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How Do Teachers View Themselves as Assessors?

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Abstract

Within the broader debate on teacher professionalism, there has been a notable increase in research interest in the identity that teachers develop over the course of their careers as assessors. More specifically, teacher assessment identity is considered a crucial component of recent conceptualisations and models of teacher assessment literacy. With the aim of providing new insights into the teacher assessment literacy debate, this article presents evidence about teachers' self-perception as assessors. The data were drawn from an analysis of self-identikits completed by nine primary school teachers. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) revealed that the participants' identity as assessors was somewhat inconsistent and was primarily characterised by social and relational interactions between teachers and students in the classroom. The study participants did not report aspects generally considered relevant to the current conceptualisations of teacher assessment literacy. There were no references to the knowledge and skills that teachers should have to ensure sound and effective assessment practices, as well as to the personal beliefs, values, and conceptions that remain unexplored and unconsidered in teachers' self-reflections. Finally, the implications for research and educational practice are discussed.

Keywords: teacher assessment literacy; teacher identity; qualitative research

1. Introduction

Over the years, it has become clear that research efforts in the field of teacher education have predominantly been driven by the notion of teacher identity and the focus on effective strategies for its development (Elliott, 2019; Schellings & Beijaard, 2023; Vignoles et al., 2011). Teacher identity is defined as teachers' understanding of, and perception of, their roles and professional selves. Recognised as dynamic, flexible and hybrid in nature, it is a multifaceted social process influenced by a wide range of individual and contextual factors (Granjo et al., 2021). Attempts to map and detect the components of teacher identity have produced a complex and contested array of models and conceptualisations, most of which aim to orient and review teacher education programmes (Barnatt et al., 2017; Chaaban et al., 2021; Zhang & Wang, 2022). Investigating how teachers perceive themselves is highly relevant to supporting them in understanding their professional role, developing their professional identity and ensuring sound and effective instructional practice in the classroom. Research studies have indeed led to the consideration of the influence exerted by situational and contextual factors (e.g., the social, cultural and political dimensions of the school community), as well as by teachers' personal characteristics, attitudes and orientations (e.g., values, motivation, norms, and moral considerations) towards teaching approaches and practice.

This lively debate is currently being paralleled by a growing research interest in teacher assessment practice and teacher assessment literacy (what teachers need to know

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in theory and in practice to effectively carry out assessments in the classroom). Given its relevant connection with teachers' decision-making, instructional design and teaching strategies, as well as teacher professional development and learning needs (Adie et al., 2024), assessment has been progressively recognised as one of the most powerful levers to improve educational quality (Birenbaum, 2015; Darling-Hammond, 2017). Recent academic and professional literature on teacher assessment literacy has provided detailed descriptions of this professional domain, its dimensions, and its components (Christoforidou & Kyriakides, 2021; DeLuca et al., 2016; Herppich et al., 2018; Pastore & Andrade, 2019; Popham, 2018, 2009; Stiggins, 1991; Xu & Brown, 2016). More specifically, these models, which identify the knowledge and skills that teachers need to practise assessment, emphasised the socio-cultural nature of assessment. Therefore, elements such as teachers' personal values, beliefs, and conceptions about assessment, as well as the influence of these aspects on assessment practices, have come to be recognised as extremely relevant to the professional identity development of teachers as both educators and assessors.

Nevertheless, in spite of the evident interest in the preparation and support of teachers to carry out sound assessment practices, and the various attempts to investigate the impact of teachers' values, beliefs, and conceptions about assessment on assessment practice, there is a paucity of research into how teachers develop their identities as assessors and the factors that affect this process (Adie et al., 2024; Looney et al., 2018).

Building on previous research that primarily focused on how teachers perceive their own professionalism, the present paper reports on an exploratory study that focuses on teachers' assessment identities. This early-stage qualitative study is part of a broader research project on the development of teacher assessment literacy. It explores how teachers conceptualise their identity as assessors. Against the backdrop of literature on teacher assessment literacy and teacher identity, the paper presents the main results drawn from self-identikits of nine primary school teachers' assessment identities. Finally, the implications for educational research and practice are discussed.

2. Conceptual Framework and Study Purposes

The three-dimensional model of teacher assessment literacy (Pastore & Andrade, 2019) lays out the foundation for the framework adopted in this study. Teacher assessment literacy, in this model, is defined as an "interrelated set of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that a teacher can use to design and implement a coherent and appropriate approach to assessment within the classroom context and the school system" (pp. 134–135). Consequently, assessment literacy comprises three dimensions (conceptual, praxeological, and socio-emotional) that allow teachers to understand and differentiate between aims, methods, strategies, and instruments of assessment to gather information to be used to make instructional decisions. More specifically, the conceptual dimension encompasses knowledge relating to the purpose and methodology of assessment (theories, models, objectives). The praxeological dimension, on the other hand, pertains to the day-to-day assessment practices that teachers implement. The elements included here, therefore, consider the ways in which teachers incorporate assessment into other teaching practices (e.g., teacher-made tests, curriculum-embedded evaluations, structured observations, oral questioning, and homework assignments). Finally, given the social nature of assessment, the last dimension includes all social and emotional aspects of assessment, such as relationships with students, colleagues and parents, and teachers' awareness of their role as assessors and issues of trust, responsibilities, and rights. In line with recent research into teacher assessment literacy (Adie et al., 2020; Looney et al., 2018), which considers the impact of personal factors (such as conceptions, beliefs, and values) and contextual factors (such as school climate, and teacher background) on teacher assessment literacy and practice (Daniels & Poth, 2017;

Monteiro et al., 2021; Xu & He, 2019), this study focuses on the socio-emotional dimension of teacher assessment literacy and considers teachers' identity as assessors. Therefore, the following research questions framed the study:

- How do teachers view themselves as assessors?
- What factors contribute to these perceptions?

Although this study specifically considers the socio-emotional dimension of teacher assessment literacy, the three-dimensional model (Pastore & Andrade, 2019) will allow for the identification of the most influential contextual, cultural, social, and personal factors in the development of teachers' assessor identity, thanks to its non-hierarchical structure. Furthermore, it will provide a fresh perspective on the factors that are most evident in the deployment of this literacy.

2.1. Teacher Assessment Literacy

Teacher assessment literacy was originally defined as the set of assessment rudiments (e.g., concepts and procedures) required for sound and effective assessment. For a long time, it has only been conceived in terms of practice (Popham, 2011). Traditional conceptualisations and models of assessment literacy, which list the prerequisite knowledge and skills that teachers need to fulfil their role, have a common positive aspect: their intrinsic simplicity and clarity. Knowledge and skills required for effective and responsive educational assessment are deductively drawn from policy documents and professional standards (Pastore, 2023). However, viewing teachers as experts who apply their specialised knowledge and skills in various educational contexts has complicated the specification of core educational assessment training. The definition of teacher assessment literacy as a fixed, standardised set of knowledge and skills has been criticised for failing to address the complexity of assessment practices and the varying professional development needs that teachers may encounter throughout their careers. The progressive recognition of the importance of teacher assessment practice for improving educational quality, alongside the transformations driven by educational policy and sometimes radical social and cultural changes, has led to renewed interest in how teachers carry out assessments and, consequently, how they are prepared for this professional domain, both pre- and in-service (Stiggins, 2017).

Acknowledging the socio-cultural nature of assessment practice represented a radical interpretative shift in the debate surrounding educational assessment (Willis et al., 2013). Assessment, therefore, is understood as a social construction, shaped by teachers' interpretations and influenced by discourses, ideologies, social practices and representations in a specific historical, cultural and political context. Consequently, profound changes in the conception of assessment practices and roles have begun to emerge. Teachers have assessment knowledge, skills and dispositions that they use in a specific school context; however, the characteristics of this context, in turn, define and prioritise the components and elements of assessment practice differently. The concept of assessment literacy has expanded to consider different aspects, such as the social and relational constructs that characterise and define any educational context. Nevertheless, it is difficult to understand how teachers carry out assessment practice, what they need to know in order to assess, and what aspects drive or hinder the refinement and review of assessment practice (e.g., assessment literacy). Recent conceptualisations of teacher assessment literacy, grounded in multidimensional, sociocultural, and holistic perspectives, emphasise that this professional competence is profoundly shaped by "teachers' affective, cognitive, and epistemological views of teaching, learning and assessment as enacted within teachers' contexts of practice" (Rasooli et al., 2022, p. 2). Teachers' understandings, knowledge, beliefs, thoughts, and emotions regarding assessment constitute the overarching framework that underpins

their assessment practices. Indeed, different studies have demonstrated that teachers' conceptions of assessment exert a pervasive influence on how assessment is designed and implemented (Daniels & Poth, 2017; Lutovac & Flores, 2022; Monteiro et al., 2021) have demonstrated, teachers' conceptions of assessment exert a pervasive influence on how assessment is designed and implemented. Other studies, instead, have examined teachers' assessment conceptions, distinguishing among the purposes, functions, and consequences of assessment exploring the differences between pre-service and experienced teachers (Barnes et al., 2017; Brown, 2004; DeLuca & Bellara, 2013; Rasooli et al., 2022) and showed the complex—and at times contradictory—ways in which teachers' conceptions of assessment shape, and are reflected in, their assessment practices and, by extension, their professionalism. From this perspective, the notion of identity, as pointed out by Looney et al. (2018), has been progressively recognised as providing more insight into teacher assessment literacy. Teachers' identities and their conceptions and practices in the assessment domain are shaped by social, cultural, relational and organisational structures, ideologies, values and their own biographies. More recent research has stressed how the identification of teacher assessment literacy components is intertwined with understanding assessment in the context of practice (Adie et al., 2020; Estaji et al., 2024; Looney et al., 2018). This aspect is evident in new definitions and models of teacher assessment literacy, which tend to exhibit similar components (Pastore, 2023). DeLuca et al. (2020), for example, define assessment literacy as "the knowledge, beliefs, and practices situated within teaching and learning contexts and influenced by factors including policy, teacher professional development, the learning environment and teacher–student negotiations" (p. 27). Xu and Brown (2016), on the other hand, define it as a combination of cognitive traits, affective and belief systems, and socio-cultural and institutional models (p. 155). The focus on teachers' perceptions of assessment has prompted an examination of assessment practice through the lens of teacher identity and agency. Looney et al. (2018) argue that, in their definition, assessment identity is influenced by context and experience and is consequently entangled with assessment practice. Personal variables (such as background, values and conceptions) are fundamental to understanding how teachers embed assessment theories, approaches and models, and transfer what they have learned into the classroom. These variables shape assessment practice and teacher identity as assessors (Estaji & Ghiasvand, 2023; Feola et al., 2023; Gan & Lam, 2023; Leonardsen et al., 2022). Following this perspective, Adie et al. (2024) point out that assessment identity is "more than assessment knowledge, skills, and beliefs; it is the interaction of these aspects as well as a teacher's own history with assessment that forms their assessment identity" (p. 2).

The next section provides an overview of the main studies focused on teacher identity.

2.2. Teacher Identity

In their literature review, Rushton and Reiss (2021) revealed that current conceptualisations of teacher identity emphasise its dynamic, flexible and hybrid nature, which is influenced by various factors, including personal biographies and narratives (Alsup, 2006), emotions (Day & Leitch, 2001), and social contexts and relationships with others (Beijaard et al., 2000; Rushton & Reiss, 2019). Other relevant factors in shaping teacher identity include external factors such as school organisations (Day et al., 2006) and working conditions (Canrinus et al., 2011), as well as policy contexts, educational reforms, and transformations. Teachers' identity self-perception is shaped by their beliefs, experiences and values, which influence how they fulfil their role and view themselves. Sachs posits that teacher identity is at the core of the teaching profession: "[*it*] provides a framework for teachers to construct their own ideas of "how to be", "how to act", and "how to understand" their work and their place in society" (Sachs, 2005, p. 5). Indeed, developing a professional

identity is a key part of becoming a professional; an aspect that has often been overlooked or underestimated in teacher education programmes that focus more on acquiring knowledge and skills (Cobb, 2020; Schellings & Beijaard, 2023). In this vein, Garner and Kaplan (2019) outlined teacher identity as "the personal version of the teacher role that a person construes within his or her lived context" (p. 9). Various definitions of teacher identity can be found in the wider literature, which have different applications in teaching and teacher education. For example, early research has shown that teachers' self-perceptions influence their teaching methods, their professional development and their response to educational changes and institutional innovations (Nias, 1989; Pratt, 1992). Moreover, initial research attempts were made to disentangle the concepts of identity and role, the latter of which specifically refers to the functions and tasks expected of teachers (e.g., instructor, assessor, coordinator and community builder). These are generally considered to be necessary for effective teaching and learning in the classroom (Schellings & Beijaard, 2023). Other studies have emphasised the relationships between teachers' roles, their conceptions, and their self-evaluation in the development of teacher identity. The recognition that teacher identity can affect teaching and learning, and that it is related to high-quality professionalism, has led to the concept of "*identity work*" being valued. This is defined as "an ongoing process of negotiating multiple positions in such a way that a more or less coherent and consistent sense of self is manifested throughout various participations and self-investments in one's working life" (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011, p. 315).

In their seminal work on identity learning theory, Beijaard et al. (2000) emphasise that identity is a unique and personal sense-making process. However, these authors also point out that it is possible to detect four main attributes:

- Continual revision. Teachers' understanding of themselves is continually constructed and reconstructed through the stories they share with themselves and others about their personal and professional lives (Rodgers & Scott, 2008). These narratives allow teachers to reflect on how daily interactions and practices contribute to their professional identity;
- Embeddedness within personal and work contexts. This attribute is linked to the influence that sociocultural and historical processes exert on the personal and professional lives of teachers (Varelas et al., 2005). Teachers' backgrounds, life experiences, values and personalities relate to their personal contexts, while their professional contexts include their experiences and relationships, as well as the structural conditions of past and present school settings (Pennington, 2015);
- Multiple and conflicting sub-identities. Teachers can maintain multiple and, at times, conflicting sub-identities through their fluid and evolving professional identity. These sub-identities are enacted through teachers' relationships with others, including colleagues, students and community members, across diverse social contexts (Beijaard et al., 2004; Hökkä et al., 2017);
- Individual agency. Agency refers to the actions teachers take to achieve intended outcomes by strategically mobilising the resources available to them in their specific contexts. Reflective practice is central to agency, as it enables teachers to develop a greater awareness of their professional identities and a deeper understanding of how these identities are situated within broader social contexts involving others (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Teachers, reflecting on their actions, can envisage and implement new ways of engaging professionally and collaborating within their social environments.

The social identity approach, which combines theories of social identity (Turner et al., 1987) and self-categorisation (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), emphasises that people and their interactions with others and groups significantly influence a person's sense of self and,

consequently, their identity. Following this line of thinking, Varghese et al. (2005) attempted to distinguish *identity in practice* from *identity in discourse*. In the former, the social aspects of tasks and practices are considered crucial. In the latter, negotiation and renegotiation processes within specific social contexts and conditions are emphasised, including social and cultural dimensions (e.g., organisation, language, and knowledge). More specifically, teachers' perceptions of their professional identity influence their efficacy, professional development, emotional well-being, teaching quality in the classroom, and how they cope with social and institutional instances. Representations of teachers' understanding of their professional identity provide an opportunity to understand their personal perception of it (Beijaard et al., 2000).

Building on this perspective and focusing specifically on teacher assessment literacy, the present study has attempted to determine how teachers perceive themselves as assessors.

3. Method

Drawing on the background of the teacher assessment literacy three-dimensional model (Pastore & Andrade, 2019) and teacher identity literature, an exploration of how teachers perceive themselves as assessors was performed using a qualitative research approach (Creswell, 2014). More specifically, the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis strategy (IPA) was employed to detect and analyse how teachers interpret their own assessment practices and their identity as assessors (Smith et al., 1999). This methodology provided the richest and most descriptive data possible, allowing unexpected issues to emerge and providing space and flexibility. It enabled exploration of teachers' conceptions and practices, and therefore their professional identity in the assessment domain.

Data were collected through a self-identikit module, which participants completed and shared with the author via a dedicated platform. A brief meeting was organised to explain the rationale behind this collection process to teachers and to demonstrate how they should complete the document. The first section of the self-identikit was designed to collect demographic information and the participants' perceptions of themselves as assessors. The second section included six prompts to encourage teachers to describe and reflect on the main aspects of their assessment practice (see Table 1). Allowing teachers time to calmly reflect before responding and filling in the various fields of the self-identikit made them less likely to perceive the task as stressful.

Table 1. The Assessor's Self-identikit.

First Section I Introduce My Self	Second Section My Assessment Practice
Who am I?	My assessment practice is intended to:
What about my story line in relation to my experience of assessment?	I practice assessment in this way:
Age and years of service	Feedback for me is:
My educational background	My emotions when I assess student learning
The subject matter I teach	My relationships with students during assessment
An adjective that describes me as assessor	How I make decisions after gathering assessment data
What I like/dislike about my assessment-related role/job	
A critical event/aspect in my journey as an assessor	

A final debriefing meeting was organised to share the results with all participants. Furthermore, they had the opportunity to check that the results aligned with their expectations, and to provide more details or additional information if needed. This one-hour-and-20-min restitution meeting was video-recorded and transcribed verbatim. These further data were used to triangulate teachers' responses and to eventually debate emerging themes and patterns.

This study included nine teachers from three primary schools (1st–5th grades) in the Apulian school district in southern Italy. In line with national educational policy recommendations to create school networks to optimise professional development activities, teachers from these schools participated in a 15-h joint professional development programme focusing on teacher assessment literacy and data-based decision-making. Five meetings were organised. To mitigate the potential influence on participants' perceptions and attitudes towards assessment and their self-perception as assessors, teachers were invited to participate in the study after the second meeting. From a list of 35 teachers who were involved in the professional development activities, an initial pool of ten teachers was randomly selected. Each of the initially selected ten participants, who received a formal invitation agreed to participate in the study, and written consent was obtained from all participants. To preserve confidentiality, essential service details about the participants are not provided. One participant dropped out of the study, so the final panel included nine teachers.

According to the IPA strategy, each participant's self-identikit was analysed individually; then a cross-case analysis was performed to identify information and themes relevant to the topics and questions of the research study. During this review, relevant statements and phrases were carefully selected and highlighted in relation to emerging themes and patterns. Significant statements and sentences were then clustered into thematic categories that were shared across participants' accounts. Themes firmly grounded in participants lived experiences and aligned with the research questions were analysed in light of the language used by the participants. Once meaningful data had been extracted, it was referred to the main aspects of teachers' contextual and narrative experiences. Finally, convergences and divergences across the teachers' texts were explored and checked with participants during the restitution meeting.

4. Results

In the first part, the assessor's self-identikit was aimed at introducing participants as teachers and assessors, as well as collecting main demographic data. Teachers (eight female and one male) ranged in age from 26 to 60 years and had between two and 35 years of work experience. Only one participant did not have a bachelor's degree. The most commonly reported subject specialization was humanities, while only one teacher had expertise in special learning needs. When asked to describe themselves as assessors using an adjective, the teachers gave positive descriptions of themselves. The adjectives "patient" and "available" were reported more frequently, along with "dynamic", "reflexive" and "emphatic". These adjectives were closely related to teachers' daily work in the classroom and, consequently, to the core of their relationship with students.

This was also confirmed by the teachers' responses when asked to identify an aspect of their work that they either liked or disliked. Indeed, all teachers reported in the self-identikit that the best aspect of teaching was building relationships with students, working with them, and supporting their learning journey. The following statement is representative:

> "*The aspect of my assessment work that I am really passionate about is being in the classroom, interacting with students and supporting them in their learning process*" (Teacher_3)

Conversely, teachers identified bureaucracy and administrative tasks as the most irritating and useless aspects of their assessment-related work. Furthermore, teachers' negative perception of this workload was increasingly evident when they had to complete formal assessment documents, such as the electronic register through which final grades were shared with students and parents. Teachers pointed out that these duties left them with less time and energy for instruction. These duties were perceived as an unimportant part of teachers' work, and consequently of their identity as assessors. As one teacher explained, if she could avoid these formal commissions, she "*would feel relieved and be able to focus more on the real needs of [her] students*".

Some teachers also mentioned that they disliked parents interfering in the assessment process. They found this aspect very frustrating, particularly as they felt unsupported by the school principal and their colleagues. One teacher, referred to a recent experience in which parents had explicitly requested that their child not be assessed because it caused them stress and anxiety. Another teacher sadly recounted being asked not to use words such as "assessment", "evaluation" and "test". Consequently, she has had to devise some "escape solutions". She started using strategies that emphasised collaboration and playfulness. However, she admitted that, despite using these strategies, she still felt unable to assess student learning effectively or collect data and information to support her instructional decision-making. Furthermore, she was disappointed in herself for not having been able to mitigate the interference of parents in her assessment practice and in her professionalism. Participants never mentioned the idea of positive and constructive collaboration between teachers and parents to ensure effective student learning progression. This was probably also related to the representation of assessment practice as being confined to the classroom: a special process for a select few, namely teachers and students. The identity of these teachers as assessors seemed to be very intimate. These teachers made no reference to the school's culture, its informal practices, or the relationships they had with their colleagues. The statements collected in this section of the self-identikit were very brief. In fact, no detailed descriptions or accounts were provided in response to the request to report on their experience of assessment. Teachers responded briefly, mostly stressing the negative emotions they experienced, such as stress from being performative and competitive, humiliation from making mistakes and fear of being criticised by parents.

The second section of the self-identikit focused on aspects of teachers' assessment practices, investigating who they are when they assess.

Three main themes emerged.

The first theme, labelled *formative and dialogic assessment*, aligns with the results of the "introduce yourself" section, in which teachers emphasised the importance of the relational and social dimensions of assessment practice. Against this backdrop, assessment appeared to serve exclusively formative purposes. However, the description of assessment practice failed to mention the strategies generally indicated by scientific literature as fundamental to ensuring sound and effective formative assessment. For these teachers, the main purpose for assessment was to gather information and data that could be used to review instructional strategies and support student learning progression.

Teachers described their relationships with students as tranquil, positive and encouraging in order to value the "*heterogeneity of the whole class*".

> "*I try to create an environment where students feel at ease and safe*" (Teacher_6)

> "*Tranquillity is the key. I explain to them that making a mistake is a way to learn*" (Teacher_4)

> "*There is a lot of dialogue between us. I talk about the learning goals they have achieved and the areas in which they could improve. I encourage them to develop autonomy and metacognition*" (Teacher_8)

Within this framework, these teachers conceived feedback as a process of reciprocal exchange:

> "[Feedback] *is essential as it reinforces the educational relationship*" (Teacher_2)

This statement perfectly summarises the teachers' reported points of view:

> "[Feedback] *is information that helps me understand how students have internalised what I suggest in terms of learning, and whether they need further support*" (Teacher_1)

However, stressing the dialogical, relational, and formative nature of assessment raised some perplexities about the knowledge and skills teachers had to enact assessment in the classroom. More specifically, no mention was found in the self-identikits of specific formative strategies or tools used; assessment was generally defined as dialogic, timely and enacted daily. Only one teacher provided a brief explanation of how assessment was performed, without offering any further descriptions or details:

> "[I use] *daily observation, planned tests, collaborative group activities, peer assessment, oral examinations, discussions and self-assessment*" (Teacher_8)

While it is evident that formative and summative strategies were mentioned indistinguishably, this result is consistent with other studies conducted in this national school context, in which teachers found it difficult to disentangle formative from summative assessment practices (Pastore et al., 2019).

The second theme that emerged from the analysis of self-identikits' texts relates to "*teachers' emotions in the assessment process*". In this case, a plural image arose.

Some teachers had a very positive attitude towards assessment. They were curious about their effectiveness as teachers and interested in the feedback that students provided. In these cases, teachers often reported feeling confident, trusting, and tranquil. In other cases, however, negative emotions were associated with assessment practices. Teachers described feelings of anxiety, fear, defeat, and a loss of control over the situation:

> "*If the results and feedback are negative, I go into stand-by mode for a while, trying to understand what has happened*" (Teacher_4)

More experienced teachers, however, demonstrated greater resilience and an ability to cope with different emotions:

> "*I experience great satisfaction when the results are positive and when I receive feedback on the effectiveness of my teaching methods. If the results do not align with my expectations, I critically review my approach and try to adapt my teaching to better meet the learning needs of each student and the class as a whole*" (Teacher_1)

Regardless of whether they experienced negative or positive emotions, the assessment was used to "*revise instructional practice*". This third theme emerged in all the teachers' self-identity statements and was also confirmed during the restitution meeting. In accordance with the perspective of assessment as a social practice, teachers considered assessment to be a process that was responsive to the requirements and conditions inherent in teaching and learning. From this standpoint, the relational dimensions of their identity as assessors became evident in their assessment practice. The purpose of this practice was threefold: firstly, to support student learning; secondly, to create a positive educational environment; and thirdly, to provide descriptive feedback. Once again, the predominant feature of these teachers' assessment practice and identity was the idea of supporting themselves and their students to ensure an effective learning path. In fact, none of the teachers involved in

this study mentioned the side aspects of assessment, such as the risk of inequity among students, the identification of assessment in terms of power relationships, or the notion of the assessor as a 'censor'.

5. Discussion

Against the three-dimensional model of teacher assessment literacy (Pastore & Andrade, 2019) and the wide range of conceptual models in identity research, this study focused on teachers' self-image as assessors and analysed how teachers view and feel in this role. Considering the new demands and expectations placed on teachers in their role as educational assessors, and the rapidly changing context of digital society (particularly the integration of AI into education), the simplistic nature of the representations of assessors' identities among the teachers involved in this study is worth noting.

In response to the first research question, "*How do teachers view themselves as assessors*?", the results demonstrate that, in their representations as assessors, the study participants have encapsulated more social dimensions of assessment practice as part of their identity than personal and professional ones. Relational and social characteristics, as well as the importance attributed to interactions and contextual aspects of assessment, emerged as the most representative of teachers' identities as assessors (Looney et al., 2018). When asked to identify or justify what constitutes assessment work, the answer was always the same: the importance of caring for students. This latent "*maternage*" habitus also emerges in their professional decision-making and in their pedagogical use of information and data collected through assessment. All their instructional decisions and assessment strategies are intended to support students in the learning process. While this aligns with the perspective of identity as a form of socialised subjectivity produced by the specific social structures and relations in which teachers act (Bourdieu, 2010), teachers' self-images as assessors completely remove reference to the fundamental components of assessment literacy: concepts, knowledge, skills and dispositions. It appears that the socio-emotional dimension of teacher assessment literacy is superimposed upon and overrules the conceptual and praxeological dimensions. However, it must be noted how the components of the socio-emotional dimension, including the identity of teachers as assessors, are underdeveloped and simplistic: beliefs, perceptions, and emotional patterns concerning assessment practice are reported superficially. More specifically, teachers do not clarify to what extent they differentiate their assessment practice in terms of intentions, actions, and perspectives (Pratt, 2024). The descriptions of assessment practice confirm that the assessment identity of these teachers is somewhat tenuous. They depict assessment practice, focusing on the "what" rather than the "how". As mentioned above, when they describe their assessment practice in the classroom, it becomes clear that they are only considering formative assessment. However, their statements and descriptions do not refer to the wide range of methods, strategies and tools that can be employed for this purpose (Black & Wiliam, 2018; Heritage, 2013; Yan et al., 2021).

Teachers' self-reflection is also superficial, as evidenced by their difficulty in focusing on their perspectives as assessors and analysing who they are as assessors.

No mention has been found of teachers' beliefs, values or conceptions regarding assessment, or of their role in evaluating student learning. It seems that there is no assessment perspective that frames and justifies teachers' intentions and actions in this context. This is probably related to the lack of critical questioning or reflection on previous assessment experiences.

Analysis of the factors influencing assessors' perceptions (RQ2) shows that contextual aspects, particularly the social context of the classroom, significantly impact assessment practice and participants' assessor identities. Participants never question the exclusive

reference to the microcosm of the classroom. Furthermore, the ways in which they deal with assessment requirements, regulations, and commitments in relation to different educational settings are never described in detail. Teachers try to balance individual and social, contextual and cultural variables, but the modalities and processes through which these elements are converted into meaningful practices are neither mentioned nor critically analysed. This is particularly evident when they describe their assessment practice in relation to formative assessment purposes: none of the nine teachers mentioned the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required to implement formative assessment in the classroom (Coombs et al., 2018; Xu & Brown, 2016; Schildkamp et al., 2020). A lack of knowledge and skills in assessment consequently represents a significant problem when it comes to developing teachers' assessment literacy (Coombs et al., 2018; DeLuca et al., 2020). The participants in this study do not have a clear understanding of the prerequisites needed for effective assessment. They do not mention any strategies or methods they use to differentiate assessment in relation to their pedagogical content knowledge. They do not consider reflections on the knowledge or skills that could support their assessment practice. These teachers appear to have a somewhat marginal identity as assessors. This clearly contrasts with the current conceptualisation of teacher assessment literacy as "the dominant construct to describe teacher assessment work" (Coombs & DeLuca, 2022, p. 268).

The present study's results confirm the assumption, as addressed in current teacher assessment literacy conceptualisations and models (Coombs et al., 2018; DeLuca et al., 2020; Looney et al., 2018; Pastore & Andrade, 2019; Xu & Brown, 2016), that assessment identity is influenced by context and experience. The results also show how components of teachers' assessment identity influence their assessment practice. Teachers' backgrounds, values and conceptions of assessment are rooted in a commitment to caring for students. This becomes evident in the formative assessment-focused practice of the participant. However, this assessment practice does not consider the knowledge and skills, or the conceptual and praxeological dimensions, addressed by the literature to ensure sound formative assessment. Consequently, teachers' ideas of themselves as assessors are shaped as they remove the "bulk" of a competent assessment practice. This vacuum emerges when teachers talk about the difficulties they have with parents or when they succinctly describe their assessment methods and strategies.

The results of this study confirm that investigating assessment identity can provide a valuable research approach to teacher assessment literacy. Adopting a holistic approach, it is now more important than ever to consider how the conceptual, practical, and socio-emotional factors of assessment interact and influence each other in relation to teachers' development in this professional domain. This requires an understanding of teacher assessment literacy and its relationship with new trends, including the contemporary challenges posed by AI, which is driving wider changes in assessment and feedback practices (Cope et al., 2021; Van der Kleij & Lipnevich, 2021). From this perspective, future research should investigate the relationship between classroom assessment practices and social, cultural and technological innovations, to improve our understanding and provide teachers with guidance and orientation.

6. Conclusions

The results of the present study must be considered in light of its qualitative and interpretative nature and the intrinsic limitations of this approach. Firstly, the influence of the researcher's subjectivity on the interpretation of participants' experiences must be acknowledged, as must the impact of these experiences on participants' identities. Furthermore, it is likely that involved teachers initially found the deep reflective process challenging. Engaging in dialogue with themselves about their assessment practice (completing and

responding to the self-identikit prompts) requires considerable reflective effort. Although the restitution meeting provided support and feedback on common representations of assessment literacy, the self-identikits lacked references to personal aspects and narratives that could have affected the teachers' development as educators and assessors. Teachers highlighted the influence of the classroom context and social relationships on their assessment practices.

The relatively small sample size is likely to have affected the results. As the teachers were all from the same region, the findings cannot be applied directly to teachers across the country. Assuming that teachers' interpretation of their job's main meaning can vary according to not only their local context but also the national school system in question, future comparative studies should try to understand how relationships between assessment literacy fundamentals, social expectations, and teacher professionalism are combined and prioritised differently in different educational contexts.

The integration of assessment practices as a core component of teaching, and as a significant driver of educational policy innovation, is a prominent feature of national school systems committed to enhancing teacher quality. Concurrently, the growing focus on teacher assessment practices and the expanding public discourse on assessment have prompted efforts to delineate the competencies expected of assessment-literate teachers in classroom settings. In this perspective, current definitions of teacher assessment literacy stress the role exerted by social, cultural and emotional dimensions leading to a focus on the identity teachers develop towards their careers as assessors. Compared to the teacher assessment literacy model used for this study it seems that the results provide a picture with somewhat blurred edges. Participants' self-identikits never reference the knowledge related to the "what" and "how" of assessment and when they describe their assessment practice these descriptions remain at a superficial, denotative level. Assessment is assumed to serve teachers and students in fostering the learning process, but how teachers realise this purpose is never considered or questioned. The praxeological dimension of assessment literacy is reduced to a list of a few strategies, most of the time mentioned without any further detail in terms of choice's reasons, effectiveness, and criticalities. Furthermore, these teachers appear to be influenced by organisational, contextual and cultural aspects in a marginal way. Teachers do not mention school and school organisation except to complain about the formal workload, deadlines and bureaucracy. Their assessment practice, and therefore their identity, is considered (and exists) only within the classroom. Interactions with actors who are not students, such as parents and colleagues, create dissonance. These relationships are not accepted and are seen as disruptive. Nevertheless, teachers could not bring to the surface their values, beliefs, prejudices, and stereotypes that can affect their assessment practice and their assessment identity.

In light of these results, it is evident that there is room for further investigations aimed at detecting the shaping factors of teacher assessment practice and teacher identity as assessors.

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