

# English Language Teachers' Professional Development and Identities

## Identidad y desarrollo profesional de docentes de inglés

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This article analyzes the professional development of two English language teachers in a Mexican language center. In particular, it explores the interplay between professional development, identity and agency, and the part played by English language teaching certificates in all of these. Drawing on a case study methodology, which included the use of a series of three interviews and other qualitative data collection methods, the article demonstrates the intimate and intricate connection between teachers' identities and their professional development. Education implications for policy makers and practitioners are discussed.

*Key words:* Certifications, English language teaching, identity, professional development.

Este artículo analiza el desarrollo profesional de dos profesoras del idioma inglés en un centro de lenguas de una universidad pública mexicana. En particular, el trabajo explora la relación entre desarrollo profesional, identidad y agencia. Se utiliza la metodología de estudio de casos, la cual incluye el uso de entrevistas biográficas y otros métodos de recopilación de datos cualitativos. Los resultados hacen evidente la íntima relación que existe entre la identidad de los profesores y su desarrollo profesional. Se presentan las implicaciones del estudio para los desarrolladores de políticas educativas, los tutores de programas de desarrollo profesional e investigadores.

*Palabras clave:* certificaciones, desarrollo profesional, identidad, profesores de inglés.

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How to cite this article (APA, 6<sup>th</sup> ed.): Mora, A., Trejo, P., & Roux, R. (2014). English language teachers' professional development and identities. *PROFILE Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 16(1), 49-62.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.15446/profile.v16n1.38153>.

This article was received on May 18, 2013, and accepted on November 1, 2013.

## Introduction

Over the last two decades, the literature has recognized the value of identity in understanding various aspects related to teaching English. In particular, researchers have identified the need to study teachers' identity issues and their impact on classrooms and schools' lives (Hayes, 2005, 2009; Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005). However, there is very little research addressing the relationship between English language teachers' professional development (PD) and their identities. This article reports the professional development of two English language teachers in a Mexican language center. In particular, it explores the interplay between professional development and identity and agency, and the part played by English language teaching (ELT) certificates in all of these.

## Theoretical Framework

The literature suggests that the practice of PD in ELT has been informed by three different approaches: the individual approach, the institutional approach, and the teacher-led approach. Although these approaches share some characteristics, the impacts they have on educational institutions and teachers' PD profiles are different.

### The Individual Approach

This approach saw the professional development of teachers as something that was essentially driven by their inner motivation and was exclusively reserved for those with career ambitions (Craft, 2000). The teachers were perceived as the only persons responsible for their PD. Edge (2002) stresses the argument that this view is closely linked to personal development and therefore entirely satisfying and fulfilling for those who are committed to the foreign language teaching profession. Edge's arguments place emphasis on the idea that this approach allows teachers to develop "coherently" because their PD

will be based on their personal authenticity for each decision.

However, the literature has also identified some limitations of this view of PD. For example, it sees teachers as isolated entities and ignores the fact that they are part of a "micro-cosmos" called school, which is immersed in a more complex "cosmos," named society. Therefore, the individual PD decisions made by one teacher will benefit or damage this cosmos (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992). Additionally, although some faculty members are able to develop professionally, others experience feelings of burnout, confusion, and frustration as a result of their isolation. This again could be detrimental not only for the individual but also for the teaching context and/or institution (Bowen & Marks, 1994; Kohonen, 2002; Roberts, 1998). Finally, this view of PD overlooks the cultural aspects of different school environments (Craft, 2000).

### Institutional Professional Development

This view refers to the situation in which policy makers or people with higher authority in an educational setting such as ministries of education, school districts, or individual schools provide their teachers with opportunities to participate in activities that would assist them in enhancing their professional practice. The advantage of encouraging PD in this way is that it may produce observable changes in a relatively short period of time.

However, this view also presents a small number of weaknesses. It is a top-down approach in which something is done *to* the teachers rather than *with* them, frequently only to improve technical skills (Craft, 2000; Day, 1999; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992). This approach, therefore, might lead to superficial cosmetic institutional changes (Myers & Clark, 2002) and difficulties in staff recruitment and retention (Craft, 2000) as a result of teachers' low levels of morale and high levels of stress.

Perhaps the most representative example of how this approach has been adopted in Latin American countries through the use of ELT international certifications is that described by González (2009) in a study carried out in Colombia. She describes the emphasis that the Colombian Ministry of Education has placed on the adoption of foreign models of teacher training with the purpose of improving English language learning at a national level. Programs such as the In-service Certificate in English Language Teaching (ICELT) and the Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT) awarded by the University of Cambridge are mandatory for all English teachers who wish to certify their teaching ability without considering contextual circumstances. Similarly, schools and English teachers must follow the national English language learning program called Bilingual Colombia as prescribed by educational authorities at the national level. This policy, including its associated risks, has also been analyzed by scholars such as Guerrero (2008), Sánchez and Obando (2008), and Usma (2009).

### Teacher-Led Professional Development

Within this approach, teachers are at the center of every educational undertaking. Teachers actively participate in their own professional development by designing paths based on their preferences, beliefs, and perceived needs. They typically receive all of the support they need, and their professional development efforts are valued (Day 1999; Pennington, 1989; Richards, 2002). This, however, does not necessarily mean that teachers are free to pursue their professional development goals without considering institutional needs. A balance must be sought between “collegiality and individuality” (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992, p. 2) that aims at meeting individual and institutional development needs.

The positive aspects of this conception of PD are first, that it values the teachers' expertise and their

contributions to the institution. Second, because PD experiences arise from the teachers' interests, the teachers are more likely to be committed to them, and the changes that emerge from these experiences are deep and long-lasting (Kohonen, 2002) and can be transferred to broader contexts such as the language classroom, students' quality of learning, and language teachers' personal lives.

Whereas in the previous two approaches, the concepts of identity and agency were overlooked and language teachers were often conceived of as technicians who merely needed to learn the right ways to teach (Johnston, 2003), identity becomes a central issue in this approach to PD. We understand identity as a phenomenon that is in continuous change, being reconstructed across contexts and discourses (Gee, 2000-2001; Norton, 2000). Four key elements that influence this reconstruction are culture, society, agency, and subjectivity. It is undeniable that we are social beings who are constructed through our everyday life experiences. The ways in which society and culture respond toward our everyday actions define to a great extent how this self is constructed. In addition to this, the power of global modern institutions can indeed affect the self in a variety of ways (Giddens, 1991). However, we actively construct our selves through reflection and action. Every person is a unique project of a self in the making. It is, in the end, individuals who empower the global institutions that shape selves (Giddens, 1991; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). Similar issues are discussed by Hayes (2005, 2009), Hiver (2013) and Varghese et al. (2005).

The concept of *agency* is also relevant in this professional development model. Biesta and Tedder (2006) have defined agency as “the ability to exert control over, and give direction to one's life” (p. 9). They argue that modern life requires us to respond in a more *agentic* way than would have been the case a few decades ago. This issue is evident in the rapidly changing nature of today's schools, and this in turn

influences many of teachers' PD needs. This is why it is of paramount importance to understand how teachers adjust to these changes and how these changes impact teachers' senses of self.

Three aspects of the work of Biesta and Tedder (2006) are relevant for PD. One is their claim that agency is three-dimensional, featuring influences from the past, orientations toward the future, and engagement with the present. The second aspect is their argument that agency is not a single, measurable thing or simply an attribute of an individual. They propose what they refer to as an ecological understanding of agency in which someone's agency depends on the context in which he or she operates. This means that someone can be *agentic* at home or school but that that may not be the case when it comes to decisions about professional development. And finally, they contend that agency is not fixed. This suggests that we can *learn* to respond differently, perhaps with more agency, in relation to decisions about professional development.

## Method

This paper is based on a case study methodology. This methodology enabled us to study teachers' PD issues, focusing on a particular site and looking for depth and meaning. We therefore based our research around a Mexican language center and, within this center, focused on a small number of English teachers.

Data were collected from six teachers who were very active participants in professional development activities. However, we selected two teachers, Angeline and Paris, for more intensive study for two reasons. They possessed the greatest number of ELT and language certificates in the language center. We felt that these two teachers represented an interesting contrast in the way in which they themselves approached their professional development. They also represented two different models of institutional professional development in a language center.

Following Seidman's (2006) model of in-depth phenomenological interviewing, we conducted a series of three interviews with each participating teacher. These interviews took place at the language center over a six-month period. The two teachers agreed to speak in English during the interviews because they were fluent English speakers and they enjoyed using this language for different purposes. The first interview was about their professional development, with questions about their participation in education and in training and certification courses, their main reasons for pursuing these, their experiences with the certification process, their main sources of support and encouragement, and so forth. The second interview was about the different contexts that had played a role in their professional development, such as home, social and professional contexts, and so forth. The last interview was about the relationship between professional development, identity, and agency.

A number of additional methods were used. Some institutional documents were gathered and analyzed. For example, policy documents about the faculty's professional development and individual records of teachers' participation in professional development activities were reviewed. Field notes about the teachers' engagement with their certification courses and examinations were also taken. Access to these data sources was easily gained because we conducted our research as insiders (Busher, 2002). Maxwell argued that insider researchers may become "a major source of insight, hypotheses, and validity checks" (as cited in Radnor, 2001, p. 30).

We adopted an emic, or inside, approach to data analysis because we were striving to understand PD and identity issues from the participants' point of view (Geertz, 1976). We first conducted an extensive exploration of the transcripts of the three interviews, developing categories of the different factors influencing the two teachers' PD such as the

language center's approach to PD, the PD programs, the participants' home contexts, their academic backgrounds, their employment trajectories, and so forth. The two participating teachers were extensively involved in the interpretation of the data. Once the individual accounts were developed, we asked each teacher to read her respective account and make suggestions or propose alternative interpretations of the data. This resulted in very full accounts of their professional development.

### **The School Context**

The empirical part of this research took place in a language center (LC) that is part of a state university located in the northeastern part of Mexico. The LC has a population of approximately 2,300 students per academic term. Most of the students study English, but French and German are also offered. The current intake is widely diverse in terms of age (16 and over), education background, and socioeconomic status. In a recent study conducted in this setting, Mora, Trejo, and Roux (2013) described that the student population is distributed as follows: 45% are students from local high schools (grades 10 to 12), 30% are undergraduate students, and 25% are professionals who study languages in their free time. Courses at the LC are non-credit because the goal of the program is to help learners enhance their academic and/or employability profiles.

The faculty is composed of 60 English language teachers, two teachers of French, and one teacher of German. Most of the teachers are there on a part-time basis, work under semester contracts, and are paid by the class hour. Many of them hold down other jobs in order to supplement their incomes. Only a group of nine members of the academic staff are there full-time, but they do not have tenure. They have been there for more than five years, coordinating academic programs such as the English language program, the self-access center, the BA in applied linguistics

program, the professional development program, and the area of examinations and certifications.

The LC has been a very active promoter of PD for English teachers. In particular, it has created opportunities for teachers to obtain certificates, both in English language proficiency and in English language teaching. It has been offering internationally recognized certification tests such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language Internet Based Test (TOEFL iBT) and the Cambridge ESOL exams, including the TKT for more than five years now. The center has also been able to offer 13 versions of the ICELT (formerly known as COTE) by Cambridge ESOL in collaboration with the British Council over a period of 16 years. More than 150 teachers have been certified through these courses across the state.

The promotion of these PD activities for teachers has been carried out with subtle differences between the last two administrations that the LC has had in the past eight years, one from June 2003 to June 2007 and the current one from June 2007 to the present. From their arrival, the former administration followed a very tight agenda of teacher professionalization in which certificates played a central role. The administrators first conducted a faculty professional needs analysis the purpose of which was to identify the faculty members' needs in order to design an institutional PD plan. The needs analysis also served to inform the faculty's re-selection and promotion process. They developed the criteria that would be used to (re)select the teachers: The teachers should possess a bachelor's degree, preferably in ELT, but this was not a requirement; they also needed to possess the COTE/ICELT and a certificate in English language proficiency at the Common European Framework B2 level, such as the FCE (Cambridge ESOL First Certificate in English) or the TOEFL ITP. Although it was not explicitly stated, this administration's plan was to standardize the faculty's professional profile and therefore improve the teaching provided by the center.

The teachers who met all of the criteria renewed their contracts and were given the opportunity to apply to a master's degree program abroad. Those teachers who lacked any of the requirements were given a deadline to obtain them. The outcome of that practice was a faculty downsize on the one hand and the creation of opportunities for development on the other. For example, those teachers who expressed their unwillingness to engage in the process of meeting the new institutional requirements set were not rehired; those teachers who fully met all of the requirements and obtained acceptance letters for postgraduate study from foreign universities received full financial support from the LC; and those who expressed their intention to participate in the new process were given the opportunity to take both an English language teacher certification course (COTE) and a language proficiency certificate examination (TOEFL ITP) at a low fee. The administration also developed a bachelor's degree program in applied linguistics within the first three years of the teachers' appointment.

The current administration followed a similar plan to create similar minimum criteria for the selection, promotion, and development of faculty members. The minimum entrance requirement is a band 3 out of 4 on the TKT and a certificate in English language proficiency at the Common European Framework B2 level. This administration has continued to offer PD opportunities such as preparation courses for the TKT and an academic support program for the ICELT. It has also invested energy, time, and money in the encouragement and support of the teachers' PD efforts, such as offering discounts on the ICELT tuition fees and giving rebates to those who obtain high scores on language proficiency examinations such as the FCE or the Certificate of Advanced English (CAE) by Cambridge ESOL. However, the teachers' employment status is not affected if they are unwilling to enroll in or unable to complete any of the PD programs the center offers.

After four years, the results of this administration in terms of PD are mixed. Some teachers have been able to certify their teaching ability through the ICELT courses that have been offered at the center. Others have not been able or willing to participate in or complete PD activities. Similarly, the BA program in applied linguistics designed by the previous administration has become an important source of teachers in that some of the former students have joined the center's faculty. Only a small number of teachers have made individual efforts to engage in postgraduate study apart from institutional efforts.

### **Case Study: The Teachers**

#### **Angeline**

Angeline is a hardworking and responsible person. She said that she became an English teacher because "I love English and have always been eager to share my knowledge with other people." In fact, most of her academic and professional decisions have been influenced by her love for the English language. She said that she decided to study hotel and tourism management at the university because she thought that she would have opportunities to use foreign languages in that field. When she realized that that was not necessarily the case, she decided to get a part-time job teaching English to young learners. However, she did not have a positive experience there because the "kids were spoiled and I would not have the chance to enforce discipline there." That is why she decided to move to her current job at the LC, where she teaches young adult and adult learners and where she feels happy because "the students are there because they want to, not because they have to."

At her present work, Angeline considered that "the best definition of me as a teacher would be strict but friendly, and knowledgeable but conscious that I don't know everything." In fact, she thought that she was always "open to new knowledge and challenges that



I can encounter in my profession.” She sees herself as a teacher who takes her profession very seriously and “my inner driving force is the main reason that pushes me pursuing different goals regarding my profession.” In particular, she said that she feels happy when she has students who really want to learn. She said she particularly enjoys watching her students succeed by obtaining English language proficiency certificates. She is always looking for opportunities to develop her English skills and those of the people around her. Ever since she joined the faculty at her present job, she implemented a personal policy that forces her to use English with her colleagues and students at all times within the workplace, despite the fact that Spanish is normally used outside of the class.

#### **Home Context**

Angeline lives with her mother, father, and younger siblings in the city where she was born. Both of her parents are professionals who have instilled in her “responsibility, love of reading, and enthusiasm to progress.” In particular, she feels that her parents have provided her with all of the economic and moral support needed to engage in academic and professional development activities, including the learning of English. She recalls that her parents once told her that “a quality professional needs to be well prepared and updated.” For example, she said that it was her mother who gave her the advice that the COTE in the end would bring her great benefits, which she thinks was “proved right.” That is why she considers that obtaining English language teaching certificates is valuable in her profession. She reflects that the decision to pursue certificates in the end has been made by her, but “my parents support has definitely been really helpful and encouraging.”

#### **Academic Background**

Most of Angeline’s professional studies have taken place at the university where she now works.

After she obtained her bachelor’s degree in hotel management, she resumed her English studies at the LC, where she now holds a teaching position and is one of the coordinators of the self-access center. She said that she first took the FCE examination in December 2000 because “it was a requirement to work there” (at the language center). Although she did not obtain the mark she had expected, she passed the exam, and she recalls that when she received her certificate she felt “really happy and with a sense of fulfillment.”

In 2003, the administration of the language center implemented an internal policy requiring all uncertified teachers to enroll in the COTE course. Participation in the COTE involved monthly three-hour trips to another city within the state for the face-to-face sessions. At that time, she thought she was not prepared to take the course because “I didn’t feel ready then. I wasn’t quite ready to write essays in English, which is one of my weaknesses in the language.” She said she had no choice but to take the course; otherwise “I wouldn’t be hired.” However, when she was awarded her COTE at the beginning of the year 2005, she says, “I couldn’t believe I got it, but I was thrilled and felt so proud of myself, because I had reached another professional and personal goal.”

After she had completed the COTE, she also took several other certificate tests. She says that she took them for different reasons. For example, in 2005, she was also required to take the TOEFL ITP as part of the job requirements. She also took the FCE again in 2006 because she “wanted to get a higher mark in it,” which she eventually did. She also took the TOEFL iBT in 2009 because “I was interested in getting a scholarship to do a master’s degree in the USA.” Unfortunately, she said that her application for the scholarship was not approved, and so she was unable to participate in the program in the USA. However, she was admitted into a master’s degree program in the UK in 2010 because she met all of the requirements, including a good mark

on the IELTS. She completed her master's in the fall of 2011 and came back to work.

### **Employment Trajectory**

Angeline's first job was in a private local English language institute, teaching English to young learners. However, she only worked there for a short period of time because of the discipline problems she said she encountered there. That is why she decided to move to her current job (the LC). Because she is there on a part-time basis and does not have social security, she also obtained a job in a local public kindergarten so as to be given "you know, the benefits we all want in a job." Her professional life has taken place mainly in these two different contexts for the last eleven years.

### **Job Context**

At the LC, her main roles have been as teacher and self-access advisor. As a teacher, she has more than ten years' experience teaching the different levels of English proficiency offered there. However, she now teaches preparation courses for certificate examinations. She says she views her role as the FCE preparation course teacher as challenging but also as an opportunity to continue improving her English language skills. She says that when she was offered to teach it, she felt she "was not prepared to teach at that level." However, she considers that her experience taking different certificate examinations has given her the confidence of being able to prepare her students by "reassuring my English, researching about any grammar topic I know little about and preparing an interesting and valuable class for my students." She has also worked as a self-access center (SAC) advisor for almost three years now. These three years, though, were interrupted for one year when she was in the UK doing postgraduate study.

Angeline has thought about the relationship between the process of obtaining the COTE and its application to her professional life. She says that although at the

beginning she was unhappy with the institutional policy requiring her to participate in the COTE course, "In the end I was really grateful with the person that pushed me to take it because the accomplishment of finishing and getting the certificate gave me such assurance in my teaching role as well as at the personal role." She also believes that having completed the COTE opened up for her new opportunities for development. She says that "I think it [the COTE] was one of the things that helped me to get a scholarship for an exchange program in the UK" where she served as a Spanish teacher of international students at a well-known British university for a period of three months.

### **Paris**

Paris considered that she was "a hardworking and reliable person, student, and teacher." She said that she learned to be independent and work hard for what she wanted from a very early age. She said that "nobody has given me anything just for free; everything I have is the result of my determination and hard work." She also described herself as "a person who sets her own goals in life without caring about what others do." She considered that she has managed to achieve goals in life because of her sustained efforts, patience, and self-confidence. She is also convinced that this personal approach has strongly influenced her academic and professional decisions.

As a teacher, she describes herself as "someone who likes to plan my classes to be able to solve any problems related to my students' learning process." She regards planning and preparation as essential aspects in any teaching situation. She said she knows "it takes time for me outside the classroom, but it is an investment, not a waste of time." She sees planning as something that "contributes to my own confidence in front of the class and my students' effective learning." She says that she likes to read in advance about any topic they will be discussing in classes and that she often uses online resources for that.



### Home Context

Paris comes from a working-class family in which her father was the only one who worked and her mother stayed at home and took care of her and her sister. She grew up in a small apartment located in a quiet and inexpensive neighborhood. Her parents instilled in her "the value of being independent and working hard for what one wants." All of her formal education has taken place in local public schools. She said that she has managed to save her parents' money by "taking advantage of all the scholarships I have earned thanks to my high grades at school." She said that although her parents did not invest money in her education, she knows that she has always had their "moral help anytime, anywhere."

### Academic Background

As is the case with Angeline, most of Paris's professional studies have taken place at the university where she now works. In 2005, she first obtained a bachelor's degree in business administration. She graduated with honors, earning the highest GPA of all of her cohort. During her undergraduate program, she also studied English at the LC simultaneously. Toward the end of her undergraduate program, she decided to take the FCE, in March 2004, because "I wanted to achieve a good level of language knowledge."

Ever since she joined the LC's faculty in 2006, she says that she has had an active role in her development as a teacher, student, and person. She says that she has had the chance to obtain English language certificates such as the ICALT and the Applied Linguistics Updating Diploma Course for Language Teachers (ALAD) offered by the Autonomous National University of Mexico (UNAM). She participated in the former in 2007-2008 and in the latter in 2009-2010. In both programs, she had an outstanding performance, obtaining the highest marks. In addition, she says she has been able to "renew my TOEFL twice." She considers that "having a degree, certificate, or diploma

means you are willing to learn anytime, and the LC has emphasized the correlation between getting these documents and the range of job opportunities you can have and the money you can make."

Paris views her participation in the different professional development activities as programs that "are going to help me to achieve bigger goals in my life in general." She also says that her next logical step forward in her academic development is the pursuit of a master's degree in a foreign country. She says that she strongly believes that all of the experience and preparation she has been gaining will be useful when "I study my master degree abroad someday." She sums up the role of certificates in her development by saying that "these kinds of certification programs move you to learn and to be updated for today's changing world."

### Employment Trajectory

Before becoming an English teacher, Paris held other two jobs. Those jobs were related to her specialty, which was business administration. When she was soon to complete her bachelor's degree, she worked as an office assistant in a local business for a short period of time. After graduating, she was then offered another job as a sales assistant with a local car dealer, where she also served for a short period of time. However, one day, a 55-year-old woman asked her to teach her private English lessons for a six-month period. There, she realized that "it was the beginning of a professional career." She said that this profession "has given me a lot of challenges and rewards and is where I feel more confident and where I have achieved most of my professional and personal goals so far."

### Analysis of the Case Study

The data analysis reveals that the two participating teachers have achieved high levels of PD. This was evidenced by the fact that they have managed to participate in a wide range of professional

development activities in a short period of time. However, a deeper analysis of their descriptions of the ways in which they have participated in the different PD activities reveals that the process has been much more complex than it may seem. It seems that Angeline took longer to develop this high degree of development than Paris did. The biographical data we collected and presented about their PD allow us to explore possible answers to the question of why their PD processes have been rather different.

Perhaps the most likely answer to this question has to do with their identities. For a start, the two participating teachers were exposed to different ways of encouraging PD by their respective administrations. In the case of Angeline, the administrators chose and made the arrangements to offer the PD activities that they felt were needed by the faculty. They also designed and implemented institutional policies regarding teacher participation in such activities. Angeline started her participation in PD activities as a result of the policies implemented by this administration. In her narration, she described that she decided to take the FCE examination because it “was a requirement to work there.” Similarly, she also described how she was “pushed” to participate in the ICELT course, “otherwise I would be fired.” That is to say, the beginning of her PD was a mere reaction to the professional demands established by her employer.

Her account of her reactions to these events revealed that she started the programs with little confidence in her academic ability. This was further evidenced by her description of how she was asked to teach the preparation course for the FCE examination when she felt she was not prepared because of her weak writing skills in English. Yet her participation in these programs appears to have had a resilience effect on her. Those initial feelings of insecurity were transformed into emotions of resilience. She said in the interviews that she developed “a sense of fulfillment” and a desire for further professional

advancement once she completed the ICELT course. Similarly, she mentioned that she now conceives of herself as the “teacher of the course that prepares students to take the FCE examination.” In other words, her identity gained strength because of the requirement implemented by her authorities.

Paris, on the other hand, was a teacher during the 2007-2011 administration. The description Paris provided of her experiences in the different PD activities suggests that she did not need much encouragement to participate in the different activities. That is to say, she seems to have taken advantage of the different PD activities because she saw them as opportunities to “move you to learn and be updated.” Her approach appeared to consist of having positive thoughts and being prepared for when opportunities arise. An analysis of her academic trajectory as an English teacher corroborates her adoption of this positive approach to PD. As soon as she completed a PD activity, she was presented with a new, perhaps more challenging, opportunity, which she was normally ready to seize. For example, she went from obtaining the FCE to the ICELT to the ALAD through to an academic stay in the USA over a five-year period.

Second, the PD programs themselves were identified as factors that played different roles in the two teachers’ development. The two LC administrations strongly relied on certificate examinations and courses such as the FCE, TOEFL, ICELT, and so forth to promote teacher PD, and these two teachers were frequent participants. The description Paris provided of her experiences in the different PD activities suggests that she viewed her participation in the activities as opportunities to enhance her teaching practice. She said that those programs had helped her raise her “confidence” in being able to prepare her students better. In addition, she made it clear that she viewed such programs as part of a long-term learning process. That is to say, her approach appears to consist

of seeing each and every PD activity as a means, rather than an ends, that enables her to achieve “bigger goals in life.” Moreover, although she acknowledged in her account other benefits or “correlations” associated with the acquisition of teacher qualifications, such as “higher pay or possibilities for promotion,” she sees these as consequences rather than causes.

Angeline, in contrast, also highlighted the idea that her participation in the different PD programs had helped her become more confident in planning and teaching “interesting and valuable classes for my students.” However, she placed stronger emphasis on how the certification process had left her with a sense of the need to look for further PD opportunities. In particular, she stated in the interviews that once she was awarded the ICALT, she developed a strong desire to pursue other, perhaps more challenging, teaching qualifications. In sum, although Paris did not state it explicitly, these courses and programs may also serve as potential sources for strengthening teachers' identities as competent professionals.

Third, there were differences between the two teachers in their degrees of pro-activity toward PD. In the case of Paris, although she was a relatively new member of the ELT profession when she began her PD journey at the LC, she was able to appropriately take advantage of and manage the PD activities available to her from the beginning because of the strong academic identity she had constructed as a result of her sustained achievements throughout her academic life. In contrast, Angeline needed more time to reaffirm her confidence in order to face the different challenges that the required PD activities represented for her. Her account revealed that her decisions about PD at the beginning of her career were made by merely reacting to institutional requirements. This was evidenced by her initial reluctance to participate in the ICALT course because she felt she “was not ready for it” and because she saw it as “an imposition.” However, after seeing all of the benefits related to the award of

such certificates, she adopted a more proactive role in her decisions about PD. For example, these decisions included the attempt to obtain “higher scores” on the TOEFL and IELTS examinations and her application to, and eventual participation in, a master's degree program abroad.

Our analysis of this case study suggests that a number of factors might play a role in these teachers' PD. These include differences in the approach to PD adopted by the school administration, the impact that the PD courses and programs had on them, and their agentic orientations. The analysis then highlights both the complexity of the PD process and the value of the theoretical framework in revealing this complexity.

### **Conclusions: Educational Implications of the Research**

The present research has some implications for educational policy and practice and for researchers. First, the findings of the case study make problematic the arguments that regard institutional approaches to PD as inadequate. It is common to find in the literature on PD the contention that institutional approaches are top-down, cause teachers low levels of morale and high levels of stress (Craft, 2000), and lead to superficial cosmetic changes (Myers & Clark, 2002). In this case, Angeline may have experienced feelings similar to those described by Craft (2000) in the early stages of her development. However, her identity was greatly strengthened as a result of her participation in the different PD programs, in particular after completing the ICALT course. Therefore, the evidence of the case study suggests that the appropriateness of institutional approaches to PD may well vary significantly from teacher to teacher. In this case, it worked well for Angeline but had little or no effect on Paris.

Second, the findings also have implications concerning the issue of teacher empowerment and the role that ELT certifications might play. The case study highlighted the idea that once the two participants

were awarded a certificate, they developed a stronger desire to pursue further qualifications. In other words, ELT certificates may not only serve as evidence of someone's ability to teach English. They may also serve as instruments of empowerment and as catalysts for further development. Hiver (2013) and Hayes (2005, 2009) described similar issues in their research contexts, which is why we believe that this finding deserves further exploration in subsequent studies.

The previous issue, however, may have disturbing implications for policy-makers. Although some teachers may have the financial resources, institutional support, and academic skills to pursue qualifications, others may not be that fortunate. This is especially true in the ELT field, in which little or no support for PD is available owing to its low status (see Johnston 2003; Nunan, 2001; and Pennington, 1992 for this point). This interpretation, of course, is only based on the participating teachers' perspectives and our own observations (and without doubt, more research needs to be conducted that takes into account other perspectives such as those of their students and school administrators). However, if this were the case, then certificates would pose the risk of widening the PD gap between certified and uncertified teachers within an institution and among institutions. This is an issue that deserves further research.

Third, the findings also have implications for PD advisors. The evidence presented here suggests that teachers may exhibit different degrees of pro-activity towards PD. However, these degrees of pro-activity may well be altered. In the case of Paris, she did not need much encouragement to participate in PD activities. Although she was a relatively new member of the ELT profession when she started her PD journey at the LC, she was able to appropriately approach the PD activities available to her because of the strong academic identity she had constructed as a result of her sustained achievements throughout her academic life. Angeline, on the other hand, started her journey

with doubts about her capability to successfully meet the academic demands of some PD programs. However, after seeing all of the benefits related to receiving such certificates, she experienced the arousal of a desire to pursue further PD activities, such as the attempt to obtain higher scores on the TOEFL and IELTS examinations and to apply for a master's degree program abroad.

This gives support to Biesta and Tedder's (2006) argument that teachers' agency is constructed by experiences from the past, the present, and a vision toward the future. They go on to suggest that agency is not fixed. This means that teachers can learn to respond differently, perhaps more agentically, in relation to decisions about PD. In this case, Angeline needed more time than Paris to reaffirm her confidence in facing the different challenges that the required PD activities represented for her. The implication for PD advisors is the need to understand teachers' identities in order to determine the ways in which they can be encouraged and supported to develop professionally. This can be achieved through dialogical interactions with individual teachers about their past, present, and future experiences, which in turn can enable them to gain control of the directions of their professional lives.

Finally, the concepts of identity and agency have been very useful in our understanding of these teachers' PD. In neither case would we have been able to make full sense of the ways in which they had approached their PD if we had not known what it was that they themselves were bringing to it. After collecting their biographical data through three interviews, however, we know a great deal about how their identities have been developing, where their agentic orientations come from, and the implications of these for teachers' PD. For example, in the case of Paris, we could never have understood why a new member of the teaching profession was able to appropriately manage the rigorous demands posed

by the ICELT and ALAD courses and to establish long-term professional plans if we had not learned in detail about her academic background and her vision for the future.

Similarly, if we had not analyzed Angeline's PD path as a teacher, we would have attributed her initial reluctance to participate in some PD activities to the institutional approach to PD adopted by her school authorities. However, after the analysis of her participation in subsequent, perhaps more challenging, PD activities and her description of her feelings of fulfillment after completing the ICELT course, we are now in a better position to understand that she was then in the early stages of constructing her academic identity. We therefore contend that any analysis of teachers' PD must consider the roles of identity and agency.

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