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Temporalities and rhythms of identity transitions amongst second-career teachers

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Abstract

This article explores the professional identity transitions of second-career teachers (SCTs) through the temporal and rhythmic dimensions of narratives written during teacher education in French-speaking Switzerland. Based on a qualitative inductive-deductive analysis of eight experience-based narratives selected from a broader corpus, the study examines how SCTs make sense of career change and narratively configure continuity, rupture, overlap and transformation. The findings indicate that identity transitions involve changes in professional activities, skills and representations of self, teaching and learners. They also unfold through heterogeneous rhythms, ranging from gradual reorientations to abrupt turning points associated with personal, occupational or existential disruptions. The article argues that narrative writing constitutes a mediating space in which prior experiences are reinterpreted, legitimised and integrated into emerging teacher identities. It thus contributes to research on professional transitions by foregrounding temporality and rhythm as key analytical dimensions.

Keywords: second-career teachers, professional identity, career transition, temporality, narrative inquiry

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Introduction

Countries worldwide are facing teacher shortages, particularly in secondary education (Berger & d'Ascoli, 2011; Levasseur et al., 2023; UNESCO, 2023). In response, many national education systems have sought to attract professionals with post-secondary qualifications and significant work experience in other fields into teaching (Aslan & Eröz, 2025; Paniagua & Sánchez-Martí, 2018).

Unlike first-career teachers, who generally move directly from their status as students into teaching positions, second-career teachers (SCTs) enter teacher education after substantial life and work experience. Their transition into teaching involves a reconfiguration of professional identity that is embedded in longer and often less regular temporalities. Leaving one's established professional role and status to take on the position of a novice teacher can therefore be destabilising and demanding (Haggard et al., 2006).

SCTs thus constitute a particularly relevant population for studying professional identity transitions as processes that unfold over time, and attention should be paid to the plurality of temporalities and rhythms at work within the training pathways they follow (Alhadeff-Jones, 2014, 2018b). Their trajectories reveal tensions between continuity and transformation, as well as overlaps between their former and future professional worlds that challenge linear 'before and after' models of change.

One central question remains underexplored: how do SCTs narrate their identity transitions and configure the temporalities and rhythms that structure their trajectories? While professional transitions into teaching have been documented from institutional and identity-related perspectives (Beijaard et al., 2004; Levasseur et al., 2023), their temporal and rhythmic dimensions remain insufficiently analysed from the standpoint of the subjects themselves.

The research outlined in this article forms part of a broader project on experience-based writing produced by SCTs during initial or continuing teacher education. The project examines how SCTs construct and articulate narratives of professional transition. Its corpus consists of 80 written narratives produced in several teacher education institutions in French-speaking Switzerland, in response to institutional writing instructions embedded in certification frameworks.

The present article focuses specifically on the temporal and rhythmic dimensions of these transitions, drawing on an in-depth qualitative analysis of eight narratives selected from the larger corpus. By analysing these experience-based narratives, we aim to better understand how professional identity transitions unfold through continuity, discontinuity and rhythms of change, and what these temporal configurations reveal about the dynamics of becoming a teacher.

Narratives in teacher training

Biographical approaches are often used as tools for self-development and emancipation in adult education (Dominicé, 2000; West et al., 2007, in Alhadeff-Jones, 2018a). Developing a narrative invites writers to describe and interpret life experiences and their meanings (Dominicé, 1990). Recounting trajectories involves both moments of disruption (crises, breakdowns, accidents) and regular phenomena (habits, routines, rituals), fostering a better understanding of one's own way of learning. Narratives also question how ways of thinking, feeling and acting are reproduced over time (Alhadeff-Jones,

2018c), while the structure of storytelling may shape learning opportunities emerging from training processes (Alhadeff-Jones, 2018b).
Developing a narrative is therefore considered a powerful tool for promoting prospective teachers' reflection and professional growth (Balslev et al., 2015). Writing can lead them to revisit and reconfigure the meanings of their experiences (Vanhulle, 2011) and regulate transitions that require learning. Beyond training purposes, narratives also provide access to how individuals construct meaning around their trajectories, position themselves within them, and articulate past, present and anticipated professional identities. We therefore consider written narratives both as pedagogical tools and as empirical material for analysing identity transitions.

Beyond their reflective function, such narratives also involve processes of self-presentation. Assembling one's experiences and commenting on one's learning trajectory requires treating oneself as an object and presenting oneself, perhaps even staging oneself. Narratives do not merely describe experience; they construct a writer's ethos, understood as an image of self presented to others (Amossy, 2010; Dobrowolska, 2018). This is particularly salient in training contexts explicitly aimed at fostering reflection.

When autobiographical writing is integrated into certification processes, such staging is shaped by institutional expectations (Balslev & Maldonado, 2020). Although this may recognise prior trajectories, it may also orient transitions towards forms deemed more legitimate within programme frameworks. Narratives thus become spaces where professional subjectivity is configured and negotiated discursively (Vanhulle, 2013).

Narratives about professional identities in transition

Transitioning from being a musician, horticulturist, manager, designer, jeweller or journalist to becoming a teacher represents a significant shift in professional identity. This shift unfolds through adjustments and tensions between professional self-images.

Professional identity is a multifaceted concept. Beijaard et al. (2004) argue that 'identity is not something one has, but something that develops during one's whole life', and describe it as a relational process of 'interpreting oneself as a certain kind of person and being recognized as such in a given context' (Beijaard et al., 2004, pp. 107-108).

Written narratives provide access to professional identity transitions as reconstructed by SCTs who describe, analyse and give meaning to them. We refer to these as *narrative professional identities*, distinguishing identity as lived from identity as narrated, while recognising that narration contributes to identity construction and transformation.

According to Ricoeur (2005), putting experience into words produces a narrative identity. Writing organises events into a plot and presents the self through that plot. Narratives are not factual accounts but processes through which individuals organise and give meaning to experience. Ricoeur (1990) showed that identity is grounded not only in stability over time (*idem identity*) but also in narrative transformation (*ipse identity*).
Narratives like those analysed here foster reflexive thinking by inviting writers to position themselves using the pronoun 'I' (Vanhulle, 2009). Drawing on one's own experiences and commenting on one's learning path requires thinking of oneself as an object, presenting oneself. This type of presentation is inseparable from temporal dimensions (Balslev & Maldonado, 2020), implying a projective or retrospective point of view (Maldonado, 2021). In narratives, temporality is not reduced to a simple, linear course of events. Temporality is lived through the conflicts between concordance and discrepancies, between continuity and transformation. Similar perspectives are developed in research on biographical temporalisation, which emphasises how narratives interweave past, present and future in the ongoing construction of identity (Schmidt-Lauff, 2023).

Through narrative mediation, SCTs can give new meaning to past experiences outside teaching and embed them within a new professional pathway. Narratives thus function as mediating spaces, articulating continuity and progressive transformation in relation to the demands of training for a new profession. They also help individuals deal with transitions 'whether they involve adapting to a new environment (…), dealing with personal changes (…), or coping with embodied changes' (Schmidt-Lauff et al., 2025, p. 2).

Narrative temporality and rhythms

In line with Alhadeff-Jones (2018a), we consider the processes of education and professional transition to be embedded in multiple, heterogeneous and sometimes contradictory temporalities. As the author emphasised, 'some educational phenomena require slowness and maturation (…), others may involve speed and efficiency' (Alhadeff-Jones, 2018a, pp. 6-7). Thinking about transitions, therefore, entails questioning the ways in which temporalities are conceived, articulated and valorised.

With this in mind, we approach professional transition as a rhythmic process, marked by tensions between continuity and discontinuity (Alhadeff-Jones, 2018c). Discontinuity – whether it takes the form of a rupture, a crisis or another significant event – does not in itself guarantee a transformation; rather, transformation depends on the individual's capacity to negotiate and make sense of such experiences (Alhadeff-Jones, 2018c).

We focus, therefore, on the temporal and rhythmic dimensions that SCTs wrote in their narratives, paying attention to the fluctuations, repetitions, accelerations and hold-ups that punctuate their trajectories. These elements help us to explain the ways in which transitions are lived, interpreted and integrated into an individual's dynamic identity in the making, rather than being understood solely as isolated or linear changes.

Narratives are thus considered privileged material for analysing the temporal and rhythmic configurations affecting their writers, insofar as they provide access to their lived experiences of transitions, to the ways in which they position themselves in time and to the uniqueness of their rhythms (Alhadeff-Jones, 2018c).

Aims and research questions

We believe that narratives provide access to particularly valuable information about professional transformations. In the field of adult education, the term 'transformation' generally refers to radical changes and to processes that profoundly and durably affect a person's relationship to knowledge, to others and to the world (Alhadeff-Jones, 2018b). Analysing narratives, therefore, enables us to grasp not only observable changes in professional roles but also deeper shifts in meaning-making processes that accompany identity transitions over time. In this article, we sought to answer the following questions:

1. What aspects of professional identity transitions do SCTs mention in their professional narratives?
2. How do transitions unfold in SCTs' professional narratives?
3. Which temporal and rhythmic dimensions are elicited in their narratives?

Methods

Data and corpus

The eight narratives analysed were produced within the frameworks of four different higher education teacher-training programmes across French-speaking Switzerland that prepare candidates to teach in primary, secondary and music schools. Three of them follow alternance-based training models combining academic coursework with periods of work placement. SCTs enrolled in these programmes typically followed academic, artistic or professional career paths after completing their compulsory schooling and before reorienting towards teaching.

The fourth programme, by contrast, is designed for vocational teachers with prior relevant academic or professional careers. In this context, teachers are initially recruited by vocational schools to teach subject-specific expertise related to their profession, and then only subsequently do they enter an in-service pedagogical training programme aimed at formally validating their status as vocational teachers (Cortessis & Deschenaux, 2024).

The feature common to all the programmes examined in this study is their use of experience-based writing as a mode of certification.

For the purpose of this article, our analysis focuses on eight narratives selected to reflect a diversity of profiles and prior experiences and were chosen because the ways in which transitions were described reflected the different trends observed across the broader corpus of narratives. All narratives were obtained directly from the SCTs once their teacher training had been completed. Participants provided informed consent for the use of their texts for research and publication purposes. All materials were anonymised, and pseudonyms are used throughout this article to protect participants' identities.

Table 1 summarises the eight narratives analysed, characteristics of the SCTs' profiles and the training programmes in which their narratives were produced, thereby making the diversity of contexts and trajectories considered more explicit.

Table 1. Characteristics of second-career teacher profiles and training programmes

Teacher	Profession prior to initial teacher education	Type of prospective teacher	Institution
AUDE	Horticulturist	Vocational college teachers	University for Vocational Education and Training
ESTELLE	Housekeeping manager in a socio-medical institution		
DAVID	Accounting assistant	Primary school teachers	University teacher training college
SARA	Visual merchandising designer		
ÉDITH	Singer	Music teachers	University-level music conservatory
FIONA	Musician		
CHANTAL	Jeweller	Secondary school teachers	University teacher training college
ANDREA	Journalist		

Analytical process

Narratives were analysed using ATLAS.ti software, combining an inductive approach (generating codes from the data) with a deductive approach (drawing on categories from

enunciative linguistics). We started by identifying segments in which the narratives revealed identity transitions, that is, passages describing a move from one role to another, often accompanied by a repositioning of the writer's view of their self. These transitions were marked by the use of expressions such as 'I'm no longer the same', 'I've changed the way I see myself as a teacher', or by descriptions of two opposing figures (e.g., 'I as a trainee' versus 'I as a professional'). We identified 33 segments within the 8 narratives selected.

We approached professional identity transitions by using a concept of change inspired by Rhéaume (2016), who defined change as 'the passage from a state x, defined at time t, to a state x^1, defined at a time t^1, where x and x^1 can represent a human being or a social environment that, after the change, becomes both different and the same' (Rhéaume, 2016, p. 67, our translation). Based on this definition, we developed an analytical framework that defined identity transitions as the movement from one state (X) to another (X^1), each located at a given time (T and T^1) and in a given space (S and S^1). This framework enabled us to identify the narrative anchor points through which subjects constructed the transition and transformation of their professional identity – from their initial career to teaching – by drawing upon different ways of using the declarative statements using the pronoun 'I' across their narratives.

We conducted an inductive thematic analysis on the same narrative segments to identify salient elements that narrators had particularly emphasised. This analysis focused on several key dimensions: the use of declarative statements with the pronoun 'I', including the characteristics attributable to the narrator according to the roles they assumed (such as shy student, committed professional, or changing mother), the personal qualities they claimed for themselves (such as curiosity, resourcefulness, or rigour) and the postures they adopted throughout the different phases of their professional trajectory (such as learning, authoritative, vulnerable or resistant postures). In line with discourse-oriented approaches to self-presentation and ethos (Amossy, 2010; Dobrowolska, 2018), we considered these narrative configurations as forms of 'self-staging', through which participants construct and manage a professional image of themselves within the context of their training.

We also explored how narrators structured their trajectories through time. Temporal markers indicated how narrators had linked the past, present and future. For instance, Aude wrote, 'But I realise *today* that I have a mild mixture of dyslexia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia […] *In the past*, these kinds of things were not diagnosed'. This showed how she had reinterpreted the past through her new understanding in the present. We also paid attention to lexical elements associated with rhythm, such as 'rapidly', 'always', or 'little by little', which reveal the perceived temporal dynamics of change.

Findings: Professional identity transitions in second-career trajectories towards teaching

The SCTs' narratives reveal how participants represent their professional identity transitions between a first profession and a teaching identity in the making. In Ricoeur's (1990) terms, these narratives contribute to the construction of a coherent narrative identity linking past experience, present training and a projected professional future.
These transitions emerge through the interplay between two narrative positions: a former professional identity (X, T, S) and an emerging teaching identity (X1, T1, S1). These markers function as reference points through which subjects articulate continuity, tension and transformation across their trajectories.

The narrators' changes involve several aspects of professional identity: activities, skills, and representations of their former profession, students or themselves. These transformations are embedded in contrasting spatiotemporal configurations between a former professional world and a new training space, generating successive reconfigurations of the 'I'. The 'I' of the past and the 'I' under construction reflect an ongoing search for legitimacy and coherence shaped by present experiences and future projections.

The narratives also highlighted, in their own temporality, the concrete and symbolic conditions of their identity transitions: moments involving rupture or continuity, experiences of training or fieldwork, and situations of revelation, doubt or adjustment. Although these processes differ for every individual, they manifest certain recurring forms that enable us to identify both the nature of the changes involved and the dynamics through which they occur. We present the results of our analysis through two main dimensions: first, what changes, and second, how these changes unfold.

What changes during professional identity transitions?

The identity changes identified in the SCTs' narratives included three main components that reflect, each in their own way, shifts in their ways of being, acting and thinking about themselves as novice teachers. These were the activities carried out, the skills used and/or developed, and the writers' representations of their new profession, their students and themselves in their professional activities. These components are closely intertwined and evolve in interaction throughout SCTs' trajectories. They are articulated over time and jointly contribute to the redefinition of professional identity.

In this perspective, the narratives lay out the conflict between two states of being situated within different spatiotemporal configurations: state X, corresponding to the narrator's first profession (T, S), and state X1, linked to their new profession of teacher, which is under construction (T1, S1).

Changes in activities

One of the components of change identified in the narratives involved the professional activities undertaken during the transition from SCTs' original professions to the teaching profession. In every case analysed, this transition occurred before the start of the SCT's training, through brief teaching experiences: giving remedial tutoring classes, being a replacement teacher, carrying out interventions with apprentices, or providing one-to-one teaching support. These initial experiences often served as exploratory spaces in which they began to experiment with taking on a teaching posture. They revealed SCTs' interest in teaching and progressively oriented their decision to engage in a retraining process. This change is not simply a reassignment to new tasks, but rather a shift towards a new professional universe, governed by different rules, temporal landmarks and frames of reference. It also involves a reconfiguration of one's professional responsibilities, from task-oriented or service-oriented activities towards relational and pedagogical forms of engagement.

Estelle's narrative (a manager at a socio-medical institution) illustrated this tipping point. Although still in her original job, she gradually became involved in teaching activities until she decided to take on a professional teaching role:

> In August 2014, I was offered the opportunity to join [name of the institute] as a teaching assistant to teach apprentices for a few periods. [...] I accepted while continuing my work as head of housekeeping management at the socio-medical institution that employed me.

Here, the transition between two professional activities occurred in a spatiotemporal middle zone, where the responsibilities of Estelle's original function with a new role still coexisted. This period of overlap illustrates a transitional rhythm characterised by coexistence rather than rupture. This shift was accompanied by an increasing investment in teaching activities, culminating in her enrolment in teacher training:

> I started my training in autumn 2017. [...] I got a taste for this new profession, and thanks to this pedagogical diploma, I felt more entitled to teach, because I had the tools in hand to continue and evolve. My classes were more understandable and were less stressful to give.

Entering teacher training and obtaining a permanent position marked a turning point in the construction of Estelle's professional identity: she progressively detached herself from her previous professional framework and consolidated her engagement in a new field of action. This type of turning point does not erase previous experiences but places them within the emerging professional identity of a teacher.

Edith's case illustrated the transition resulting from her initial artistic practice as a singer to teaching singing at the university and then giving private lessons. She characterised this transition into the field of teaching as a gradual shift from an artistic to a pedagogical approach, characterised by being attentive to others, adjusting and making the effort to explain things: 'I finished the hour [of teaching] extremely tired because I had made intense efforts to understand how things worked in my body and then I explained it directly to my students [...]'. Her activity changed from that of musical interpretation to that of putting knowledge into words and gestures and transmitting it.

The analysis of the SCTs' narratives revealed their transitions from state X, corresponding to a previous activity, sometimes anchored in a framework of technicality, production and mastery, and sometimes marked by relationships with others that are structured by a service or market orientation, to a state X^1, in which subjects engage in a new activity centred on interactions, knowledge transmission and broader educational responsibility. The meaning of this change is expressed through the narrative construction of different figures of the 'I': a past 'I' embedded in a former rationale of action and an emerging 'I' adopting postures involving listening, co-construction and reflexive thinking.

Changes in skills

Another dimension of change concerned the evolution or acquisition of new skills during the SCTs' transition. These transformations involved technical or didactic know-how as well as relational, ethical, and reflexive interpersonal skills. Rather than appearing all at once, these skills evolve over time through successive skill reconfigurations that combine prior experience with new professional knowledge:

1. *From intuitive to formalised skills:* The narratives expressed this type of transition as a transition from a state X to a state X^1, in which skills that were formerly anchored in personal experience, intuition or automatic responses were transformed into more formal, reflective or intentional knowledge. This transformation does not imply the disappearance of intuitive knowledge, but rather its reinterpretation within renewed professional and training frameworks. Edith clearly illustrated this process: 'So, I had accumulated a lot of experience over the years, but it was when I began a master's degree in pedagogy that things became much clearer'. Her trajectory exemplified how the professional

behaviours she had first experienced in teaching singing as an amateur could find new meaning as she appropriated theoretical and scientific knowledge about teaching. In particular, she recounted how her bodily experience of singing was transformed by learning about the anatomy of vocal expression: 'I integrated scientific and bodily aspects that fulfilled me in my relationship with my body [...]'. She thus described how her intuition evolved into a conscious, transmissible, theorised skill.

Similarly, Aude evoked a long history of informal support activities – tutoring, sports coaching, supervising apprentices – which, in retrospect, she identified as signs of a pre-existing disposition for teaching: 'I was always the one who took the time to explain things calmly, simply, without judging [...]'. However, it was only in her teacher training that she became aware of the didactic dimensions of these gestures: 'I realise that I have always paid particular attention to what is called didactic transposition [...]. I thought about it without knowing'. Here, the transition operates through a temporal rereading of past practices, which are retrospectively endowed with new professional meaning.

Sarah's case also illustrated this type of transformation. She described a first state (X): 'I learnt everything 'on the job', trusting my intuition, my experience as a mother and my creative skills'. Her first professional 'I' was based on the experiential and implicit knowledge that she mobilised spontaneously in her activities. The education programme she was participating in as a new teacher added an intensive training space that restructured her professional activities. Her training experiences not only allowed her to acquire new tools, but also to question her practices: 'I was able to discuss issues with my coach and my colleagues, think about solutions, analyse and implement alternatives, and question my practice'. In her transition to a new state (X^1), we observed the emergence of a more reflective 'I', one more capable of thinking about her acts, analysing them and adjusting them to more prepared pedagogical frameworks. Here, the move from X to X^1 took the form of a transition between actions based on experience and the new postures of a reflective teaching practitioner capable of adjustment and self-analysis.

2. *From a concrete world to an abstract one:* This transition often takes place when the SCT enters a teacher training institution, which is perceived as a place of distancing, explanation and of rereading one's experiences. The previous world – untrained teaching in the field, of informal experience, of immediate 'doing' – is gradually contrasted with the new symbolic space of the teaching profession. This contrast introduces a new relationship to knowledge, characterised by abstraction, conceptualisation and specialised pedagogical vocabulary. This spatial dissociation between a 'before' and a 'now' was particularly apparent in Aude's narrative when she evoked her transition from the world of professional horticulture and its associations with concrete utilitarian gestures, to the world of pedagogy:

> I suddenly left the world of landscaping to jump, with both feet, into the vast world of pedagogy, which, I admit, scared me at first... It was not easy to learn a new job with a complex and, above all, very abstract vocabulary for me, who had only lived in the concrete. It remains a human science; there is no right or wrong, but rather multiple paths.

3. *From an absence of teaching skills to their blooming:* For Estelle, this spatial move was accompanied by new contact with an extended professional network and new tools: 'I was able to exchange [with my new colleagues] and discover new educational tools'. The change manifested itself as a gradual expansion of her professional repertoire within a structured institutional framework. As for Fiona, her narrative showed how the classroom itself became a learning space for her. She was initially confronted with class management difficulties: 'The students were disrespectful, inattentive and disinterested. However, this enabled me to realise that I lacked authority'. She integrated the learnings from her teacher training to transform her posture: 'As the second year [of training] progressed, while we were learning about authority and its different types, I now had more control in the classroom [...]'. The destabilised 'I' of the past gave way to a more assertive 'I' capable of maintaining her proper position in the school space.

In all these cases, how the SCT presents themselves accompanies this transition in professional identity: the 'I' of the past – often intuitive, fragmented or exploratory – is reconfigured into a more structured, reflective and professionally legitimate 'I'. These self-presentations are not necessarily contradictory; depending on the narrative, they may form part of a coherent process of progressive enrichment marked by differentiated rhythms of transformation.

Changes in SCTs' representations

The last component of change that we identified was how SCTs saw things. Unlike changes in professional activity or skills, this component involves the way they perceived what they were doing – their new role, their new profession, their students or the reasons they were now teaching. These representations correspond to implicit frames of reference that orient action, rather than to explicit or immediately observable practices. These form part of the invisible dimension of their professional identity, the implicit thought patterns and beliefs that guide their actions while revealing themselves in the daily gestures, choices and postures they adopt. These changes often first emerge in the context of initial teacher training or subsequent training undertaken after early teaching experiences in the field. They stem solely from a reflective process that invites subjects to revisit and question what they previously took for granted.

Here, the transition from state X to state X^1 corresponds to a transformation in the SCT's frames of reference, from an initial 'I' acting with their experiential knowledge, spontaneous beliefs and guided personal experiences as a learner, as David revealed when he recounted the following: 'Based on the tasks inherent in my position as an assistant accountant and integrating the knowledge acquired in business school [...] and at university, I immersed myself, for the first time, in a reflection on pedagogical construction'. This excerpt highlights the emergence of an 'I' that questions its activities and reconstructs them using new interpretative landmarks.

Fiona's case clearly illustrated a change in her way of viewing things. In her narrative, state X corresponded to a posture that was still intuitive, in which she said that she was creative but unable to structure her ideas into concrete pedagogical practices. She described this moment as a threshold of powerlessness: 'Before I had acquired critical reflection skills, I was unable to put my ideas into practice'. Here, teacher training had become a transformative space, inviting her to think differently about how she taught: 'I have learned that I can study and perfect my teaching processes, become an agent of

change by looking for different effective, inclusive, varied and creative ways of teaching'. This transition marks a shift from an 'I' that reproduces existing models towards an 'I' that invents, reflects on its posture and considers each learner as unique. The teacher training space thus acts as a structured framework for reflection, allowing the future teacher to perform an in-depth reconfiguration of their relationship to their chosen profession.

These transformations are not immediately perceivable. They are revealed in the SCT's actions, didactic choices and stated priorities, or in the way in which they talk about their profession. They testify to an internal process of reconfiguration of the professional 'I', often initiated or supported by training contexts that act as catalysts. In the narratives of SCTs in retraining, these changes are testimony to a gradual shift in individuals' frames of reference: from state X, marked by the reasoning inherited from their experience, intuition or previous beliefs, to state X^1, where the SCT questions their teaching practices, reformulates their intentions and redefines the meaning of their commitment to teaching. These discreet yet profound transformations constitute a central component of the professionalisation process involved in transitions towards the teaching profession.

How do professional identity transitions occur?

Two forces run through the professional transitions described in our selected narrative segments: continuity and ruptures. These forces are intertwined and jointly shape professional identity transitions. Together, they contribute to the construction of a coherent narrative identity (Ricoeur, 1990).

Through the different ways in which they represented themselves, our SCTs managed to narrate who they had been, who they were in the process of becoming and who they aspired to be in the teaching profession. This narrative work unfolds through a movement of the articulation between past, present and projected identities. This to-and-fro between subjects' *idem* identity (the permanence of oneself) and *ipse* identity (the ability to transform oneself) constituted the very rhythm of their professional identity transitions. The next two sections present these two complementary forces: first, experiences of continuity, in which early identity elements continue to resonate in SCTs' teaching postures, and second, the different forms of transformation that redefine the contours of their professional identity.

Transitions as continuous processes

Some accounts of professional transitions described a sense of biographical continuity: the 'I' expressed in current teaching activities was recognised in previous experiences that did not directly belong to the SCT's initial profession, but which had forged their way of being, feeling and acting. These elements of continuity do not stem from professional expertise transferred from one occupation to another, but from more enduring dispositions rooted in earlier socialisation. Often established during childhood or youth, these more enduring identity dispositions persist across different periods and contexts and are reactivated within SCTs' teaching postures, reflecting what Ricoeur (1990) described as idem identity. They do not constitute transferable skills in the strict sense, but rather deep-seated values, worldviews and relationships with others that find renewed expression in the vocation to teach. This dynamic is particularly visible in the case of Estelle, who is now a teacher in a vocational school. She narrated her twenty-year commitment to the Scout movement, from the age of four to becoming a leader. This

foundational experience, marked by the values of sharing, creativity, and mutual aid, was described with unapologetic nostalgia. Only retrospectively did she become aware of how these values had been reactivated and reconfigured in her professional teaching role. As she stated: '*Over time, I realised that I used them daily in my role as a teacher'.* Here, the 'I' of childhood – the young person who learnt to live in a group, and accompany others – joined today's professional 'I' in a school setting. While the underlying values remain similar, their expression is transformed by the institutional, relational and professional framework of teaching. The link between the two representations of 'I' – past and present – thus reflects a continuity of identity that operates less as a repetition than as a rearticulation of earlier dispositions.

Transitions in professional identity based on a continuity of values do not mean that there is an absence of transformation. On the contrary, they indicate that change unfolds through the reinterpretation and redeployment of pre-existing identity resources within new professional contexts. In this sense, the transition towards teaching is experienced as the fulfilment of an identity trajectory that is already in motion. This slow, fluid, meaningful rhythm to change allows SCTs to maintain their personal coherence, despite their new professional trajectory, by symbolically linking the different times and spaces along those trajectories.

Transitions via ruptures

These types of transitions involve a marked shift in individuals' professional trajectories, often experienced as a rupture with a previous professional identity or occupational framework. Rather than constituting a simple moment of change, these transitions are characterised by strong experiences of discontinuity, in which narrative bridges between different temporalities are weakened or temporarily halted. The individual's former professional posture may be rejected or distanced, and they are confronted with the need to renegotiate their relationship with themselves, with time and with space. Aude, for example, wrote: 'I left the world of graphic design with relief, after years of pressure and loss of meaning'. Her rejection of her former professional identity reflected a perceived incompatibility between her personal values and her past activity. The new presentation of her 'I' was grounded in a radical distancing from the past, which she experienced as liberating. However, this distancing could not erase the past entirely; rather, it marked a reconfiguration of meaning, one in which her former professional identity became something to move away from in order to restore coherence. Such ruptures in temporality are sometimes triggered by external events (such as burnout, illness, or maternity) and sometimes by internal dissonance. They give rise to phases of acceleration, halting or destabilisation, which require a rapid reconstruction of one's relationships with oneself, with time and with space. Alhadeff-Jones (2018c) describes these moments as rhythms of discontinuity, or 'syncope', within transitional processes, revealing biographical tensions that compel individuals to reinterpret their trajectory and reconfigure their identity. Several forms of rupture were identifiable in our corpus of narratives, and these are presented below.

Imposed ruptures: Imposed ruptures result from unchosen constraints, such as illness, burnout or other biographical events that interrupt a professional trajectory. Aude, for example, wrote: 'I had to stop this activity for health reasons. It took me a long time to accept this loss'. This rupture was endured rather than chosen and was followed by a prolonged and uneven process of identity reconstruction. Chantal, for her part, evoked her inner struggle when faced with abandoning her creative job: 'I persevered in creating

[things] in my studio, I hung on, I struggled, I sank [...] Reluctantly, I gave up my creative business' These presentations of inner struggles illustrate imposed, conflictual changes of identity. Ruptures were described using verbs suggesting their underlying tensions ('struggle', 'renounce'), and narrative rhythms were tense and emotionally charged. Later, Chantal wrote: 'My entry into teaching was synonymous with transformation, like a snake that moults [its skin]'. The metaphor of moulting condenses Chantal's feelings of the rupture she suffered and the redefinition of herself: her 'I' was altered by loss but was then rebuilt in a new professional posture. This example illustrates how imposed ruptures, while initially disruptive, can become pivotal moments in longer-term identity transitions, once their meaning is renegotiated over time.

Chosen ruptures: In chosen ruptures, individuals voluntarily distance themselves from their original career paths, or from an environment they deem incompatible with their aspirations. This choice is experienced as a liberation. Sarah formulated it explicitly: 'In May 2018, I made THE decision of my life, I resigned! […] and jumped into the void.'. This sentence condensed the symbolic violence of her move, but also its emancipatory dimension. It depicted her strong rejection of the profession she felt alienated from and the opening of a space for future reconstruction, despite the uncertainty involved.

Aude's narrative illustrated a similar dynamic, but with a more internalised tone. She managed to put a form of retrospective pride into words, as if the chosen break from her original career path had enabled her to reconcile with herself: 'Today, I am very proud of my career and the strength I was able to develop to go where I feel I belong'. This formulation indicated that hers was a constructed emancipation, on a trajectory guided by her desire to find her true place – professionally but also symbolically – a place where she could fully exist.

In chosen ruptures, individuals often exhibit a lucid distancing from their former professional identity, while valuing the inner strength they were able to mobilise to cross the threshold. Transition is presented as an affirmation of oneself, a conscious decision to turn towards a life lived more fully.

Existential ruptures: Existential ruptures go beyond professional contexts: they involve profound reconfigurations of the self, triggered either by a loss of meaning or a conflict between personal values and professional reasoning. Individuals no longer recognise themselves in their actions. This tension often takes the form of a contradiction between two symbolic spaces: the personal space, invested with ethical and existential convictions, and the professional space, which involves obligations. When these two spaces collide, the individual is no longer able to identify with the actions they perform daily, which opens a breach in the coherence of their identity and makes it necessary for them to reconfigure their sense of self. Identity transitions are thus presented as existential bifurcations where a reconversion to teaching reflects a search for realignment between being, acting and one's deep convictions. Sarah illustrated this tension clearly:

> Who could be fulfilled in a job where you work for companies that you boycott in your private life? [...] I advocated for ecology and found myself organising the distribution of 200,000 mini aluminium Coca-Cola cans.

The disconnect between her personal ethics and the demands of her job created a sense of alienation: 'I didn't feel aligned with myself'. The professional space became one of existential malaise, incompatible with her own convictions. This rupture did not only concern her professional activity but also affected her very ability to recognise herself in her actions: 'I was on the verge of a burnout, exhausted by the workload and the non-

sense of my professional position. […] My job at [name of a promotion agency] was a deep drain on my morale'. When work becomes the scene of an existential malaise, it also becomes the fracture from which the need for change emerges – not functional change, however, but a profoundly identity-based change.

In existential ruptures, identity change results from a lack of meaning and is oriented towards a need for coherence. Teaching becomes a way of rediscovering oneself or of attaining a more authentic self. The pace of change is introspective, guided by a desire for in-depth transformation.

Positive or obvious ruptures: These types of transitions are based on a moment of sudden clarity – an encounter or a significant event – that triggers an inner repositioning. The individual discovers, sometimes unexpectedly, a professional posture in which they fully recognise themselves, with a feeling of 'obviousness' or rediscovered pleasure. The meaning conveyed through this kind of transition is not one of rejection or exhaustion, but rather that of a sensitive or existential awakening: the individual discovers that they can inhabit a new position, one which resonates with what they aspire to become.

Here, change is the result of an inner movement marked by evidence, joy or the feeling of having found one's way. Aude, a former graphic designer, evoked an immediate feeling of realignment, from her very first weeks of teaching: 'I had never imagined teaching, but [...] I felt a form of obviousness'. Earlier in her career, a cultural mediation workshop with children had been a formative experience: 'I had a kind of epiphany'. As for Sarah, who came from the field of marketing, she discovered an unexpected affinity for educational activities with children during an art festival: 'I loved discovering sharing [...], the bonds that could quickly be forged'. This joyful moment, experienced as a pleasant surprise, opened her identity to new horizons. She had never considered working with children, but this experience acted as an emotional awakening, and a new direction suddenly became possible.

In these rupture-type identity transitions, change takes place at a rapid, almost instantaneous pace, in contrast to evolutionary transitions or painful ruptures. They mark the beginning of a movement towards adherence to a new identity, in which pleasure and the feeling that things are 'right' occupy a central place in the reconfiguration process.

Discussion and conclusion

This analysis of the written narratives of second-career teachers (SCTs) highlights how their professional identity transitions can be seen as temporal and rhythmic processes rather than simple linear shifts from one stable state to another. Far from corresponding to a 'before and after' rationale, the transitions described in their narratives reveal heterogeneous configurations combining continuity, ruptures, overlaps, accelerations and halts. In this respect, our findings echo Alhadeff-Jones' (2014, 2018a) invitation to rethink professionalisation by going beyond standardised chronologies and considering the plurality of temporalities and rhythms that run through training trajectories.

The narratives analysed render visible the complex articulation between continuity and transformation. Some transitions unfold through the rearticulation of long-standing personal values and dispositions within new professional contexts, suggesting that identity change may occur through progressive reinterpretation rather than through radical discontinuity. Other transitions are marked by experiences of rupture – whether imposed, chosen, existential or positive – which introduce moments of biographical 'syncope' (Alhadeff-Jones, 2018c), destabilising prior configurations and compelling subjects to renegotiate the meaning of their trajectory over time. Taken together, these

configurations show that professional identity transitions do not constitute a homogeneous process but rather a series of differentiated rhythmic dynamics.
Our findings also reveal the role for narratives as spaces for mediation within which these temporal and identity configurations are constructed and negotiated. SCTs do not begin their training as 'novices' in the sense that they lack work experience; rather, they draw on rich, situated and sometimes long-standing professional trajectories that constitute identity resources they can use in the construction of their new professional position. These prior work experiences function as anchor points for interpreting the situations they encounter in teacher education or internships, and they guide certain decisions and ways of acting in the classroom. It is primarily through reflective writing that these resources can be named, put into perspective, and transformed. In this sense, the narrative itself operates as a space for mediation that reconfigures implicit knowledge into more formalised forms and articulates inherited identity with an identity in the making. From a Ricoeurian perspective (1990), narrative emplotment enables writers to integrate heterogeneous experiences into an intelligible trajectory by configuring a narrative identity that articulates permanence (*idem*) and the capacity for transformation (*ipse*).

Nevertheless, the fact that these narratives are produced within frameworks designed to certify new education professionals must be taken into account. Staging does not refer solely to an internal reflective process; it is also shaped by the conditions in which the text is produced. Subjects' narratives are developed within a time-limited evaluative horizon that explicitly or implicitly requires them to demonstrate what they have learnt, how they have developed as professionals. We hypothesise that the recurrent restructuring observed in these narratives does not result solely from a biographical process of meaning-making but that it is also linked to the dimension of certification for which the training devices analysed were designed. When autobiographical writing is embedded in processes of validation or professional recognition, participants are not only invited to reflect on their trajectory – they must also make visible any identifiable learning outcomes or professional progress. This requirement may orient narratives toward configurations in which past difficulties are presented as necessary steps in a developmental process that culminates in a positive repositioning. It also affects the meaning attributed to temporality itself, by valuing the idea of continuous evolution and demonstrable transformation, and by encouraging writers to select events that show that, despite an atypical trajectory, they are now legitimately ready to enter the teaching profession. Without calling into question the authenticity of the experiences they describe, these narrative closures suggest that the temporalities and rhythms constructed in their narratives are partly shaped by institutional expectations, as being able to adequately present one's learning or accomplishments contributes to establishing one's professional legitimacy.

These findings invite a broader reflection on the role that training devices should have in shaping narratives about professional transitions. While the results presented here are grounded in specific contexts and must be interpreted in consideration of when, why and how the narratives were written, they nevertheless raise a more general pedagogical issue: when certification frameworks orient narratives toward a presentation of the writer's demonstrable achievements, they may contribute to marginalising incomplete, ambiguous or unresolved dimensions of the writer's professional experience. It therefore appears relevant to design training spaces in which the temporalities and rhythms of SCTs' trajectories can be explored outside of any imperative of success by certification, thus allowing teachers in training to put into words not only their learning and achievements but also their moments of stagnation, doubt, contradiction or experiences of failure as integral components of their professional development. Such openness would foster a more nuanced understanding of professional temporality, recognising that a

teacher's identity development does not necessarily culminate in permanent identity stability, but may continue through tensions and ongoing reconfigurations over time.

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