

Monereo Font, C. (Noviembre-Diciembre 2017). The role of critical incidents in the dialogical construction of teacher identity. Analysis of a professional transition case. *Revista Akadèmeia*, 16 (2), 49-75.

**The role of critical incidents in the dialogical construction of teacher identity.**

**Analysis of a professional transition case.**

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this article is to explore the relationship between critical incidents and changes in teacher identity positions, and the effect that these changes might have on School Community and institutional dynamic. This article considers a multilevel analysis (MULACI) for critical incidents constituted by *Hubert Hermans* and data from a relevant actor in an educational context moving from teaching in a particular educational level to another. Data collection was longitudinal and covered one natural year and included mapping critical stages, elicitation cards and a journey plot. The main findings show that the most stressful issues with a greater influence in identity occurred: the loss of a sense of activity accompanied by a loss of self-esteem. After adopting a new strategic position she achieved a good level of acceptance among all the teachers and a certain level of leadership in the area of innovative methodologies. MULACI offers an appropriate method to identify and analyse systematic relationships among different levels such as institutional, interpersonal and personal ones.

**Keywords:** teacher identity, teaching competencies, critical incidents, dialogical construction

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## **Resumen**

El propósito de este artículo es explorar la relación entre los incidentes críticos y los cambios en las posiciones identitarias del docente, y el efecto que estos cambios pueden tener en la comunidad escolar y la dinámica institucional. Este artículo considera un análisis multinivel para incidentes críticos (MULACI) inspirado en la propuesta de Hubert Hermans y datos de un actor relevante en un contexto educativo que se mueve de la enseñanza en un nivel educativo particular a otro. La recolección de datos fue longitudinal y abarcó un año cronológico e incluyó el mapeo de etapas críticas, tarjetas de registro y una trama de viaje. Los principales hallazgos muestran que los problemas más estresantes con una mayor influencia en la identidad ocurrieron en torno a la pérdida de un sentido de actividad acompañado de una pérdida de autoestima. Después de adoptar un nuevo puesto estratégico, logró un buen nivel de aceptación entre todos los profesores y un cierto nivel de liderazgo en el área de metodologías innovadoras. MULACI ofrece un método apropiado para identificar y analizar relaciones sistemáticas entre diferentes niveles, tanto institucionales como interpersonales y personales.

**Palabras clave:** identidad docente, competencias docentes, incidentes críticos, construcción dialógica.

## **1. The theory of identity positions and its relation to critical incidents**

In the last five years, teacher identity has become a central topic in research regarding teacher careers, conceptions, competencies and, especially, teacher training. The main reason behind this interest lies on the ability of the concept to act as an excellent unit of analysis for changes, as well as a precise and defined unit of intervention. Most of the studies about teacher identity have moved from a traditional conceptualisation of identity as singular, continuous and individual to a multiple, discontinuous and contextual one (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011); however, apart from this basic consensus, the interpretation

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of what “multiple” actually means varies greatly. In this article, we assumed the ideas of Hubert Hermans, the founder of the Dialogical Self Theory (DST) (Hermans, 2003; Hermans & Gieser, 2012). The DST was initially developed in the field of Clinical Psychology. However, it has moved into the area of educational psychology as a result of the work of authors such as Ligorio and various collaborators (Ligorio, 2012; Ligorio & Loperfido, 2012; Ligorio & Tateo, 2008).

As known, from this perspective, identity is considered a theoretical construct that consists of different positions, expressed through their own voices and each of them interpreting one reality. These positions can be internal - *I-positions* - referred to one’s own self voices, or external, - *others-in-me-*, that is, the voices of significant others that are invoked in certain circumstances. Dialogues occur among these distinct positions, and their corresponding voices, which at times take the form of agreements or disagreements that, in turn, lead to changes in positions or to the creation of new positions. This intrapsychological dynamic, a form of mental society, extends beyond the internal and external to form a reciprocal relationship of influence with voices from interpsychological interactions and institutional dynamic.

Focusing on teacher identity, I-positions should be directly linked to the tasks teachers solve regularly when developing their various roles: manager of curriculum content (selecting, programming and coordinating content with colleagues), instructor (transmitting content), tutor (offering personal guidance to students), manager of classroom behaviour (negotiating and administering norms in class) and evaluator (assessing, correcting, qualifying and communicating the level of knowledge acquired by students). Of course, each of these positions is adopted idiosyncratically depending on how each teacher conceives, executes and experiences the functions performed. For example, a teacher may adopt a position of understanding teaching as the transmission of information and thus, may use mostly expository methods and feel as an authority on the subject being presented, while another teacher can approach his/her role as someone who guides the student’s learning through methods of joint construction of meaning and whose attitude should be especially tolerant and collaborative. Note that a position

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always involves a way of interpreting reality, e.g. the event that occurred, a way to react to it, and the attitudes and emotional responses that are associated with it. In other words, we consider that a position is an idiosyncratic grouping of conceptions, strategies and feelings expressed through a voice in dialogue with other voices (Author, *et al.*, 2013) that correspond to other positions in the perspective defined by Mikhail Bakhtin (1986).

This perspective on identity as a collection of positions in constant dialogue also redefines the concept of teaching competencies. From this point of view, teachers are competent when they have developed positions that are appropriate for, and adjusted to, the challenges or contingencies they must face in their teaching. This has, at least, two important consequences: (a) contingencies play an important role when analysing the positions teachers activate at any given moment, and (b) knowledge about one's own positions is crucial to regulating them. Thus, through the contingencies that occur during teaching, we can examine the positions teachers adopt to manage them and to find out if they are able to provide satisfactory and context embedded solutions, based on individual and community perspectives.

With regard to the contingencies that can appear in the classroom, this study is particularly interested in the so-called critical incidents (from now on CI). A critical incident is an unexpected event that emotionally destabilises teachers to such an extent they lose some control and act inappropriately or react inconsistently with their own teaching principles, and this, in turn may lead to a review of their own professional identity (Everly & Mitchell, 1999; Tripp, 1993). This type of incident can have a positive meaning (it is beneficial for the classroom climate, student learning, etc.) or negative (it is detrimental to learning, the classroom dynamic, etc.). Moreover, incidents usually appear as a result of a conflictive relationship, a situation of opposition, disagreement or confrontation between positions. When the magnitude and emotional impact of a particular incident is so high that it provokes a crisis and requires a change, we label it as *critical*.

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However, what we consider substantial about CI is that they may force teachers to review their identity positions and thus, potentially elicit changes in their professional identity (Author, et al., 2009; Author, et al., 2013; Amade-Escot, 2005; Author, et al., 2014). Therefore, the purpose of this article is to explore relationship between CI and changes in teacher-identity positions, and the effect that these changes might have on School Community and institutional dynamic. Consequently, a methodological approach focused on dialogue and integrating different levels of analysis is adopted.

## **2. A multi-level analysis of teacher's identity positions**

Traditionally, the study of teacher career development and identity has been based on the gathering of autobiographical information (e.g. life histories), narrated and declared by the teacher, with researchers subsequently performing content or discourse analysis and frequently establishing different type of emergent categories, with comparisons and triangulation not always being part of the analysis (Izadinia, 2014).

Although these studies constitute an important primary source of information regarding teacher identity, accepting them as the only source, has been claimed to be overly restrictive (McAlpine, Amundsen & Turner, 2012). This restriction has to do with the inability to address the dynamic nature of the identity construction process, which, according to the DST, goes both beyond and within the individual. The former involves *interpsychological* interactions with other social actors and their particular rules and cultures, whilst the latter involves *intrapsychological* interactions that filter, interpret and prioritise information from distinct positions. Therefore, the process of identity development implies a continuous dialogue between the public and the private, the explicit and the implicit, or the *society of people* and the *mental society* of the subject (Hermans, 2014).

In line with the argument of Tateo (2012), and in order to understand the professional identity of a teacher in all its complexity, it is essential to undertake three levels of analysis: a) personal, including the biography of the teacher; b) interpersonal,

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relating to the social relationships of the teacher with other members of their community; and c) institutional, which contains the representations, rules and values of the educational institution.

To analyse these different levels of analysis and their impact on the identity of the subject, we need to obtain information from all of them based on the same unifying thread that allows us to evidence the deletion, construction or re-construction of positions. For us, the unifying thread is the critical incidents faced by the teacher, interpreted from her perspective, while taking into account that her perspective is not solipsistic, but the result of the interaction with other influential perspectives and voices the teacher can invoke and which can dialogue: influential people on her personal and family context, pupils and her parents or tutors, department colleagues and the rector team and the educational principles of the institution.

Our intention is to collect these voices related to those CI she identified as relevant, and analyse the way she dialogues with them and if they produce complete or partial changes in her own positions. These dialogues between internal positions -attributed to oneself- and external and outer positions -attributed to other educational agents and the institution-, as we noted earlier, can be non-conflictive, when different voices admit, accept and complement each other, or conflictive, when existing positions disallow or reject them.

In this sense, a multilevel analysis can provide a more complete picture of the changes that occur in the subject and the dialogical mechanisms dialogical influencing these changes. At the same time, it also allows us to observe how those changes in the internal positions result in changes in relationships with the school community. To conduct this analysis, the DST of Hermans collaborators, previously discussed, offers us a complete, complex and systematic explanation of identity positions and their relationships, as well as graphic instruments such as the Personal Positions Repertoire – PPR- that permits the examination of the dynamic conflicts between these positions on a personal, interpersonal and institutional level. This instrument of analysis can be

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complemented, as noted, with data from some relevant actors in the educational context of the subject. This approach, that we have defined as Multi-level analysis based on critical incidents – from now on MULACI- will be applied to a real case of a teacher professional transition.

### **3. A case study of professional transition based on critical incidents**

Radical life changes or transitions, either in a personal, professional or social situation, often affect identity. Reasons seem obvious; there is a move from a known, stable and controlled situation to one characterised by uncertainty and risk, in which individuals have to demonstrate they possess the necessary competencies to confront whatever problems may appear.

Recently, research has been especially interested in those professional changes that represent a transition, which, in turn, might imply a discontinuity in the functions and tasks a teacher usually undertakes. For example, transition situations from teaching to research positions (Bronkhorst, Van Rijswijk, Meijer, Köster & Vermunt, 2013), from the university to professional work (Lalitpasan, Wongwanich & Suwanmonka, 2014) or from one cultural context to another (Arthur, 2001) have been studied since they challenge teachers' conceptions, strategies and feelings in such a way that, in many cases, force them to revise and rebuild elements of their professional identity.

In this study, we will analyse a transition situation, which, although possible, does not frequently occur: moving from teaching in a particular educational level to another. Generally, teachers in nursery schools, primary and secondary education prefer to teach at their respective levels and shy away from teaching other students whose needs are very different from those they are used to being taught. In fact, it is often accepted that nursery schools and primary education have distinct historical roots and conceptions regarding education (Hunkin, 2014) and that even teachers have different psychological profiles on issues such as interpersonal conflict, perceived workload, and stress or

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satisfaction (Bucur, 2012). However, in certain circumstances such as a school change, an interchange between educational levels can occur.

The subject of our case study, JC, is a 28-year-old female who, after teaching in a nursery school for six years and for personal reasons, decided to accept a position as a substitute teacher in a private school at the primary level, starting in January 2014. Feeling insecure, she decided to contact her university professor (the author of this study), who proposed to track her during a year with the purpose of jointly analysing changes during the development of her new professional situation.

The ultimate goal of our study was to explore changes in her identity positions. To achieve this goal, we applied the MULACI to the case-study of JC. With her, we agreed upon the following specific objectives:

1- Describing the major milestones and previous incidents in the trajectory of JC that explain her identity positions before facing the professional transition (initial identity positions).

2- Analysing changes in JC initial identity positions, precipitated by critical incidents at personal, interpersonal and institutional level.

3- Identifying what are the mechanisms underlying these changes that lead JC to modify and/or construct her identity positions

#### **4. Method, instruments and procedure**

Data collection was longitudinal and spanned one natural year, from January to December 2014, since JC was hired by the institution in January as a substitute (teacher). To apply the previously discussed MULACI, a set of different instruments was used in order to access complementary data from the three levels of analysis. Two different phases can be distinguished.

##### *4.1. Phase 1. Establishing background knowledge.*



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The first phase was developed during the first two weeks (from 1-15 January) and consists in collecting background information on conditions of the centre and JC's expectations. To do this, first, we applied the technique of *mapping of critical stages* (Burnard; 2012; Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013). It involves a graphical representation through a sinuous line, with distinct curves that represent decisive moments, positive and/or negative, in the professional career of the case being studied. Then we conducted the initial *in-depth interview*. The interview included, in a first section, questions related to antecedents and biographical issues, and in a second section questions about her understanding of the institutional characteristics (pedagogical principles and guidelines, curriculum, rules and distribution of functions or activities organisation); and about her expectations on the course.

Finally, based on the information provided by JC in the interview, *elicitation cards* (Amundsen, Westonb & McAlpine, 2008; McAlpine, Amundsen & Turner, 2012) were elaborated and JC was asked to order them. This technique consists in elaborating a list of words derived from the discourse of the subject, which are written on different coloured cards in order to facilitate the establishment of an order of priority and key words. Three lists of words were created corresponding to (a) conceptions regarding teaching, learning and evaluation; (b) strategies and procedures used in the classroom; and (c) feelings and attitudes related to teaching. The teacher ordered the words within each list from the most to the least important. Then, we asked her to relate conceptions, strategies and feelings, and explain these relationships with the purpose of producing statements such as: "*In my opinion, learning is possible only if there is happiness in the classroom (conception), and free play (strategy) has always been a great method to achieve this. However, I am unclear as to whether this will work at a primary level and, for this reason, I feel somewhat insecure (feeling)*".

Building on this initial information, we constructed a first representation of JC's identity positions with the support of an instrument adapted from Hermans' (2001) Personal Position Repertoire (PPR), in which the inner positions (*I-positions*), outer

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positions (*others-in -me*), external positions (*other voices not mine*) are plotted in three concentric circles.

#### 4.2. Phase 2. Following JC's professional trajectory.

The second phase lasted 10 months (from 16 January to 23 December 2014, excluding the months of school holidays, July and August), and consisted in following JC to document her trajectory and challenges occurred during that period. We developed weekly follow-up interviews in which diary logs (Kayi-Aydar, 2015) were used to help JC to recall her daily teaching and events occurred. These follow-up interviews addressed issues on the situations and events during daily teaching that worried her (what happened? why do you think they happened? how did they affect you?).

Moreover, a progressive *Journey Plot* (Shaw, Holbrook, Scevak & Bourke, 2008) was completed every month. It consists of a system of coordinates in which the horizontal axe represents time and the vertical the intensity or emotional impact of events. It serves to appreciate the temporal duration of each contingency, its rhythm, frequency and emotional intensity. Concurrently, we conducted interviews with JC's department colleagues and school principal. More specifically, we conducted initial and final interviews with the Department Head, with a junior colleague, a senior colleague and the school principal in order to contrast the identity positions adopted by JC in the interpersonal relationships and the institutional culture.

The new information allowed us to create two new PPR (initial and final). Thus we could observe JC's evolution in her main identity positions through her conflictive and non-conflictive relationships, in turned promoted by some relevant incidents.

#### 4.3. Data analysis

All the information coming interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Data analysis involved an iterative process of content analysis following the principles of Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which has also been used in previous studies based on the DST and in case studies (O'Sullivan-Lago & De Abreu, 2010). Unit of

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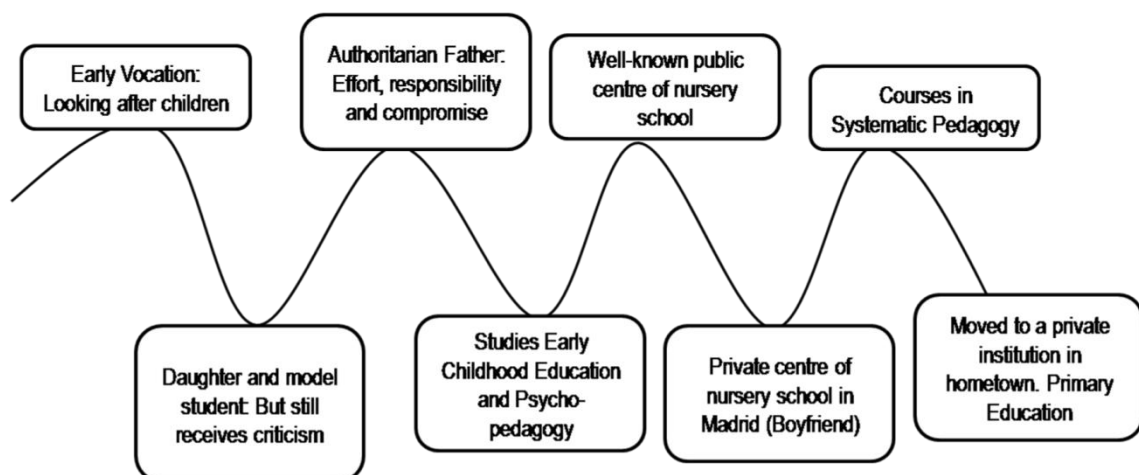
analysis was *utterance* defined as the minimum statement with an independent meaning and thematic unity. After identified, each *utterance* was coded based on previously established labels: *Identity professional position* and *conflictive* or *non-conflictive relationship* of it with other I-positions. Four experienced researchers, members of the same research group, independently coded the data set and afterwards discussed until consensus was reached (see Tables 1 & 2). Finally, all graphics and written explanations were given back to JC, to the Department Head and to School Principal for their feedback. There were not significant disagreements with our interpretation.

## 5. Results and Discussion

Results will be presented on the basis of the three objectives established in our casestudy and discussions will be provided to analyse the significance of data in each case.

### 5.1. Milestones and incidents before professional transition that explain initial identity positions

Regarding the first objective, in the first in-depth interview, we identified the major milestones and incidents of JC's teaching career, as displayed in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Mapping of critical stages: JC's autobiographical trajectory

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In summary, we observed that JC's life and career were marked by three line-forces:

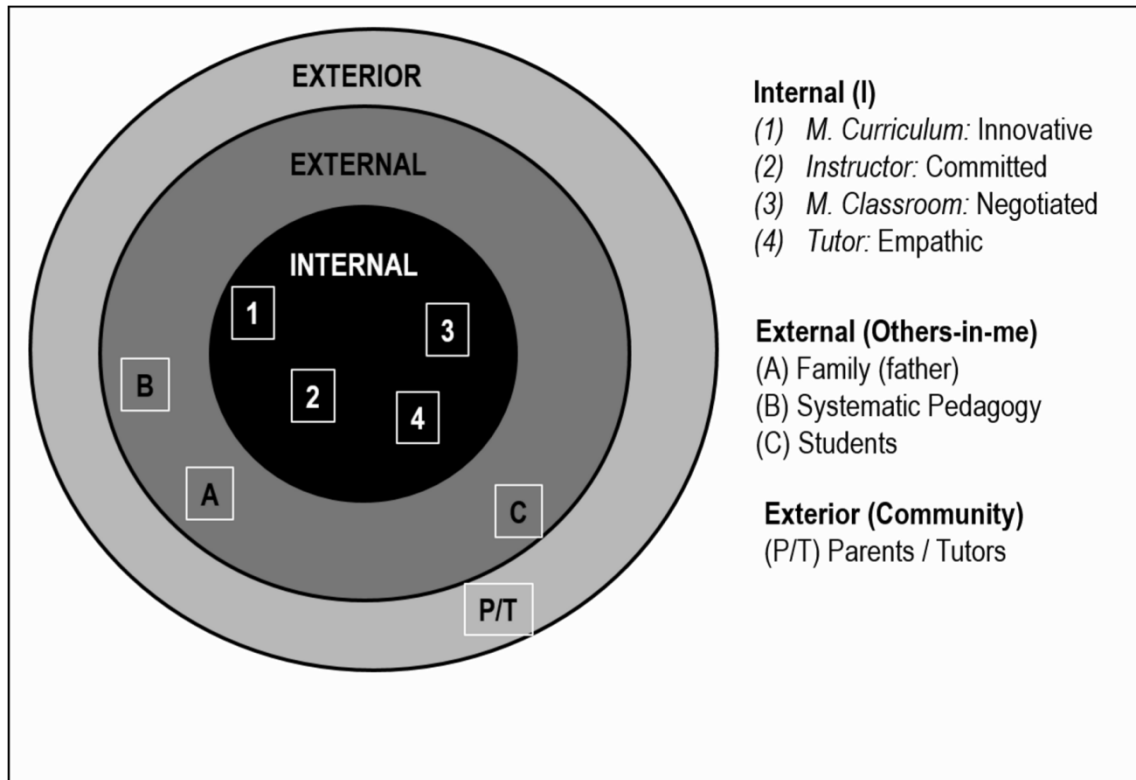
a) An early vocation -she explained how she was the one looking after the young children in family gatherings– which prompted her to study Education and Psychology, receiving outstanding grades in both disciplines. After university, she worked in a nursery school known for its innovative approach. Following this, she moved with her partner to Madrid and worked for two years in a private nursery school, where she took a leadership role due to her more advanced psycho-educational approaches.

b) A strong emotional dependence on adults and the need to always meet their expectations; specifically: (1) a strong influence from her father, a man of few words and little overt affection, and (2) a negative incident at school (a nun scolded her for her poor presentation and she responded by stating “*I will never give you another chance to scold me, I will be smarter than all the others*”) that motivated her to become a model student and achieve all that was expected of her.

c) A strong attachment to the systemic approach which defends the reconciliation with one's own family history (to love one's parents as they are), the acknowledgment of how family factors influence people (including family members who died with an unsolved problem) or the abandonment of the attempt to change reality (predestination: changes happen when the time comes).

Using the main concepts expressed by JC in relation to the meaning and value attributed to teaching, methods and strategies she prefers to use and her attitudes and feelings about being a teacher, we created a list of keywords. She ordered the keywords following the instructions of the elicitation cards technique, explained above.

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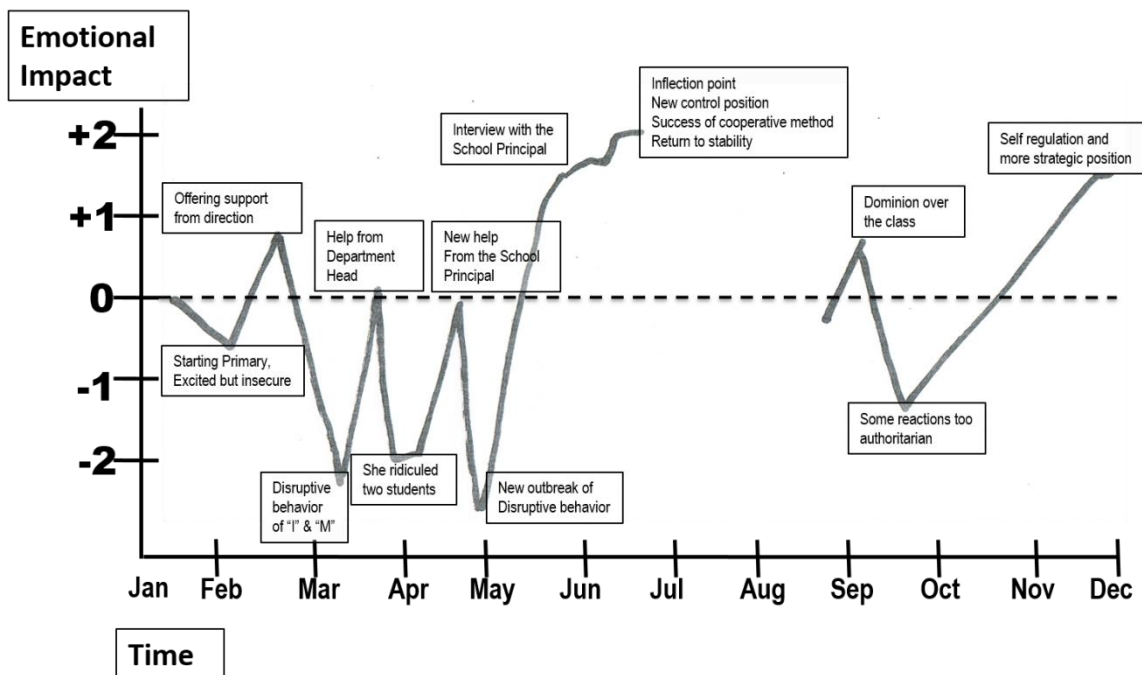
**Figure 2.** Previous Personal Position Repertoire of JC

This information allowed us to develop an initial PPR (see figure 2) in which four initial identity positions were identified: *a manager of curriculum innovative* (code: *m. curriculum*), who thinks that focusing on students' interest is essential; *a hard worker and committed instructor* (code: *Instructor*), who thinks good mood and game should reign the class, and that individual learning paces should be respected; *a manager of classroom behaviour* (code: *m. classroom*), who thinks students should be free to negotiate with her their relationship and the way they behave in class; and a role of *tutor* (code: *tutor*), focused on a continuous and empathic communication with students and their parents or tutors.

## 5.2. Changes in Identity positions precipitated by critical incidents during professional transition.

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As for the second objective of the study, to analyse changes in identity positions adopted by JC as a teacher during her professional transition, results come from information gathered through Journey Plots and follow-up interviews regarding CI and their impact on her teaching. Figure 3 shows the Journey Plot for the period analysed (January-December, 2014).



**Figure 3.** The Journey Plot representing the contingencies arising during the period of analysis.

In the *Journey Plot*, results showed that JC experienced four negative and three positive CI of high emotional intensity (see Figure 3). The first two negative incidents corresponded to the inappropriate behaviour of two students, “I” and “M”; in particular, “I”, who experienced episodes of uncontrollable anger and abused school facilities. For his part, “M” exhibited a number of moments of defiance, disobedience and disrespect. At two extreme moments, “I” hit the classroom windows and “M” insulted JC. In response to this, JC confessed to having lost control and ridiculed “M” with a sarcastic

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comment about his lack of intelligence, as well as having physically reprimanded “I”. She considered both reactions to be absolutely opposed to her educational principles.

Fortunately, when these episodes occurred, JC received immediate and continuous help from her Department head and especially from the Principal. With the latter is especially important an interview in which JC decides to change the strategy to manage her class, as we discuss later. By the end of May, a new episode of disruptive behaviour occurs in class but, in the words of JC: "I took the reins" and, with these new I-position she smoothly controls the situation. From that moment on, conflicts are much less frequent. That new I-position consists in maintaining authority through an attitude of no interaction with students, forcing them to do the tasks in complete silence.

The latest incident, which occurred in October with a new group, has a very different nature. JC feels she can go too far in the implementation of her new position. To avoid an authoritarian drift, she decides to regulate its use and she learns that a mere suggestion is usually sufficient to restore the good climate in class.

As it can be appreciated in figure 3, the rhythm of the transition along time is by no means regular and stable, and is better described in the words of JC as a “rollercoaster” with pronounced inclines and declines, with minimal separations as well as plateaus indicating periods of security and satisfaction.

In the table, as an example, we show some excerpts of the transcription of the interviews with JC and the coding for their analysis.

**Table 1.**

Relationship between experienced CI during JC’s professional transition and her initial identity positions  
(January-June, 2014)

<i>JC reaction to the CI (Extract)</i>	<i>Initial I-Position</i>	<i>Relationship between the Initial I-position and CI</i>
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<p><i>"My father taught me a sense of responsibility and commitment. Very often I stay late at night to prepare my lessons and I am always the first to arrive at school"</i></p>	<p>M. Instructor (Committed; hard worker)</p>	<p>Non-conflictive: Father &amp; Commitment/Hard Work</p>
<p><i>"Since Preschool I learnt to communicate effectively with children's parents and tutors; it is easy for me to put myself in their shoes "</i></p>	<p>Tutor (Empathetic)</p>	<p>Non-conflictive: Parents/tutors &amp; Empathy</p>
<p><i>"From the beginning I felt supported by the Principal. She values my innovative ideas, thinks the school needs to change, although it is a big responsibility"</i></p>	<p>M. Curriculum (Innovative) M. Instructor (Committed)</p>	<p>Non-conflictive: Principal/ Institutional Culture &amp; Innovation &amp; Commitment</p>
<p><i>"I started with what I knew about Preschool, using games a lot, taking into account their interests, respecting their learning pace, but we never finished the units, and some students like M started complaining about the slow progress"</i></p>	<p>M. Curriculum (Innovative) M. Classroom (Insecure)</p>	<p>Conflictive: Systematic Pedagogy M &amp; Insecurity</p>
<p><i>"The last day M made fun of me in class, he confronted me and I lost control and threw him out of the room (...). A very tough moment was when I joined M's defiant and impertinent behaviour"</i></p>	<p>M. Classroom (Insecure)</p>	<p>Conflictive: M/I &amp; Insecurity</p>



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<p><i>“The first part of the course has been a disaster, I felt overwhelmed by the situation. On Wednesday I went to the Principal’s office crying (...) she told me I should be more authoritarian, impose clear rules and be rigid with punishments. That’s</i></p>	<p>M. Classroom (Insecure)</p>	<p>Conflictive: Principal &amp; Systematic Pedagogy &amp; Insecurity</p>
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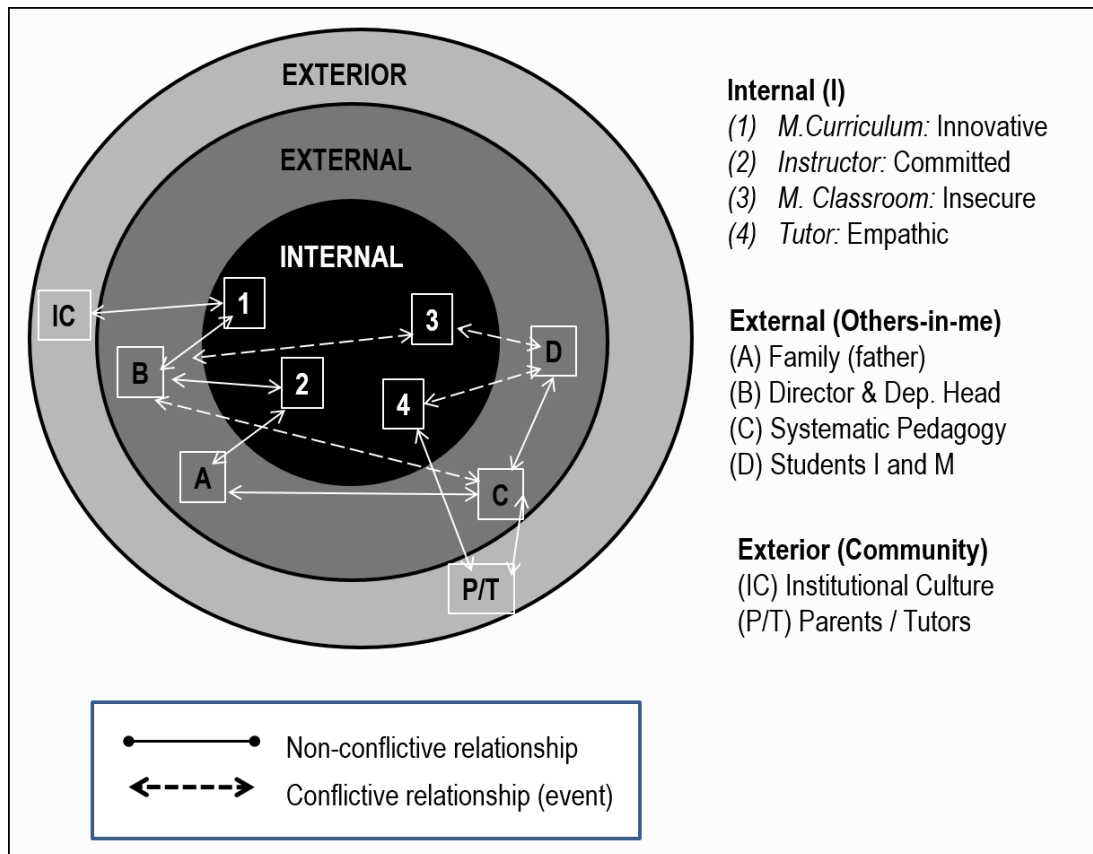
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*something very difficult for me because it’s against my pedagogical principles”*

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From this information we developed a second PPR in in which again the four basic positions, -m, Curriculum, Instructor, m. classroom, tutor appeared. But it had a new external position, the Principal and the Department Head- and a new external position, the Institutional Culture of School (see figure 4). Changes are mainly related to JC’s first understanding the context of the centre and, in particular, to the appearance of feelings of insecurity, especially in the position of m. classroom.

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**Figure 4.** Initial Personal Position Repertoire of JC

As for the non-conflictive relationships, we could determine two groupings; on the one hand, innovative positions that were in line with the management, school, and parental influence. Whilst on the other hand, adscription to Systemic Pedagogy, which at first seemed like a good solution for dealing with the behaviour of two disruptive students, “I” and “M” (detailed in the next section), and for managing the problems with the family of those students.

Concerning the conflictive relations, we can observe a complex cluster where empathy and insecurity positions are confronted with her ability to manage the behavioural problems in the classroom and with her need to demonstrate her competence in front of the Principal. As mentioned, these data were broadly corroborated by the Principal and the Department Head.

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In the final interval, from September to December, JC appeared to have gained more control of the situation and experienced a period of fewer doubts and conflicts. Table 2 shows some relevant excerpts of this period and the way they were coded.

**Table 2.**

Relationship between experienced CI during JC's professional transition and her initial identity positions (September-December, 2014)

<i>JC reaction to the CI (Extract)</i>	<i>New I-Position</i>	<i>Relationship between new I-position and CI</i>
<i>"At the end of last year I felt more secure and lived it differently. The letters from students, parents' gifts and especially that M note in which apologised ... I was a shot of adrenaline! I realised that some of things I'd done were good (...) Now I wants me a lot and confessed to me things that did not do before"</i>	M. Classroom (Strategic) Tutor (Empathetic)	Non-conflictive: Students & Strategy & Empathy
<i>"Now I'm better at deciding when I am authoritarian and when I am not ... I feel like I have better control of the emotions ... in general I am more aware at self-regulating and teaching content..."</i>	M. Classroom (Strategic)	Non-conflictive: Students & Strategy
<i>"Nobody tells me what I have to do anymore, it's me who makes proposals, I am the engine ... the team listens to me a lot, they trust what I say ..."</i>	M. Curriculum (innovative)	Non-conflictive: Department Head/colleagues & Innovation

Results regarding the final *PPR* (see figure 5) showed that JC constructed a new position related to the management of behaviour problems in the classroom, which we named "*strategic*", since it allows the re-evaluation of her actions and a more conscious

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form of deciding when to apply her authority and when to allow the activity to flow without intervention. Our interpretation is that JC has acquired “strategic position” that tells her which way to act under different circumstances; in fact, in the final interviews, JC admitted that she was capable of appreciating some signals of the group that allowed her to anticipate their next action: “Now I notice when the activity is waning or when the group needs a change as some students begin to pay less attention to it”.

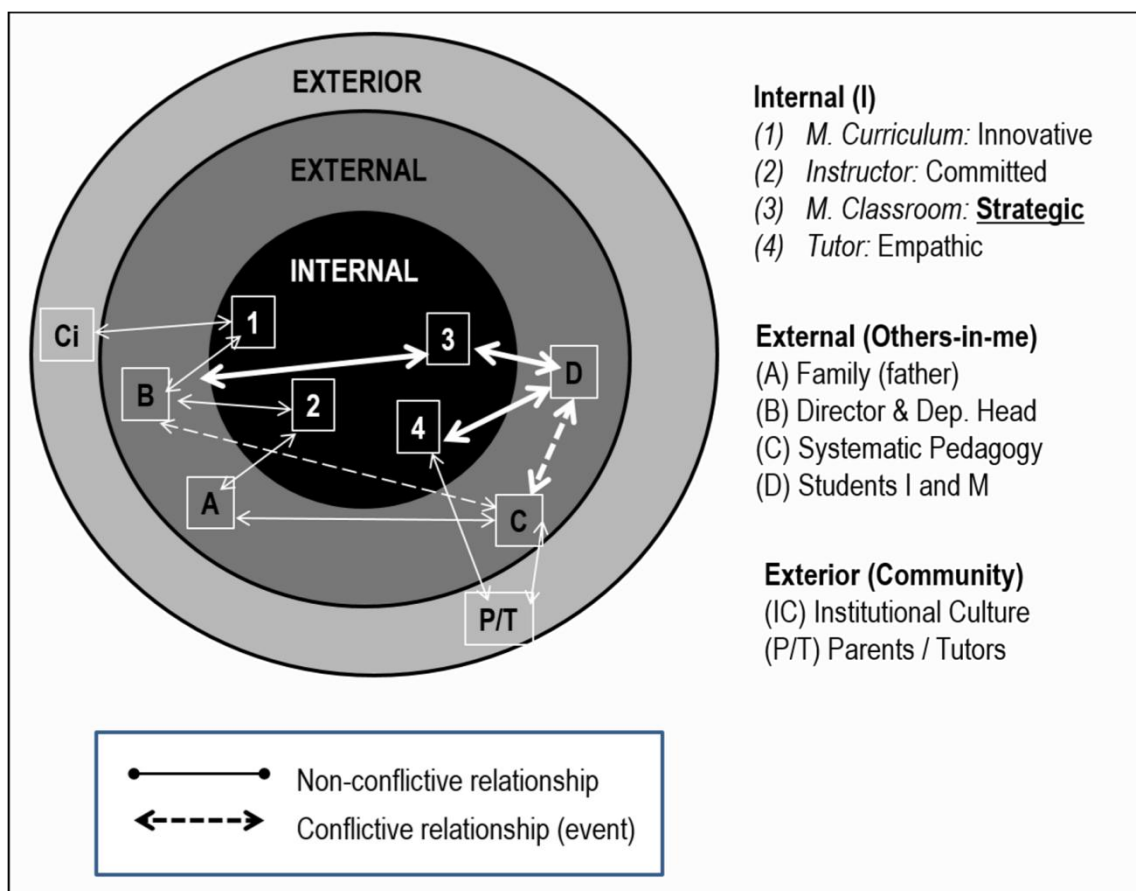


Figure 5. Final Personal Position Repertoire

As in figure 5, favourable and non-conflictive relationships have clearly increased. Doubts regarding the usefulness and effectiveness of the principles of systemic pedagogy to address classroom behaviour problems remained a point of tension, although it was still considered as a valid approach to strengthening the relationships between students’ parents and their own family. The links with the institution, the direction and the

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coordination were strengthened enormously and this has had a positive effect on JC becoming an innovative and empathetic teacher.

Regarding the situation of JC within the institutional impact, it can be noted that, at that moment, JC's goals were less academic-oriented and more focused on developing a climate of kindness and reciprocal respect. This focus was in line with her work with the stages of 0-3 years old in nursery school, with the introduction of methods of cooperative teaching, Systemic Pedagogy or play as the centre of educational action. However, she did disagree, in part, with the expectations and rules of the community in Primary education that was focused on completing what was planned, disciplining in the classroom, and progressively introducing new subjects, such as English, with the purpose of producing bilingual classrooms.

When we did the last interview the data was somewhat coherent with the inclusion of the new strategic position in JC's identity repertoire. JC had acquired a stronger influence in the institute as a leader. She also introduced new didactic methodologies that appear to guarantee more academic learning than those merely based on play, and above all, she modified her objectives and priorities. She no longer considered being liked as an asset, but instead she valued being respected and understood for her psycho-educational proposals. This tells us about the transfer of the strategic position as a teacher to a similar one as a colleague and member of the teacher team point, which indicates that a new intrapsychological identity position can result in an interpsychological change and, perhaps, in the long term, in a change in the institutional dynamics.

### *5.3. Mechanisms to modify and construct new identity positions*

Finally, in relation to our third objective, to identify the mechanisms underlying changes and construction of new identity positions, results showed that the driving force for change was the conflict latent between JC's insecurity in controlling the situation created by some students through her classroom manager position, focused on empathy, and the emotional impact triggered by several CI.

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Thus, a conflictive relationship between positions is not enough to produce change. Conflict has to be accompanied by a truly critical incident, that is, an incident that challenges the position held so far and forces a change as the subject perceives that maintaining the same position is not possible.

A clear example is the CI regarding the challenging and inappropriate behaviour of two students. In response to this situation, the school principal offered help but also invited JC to impose strict limits in the classroom. JC opted to follow this advice for three days and implemented an authoritarian position that included imposing sanctions (students couldn't speak in class, move from their chairs without permission and could only complete the exercises set by JC, whilst she rarely spoke and acted in a serious, rough and judgemental manner). She considered this to be one of the most difficult phases of her career.

This new practice of classroom management gave JC such good results that she acknowledged having acquired a new power. However, she stated that this kind of power frightened her and she labelled it her "dark side" because she realised how easy and comfortable it would be to exercise it daily in order to avoid disruptions in the classroom. However, this approach goes against some of her principles and her deepest convictions such as the development of a tolerant, participatory and cheerful classroom climate. In order to avoid the indiscriminate use of authority and punishment, JC built, as already mentioned, a new position that we have called *strategic* since it implies that JC learnt to read the situation and to decide when to impose or not her authority. In fact, JC stated that pupils also learnt to recognize certain signs and to anticipate when JC would change her position and prevent this by changing their own behaviour first.

## 6. Conclusions

In this study, we aimed at exploring the suitability of the MULIC to analyse and explain changes in identity positions, looking at relationships between different levels of analysis. To reach this aim, we developed a case study of a teacher in a professional

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transition and looked for milestones and incidents in her teacher career, her identity positions changes at the personal, interpersonal and institutional level and mechanisms for modifying and developing new identity positions.

Overall, results allowed us to accomplish these objectives. The major milestones and incidents of JC's teaching career, before and during her (career) transition, were described according to how these circumstances affected her teaching positions. When she arrived at her new professional environment, her teaching position in classroom management, which was constructed during years of professional practice in early nursery school, was centred on tolerance, empathy and comprehension, and the objective of creating a permissive climate that ensured a harmonious and satisfactory position for everyone in the classroom.

The CI she suffered in the classroom caused by some of the students took her completely by surprise and they were of such a profound nature that they triggered a conflict between her initial professional identity positions. At this point, two of the most stressful issues with a greater influence in identity occurred, according to a recent study of Batory (2015): the loss of the sense of activity accompanied by a loss of self-esteem.

Fortunately, her integration in the institutional dynamic was very positive and her initial position as an innovative teacher remained quite safe. Precisely, the attitude adopted by the school principal ensured that the situation did not go beyond the control of JC and, in the end, led her to adopt a new *strategic position* sensitive to the distinct emotional situations of the classroom, and, therefore, more flexible. Similar studies like the one conducted by Schmidt & Whitmore (2010) focused on the use of rhetoric resources used by a primary level teacher to address situations of school marginalisation and exclusion, and also highlight the existence and importance of this *strategic position* in classroom management.

In addition, the adoption of this new position produced some changes in the institutional level, including a certain crisis related to the application of Systemic Pedagogy in the classroom, at least regarding behaviour management; also a more

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academic approach, as opposed to having play as the centre of classroom activity. Moreover, some of her priorities such as “*to be loved*” by parents and students, to be able to “*work with all students*” without exception or “*to improve interaction*” faded in significance. Instead, priority was given to experimenting with innovative methods and to a clear attitude of achieving institutional goals (finalise curriculum planning, improve classroom discipline and progressively introduce English as a language of opportunity). However, what appears to be the most relevant finding is that this new strategic position was not only adopted with students but also with colleagues. As a result, she achieved a good level of acceptance among all the teachers and a certain level of leadership in the area of innovative methodologies, based on comments from the final interviews. As mentioned in the results, this transfer from a strategic position as a teacher to a similar one as a colleague and member of the teacher team point indicates that a personal new position can result into an interpersonal and institutional change.

Finally, regarding the integrated dialogical method of analysis, the Multi-level Analysis based on Critical Incidents (MULACI), we consider that this summary of the main findings of the case study offers evidence of its appropriateness to identify and analyse systematic relationships between the distinct levels of the study: institutional, interpersonal and personal, as well as to establish how institutional or interpersonal moves can result into personal changes and vice versa.

However, we also acknowledge there is a need for further research that attempts to establish this type of holistic and systematic relationship through collecting data from across educational interaction levels, and that embraces the complexity and situated nature of teaching in order to overcome the scarcely productive reductionist approach when the focus is on identity development.



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