

# Teachers' Identities in Rural Areas From Chile

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*The research study presented in this article has attempted to generate deep and first-source knowledge on how the identity of teachers who practice their profession in the rural context is forged and configured. The study was carried out in two rural communes in the Ñuble Region.*

*Through a mixed study, with qualitative predominance, it was possible to investigate the perceptions of a sample of in-service teachers, at different stages of their careers. The study findings show that the identity of the rural teacher is configured by various characteristics, particularly relevant to the rural educational context of Ñuble, but which are equally transferable to other educational realities in rural communes in Chile. The study has revealed that the rural teacher is perceived as a professional with a high degree of vocation and motivation for his/her work, characterized by a high level of professionalism, who exercises multiple roles, establishes close relationships with his/her educational communities and commonly works in challenging conditions due to scarcity of resources available to carry out his/her work in favorable conditions.*

*Keywords: rural education, teacher identity, teaching professionalism, vocation*

## INTRODUCTION

The process of building professional identity is complex, even more so when the identity being forged has to do with one of the most socially undervalued professions in Chile today. The teacher identity concept brings together and converges a series of personal and social factors that shape and forge the teacher's identity. The building of this identity undergoes fluctuations and changes that directly affect the teacher in relation to how he/she perceives him/herself and how he/she feels about how his/her work is valued by society. Within these same changes, identity conflicts are generated, due to the fact that, commonly, the same system in which teachers are inserted generates identity crises (Balbontín, 2019).

The research presented here has attempted to generate deep and first-source knowledge on how the identity of teachers who practice their profession in the rural context is forged and configured. Considering that research on teacher identity is mostly focused on urban teachers, this research has sought to contribute to an unexplored area in the national context, since there is limited research on factors involved in the configuration of the rural teacher's identity.

This research has made it possible to investigate the self-perception and professional valuation that rural teachers have of their work and of the different roles they play in their educational communities. The working conditions they face on a daily basis have been studied in depth in order to contrast the results of the research with findings on urban teachers and to establish convergences and divergences between the two groups.

This research was carried out in three rural schools in the communes of Bulnes and San Ignacio in the Ñuble Region, localities characterized by a high percentage of rural population. The schools involved serve students from rural areas surrounding the schools in the aforementioned communes. These schools provide basic education and are characterized mainly by providing their students with a comprehensive education, which means that the work carried out by the education professionals goes beyond the mere delivery of knowledge; they are schools that focus on the delivery of values and tools for life.

## FRAME OF REFERENCE

### Conceptualization of Teaching Identity

Identities are influenced and shaped by different factors, such as the place where a person lives, the social group to which he/she belongs, the profession he/she has, the religion he/she practices, gender, sexual orientation, etc. Thus, identities can be defined as constructed meanings of who one is, what social position one holds, and are assumed personally or as a group on the basis of cultural attributes assigned by society (Castells, 1997). The job or profession a person has constitutes a central dimension of individual and collective identities (Dubar, 1991).

Starting from this perspective, we have focused on one profession in particular, the teaching profession, whose specific tasks, responsibilities and expert knowledge directed at learners make up the practice of the profession. The support for this statement is found in the concept of profession coined by Abbott, who in his study on the system of professions defines it as “exclusive occupational groups that apply somewhat abstract knowledge to particular cases” (Abbott, 1998, p. 8, referred to in Ávalos, 2013). Taking this definition into account, the core element of a profession would be the ability to perform a specific job, based on a theoretical knowledge base and the ability to apply it in relevant situations.

The specific action field of teachers is teaching (Lessard, 1991, referred to in Lang, 2006). Although teaching is understood as part of the educational concept that teachers share with other social groups, the exercise of the profession requires that in front of their students and, in conjunction with the social mandate to educate and teach, each teacher must use some of the specific knowledge, skills or competencies acquired during their professional training or in the exercise of the profession itself.

At the work level, specifically in the teaching profession, and considering that society entrusts teachers with the task of educating in specific contexts such as schools and high schools, it is possible to determine that teachers create an identity during the course of their work, a seal that characterizes them as belonging to a particular social and professional group. In summary, from the *concept of professional identity* stems the *concept of teacher identity*.

The aforementioned concept of *teacher identity* is composed by a personal aspect (teachers’ self-perceptions) and a social aspect (the external vision of teaching), (Avalos, Bellei, Sotomayor and Valenzuela, 2011). Therefore, a comprehensive definition of the concept will consider the interaction of personal and professional experiences and the influences of the conditions and social environment where teachers work. It should be noted that there is a certain *dynamism* within personal and professional experiences that shape professional identity, so identities are not static, but dynamic (Balbontín, 2019). For example, the identity of a rural teacher differs from that of an urban teacher, which changes according to the different scenarios and conditions he/she faces during his/her years of professional practice. In other words, teacher identity and its sub-identities are constructed and reconstructed throughout the professional career (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004).

There are three core elements that are part of the teacher identity construction process: *beliefs, emotions and attitudes* (Rodgers & Scott, cited in Hamman, Gosselin, Romano & Bunuan, 2010; van der Berg, 2002). *Beliefs* are related to teachers’ perceptions regarding the efficacy in performing their tasks (Bandura, 1993).

*Emotions* have a high impact on the motivation and vocation of teachers (Boler, 1997; Nias, 1989; Hargreaves, 1998; Little, 1996, referred to in Zembylas, 2003). Essentially, emotions are affective elements that positively or negatively accompany the achievement of teaching tasks and are directly linked to the vocation and commitment of teachers. Finally, *attitudes* are related to the way in which teachers react to social processes, such as education reforms. In short, these elements and their interactions are crucial for the decisions that teachers make during their professional lives (van der Berg, 2002).

As mentioned above, the process of constructing teacher identity is dynamic and is determined by a variety of contexts, geographic or sociocultural realities and by personal experience (Cardelle-Ellaward et al., referred to in Hamman et al., 2010). These fluctuations, typical of the identity construction process, cause feelings of instability and identity conflicts in teachers (Balbontin, 2019). Contextual situations, such as changes in policies and reforms, come into contradiction with identity definitions producing conflict in teachers, for example, in teaching practice (Wills & Sandholtz, 2009).

Van der Berg (2002) identified five aspects that cause identity conflicts among teachers: (a) questioning the quality of their own work; (b) questioning the legitimacy of external definitions of their work value; (c) negative perception of personal value expressed in doubt, resistance, disillusionment and guilt; (d) feelings of uncertainty and ambiguity in the face of external demands that are diffuse and unclear; and (e) stress and *burnout* triggered by situations such as conflict between roles and expectations, limitations of autonomy at work and pressure due to lack of time to meet all that is demanded. Barrett (2008) adds to these conflict triggers elements, the tension arising in the interaction between teachers and the distancing produced by external pressures that circumscribe teacher identity to the production of measurable results (Jessop & Penny 1998; Osborn et al., 2000; George et al., 2003, referred to in Barrett, 2008).

The aspects described above also correspond to the sources of identity conflict identified by Chilean teachers, who, in addition to being affected by an undervaluation of their own work, must face external requirements and demands and deal with time and autonomy limitations. In addition, at the professional level, they often face adverse working conditions, such as long working hours, low salaries, scarcity of teaching resources and disproportion between teaching and non-teaching hours. Teachers' working conditions directly affect their professional performance and this leads to fluctuations in their professional identity. There are mainly two types of elements that have an impact on teaching performance: (a) *conditions for the exercise of teaching*, among which we can mention the workload of teachers (number of hours versus number of students), the time available for tasks such as planning and proofreading work, and the availability of support resources for teaching; (b) *conditions deriving from educational policies that have an impact on teaching*, including salary policies, recognition of a teaching career, evaluation mechanisms, and the operational conditions of the public or private institutions in which they work (UNESCO, 2008, referred to in Ávalos, 2013).

Some of the conditions for teaching that have the greatest impact on the motivation, sense of efficacy and well-being of teachers are the *teaching load*. The most common way of estimating the teaching load is the students/teacher ratio, but this estimate does not reflect well the differences between rural and urban education. The UNESCO/OECD *World Education Indicators* program (UNESCO, 2008) considers as an indicator the number of students enrolled divided by the number of existing courses, a measurement that is more accurate in establishing differences between rural and urban education. Based on this indicator and comparative information from 2006, the highest teaching load in Latin America is found in countries such as Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil (Ministry of Education of Chile, 2007). The excessive teaching load in the aforementioned countries is perceived as a factor that impacts the availability of time to perform teaching tasks, such as proofreading assignments and notebooks (Tenti-Fanfani, 2005). On the other hand, a study conducted on high school teachers in Chile concluded that the *importance* and the *level of load* perceived by teachers in their work are among the intra-school factors with the highest incidence on their well-being/discomfort index (Cornejo, Assael, Quiñones, Redondo & Rojas, 2010). In addition, a study of fourth grade teachers in 11 countries, carried out within the framework of the *World Education Indicators* (WEI) program (UNESCO, 2008), found a general dissatisfaction among teachers with their working conditions between 2005 and 2006.

## **Rural Teacher Identity**

All previous conceptualizations regarding the profession, identity and working conditions of teachers point, for the most part, to the most massive type of education in the country, which corresponds to education in the urban context. However, there is little research that has explored the role, identity and working conditions of professionals practicing in rural areas.

According to figures from the Quality Assurance Agency for Education, as of 2017 in Chile there were around 3,524 educational institutions in rural sectors, which welcomed around 272,000 students (Quality Assurance Agency for Education, 2018a). According to data collected by the Agency in 2015, Rural Education in Chile is characterized by serving students belonging to a low socioeconomic level and in vulnerable conditions. The average schooling of parents of students in rural institutions is 9 years, while in the urban context it is 12 years. Additionally, in relation to the average monthly income, parents of students in rural institutions perceive an income twice lower than the income of parents of students attending urban institutions (Quality Assurance Agency for Education, 2018b). In terms of access and provision of schooling at the rural primary and secondary levels, Chile is in one of the best positions in Latin America (López, Pereyra and Sourrouille, 2012). However, there is evidence that students in rural areas have a higher prevalence of school dropout, which is associated with preserving situations of social vulnerability (Ministry of Education, 2013, 2016).

In Chile, rural education is much more concentrated in primary or basic education, since students in secondary or middle school usually move to urban areas to continue their education. Regarding this point, it is possible to state that this is the generality, but there are isolated cases of rural high schools that attract urban population due to their good results (Balbontín and Rivas, 2018). It is important to emphasize that rural education takes place in socio-cultural contexts that are very different from those of urban education, since geographic isolation determines that many schools have very different teaching modalities, such as multi-grade or multi-level schools, where several grades coexist in one classroom. While this can make teaching and teaching-learning processes more complex, it often becomes an opportunity to integrate innovative teaching strategies.

The reality of rural schools in Chile is not homogeneous; the role of the rural teacher varies according to the school where he/she works and the characteristics of the geographical area where it is located. Although there is no teacher prototype, evidence suggests that rural teachers are characterized by being articulators and facilitators of the learning process and creators of spaces for community participation. Therefore, the role of the rural teacher is not limited only to the teacher-student relationship, since his or her work is conceived as a service to the community (Villaruel, 2003, 2004; Thomas and Hernández, 2005). This broad spectrum of tasks expected of rural teachers demonstrates that they have been required to meet demands for which they were probably not prepared during their initial training and that often have a negative impact on their motivation to teach (Thomas and Hernández, 2005).

Concluding the previous point, it is possible to state that the rural teacher is expected to develop different competencies and tasks for which many times he/she is not prepared. Considering the definition of identity, specifically with regard to the situations that cause crises, possibly the lack of preparation to face precarious educational scenarios generates a state of stress or *burnout* due to feeling incapable of fulfilling the expectations generated by the role of rural educator. However, this situation may turn out to be favorable in terms of the configuration of his/her identity as a professional, since after this kind of stress comes experiential learning, which translates into the reconfiguration of his/her identity as a teacher. After some time and as they gain more experiences in different educational scenarios and social contexts, their identity will undergo changes again, giving rise to a constant dynamic process of identity construction and deconstruction (Balbontín, 2019).

## **METHOD**

The research presented considers the use of a mixed sequential design with qualitative predominance. The choice of this type of methodology is based on the conception that all methods have weaknesses that can be reduced if triangulation is performed and if these methods belong to antagonistic but complementary

epistemological views of research (Creswell, 2009; Denscombe, 2010; Hernández-Sampieri & Mendoza, 2008; Hernández-Sampieri, Fernández & Baptista, 2010; Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2004; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Concerning this point Creswell (2009) states that all methods have limitations, which can be neutralized by the use of another method. Denscombe (2010), in turn, argues that the use of more than one method can improve research findings by providing a broader and more complete representation of the phenomenon under study. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) propose that the use of a mixed methodology can provide much more solid research inferences than a traditional quantitative or qualitative methodological design. If we analyze the individual potentialities of the different methodological currents in a general way, we could indicate that the use of quantitative methods can increase the possibilities of generalizing a study, while qualitative methods or techniques give depth to the understanding of the phenomenon studied. In the specific case of this research, the main objective is to generate deep and first source knowledge on how the identity of teachers who practice their profession in the rural context is forged and configured, so a mixed methodological approach with a qualitative preponderance is justified, since this knowledge will be obtained mainly through the perceptions of teachers of their own profession, which will be obtained mainly through interviews. At the same time, the quantitative element, which in this case will be supported by surveys applied to teachers, has a complementary and triangulating role and will contribute to improve the research inferences.

### **Data Collection Instruments and Techniques**

The research data were collected through the use of an interview and the implementation of a survey. In this way, it was possible to obtain both qualitative and quantitative data and achieve more solid and comprehensive results and conclusions. For Denzil & Lincoln (2005, p. 643, referred to in Vargas, 2012) the interview is “a conversation, it is the art of asking questions and listening to answers”. As a data collection technique, it is strongly influenced by the personal characteristics of the interviewer. For this research, a semi-structured interview was used. In order to carry out this type of interview, a guide of questions was prepared, where the interviewees were free to express their opinions and qualify their answers, but always with the guidance of the interviewer. In short, they were free to answer the questions posed as they considered appropriate and were able to expand, revealing their own experience and perspective on the teaching profession.

Regarding the quantitative approach, data were collected using a survey that was designed in online format, the data were obtained through the responses of the study subjects, which allowed the establishment of descriptive statistical indexes on the reality of rural teachers.

Both data collection instruments were designed by the researchers, based on the literature about teaching identity, the Teaching and Learning International Survey TALIS 2013 (OECD, 2014) and the objectives defined for the research. On the other hand, they underwent expert peer validation tests, with the participation of 4 scholars from two universities, who reviewed the structure, suitability, reliability and relevance of the instruments.

Given the sequential mixed research design, data collection was conducted sequentially, i.e., quantitative data first and then qualitative data.

It should be noted that under a mixed research methodology, both qualitative and quantitative methods are used to meet the same research objectives. If the interview were used exclusively to answer some objectives and the survey to answer others, we would be using a multi-method approach. In addition, mixed approaches involve synergy and complementarity, so that the results are often not presented in a fragmented manner, but in a single section.

### **Participants**

The target population for this study was selected through simple random sampling. Both the samples of participants in the survey (60 teachers) and in the interview (8 teachers) are characterized by: working directly in the classroom in municipal schools located in rural areas of the communes of Bulnes and San Ignacio; being at different stages of their professional careers; and belonging to schools with different

realities, structures and operating conditions. In addition, all participants agreed to be part of the study on a voluntary basis.

### **Ethical Aspects and Access to Institutions**

This research considered the ethical treatment of the participants, both in the data collection process and in the data analysis process. Thus, in order to safeguard these procedures, an informed consent form was prepared and given to each participating practitioner. In this document, the research objectives, the type of instrument to be applied, the approximate application time and the technical specifications of the process were reported. In addition, it is clearly stated that each teacher is free to participate, expressing his or her decision by voluntarily signing the document.

Access to each institution was arranged with the respective education departments (DEM). In the commune of Bulnes, access was requested personally to the principals of the participating educational institutions through a previous meeting, where the main points of the research process were explained. In the case of the commune of San Ignacio, in a previous coordination meeting, the Head of the Education Department drafted an official letter requesting authorization from the principals of the educational communities to collect data and collaborate with this research.

### **Data Analysis**

Regarding the analysis of the qualitative data, the interviews were recorded, with prior authorization from the participants, and then transcribed. Through the use of qualitative analysis matrices, reading, coding and thematic categorization was carried out considering pre-established factors (a priori) and emerging issues. Subsequently, categories were reduced and connections between them were established. Finally, the categories were described analytically, providing evidence from the interviews.

On the other hand, as for the quantitative analysis, the survey data were tabulated and processed and, based on these, descriptive statistical indexes were obtained, such as the mean, percentages, frequency tables and bar charts. The above, in order to perform data triangulation to complement the information obtained in the interviews and thus be able to integrate the research findings and generate more solid inferences and conclusions.

## **RESULTS**

As a result of the data analysis, both from the interviews and the surveys, it was possible to establish some global categories of analysis that made it possible to answer the research objectives, namely, *professional choice, motivation to work in the rural context, working conditions, perception of professionalism, vision of the rural teacher and differences between the rural teacher and the urban teacher*. These factors explore an aspect of the configuration of the rural teacher's identity, which according to Ávalos et al. (2011) involves two aspects, a personal one related to the self-definitions of teachers and a social one that refers to the social vision of teaching.

Regarding the first aspect explored, *professional choice*, it was possible to obtain information that shows that 80% of the teachers interviewed experienced a kind of "vocational calling" (Avalos, 2013) that conditioned them from an early age to choose the path of teaching, as expressed by the following teacher:

"I think that I did not only choose pedagogy, it chose me because since I was very young, my games were to teach and my parents had all the implements so that I could be a little teacher, my dad brought me the books of his work, they gave me a little chalk board and so I always played at teaching. So, I think this profession was with me since I was a child."  
(Teacher, Commune of Bulnes)

On the other hand, 85% of the teachers express that they have never questioned their professional choice because the "vocational call" towards the pedagogical path was quite decisive in relation to their future as

professionals. However, some of them did indicate that, during their time as university students, they considered the option of abandoning the professional training process, although, in their own words, “fortunately,” they did not do so.

“I remember that, at university, in my third year I went through that stage of thinking of giving up, it was even difficult for me to finish my degree for the same reason, but now I am grateful for not having dropped out.” (Teacher, Commune of San Ignacio)

This teacher’s statement is the normal process of vocational choice that often takes place when university students in teacher training are in the first years of their careers. Although this does not necessarily always suppose a low level of vocation, but rather could be understood as part of the normal process of personal maturity, in the face of vocational decisions.

A second factor identified through the surveys and interviews is *the motivation to practice in the rural context*. 100% of the teachers are motivated to stay in rural areas mainly because the organizational environment within their schools is calm and fosters a closer relationship between teachers and students, creating a more relaxed and comfortable atmosphere among all those who make up the educational communities (teachers, administrative staff, education assistants and parents). Another important point, which was mentioned by the teachers among their motivations, was the difference between children living in rural areas and children living in urban areas, as highlighted by the words of a teacher when asked about her motivation to work in rural areas:

“The tranquility and the close relationship generated among all the members of the school, from the principal to the parents, we all know each other and have a good relationship. On the other hand, the children are completely different from the city, in every sense, innocence, world view, etc.” (Teacher, Commune of Bulnes).

When mentioning the scenario of a possible change of institution or a change to the urban sector, 87% of the teachers surveyed expressed that they have no intention of moving to an urban environment. This is because they feel encouraged and motivated by the same environment of companionship and fellowship that is generated among colleagues, in addition to the good relationships that are established with students and the environment surrounding the educational community. These factors make them bond and identify themselves in a very deep way with their educational institutions, as expressed by this teacher:

“No, I would not feel comfortable in any other school, it is hard for me sometimes to adapt to changes and in this school I already feel so comfortable with everything that I would not like to move, even if I had the option.” (Teacher, Commune of San Ignacio)

In relation to the *working conditions* factor, the teachers referred to other important aspects of teaching, specifically the pressure and teaching load, and some of the teachers interviewed stated that they have never or almost never been overburdened in their work. Some teachers emphasized that perhaps at the beginning of their professional life they were a bit overwhelmed with the wide range of roles and functions that a teacher must fulfill while working in the profession. However, once they had become accustomed to the teaching profession, this pressure began to disappear, as the following quote from one of the interviews shows:

“Not so much, once you get into the rhythm of everything that working here involves and you are a head teacher and you get used to all the other roles you have to play in the school, it is not so terrible and you don’t feel the pressure of the job so much.” (Teacher, Commune of Bulnes)

Continuing with the *working conditions factor*, the teachers expressed that, although it is true that the environment and the good relations generated within the schools help to create a good working environment, sometimes the conditions in which they have to teach are not ideal. This translates into significant differences with urban schools in terms of access to ICTs, for example, or in simple things such as having the necessary materials to conduct a class, as evidenced by this teacher:

“Sometimes I do feel like my hands are tied because there are not enough materials, we don’t have a computer lab with internet access and things like that, but I know how to handle that frustration.” (Teacher, Commune of Bulnes)

When considering the fourth factor of analysis, *perception of professionalism*, which is related to personal appreciation of the professionalism level with which teachers carry out their work, they were asked to reflect on whether, on any occasion, they have doubted about their quality as teachers. Most of the teachers surveyed and interviewed expressed that they have never questioned their professional quality, as they have always obtained good results:

“No, because I feel I have prepared a lot to be where I am. I know my worth as a professional and no one can make me doubt about that.” (Teacher, Commune of Bulnes)

In turn, the teachers also referred to the aspect of professional violation and 100% of them stated that they have not been victims of any type of violation, either inside or outside their workplaces. It is observed that teachers do not doubt about their professional quality, which translates into greater confidence and the valuation of themselves as professionals, feelings that do not give rise to violation, since they are clear about their value as educational professionals:

“No, I have not felt infringed upon in the schools I have been in. Of course, in every institution there are differences, but at least we here have a way of socializing that is positive, in the sense that we tell each other things, we talk and we accept. We don’t make destructive criticism, and we all support each other.” (Teacher, Commune of Bulnes)

On a separate point, teachers were asked about the *rural teacher’s vision* factor. From the evidence it can be concluded that the rural teacher is considered as a professional who delivers much more than content; he/she also focuses on the human aspect, on the delivery of values and, above all, in giving love and attention to all his/her students:

“The rural teacher is someone who gives a lot for his/her students, someone who really knows what a professional vocation is. Someone who understands that our work is not limited to being transmitters of knowledge, we are also often the children’s friends or shelter.” (Teacher, Commune of Bulnes)

On the other hand, the teachers referred to the multiple roles that the rural teacher fulfills, highlighting mainly the role of mother or older sibling of the students, a role that also helps to strengthen ties and get closer to their students and their families. In addition to the above, there are the administrative roles that must be fulfilled when there are no human resources within the institution:

“I’ve done a little bit of everything, I’ve done everything from cleaning to nursing, I don’t mind that. But that’s the way things are in these schools, due to lack of resources sometimes, you have to apply yourself to everything you can, and with the students to be a mother and fulfill the roles that many times at home are not fulfilled for various reasons.” (Teacher, Commune of Bulnes)



Finally, regarding the factor that is related to the *differences between the rural teacher and the urban teacher*, the teachers identified a wide range of characteristics, highlighting among them the close relationship generated between teachers and students, which, in their own words, does not occur in urban contexts. This is mainly due to the fact that life in urban areas is accelerated and the great majority of teachers who work in this context only limit themselves to delivering content and do not give much space to generate ties with their students. The opposite situation occurs in rural education, where the creation of ties is a distinctive and highly present characteristic in the educational communities, as stated according to the words of this teacher:

“I think the commitment we have acquired with the school and with everyone is the thing that differentiates us the most from our colleagues in the city. Here, in this context, it is not easy to stay away from the diverse realities of our students, most of them seek shelter and support from us and that makes it impossible not to get involved. Things that do not happen in the city, the teachers there do not get so involved because they consider it exhausting”.  
(Teacher, Commune of San Ignacio)

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The research objectives reported in this article gave way to the exploration of certain factors, whose analysis has attempted to reveal how the identity of teachers who practice their profession in the rural context is forged and configured, by learning about their beginnings in vocational terms, what motivates and drives them to maintain their professional commitment, how they define themselves professionally, what is their vision of the rural teacher's role, what are the roles they play in the educational communities, what are their working conditions and what characteristics differentiate them from urban teachers.

Concerning the *professional choice*, it is possible to observe that the research subjects chose pedagogy at an early age, and after some years of experience, they are still firm in their decision. Several of the interviewees stated that they have felt a kind of “vocational calling” (Avalos, 2013), which has undoubtedly encouraged them to work in a completely different world and reality, far from the fast-paced life in urban contexts, where it is possible to create much closer ties with colleagues, students and even with families, relationships that allow for a peaceful coexistence with their peers and with all the members of the educational community. This type of coexistence is clearly not free of problems, however, the focus on teamwork is maintained, facilitating conflict resolution.

On the other hand, regarding the *motivation to work in the rural context*, teachers remain in rural areas mainly attracted by the calm and positive organizational environment within their school communities, which favors close and constructive relationships and the generation of a more relaxed environment among the members of the school community. Another point they have emphasized regarding the increase in their professional motivation is the difference between children living in rural areas and children living in urban areas, understanding this “difference” as a more receptive, respectful and collaborative attitude towards teaching and characterized by a purer and more innocent world view.

Regarding the *working conditions* factor, the participating teachers stated that sometimes they do not have the necessary technological and material resources to teach, which differs from urban institutions. However, this situation, which generates a certain amount of frustration, is mitigated by the good working environment prevailing in their institutions. On the other hand, in terms of workload, the teachers expressed that although it can often be excessive, they have never been overwhelmed, perhaps only at the beginning of their careers, mainly because they were not accustomed or sufficiently prepared to fulfill their expected range of roles. However, they said that once they became accustomed to the pace of work, the pressure decreased. This finding differs from what is expressed by teachers working in urban areas, who state that they have a heavy work overload. According to the TALIS survey (OECD, 2014), Chilean teachers spend a large part of their working days in direct classroom teaching and the rest of the time in maintaining discipline, administrative tasks, proofreading assignments or evaluations and lesson planning, a situation

that has gradually improved in recent years, but which is still far from the ideal ratio between teaching and non-teaching hours in developed OECD countries.

In terms of the *professionalism perception factor* (Tenti Fanfani, 2006), which is related to the concept of “occupational professionalism” developed by Evetts (2010) and which refers to the fact that those who describe their professionalism are the teachers themselves, all the participants in the study agreed that they do not doubt about the professionalism level they have in their tasks, they believe they have a solid preparation, so they feel absolutely confident in relation to their teaching skills, their knowledge and the quality of the teaching they provide, what Hargreaves & Fullan (2015) have defined as professional capital.

Regarding the *rural teacher’s vision factor*, it is possible to indicate that the rural educator is a professional with a high degree of commitment, who fulfills several roles, both in the interaction with his/her students and in his/her educational community. The teacher is commonly close to his/her students, focused on the human aspect and the transmission of values. In Chile, it is common for many rural teachers to travel for hours in order to get to their schools, many of them walking long distances under the sun or under the rain to get to work or go home. These situations show that beyond being transmitters of knowledge, teachers are committed in a very special and close way to their work and create emotional ties with their students. According to Hamman et al. (2010), the emotions experienced by teachers positively or negatively modify the way they face the tasks involved in teaching and, in this case, the impact is positive.

Finally, regarding the factor related to the *differences between rural and urban teachers*, it is possible to indicate that the main divergence identified is the type of ties they create. In the urban context, there is not much connection with the students or families; there is a somewhat colder culture focused on the transmission of knowledge. In addition to this, it has become evident that another factor that increases the gap between urban and rural teachers is the aforementioned working conditions, since in the urban context it is more common for teachers to have the tools they need to optimally provide the content. A major difference is observed when contrasting this reality with that of rural schools, which was a recurring point in the interviews. The testimonies of the participants showed that in rural schools it is very difficult to access educational resources, such as access to ICTs, which is much less frequent in urban contexts.

As a conclusion, it is possible to state that this research allowed us to generate first source knowledge about the factors that characterize the identity of rural teachers, such as their level of vocation and commitment to their students, the motivation with which they carry out their work, and the high self-perception of their professionalism. It was also possible to inquire about their working conditions and the multiple roles they play in their educational communities. In addition, differences were established between urban and rural teachers. First, in terms of the type of relationships or ties they develop with the educational communities in which they work and, second, in terms of the material conditions they have for teaching. In summary, we can affirm with certainty that rural teachers are perceived as professionals who have a high degree of vocation, motivation for their work and professionalism, fulfill multiple roles in their educational communities, establish close relationships with their students and commonly work in difficult conditions due to the scarcity of resources available to carry out their work.

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