



Using Symbolic Interactionism to Investigate Teachers' Professional Identity

Sudtho, J.*, Singhasiri, W. and Jimarkon, P.

School of Liberal Arts, King Monkut's University of Technology Thonburi, 126 Pracha-Utit Rd, Bangmod, Thungkru, Bangkok 10140 Thailand

ABSTRACT

This investigation is a case study of a process of negotiation of professional identity of a Thai pre-service teacher during her teaching practicum through the lens of Symbolic Interactionist theory. It posits that interaction with different objects allows for complexity of professional identity formation to emerge. The participant's narratives in the form of reflections over 15 weeks were collected and transcribed for analysis. Key phrases of the participant's role claims were investigated to identify themes vital to observe her self-image as a teacher. Findings also revealed that the interaction with social objects i.e. her students as human agency, was found to be most influential on her identity formation. This study hopes to shed light on teacher training education on the importance of teacher identity, which is central to beliefs, assumptions and values that guide a teacher's practice in the process of becoming one.

Keywords: Pre-service teacher, professional identity, Symbolic Interactionism, narratives

INTRODUCTION

Teaching has been recognized as a complex and skilled practice because teachers need to have basic competence, which is formed according to societal expectations. The

descriptions of these competencies are varied and based on an educational vision that is specifically contextual, emancipatory and pupil-orientated (Schepens et al., 2009). To pursue and satisfy these competencies, novice teachers need to gradually increase their sense of being a teacher while keeping in mind the need for "a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting" (Gee, 2000, p.103).

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 8 January 2015

Accepted: 1 June 2015

E-mail addresses:

gate.jariya@gmail.com (Sudtho, J.),

wareesiri.sin@kmutt.ac.th (Singhasiri, W.),

pattamawan.jim@kmutt.ac.th (Jimarkon, P.)

* Corresponding author

Continuous growth of teachers in knowledge, skill and attitude correspondence with social norms starts when teachers enter their training institution. During this training, these student-teachers (pre-service teachers) are taught new methods of teaching and strategies for managing a classroom because contemporary teachers are expected to have advanced knowledge, skills and high academic and ethical standards (Osagie, 2012). To facilitate a teacher's competence, Korthagen (2004) proposed that a teacher preparation programme should consider cultivating the pre-service sense of teacher-identity to let teachers realise their mission of being teachers.

The construction of a pre-service teacher's identity is a gradual process that parallels the experience of developing a deeper understanding of the self as a teacher. During this period, the pre-service teachers will encounter many sets of ideas and concepts acquired through socialisation in their actual practice. As a result, they progressively obtain values that will subsequently develop an intuition on which they will base their actions (Bourdieu, 1993).

A teaching practicum is a vital component in teacher education as it provides the context where trainee teachers can test the professional skills gained from teacher training (Feiman & Nemser, 2001; Korthagen, 2001; 2004; Strong & Baron, 2004; Lazovsky & Reichenberg, 2006; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011;). Furthermore, the practicum experience also provides

opportunities for pre-service teachers to formulate their teacher-identity or professional-self through interactions (Zembylas, 2003). Considering the nature of a teacher's training period, the teaching practicum sets itself as a suitable ground for the exploration of the journey of forming one's professional teacher-identity (Liu & Xu, 2011). This period is generally regarded as a major influence for the conception of teaching (Britzman, 1994; Danielewicz, 2001).

Pre-service teachers, when confronted with different elements prevalent in teaching, such as their colleagues, curricula, students and stakeholders, would be compelled to consider multiple meanings about their teacher-self. Through subtle conditioning processes, the practicum is extremely powerful in establishing a pre-service teacher's construction of the teacher self (Walshaw, 2009). Therefore, this period of time should be an appropriate time for studying self-identity formation.

The process of building a pre-service teacher's identity is typically initiated during the teacher-training programme. Pre-service teachers begin practising teacher-practices in their educational process; they are equipped with knowledge, attitude and skills required to perform their tasks effectively. After learning the content knowledge in the teacher-training classrooms, these pre-service teachers can experiment with the obtained knowledge (knowledge for teaching) and put it into practice while undergoing their teaching practicum.

In creating a better understanding of the self, pre-service teachers may resort to self-interpretative processes. Self-interpretation that pre-service teachers do for their teacher-identity may stem from interactions with others in their teaching context (Weick, 1995; Coburn, 2001). Moreover, the meaning that the immediate environment or society has for teachers will influence the pre-service teachers' interpretations of their identity as new teachers tend to base their values and judgements on their environment (school culture, social expectation and self-portraits for career development) while recognising who they are as teachers (Dong, 2008).

For this study, Blumer's (1969) Symbolic Interactionism theory was deemed useful for the purpose of examining how one forms teacher-identity through interaction with different things or objects present in the teaching context.

Symbolic Interactionism states that humans act towards objects and people based on the meaning that those objects and people have for them. In a teaching context, objects can be classified by three types: abstract objects (beliefs about a person), social objects (students) and physical objects (materials and subject content). By interacting with these objects, the meaning of being a teacher gradually becomes individualised. In time, teachers will be able to present stories about themselves at specific moments pertinent to specific contexts (Vlot & van Swet, 2010). Hence, since the aim of this study is to understand the gradual development of

a pre-service teacher's identity, Symbolic Interactionism will serve as the primary theoretical framework.

This study will provide glimpses of the participant's professional identity by focusing on interactions with objects experienced over the practicum period. The teaching practicum period serves as a fertile ground for observing the gradual development of a pre-service teacher-identity. Furthermore, the practicum period is a time when a pre-service teacher's pre-existing beliefs and identities may be contested, enhanced or reconstructed (Britzman, 1994; Danielewicz, 2001). The nature of case studies permits a deeper exploration of a particular person's experience. This in-depth qualitative approach parallels the basic tenets of narrative inquiry in that the method does not seek to find one common generalisable truth, but considers different kinds of truth depending on individual experience.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

In the next section, we will present some major concepts used to understand this one pre-service teacher's ways of forming professional identity through the interpretation of the meanings of the objects around her during the practicum.

Professional Identity and Roles

Starting with the notion of identity, this study defines identity as the way people "see themselves and how they enact their roles within different settings" (Burn & Richards, 2009, p.5). This is the first facet

for studying teacher-identity. Nevertheless, this concept has been defined differently since its emergence in the area of teacher-research in the past decade. Broadly speaking, professional identity is often defined as what teachers find important in their professional work and the type of teacher they wish to become (Tickle, 2000). Although professional identity is closely linked to concepts of self (Mead, 1934; Erikson, 1968) and self-understanding (Kelchtermans, 2005), influence from societal expectations of what it is to be a teacher is also crucial (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop (2004) proposed that professional identity is a complex, dynamic combination of roles professionals construct and reconstruct through different social contacts (Burns & Bell, 2011). These features are in line with the present study since they point to some processes described in the discussion of the data in two ways. First, they see identity formation as an ongoing process regarding interpretation and reinterpretation of experience, which is in line with the current study whereby the participant invariably interprets her roles and conceptions of being a teacher in relation to her practicum experience. Second, professional identity implies an interaction between a person and his or her context.

A second facet for studying pre-service teacher's identity is the role that that teacher performs throughout his or her teaching practicum. The teacher-identity is determined by how each person

perceives himself or herself related to the role assigned by that person's society (Combs *et. al.*, 1974). In this study, the notion of roles in a particular setting is applicable for the guiding theory as this study will investigate the teaching journey of the participant by looking at how the participant enacted her different teacher roles. Investigating teachers' perceptions of roles is useful as it is closely linked to teacher-identity (Ben-Peretz *et. al.*, 2003) because, in order for pre-service teachers to attain that goal of being good teachers who satisfy their perspectives, they need to maintain coherence between their identity and the roles of teachers that they expect to perform (Sexton, 2008).

Symbolic Interactionism

This study is grounded in the theory of symbolic interactionism as it is a useful lens through which to look at professional identity and the formation of teacher-identity. The theory was proposed by Blumer (1969) based on Mead's (1964) work, in which was coined the term "Symbolic Interactionsim" that originally stemmed from pragmatic philosophies (Crotty, 2003). He mentioned the following:

Symbolic interaction rests in the last analysis on three simple premises. The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings they have for them ... The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled

in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters. (Blumer, 1969, p. 2)

Blumer (1969) concluded that the results from his research showed that human actions are the outcomes of individual interpretation of objects and events surrounding them. For this reason, people, including teachers, are active agents adjusting their behaviour and identity in response to the interpretation they make with surrounding objects. With regards to objects that teachers interact with, Blumer (1969) classified them into physical objects (offices, spaces and textbooks), social objects (interactions with teachers, students, colleagues and others), and abstract objects (interpretations of beliefs about teaching or professional development). According to Blumer, interactions with these objects create meaning-making processes for individuals, which they then invest in their formation of teacher-identity.

Within this perspective, the subjective experience demonstrates how individuals act towards objects and people around them. This means that understanding individual identity lies in observing interpretive processes of how a person assigns meanings via interactions in his or her environment. For teachers, successful enactment of professional identity involves a range of multifaceted identifications with learners, teacher-training institutions and ongoing communication with peers (Bakar *et. al.*, 2008). The appropriateness of Symbolic Interactionism for this paper's study is that this theory stresses the role of human

agency in identity construction by clarifying reasons for an action that a teacher takes (Hargreaves, 1995). This idea also aligns with the method of narrative inquiry, which links the exploration of a teacher's identity with that individual's unique experiences. Furthermore, this theory answers this study's research question, which aims to understand how the participant interpreted, constructed and applied meanings for her remaining teaching career through interactions in the professional identity formation process. Symbolic Interactionism offers the path for viewing the participant as actively in the meaning-making, interactive process as well as allowing change and stability of identity formation.

Research Question

How do interactions with different objects cause and affect a pre-service teacher's professional identity?

METHODOLOGY

The Subject

The subject of this study was Meena (pseudonym). She was one of the pre-service teachers enrolled in KMUTT's Master of English Language teaching programme for the School of Liberal Arts. I purposively selected her as the participant due to her academic background and teaching experience. Prior to commencing her graduate studies, Meena completed a Bachelor of Arts degree majoring in English. Furthermore, her formal teaching experience was limited, which would

be useful for capturing her formation of professional identity through the actual teaching practicum.

The subject was enrolled in the course called "Teaching Techniques in Practice". The course aimed to improve a pre-service teacher's teaching methods and expand his or her professional education skills. All pre-service teachers were assigned to teach in the same school but in different classes. For each class, there were two pre-service teachers in charge for managing curriculum and prepared materials, and they worked under supervision of a lecturer from the faculty. The supervisors observed the paired teachers in their actual classroom. Afterwards, feedback was given for improvement.

The school Meena did her practicum in was a medium-sized school for grades 7–12. At the time of data collection, the school was very new, established for six years, with some new equipment provided for each classroom, such as a computer and an overhead projector. Meena taught for one semester (May-September) in 2013. She was responsible for teaching grade 10 students who were preparing to enter high school. All pre-service teachers taught on Wednesday morning for 1 hour and 40 minutes. There were a total of 40 teenagers (ages 15-17) whose English proficiency level was considered to be at lower intermediate.

Framework

In light of the complexities involved in examining a teacher's professional identity formation, qualitative approaches such as the interview, are appropriate tools to

construct collages of how teacher-identity shifts and changes over time (Lerseth, 2013). In the past two decades, a number of studies have adapted the narrative inquiry to understand teachers' experiences through stories lived and told (Clandinnin & Connelly, 2000). This approach opens up opportunities for exploring and revealing aspects of how one forms teacher-identity as telling others' stories of experience can lead to better understanding of oneself as a teacher (Kelchtermans, 2005).

The case study was approached from a narrative analysis perspective. Narrative analysis, within the context of this research, is "the process of making a story, to the cognitive scheme of the story, or to the result of the process" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p.13). Hence, analysing the case study's narrative with Blumer's framework (1969) would give insights to answer the research question. From a narrative analysis perspective, the case study would be able to "impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions" (Riessman, 1993, p.2).

The analysis was guided by Polkinghorne (1996) whereby we acquainted ourselves with the narrative data by reading and rereading the case study's stories. It was by this iterative reading that we familiarised ourselves with the interview transcriptions. While reading, memos were made to account for episodes important to the teacher's teaching life. Furthermore, the case study's mention of objects encountered during the teaching practicum period were identified in order to

see how the pre-service teacher interpreted meaning for each object and how she invested in these meanings towards the formation of her professional identity.

Data Collection

A series of 15 interviews was arranged over the participant's practicum period. The interviews were conducted regularly (once every week with each session lasting about 45 minutes) as identity construction was regarded as an enduring process in the participant's teaching experiences (Pollard, 2003). Having multiple interviews was beneficial for validating previous information gained as there was opportunity for the case study to refer to previous teaching events in order to spot any changes in the way she tried to make sense of her teaching profession. Variations of questions surveyed the pre-service teacher's perceived role as a teacher because mutual understanding between the researcher and the subject needed to be achieved (Manara, 2013). The semi-structured interview questions were developed from the participant's written reflections on her classroom practice, which suggested understanding of the teaching profession. After obtaining her permission to be interviewed with audio recorded, the place of meeting was then arranged. In each interview, the participant was encouraged to reflect upon her teaching practice, the interaction with students, co-teacher and supervisor, and how she viewed herself. This process lasted about 30-45 minutes each time. The total number of interviews was 15, conducted over the 15 weeks of the

practicum starting from May until September 2013. The participant was also asked to express her opinions and interpretations of what it meant to be a teacher in her context. Her expression of dynamic roles affected by dealing with different objects was useful in the data analysis step.

Data Analysis

The analysis of this study was based on the Symbolic Interactionism perspectives. The content and themes from the case study's narratives were categorised according to Blumer's (1969) definition of objects. The narrative data was analysed using the following procedure:

- a) Interview content was selected based on Blumer's (1969) definition of categories of objects. (This was done to frame the content for further analysis.)
- b) A frame of linguistic features was used to capture moments when the participant mentioned her identity. The criteria for choosing these phrases were lexical items and phrases, such as 'when I teach', 'as a teacher', 'a teacher should be', 'I wish to be a teacher who', and more, used to mention and reference her.
- c) Emerging identities were grouped from the data into three categories: 1) present identity was referred to as a self-defined role at the time of the interviews, 2) expected identity was the role that she would like to become or the issue that she would like to develop in her teaching style, and 3) accomplished identity represented an expected identity, which could be completed.

- d) The teacher's interactions with objects in the contextual classroom setting were observed, and her professional identity was investigated by identifying how she viewed herself as a teacher.

RESULTS

This section presents how the pre-service teacher's professional identity was formed by the influence of meanings that emerged from the interpretation of interaction with objects during her childhood. Meena grew up in a teacher-family. She was influenced by her mother, a Math teacher at a primary school, and her father, a Physical Education teacher. Both teachers taught in a rural school in the Northeastern part of Thailand. Meena mentioned that during her childhood her conversations at home were full of stories about students' behaviour, teaching techniques and ways to come up with new teaching methods. She had gradually learnt that a teacher's responsibilities extended far beyond knowledge shared in the classroom. Her parents informally and indirectly taught her that teachers should possess an aptitude to teach based on students' needs and learning styles. This experience influenced her belief about how a teacher should behave, which also inspired her to become a teacher. For her, the quality of being a good teacher included the ability to provide all students an opportunity to learn. In order to impart knowledge of the subject matter accurately, she had to master classroom control. She pursued this vision of her identity during her practicum.

This belief, an abstract object according to Blumer's definition, about being a teacher was crucial for the formation of her professional identity during her practicum. When coming into the classroom, Meena believed that she had to manage her classroom in a neat and orderly manner. Furthermore, her expectation of herself was that she had to be a knowledgeable person in terms of teaching content and pedagogy. She indicated a desire to be in control of the classroom and possess the power to run the class in the way she desired. That was why she turned herself into a controller who had enough authority to get the wheel turning smoothly right from the start when she met her students.

When entering the first class as a novice teacher during her practicum, Meena was determined that she would exert control over her students. She often mentioned that discipline was vital in order for her to pass on knowledge properly. With this consideration in mind, she positioned herself as a controller. She saw herself as a strict teacher who valued certain student behaviour that would allow her to play this role successfully. The following information is Extract 1:

I think I was a strict teacher and sometimes I felt I was too strict. I had to be strict with them at the first class. I stopped talking if the students were talking while I was teaching and then the other classmates would realize that the teacher changed the mood. So, they told their friends to stop talking. (1st week interview)

Apart from the abstract object, there were two other objects which drove her to control the class. The physical objects or the course content was difficult and the social objects or her students' limited English proficiency made her view herself as a controller in class. The following information is Extract 2:

I was quite [a] strict teacher and also teacher-centred because I tended to talk a lot in the class. Partly, it was because of the content, which was too hard for my students' level of proficiency, but again, if I tried to allowed students to talk and use English more, it will be better. (1st week interview)

Apart from seeing herself as a controller, she also viewed herself as a knowledge transmitter. As we can see from the following (Extract 3), she was the one who provided students with one-way teacher-directed information:

I talked a lot in the class because I tried to finish the class as I plan. As a result, I talked a lot, and I did not think it's good. It's was because of the content as well because we needed to explain to them the rule, the vocabulary, and the reading. (2nd week interview)

From Extracts 2 and 3, even though she showed a concern that students were supposed to practise using the target language more, she had a problem dealing with the difficult subject content. She mentioned that due to the mismatch between the level of her students' proficiency and the expectations of the content, she had to become a controller who dominated the class by her own voice and commands.

Then, Meena's abstract object, which governed her belief about how teacher should behave, was challenged by interactions with social objects, her students. Her belief about being a teacher who controls everything in class was slightly shifted since she could see that only being a knowledge transmitter or a teacher who kept feeding students with subject content would not suffice to ensure a smooth learning experience. From her observation of her students' mannerisms in class, she became aware that building rapport with her students would serve as the best solution for classroom management issues. With the influence of her social objects or her students' responses, she then started to realise that she needed to become a nurturer who provided a positive and calm learning environment. The following information is Extract 4:

I wanted to be trusted by my students, so I needed to comfort them when learning with me. That would help me in teaching, in [to] control the class, in [to] manage the class better. If the students trusted me that I had the knowledge to help them to improve their English proficiently, that would be better. It would help me in getting respect from the students as well. (2nd week interview)

From Extract 4, with the expectation of wanting to be a nurturer to create a more comfortable learning atmosphere brought a change to her role. She believed that being a kind teacher would help her students to experience a more pleasant time studying. For this reason, Meena started modifying and adapting her lesson plan by including

some games and group work. By about week 3, she thought she would like to be a prompter who encouraged students to become more independent in their learning by using different teaching techniques and various materials. The following information is Extract 5:

I was not giving them the knowledge directly, but I let them work in [a] group. I let them read by themselves, and we did some games to make them active in the class. So, it was more like a tutoring school because it was full of students' participation. (3rd week interview)

It appeared that her belief about being a knowledgeable teacher who had extensive information was challenged during her actual teaching. Meena had changed her strategies to keep her students under control by trying to win their trust and gain their respect by showing her wish for them to have some fun while learning, instead of just listening to her. She also started making use of the overhead projector and Power Point presentations to make her students develop a positive attitude whilst learning from her. Meena hoped that changing her role from a controller who dominated classroom talk to a prompter who provided students with more chances to visualise clearer content using technology. The following information is Extract 6:

I used the visual from the power point, and it went very well. The students could see the picture, so it was easy for me to teach and elicit the vocabulary for them. (5th week interview)

It seemed that being a prompter brought her great success as most students today are familiar with technology. They were fond of learning by viewing visual representations, so Meena could increase her use of L2 because her students could look at pictures as cues to guess what she meant. Therefore, her role of being a prompter brought along a pride that she could be understood by her learners with the help of physical objects, including computers and the overhead projector in her class.

However, keeping students engaged through making a variety of learning activities was not without challenge. Meena found herself reluctant to bring only fun into the classroom just to get them to participate. She felt that what really needed to be done was to instil a sense of order among her students. There were times when her teenage students' excitement disrupted lessons being held in nearby classrooms. She then pointed out during her interviews the necessity of her becoming a controller again. The following information is Extract 7:

The role of teacher was not only teaching them content, but you also needed to tell them how to live in the world, how to behave in the society as well. What they need as a person to live with other, so as a teacher, I had to emphasise the common rules that they needed to bear in mind in order to live with others. (6th week interview)

Her strong belief of teacher-identity (as a controller who dictated both content and student behaviour) was prominent in her concept of being a teacher. It can be

seen that the abstract object influenced her identity formation. No matter how hard she tried to disguise her controlling behaviour by allowing her students to have fun and facilitating their learning in a meaningful way, it was hard for her to permit total freedom as it would contradict her notions of what an ideal classroom is like i.e. a neat and smooth learning environment where the whole situation is under her control. However, Meena learnt that she could not be strict all the time. She needed to balance the power that she had over the students and the ability to comfort them to create mutual understanding between them. She told herself to build rapport with students as she saw this form of interaction as an indicator of success in teaching. Therefore, she put herself back into the role of nurturer by trying to be nice to her students as compensation for having made harsh comments to discipline them. The following information is Extract 8:

I was very kind to them this time. I thought they felt bad last time that I told them to discipline themselves. The leader of the class, when the class was noisy, he told his friend that “you need to be quiet”. So, I define myself as a kind teacher for this time. I did not have to discipline them, they knew what to do. (7th week interview)

By mid semester, she then came to the conclusion that being a teacher was the mission of balancing everything, such as content, materials, teaching techniques and also, her own roles. The following information is Extract 9:

My principle is to balance between being [a] strict teacher, and sometimes, you have to be kind and play with them because I want the atmosphere in the class to be more relax, not only lecture because they are still young. I can't do that all the time. (9th week interview)

Meena had developed a sense of commitment to her own belief over time that teachers should take control of their own classroom to maintain their smooth teaching. The control in this case meant both control of her accuracy as a teacher and the control over her classroom management. This belief, the abstract object, became the guiding principle she held to when dealing with her social setting, students and physical setting, which included the textbook and subject contents. The following information is Extract 10:

The students learn from what I did in the class, what I write in [on] the board. If I did that wrong, it affected the students' learning. I got this idea from my MA course; we learnt that we had to be careful. Our teachers here always emphasised that the students would learn from you. That kind of things came in my mind when I was teaching too. (13th interview)

As Meena's practicum approached its natural termination, she was asked to review her belief about being a teacher. Meena mentioned her teacher training as a major influence of her abstract object or belief she held about teaching. She also reflected on her own experience as a student-teacher as an influential factor for her to feel sympathetic to her students

because she experienced the same from her lecturers in her graduate courses. These experiences and interactions with social objects influenced Meena to become calmer, less strict and willing to adapt as she tried to cultivate a less authoritarian relationship towards her students. The last week of her teaching was blissfully rewarding for her. Her students commented that they wanted to study with her again.

CONCLUSION

Identity is an abstract concept; this study attempted to reveal the professional identity formation of teachers by studying a specific teacher. What can be seen is how the subject was influenced by many objects found within the context of her teaching practicum. This highlighted a rather integral aspect of professional identity formation, affected by a myriad of constructs that are at interplay with each other, instead of discrete and unrelated constructs or principles. Throughout her teaching practicum, we could see interactions with different objects, and all of these had a significant role in shaping the subject's professional identity. The identification of these abstract objects was crucial as it gave us an insider's glimpse into the identity formation process. What was yielded from this analysis included her beliefs about being a teacher and what it means to be a good teacher. In the case of the subject, Meena, who grew up with parents who themselves were teachers, entered the teaching field with certain pre-conceived ideas, such as the assumption

that a teacher should ensure discipline during instructions and that students should behave in a specific way. This belief about being a controller was prominent in the initial period of her professional identity formation. This belief was accentuated more as the subject interacted with other objects as her practicum progressed.

Physical objects were also present in her practicum setting. The availability of teaching and learning resources allowed a shift from being a controller to a prompter. The most powerful factor, which contributed to Meena's shift in identity, was the prevailing social objects. The social objects, in the form of her students, compelled Meena to evaluate and reevaluate her knowledge, beliefs and skills. Her teaching practice shifted and changed due to the interpretations of how she related to her students. The lessons gleaned from Meena's stories could lead us to value the process of identity formation. Both teacher trainers and trainees should be aware of how novice teachers negotiate and interpret meaning from the interactions with the different objects around them.

Exploring and explaining how a pre-service teacher makes meaning of her professional life while interacting with different objects, together with how she formed her identity allowed educators a glimpse into Thai pre-service teacher training. Through the participant's narratives, we can understand better how teachers' professional identity formation involves a range of complex interactions. This involves a complex interplay between

internal factors, that is, the self and beliefs about being a teacher, and external factors such as co-teacher, learners and institutional requirements that impact the development of professional identity.

Though internal factors relating to self and perception about being a teacher are crucial for building a foundation for teachers to develop professional identity right from the beginning, external factors provide the opportunity for these factors to be challenged so as to allow the teacher trainee to be in harmonious tandem with students, co-teachers and institutional expectations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This study was funded by the Office of Higher Education Commission, Thailand University Staff Development under the Higher Education Research Promotion, USD-HERP.

REFERENCES

- Bakar, A. R., Konting, M. M., Jamian, R., & Lyndon, N. (2008). Teaching efficacy of Universiti Putra Malaysia trainee teachers in teaching Malay Language as a first language. *Pertanika Journal of Social Science & Humanities*, 16(1), 1–14.
- Beijaard, D., Meijer, P. C., & Verloop, N. (2004). Reconsidering research on teachers' professional identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20(2), 107–128.
- Ben-Peretz, M., Mendelson, N., & Kron, F. W. (2003). How teachers in different educational contexts view their roles. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 19(2), 277–90.
- Blumer, H. (1969). The methodological position of symbolic interactionism. *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*, 1–60.
- Bourdieu, P. (1993). *The field of cultural production: Essays on art and literature*: Columbia University Press.
- Britzman, D. P. (1994). Is there a problem with knowing thyself? Toward a poststructuralist view of teacher identity. *Teachers thinking, teachers knowing: Reflections on literacy and language education*, 53–75.
- Burns, E., & Bell, S. (2011). Narrative construction of professional teacher identity of teachers with dyslexia. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27(5), 952–960.
- Coburn, C. E. (2001). Collective sense making about reading: How teachers mediate reading policy in their professional communities. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 23(2), 145–170.
- Combs, A. W., Blume, R. A., Newman, A. J., & Wass, H. L. (1974). *The professional education of teachers: A humanistic approach to teacher preparation*: Allyn and Bacon Boston, MA.
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (2000). Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research. *Educational Researcher*—San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 6, 94–118.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Sage.
- Danielewicz, J. (2001). *Teaching selves: Identity, pedagogy, and teacher education*. SUNY Press.
- Dong, X. (2009). A case study of new teachers' role identity in China. *International Education Studies*, 1(4), p.19.
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. WW Norton & Company.
- Feiman-Nemser, S. (2001). From preparation to practice: Designing a continuum to strengthen and sustain teaching. *The Teachers College Record*, 103(6), 1013–1055.

- Gee, J. P. (2000). Identity as an analytic lens for research in education. *Review of research in education*, 99–125.
- Hargreaves, A. (1995). Beyond collaboration: Critical teacher development in the postmodern age. *Critical discourses on teacher development*, 149–179.
- Ingersoll, R. M., & Strong, M. (2011). The impact of induction and mentoring programs for beginning teachers: A critical review of the research. *Review of Educational Research*, 81(2), 201–233.
- Kelchtermans, G. (2005). Teachers' emotions in educational reforms: Self-understanding, vulnerable commitment and micro political literacy. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21(8), 995–1006.
- Korthagen, F. A. (2004). In search of the essence of a good teacher: Towards a more holistic approach in teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20(1), 77–97.
- Korthagen, F. A., Kessels, J., Koster, B., Lagerwerf, B., & Wubbels, T. (2001). *Linking practice and theory: The pedagogy of realistic teacher education*. Routledge.
- Lazovsky, R., & Reichenberg, R. (2006). The new mandatory induction programme for all beginning teachers in Israel: perceptions of inductees in five study tracks. *Journal of education for teaching*, 32(1), 53–70.
- Lerseth, K. A. (2013). *Identity development among pre-service teacher candidates*. (PhD thesis dissertation). Iowa State University.
- Liu, Y., & Xu, Y. (2011). Inclusion or exclusion? A narrative inquiry of a language teacher's identity experience in the 'new work order' of competing pedagogies. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27(3), 589–597.
- Manara, C. (2013). English language educators' professional learning as a site of identity struggle. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, 21(3), 1193–1212.
- Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, self, and society from the perspective of a social behaviorist*. University of Chicago, Chicago.
- Mead, G. H. (1964). *On social psychology*. Retrieved from <http://philpapers.org/rec/MEAOSP>
- Osagie, R. O. (2012). Teacher development programs and teacher productivity in secondary schools in Edo State Nigeria. *National Teacher Education Journal*, 5(3).
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1988). *Narrative knowing and the human sciences*. Suny Press.
- Pollard, C. (2003). Exploring continued and discontinued use of IT: A case study of OptionFinder, a group support system. *Group Decision and Negotiation*, 12(3), 171–193.
- Riessman, C. K. (1993). *Narrative analysis* (Vol. 30). Sage.
- Schepens, A., Aelterman, A., & Vlerick, P. (2009). Student teachers' professional identity formation: Between being born as a teacher and becoming one. *Educational Studies*, 35(4), 361–378.
- Sexton, D. M. (2008). Student teachers negotiating identity, role, and agency. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 35(3), 73–88.
- Strong, M., & Baron, W. (2004). An analysis of mentoring conversations with beginning teachers: Suggestions and responses. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20(1), 47–57.
- Vloet, K., & Van Swet, J. (2010). 'I can only learn in dialogue!' Exploring professional identities in teacher education. *Professional Development in Education*, 36(1-2), 149–168.
- Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sense making in organizations* (Vol. 3). Sage.
- Zembylas, M. (2003). Interrogating "teacher identity": Emotion, resistance, and self-formation. *Educational theory*, 53(1), 107–127.