exercises, good practices within the lessons, strategies that they could adapt to their class, among others (Field Notes 3). This task had become so important to the PSTs that often they attended the lessons of their peers, not by imposition of the faculty, but on their own initiative:

"Observe the lessons of our colleagues was something imposed, but it was something that we always did because we understand that this was important for us" (Ref. Isabel 3).

While watching the lessons, each PST was able to discuss the lessons of their peers, trying to reach some understanding of some aspects concerning the lessons, strategies and methodologies (Field Notes 3). When the lesson is finished, they share their thoughts, they ask what everyone thinks about the lesson and they try to realize, as a group, how they can improve their practices.

This shared behaviour, doesn't have its source in the institutional power (school or faculty), nor is something inherent to the state of being a PST. This was a voluntary behaviour shared by the group. We return to Gee´s idea [13], when he claims that affinity groups like the practicum group, share interests, which allow the participants to have access to new experiences and knowledge. In this case and because the PSTs are learning within a group, as a community of practice, they feel the need to access to more and better learning situations as they become teachers.

Coia and Taylor [43] pointed out that when self-reflection is carried out in a small group it "*drives us to look deeper and more analytically at our teaching beliefs, experiences, and practice*" (p. 51). Fitzgerald et al. [44] talked about the creation of what they call professional intimacy in small communities, where we could be both professional and personal. For them, professional intimacy means we have created a community where we can talk and care about teaching, and speak about our teaching lives and

what they are like for us, sharing how we fail and what we struggle with in teaching.

For this sharing process, established between the PSTs, be present, it is required a collaborative environment provided by the cooperating teacher and also by the faculty supervisor. In such environment, the PSTs are proactive and responsible for each other for the benefit of all [13], working as a true community of practice.

The PSTs saw the fact of observing their peers lessons as an advantage, because in that way they were able to share some important details about the teaching process and because they were able to help the ones who were being observed. Sometimes, the PSTs worked in practicum tasks together, sharing ideas, questions and dilemmas with each other.

Other practice shared by PSTs was the seminars. This is a compulsory task, asked by the faculty. Although, the days where the seminars took place and their frequency could be concerted between the PSTs and the cooperating teacher. In this case, the seminars were bi-weekly moments that bring together the practicum group under the orientation of the cooperating teacher.

He introduced the points to develop during the seminar and the purpose of each session, alerting the PSTs about some relevant aspects, not only about the classes but also about the numerous tasks and duties that they have to accomplish (Field Notes 1). Simultaneously, the cooperating teacher represents the link between the school, its standards, its boundaries, its rules, its activities and the PSTs. He represents a major part in integrating and involving the PSTs in the specificities of the school system.

Often, the cooperating teacher starts the seminars providing some general information about the lessons or concerning other tasks, and then provides feedback in collective terms, specifying the feedback along the session (Field Notes 1). During the seminars a two-way communication is established between the PSTs and the cooperating teacher: they share opinions, doubts, concerns and other feelings related to the practicum.

In the seminars, the cooperating teacher evaluates and assesses the decisions of the PSTs, their lesson's plans, encourage them to talk about their concerns and to reflect about their lessons, among other things (Field Notes 2).

Throughout the seminars, features such as professionalism, competence and pedagogical knowledge were always present in the cooperating teacher's discourse (Field Notes 1). Encouraging the PSTs is fundamental since hard work is a constant requirement during the practicum and in the constant search for excellence.

The data showed that the cooperating teacher is always challenging the PSTs to reflect about the applicability of some methodologies and about the best way to provide the best lessons to their students (Field Notes 1).

The cooperating teacher pays great attention to the particular aspects of each PST and he tries to be as specific as he can when informing the PSTs about their development

process, when he provides feedback to the PSTs and when he is alerting them to the aspects that he considers that are urgent to invest in (Field Notes 2).

The observation in the practicum context, at school, provided information about each PST, which allows us to identify certain characteristics and particular aspects of the PST's PI. Indeed, the data showed how personal and social characteristics influence the performance of teachers' tasks and, consequently, the PST's PI construction. Another evidence is that each PST in interaction with the others members of the practicum group, plays an important role to the individual process of their PI construction. Taking into account these features and others elements captured during the stay at the school context, we have tried to delineate how each PST constructed his/her PI, how each PST is as a teacher.

Allender and Manke [45] stated that reflecting on the self and sharing these reflections within a group can offer wider perspectives. This seems very similar to the work of Keats-Whelan et al. [46], who argued that schools should become more like "chosen communities" where teachers can tell their stories, receive responses, retell them and imagine new ways to live their stories. In fact, all experience in teaching is new for the PSTs and there are no past experiences to compare with, because the PSTs need these moments of sharing and someone who leads their thoughts.

3.3. The Pre-service Teachers: How they Constructed their Professional Identity?

3.3.1. PST Isabel

Unlike her colleagues, Isabel revealed some difficulties in engaging with her students in the classroom, most likely because of her lack of confidence (Field Notes 4). Isabel told that she needed to grow up as a person in order to be able to grow as a professional and as a teacher:

"The beginning of my practicum was a really important moment. It was a time of controversy, I needed to understand who I was in order to be able to change (…) the truth is that this was a construction of myself and also a construction of who I was as a professional (…) I think that this discovery of myself and realizing how insecure I was and my own doubts, made me reflect (…) when I truly experience what is to be a teacher, things was much more consolidated. I can only felt pleasure in being a teacher in this phase, when all of the anxieties were through." (Ref. Isabel1).

This lack of confidence was one of the recurrent themes during her individual seminar and even the cooperating teacher stated that this was a characteristic of Isabel and that she needed to overcome it in order to enhance her teaching skills (Field Notes 2). This was important namely to Isabel can become autonomous and capable of making her own choices:

"(…) I needed to know what to do and when to do it and after I've realized this my lessons evolved and my insecurity was decreasing. (…) The fact that I was feeling more secure during my lessons allowed me to make decisions." (Ref. Isabel 2).

Indeed, like Greene and Magliaro [47] stated, the true experience of teaching during the practicum allow the PSTs to achieve a high level of knowledge and confidence, providing them a more concrete image of what means to be a teacher and of what are their tasks and roles.

It seems that the PSTs acknowledge this, emphasizing teaching in schools as the most valuable and important part of their training [48, 49]. The "experience, gave us the real picture of what we had to face in schools" (p. 51) [49].

There were some specific moments, reported by the PST, like the ongoing process of works in the school, that seem to affect the stability of Isabel, as much as the decisions concerning the space and the methodologies that she must adopted to face this instable conditions (Field Notes 4). For example, Isabel tended to show some concerns when she had to teach in the borrowed sports centre on a rainy day (Field Notes 4). This pointed out that, even though PSTs are involved in the practicum process, the institution does not always provide them the appropriate facilities to teach. Therefore, being aware that unpredictability is part of teaching, we can see how these constraints become important for the development of decision making by PSTs.

However, while Isabel recognized that the physical space of the school was not the most appealing to physical education lessons, she slightly devalued this factor and she talk about the collaborative spirit shared by all the school community stakeholders, seeing this characteristic as essential for a good teaching process:

"(…) I got there and I saw a space completely degraded, obsolete (…) but the structure of the school really works and works because of the proximity between all of the people that works in the school (…) We often see that colleagues help each other and I think that this is very good. And the director does not seem the Director (…) he is a director who exposes himself to the community and who is actively involved in the community despite the school will now undergo through some renovations because it really is already very degraded." (Ref. Isabel 4).

Another difficulty that Isabel showed, associated to her insecurity and unrealistic vision of teaching, was concerning with the leadership of her class. The unrespectable behaviours from her students was constant, she got bad answers, complaints and some refusals to do some exercises (Field Notes 4). Students recognized the teacher's position of authority and the roles that she plays, assigned by the faculty (structure). But leadership is one feature that sometimes teachers need to develop in their classrooms, during the teaching process (agency). Isabel appeared to be very helpful and caring with her students, but this excessive "proximity" between her (as teacher) and student prevented them to distinguishing and respecting the teacher's authority during her lessons (Field Notes 4).

During this process of growing, Isabel had recognized some factors as fundamental to her development and that contributed for her PI construction. As we can see from the reference below, Isabel recognized the role of reflection to enhance her capacity to teach:

"The reflection was exactly this process, (...) it was a necessity and not an imposition and I did it naturally, almost like something that was implicit to teach a lesson." (Ref. Isabel 8).

Although reflecting was understood like an imposed task in the beginning of the practicum, the difficulties that Isabel faced in the reality made her understand that thinking about the action is not enough in order to improve the next lessons, it's crucial to think about the action, in-action and on-action [50]. This process involves looking to our experiences, connecting with our feelings, and attending to our theories in use. It entails building new understandings to inform our actions in the situation that is unfolding. As Silva [51] advocates only through reflection the PSTs can think about the teaching process, about the strategies used and the results obtained. Thinking about all of these aspects allows the PSTs to change, to adapt and to enhance their teaching practices in order to achieve the intended goals.

As expected for Attard and Armour [52], the reflective practitioner is always looking for ways in which to further his/her knowledge and expertise by reflecting on teaching experiences. Teachers who are reflective, "systematically collect evidence from their practice, allowing them to rethink and potentially open themselves to new interpretations" (p. 1) [53]. This is an ongoing process that should help teachers to change, adapt and modify his/her teaching to a particular context [52]. The professional knowledge is reshaped through this process of reflection [54].

Isabel also valued the relationship with her peers and with the cooperating teacher, considering that it's crucial to the teaching and learning process that the practicum occurs in a community of practice. In fact, there were various moments of cooperation and of good relationship among the members of the community of practice, which allowed Isabel to offset some of her difficulties:

"I think that being integrated in a practicum group was really important. I've evolved with my colleagues (...) I have no doubts that my reflections had improve because of the reflections that we had made together, both the practicum group, as with the cooperating teacher." (Ref. Isabel 9).

Isabel also stated that the sharing process represented a major component to her learning process, emphasizing the knowledge exchange and joint experience as fundamental characteristics to the professional development:

"(...) I have a lot to thank especially to Manuel that during lessons was beside me and indicated me what I should do and not do." (Ref. Isabel 10).

Indeed, it is these experiences that facilitate the continued development and expansion of knowledge. It is expected that the interactions established provide the PSTs opportunities to observe, help, question and reflect together, which will help them to build the knowledge and to (re)interpret their own values and experiences [55].

Furthermore, the collaborative reflection with the peers is important both as a learning opportunity and as a support mechanism. Becoming a reflective practitioner is a complex and challenging process [52].

Isabel seemed to be a truly concerned teacher with her students but she revealed some difficulties during the process of teaching, mainly because of her lack of confidence in her capacities. In fact, her insecurity and impatience turned out to be prominent characteristics in the way she acted as a teacher during her classes. Her students were undisciplined and this fact was very harmful to the teaching process. Isabel didn't show a lot of initiative (agency) during her practicum. In this sense, she didn't propose a lot of new activities with her class. However, Isabel was eager to learn more and so she decided to integrate the group of gymnastics. The reflection was used by Isabel to overcome some of her difficulties during the practicum.

3.3.2. PST Rita

During the observations, we've noted that Rita was very insightful in implementing strategies to maintain student's engagement, motivation and attention during her lessons (Field Notes 2). Her practices during the lesson showed concern about the main aspects of the teacher's position, by always keeping her students in front of her and by captivating their attention with gestures and by saying, "look at me" (Field Notes 2). She was very expressive and clear during instructions and specifically while giving feedback (Field Notes 6). She was also very persistent. She enjoyed correcting and enhancing the student's performance reminding them that it is important that everyone takes the opportunity to learn through observing their peers (Field Notes 6).

Wanting to set an example for her students, Rita wore the mandatory training equipment for physical education classes, the same as her students (Field Notes 2). A yellow t-shirt, black short, black or white socks constituted this training equipment, an obligation stated by the school only for students during their physical education lessons.

Rita was always available to discuss about how to improving her teaching methods. Rita clearly played an active role in her lessons, involving her students, not by imposition, but by the acceptance and enjoyment in practice as a result of the way she communicated and the sort of tasks she proposed.

In addition, we can recognize the influence of Rita on the remaining members of the group. During one of the observed lessons, while the cooperating teacher was giving his lesson, the interaction between the PSTs was always active and the influence of Rita in the others PSTs was noticeable (Field Notes 3). She appears to be very attentive and insightful, able to draw the attention of their colleagues to some aspects that usually seem to go unnoticed to the PSTs like, for example, the classroom organization, the type of feedback provided and their relevance.

While watching the cooperating teacher lesson, the PTSs maintained an informal talk and promoted an emotional and friendly atmosphere, by supporting and trusting each other (Field Notes 3). Rita appeared to be extroverted, sociable, fun and very talkative. But, we perceive that she´s a little resistant in taking leadership of the practicum group. However, like his peers, Rita also reveals some difficulties that she was learning to overcome. The planning of teaching

units, designated by *structure model of knowledge (MEC)* [56], seemed to be the task more difficult for her, as we can see below:

"Doing the MEC's! I did not feel comfortable doing the MEC's, because it is a lot of information and then we have the idea that we must insert all within the MEC (...) but in fact it was very complicated." (Ref. Rita 7).

Perhaps for this reason this was one of the tasks that Rita considered less comfortable. She also mentioned the difficulty of formalizing lesson plans, defining with clarity and accuracy the critical components of each exercise:

"I did not feel comfortable doing lesson plans. Comparing the beginning of the year with the end of it, it was different; in the beginning it was much more complicated. It was not the plan itself (...) but it was more a question of critical components. My God! Inserting the critical components in the lesson plan was a real drama!" (Ref. Rita 10).

Reflection was also important for Rita, but she never felt this as an imposed task, because allied to her good capacity to reflect, she also felt very confortable in doing it mostly because of her ability to write. She combined her taste for writing to the task of reflecting and writing about what she loves – teaching *(Ref. Rita 12).*

Using the words of Attard and Armour [52], when one of the authors wrote about her experiences, feelings and emotions she just sat down and wrote, as if writing was like a chain reaction. For these authors "the writing became my principal tool through which I learned about myself and the world. I wrote so I would have a life" (p. 8).

To Rita, it was essential to maintain a healthy relationship with her students, not only to be able to transmit to them more then the contents of the physical education curriculum but also because she believed that in this way she will be able to provide better lessons and to provide more opportunities to her students to learn. She believed that the teacher responsibility exceeds the intervention during the lessons. Taking this into account, Rita invested primarily in study visits (Ref. Rita 15) because she assumed that those moments were very important not only for a better development of their students but also to improve the teacher-student relationship. Sêco [57] says that, "teaching is an interpersonal relationship (...) there is a teacher and a student, resulting from the action-reaction process between both (...) the teacher-student situation is thus the starting point for the knowledge transfer" (p. 60).

"(...) We went to the book fair (...) went through some emblematic areas of Porto (...) we have created a great bond and was undoubtedly an important moment." (Ref. Rita 15).

Thus, according to what Rita and the cooperating teacher told us, we can infer that the PSTs participated in various activities related to the school like some fieldtrips with their students and others activities regarding the school project (Field Notes 7). Although during this data collection, we could only observe the PSTs acting in one club of school sports – gymnastics. Two of the three PSTs – Rita and Isabel – decided to participate voluntarily in the club of gymnastics of the school. But, we were only able to observed Rita, which were at school during the training sessions at

Wednesdays and Fridays after classes and Saturdays. Sometimes, there were some competitions on Saturdays. In this context, we appreciated, once again, the "authority" given to these PSTs when the school provides them the opportunity to assume the role of coaches in the club of gymnastics. The gymnastics group is divided into three sub-groups identified by three distinct levels of performance. Usually, the PSTs were in the beginning level group (Field Notes 7). In fact, Rita played an important role during the training sessions, since she was responsible for one of the groups of gymnastics (Field Notes 7). However, she only occupied the position that the structure allowed her to. The PSTs may have little freedom to exercise their own willing, although they tend to be accepted by the school. The pressure sometimes felted by the PSTs from the peers, school director or from more experienced teachers may prevent the PSTs to conquer their freedom or applied some new strategies or activities in the school [13, 28].

Rita was a really active and dynamic teacher, since she was involved not only in the teaching process during her classes but she also proposed a lot of activities with her students besides the practicum time. She seems believe that the teacher responsibility overflows the class and she tries hard to provide a good example to her students. Think and reflect about the teaching process was really important to Rita. Additionally, we can perceive through her discourse and through her interaction with others, that Rita incorporates a lot of her personal characteristics in the way she is as a teacher. On one hand, she was affective, demanding, joyful and funny, and therefore she was able to easily motivate her students into the learning process and for extracurricular activities that she had proposed. On the other hand, she was observer, comprehensive, wise, sociable, talkative and it seemed to be who assumed the leadership of the practicum group.

3.3.3. PST Manuel

Manuel, as a teacher, seems to stimulate the participation of all students in the lesson activities, in order, not only to continually assess the knowledge and interest of each student, but also to promote student's motivation and involvement (Field Notes 5). Therefore, he assumed the role of questioner and guided the students so that he can independently explore their own learning process (Field Notes 1).

He had a great relationship with his students, so it was easy for him to be heard by them. The lessons were fluid and don't had a lot of stops (Field Notes 5).

Even though, he had a student that shows some different characteristics having a lot of averseness in participate actively in the lesson. Manuel has shown that he is skilled of adapting his teaching competences to the special needs of his students (Field Notes 5).

Manuel considered that the relationship that he was able to maintain with his students was really important to his professional growth, since he was capable of value the role that he had in the development process of his students:

"(...) What I remember with more intensity is my performance with the students. The relationship established

with my students was the most crucial thing to me during my practicum... Only based on this relationship of affection, based on a conception of sharing and not only transmission, being aware of their problems and difficulties it's possible to really be a teacher, to feel our competence and our professionalism, in a much more effective and efficient way." (Ref. Manuel 1).

Manuel stated that he couldn't remember bad moments during his practicum, enhancing once again the importance of the evolution of his students and their commitment during the classes:

"(…) The way that they were evolved and participated in the classroom project was really rewarding to me as a teacher (…) I think that this is one way of involve our students. They need to became more pro-active in what means teaching and also learn." (Ref. Manuel 3).

Not only was the close relationship with his students important to Manuel to seem himself as teacher but also the participation in the school activities (Ref. Manuel 4; Ref. Manuel 12).

These moments allowed him to get to know the school and once again to develop a close relationship with his students.

"(…) The organization of the cross-country, the fitness day... these activities provided us a closer contact with the school and with the students (…) after this we were aware of what means school as an organization." (Ref. Manuel 4).

"I think that this was important and in a way they legitimate what we do in the school. The activities were not imposed to us and they were really important to our training." (Ref. Manuel 12).

Manuel reinforces the important role that the cooperating teacher plays during the practicum, since he helped to transform and to adapt their knowledge to the real context of the school, adding that the practicum group exceeded his expectations:

"During my practicum I think that everything was positive in terms of my initial expectations, my learning process and the construction of my professional identity, my expectations was overcome, the practicum group was fantastic, as well as the cooperating teacher that helped us a lot throughout the year concerning our way of being in the school and in the lessons. (Ref. Manuel 8).

"It was really important to be able to transform the knowledge that we have learned in the faculty to the reality of the school context. I was connected to football training but in the context of lessons in the school, physical education is really different. If we have someone to guide us, it's much more easy to not loose track of the important things, what's fundamental is the learning process of the students." (Ref. Manuel 9).

In fact, Russell [58] believes that the need to link theory and practice naturally leads to learning from experience and to reflect within the practice. Here, the structured and ongoing reflection on actions seems to be an effective way of bridging the gap between theory and practice [59].

Regarding the tasks imposed by the faculty, Manuel started by feeling that reflecting was one imposed task but during the year he started to realize that this task was really important to his developing process, considering as Isabel, that this task was a necessity and not an imposition:

"Throughout the time, reflecting was no longer an imposed task but a necessity. A person writes because we need, not only because it was mandatory but because it was a inevitability." (Ref. Manuel 11).

On the other hand, referring to the planning process (MEC construction), Manuel stated that he thinks that this task can reduce what he thinks is the main concern of teaching and of what he think teachers should develop with their students. So, representing a mandatory task, hardworking and with few contextualization of what he thinks is the school. However, he acknowledged that the construction of the MEC's could represent a way of searching new knowledge. Manuel, highlighted some of the constrains that the school (structure) posed to some actions of the practicum group (agency), as we can observe in the next quote:

"There were some activities that we, as practicum group, proposed (…) but we only could implement some of the activities because the school is so much more than me (…) in that aspect we [PSTs] do not have a lot of influence in the school life." (Ref. Manuel 13).

Yet, Manuel considers that the teachers should gathered in order to surmount some causes and that in this way it's easier to accomplished something if we work together, even when they have to outline the school (agency). In this case, he was conscious of the importance that the physical education group has within the school and he also acknowledged the importance of having opportunities to share these experiences within the group:

"Sometimes, we can be the group in the school that origins a change. No doubt, this was the role that I have searched to play during the whole practicum." (Ref. Manuel 14).

When we ask Manuel about the experiences that made him feel like a teacher, he mostly recalls the lessons. He stated that during the lesson he felted the transition from student to teacher:

"I think that when we stop being students and become teachers... I think that being a teacher gains meaning when our actions also gain meaning and gain meaning to the students (…) It happened when we were in a lesson and a group of students asked me: "Teacher, can we schedule another day beside our lessons this week to practice?" From this moment, I felt that my action had more meaning to them and also represents a need to them. In that moment I began to feel like a true teacher." (Ref. Manuel 20).

Manuel considered the practicum the peak of his learning process, in the context of his educational program, as we can see:

"This is what means to develop our professional identity, being able to develop new knowledge, with problems and trying to overcome these problems (…) We need to develop

our potentialities, to overcome our needs and this is all we want to construct as teachers. (Ref. Manuel 24).

Manuel felted like a true teacher when he perceived that his students relay on him for making important decisions concerning the teaching process. For him, one of the most important things in being a teacher was the relationship established with his students. He also believed that being a teacher was so much more than teaching. As the practicum went through, Manuel came to understand how important the reflection is in order to attribute new meanings to the teaching process. Although Manuel was less involved in the extra curricular activities of the school, he always tried to invest his time in new activities for his students, since he considered that a teacher should provide new experiences to their students. Manuel considered that this could improve the learning process not only due to the specific knowledge but also due to the transmission of some principles and moral values that could help his students throughout their life. Always demanding, challenging and innovator, Manuel revealed to be a insightful teacher, adapting his teaching style to the necessities of his students.

CONCLUSION

The daily activities of the PSTs in the teacher role is preparing lessons, taking into account the management of time and equipment, as well as the behaviour of students in order to keep active control. They also reflect upon the unpredictability of the educational context, readjust schedules and adopt new strategies to become autonomous in the process of decision-making. Furthermore, interaction with students inside and outside the classroom develops a good learning environment, and is a feature of the role of being a teacher.

To be a PST was interpreted as to teach, i.e. taking responsibility of the students' learning process and their construction as human beings; to respect the school rules and the disciplinary group and, simultaneously, to cooperate on the development of extra-curricular activities; to reflect about their own actions as teachers, i.e. researching about their practice in order to improve the teaching process and acquire new competences; to manage teacher and students' tasks; and to share new knowledge with the students, teachers and the members of the community of practice.

It was evident that the construction of the PI is a complex process, and that the cooperating teacher plays an important role as a guide in the whole process, predominantly because he represents the 'bridge' between the theoretical knowledge (learned in the faculty) and the real context of the school, where the knowledge needs to be adapted to the students' needs. The three PSTs consider that being within a practicum group had a great contribution to the process of becoming a teacher, especially because of the sharing process and of the sense of fellowship developed during the practicum. They expressed that their initial expectations concerning the practicum group was exceeded and that working in such environment it is easier.

Reflecting, sharing, cooperating and trying are essential characteristics to the development of the teacher's PI.

There seems to be some common characteristics shared by the PSTs as teachers and others that are very specific, enhancing their specificity as individuals and as teachers. Moreover, despite of the common routines in their classrooms, confidence and initiative are the characteristics that better allow the control over the different contexts of intervention, while creativity and carefulness seem to arouse more interest in the students for the Physical Education subject matter. They all express the great meaning that teaching has to them and the importance of maintaining a good and healthy relationship with their students in order to access to them more easily. Although, there are some moments, especially during the beginning of the practicum, where the PSTs experience some frustration, feel anxious and express some concerns and doubts. Isabel was the PST who struggle the most during her practicum mostly because of her anxiety ally to a class with more disciplinary problems. Yet, during her practicum she stated that she was feeling more confident especially because she was becoming aware of her potentialities and of her difficulties. This was possible particularly through reflection. All the PSTs noticed that reflecting is a key step in order to construct their way of being teachers, in other words, their PI as teachers.

To Manuel and Rita, the practicum had, mostly, a positive side; they stated that the establishment of a wholesome relationship with their students is fundamental to gain their trust and to provide meaningful learning outcomes. On the other hand, they also stated that some required tasks by the faculty were difficult to carry on.

Manuel stated that the PSTs are only a small part of a school and that they cannot always, even if they want to, try new things in classes or to propose some different activities (agency). Notwithstanding, they all accomplished to apply some different activities during their practicum, specially Rita that have proposed several field trips with her students, that attended numerous races outside the school, etc.

They all seem to believe that the influence and the responsibility of the teacher with the students overflow their lessons.

It is fundamental to understand how the transition between PST and in-service teacher is made, especially concerning the process of PI construction and reconstruction. Given an active voice to the PSTs we can deeply understand the practicum dynamics and their educational value. This knowledge allows us to rethink teachers' initial training, namely the practicum organization.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors confirm that this article content has no conflict of interest.

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