

# Teacher's Professional Self-Awareness Within The Interactions With Students In Higher Education: Temporality and Relationality

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**Abstract.** Becoming and being a teacher in higher education is a long process of individual transformation. The research aims at highlighting the meaning of time and relations in regard to teachers' professional self-awareness through their interactions with students in higher education. The research design was qualitative in which the phenomenological methodology according to Max van Manen version was applied. Findings revealed that temporality and relationality are social constructs that shape the teacher-student interactions in higher education as they are loaded with worldviews that guide their educational actions and their relationships. Thus their subjectivities and life-world educational experiences-based worlds are built on temporalities. A higher education teacher's professional self-awareness is a developmental process which requires from the person reflection on his/her own experiences. Teachers through interactions with students balance between expectations and requirements which encourage both sides to find ways of integrating creative methods into the teaching and learning processes. Through working with students, teachers step into the "unknown" and learn within togetherness. Being in togetherness brings bilateral interchange between teachers and students, which motivates both sides to be self-aware. These reciprocal interactions invite participants to grow and seek mutual interchange through different experiences and contexts.

**Keywords:** higher education, professional self-awareness, relationality, teacher-student interaction, temporality.

## Dėstytojo profesinė savimone sąveikose su studentais aukštajame moksle: gyvenamasis laikas ir santykis

**Santrauka.** Tapti ir būti dėstytoju aukštojoje mokykloje yra ilgas individualių pokyčių procesas. Tyrimu siekiama atskleisti laiko ir santykio prasmę dėstytojo ir studento sąveikai aukštajame moksle dėmesį skiriant dėstytojo profesinei savimonei. Šiame kokybiniame tyrime taikyta fenomenologinė metodologija pagal Makso van Maneno versiją. Radiniai atskleidė, kad laikas ir santykis yra socialiniai konstruktai, formuojantys dėstytojo ir studento sąveikas aukštajame moksle, nes jos perkrautos pasaulėžiūromis, nurodančiomis jų ugdymo veiksmus ir santykius. Abiejų pusių subjektyvumas ir gyvenimo patirtimi grįstas pasaulis remiasi laikinumu. Aukštosios mokyklos dėstytojo profesinė savimone yra vystymosi procesas, reikalaujantis, kad asmuo apmąstytų savo patirtis. Dėstytojai, sąveikaudami su studentais, balansuoja tarp lūkesčių ir reikalavimų, kurie skatina abi puses ieškoti būdų, kaip kūrybiškus me-

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todus integruoti į mokymo(si) procesus. Dirbdami su studentais, dėstytojai žengia į „nežinomybę“ ir mokosi kartu. Būvimas drauge lemia abipusius dėstytojų ir studentų mainus, kurie motyvuoja abi puses suvokti save. Dėstytojo ir studento santykiai reikalauja abipusio atvirumo ugdymo procesui. Ši sąveika kviečia dalyvius augti ir siekti abipusių mainų, remiantis skirtingomis patirtimis ir kontekstais.

**Pagrindiniai žodžiai:** aukštasis mokslas, profesinė savimone, santykis, dėstytojo ir studento sąveika, laikas.

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## Introduction

In our society, teachers are not rarely seen as exemplars, because their work is relevant to teaching and developing students. Society has a lot of expectations of higher education teachers, but they occasionally come into collision between reality-as-it-is and reality-to-be (Tateo, 2012). At this point teacher's professional self-awareness becomes one of the most important aspects of becoming and being a teacher in higher education. "Through self-awareness teachers develop their values, attitudes, prejudices, beliefs, assumptions, feelings, counter transferences, personal motives and needs, competencies, skills and limitations" (Cook, 1999, p. 1293-1294). The teachers' professional self-awareness fosters him/her to raise questions like: "what does it mean for me to be a teacher?" or "why I chose to be a teacher?" Professional awareness leads to active thinking and understanding of one's professional designation (Richardson & Shupe, 2003; Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). Through thinking, understanding and self-reflecting as components of self-awareness the teacher begins the professional self-identity transformation process when s/he identifies the self as a higher education teacher and professional. A self-aware teacher's professional identity is coherent with personal self-attitude, interpretations of his/her continuing interactions within the context (Canrinus, Helms-Lorenz, Beijaard, Buitink, & Hofman, 2011). Professional self-awareness brings for teachers greater satisfaction with their work (Frelin, 2010). This satisfaction increases teacher's worth and pride in themselves and their academic profession (Roccas & Brewer, 2002).

The relationship between teacher and student has always been central to the educational process. Higher education teachers are always immersed into interactions with students. This authentic professional relationship and connectedness influences the teacher's personal and professional growth, as they become potential learners themselves (Wald, 2015). Through interactions with students teachers come from areas which they know to areas which they do not. It is like overstepping oneself and going into the unknown. It requires reflection. Through reflection, a teacher grows as a person, becomes a professional and an authentic self-aware teacher (Kreber, 2009; Bialystok, 2015). That is why a higher education teacher should develop skills of self-reflection and self-awareness. While the nature of teacher-student interactions can be understood from various theoretical frameworks (Giles 2008), but this research seeks to understand the lived experience of this relationship in regard to higher education teacher self-awareness.

Interaction means the relationship and connectedness between teacher and student that is mediated by each participant's identity and agency (Kriewaldt, 2015). Relationships between teachers and students in higher education incorporate temporality as lived time and relationality as lived self-other (Vergara, 2015). According to van Manen (2014), the

temporality and relationality guides the teacher's reflection to ask, "What is the meaning of his/her time experiences and experiences of relationships within the teacher-student interactions in higher education with respect to professional self-awareness?"

Thus it becomes important to broaden the understanding about teacher self-awareness in regard to temporality and relationality in higher education. So why it is essential to locate the scientific discussion by considering the teachers who live in the world of higher education and become self-aware through interactions with students. This is an issue that requires a phenomenological perspective, allowing a hermeneutic understanding of how the dimensions of temporality and relationality operate in shaping a higher education teacher's self-awareness through and/or within the interactions with students.

Then the **aim** of this research is to explore the meaning of time and relations in regard to teachers' professional self-awareness through their interactions with students in higher education.

### Understanding self-awareness

Self-awareness denotes one's ability to think, relate, and define feelings, thoughts, and/or actions. The term "self-awareness" is used to describe an overall concept that includes many sub-concepts, such as self-esteem, self-concept, self-description, self-control, self-evaluation, self-image, self-perception, self-presentation, self-reflection, self-knowledge, and self-understanding (Flavian, 2016). Flavian's description of self-awareness could be broadened by characteristics mentioned in Cook's (1999) research such as values, attitudes, prejudices, beliefs, assumptions, feelings, counter transferences, personal motives and needs, competencies, skills, and limitations. All these characteristics are important for every teacher in their interactions with students in higher education.

Every person has his/her life story and experience, which is interrelated with self-awareness. Underhill (1992), marks out two experience levels:

- Primary, which concerns what the person can tell from own observation of the self in action and in reflection; how can s/he use own experience, so that s/he can learn from it in a directed and conscious way.
- Secondary, which concerns what other people can tell the person about the effects of his/her performance on them as other people can see things about the person that s/he cannot see.

These levels illustrate that self-awareness is hidden in every person, but through reflection of personal experience it becomes actualized. As Flavian (2016) mentions that "self-awareness development derives from a variety of life experiences" (p. 92). Thus the self-awareness is developmental process, which occurs in relation to the self, others, and one's environment.

There are different ways to reach a center of personal self. The self is related to one or more of four concerns that have preoccupied human thought in all cultures and throughout history. First, the problem of identity ('Who am I?'); second, the issue of personal value, i.e. self-evaluation ("What does it mean to be myself?"); third, the limitations and

restrictions that self-hood imposes on the individual (“How can I be self-aware?”); and fourth, the problem of the relationship between self and society (Cook, 1999). These concerns bring tension to a teacher’s life. There will always be people who influence the teacher’s thinking, or turn a teacher’s life path in one or another direction. But the final decision has to be taken by a person on his/her own. “Examining the self, with all of its light and shadow, may be uncomfortable, provoke anxiety, or even be painful” (Stolder et al., 2007, p. 266). At this point it is important that a teacher is self-aware what leads him/her to deeper self-understanding.

Likely, every teacher in higher education is expected to be successful in their work. Individuals who know the self can, through this knowledge, change their characteristics to a positive level of self-awareness and to use effective teaching methods (Yalcin & Erkal-Ilhan, 2008). That is why people who realize the self in positive way feel more successful despite their mistakes and failures, which are seen as a part of the development of self-awareness.

### **Considerations on professional self-awareness formation of higher education teacher**

Being self-aware is significant for the formation and growth of a higher education teacher’s professional self-awareness. In higher education “teachers require more than just an awareness of the external context to teach most effectively. Teachers need an awareness of the internal context, an awareness of the self, in order to understand how they are interpreting a teaching situation through their own individual lens” (Schussler & Knarr, 2013, p. 74). It means that teachers have to have inclinations towards acting and thinking in particular ways and one’s awareness of why those behaviors and ways of thinking make sense in specific situations to achieve intended purposes.

A higher education teacher has to know themselves first as a human being, and then as a professional. Through self-knowledge teachers recognize their own values and biases that might color their perception of others and they can assess the effects of their behavior on students (Schussler & Knarr, 2013). This means that self-reflection is a part of higher education teachers’ self-awareness. On the other hand, “the development of the teacher’s self-awareness takes place under the influence of social consciousness, the moral, aesthetic, and worldview norms prevailing in society” (Mitina, 1992, p. 57). Not every influence is meaningful and useful in teacher-student interactions in higher education. But through self-reflection a teacher can pick out things that s/he feels are (not) acceptable. This implies that the personal dimension overlaps with the professional dimension and forms professional self-awareness with unique personal elements which occur in the educational process through teacher-student interactions in higher education.

Mitina (1992) names three substructures of teachers’ professional awareness in higher education:

- The cognitive substructure holds the self-understanding of a higher education teacher and incorporates the teacher’s conscious awareness of the self in regard to

interpersonal relations that are determined by educational activities and in regard to teacher's and students' personal development, which is linked to educational activities, communication, and interactions.

- The affective substructure is related to the differentiated self-relation that is an integrated feeling "in favor of" or "against" one's own self, and to self-respect, self-interest, the anticipated attitude of others.
- The behavior substructure is directly linked to the teacher's satisfaction with themselves and the professional activity they implement.

Montgomery & Walker (2012) suggest another structure of teachers' professional awareness. This structure consists of three layers:

1. The first layer is based on preconceptions, an archetypal depth of knowing and observations of the world. It means that higher education teachers need a sense of broader world context, which brings knowledge and intelligence into interactions with students in higher education.
2. The second layer is awareness of the self or self-identity. With this layer, reflection and understanding our unique position in the world give characteristics that define self and those attributes that are different from others in communities and culture. Teachers' personal insight of self brings a unique, but aware, worldview into interactions with students in higher education.
3. The third layer is a socio-political awareness. In this layer, higher education teachers develop group values that can be realized through society and its institutions, such as higher education school (university, college) and integrate values in interactions with students and not only them within the higher education context.

Romanelli, Cain, & Smith (2006) refer to emotional intelligence taking a huge part in professional self-awareness development of a higher education teacher and within their interactions with students. Researchers accentuate that emotional intelligence includes empathy, problem-solving, optimism, and self-awareness which allow people to reflect, react to, and understand various situations. Because of emotional intelligence higher education teachers are capable of reflecting their emotions, behavior and any problematic situation in which they appear. And the self-reflection for a teacher helps to recognize emotions and to manage the self-behavior (Asrar-ul-Haq, Anwar, & Hassan, 2017). This means that these components of emotional intelligence include the whole higher education teacher's individuality, from controlling self-emotions to interaction with students.

### **Alignment of temporality and relationality to teacher's professional self-awareness in higher education**

*Temporality.* In the world of life, temporality is experienced in complex ways and not just from dominant logics. Thus higher education teachers live experiences of de-synchronization from cultural referents and it shapes their self-awareness (Lewis, 2017). The professional self-awareness of a higher education teacher within the interactions

with students not rare is understood as a competence, which means the alignment of the teacher's knowledge, attitudes, values, and thinking to the formal requirements and management of the temporality that is imposed on learning and which is conceived as a continuous and progressive process (Vergara, 2015). But teacher's professional self-awareness is developed within the logic of temporality of particular higher education school and temporality of the balancing between the didactic and spontaneous nature of their interactions with students, i.e., combining or balancing between the intended and unforeseen aspects.

Usually in the context of higher education and teacher's work, time is perceived as a measurable component. This way of thinking is related to an objectified understanding of time, the reason for which it is seen as external to the teacher-student interactions, and leads to an attitude that it is possible to manage time through educational particularities. This makes the temporality of teacher-students interactions invisible. However, humans perceive events separately (Vergara, 2015). But in higher education teachers organize them into a continuum in regard to formalities such as study program, study subject, and study level, to which the former two are related.

If the higher education teacher is not capable of understanding the signs, norms, and rules within teacher-student interactions, then they cannot synchronize with its temporality and are not capable of narrating and reflecting events that are interrelated with their professional self-awareness (Bennet & Burke, 2017). Thus treating the time formally, the higher education teacher chooses a linear approach from unit to unit just because it is in the program, where the focus is not on what is happening but on the knowledge taught that claims reproduction. This also manifests itself in the early stage of a teacher's professional awareness, according to Mitina (1992) and Montgomery & Walker (2012).

If temporality is removed from higher education teacher's work, which is experienced through teacher-students interactions, then this is not more than the plan (Lewis, 2017). But if they integrate temporality, then higher education teacher work students becomes an educational project. A project that connects the present and the past. "There is no future time, past time, and present time, but a triple present – a present of future things, a present of past things, and a present of present things" (Ricoeur, 1995, p. 124).

Temporality as an important part of higher education teacher's professional self-awareness provides the chance to develop it through interactions teacher-student with the self-being from both sides what makes this interaction unique. This uniqueness includes interaction-related thoughts, experiences, and abilities of teacher and students. It means that through such interactions teacher and students focus on themselves and evaluate, compare their current communication and behaviors (manifest components) to their internal thoughts and values (latent components) (Stonehouse, 2015). Both sides have the chance to grow and become self-conscious as objective evaluators of the self, individually and as a group.

*Relationality.* The teacher-student relationship in higher education, seen through a phenomenological perspective, is seen as lived self-other, a relationality (van Manen, 2014). For Kriewaldt (2015) this relationship is a happening within the teacher-student

interaction through an interpersonal space. In this space interactions flow from one side to another interchangeably. But it is important that this teacher-student-based relationship would not become a technique, which is possible to assess through its effectiveness. If it is so, then according to Buber (2002), interactions “I-You” could shift to transactions “I-it”. “<...> education exists only in and through the communicative interaction between the teacher and the learner <...> This <...> gives us a better understanding of the relationality of educational relationship. It helps us first of all to understand that education has indeed a relational character and that it does not exist in any other sense than as a relation and “in relation” (Biesta, 2004, p. 21).

Interaction between the teacher and the student is a relational connectedness, which means a holistic relationship in which the space as an objectified physical characteristic of functionality is irrelevant (Gibbs 2006). This interaction is educational in its nature, and the relationality as a lived self-other is a value directed to sincere care for the teacher-student relationship (Giles, Smythe, & Spence, 2012). Such a relational phenomenological dimension can be understood in terms of relationships which are the ongoing connection between two or more people (Kriewaldt, 2015). Teacher-student interaction in higher education includes the communication of meaning or education, which is made possible through participating in social practices where meaning can be formed and transformed (Frelin, 2010, p. 61). By being part of interaction-based relationship, the higher education teacher becomes a potential learner, and it makes this relationship symmetrical in regard to students. This helps the teacher grow in the direction of becoming professionally self-aware.

## Methodology

Phenomenology as according to van Manen (2007, 2014) was applied in this study. Phenomenology, if practiced well, enthralls us with insights into the enigma of life as we experience it – the world as it gives and reveals itself to the wondering gaze – thus asking us to be forever attentive to the fascinating varieties and subtleties of primal lived experience and consciousness in all its remarkable complexities, fathomless depths, rich details, startling disturbances, and luring charms (van Manen, 2017). “Phenomenology is a project of sober reflection on the lived experience of human existence – sober, in the sense that reflecting on experience must be thoughtful, and as much as possible, free from theoretical, prejudicial and suppositional intoxications. But, phenomenology is also a project that is driven by fascination: being swept up in a spell of wonder, a fascination with meaning. The reward phenomenology offers are the moments of seeing-meaning or ‘in-seeing’ into ‘the heart of things’” (van Manen, 2007, p. 12). In this methodology the researcher moves in the ‘hermeneutic circle’, between part of the text and the whole of the text, to establish truth by discovering phenomena and interpreting them (Langdridge 2007). This circle is the process of understanding a text by reference to the individual parts along with the researcher’s understanding of each individual part. van Manen draws upon and connects phenomenology and hermeneutics (Sloan & Bowe, 2014).

The sampling was purposeful. It is a technique used for the selection of information-rich cases (Patton, 2002). This involves identifying and selecting individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Bernard (2002) notes additionally the importance of availability and willingness to participate, and the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner. The sample consisted of eight higher education teachers (researchers) with formal PhD qualifications. Seven women and one man participated in the study: sociology (3 participants), education (3 participants), psychology (1 participant), political sciences (1 participant). The age mean was 45 years old.

Semi-structured interviews conducted between February and December 2019 were used for data collection. The shortest interview took about 46 minutes, and the longest – 1 hour and 16 minutes. “Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher and the participant to engage in a dialogue in real time. They also give enough space and flexibility for original and unexpected issues to arise, which the researcher may investigate in more detail with further questions” (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p. 10). The following questions were provided to research participants: i) What does it mean for you to be a researcher/scientist? ii) What does it mean for you to be an aware teacher (in higher education)? iii) If you had to choose, which role you would prioritize and why?

Five dimensions are recommended by van Manen (2014) to be focused on while analyzing the interview data: relationality, corporeality, spatiality, temporality, materiality. Researchers in this article provide findings only in regard to temporality and relationality; nevertheless, they implemented the analysis with a focus on all the phenomenological dimensions posited by van Manen (2014). Then researchers provided findings close to the central moment of the particular phenomenological dimensions by including concrete details with quotes.

## Findings

### *Lived time (temporality)*

The lived time (temporality) dimension reveals itself through identifying and recognizing self-identity (van Manen, 2014). This search for an authentic relation with reality makes a huge impact on a person's life – reflecting personal experiences and finding what kind of things are truly theirs:

*As far as I remember myself, I wasn't a diligent student, but it was always important to find out and clear up how and why things happen. And it was always related to time. I needed a time to reflect. And now, as a university teacher, I need a time to think not formally in regard to my subject and my students (R3).*

This lived experience shows that the higher education teacher seeks authenticity and personal growth. Sometimes the teacher does not fit into established requirements of the institution, but this does not stop him/her progressing and going through own unique professional path.

Being a higher education teacher connects with cooperating and adjusting experiences. Sharing knowledge and skills requires the teacher to be prepared and this demands a time (R2):

*It is my responsibility to help students develop the specific knowledge and skills and I put great emphasis on behavioural objectives and making sure that I cover the subject content thoroughly. In preparing a lecture, I know exactly what notes I want the students to get. And I use the time for preparation by thinking about the value for students lives.*

At those moments when the teacher is tired or has a lot of other commitments, this sharing process through interactions with students requires self-awareness from both sides and brings joy. Through reflecting time on all experiences a teacher becomes more aware of his/her sharing process with students (R5)

*The function of the university teacher is to bring inquiry to life, the inquiry that learning. I'm challenging the students in the lecture to think something through for themselves using a conversation to maintain a sense of a subject content, creating and taking opportunities to engage students' interest and thinking. Examples, narratives, discussions and reflections can be chosen to maximise such engagement and wherever possible to elucidate and challenge students' preconceptions. And I experience the time of our meetings with students differently. Thus the time to me becomes more as a life but not as an amount of hours or minutes.*

For higher education teachers, an adjusting process is unavoidable. Balancing between requirements and reality reveals itself in work with students. When a teacher comes into collision with higher education school requirements that do not work in everyday routine of life, they feel lost and despairing, because there are commitments which should be fulfilled:

*We do not have a study concept, we have a lot of contact hours and my module which has five credits right now has many more contact hours than should be (R7).*

While working with students, the teacher need to balance demands and requirements, which are related to the utilization of time:

*My work with students includes being able to deal with problems independently after entering the society, being innovative at work. It can nurture my thinking consciousness and me being in the habit of thinking. It takes time, which is impossible to evaluate quantitatively or just to say that it is effective or non-effective (R1).*

There is a formal part during which the they should teach particular things in one or another lecture, but at the same time the teacher has to find methods of how to present all requirements in a way that is understandable for students, as they are required to complete tasks within a specific period of time:

*Relations between me and my students get complicated when I require more to be done, or read without receiving more time than specified in the particular subject studies <...> I want them to become self-aware and persistent, and to show more effort to learn (R6).*

Despite all the hard moments in a teacher's experience there is still the desire for quality in education. By integrating formality and creativity into academic routine the

teacher finds his/her unique way to work with students. Quality seeking is unavailable without reflecting on the progress at work (R8). In reflecting on experiences in the educational process, a teacher could better understand oneself as teacher and a scholar (R3). Through reflection the higher education teacher realizes how important it is to be responsibly self-aware:

*My biggest nightmare is to stand in front of students and have nothing to say, that I can't present anything new, that I can't inspire them. And I experience like a time, which never ends (R5).*

Being an aware teacher in higher education means spending time not only on preparation for lectures, or reflecting on experiences, but also for contributing to the growth and improvement of students (R6).

Teachers who have a lot of contact hours with students see the process of how students change and improve (R4). Spending time with students forms the process whereby teachers help students to develop skills for their future life, or career (R1). Helping to discover capabilities arises from caring about students who have their own life crises, problems and other difficulties and the teacher must devote the time to this notwithstanding that empathy, the concern and care are not included in the formal lecture time (R8).

*From my experience students should develop emotional and social capital at a time of our meetings through lecturers, seminars and discussions. And I must make the time of our meetings meaningful (R2).*

Seeing how students grow and discover their own talents or capabilities motivates teachers and they find meaning in their work, and they enjoy a meaningful time devoted to students (R1; R5; R7).

Teachers need time to move away from students and colleagues and to devote time to rethink, reflect on, read, and develop the self so that they can once again spend time with students in a meaningful way that contributes to their education (R1; R4; R6; R8). Demanding individual time, it is like self-recollection, when a higher education teacher detaches themselves from work (R1). During this “own” time (R3), a higher education teacher seeks self-understanding and takes time to pursue a cultural life, which fulfills the self with new experiences and ideas that can be used in their professional life (R4; R6; R8).

### ***The lived self-other (relationality)***

The lived other (relationality) dimension manifests itself through identifying and discovering self-identity within the community (van Manen, 2014). Working together with students, a higher education teacher discovers the self in that particular community (R2). While working with other scholars at a university a teacher identifies him/herself as a colleague to others (R1; R5), and at the same time while working with students, a teacher identifies him/herself as a teacher, or authority (R2; R7; R8). Connection between teaching and research in higher education teacher's professional life helps him/her to discover the self as an authentic teacher and scholar (R6):

*I see myself as a teacher and it is absolutely connected with my scientific activities. Teaching and research are not separate in my academic professional life. I think, it is my authentic way to discover the self. through that I create relationships with others. I mean, colleagues and students.*

Relationships for the higher education teacher possess a meaningful way to move forward in professional life (R4) and to grow as self-aware academic professionals (R8). Working in togetherness brings support for each other:

*There are some situations where working alone is not possible and working together is faster, effective and joyful (R3).*

Enjoying togetherness at work is like giving meaning to what a teacher is doing at higher education school:

*We are relational living beings and feeling connection with others not only motivates us, but also brings joy and happiness. Pursuing conscious collegial work is like a requirement for scholars and teachers. This conscious collegial work ensures quality for common work and grows trust in the community of scholars and teachers (R2).*

The lived other (relationality) dimension reveals itself through a teacher cooperating with students. Experiencing a mutual relationship becomes significant in the educational process through a dialogue (R1):

*I always start a dialogue with students by telling them that I am also learning together with them.*

Seeking togetherness through common purpose motivates not only the student, but also the teacher. When students understand that their participation in lectures rests on sharing other contexts, discussing, and taking part in common activities, it improves the quality of lectures and encourages the teacher to be more aware (R3; R5; R6). The relationship, when the teacher seeks mutual involvement in the educational process in which student and teacher cooperate and work together, becomes a bilateral interchange:

*A lot of things depend on students whom I work with. I think that from this relation happens mutual interchange (R3).*

Cooperating for the educational process and being involved in that process mutually requires a lot of awareness from both sides. From the teacher – to understand that they do not have all the answers, and maybe the student has knowledge which could supplement the whole lecture (R1). A student's awareness is in understanding that the educational process is not only the teacher's responsibility, and that every student's participation in lectures, reading, and discussion makes the whole process more interesting and gives an opportunity to cooperate for common purpose (R4).

Creating a relationship while researching and discovering connects teacher and students through curiosity and the motivation to work together for one purpose (R1). That is the reason why a complementary relation arises between being teacher and scholar:

*When I am doing research and I get results, I come to the lecture and present my research*

*results to students. We discuss and I get feedback from them. It is a very valuable thing to understand how they see. Through our dialogue I experience connectedness (R1).*

From this point of view, for a teacher, working together with students is like a process of growth in which both sides participate. Forming relationships helps make the educational process immersive and joyful (R5; R7).

Looking further, the lived other (relationality) dimension reveals itself in research findings through forming, motivating, and inspiring. The teacher engages students to improve and inspire them to be academic (R4). Through cooperation with the teacher, students experience their growing by reflecting on what they have learnt and how they see things differently (R6). By sharing experience, teachers show students that they also have some difficulties in their academic life, and discuss how they manage to solve these problems, and that regardless of circumstances they are still happy to be higher education teachers (R8). Sharing peculiarities of professional life involves students in seeking their own authentic academic life (R6).

The teacher-student relationship brings bilateral motivation for both sides. Balancing between seeking quality and the avoidance of student to engage in discussion disappoints the teacher:

*I want from students more feedback, to know where and how to improve my lectures. They say that they want quality, but what is this quality? Just lectures, but how about the content of these lectures? Easier tasks, is that the quality? (R3)*

Teachers who do not get proper feedback cannot progress and move forward in regard to professional self-awareness (R6). The teacher-student interaction adds meaningfulness to the quality of higher education (R8).

## **Discussion**

Findings have highlighted that teacher-student interactions mean connectedness and relationality in higher education have an impact upon a teacher's professional self-awareness. When teachers reflect on their experiences, their professional self-awareness becomes a natural process of their academic professional life (Flavian, 2016).

Findings have revealed that teachers' professional self-awareness grows through contextual reflection on experiences which occur within their interactions with students and it is characterised by temporality and relationality. Through a teacher's inner reflection, which happens because of their relations with students, their self-awareness grows (Schussler & Knarr, 2013). In this case, a higher education teacher's authenticity becomes the center of the whole professional self-awareness growing process. The teacher's self-awareness brings into education a search for quality through relationships with students what means togetherness for both sides. When the interchange of knowledge and different experience happens because of teacher-student interactions, the teacher experiences satisfaction in his/her work (Montgomery & Walker, 2012). Through this the professional self-awareness of higher education teacher grows, and this is not measured or evaluated formally because it is temporal and timeless, as well as

relational and experienced as lived self-other. Without reflection a teacher is inclined to provide objective and factual knowledge by removing it from the context in which it was created. It implies transforming it into packaged knowledge, closed to itself, fragmented and transmitted at a given time formally (Vergara, 2015). Such perspective contradicts human diversity and is focused on the incapability of students to design and implement a learning that allows them to effectively learn the same thing and at the same time. This formality and narrow attitude is not a part of teacher's professional self-awareness growth. Such attitude belongs to the modern rationality and does not tolerate uncertainty, because it related to linearity and time control (Sloan & Bowe, 2014).

Findings have showed that the active participation of students in the educational process, which is implemented through their interactions with teachers, affects a teacher's professional self-awareness and motivation in regard to self-reflection and quality of work. Without practice-based reflections, a higher education teacher cannot find their personal strengths and weaknesses. Through successful and unfortunate experiences with students, the teacher finds things which they need to improve. Without equal participation in interactions between the teacher and students, the educational process becomes a formality with a focus on counted time and interactions "I-it" instead of "I-You" (Buber, 2002), without growing and sharing from both sides. Teacher-student interactions mean a mutual openness to the educational process. Student feedback helps teachers reflect on their work and grow their professional self-awareness, and this is the added value to quality of education, which is the duty, obligation, and mission of a teacher in higher education (Asrar-ul-Haq et al., 2017).

## Conclusion

Temporality and relationality are social constructs that shape the teacher-student interactions in higher education as they are loaded with worldviews that guide their educational actions and their relationships. Thus, their subjectivities and life-world educational experiences-based worlds are built on temporalities.

A higher education teacher's professional self-awareness is a developmental process which requires the person to reflect on their own experiences. These reflections awaken authenticity deep inside a particular higher education teacher. When a teacher stands in front of students and shares their authentic experiences, knowledge, and values, students are invited to respond in an educational process that becomes a bilateral interchange, which occurs through interactions that mean relationality and connectedness. Through this continuous process, teachers in higher education grow as individuals who are professionally self-aware of the things they think, say, and do.

## Declaration of interest statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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