

The Early Childhood Teacher in Their First Years of Work: From Initial Training to Exercising the Profession

La maestra de educación infantil en sus primeros años de trabajo: de la formación inicial al ejercicio de la profesión

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Abstract

In the process to construct the professional identity of the preschool teacher, the aspect of exercising the profession during their first few years of work affects not only the process of identity construction, but also their transition into employment. This paper outlines the complexities faced by preschool teachers in their first work experiences. The research used a multiple case study method, with narrative biographies of nine early childhood teachers from the same university in their first three years of work. The results show the following complexities: the support needed by beginning teachers, which becomes a key factor for transition into employment; the meaningful learning that contributes to their professional development; working conditions that directly influence the pedagogical work; and complex work situations experienced with actors in the educational community.

Keywords: Novel educator, professional identity, early childhood teacher, transition from student to teacher, professionals' skills.

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Resumen

En el proceso de construcción de la identidad profesional de la maestra de educación infantil incide la dimensión ejercicio profesional en sus primeros años de trabajo, que afecta no solo al proceso de construcción identitaria, sino también a su inserción laboral. El artículo expone las complejidades a las que se enfrentan las maestras de educación infantil en sus primeras experiencias laborales. Se trata de una investigación en la que el método utilizado es un estudio de caso múltiple, con características biográficas narrativas, aplicado a nueve educadoras en educación infantil tituladas de la misma universidad. Los resultados evidencian las siguientes complejidades: las necesidades de apoyo de la educadora principiante, que se transforman en un factor clave para su inserción; los aprendizajes significativos que contribuyen en su desarrollo profesional; las condiciones laborales que influyen de manera directa en el quehacer pedagógico, y las situaciones laborales complejas vividas con actores de la comunidad educativa. Los resultados permiten constatar que la inserción laboral está condicionada fundamentalmente por la experiencia de las educadoras principiantes, el apoyo entregado por la institución educativa de la cual forma parte, y la reflexión que realiza de este proceso que, a su vez, contribuye a la construcción de su identidad profesional.

Palabras clave: educadora principiante, identidad profesional, maestra infantil, inserción profesional, competencias profesionales.

Introduction

Over time, there has been growing recognition that early childhood education is a crucial period to facilitate timely and relevant learning in childhood, both from an educational and a social perspective (Falabella, Cortázar, Godoy, & Romo, 2018). The appreciation of the value of this phase has led to the reconceptualization of the work of the early-childhood teacher, changing from a care-based role to a more complex type, which includes the duty of facilitating educational opportunities for children to promote their development and meaningful learning, both at the pedagogical and socio-emotional level (Falabella et al., 2018).

This new and more complex perspective assumes that the early childhood teacher should have knowledge about development; the provision of timely, relevant, and quality learning; address the needs of the context and respond to emerging situations; and possess specific professional skills that promote the learning and well-being of the children. For example, they should have high expectations for their group of children, be affectionate and sensitive, cooperative, inclusive, and empower children in accordance with their individual characteristics (Peeters & Sharmahd, 2014). At the same time, collaborative work with a variety of educational agents is necessary, particularly in terms of engaging with families in their role as the first educational agent (Robinson, 2019). From this perspective, it is important to make the child the focus and promote their overall development through care, play, and socio-emotional development (Bubikova-Moan, Naess Hjetland, & Wollscheid, 2019).

In addition to this, preschool teachers in Chile also have a greater workload than other professionals (from 8 to 11 hours a day), with salaries that are lower than those of a basic education teacher (Viviani, 2016). They also have to respond to the results and accountability policy that has been implemented both nationally and internationally in recent years. Proof of this is the guiding standards for preschool education careers in Chile, in which future graduates have to demonstrate certain pedagogical and disciplinary knowledge at the end of their training, which, when working, particularly in socioeconomically deprived environments, is difficult to put into practice. This is why the importance of professional training of teachers at the preschool level is increasingly emphasized (Pardo & Alderstein, 2016).

In this respect, the professional development system for teachers (Law 20,903) promotes the improvement and equality of working conditions for preschool and other teachers, which can be seen as a social recognition of the professional practice of the preschool teacher. However, as suggested by Pardo and Alderstein (2020), the assessment instruments associated with teaching careers should be adjusted and improved so they do not become an individualistic pedagogical assessment process that is removed from the pedagogical principles of preschool teaching, comprehensive learning, or work with families, among other things. This could have a direct impact on the professional identity of the teacher.

Preschool teachers conduct their work in a certain educational reality, establishing interactions with other educational and community agents. They progressively construct their professional identity based on the exchange of experiences and opinions with their peers, in addition to their previous experiences, both personal and professional (Ivanova & Skara-Mincăne, 2016). This identity predominantly begins in initial training, through a dynamic and relational process, in a certain context and in interaction with others (Bolívar, 2016). It can therefore be stated that, on the one hand, this identity construction is defined by the conceptions of educational and community agents about the context and other social actors and, on the other, by the teacher's self-concept regarding their work, which is conditioned by their personal experiences (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). As far as early childhood education is concerned, and according to Vergara (2014), identity construction should be based on the intention of providing timely, relevant, and quality learning, which has no relation to the social representation that is characterized by a lack of appreciation of the work carried out by preschool teachers (Zabalza Beraza & Zabalza Cerdeiriña, 2011).

The teacher thus has characteristics of their identity defined in the professional, work, and personal areas, all of which lead to the construction of their professional identity (Pelletier & Morales-Perlaza, 2018). In this respect, the biography and the social environment in which they interact are related (Arvaja, 2016).

At the professional level, the early childhood teacher shares space, time, and characteristics with their peers, with whom they establish a bond that promotes a sense of belonging and a commitment to the work context. All of these are aspects that enable them to carry out their work in a more satisfactory manner (Correa, Martínez-Arbelaiz, & Fernández-Plaskoaga, 2017). Therefore, the construction of identity makes it easier for the teacher to find their own style, integrating characteristics, habits, and ways of acting that are similar to their group, which are also shared, thus allowing them to feel part of an educational community (Vergara, 2014). A solid and shared sense of personal and professional identity thus encourages beginning teachers to understand their role and the demands they currently face as educators (Chong, 2011).

The teaching profession is characterized by being variable and dynamic: the skills that the preschool teacher has to develop will depend on the setting in which they carry out their pedagogical work (Perrenoud, 2004). It is in educational work, in real situations, in the responses or actions carried out, where professional skills are developed. According to Blanch et al. (2017), one of the defining aspects of training teachers in early childhood education is developing personal competencies and skills such as creativity and imagination, critical thinking, active listening, interdisciplinarity, resilience, autonomy, emotional control, assertiveness, adaptability, empathy, leadership, cooperation, social responsibility, and mediation and receptivity, among others.

This is directly related to the work to be carried out not only with children, but also with families and the educational community, understanding that this educational level must have a dynamic response to the concerns, opinions, and interests of the specific context. The role of the teacher is therefore considered to be key, since they have to coordinate activities and mediate pedagogically with children, families, the technical-pedagogical team, and the community (Ministerio de Educación, 2018).

Moreover, a teacher's first few years of work are characterized by being a distinct and transitional stage, defined by the tensions and complexities experienced in an unknown educational reality (Martínez, 2012). It is in this context that they acquire significant experience and professional knowledge (Marcelo & Vaillant, 2013), which, in turn, implies diversity of learning and also interpreting the new experiences with the knowledge acquired in their initial training (Loughran, 2014).

Meanwhile, the transition into employment involves tensions and conflicts because the teacher faces new situations, as well as due to the ambiguity of their role at work (McGillivray, 2008). In this regard, reflection on the pedagogical work is essential because, based on their experiences in interactions with other educational and community agents, learning is reformulated and re-signified, which is of direct benefit to their professional development. In addition to this, the way in which these tensions and conflicts are addressed may be related to analysis of and reflection on professional practice, as well as the cognitive skills developed in initial training and through the support received in their first years of work (Ávalos & Seville, 2010; Ávalos, 2016).

Pillen, Den Brok, and Beijaard (2013) argue that tensions are seen as internal conflicts, in terms of the feelings as an individual and as a teacher, which lead to questions related to their values. These emerge from both the personal and the professional aspects; they transition between what they want and what it is possible to do, and also through the conflicts experienced and whether these are resolved with significant peers or autonomously (Pillen, Beijaard, & Den Brok, 2013).

On the other hand, although responsibility towards the social context is observed in novice teachers, there are evident insecurities related to their abilities and knowledge, mainly because they lack experience in the classroom. For this reason, they see their peers who have been working in the institution for more years as references in the educational process (Ávalos & Sotomayor, 2012). The difficulties that teachers face in their first few years of work are related to their lack of skills, their lack of resources and strategies to handle situations, and the multiplicity of duties they have (Solís, Núñez, Contreras, Vásquez, & Ritterhausen, 2016).

In terms of the concerns and challenges that beginning early childhood teachers have to face, Sancho and her colleagues (2014) highlight the unstable working conditions, the lack of a teaching career, bureaucratic and de-professionalizing educational policies, the gap between initial training and practice, the tendency to repeat models and practices, the loneliness of teaching work, and the need to continue learning and to review the initial and ongoing training of teachers. Although this study echoes nearly all of the characteristics outlined by the authors cited, it must be pointed out that, in Chile, the teaching career is established by Law 20,903 of the Professional Teacher Development System, in a stage of implementation from 2017 to 2026, the purpose of which is to recognize educational professionals considering their achievements, thus promoting continuous improvement.

Another of the difficulties they frequently face is early childhood teachers' perception that they do not obtain the same levels of respect as teachers at higher stages, thus affecting the value of their work and profession (Moloney, 2010).

This study is part of an investigation that addresses the process of constructing professional identity in early childhood teachers during their first years of professional practice, bearing in mind the initial training and the development of skills. However, given the importance of the identity construction process, it is essential to identify the obstacles that teachers encounter during the first years of insertion in the educational field. We therefore believe that it will be possible to more efficiently articulate the various initiatives in public policies that have been developed in recent years to strengthen their pedagogical work, such as curricular innovations in undergraduate training, a framework for good teaching, or guiding standards for careers in early childhood

education. According to this premise, this paper aims to answer the question: What complexities related to the construction of preschool teachers' professional identity do they have to face during the first few years of practicing the profession? The objective is focused on characterizing the complexities of the transition into employment among beginning teachers in preschool education, identifying the needs they have to support their identity construction.

Methodology

Design

This study is based on the interpretive paradigm, which seeks to discern reality based on the meaning attributed to it by the subjects participating in the research, the objective being to analyze the perceptions of those included in the study. The research approach is qualitative in nature, as it aims to explore and understand the individual or group meaning attributed to a certain problem (Creswell, 2014). The method used is a multiple case study (Stake, 2013), since it focuses the search on a certain phenomenon, using more than one case with common characteristics, either because of their similarities or differences.

Participants

For this multiple case study, an intentional sample was established as a characteristic and selection criterion for nine graduates of the preschool education degree, all from the same university in the Valparaíso region of Chile. All of them are in the first three years of their professional practice, having graduated in 2014, 2015, or 2016, working in public schools, in subsidized private schools, and in private kindergartens. That is, three per promotion, carrying out their teaching work with children at the middle and transition levels.

The criteria used to select the preschool teachers that graduated from the same university are based on what was stated by Bolívar, Fernández, and Molina (2005), who suggested that one of the aspects that determines the process of acquiring professional identity is the education received in initial training.

Furthermore, Huberman (1989) argues out that the first three years of work involve entering the professional career, and knowledge and awareness of the educational reality. In this vein, the first few years of work are characterized by tensions, fears, conflicts, and questions, due to facing unknown situations and lacking work experience (Ávalos & Sevilla, 2010). It is this area that this paper aims to examine.

Table 1
Characterization of cases

Teacher	Year of graduation	Professional experience	Time in job	Educational level responsibility	Previous professional experiences
1	2014	2 years, 6 months	1 year, 3 months	Upper middle	Permanent and replacement kindergarten teacher in public early childhood education centers.
2	2015	1 year, 7 months	1 year, 4 months	1st transition level	Replacement kindergarten teacher in public early childhood education centers, 3 months.
3	2016	7 months	3 months	Lower middle	Replacement kindergarten teacher in public early childhood education centers, 4 months.
4	2014	2 years, 9 months	1 year, 7 months	2nd transition level	Kindergarten teacher in private kindergartens, 1 year, 2 months.

5	2015	1 year, 10 months	5 months	1st transition level	Kindergarten teacher in private kindergarten and in private subsidized education center, 1 year, 5 months.
6	2016	9 months	5 months	2nd transition level	Replacement kindergarten teacher in public early childhood education centers, 4 months.
7	2014	7 months	5 months	Lower middle	Assistant and replacement kindergarten teacher, acting director in public early childhood education centers, 2 months.
8	2015	1 year, 10 months	1 year, 5 months	Heterogeneous	Kindergarten teacher in private kindergarten, 5 months.
9	2016	10 months	5 months	Lower middle	Replacement kindergarten teacher in public early childhood education centers, 5 months.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Instruments

The instruments used are in-depth interviews (nine) and a focus group, in which all the teachers took part. Given the characteristics of the phenomenon under study, this work considers aspects of the narrative biographical method, using life stories, which refer to autobiographical narratives that provide an account of a person's identity and the way in which they recount what they have experienced (Chase, 2015). Within these accounts we distinguish biograms that form a map or diagram of their life trajectory, which describe and reveal the relevant events that they wish to highlight. Meanwhile, critical incidents are a way in which to understand how an event experienced in the past, whether it was positive or negative, becomes relevant in the present.

The scripts for the interviews and the focus group are structured based on the aspects specified in Table 2. According to the semi-structured nature of the interviews, it is important to consider that the questions are only indicative, so they could be modified or reformulated according to the way in which the interviews progress, keeping in mind the purpose of this instrument at all times.

In this study there are deductive categories (meaningful learning, working conditions, support for the beginning teacher), built based on the reference framework, establishing a series of steps in the construction of instruments, ranging from the general to the specific. Inductive categories, which are also present in this research (complex work situations), emerge from the findings of the fieldwork itself.

Table 2
Information collection techniques according to aspects and categories

Aspect	A priori/deductive categories	Information collection technique		
		Life stories	Interview	Focus group
Transition into employment	Meaningful learning	x		x
	Work conditions			x
	Support for the beginning teacher			x

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Procedure

Prior to the application of the information collection instruments, the scripts for the interviews and focus group were submitted to experts to garner their opinions (Escobar-Pérez & Cuervo-Martínez, 2008). In this case, nine education professionals were involved, considering the criterion of solvency-professional expertise for this, along with the criteria of univocity, relevance, and importance.

Based on the assessment of experts and according to the criteria established, the results for the interview indicate that 13 of the 14 questions are left unchanged, and all of them are maintained in the focus group. According to the pilot tests, it was estimated that a period of 45 to 60 minutes would be required to apply it. To conduct the research, in which the novice kindergarten teachers are the key agents in the study, it is necessary to clarify their participation based on informed consent.

The procedure used was as follows:

1. The kindergarten teachers were contacted, one from each context being studied, informing them of the purpose of the research and their participation.
2. Signing of informed consent.
3. The life stories instrument was sent to them by email, in which they first had to develop the biogram and then the critical incidents.
4. Application of the interview (after delivering the life stories).

Analysis of the information was carried out according to the categories established based on their similarity/recurrence and difference/relevance (Bustingorry, Sánchez, & Ibáñez, 2006), along with the meaning given to the deductive-inductive system of categories. Likewise, following Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014), three stages of analysis were established: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.

Results

In the context of this study, as we stated in the objective, the complexities related to the aspect of transition into employment are addressed. The results obtained allow us to determine and visualize the situations experienced by the beginning teachers that cause conflict in their pedagogical work. Table 3 shows a summary of the four categories and their typologies: deductive or inductive, their frequencies, and what procedure was used for that finding.

Table 3
Categories and their bases

Category	Instrument/technique					
	Life stories		In-depth interviews		Focus group	
	F	TC	F	TC	F	TC
Support for the beginning teacher			10	E	37	A
Meaningful learning	80	A	49	E	29	A
Work conditions	22	E	28	E	24	A
Complex work situations	28	E			15	E

F= Frequency; TC= Type of category; E= Emergent; A=A priori

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The semantic networks are shown in Figure 1, 2, and 3, with their respective categories and subcategories, according to the instrument used. With regard to the inductive categories, they have been capitalized to differentiate them from the deductive ones.

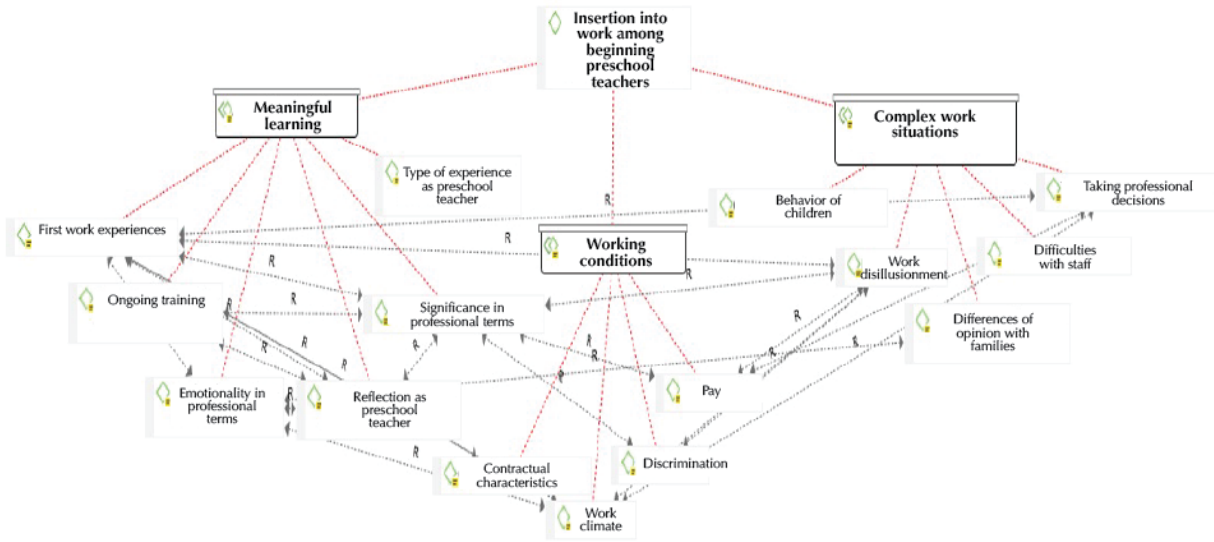


Figure 1. *Semantic network of life stories*
Source: Prepared by the authors.

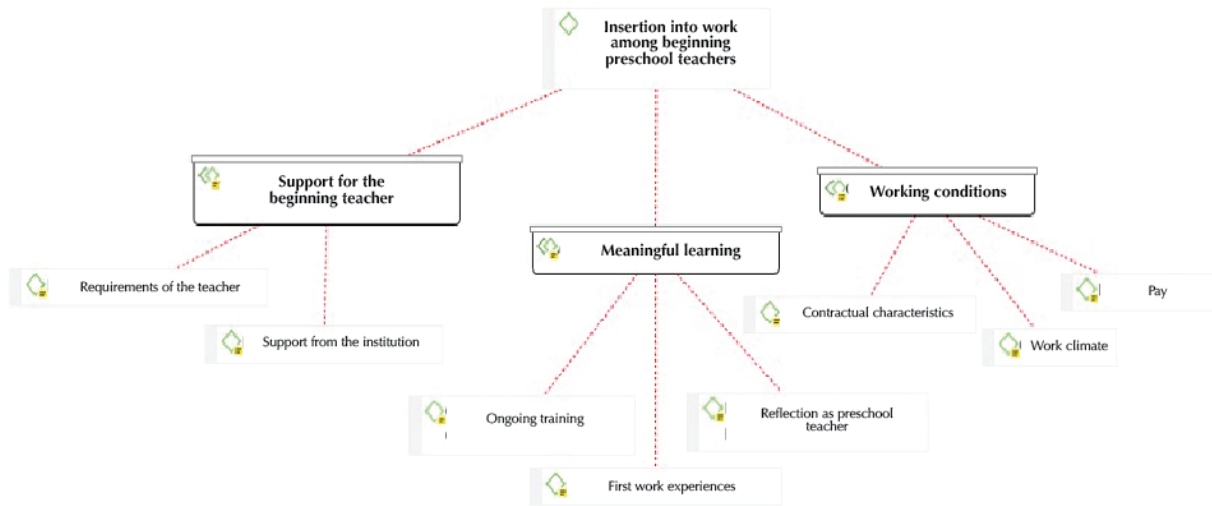


Figure 2. *Semantic network of in-depth interviews*
Source: Prepared by the authors.

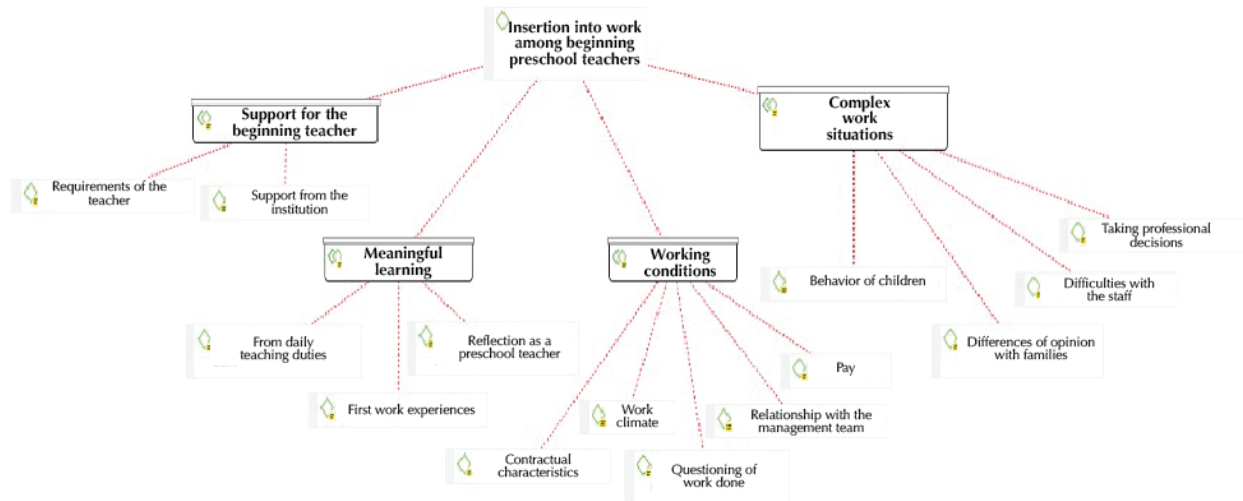


Figure 3. *Semantic network of the focus group*
 Source: Prepared by the authors.

Support for the beginning teacher

There is a clear need for support of the teacher in their initial years of work and to resolve emerging situations that, because of their inexperience, they do not feel capable of handling. The support required is related to establishing links with the educational reality, which would give them greater confidence and security in their professional performance.

It's no use to me that they say 'all the books are there' ... but what is useful to me is to guide me to what I need ... in my case, 'ok, we need you to have this profile to fulfill the role of teacher at the level...'. (Interview, teacher 3).

My weakness is in the diagnosis and all those things ... of the assessment, which I've done, because there's no format, nothing, but I don't know if they're really okay (Interview, teacher 7).

These needs are related to being able to count on an educator with greater experience in the context, to guide them based on the assessment of learning. It seems to be essential to feel emotional support and greater empathy on the part of the technical-pedagogical team, that they trust their work and support their decisions.

They had also been in their first year, so there was a lot of pushing me, like '... you have to do it well, because you've been at university and you know', but put yourself in my place! 'How would you feel if this was happening to you?', 'no, it's your fault!' (Focus group, educator 3).

The significance of working with peers and in an interdisciplinary manner is noted. It also suggests the importance of support networks and the need for them to be more operational.

There is work in networks, but distanced ... I write to them today and I don't receive an answer until a week later I've had different types of problems or cases of rights violations where I've needed support ... and I haven't received a response for a week. So, what do I do? If I have the same problem every day ... and I've already tried everything ... based on my role to help that child (Focus group, teacher 2).

Meaningful learning

This refers to the opportunity provided by the new situations experienced, which allow meaningful learning, in addition to giving meaning to the teacher's work. The support received or not received from the management team and technical-pedagogical team and the experiences gathered in the first few years of work raise questions in the teacher about certain conceptions. In this manner, new learning is established and both their personal and professional development is encouraged, allowing them to rethink their pedagogical work.

At work you see good things and bad things ... you're training there, which is what you want to do ... So you yourself are forming your own identity, you're forming it through the practices at work (Interview, teacher 5).

It's like I feel that the change starts with you, so I can't teach about good treatment, I can't teach about being empathetic with another if I'm not, so that has helped for me ... this context full of bad information (Interview, teacher 9).

This learning take place in the interaction with different actors in the educational process, such as preschool children, who have their own specific and different characteristics. As for the families, they emphasize that it is essential to work together, valuing their role as the first educational agent of their children. With regard to the technical-pedagogical team, they show the importance of reaching agreements to work as a team in an environment that is conducive to learning.

This has allowed them to broaden their view regarding certain topics of interest, contributing to their professional identity and empowering themselves in their pedagogical role. In this respect, reflection and the meaning that is given to what has been experienced is decisive, since it contributes to the improvement of the teacher's pedagogical practices and encourages them to reconceptualize their personal frames of reference, contributing to the construction of their identity as an early childhood education professional.

At the beginning I had a lot of doubts and desire to be able to know about the issue of sexual diversity in childhood, since ... we have lots of prejudices I was moved ... when I learned about the opinions of trans boys, girls, and adolescents For me it was emotionally strong, how somehow we adults can mark the life of a child in a positive or negative way (Life stories, teacher 1).

The post-graduate degree ended up giving me the confidence that I lacked; I can face life with another perspective, and I also feel that I like that area a lot and it motivates me to continue studying ... not only for myself, but to give the best to the boys and girls I learned that you never finish learning and that it is very necessary to do that (Life stories, teacher 5).

Within meaningful learning, training and lifelong learning are emphasized, where meaning is attributed to the acquisition of new learning, as well as work experiences, which is viewed as an essential stage in the teachers' professional development, forming part of their personal growth. Finally, they mention reflection as an early childhood teacher, based on the training in which they have participated and the experiences they have had in their educational work, understanding that the personal influences the professional.

Working conditions

This aspect involves the characteristics of the context and factors related to the work carried out in the educational reality, which constitute the teachers' first experiences in the employment field and determine, depending on their experiences, decision-making in the transition into and permanence in the job. The latter mainly applied when the teacher's contract has a fixed term, as in the case of replacement teachers.

I feel that every professional or worker is seeking job stability, not short-term replacements; that's why this contract provides stability to my life and that of my daughter. With this we can think about the future, about becoming independent (Life stories, teacher 9).

In addition to the above, the work environment influences pedagogical duties. If it is positive, the communicative interactions are favorable and the climate is suitable for learning, thus establishing a close relationship with the degree of job-professional satisfaction of the teacher.

Because the opinion of the other is respected, they validate your opinion, the colleagues are empathetic with each other (Interview, teacher 1).

In contrast, if there is not good communication, a climate is established that is not conducive to learning.

Now, for example, with the technician I have, she doesn't really get on with me; all the work is more difficult. There's a somewhat tense atmosphere that the children can feel too; there's no closeness, so ... there's a cold climate (Interview, teacher 4).

The teachers' first experiences, particularly if they are characterized by being negative, generate self-questioning about whether they are good teachers or not.

When I started my first job there was such a bad climate that I said ... whether I was good or not, because they let me know that I was bad, so nobody trusted me ... and as it was my first job I was uncomfortable (Focus group, teacher 5).

The same occurs when what is requested of them differs from their personal-professional thinking and their initial training, which causes work conflicts.

Suddenly I question myself, 'I'm the teacher, I'm the one in charge ... of their education and I see that they have that need, so how am I going to keep quiet?' regarding something that ... has to be worked on. So, because of the pressure ... I question my character ... I have to be concerned about the child's education, that is, my ethics, so that creates conflict for me (Focus group, teacher 8).

At some educational centers there is an inverse relationship between the multiplicity of duties and the low salaries, and there is evidence of an environment that is not conducive to learning, as the teachers receive constant criticism and there is a lack support from the management and technical-pedagogical team. On the other hand, the professional growth that some educational institutions allow them is appreciated. However, in other educational centers, the environment is characterized by long working hours, low pay, and discrimination, which has led the teachers to seek other job opportunities.

I remember on one occasion they put me in a kindergarten where I thought that they paid well and I was very happy, but when they called me to sign the contract and fill in my information, they told me that I couldn't stay because I had lots of children and I had a very small baby. It was unfair (Life story, teacher 7).

Complicated work situations

These are situations that are mainly related to difficulties in communicative interactions with community agents. Due to their lack of experience, they do not have the necessary skills to provide a timely solution to situations experienced with children, families, and the technical-pedagogical team.

It happened to me with a child who has autism spectrum disorders ... that there was a moment when an experience was disruptive to him, and he lost control ... and so I reflected on 'What should I do, how can I do it, how do I get closer to him? I have to study, I have to find more' (Focus group, teacher 1).

There's like a level of frustration when you do everything possible so that the family understands, comprehends that there's a special educational need ... he really needed another kind of help and the family refused ... and so I think about that boy and about what reality he might be experiencing now (Focus group, teacher 6).

I had never been treated so badly by someone. It happened on the last day of the seasonal kindergarten. I had never been disrespected in that way. It was so bad that I even thought about leaving work at noon as I felt very uncomfortable being in the same place as that person. It marked me to such an extent that now ... I'm afraid to say things or ask for things from the people on my team (Life stories, teacher 3).

The moments of conflict that the teachers have had to face in their pedagogical work have caused them emotional exhaustion, self-questioning and rethinking, feelings of disappointment, and fear.

Another case that hasn't left me sufficiently satisfied has shown me and demonstrated that, no matter how a professional puts in all their effort, desire, strategies, and support, if the family fails to understand that an educational need doesn't limit a child if they receive the appropriate help ... you can't interfere in their family decisions (Life stories, teacher 6).

In some cases, this has resulted in decisions being taken regarding continuing to work at the educational institution. On the other hand, these types of complicated situations are significant for some teachers because, despite the difficulties and the problematic situation, they have been able to present their arguments clearly and confidently.

Discussion and Conclusions

The findings we have made enable our objective to be achieved and thus contribute to the characterization of the complexities of preschool teachers' first years of work, identifying the support they need to construct their professional identity. In this respect, we can establish that the initial years of work as an education professional are key to their future development, where the lack of classroom experience is a common condition that should be the focus of attention and the guiding principal of the actions to be carried out, both in terms of the public policies implemented and by the work teams of the educational communities to which they belong. These complexities are *support for the beginning teacher* and their needs, *meaningful learning* from experience, whether positive or negative, and *complex work conditions and situations*.

With regard to *support for the beginning teacher* and their needs, this is related to the lack of resource skills for solving new and unknown situations. This is why being able to rely on the guidance of their peers and other professionals who have greater experience in the context becomes a key factor in resolving emerging situations (Robinson, 2019). In this respect, mentoring support could be considered to assist teachers who are starting out in the profession (Gasper & Walker, 2020).

In terms of induction programs, in Chile, with Law 20,903 of 2016, support is promoted during preschool teachers' first year at state-financed educational centers. Even though this is an advance in educational public policies at the national level, there is still a long way to go for this to be considered essential and a part of the training process

for the transition into employment, and not just voluntary assistance for certain establishments. If educational reforms are really intended to improve the quality of education with equity from the very first educational level, it is necessary to provide all preschool teachers with the same possibilities of action and participation.

However, more than support in terms of curricular needs and the institutional requirements, we have revealed that emotional support and empathy are integrating factors for creating environments that are conducive to learning. Although Chang, Kredl, and Kingsley (2014) point to the importance of developing the emotional aspect of teaching in initial training, this study confirms the need for continuity in exercising the profession, recognizing that the first few years of work should be seen as a period of transition (Marcelo & Vaillant, 2013), where putting oneself in the other person's shoes contributes to the formation and consolidation of technical-pedagogical teams with clear purposes and which are appropriate to the educational context. In this way, the initial experiences of work would favor the reaffirmation of the self-concept in teachers (Ávalos & Sevilla, 2010).

Meaningful learning, which is part of the training process for early childhood teachers, is related to lived experiences and situations, whether positive or negative, that have provided meaning to their pedagogical work, contributing to their identity construction. This contribution is only effective when it is intended to reflect on what has been experienced.

In this respect, the first work experiences and reflection can be established as common subcategories; the former is characteristically a complex stage, full of fears, self-questioning, and insecurities, difficulties that can be overcome by acquiring new learning through the situations the teachers have to face, on the one hand, and in interactions with other educational and community agents, on the other. This stage, the transition from student to teacher, is seen by Tejada (2018) as a social process that involves and integrates the previous knowledge of the teacher's biography, initial training, and training practices carried out in different educational contexts, also being a period of great challenges (Loughran, 2014).

Reflection, meanwhile, allows the teachers to expand their view of the world, which is a direct benefit for their professional development (Ávalos & Sevilla, 2010; Rojas Torres & Berger, 2017). In other words, the professional development of every teacher in early childhood education is the result of systematic reflection (Vergara, 2014), which must be intentional, conscious, and in-depth.

With regard to *working conditions*, the third complexity identified, the subcategories are the contractual characteristics, related to the type of contract agreed; the work environment, considering an environment conducive to learning; and the pay.

This category is related to elements of the new educational reality that affect the teachers' pedagogical work and their continuity in the institution. In line with this, Ávalos (2016) points out that the beginning teacher has the contributions provided by their undergraduate training practices and, therefore, they have partial and general knowledge of their work, but are not aware of the working conditions in their educational reality. The way in which they address their first experiences is directly related to the communicative interactions established in the educational context of which they are part. This complexity is also consistent with what was stated by Sancho et al. (2014), principally regarding job instability, which is shown in replacement contracts for short periods or fixed terms of one or two years.

Likewise, the multiplicity of duties that they must perform makes their pedagogical work essential and complex at the same time (Horm, Hyson, & Winston, 2013). However, this is not considered by some educational institutions. A great deal is demanded of them in a job that is not as socially valued as it should be: proof of this is the low pay and lack of social recognition.

In relation to the *complex work situations* experienced with different actors in the educational community, where the subcategories are the behavior of the children, difficulties with staff, and differences of opinion with the families, these cause conflicts in the teachers when they are unable to resolve them in a timely manner. Pillen, Den Brok, and Beijaard. (2013) point out that these tensions represent internal conflicts, which are linked to their feelings, perceptions, and professional values.

With regard to complex work situations, the findings of this study are directly related to what was suggested by Solís et al. (2016), who noted that the difficulties of beginning educators include interactions with actors in the educational community, which is essentially the case because they lack the resources to handle situations.

Beginning teachers' first jobs are essentially characterized by their inexperience, conditioned by the context, public policies and their requirements, and the way in which the educational community fosters the integration of the novice professional, where the difficulties that have to be faced are more bearable if they have a team to guide and support their pedagogical work. Similarly, the critical reflection that they carry out at this transitional stage is directly related to the construction of their professional identity and, as a consequence, the first few years are decisive in this process of identity construction.

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