

The Goldilocks Phenomenon: An Autobiographical Inquiry into Becoming EFL Teacher Educators

Abstract

This study explored the pathways to becoming a teacher educator, experiences of (il)legitimacy as an educator, and how teacher educators learn to become educators. The DeleuzoGuattarian perspective of Beings and Becomings framed the understanding of their professional journey, highlighting the tension between expected and evolving educator identities. Using an autobiographical narrative inquiry, six English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher educators shared their experiences over a year through written prompt-based narratives. Findings revealed that becoming a teacher educator is an unintended journey shaped by experiences, reflections, education, and research. Narratives showed that educators' legitimacy fluctuated through interactions with various actors in the education system, leading to contradictory feelings that their qualifications and knowledge were never enough, yet they still developed an increasing sense of competency. This was termed the 'Goldilocks phenomenon'. The study challenges current review processes and suggests a need for a different perspective on professional development needs.

Keywords: language teacher educator identity, autobiographical inquiry, legitimacy, professional development

Subject classification codes: include these here if the journal requires them

Introduction: Teacher Educators: Who and How?

Who are teacher educators? Over the past few decades, this question has been addressed in the teacher education arena, debating who should be considered qualified educators (Murray and Male, 2005; Newberry, 2014; Williams et al., 2012) and what a teacher education pedagogy should look like (Cochran-Smith et al., 2020; Goodwin et al., 2014). Initially we recognize that teacher educator is a broad term that covers a wide range of academic work, such as teaching both preservice and inservice teachers, research, community outreach, and includes a variety of

roles, from the more traditional university professor, to practicum supervisors, teacher mentors amongst others (Kelchtermans et al., 2018; Richter et al., 2021). Nevertheless, to create a definition of *who* a teacher educator is requires introspection about how this professional identity is perceived, whether we are searching for a rigid idealization to be pursued by the teacher education system and/or a more errant identity that multiplies and morphs throughout an individual's professional journey.

When we recognize that teacher education is a highly developed system with interwoven layers of political relations between government ministries, PK-12 school actors, and hierarchies of academia, then we find a teacher educator in the midst of all these relations and therefore an individual who is constantly needing to respond to the identity desires of these diverse actors. Olsen and Buchanan (2017) describe teacher education as an interactional space between two different education worlds: the university and the school; the affective experience requires learning to have an equal footing in each world. Creating this balanced stance is challenging, and teacher educators are torn between simultaneously strengthening their relationships with the PK-12 arena and developing their lines of research and obtaining prominent research grants.

If we recognize this entangled world of teacher education and the complexity of relationships that teacher educators must create and maintain at this intersection, the question becomes how is it that teacher educators learn to *be* and/or *become* educators. Is their professional learning shaped by the need to *be* a certain persona and therefore consist of the study of a theoretically defined identity outlined by policies and the academia, or is it characterized by processes of becoming, constantly unfolding and shifting with personal and nomadic experiences, or in true Deleuzian fashion, is it both.

This study explores the narrative experiences of a group of EFL teacher educators looking to understand how identity both structures their learning and how their learning transforms their identity. We recognize early on that the teacher educator identity is relational and professional learning is interactional (Fuentelba and Montenegro, 2016), we also reflect on how these narrative experiences shape our sense of (il)legitimacy within the profession.

Literature review

Teacher Educator Beings and Becoming

The DeleuzoGuattarian perspective of Beings and Becomings provides a framework for understanding this professional learning journey and the differentiation between the rooted or normalized identity and that of the rhizomatic and nomadic identity. Within this logic a being is an entity that one attempts to take on, like wearing a mask; it is formed by “perpetually imitating one another, progressively and regressively (...); or in the form of a mirror Imitation with nothing left to imitate because it itself is the model everything else it imitates" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 235). It is understood that the actor here is working towards idealized models outlined by the dominant lines of politics with a set of principles and characteristics.

Teacher educator identities, experiences, practices can be understood as “assemblages” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) “arrangements of heterogeneous human, material, and non-tangible elements and conditions that form particular relationships and connections” (Hordvik et al., 2020, 3). In the highly mechanical assemblages of today’s education systems, teachers and teacher educators are challenged to take on certain beings, these normalized identity assignments that can be worn and replaced as easily as new standards and evaluation criteria can be written (Webb, 2013). Beyond the descriptive standards that often outline who an educator should enact, the more rigid being is also found in notions of “compliance and accountability” (Forgasz et al., 2023) that characterize university systems today.

The teacher educator identity can be understood through the lens of a becoming, a metaphor used to convey the self, not as static (Hamilton and Pinnegar, 2015), but as a coming into being, an “evolutionary, iterative process”, a “creative transformation” (Ovens et al., 2016) resulting from interactions with others. Although they refer to

becoming as evolution, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) remind us that it is not evolutionary in the sense of leading to improvement, but rather a transformative journey that is errant in nature. In becoming, an educator's identity is no longer contingent upon following an imposed route nor is it the product of one's imagination; to become is to allow the erratic experiences of one's time within the teacher education assemblage to offer new understanding and readings of their relations and actions.

Glissant (2019) connects with the Deleuzian ideas of beings-becomings and rhizomatic relations in his own work on relations. He expands this differentiation of being and becoming by describing root identity and relation identity. He argues that the, "Root identity is founded in...a myth of the creation of the world" (143), while relation identity "is linked not to...the conscious and contradictory experience of contacts among cultures" (144). One of the critical differences is the role of political enforcement, where the teacher educator being is a desired-subject that is both founded and continuously maintained through a shared symbolic language.

This violence perceived by Glissant in imposing the desired-subjects can create intense affective experiences for educators, feelings of discontent, frustration as well as achievement as educators react to political moves that require compliance with these identified beings. For Deleuze and Guattari (1987) these political moves are the surfacing of micropolitics. What becomes legitimate or illegitimate depends on the effect that these micropolitical behaviors have in constructing and/or sustaining dominant beliefs within the assemblage. Every action can become a micropolitical move to attempt to impose a desired subject (Ehrich and Millwater, 2011; Kelchtermans and Ballet, 2002); a simple glance between colleagues, direct communication from superiors, teacher evaluations, and many other behaviors have been used to communicate the (il)legitimacy of identity acts amongst colleagues.

Learning how to become a teacher educator in Chile

Given that the work of learning to become an EFL teacher, involving both theory and practice, occurs in both the academic setting of the university and the practice-based setting of the school (Barahona, 2019), there are multiple profiles for what could be considered a teacher educator. Traditional teacher educators are university-based academic researchers who work in the teacher preparation programs; they are perceived by pre-service teachers as being distanced from the classroom context (Gonzalez-Vallejos, 2017). The second profile for teacher educators is the university-based practicum supervisor, a liaison between the pre-service teacher and the school placement, who makes in-person visits, albeit infrequently (Barahona 2019). Additionally, some might consider a third profile of teacher educator: that of the school-based teacher who directly supervises the practical learning of the pre-service teacher doing their internship, but who is not associated with an academic position at a teacher education institution (Cuadra et al. 2023).

Part of the tension of being a teacher educator is there are in fact many possible profiles, some seemingly more legitimate or prestigious than others (Barahona, 2019, Zeichner, 2005). There is consensus that there is no formal preparation to take on any of these profiles (Zeichner, 2005). The profile that the teacher educator is enacting and the preparation, or lack thereof, that the teacher educator has, may influence feelings of legitimacy in fulfilling this role.

Teacher educators' role is seen as one of a "transmitter and accreditor" (Díaz Maggioli, 2014, 189), where they need to know everything about teaching and learning, and also be a model of these practices. Yuan and Yang (2021) state that teacher educators' expertise should include knowledge of the English language, language education (curriculum, policies, and school context), and teacher learning in context.

Teacher educators engage in a continuous cycle of discovery of their ideal and feasible selves (Dörnyei, 2009), and are open to questioning who they are and what they are doing as a result of interacting with other teacher educators, their experiences, and their teaching-learning context (and of their student teachers).

Methodology

An Autobiographical Narrative Inquiry Path

It is understood that narrative inquiry is found in the midst of the life stories that individuals are creating and telling (Guyotte, 2015; Barkhuizen, Benson, and Chik, 2014).

To explore the diverse paths and experiences teacher educators have when developing their careers, a group of six teacher educators engaged in an autobiographical narrative inquiry. We first met through participation in a virtual professional EFL teacher education community, and recognized our shared interest in understanding teacher educator identity. We represent diverse paths of arriving at teacher education, location of teaching, amount of initial teacher education experience and even our country of origin, which is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Teacher Educator Participants

Participant	Current Employment Location	Experience	Country of Origin
Lucas	Northern Chile	12 years	Chile
Margarita	Central Chile	25 years	Chile
Paola	Southern Chile	10 years	Chile
Natalie	Central Chile	14 years	United States
Laura	England	15 years	Chile
Christine	Southern Chile	9 years	United States

Our inquiry slowly developed over time as our stories and conversations led us to new questions (Appendix 2). For nine months, our group met to read and discuss different narrative tellings we had written. We collectively chose a prompt question to focus on and allotted two weeks to write about specific lived experiences that helped us think about the chosen aspect of becoming a teacher educator. After writing, we met virtually to read these narratives aloud, then discussed and reflected on the similarities and differences in our experiences. Over this period we wrote about how we arrived at language teacher education, about feelings of legitimacy, about personal experiences that challenged us as educators, about how we have learned to be educators, and future desires for growth as teacher educators. At the end of this iterative writing process, we collected 26 written narratives and met 8 different times.

Johnson and Golombek (2011) outline how narrative inquiry can act as verbalization, not just describing and restating memories of the past, but rather an act of internalizing and reinscribing the meaning of these narratives. This understanding of verbalization and internalization helps describe the dialogical encounters as we wrote and discussed our experiences of becoming teacher educators. The importance of this almost year-long experience of writing and discussing is similar to what Jokikokko, et al. (2017, 63) note about narrative anecdotes and that they “can be used for theorising phenomena, not only for describing them”. As new narrative tellings arose amongst our group, so did questions about what it meant to both be and become teacher educators. This first stage of co-constructive dialogue in the narrative inquiry process initiated the reinterpretation of what this phenomenon of being and becoming teacher educators could mean.

In the second stage of the inquiry process, we utilized Polkinghorne’s (1995) analysis of narrative to more thoroughly understand the shared themes amongst the

collection of 26 written texts. Our coding process was lengthy, spanning over 10 months. We began by collaboratively rereading each of the narratives and thematically coding the texts. Given this study's autobiographical nature, dialogical reflexivity was key (Cho and Trent, 2006) in identifying the codes, and so there were often discussions about what each narrative was telling, recalls of previous discussions during the writing phase, and even retellings of the stories themselves. With an initial draft of the coding, we reviewed our coding again, checking for consistency in code use, creating definitions, and adjusting when segments of the story fit elsewhere. We ended the process identifying diverse emerging themes, which included the nomadic pathways of becoming a teacher educator, the experiences of (il)legitimacy that shape our affective experiences as educators, as well as the breadth of professional learning processes that often vary drastically from the institutionally recognized professional development.

Ethics and Trustworthiness

The study was granted approval by the ethics committee of one of the participating universities. Given that not all of the participants from the self-study participated in the analysis and writing process, consent was obtained to include their narratives.

We follow De Costa et al. (2021) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) principles on ethical issues on narrative inquiry research, and trustworthiness, respectively, addressing these principles as follows. For credibility, we framed how we have coded our data extensively, and have included a sample of our data analysis (Appendix 2) to illustrate this point. For dependability, we performed a rigorous analysis of our data in several rounds, by individual participants on their own data and then collectively. In this way, we ensured the finding's consistency, and that they address the research questions. For transferability, we provided a thick description of our narrative inquiry, including our

reflective questions (Appendix 1), to increase replicability. For confirmability, we believe that the stories honor “*what* participants share in their stories, but also *how* they narrated their stories (De Costa et. al. 2021, 6, italics in original), i.e. the results fully represent the voices of the participants, and they have been threaded in the themes that we set throughout the inquiry process.

Results

Becoming teacher educators

To answer the first question, How do we become teacher educators? All six participants reported different trajectories, but generally agreed their career path developed rather accidentally with only one exception. While Natalie asserted that she “studied languages: English and Spanish, with the goal of going to graduate school and eventually teaching *at the university level*”, many of the other educators recognized interest in becoming a K-12 teacher but similar to Laura “never thought that I was going to end up in teacher education.” Their arrival to teacher education was therefore a result of constant cycles of work experiences, reflections and pursuit of professional development.

Each educator understood the need for formal qualifications; nevertheless, there were differences between the four Chilean participants and the two participants from the US. The Chilean educators followed a traditional route to become English teachers, studying first an undergraduate English language teaching program which awarded them a Bachelor’s in Education and a teaching licence. In contrast, the participants from the US received undergraduate degrees in areas related to language and international affairs, but did not pursue a traditional teaching licence, which, in the US, is only for those who will teach at the K-12 level. Both groups of educators eventually followed up with master’s and Ph.D. degrees.

Between their undergraduate and doctoral studies, these educators described a wide array of teaching experiences. In fact, participants have taken multiple teaching jobs leading them to accumulate experiences with diverse roles and contexts. Some roles identified were teacher assistants in school settings, schoolteachers, and Spanish and English teachers in language schools and businesses in Chile and abroad. A noticeable similarity was their experience with both volunteer teaching opportunities and teaching positions in vulnerable contexts. As educators narrated their experiences in these particular contexts, they spoke of the importance of connecting and contributing to these unique communities, valuing education and access to languages as a manner to offer a better life. In principle, participants reflected that there was a sense of purpose on why we teach English, to whom, and how their learners make sense of it (or not), and also reveal some issues in doing so, for example, dealing with inequality and race in multiple (teaching) contexts. Given that the teacher educator is an individual whose work lies at the overlapping borders of the university and school contexts, educators recognized the important learning coming from interaction with the diverse communities, education contexts, and school actors. This diversity of professional experiences was therefore an important piece of their professional development which gave them opportunities to face the diverse realities and challenges that teachers are situated in.

Often entrance to teacher education was gradual, taking on diverse roles from serving as practicum supervisors or part-time instructors. This entrance frequently was combined with uncertainties about one's identities. Margarita believed that this was related to understanding that the educators had "experienced how teachers were educated to teach EFL" but simultaneously "didn't know much about" the pedagogy of teacher education itself. Others acknowledged struggling with transitioning to teacher

education, for example when Paola shared that “my professional identity remained as a teacher of adults...reinforced by my lack of induction and preparation to become a teacher educator.”

During their initial careers in teacher education, one important driver of their professional learning and reflection was the desire to address preservice teachers’ needs. For example, Laura reflected that working in higher education she needed to work “with real students” referring to updating her view on school contexts while teaching future teachers. Similarly, Lucas reported his need to pursue further studies because “I internally believed I wouldn’t be good enough for my students.” Furthermore, Natalie reflected on the commitment to be a good teacher and learner herself, to be a model for her students: “you have to have lived the process of developing a high level of proficiency in a second language yourself.”

Participants’ interest in education, language learning and teaching, and subsequently teacher education has therefore been pushed by this myriad of experiences, and reflected in their current positions. These include their experiences with language learning (English and Spanish), and what learning a second/foreign language involves, teaching experience in multiple contexts, the opportunities that language learning offers, and the sense of achievement that teaching future teachers brings.

Legitimacy and Illegitimacy

In regards to the second research question: What makes teacher educators feel legitimate or illegitimate? several themes emerged: their experience and qualifications, validation from colleagues, superiors, and students, and a theme we called “nativeness.” These themes can be seen as a double-edged sword, in some contexts providing a sense

of legitimacy, but in other situations, producing feelings of illegitimacy. A final theme that emerged was related to the compensatory strategies that teacher educators employed when confronted with a sense of illegitimacy.

Qualifications and legitimacy

The teacher educators recognized that their sense of legitimacy was related, in part, to their professional qualifications; this referred to having obtained advanced academic degrees, procuring research grants, publishing academic articles, and through the knowledge gained by experience working in teacher education. For example, Margarita explained:

“I thought that the Ph.D. degree and my research granted me legitimacy as a researcher in English language teacher education in Chile. I thought this was a major breakthrough since the research in this area was almost non-existent at that time.”

In a field where Ph.D.s were still fairly rare and research was incipient, having those qualifications gave her a sense that she was qualified to work in teacher education.

For other participants, gaining research experience through the masters and doctoral studies strengthened the sense of legitimacy. Christine, for example, explained that though initially she felt inadequate in her role as teacher educator, explaining how she “was glad to have the excuse that I wasn’t a faculty member because I didn’t feel competent enough to fulfil that [thesis advisor] role”. Gaining more experience in research and in working in teacher education has made her feel more competent in working with students. This recalls Olsen and Buchanan’s (2017) argument that teacher educator identities are often a balancing act of being a teacher and a researcher, and therefore the need to have qualifications and expertise in both areas.

Qualifications and illegitimacy

However, although these teacher educators have obtained graduate degrees, gained experience in teacher education, participated in research, obtained grants and published in their field, they also expressed that they often received comments that made them feel that they did not have the right qualifications or experience. Margarita, in her comment above, explained that she originally felt that her Ph.D. and research qualified her, yet she felt constantly questioned:

I was told I still had to prove if I could be a teacher educator in a Chilean university programme. I had been away for 5 years [...] things have changed and I was not part of the teacher educators' community any more. I have felt illegitimate many times as other teacher educators have told me things such as I 'don't know their context,' ...or 'we cannot do that in our programme'.

Margarita also mentioned feeling that she would never have the right type of experience or enough experience: "Although I taught English at schools, language schools and universities for more than 15 years, this is not enough... In other words, to be a legitimate teacher educator, I should have been a school teacher for 20 years."

The two participants from the U.S. Natalie and Christine, also expressed feeling illegitimate because they did not have a Chilean teaching licence. In Chile, being a teacher is synonymous with having studied a teacher preparation program, which bestows a teacher certification. Although they have obtained master's and Ph.D. degrees related to education and language teaching, these two educators have struggled at times with not having what can be considered an 'official' teaching qualification. Christine pondered: "When I hear colleagues and students debate about the inferior quality of teachers that come to the profession after studying a different major, I wonder if they see me this way."

In the case of Natalie, although she had been teaching all of her working life with adults in institutes and universities, holds a Ph.D. in language education, has worked in teacher education for almost 15 years, and has designed and directed a teacher education program, not having an undergraduate teaching certification gave her the sense of being an impostor. She recalled a celebration on Teacher's Day when the Dean of the School of Education where she worked asked how many of the teacher educators present were "really teachers." She further reflected:

I knew he was asking who had studied education as an undergrad and had received a teaching degree, so I didn't raise my hand. I think he would hate to feel like he made any of us feel "de-legitimized"....(but) it feels like one's right to be a teacher educator is so connected to having that undergrad K-12 teaching certification. How can you teach someone else to be what you are NOT... really? There are no other roads to Rome.

Thus, although most of these teacher educators had qualifications, both in terms of degrees and experience, that should legitimate them as teacher educators, they felt that their qualifications and experience were never enough; they *felt* constantly questioned and de-legitimated.

Validation from colleagues and superiors

Validation from colleagues was also relevant in generating a sense of legitimacy: positive comments, feedback, and recognition received from university colleagues or superiors, reinforced the perception that they were valued in their roles as teacher educators. Christine, for example, explained: "I began to feel legitimate in my role as a teacher, when I kept receiving positive comments from my mentors and administrators, when my formal reviews and observations were all high ranking." Similarly, Natalie

affirmed: “I feel like what I have to offer academically, my vision of teacher preparation, the elements I want to incorporate are all appreciated.”

For some of the participating teacher educators, this positive validation developed as a result of being asked to help colleagues: “when other colleagues from my university or others have asked me to help them with their projects, situations, or specific knowledge makes me feel I am doing something right” (Lucas). Hence, the participating teacher educators understood that by asking for feedback, their colleagues were recognizing that they made valuable contributions.

Validation from students

In addition to colleagues and superiors, current and former students also played a role in recognizing the value of the teacher educators’ work, lending to their sense of legitimacy. Margarita described how “student teachers, in-service teachers [...] confirm that my research and teaching are relevant and meaningful for initial English language teacher education”, a sentiment that was shared by Christine who identified the “hope” she finds in students’ positive teacher evaluations. Similarly, Natalie recognizes this appreciation, recalling how both her undergraduate and graduate (MA) students have indicated how their classes have “helped them change what they do and think about language learning differently” and reflected on how “that in the end this is more legitimating than anything else”. In other cases, this validation came from former students who shared their gratitude for what was learned, as in the case of Paola: “what has definitely strengthened this feeling of being a ‘genuine’ teacher educator is running into former students, now early career teachers, who highly value what I did when I was their teacher.”

The importance of the student validation was so strong, that teacher educators even recognized how they would incorporate ways to collect this information, for example Lucas explained

I have taken the practice to ask my students to assess me as the semester/term is going. The assessment the university provides students does not give me the feedback on how I am doing in my daily practice or the positive and negative things that I do.

In essence, educators value the student voice and look to use it to help shape their practice.

Lack of validation from colleagues or superiors and students

However, not all interactions with colleagues and students led to a sense of legitimacy for teacher educators; they also described situations where they felt questioned, leading to self-doubt and feelings of illegitimacy. In some cases educators felt that their teaching methods were questioned by colleagues or students. For example Christine described two such instances, “when a colleague told me that I needed to incorporate more ‘serious’ evaluations to my teaching practice, or when a failing student complained to the director about me.” Another example was shared by Lucas:

One day I was going over lesson planning and three students came to me saying that what I had taught was wrong [...] They said that my colleague had said so. [...] Of course I felt terrible and started doubting what I had learned and knew. [...] During those months I felt every single word I said as I taught or was in meetings was being judged.

Hence, teacher educators had experiences with colleagues, superiors, and even students that led them to feel, at times legitimate, yet at others, illegitimate.

“Nativity”

A final theme that was found to alternately lead to feelings of legitimacy or illegitimacy was what we called *nativeness*. Two of the teacher educators were originally from the US, born and raised speaking English as a mother tongue, had immigrated to Chile as adults, and were proficient in Spanish; they are considered *native* English speakers in this EFL context. The other four teacher educators were from Chile, born and raised speaking Spanish as a mother tongue, and had become proficient in English later through studies and through extensive periods doing graduate studies abroad; they are considered *not-native* English speakers. The theme *nativeness* referred to the feeling that being or not being *native* affected how others perceived whether they belonged in this field or not, their desirableness as a teacher of English or EFL teacher educator, or their feelings of discomfort when whether they were *native* or not seemed to determine if they were considered qualified.

Similar to the other themes under legitimacy, *nativeness* was perceived as a double-edged sword that could be seen as an advantage or a disadvantage. For the two teacher educators from the US, they felt that their qualifications were reduced to their origin, in the sense that their assumed “belongingness” was often reduced to their *nativeness*: “This assumption some people seem to make that I am only in this field because I am a ‘native’ speaker of English, without even considering I might have other qualifications” (Natalie). Christine shared this perception:

I doubt my ability to label myself a teacher educator because I find myself labelled as the native speaker, as the friendly one. This is what it seems people see or better yet hear, what is hidden is the purposeful planning based on careful reading of academic literature and critical reflection of past experiences. So, I question myself.

They both had the sense that being *native* reduced their qualifications to origin in the eyes of others,

For some of the Chilean teacher educators, who are considered *non-native* in this context, *nativeness* was also a theme. Some also felt that being *non-native* made them less desirable as English teachers and teacher educators and hence, less legitimate. Paola, for example, explained:

Even though my identity as a teacher educator has been shaped by my own professional development and learning journey and the interaction with the context I work in, the fact of not being a “native” English speaker has more often than not prevailed when reflecting on my role as a teacher educator. EFL student teachers’ expectations of having only “native” English speakers as part of the academic team has made me question my current identity, having to justify why I am qualified to be part of the staff. Even though I understand their prospects about this “ideal teacher educator”, this still plays a part in shaping my own identity.

Paola questioned her legitimacy and whether she should be a teacher educator given that she understood that students expressed preferences or expectations for having *native* English teachers, as if *nativeness* were more of a qualification than her advanced degrees or years of experience.

Compensatory strategies

Illegitimacy persists throughout the teacher educators’ narratives. However, educators do not simply remain static in these affective experiences, instead they are pushed to respond with diverse compensatory strategies. Often the participants recounted their desires and efforts to compensate for the perceived holes within their teacher “being” by ensuring their practice was informed, pertinent, and that it utilized

contemporary teaching practices. Natalie spoke of going “to great lengths to make sure what I am doing is grounded and relevant, to compensate, in a way for what others may see as missing in my trajectory”, while Christine reflected on a self-imposed need to “do well” and need to “do everything in my power to resolve [conflicts] myself”. For Natalie this stemmed from needing to “justify why I am qualified to be doing what I am doing”, while Christine came from a position of fear of being seen as someone who could not handle the complexities of teaching. Interestingly, both of these educators who entered teacher education with qualifications that differed from the norm, had even seriously considered “getting a teaching degree...even though I could teach almost all of the classes myself, just to be able to say: I AM a teacher and have the degree to ‘prove it’.” (Natalie, emphasis in original).

Research also became a pivotal tool to support their sense of belonging, enabling participants to position themselves as knowledgeable beings because they both knew the relevant literature surrounding the different intersecting fields and were contributing to the field. Laura for example recognized “I felt that I had to prove that I knew what I was doing (I did know) with the support of the latest research so my voice could be heard and taken into account, but most importantly respected.” She used research to legitimize her voice. Margarita similarly understood how her “feelings of illegitimacy have pushed [her] to do research in initial English language teacher education considering not only student teachers, but also teacher educators.” Connected to this same topic of studying the education of teachers and teacher educators, Margarita noted how creating collaborative professional development communities for teacher educators also supported her own sense of legitimacy.

In thinking about each of these compensatory strategies, what is noticed too is how they simultaneously become moments of significant teacher educator learning.

Participating in research helped narrow teacher educators' focus on what educators study and the teacher practices that each uses. By engaging with contemporary literature, teacher educators push themselves to critically reflect on the purposes of teacher education and their own contributions.

Discussion

Glissant's *Poetics of Relations* (2010) is helpful in theorizing how our narrative experiences illustrate the way in which our identity and the perceptions of our own (il)legitimacy rise from the relations we encounter and construct along our path of becoming. Being in an educational system, entrenched in processes of standardization, there are dominant discourses, found in formal and informal conversations that describe who a teacher educator should be. While, Cochran-Smith et al. (2020) outline the lack of deliberate education of teacher educators across international contexts, the participants in this study perceived only one authorized "road to Rome". They sensed a professional path that begins with undergraduate teaching degrees, includes significant professional K-12 experience, and eventually leads to doctoral studies and research. Diverse regulatory processes, such as the highly technical information about teacher educators' lines of research, qualifications and research projects required in accreditation reports shape the formal and informal discourses that educators perpetuate about what a qualified professional looks like in Chile.

In contrast to this rooted teacher educator being, the study's narratives demonstrated nomadic traveling similar to that described by Ovens et al. (2016). Only one of the six participants began their professional journeys knowingly working towards a tertiary education destination. For others, however, their professional wandering was created by cycling through experiences, reflection, identifying gaps in knowledge or experience, and pursuing ways to compensate for experience. With each new context

and role that the educators encountered, new practices were discovered and the need for new knowledge was recognized.

The legitimacy of these diverse paths of becoming teacher educators is found in the relations that teacher educators develop. Given the lack of clearly defined pathways to teacher education (Cochran-Smith et al., 2020; Goodwin et al., 2014; Sepulveda-Escobar, 2024), and the numerous intersecting arenas that EFL educators find themselves in, educator's identity acts were found to be constantly both legitimate and illegitimate, depending on their relational connections. As educators desire a certain subject-being with its collection of qualifications, beliefs, skills, and theoretical knowledge, they connect themselves with Others. These other colleagues, superiors, students and/or K-12 teachers may desire similar educator beings and therefore validate what we are doing and becoming, but they may also discursively reject this being, creating tension within the relationship. Furthermore, with Chile inserted in a globalized world that simultaneously critiques the hegemonic north, actively desires participation in international markets, and readily imports anglo pop culture, the teacher education assemblage in Chile both values and criticizes "nativeness."

The issue we find unveiled in these narratives is that as teacher educators navigate simultaneous feelings of legitimacy and illegitimacy, and as they seek to fill perceived gaps in knowledge and experience, a Goldilocks effect occurs in the way these actors juggle their idealized subject-beings with those that are imposed by the expectations of others. An educator for example may be applauded for their developing lines of research, as they connect with the required scholarly-being with its associated academic expectations and obligations, but simultaneously seen as illegitimate due to their limited focus on research and lack of experience or current classroom connections. Similarly, an educator can be validated by their students for their pedagogical approach,

while also criticized by colleagues for their lack of alignment with a specific linguistic theory. This pattern continues on for qualifications, knowledge, skills and experiences: the teacher educator is consistently found in a network of relationships that say they are both too hot *and* too cold, meaning they are both a legitimate being as well as an illegitimate one.

Conclusion

The educators' narratives illustrated that becoming a teacher educator is rarely a journey intentionally chosen at the onset of one's teaching career. Rather by cycling through different experiences in diverse educational contexts, teacher reflection, formal education, and research, teachers nomadically journey towards becoming teacher educators. While there is a perceived singular and legitimate path toward becoming a teacher educator, the experiences outlined demonstrate otherwise. As educators experience and interact with various actors in the educational system this often leads to a sense of legitimacy or illegitimacy, as the educator's being is evaluated by a normalized view of who and what a teacher educator is. Throughout the narrative analysis process, we shared both the feeling of never being quite enough in terms of qualifications, experiences, and knowledge required, and simultaneously feeling a growing sense of competency in this role. We have called this the Goldilocks phenomenon. It is a phenomenon that seems to be characteristic along the entire length of teacher educators' careers.

Implications

When we think about current institutionally approved forms of professional development, the participants' discussions described encapsulated courses offering techniques and strategies to be digested and implemented. In other words, there is a sense that the professional development courses that are offered to teacher educators are those that provide the skills and knowledge that help create the standardized teacher

educator. Whether this is because the university is working to ensure the educators meet the accreditation requirements and can accurately verbalize the institutional policies and education designs, or because they are institutional sessions meant to embed a shared discourse about teacher standards. This coincides with Sepulveda-Escobar's (2024) finding that Chilean teacher educators often consider only formal coursework and degree programs as continual professional development. This could be due to the educator evaluation processes used in universities and the new managerialist discourse that pervades the Chilean teacher education system (Hinostroza-Paredes, 2020), where only certain types of formal professional development are measured and considered in accountability processes.

However, the educators narratives in the study spoke of learning through relationships, through interactions with diverse others and by experiencing and reflecting on those experiences. Teacher educators recognized this need for learning through interaction, sensing the importance of collaboration and reflection in any teacher educator professional development design (Fuentealba and Montenegro, 2016; Ping et al., 2018). Ovens et al. (2016) mention that "becoming [is] an emergent process that occurs within the relationships of particular social-cultural-material environments as people live their lives, build relationships and pursue particular goals" (p.183). If teacher educators are allowed to act as becomings, as actors that are constantly in motion evolving with their experiences, research and relationships, then their professional development needs to align with this way of relating.

The question that this study leaves us with is therefore questioning how universities and public education agencies might be able to incorporate more flexible and reflective forms of professional learning into their institutional practices. How can we legitimize relational learning across educators, so that it does not need to compete with

the more formal training programs that educators often feel compelled to take as compensatory strategies? We understand that posing these questions senses teacher educators as agential actors within the teacher education rhizome, creating tensions with the current macropolitical context engulfed in accountability and managerial processes.

Limitations

As we started the narratives, due to time constraints, not all participants wrote one for every prompt nor engaged in the data analysis stage. Another drawback was that we did not record our discussion meetings, which would have constituted relevant data for our analysis. Finally, findings should be interpreted cautiously, particularly when generalizing these to other contexts.

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Appendix 1: Prompts

Narrative	Prompt(s)
Narrative 1	How did you arrive to language teacher education?
Narrative 2	What is it that makes you feel legitimate or illegitimate within your role as a teacher educator? What might be some challenges to your identity as a teacher educator?
Narrative 3	What similarities exist in how we formally legitimize our teacher educator identity? What similarities exist in how we informally legitimize our teacher educator identity? How are these processes of legitimizing our identity lived out internally and externally?
Narrative 4	How have we learned how to be teacher educators? Describe actions, interactions, events.
Narrative 5	Please write about your interests in future learning and growth with your teacher education practice. One of our original questions was what are your aspirations for the future of your job, so what are these goals and what are different ways that you think you can work towards this?

Appendix 2: Data analysis sample

Illegitimacy	Emotion/ Internal conflict	sense of illegitimacy coming from internal dialogue	Feeling legitimate or illegitimate, I believe personally, has been lived as an internal and highly personal struggle. It feels like a constant pressure that I place upon myself and not because of any formal process I have been specifically required to go through. My desire to feel legitimate (Christine)
	Compensatory Strategies	Strategies used to compensate for the sense of illegitimacy, attempting to make up for what is seen as lacking.	I have gone to great lengths to make sure what I am doing is grounded and relevant, to compensate, in a way for what others may see as missing in my trajectory. This has generated a sense of discomfort at times, when I feel I have to justify why I am qualified to be doing what I am doing (Natalie) I felt that I had to prove that I knew what I was doing (I did know) with the support of the latest research so my voice could be heard and taken into account, but most importantly respected. (Laura)