

EDF4121

Assignment Task 1

Case study: Critical biography - a report of teacher's work in context.

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PART A

Professionalisation of teaching has comparatively (to the past) led to more stress laid on the importance of the roles and responsibilities of a teacher inside and outside the classroom. In relation, self-efficacy, effectiveness and an educator's likelihood to remain in the profession is strongly affected by the construction of a teacher-self that is mainly based on his or her educational beliefs stemming from personal experiences and professional environments (Settlage, Southerland, Smith, & Ceglie, 2009, as cited in Hsieh, B. 2016).

The first section of this essay tries to explain the concept of Professional Teaching Identity and the process is briefly discussed. Here, it also investigates the internal and external factors affecting the formation of a 'teacher's professional identity'. Following this, it discusses self-reflections of educators from Early Years and Primary school settings about the formation of their professional teacher identity. Simultaneously, the impact of my personal values and educational beliefs on the formative development of my identity as a teacher is illustrated.

Researchers believe the construction of teacher identity to be an ongoing process. In terms of continuing professional development, Churchill et al. (2015) suggests that a teachers' role being multi-dimensional and ever-changing due to constant change in curriculum and policies, pre-service degrees are inadequate to suffice the requirements of work in the later stages. This is irrespective of the dedication and commitment exhibited during that period (Churchill et al. 2015). Hence, Buchanan (2015) contends that construction of identity is a continuous life-long process, which deeply influences the origin based on past experiences and simultaneously developing through daily practices. Thus, it is a product as well as a process (Buchanan, 2015). As an inference, the impacting variables have to be fixed and changing. The next section focuses on briefly illustrating them with respect to their situational contexts. These factors can be divided into Internal and External.

External components include normative requirements related to meeting expected standards and social norms, whereas, educational orientations in hand with self-perception of the role is largely associated with internal components (Murray, J. 2013). Also, Murray (2013) warns us about the possible conflict between self-image

providing personal agenda and external expectations providing structural norms. Dominance of the latter can affect personal as well as professional efficacy and stronger influence of the former can have impractical implications as a professional role needs social legitimacy for recognition and influence (Murray, J. 2013). Hence, a balance between the two is paramount to successful application, in my understanding. Some overlaps will also be observed.

INTERNAL FACTORS

Personal as well as shared experiences by colleagues, peers and mentors profoundly affect teacher identity (Dixon, Ferguson, Hay, Moss & White, 2004, as cited in Churchill et al. 2015). Churchill et al. (2015) also suggests that it is these narratives that constitute the first layer of a pre-service teacher's developing professional identity as they act as a base for our purpose. Reflecting on others' and own personal experiences generates a thought pattern explaining as well as exemplifying events about classroom practice, educational needs, pedagogy, etc. In hand with this, in later stages of becoming a teacher, Professional associations such as Teacher Unions promote professional learning in a social manner. This could be considered as an external influence affecting internal values and beliefs. Thus, it proves that a teacher's beliefs are influenced throughout the professional lifetime.

The phenomenon discussed above results in the creation of 'Personal Agency' (PA), which corresponds to a teacher's professional identity (Buchanan, 2015). The beliefs are converted into actions in this context, leading to either *stepping up* or *pushing back* in his words. Hereon, every influencing factor is challenged and then accepted, altered or rejected. In a way, PA complements Teacher Identity because according to Buchanan (2015), the combination of the lenses of identity and agency provides an opportunity to see the process of self-formation in action. It gives a perspective to a teacher's life that undergoes constant change between teachers and learners, subject matter and instructional methods.

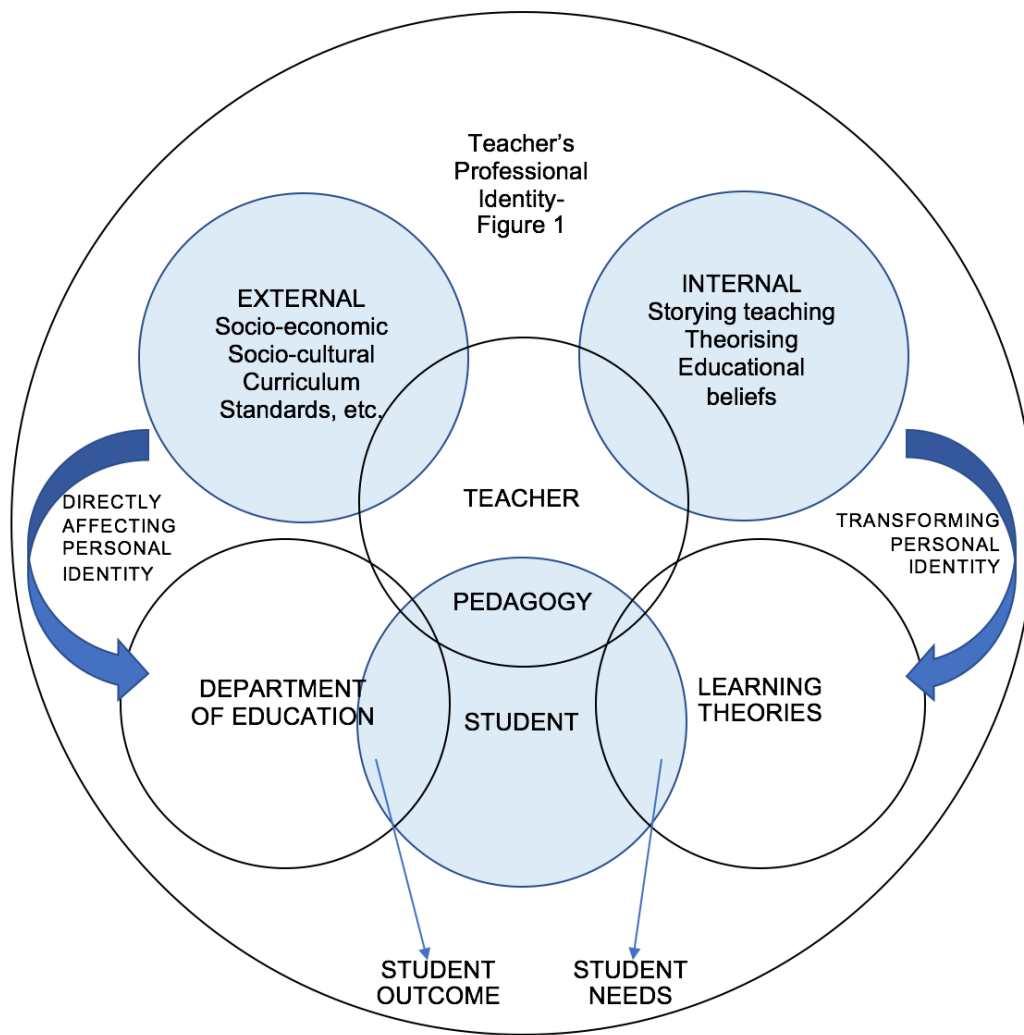
These internal image building processes and aspects comprising Professional Teacher Identity enable the teacher to detect student needs and formulate pedagogy relevant to the classroom. This also assists him or her in accommodating the external factors discussed in the following section.

EXTERNAL FACTORS

Primarily, the government is involved in designing policies for educational governance related to professional expectations from teachers, curriculum, codes of conduct, etc. The professional competence of a teacher has been benchmarked by the Australian government by introducing the National Professional Standards for Teachers (ATSL, 2011). These were introduced to improve teacher quality and status of teaching according to Churchill et al. (2015), who also suggests that these are derived from imposing power relations connected with particular sociopolitical constructions. They also are grouped into three sections concerned with knowledge, practice and engagement. All three are directly associated with a teacher's core work. Thus, a teacher is bound to be influenced by its impact on his or her practice, hence affecting teacher identity. Or as mentioned earlier, the individualistic views of policymakers, PA can make a teacher's professional identity not choose to follow certain aspects of it.

The Melbourne Declaration brings into context socio-economic and socio-cultural facets into account for teachers to frame their identity relevant to the current needs of the society. Concurrently, neoliberalism ideology has affected public institutions such as schools in order to foster economic development (Churchill et al. 2015). Human capital is required to be more competent and efficient to reach the global bar. Aspects such as these are the base upon which Teacher standards are built. They affect not just a teacher's professional identity but also the school culture, classroom climate, pedagogical practices, etc. All schools have their own culture in terms of an understanding of the way they do things (Churchill et al., 2015). It is reflected in their mission statements as well as the values and beliefs they adhere to as an institution. It is the responsibility of an educator to adapt their professional identity to these ideas.

Finally, the curriculum, achievement standards, legal accountability, etc. in hand with learning theories facilitating effective pedagogical practices comprise a Teacher's Professional Identity (see Figure 1).



PART B

Vanessa's (Early Years educator) early professional identity has changed over the years from her simply wanting to work with children to it being influenced by mentors and colleagues on the way. It has moved on from an emotional standpoint of caring to a more concrete one, wherein, her pedagogy and theoretical beliefs are strongly influenced by the environment she works in and students' measurable outcomes. Shifting specialisations from Early Years to Primary and then back into Early Years, her interest in involving the family in the child's cognitive as well as intellectual development also confirms my belief of the importance of parental involvement in a child's growth. Growing up, my parents were involved in my learning only when it

came to my progress in class. Additionally, my experience as a teacher in a school in Cambodia for a few months involved parents of my students demanding us to make their kids learn to speak English fluently at the age of four or five, irrespective of the fact that the language spoken at home was their native language. Parents may not always perceive the school-to-home connections as important (Wilson, R. 2011). Hence, these instances resulted in the creation of my identity as a teacher to strongly believe in involving parents in my students' learning as they can have a stronger impact.

Making a difference in her students' lives by creating a space for them to be comfortable and free with who they are as individuals is a perspective Vanessa came to believe over the years of her career. This aspect of her identity could have been developed through her engagement with children in her classroom with diverse backgrounds, trying to compete with each other, leaving the majority unsuccessful (according to common standards) – a practice not taking into consideration their unique individual experiences. Well, I believe that her practice is designed for learners like me and my siblings. I grew up with siblings whose learning motivation was crushed by the standardised education system. My brother and sister failed a year and had to repeat it. This experience was the hardest for them because they had to deal with the studying and the emotional burden of seeing their friends and classmates move ahead in life. At that age, we are not aware of such aspects but after so many years it seems evident why their situation worsened after that. Unbelievably, their lives seem to be affected by something that took place more than 20 years ago.

In conjunction, her pedagogy also changed from developmental to constructivist, exemplifying that identity creation is an ever-changing process. I volunteered at a conventional school in Indonesia as a teacher several years ago. Growing up in classrooms with a strong influence of behaviourism, I knew only that and applied my experience-based knowledge. Few years later, my experience at a Montessori based pre-school changed my viewpoint of effective teaching and learning practices. Social constructivism, humanism and cognitivism were blended into one pedagogy suitable for learners with various learning needs.

Hanan's (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=02Z1NpMB2r4>) teacher identity is greatly influenced by the socio-political and socio-cultural aspects of the society she lives in. Additionally, she was brought up in the same environment her students are getting educated in right now. The changes observed in her children's behaviours after the gruesome incident of their father being killed in front of them made her personally evaluate the situation in order to overcome it. This was an identity creation moment inherent in her personal beliefs before she became a teacher. Her opinion about her students' personalities affected by the conflict-struck environment form the essence of her identity as a teacher and everything she does in her classroom. Ideal beliefs such as non-violence enable Hanan to develop individuals whose behaviours are not affected by the environment they live in and are exposed through media.

Her personal conduct with her students as seen in the video, wherein she hugs her student and kisses on both cheeks depicts cultural influences affecting teacher identity. A common greeting ritual in middle-eastern countries. Also, possibly signifies close relationships and individualised learning with her students.

I worked with young Egyptians in an NGO for a year after the Revolution on youth development projects. This life-changing experience challenged me to the maximum and made me believe in the power of change. I decided to change my profession from Design to Education as I believe, like Hanan, Educators have the power to become social justice regulators through their practice.

I have been exposed to educational settings of various cultures over the past few years in Asia, Egypt, The UK and now Australia. Hence, my professional identity as a teacher is built upon a global perspective and is constantly changing. As a result, inclusion is majorly going to reflect in my teacher practice. Rest, I am looking forward to discover.

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