

## Teaching in higher education in nursing and identity construction: entry, career and permanence



*Docência no ensino superior em enfermagem e constituição identitária: ingresso, trajetória e permanência*

*Docencia de la enseñanza superior en enfermería y constitución identitaria: ingreso, trayectoria y permanencia*

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To identify and analyze the relation between biographical and relational processes in constituting the professional identity of the nursing course faculty in higher education institutions in the state of Goiás, Brazil;

**Method:** This study is a qualitative research, data were collected in 2014, attended by 11 teachers from four nursing courses. A semi-structured interview was used. Data analysis was guided by the thematic content analysis modality and discussions used the theoretical-philosophical framework of Dubar.

**Results:** Three thematic categories were identified: The entry into higher education teaching in nursing; The identity construction process of teaching in nursing and; Identity, career and permanence in the teaching profession.

**Final considerations:** The constitution of the teaching professional identity required a complex negotiation between the biographic and relational aspects, highlighting the search for professional faculty development mechanisms.

**Keywords:** Faculty, nursing. Education, higher. Professional role. Nursing.

### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Identificar e analisar a relação entre os processos biográficos e relacionais na constituição da identidade profissional dos docentes dos cursos de enfermagem em instituições de ensino superior no estado de Goiás, Brasil.

**Método:** Trata-se de pesquisa qualitativa cujos dados foram coletados em 2014 e da qual participaram 11 professores de quatro cursos de enfermagem. Foi utilizada a entrevista semiestruturada. A análise dos dados foi norteada pela análise de conteúdo modalidade temática e, para as discussões, utilizou-se o referencial teórico-filosófico de Dubar.

**Resultados:** Foram identificadas três categorias temáticas: O ingresso na docência do ensino superior em enfermagem; O processo de constituição identitária do docente em enfermagem e Identidade, trajetória e permanência na profissão docente.

**Considerações finais:** A constituição da identidade profissional docente exigiu uma complexa negociação entre os aspectos biográficos e relacionais, evidenciando a busca por mecanismos de desenvolvimento profissional docente.

**Palavras-chave:** Docentes de enfermagem. Ensino superior. Papel profissional. Enfermagem.

### RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** Identificar y analizar la relación entre procesos biográficos y relacionales en la constitución de la identidad profesional de los docentes de enfermería, en instituciones de enseñanza (IES) del estado de Goiás, Brasil.

**Método:** Es una investigación cualitativa cuyos datos fueron obtenidos en el 2014, y de la cual participaron once profesores de cuatro cursos de enfermería. Se utilizó una entrevista semiestructurada. El análisis de los datos se realizó a través del análisis del contenido en la modalidad temática.

**Resultados:** Se identificaron tres categorías temáticas: Entrada en la enseñanza de la educación superior en enfermería; El proceso de construcción de la identidad de la enseñanza de la enfermería y la identidad, la historia y permanecer en la profesión docente.

**Consideraciones finales:** La constitución de la identidad profesional de la enseñanza requiere una negociación compleja entre los aspectos biográficos y relacionales, destacando la búsqueda de mecanismos de desarrollo profesional de los docentes.

**Palabras clave:** Docentes de enfermería. Educación Superior. Rol profesional. Enfermería.

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## ■ INTRODUCTION

Research in the field of teacher education gained importance mainly from the end of the 1970s, in Brazil and in the world, however, when research surrounding the question of identity and teacher professionalization, still occupies a small portion, showing diversity of theoretical perspectives indicating a weak link between researchers and fluidity in this field <sup>(1)</sup>.

Some studies<sup>(2-6)</sup> on the training of teachers and identity construction of nursing teachers in higher education, revealed that teachers seek changes related to their educational training mainly to fit the legal guidelines that propose the use of a more dialogical and integrated perspective, as opposed to the appreciation of technical and scientific education in this area of expertise. Although there is a trend to carry out pedagogical training focused on these faculty members, experiences and inspiration from those teachers considered remarkable are still used as the main source of teaching knowledge <sup>(2,4,7)</sup>.

Encouraging teacher training has also been used as retention mechanism in the academia, favoring the formation of partnerships between beginners and experienced teachers as well as conducting research on the development of teaching and its practice, considering that teaching in higher education has been carried out in contexts where individualism is still prevalent, work is precarious and there is a belief that to be a university professor all you need is to be a good professional with initial training, undervaluing pedagogical training <sup>(7-8)</sup>.

The understanding of one's professional identity also involves knowledge of factors such as choice, entry and career path in higher education teaching, which can provide support for the construction of effective teacher training practices, since there are multivariate career conditions. For example, there are teachers who are considered beginners, but have wide experience in nursing assistance, and others who have extensive academic training, such as masters and doctorates, but no professional experience in care in nursing. In both conditions, they facing dilemmas to perform the work as teachers <sup>(6)</sup>.

In the current investigation proposal for understanding the constitution of the teaching professional identity, the theoretical-philosophical framework according to Dubar <sup>(9-10)</sup> was adopted. Because it is a complex reference, this article presented some of the key concepts for the understanding of professional identity. The identity can be conceived because of the socialization process, which occurs

as a result of the congruence of relational and biographical processes. The relational processes are those where the subject is analyzed by another within the systems where they operate and fall; biographical processes are those that deal with history, skills and individual projects. As identity of one person is uncorrelated to the identity of another, identity is constructed and becomes recognized by through the eyes of another, in a field of uncertainty and varied durability <sup>(9-10)</sup>.

The establishment of a professional identity can be understood through two processes: the first process is understood as ascribing an identity through institutions and agents that are in direct interaction with individuals, this leads to a variable form of labeling, producing what is understood as virtual social identity. The second case concerns the active internalization, the incorporation of this identity by the individuals themselves. It can only be considered within the social trajectories in which individuals construct "identities for themselves", which are nothing more than the story they tell of what they are; otherwise understood as a real social identity <sup>(10)</sup>.

The complex communication adopted by the subject is critical in the identity negotiation process between contradictions and confirmations, objectivity and subjectivity, acceptance and rejection, certainties and uncertainties, having the individual career as reference, avoiding labels as predefined identities <sup>(10)</sup>.

Thus, the process of identity formation is occurring because of the tension between acts of assignment and acts of belonging. While the acts of assignment correspond to the identity of others, acts of belonging indicate the identity given to themselves. The tense movement, characterized precisely by the contrast between what the subject is expected to assume and be and what the individual desires to assume and be in terms of identity <sup>(10)</sup>.

A teacher's professional life cycle has an interface with the identity formation process offering an understanding of one's professional development from a sequence of steps that occur in general and can vary in duration according to each person's cycle. The first phase of a teacher's professional life cycle called "career entry" is the first 2-3 years in the profession, it is the moment when the individual explores, where the initial contact with teaching situations occurs, verifying situations that are common to survival and the discovery of professional life, where in them questions are perceived involving what is ideal and real in the profession, the shock with reality, the conflicts surrounding the possibilities to

remain in or leave this activity. The second phase, called “Stabilization” is considered a key moment in which the final choice for the teaching profession takes place, although not always easily, but a sense of freedom and identification with the profession is instilled consolidated through pedagogical actions. This phase usually takes place from the end of the entry phase, until the 6th year as a professional <sup>(11)</sup>.

The phases that follow are: the diversification phase (7-25 years of career) particularly marked by a search for new professional challenges, by more pedagogical experimentation, appreciating personal experiences in the composition of practices applied at work in search of new challenges associated to the fear of losing enthusiasm for the profession; next is serenity and affective distance (25-35 years in the career) particularly marked by a search for new professional challenges, more educational experimentation, enhancement of personal experiences in the composition of work practices, where the search for new challenges is associated with the fear of losing enthusiasm for the profession. Finally, conservatism and lamentations, and disinvestment (35-40 years in the career). This phase can occur in one of two ways: serene or bitter. It will depend on the subjectivity attributed and build by each professional throughout their professional life <sup>(11)</sup>.

The motivation for the study was established from the effort to understand how higher education teachers build their identity, considering this is a complex field of study and the professional experiences of the authors as teachers themselves. This investigation was guided by the following questions: who are the teachers who teach in undergraduate nursing courses in higher education institutions? Do they identify with this profession? How is their professionalism formed? What do they plan for their professional future?

This study's objective is to identify and analyze the relation between biographical and relational processes in constituting the professional identity of the nursing course faculty in higher education institutions in the state of Goiás, Brazil.

## ■ METHODOLOGY

This was a qualitative study of descriptive and exploratory nature <sup>(12)</sup>. The study was conducted in the state of Goiás, Brazil, in public higher education institutions and municipal foundations. The existence of four public higher education institutes was identified through a survey per-

formed on E-mec <sup>(13)</sup>. Their legal natures were as follows: one federal agency, one state agency, two municipal foundations. Among these four institutions, there were eight undergraduate courses in nursing. The criteria used to choose the course of each institution were: longest time of existence and classroom teaching modality. Thus, the selected courses were in the cities of Goiânia, Ceres, Goiatuba and Rio Verde <sup>(13)</sup>.

The inclusion criteria for the selection of research participants were: holding a degree in nursing, being a teacher of a nursing course at one of the higher education institutions selected, and having taught for more than three years at the institution. To elect the criterion time in teaching career, we used the overall trends in the professional life cycle of teachers <sup>(11)</sup>, in this case, with emphasis from the phase of “stabilization” considered a key moment in which the definitive choice for the teaching profession is made (4-6 years in the career).

To select of research participants, the course directions/ coordinations were asked to provide a list of all teachers in the institutions. In cases where the institution did not provide such list, a survey of the faculty was performed on site in each institution and the teachers' curricula was verified through the *lattes* Platform with the intention of gathering information about their academic training and their date of admission to the institution. Next, a random sampling draw was held from the list of participants who met the inclusion criteria described above, and subsequently, an invitation was extended for teachers to participate in the research using email or phone calls. Only one participant refused to participate, in which case a new draw was held. Three participants from each institution were interviewed, but in one institution only two participants were interviewed, as they met the inclusion criteria.

The criterion for defining the number of participants was theoretical saturation, which indicates the suspension of adding new participants once the data becomes repetitive. This way, the researcher can determine collection be suspended based on the constant analysis of data <sup>(14)</sup>.

The Free and Informed Consent Form (FICF) was presented to participants, and interviews were only held after the participant granted their consent. This study was part of a research matrix, which sought to investigate the process of construction of teacher identity among nurse teachers (Opinion No. 711.121, approved by the Ethics Committee of the Escola de Enfermagem de Ribeirão Preto da Universidade de São Paulo, 07/07/2014).

The data collection process took place between September and December of 2014. As a resource for obtaining the data a semi-structured interview<sup>(12,15)</sup> was used as a resource for obtaining the data, and was performed in the respective educational institution of each participant, in room reserved for this purpose, with an average duration of one hour. The guiding questions of the interview were: How did you become a teacher? How do you perceive your professional teaching performance? How do you describe yourself as a teacher? What would you do differently in your professional career? Do you have plans for your teaching career? What makes the performance of your teaching profession easier? What hinders the performance of your teaching profession?

Audio recordings were made and the interviews were transcribed. To preserve the participant's identity, actual names were replaced by a fictitious name. Eleven teachers from the selected courses were interviewed.

Data analysis was based on content analysis, specifically in thematic categories according to Bardin<sup>(16)</sup>. Thematic analysis attempted to establish the "meaning cores" inserted in the interview transcripts, and whose presence or frequency appearances had significance for the research question. The analysis technique developed in three phases: pre-analysis, selection of analysis units and categorization process<sup>(16)</sup>. The contribution of the theoretical framework proposed by Dubar<sup>(9-10)</sup> was presented in the discussions from the analysis of the core concepts presented in his work in conjunction with the testimonies of the participants.

## ■ RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As most relevant approach characteristics between participants are sex, all are women, marital status (seven of eleven participants are married), and having children (eight participants have between one and three children). The participant's age varied between 28 and 58 years of age, with the average age being 37.9 years. Three of the 11 participants work exclusively at the institutes where they were recruited, two work exclusively in higher education teaching and six work in more than one job, most of them as welfare nurses. Seven participants are effectively employed in the educational institutions and four work on a temporary contract.

Time as a teacher ranges between three and 35 years of experience, with an average of 11 years. Among the professionals, six are currently in the stabilization cycle; four in the diversification and questioning phase and

two in the affective detachment and disinvestment phase. The academic qualification of participants are as follows: three are masters and five are specialists. Nine of the teachers teach between three and five undergraduate disciplines. Three of the teachers work in academic management positions in the course to which they are linked. Only two in 11 of the teachers also work in *post-graduate courses*.

The data analysis revealed three thematic categories: The entry into higher education teaching in nursing; The identity construction process of teaching in nursing and; Identity, career and permanence in the teaching profession.

### Entry into higher education teaching in nursing

Contingency stood out as a factor that motivated the entry into the profession for most of the participants, chance prevailing as justification through the use of expressions such as "I fell into this job", or even divine intervention:

*I never thought I would be a teacher, I think almost everyone is sort of thrown into it, I know I was, too [...] (Joana).*

*There were two openings, I came in first place, with a perfect score [...] So, I think it was God's plan for me (Lia).*

Only three in 11 participants expressed a desire and plan to enter the profession. As strategies that have led to their preparation for entry into the profession are being a teaching assistant while getting their bachelor's degree, investing in training by taking post-graduate courses, that privilege reflections on university teaching:

*I had guidance counseling with a psychologist and directed my efforts to this, this is what I wanted. So, I ended up opting for nursing because I thought I would have opportunities to work as a teacher in this area, since I was an undergrad, I was always involved in research activities, I was a teaching assistance, so I've always had this interest since I began college (Sofia).*

The participants considered assuming the professional identity of a higher education teacher a demanding process and recognized that their training as nurses didn't provide them the tools to work as teachers, pointing to a need to invest in professional teaching courses, exemplified in the speeches below<sup>(2,5-6)</sup>.

*It's funny, I always say that those who graduate in Nursing aren't able to learn to be a teacher. I always say I didn't graduate to be a teacher. [...] we don't have a very broad vision of teaching. But then we learn (Victoria).*

*[...] But I didn't have any specialization in university teaching, in specific training for teachers, [...] I think it would be more feasible if I had a real training course for teaching. I think every teacher should take one (Rosa).*

Thus, understanding the entry into the profession is directly connected to the professional identity constitution process, and for the participating teachers, the understanding they have about the motivation for entering the profession are situated in more of an external field (a life contingency) than an internal one (a choice)<sup>(10)</sup>.

### The identity construction process of teaching in nursing

The participants' professional description in this category showed aspects that made it possible to understand how their professional identity was constituted, for "what exists are ways of identifying one's self, variables that have presented themselves throughout the collective history and personal life of these individuals, destining them to various categories that depend on context"<sup>(9:14)</sup>. The ways of identifying are two: the identifications assigned by others and identification claimed by one's self, both being grounds for the notion of identity forms<sup>(9-10)</sup>.

Thus, the study did not intend to make an opposition between the identity form taken by the participants, or which one is preferable, but to understand what belief they have when assuming an identity for themselves and before others and how they relate to configuring the individual's identity. The reports provided by teachers showed the assumption of a name for themselves such as "demanding", creating an ideal teacher, who teaches and protects students from future suffering, justified by past experiences, as they have indicated:

*I see myself as demanding. I'm demanding because I realize there is a lot that I have been through in my professional life because teachers didn't teach me. I remember the hardship, [...] and because of that, because I know they will suffer a lot because of the demands out there, that's why I am demanding (Helena).*

*What I really want is for them to question me about anything and to be able to answer...give them knowledge, clarity(Clarice).*

*Look, nursing has its own fame, we had very severe training, because of my insecurity when I started in teaching, was very strict, you know? I was like a former teacher of fundamentals, I made the students suffer (Fernanda).*

The intended professorial identity in this case is the teacher with technical expertise and that knows how to "transmit" knowledge, an aspect directly connected to the traditional teaching model, centered on the teacher figure as aspect directly linked to the traditional model of education focused on the teacher figure as the center of knowledge<sup>(8)</sup>. What can contribute to the understanding of the model assumed in the identity constitution of the teachers included in this research was that the experience as nurses in care practice was often related to suffering and professional demand, since they did not feel adequately prepared for this reality during the undergraduate education. Thus, they assumed a protective role before the students/future nurses with the intention of teaching them how to deal with this possible reality, simulating this scenario filled with requirements under through their teaching and learning process, as if it were an 'obligation' to be defended and which also revealed the strong role of affectivity in educational relations<sup>(2,6)</sup>.

However, in the identity construction process is the possibility for the individual to accept or deny what is determined by the other, and rebuild otherwise. In this case, only the student will carry out the processes of choice for their professional identity<sup>(10)</sup>. As a strengthening aspect of teaching trust was the recognition of limits and possibilities to transform, as shown in the following speech:

*[...] I see myself as being hard and soft at the same time, I try to get as much from students as I can and to do my best, but I think there are a lot of limitations (Joana).*

Thus, to consolidate their professional identity as teachers, they need to invest in their professional development, especially creating conditions to expand personal autonomy and confidence<sup>(5:17)</sup>. The participants also revealed that teacher models who they encountered during their experience as students provided important elements to the process of constitution of the professional teaching identity:



*I think that nursing is a bit methodical in that sense, very rigid, it must be very severe, that wasn't good for me in college, I chose to not repeat that and throughout the years I've seen many calm teachers, from other courses, that were more laid back, you know? (Fernanda).*

*I don't know, I think we end up becoming a copy of what we thought of our teachers and end up repeating what we learned from them as far as behavior goes [...] (Roberta).*

*[...] I think I may have reproduced what I experienced as a college student [...] so I think maybe it was a reproduction. Through the master's program I started to think more and more that I could bring contributions [...] (Marta).*

Another significant influence on the participants when they entered the teaching profession was living with experienced teachers in the context of work, which represented a professional training strategy for them through the exchanges and intergenerational sharing<sup>(3,5,17)</sup>. The relationship between teachers who are contemporaneous exist and therefore share the work at the same time but with different experiments since they are at different stages of the teacher professional life cycle<sup>(11)</sup>, as seen below:

*[...] what helped build me to be a teacher, my teachers, the reflection left by them and experience with the teachers here. I asked for a lot of help at first, wondering how to do this, is it this way; remembering my teachers, what my teacher taught me what he did, he did this and that, and I asked my colleagues with the most experience here at the institution (Helena).*

*[...] So, in the beginning I have had contact with many good teachers, here at the College who had been here for a while, and were able to help me in this experience, this exchange with those who are arriving and those with more experience in academia, it's really interesting (Sofia).*

These considerations show how learning how to teach was influenced by previous experiences and while teaching, however, the complexity of the teaching activity requires investments in the enhancement of professionalism, especially in the aspects of pedagogical training<sup>(7,11, 17)</sup>.

Given the identification of several harrowing situations experienced by participants in the professional

identity constitution process, the existence of an "identity game" was considered, where the teacher feared the acts of attribution they received and offered, especially in relation to students<sup>(9, 10)</sup>.

## **Identity, career and permanence in the teaching profession**

The development of the identity follows the teaching maturity process in the profession, the longer your experience and the more you feel secure in identifying as a teacher and following the phases of approach with the profession, as in a metamorphosis<sup>(7, 11)</sup>. The participant Victoria acknowledged that the absence of pedagogical training hindered her performance, especially regarding technical and methodological aspects of the teaching practice, and in the recognition of her weaknesses and those of students:

*I did not even know how to plan my classes. I had to methodology, resources, content, [...], the first day of school when I had to fill my diary out, 'which terms do they use? What was the type of methodology that I used to give this class?'. And so, that was one of the most difficult things for me at first. [...] We didn't learn how to be a teacher. I find myself an eternal learner. I do not feel like I own knowledge, I do not feel like I own the truth (Vitoria).*

The laborious and heterogeneous character of teaching requires critical thinking skills from the teacher, an understanding of its possibilities and limitations, which may influence their personal, professional and institutional development, and autonomy<sup>(1-2,17)</sup>.

Teachers Luiza and Lia emphasize situations and impressions of the professional maturation process and the ability to recognize themselves as being in the "serenity and emotional detachment" and 'conservatism' phase of the professional life cycle of teachers<sup>(11)</sup>, where the value of the person teacher stood beyond the professional obligations (such as aspects related primarily to academic productivity), allowing reflection on philosophical questions of the person and the influence of professional development in their lives and in the lives of students:

*That's why age sometimes brings you an advantage, right? There must be some advantage to aging. And the advantage is the serenity that comes in tow, when you're able to look at things and filter them (Lia).*

*The burden carried by a teacher is a very heavy one, because we have to undertake PIBIC (Programa Institucional de Bolsas de Iniciação Científica – Institutional Program for Scientific Initiation Scholarships), PIVIC (Programa Institucional de Voluntários de Iniciação Científica – Institutional Program for Scientific Initiation Volunteers), Extension, research, when we're in the middle of our master's degree there are more demands to meet like publishing articles, but then that's not enough, because you have to publish an article abroad, and then there are whatsapp messages, and sometimes I'm even scared of accessing my email [...] I just think we're sort of worn out, overwhelmed (Luiza).*

The teacher development along the path of life and the process of saying goodbye to the profession, from the experiences of the participants with longer periods as a teacher and that experience the approach to retirement, revealed the dilemmas they also faced regarding context of relationships with peers considered entering the race and identity forms in the relation me-others (peers) in the perception of themselves, assuming a feeling of character and devaluation the worker <sup>(11)</sup>:

*It is an absolute disregard for the teaching profession, the life history, the years of contribution, it's so inhumane, to the point you would never want to come back. Those who retire are just short from saying: Thank God! [...] (Lia).*

In the search to minimize conditions that cause wear and opposition to their ideals or life purposes, teacher Luiza manifested her discontent with the work conditions and fragile interpersonal relationships, expanding the focus of her lack of satisfaction beyond work, meaning she recognizes her contributions throughout her long professional career and says goodbye to or draws away in an act of serene disinvestment <sup>(11)</sup>:

*[...] our identity goes through periods, and that doesn't mean you don't have an identity, quite the contrary, but we will mature, and the process is beautiful [...] it means looking and this and savoring it, bringing lightness to things, being a teacher, being a nurse, there are times when it's hard, but it's also amazing (Luiza).*

This conception of the professional development process expressed by Luiza participant in the speech above, showed that the process of constituting a professional identity started by appreciating and building themselves,

demonstrated by the expression of positive feelings towards their own person and the investment made to develop their professionalism<sup>(10,17-18)</sup>.

The participants expressed an almost unanimous desire to continue in the teaching profession. They stated they can't see themselves practicing another profession, and recognize situations that justify remaining in higher education. This desire to stay in the profession has been exposed either as a representation of a full professional satisfaction, as a reflex of all expectations for the professional career and as an opportunity for constant development, or as a refuge from the drama lived as a nurse due to the little social value, work overload and low pay that comes with that profession. This is shown in the speeches below:

*I like being a nurse, and teaching nursing is to what makes me very proud to be doing, I think it makes all the difference [...] for who is a teacher. So, I don't think of leaving this career and doing something else. I think of constantly seeking diversity in what I set out to do (Sofia).*

*I wouldn't change anything, I would be a nurse again [...] in a not so distant future, I think I will remain with teaching alone, I don't know, I think so, that's what I see for myself. Not that I don't like care, but I think teaching is more interesting from a financial point of view than nursing [...] (Roberta).*

The speeches of teachers highlight the main axes of investment intended as prospects for planning and development in the profession:

Development of the teaching profession to venture into fields other than education and that are occupied/required to enter in graduate programs, occupying management positions or university management:

*I would like to mature a little more, as a researcher, to improve in order to build very interesting research projects that give back to those populations for which I work, I would like to, in the future, get involved in the graduate program, I'm still not a teacher in the graduate program, give my contribution in this direction, as I thought in the future to migrate to the administrative area, either in undergraduate courses or the board (Sofia).*

Investment in training, especially through *graduate studies*:

*What I would like, as a goal, would be to invest, my dream is to do my doctorate, I wish I could dedicate myself entirely to research, I would like that (Fernanda).*

The student's development as a way of getting involved with the teaching process and a way to satisfy the goal to be achieved such as a capacity for teaching practice:

*I want to be a teacher, remain involved, committed to learning, more attentive to what each student has their difficulties, pay more attention to the students' individual features (Martha).*

Strengthening the field of teaching and research as a way to leave a legacy/brand or contribution to the group:

*So now, my role here, in my area especially, is to strengthen my area, I created a research group that is being consolidated with these colleagues that are with us, great partnerships, we are doing great (Luiza).*

Despite the dilemmas faced in the profession, teachers identify in teaching a profession that promotes satisfaction, making it possible to plan their career<sup>(19-20)</sup>.

## ■ FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The construction of the teaching professional identity among the survey participants occurred in a complex negotiation between the biographic and relational aspects, first, they faced the dilemma of entering the teaching profession with little or no pedagogical training. Therefore, they sought different strategies for identity construction as the appropriation of models from teacher who they considered successful and outstanding during their experience as students and the enhancement of professional experience as nurses in an identity transposition movement, which was undergoing changing along the professional maturation process. There was a distinction in relation to the stages of the professional life cycle among the participants showing different ways to deal with the dilemmas of the profession and, as they advance the professional life cycle, the more secure and autonomous they felt to practice this activity.

There was recognition of teacher training as a key element for identifying with the teacher profession; and for strengthening teaching in addressing its weaknesses. The unanimous desire to remain in teaching with indicative plans for the future of the teaching profession

was also manifested. In this sense, the constitution of the teaching professional identity can be regarded as procedural and experienced in a specific way for each participant in the complex and dynamic context of the teaching profession.

As a limitation to comparisons and reflections with the results of this study were the quantity of published research on this topic in the field of nursing, with the aim of understanding the identity construction of teachers in higher education with the theoretical framework proposed. Thus, there is a need for other studies focusing on this theme, seeking to understand the teaching identity construction processes and that may constitute a theoretical basis for policy and institutional interventions to improve work quality and teaching in higher education.

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