

THE IMPACT OF PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES: HOLISTIC EXPLORATION OF TEACHER IDENTITY

doi.org/10.61425/wplp.2013.07.48.73

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Abstract: This paper investigates the impact of personal and professional experiences on the development of teacher identity. The holistic perspective in this article refers to the language teachers' exploration of their personal and professional experiences with the use of both conscious/rational and intuitive/tacit thought processes. Three language teachers who participated in this study explored the beliefs, perceptions, and interpretations originating in their personal, educational, and professional experiences which also affected their teacher identity. Reflexive autobiographical journaling, a guided visualization activity, and three in-depth interviews were used in the research methodology. The results confirm that teacher identity is deeply embedded in one's personal biography. The participants' beliefs and interpretations rooted in their family environment influenced their early school experiences, career choice, instructional practice, teaching philosophy, and teacher identity. The results suggest that the analysis of teachers' personal life experiences and their influence on professional practice can lead to a holistic understanding of the dominant influences on the development of teacher identity. The implications of this research are that a broader spectrum of the influences on teacher identity development needs more overt attention in professional development. This paper argues for the necessity of designing an integrated personal and professional development program for language teachers.

Key words:

teacher identity; teacher beliefs; professional development; autobiographical journaling; language teachers

1 Introduction

This paper explores teacher identity from a holistic perspective and presents selected results of a larger study (Bukor, 2011). In particular, it investigates the interplay between personal and professional life experiences by exploring the complex relationships between beliefs, assumptions, perceptions, and interpretations originating in three language teachers' educational, professional, and personal experiences that, in turn, shaped the development of their teacher identity. In this paper, *holistic perspective* is defined as (i) the interconnectedness of personal and professional experiences and (ii) the use of conscious/rational and intuitive/tacit thought processes. *Personal experiences* is understood as the participants' personal life experiences (e.g., childhood, family, friends, and significant others), and their schooling. *Professional experiences* refers to the participants' professional education and teaching practice. The concept of teacher identity requires an elaborate definition. Identity has often been described as an elusive, intangible, and highly idiosyncratic abstraction that cannot be accessed or observed directly. In my view, one's identity *may be expressed* in the *form* of beliefs, assumptions, values, and actions as well as in the various *ways* one perceives and interprets oneself and the world. Therefore, the terms *beliefs, assumptions, perceptions, and interpretations* in this article refer to the forms and modes of manifesting and expressing one's identity as a teacher.

2 Teacher identity in the literature

In order to establish a holistic understanding of teacher identity, it is important to define the concept itself and to clarify its components. I reviewed the relevant literature to contextualize my research in the field of educational research.

2.1 Defining teacher identity from a holistic perspective

Current research interest focuses primarily on the construction of teachers' professional identity by looking at perceptions of their professional role and the relationship between teachers' perceptions of their role and self-image (e.g., Alsup, 2003; Atay & Ece, 2009; Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Ben-Peretz, Mendelson, & Kron, 2003; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Korthagen, 2004; Ronfeldt & Grossman, 2008). It is argued that there are close relationships among professional identity, classroom practice, teacher knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes. The personal and professional aspects of teacher identity investigated from diverse viewpoints have been another important realm of current research (e.g., Andrzejewski, 2008; Clarke, 2008; Meijer, Korthagen, & Vasalos, 2009; Soreide, 2006; Watson, 2006). Researchers have used a variety of methodologies, such as autobiography, reflexive inquiry, life history research, and discourse analysis, to explore the impact of personal life experiences on teaching practice (among others, Alsup, 2006; Anspal, Eisenschmidt, & Löfström, 2012; Cole & Knowles, 2000; Kitchen, 2005a, 2005b; Palmer & Christison, 2007; Simon-Maeda, 2004).

The literature provides numerous definitions of professional identity. For example, it is understood as a useful "research frame" and a "pedagogical tool" for professional development (Olsen, 2008a, p. 5) and a "lived experience of participation" (Wenger, 1998, p. 151). Beijaard, Verloop, and Vermunt (2000) view teacher identity as being a "subject matter, pedagogical and didactical expert" (p. 750). Others view it as being "multifaceted, multi-dimensional and multi-layered" (Cooper & Olson, 1996, p. 82) and "multifaceted and dynamic" (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009, p. 178), while it is also regarded as being "multiple, shifting and in conflict" (Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005, p. 22) and a "continuing site of struggle" (Maguire, 2008, p. 45). These definitions highlight the legitimate professional aspects of teacher identity but overlook the psychological, emotional, and personal aspects, which are essential for a holistic definition. In this research I found that of all teacher identity definitions, Palmer (1998) put the concept into a larger conceptual framework by interpreting teacher identity in a holistic fashion:

By identity I mean an evolving nexus where all the forces that constitute my life converge in the mystery of self: my genetic makeup, the nature of the man and woman who gave me life, the culture in which I was raised, people who have sustained me and people who have done me harm, the good and ill I have done to others and to myself, the experience of love and suffering – and much, much more. In the midst of that complex field, identity is a moving intersection of the inner and outer forces that make who I am, converging in the irreducible mystery of being human. (Palmer, 1998, p. 13)

This definition includes one's personal experiences, family background, socio-cultural contexts and influential people as well as psychological, emotional, and intellectual features. The author also highlights the *integrity* between the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual aspects of teacher identity that can lead to a new "wholeness", i.e., "becoming more real by acknowledging the whole of who I am" (Palmer, 1998, p. 13). Due to its inclusive and holistic nature, I adopted this definition as the working definition of my research.

2.2 The components of teacher identity

There is an established body of literature on teacher knowledge and beliefs, professional development, and the role of emotions in teaching that are essential components of professional knowledge. These are important aspects of teacher knowledge that may influence the development of teacher identity. Thus, I examined the *relationships* between identity and each of the above components.

2.2.1 Teacher knowledge and beliefs

Although teacher knowledge has been considered an important part of a teacher's makeup (e.g., Björklund, 2008; Borg, 2003, 2006; Brookfield, 1995; Clandinin, 2000; Day, 1991; Johnson & Golombek, 2002, Shulman, 1986; Woods, 1996), the *relationship* between identity and knowledge shows conflicting views. Some researchers explain knowledge and identity holistically, "each is part of the other" (Olsen, 2003, p. 4). Others, however, view knowledge as "external to the individual and fixed" (Smith, 2007, p. 379). Johnston, Pawan and Mahan-Taylor (2005) claim that "teacher knowledge is seen in relation to teachers' lives and the contexts in which they work" (p. 54).

Research on teacher beliefs (e.g., Joram & Gabriele, 1998; Kagan, 1992; Munby, 1982; Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 1996; Woods, 1996, 2003) can be viewed as one of the precursors of teacher identity research. Richards and Lockhardt (1994) argue that teachers' belief systems are rooted in various sources, such as their own experiences as language learners, their experience of what works best, established practice, personality factors, educationally-based or research-based principles, and principles derived from an instructional approach or method.

2.2.2 Professional development

A number of authors (e.g., Borko, 2004; Casborn, Hennissen, Brouwer, Korthagen, & Bergen, 2010; Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Freeman & Johnson, 2005; Gao, 2012; Lunenberg & Korthagen, 2009; Tarone & Allwright, 2005) have emphasized the importance of the exploration of teachers' professional selves as an integral part of on-going professional development arguing that the way one teaches "is tied to the ways teachers see themselves" (Kincheloe, 2003, p. 47). Teachers are actively engaged in the process of creating themselves as teachers during their entire careers (Coldron & Smith, 1999). According to Williams (2007), researching the concepts of teacher identity can lead researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that influence a teacher's decisions and attitude in teaching.

In second language education, the relationship between professional development and teacher identity has been scrutinized by exploring teachers' personal experiences (e.g., Bailey, Curtis, & Nunan, 2001; Palmer & Christison, 2007). These studies emphasize the importance of using personal experiences as a source of continuing professional development. Self-awareness, self-observation, and reflective teaching are viewed as important cornerstones of professional development.

2.2.3 Teacher emotions

An emerging field investigates the role of emotions in teaching and teacher identity (e.g., Day & Kington, 2008; Day & Leitch, 2001; Hargreaves, 1998, 2000, 2001; Kelchtermans, 2005; O'Connor, 2008; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003; Zembylas, 2003, 2005, 2010). It is important to define what we mean by emotions before discussing the role they play in teaching and the development of teacher identity. Damasio (1994) argues that emotions are indispensable to rational decision-making. He adds that emotion and cognition are inextricably intertwined and affected by personal biography, social context, and external factors (Damasio, 2003). Goleman (2005) claims that "we have two minds, one that thinks and one that feels" (p. 8). The emotional mind is far quicker than the rational mind; it takes its beliefs to be absolutely true and discounts any evidence to the contrary. On the other hand, the rational mind takes its beliefs tentative; new evidence can disconfirm one belief and replace it with a new one. Hence, emotional intelligence is at the heart of good professional practice (Goleman, 2005). These interpretations of emotions supported my rationale for including two approaches (i.e., conscious/rational and intuitive/tacit thought processes) for participants in the process of exploring their life experiences.

Empirical research shows that emotions may influence teacher cognition, motivation, memory, categorization, and problem-solving abilities (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). Research findings suggest that students are aware of and influenced by teachers' emotions. Teachers' negative emotions (e.g., anger) result in lower student motivation, whereas teachers' positive emotions (e.g., caring) seem to have positive effects on students by raising the level of student motivation and engagement (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). Teaching has an emotional dimension because teachers invest their selves in it (Nias, 1996). Hargreaves et al. (2001) state that teachers become who they are "by the emotional experiences they have developed within their culture, through their upbringing, and in their relationships" (p. 137). Others argue that emotion and cognition are inextricably intertwined. Day and Leitch (2001) maintain that (i) emotional intelligence is vital for good professional practice; (ii) emotions are essential for rational decision-making; and (iii) emotional and cognitive health is affected by personal biography, social context, and external (policy) factors.

In summary, the literature shows a variety of research interests with an emphasis on professional identity formation by examining knowledge and beliefs, professional development, and emotions, separately. The overall insight, however, is that identity is a complex notion made up of several *interconnected* parts, each affecting one's overall perception of teacher identity to a more or less noticeable extent. Teacher identity has been viewed as identification with *one* or *many* things, e.g., knowledge, beliefs, emotions, or professional development. I argue that all the above-described components should be considered together through the individual teacher's

meaning-making processes in order to understand identity from a holistic perspective. In this respect, my research broadens the repertoire of influences on teacher identity development by exploring both the professional and the personal aspects of identity through examination of both rational and intuitive thought processes.

3 Theoretical framework

I employed a multi-disciplinary theoretical approach grounded in theories and concepts from psychology and educational research, such as Personal Construct Theory (Kelly, 1955, 1963), the complementary nature of reason and intuition, and the concept of perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1978, 2000). All three pillars of my theoretical framework were interconnected. They provided a conceptual basis for understanding my participants' interpretive processes and justification for utilizing both rational and intuitive research methods.

3.1 Personal construct theory

Kelly's (1955) theory claims that individuals are actively engaged in making sense of their experience based on their interconnected construct systems. Kelly (1963) states that "man creates his own ways of seeing the world in which he lives; the world does not create them for him. [...] [However,] man can enslave himself with his own ideas and then win his freedom again by reconstructing his life" (pp. 12, 21). Put differently, what an individual perceives may *not* exist, but *his perception* does, and for an individual his perception is real (Kelly, 1963). This was a key indicator for me of the power and influence of the participants' beliefs and perceptions of themselves regardless of others' perception of them.

Construct systems are constantly confirmed or challenged. Consequently, they influence our expectations and perceptions. Some constructs are more important than others; some are easy to change while others are more resistant to change (Kelly, 1955). A person's construct system represents the truth as they understand and experience it, therefore construct systems are idiosyncratic. This point reminded me of the importance of respecting my participants' idiosyncratic interpretative processes.

Kelly's view of the universe helped me to explore and understand my participants' universes: (i) the universe is real; (ii) everything is interlocked; and (iii) everything is measured along the dimension of time. An individual's life can make (more) sense if put in a bigger perspective of time (i.e., life span). Sequencing one's life events chronologically allows us to seek connections among them and this process also facilitates reflection and interpretation. In this light, time *is* an important factor in re-constructing one's life and identity. Kelly's view of the universe offered an important conceptual basis for my research design.

The notion of "psychological re-construction of life" refers to the assumption that "all of our present interpretations of the universe are subject to revision or replacement" (Kelly, 1963, p. 15), which can result in personal growth provided an individual can replace a dysfunctional, conflicting aspect of their construct system through the successive re-construction of what

happens. This theory provided me with a conceptual foundation for understanding how my participants make sense of their experiences.

3.2 Two complementary and interconnected modes of thought: Reason and intuition

The two complementary modes of thought – reason and intuition – formed the second pillar of my theoretical framework. The first mode of thought is called intellect (Arnheim, 1985), consciousness (Jung, 1959), and reason (Bastick, 1982). It is described as deliberate (Hogarth, 2001), paradigmatic, rational, logical (Bruner, 1986), explicit (Polanyi, 1969), and directed (Jung, 1959). The second mode of thought is referred to as intuition (Arnheim, 1985), tacit knowing (Polanyi, 1969), and the unconscious (Jung, 1959), which shows a range of interpretations. It is characterized as narrative (Bruner, 1986), implicit, tacit, pre-verbal (Polanyi, 1969), imaginative, spontaneous, non-verbal, non-logical, and non-directed (Jung, 1959).

According to Jung (1959), consciousness is understood as being cognizant of the contents of one's mind that are created through thinking in words and logical patterns. Conscious behaviour rests upon the personal unconscious, which stores all forgotten impressions, reactions, partially realized or wholly repressed emotions, and critically rejected thoughts and feelings. The unconscious is the product of an individual's personal existence and biography. Jung (1958) approached the unconscious on its own terms, i.e., with an empathic rather than an analytical approach. He claimed that techniques of association can help bring the forgotten aspects into consciousness, which supports the intuitive process that I endeavoured to facilitate with the guided visualization technique. The theoretical reasoning about the complementary and interconnected nature of these two modes of thought convinced me to incorporate both ways of knowing – through journaling and the guided visualization activity – in my research in accordance with my holistic approach. Using the two ways of thinking was an innovative methodological aspect of my research which, due to the space limitations of this article, is discussed in more detail elsewhere (Bukor, 2011).

3.3 Perspective transformation

The last concept of my theoretical orientation was “perspective transformation” developed by Mezirow (1978, p. 102; 1981, p. 6). A “meaning perspective” is a personal paradigm for understanding ourselves and our relationships. A *transformation* of this perspective occurs when an old perspective can no longer deal successfully with problems and issues in a new situation (Mezirow, 1978); hence the term “perspective transformation”.

The maturation process in adulthood is viewed as a “trans-formative” process “involving alienation from those roles [in childhood], reframing new perspectives, and rearranging life with a greater degree of self-determination” (Mezirow, 2000, p. xii). Thus, the first vital step in transforming our meaning perspectives about ourselves is “that *we become critically aware* of the fact that *we are caught in our own history* and are reliving it” (Mezirow, 1978, p. 109, italics added). Gaining awareness of our life history is, then, an important first step in personal and professional development. Furthermore, time also plays a central role in perspective transformation in two ways. First, time provides an overall interpretive framework and continuity

within which one's life experiences can be viewed. Second, time is also necessary for in-depth introspection and reflection to happen and for the re-construction and emergence of a new perspective of oneself to occur. One of my research purposes was to facilitate the emergence of a reconstructed teacher identity that could lead to the participants' personal and professional growth.

4 Research purpose and research questions

I explored teacher identity holistically by (i) integrating personal and professional experiences, and (ii) applying conscious/rational and intuitive/tacit thought processes viewed as complementary and interconnected. The participants examined their understanding of the *relationships* between their personal and professional experiences and the beliefs, assumptions, perceptions, and interpretations inherent in them, with regard to teacher identity. My research purpose was to depict these understandings both from the viewpoint of each participant and from the perspective of the researcher.

My research questions were the following:

1. How do language teachers experience and interpret the influence of important personal, educational, and professional experiences on their perceptions, assumptions, and beliefs about their teacher identity?
2. How do language teachers experience and interpret the changes in their perceptions and understandings of their teacher identity as they re-interpret and integrate the relationships between their experiences and their teacher identity?

5 Participants

Three experienced language teachers participated in this study over a period of six months. Mary has extensive experience with teaching international students in a variety of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses at the university level. She is a seasoned language teacher in her mid-50s who has taught at the university level for nearly 30 years. Cassie and Karen are in their mid-30s and they have been teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) to immigrants and refugees at a community-based educational organization. For the sake of anonymity, all names in this article are pseudonyms.

In selecting participants my assumption was that the target student population and the workplace of prospective participants were not as vital for my research purpose as some other criteria I had set, which are summarized in Table 1 below. This manner of selecting participants can be defined as criterion sampling (Patton, 2002). Due to the nature and purpose of my research it was crucial to find participants who had an interest in holistic/reflexive self-development as well as a willingness and openness to embark on and commit to an in-depth self-exploration for the period of six months. One of my assumptions was that participants should also be inquisitive about understanding the relationships and connections among their beliefs, life experiences, and professional practice.

Criteria for selecting participants
Active teaching experience in ESL preferably at the university level for at least 5 – 10 years;
Actively engaged in teaching ESL, or undertaking graduate studies, or being on leave from teaching duties;
Interest in holistic/reflexive self-development;
Willingness and openness to embark on and commit to an in-depth self-exploration for a period of 6 or 7 months and to dedicate sufficient time (i.e., 2-3 hours/week) to engage in the research process;
Inquisitiveness about understanding the relationships and connections among beliefs, life experiences, and professional practice.

Table 1: Criteria for selecting participants (Bukor, 2008)

6 Research methods

My methodology was heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990, 1994) – a form of phenomenological inquiry – defined as “a search for the discovery of *meaning* and *essence* in significant human experience” (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 40, italics added). There is a strong emphasis on self-discovery and self-search of both the researcher and the participants. Put differently, heuristic research focuses on the person having an experience (i.e., “How do you make sense of your experience?”) and it is about self-understanding through the study of relationships, connections, and influences on the person’s way of thinking. This methodology focuses, then, exclusively on the participants’ sense-making of their life experiences. While it is acknowledged that external factors, social contexts, and social interactions with others do play a crucial role in how individuals make sense of the world around them, they are considered through the individual’s interpretive framework. An important criterion in using this methodology is that the researcher must have a concrete personal experience with the topic of investigation. My prior professional autobiography and on-going self-discovery process satisfied this criterion.

Methods of data collection included reflexive¹ autobiographical journaling, guided visualization, and three in-depth interviews (see Appendix A for an overview), all of which were interconnected. My role as a researcher during the entire data collection period was that of a facilitator and observer who asked questions, probed into issues, and facilitated the reflective process for the participants. The teachers worked with two sets of homework assignments (journaling on a specific theme and a guided visualization technique) in preparation for each interview. The guided visualization, an innovative technique, aimed to expose participants to a less rigorous and cognitive, and more intuitive and imaginative type of activity in order to allow them to experience their intuitive/tacit side. It was intended to assist the participants in exploring connections between their personal and professional lives in a less constrained setting than an interview could provide. This consideration was based on Jung’s (1959) argument for the importance of allowing an experience with the more intuitive realm of our psyche before

¹“Reflexive inquiry is reflective inquiry situated within the context of personal histories in order to make connections between personal lives and professional careers, and to understand personal (including early) influences on professional practice” (Cole & Knowles, 2000, p. 2).

jumping to conclusions about its meaning and relevance with respect to our conscious life experiences. The guided visualization was a short exercise of about twenty minutes provided on an audio CD for each participant's use. The exercise was completed individually once a week during the six-month data collection period. The scope of this article does not allow for a detailed elaboration of the use and the impact of the visualization activity; for details see Bukor (2011).

6.1 Data analysis

Data analysis and interpretation occurred in three phases (description, analysis, and interpretation) and at three distinct levels (the participants', the researcher's and the group's perspective). The first phase (i.e., description) involved developing each participant's narrative portrayal based on the interview transcripts and journal entries (Moustakas, 1990). Using "content analysis" (Patton, 2002, p. 453) I reduced the data and identified recurring themes and patterns, such as beliefs, assumptions, insights, and signs of perspective transformation, by reading each interview transcript several times. These themes and patterns became my "categories of analysis" as termed in traditional qualitative research. Each narrative portrayal retained the participant's voice and represented thick description (Geertz, 1983). It included five parts: experiencing the professional self, the personal self, the intuitive self, the reconstruction of teacher identity, and the corroboration of experience. During this lengthy process it was essential to keep the participant's perspective in the portrayals, which captured their sense-making of the connections between their life experiences and the changes in their perspectives over time (Moustakas, 1990). Then, the portrayals were returned to the participants to validate accuracy and comprehensiveness, and minor revisions were made based on their feedback. I also had short corroboration interviews with each participant to provide a face-to-face opportunity to discuss their feedback on the portrayals.

The second phase, which diverged from strictly following the methods outlined by Moustakas (1990), included the thorough and time-consuming analysis of each individual portrayal. At this point, I merged heuristic research methods (Moustakas, 1990) with principles and procedures for data analysis and interpretation in traditional qualitative research (Patton, 2002; Wolcott, 1994). As I intended to do a rigorous data analysis, an analytical summary from the researcher's perspective was added to each portrayal, which is not required in heuristic research. The second phase, then, involved the following steps:

1. several readings of each participant's portrayal;
2. highlighting again each participant's significant experiences from the researcher's perspective;
3. identifying and listing each participant's beliefs, assumptions, desires, and insights;
4. matching up the beliefs with the "first" instances as they occurred in the portrayals and finding an instance of the impact of that particular belief on the participant's professional life and teacher identity;
5. identifying instances in the portrayals that revealed signs of perspective transformation;
6. preparing several drafts of each participant's analytical summary.

The third (i.e., final) phase included the interpretation of the results representative of the whole group. It entailed (i) an in-depth group analysis of all participants' portrayals and (ii) the interpretation of the emerging influences on the development of teacher identity from each individual's "analytical summary". My rationale for including an analytical and interpretative phase (i.e., phases two and three) rested on my preference for a healthy balance between description, analysis, and interpretation as opposed to relying heavily on description, as would be expected in heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990).

7 Findings

Educational research has primarily examined the impact of teachers' prior schooling experiences on the development of teacher knowledge and beliefs in teacher education, e.g., the "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975, p. 61). Calderhead and Robson (1991) emphasize that student teachers "hold particular images of teaching, mostly derived from their experiences in schools as pupils", and they add that "we have little understanding of the nature of the integrated body of knowledge that teachers use [and] how it originates" (p. 1). Although the impact of the family environment on the development of beliefs and teacher identity has become a focus in recent educational research (e.g., Olsen, 2008b, 2010; Malderez et al., 2007; Trent, 2011), I believe my research adds further aspects and/or dimensions to the examination of this connection.

In this section, I present the impact of three teachers' personal and professional experiences on the development of teacher identity, which is part of the findings of a larger study (Bukor, 2011). First, I show evidence of the impact of the family environment on the development of the participants' beliefs that draws on ideas from Bergner and Holmes (2000), Kelly (1955, 1963) and Roberts (1994). Then, I present some findings on the influence of beliefs derived from the family on career choice, instructional practice, and teaching philosophy. The quoted excerpts present the participants' views.

7.1 Impact of the family environment on the development of beliefs

My participants' often critical and judgmental relationship with the mother unfavourably influenced their school accomplishments and academic success. The death of Cassie's mother affected her school experiences:

I had some behavior problems in primary school. I didn't like taking orders and directions. Public speaking in primary school was a big deal for me, I felt always nervous. I hate being the centre of attention. I'm not good on the spot. I'd always come in second place. I was first in everything else. I used to be an honour roll student but I feel I'm below average. I've never had a lot of confidence but I work really hard. I spend a lot of time planning. I'm so organized.

Due to her lack of self-confidence Cassie developed compensating strategies, e.g., planning, working hard, and being organized. She put a great emphasis on grades, success, and intelligence throughout her education. She yearned for success at school but was unable to

acknowledge it for herself despite her excellence at school. Her university studies brought her approval and acknowledgement which boosted her self-esteem. Intelligence and others' perception of her were important for Cassie at university. This is an expression of her unconscious desire for acceptance and appreciation by the external world because she was unable to see this in herself, which supports Jung's views (1959).

I was brought up to believe that grades and success are very important. My biggest fear is being dumb. I excel in the school system. Getting good marks doesn't mean that I'm smart. It means that I'm a hard worker. Intelligence is so important to me. Being perceived as not intelligent scares the hell out of me. It's perception that scares me more than actually not being intelligent. But, what if your self-perception is not accurate of yourself??

Karen's relationship with her mother influenced her experiences of school and learning. She hated going to school. This resulted in poor academic achievement and her inhibition to show and her reluctance to demonstrate her abilities at school. The lack of love and caring at home made an impact on her school behavior. Karen's school experiences reveal insecurity, inability to establish contact with and to speak in front of others, and reluctance to acknowledge her identity.

As a child I was quiet, shy, and sick. I hated grade 6 with passion. I felt like a big failure because I was supposed to be so smart and I wasn't getting the grades. Grade 6 teacher was horrible, he was mean. I was so shy and we had to do book reports in front of so many people. I could not do it. I stood up and I could not say a word. I got zero.

Karen gained confidence as a result of her teacher's acknowledgement, positive reinforcement, and appraisal of her good work. This demonstrates that she needed external validation and acknowledgment of her accomplishments due to her insecurity. In response to a challenging family situation she developed eating disorders. However, her participation in drama in high school compensated for the lack of love and caring at home and helped her to improve her academic standing. The expression of her artistic side brought her greater peace of mind, better grades at school, and improved communication skills with others.

I wrote a dialogue all by myself. When I performed it, the class loved it. I felt good and strong. I was competent. I discovered I could act. It was much easier to act than to be myself in front of other people. I think they saw a side of me that they'd never seen before. Not just the quiet girl there, but something of substance. I started to believe in myself and my marks improved. I got rewarded on an assignment and I realized that I should respond naturally, honestly. That was the year when I became anorexic. My brother was in an explosion, my Mom got cancer, my Dad had surgery, and my sister moved away. My life was out of control and food was the only thing I could control. I felt like a loser; smart but unable to achieve. I hated going home. There was a lot of tension between my Mom and myself.

Mary grew up in a big family that had an impact on her sense of self, “I was just one of many”. Conformity was encouraged and as a result she learned to keep a low profile. She did not like being at home therefore school was a place of refuge.

Doing well at school was expected. We didn’t get praised. We weren’t allowed to fail. I remember winning a piano competition when I was in grade 5. It just wasn’t a big deal. It was expected. There was no opportunity for the development of a sense of self at home.

Mary’s university studies were the first opportunity for her to develop a sense of identify after having been deprived of it in childhood. All forms of self-expression (playing the piano, reading books, university studies) were disapproved of her husband – however, they tested her own self-determination and commitment to stand up for herself. At university she learned to value herself and be proud of her accomplishments.

When I was writing the final exam, I loved it. For the first time in my life I was having someone acknowledge my thoughts, my ideas, and my effort in a tangible way, with a grade. I was experiencing the potential acknowledgment for nothing more than ME. Not someone’s eldest daughter, not someone’s wife or not even someone’s mother. THIS was just ME. That was a profound experience for me. One of my lessons was that if I work hard at something, regardless of the result, it has value. These experiences influenced my views on teaching and learning profoundly.

7.2 Impact of personal experiences on career choice, instructional practice, and teaching philosophy

The participants’ beliefs, personality traits, and their relationship with the mother² had a strong impact on their career choice, instructional practice, and teaching philosophy.

Cassie admitted that “teaching is something I fell into, it’s not something I chose”. Her traveling and teaching experiences abroad influenced her decision to attend graduate school for professional education in language teaching. Finally, she found her ideal job. She now loves teaching and it has become her passion, “I’m in the right profession; now education is my passion”. Cassie articulated that life-long learning is an important characteristic of a teacher. Education is a top priority for her and this is reflected in her daily life, “I structure my whole life round the school year. I buy planners that are structured from September”.

Cassie’s loss of her mother demonstrated a strong connection with several issues identified in the analysis, e.g., anxiety, insecurity, perfectionism and planning, and being organized. These issues are also reflected in her teacher identity and professional life, “Things should be done right away. I mark tests within a day. I need to be organized, in my head especially. Teaching is the perfect career if you’re organized”. I have associated Cassie’s compassion and empathy for others with her unconscious need for love that could directly be

² the source of several personality traits, as discussed in 7.1.

connected to her career choice, “I’m a very empathic teacher. Empathy is the biggest thing I’ve gained from the negative experiences in my life”.

Karen admitted that several “little things” led her to choose teaching: good presentation and explanation skills at school, theatrical background, and a book being major turning points in her becoming a teacher. Karen explained that her teaching has also been influenced by the workplace environment, “it changes your identity” and by her theatrical background, “you are performing”. The drama background helped her to overcome her shyness and stage fright and she became comfortable with improvising or responding on her feet. For Karen, teaching means having a “different role” because she believes that as a teacher “you act like a nice person”. Due to her lack of self-confidence she questioned her competence as a teacher in the classroom. The research process made her reflect on the reasons for her becoming a language teacher.

Am I so insecure if I worked with English speakers, they might see how bad I am? Maybe the immigrants can’t? I can’t understand why I went into this field. Am I trying to gain LOVE from them? Is that why I chose a certain profession because I know they desperately need me?

Karen realized that (i) her career choice might be connected to love and acceptance from students, which was also evident in her family relationships, “I’ve always been looking for my Mom’s love”; (ii) that it was important to develop her own teaching style and not to follow other people’s paths; and (iii) that teaching involves a great deal more than she had anticipated, “You are a lot more than an instructor. You have more than just one role as a language teacher”. Looking for love due to the perceived lack thereof in her family affected her self-esteem negatively and that, in turn, also influenced her professional life by causing her to constantly questioning her own competence.

Mary’s decision was made quite late in her life as a result of her graduate studies, after having established a family and raising three children and later becoming a single mom. Mary’s first language teaching experience was volunteering in English conversation classes, which shows a close connection with her childhood experiences at home (i.e., giving herself freely, helping out, and caring for others). Her students’ acknowledgement and appreciation for her efforts touched her deeply because this compensated for the lack of appreciation and affirmation in her family as she was growing up. For Mary, awareness development is an important trait that she tries to pass on to her students. Mary’s case is an excellent example of the impact of personal experiences on professional matters.

Mary’s relationship with her mother and her perceptions of family life are reflected in the following issues: non-existent self in childhood; caring for others in the family; lack of explicit praise and love from the mother; fear-based attitude toward everything; and striving to fulfill her mother’s needs. For several decades, Mary struggled with self-acceptance. The fear-based attitude stemming from the home environment appeared in the lack of trust and confidence in herself and others at school. Mary strove to fulfill her mother’s needs in order to gain her love and acknowledgement. As a result of her late awakening and personal transformation, Mary was able to turn the negative childhood experiences into positive ones as a mature adult. These positive traits are observable in her teaching philosophy and her instructional practice.

The most important thing for me in teaching is getting to know what it is about each individual person, how I can – as a teacher – inspire them to do their best whatever they’re learning. It’s a matter of self-discovery. If you recognize yourself, then you want to do well. I teach with all my heart.

The implicit or indirect driving force for each participant to become a teacher clearly originated in their family relationships, e.g., in Cassie’s case the lack of having a mother; in Karen’s case the insufficient expression of love and caring expressed by the mother; and in Mary’s case, the lack of praise and acknowledgement from her mother.

The participants concluded that the research experience was “insightful”, “eye-opening”, and “confirmatory, assuring, and clarifying”. They found that overall it was a “healing experience” even though it was a “struggle” at times. Cassie claimed that “I have become more reflective in my professional role”. Karen acknowledged that “I’m stronger than I thought I was. There is more to me. I’m surprised at the connections”. Mary added that “this experience was like putting on a pair of glasses and things came better into focus”.

8 Discussion

The analysis of the participants’ portrayals (Bukor, 2011) and the findings above show an intricate relationship between family, schooling experiences, and career choice (see Figure 1).

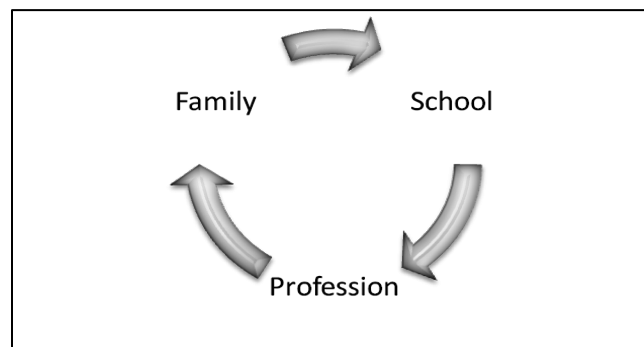


Figure 1: The relationship between family, schooling experiences, and career choice

The findings reveal an overarching structure that extends over each participant’s life span to the date of the research. My participants developed some personality traits as a result of (i) their beliefs and perceptions of their relationship with the mother, and (ii) their *perceived* deprivation of love, praise, acknowledgement, and acceptance by the mother, or, (iii) by the loss of the mother. These traits, in turn, strongly influenced both the participants’ perceptions of the family relationships and their school experiences, which demonstrate interplay between belief systems and perceptions (Kelly, 1955, 1963). Roberts (1994) claims that the accepted beliefs from parents serve as a framework within which a child grows and “this provides a leeway until the conscious mind is able to reason for itself and provide its own value judgments” (p. 57). Roberts (1994) argues that “you create your experience through your beliefs about yourself and the nature of reality” (p. 11) adding that “your beliefs can be like fences that surround you” (p. 20, underlining in the original). Lipton (2008) refers to this relationship as the belief effect “to

stress that our perceptions, whether they are accurate or inaccurate, equally impact our behavior and our bodies” (p. 107).

Based on these findings, the school environment provided the participants with a *possibility* to make up for the *perceived* lack of or insufficient emotional and psychological support in the family environment. The participants developed various compensating strategies to offset the missing love, praise, and acknowledgement at home, e.g., focus on grades, academic success, and intelligence; and importance of receiving acknowledgement and praise from teachers. In my interpretation, schooling was a period of compensating, re-claiming, and developing one’s sense of self, the self that had been wounded in the family due to the unquestioned acceptance of beliefs and perceptions that had been “assigned by important others” (Bergner & Holmes, 2000, p. 39). These results shed a new light on the role of the school environment in the participants’ lives and provide a dimension additional to the familiar academic perspectives (Borko, 2004; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Lortie, 1975; Smith, 2007). Others have also highlighted the importance of the relationship between teacher identity and prior personal experiences in pre-service teacher education (e.g., Olsen, 2008b, 2010; Malderez et al., 2007; Trent, 2011). The role of the school, uncovered in this research, shows personal, emotional, and psychological aspects that are rooted in beliefs, perceptions, assumptions, and interpretations nurtured in the family environment *prior* to schooling. The school experiences are viewed here through the lenses of the participants’ “personal interpretive framework” (Kelchtermans, 2009, p. 260) that facilitated the process of “teachers’ self-understanding” (Kelchtermans, 2009, p. 261), as well as the process of “perspective transformation” (Mezirow, 1978, p. 102; 1981, p. 6).

These interpretations, perceptions, and beliefs of schooling experiences also influenced my participants’ career choices, instructional practice, teaching philosophy, and the development of teacher identity. Thus, teaching as a profession, in adulthood, allowed for the *potential enactment of one’s re-constructed identity* in terms of providing a place for self-acceptance, self-expression, enhanced self-love, and self-confidence of which each was deprived in the family environment as they were growing up. Put simply, teaching offered them a *possibility* for self-development and self-growth.

The analysis highlighted the impact of the participants’ perceptions, assumptions, beliefs, and interpretations on their personal, educational, and professional experiences, and the complex interplay among these. The family environment – the first fundamental socializing milieu – stands out as the cradle of an individual’s personality traits, core beliefs, perceptions, and interpretations, which have a lasting impact on self-development. Since my research approached teacher identity from a holistic perspective with an emphasis on the participants’ beliefs, assumptions, perceptions, and interpretations, the internal personal frame of interpretations is prioritized over social factors or external interpretive viewpoints. The “individual’s internal frame of reference” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 26) played an important role in this analysis in terms of explaining the relationships between the internal and external worlds. In concert with my theoretical orientation (Jung, 1959; Kelly, 1955; Mezirow, 1978), everything (i.e., all things external and internal) is interpreted through an individual’s belief system. Therefore, this personal dimension can, I suggest, provide a broader interpretive framework than the strictly professional one as understood from an outsider perspective (e.g., Beijaard et al., 2004; Ben-Peretz et al., 2003; Coldron & Smith, 1999; Ronfeldt & Grossman, 2008). This perspective may

help to shed light on the intricate interconnectedness between life events. I argue that the impact of schooling experiences on teacher development may be better understood when embedded in the context of teachers' lives and examined from an individual's internal frame of reference rather than from a conventional observer/researcher perspective.

In conclusion, the findings of this research can be summed up in the following propositions:

- Childhood experiences have a greater than heretofore acknowledged impact on the development of teacher identity and future instructional practice; and
- There is a substantial interconnectedness between personal and professional lives.

The findings reveal that important childhood experiences made a lasting impact on the participants' perceptions of their identity as well as on their instructional practice and teaching philosophy. The integrated reflective process evoked a realization in all participants about the strong intricate relationships between personal and professional lives regardless of the apparent differences in roles and responsibilities in each segment of their lives.

I acknowledge the fact that my participants' sense-making of their life experiences is idiosyncratic, which makes it challenging for the researcher to make generalizations and draw shared and definite conclusions from the propositions presented above. Self-understanding is, then, idiosyncratic. However, I believe that *the process* itself applied to gaining greater self-understanding may be transferable. Understanding ourselves is an important first step in the process of understanding others and it is particularly relevant for teachers because of the important role interpersonal relationships plays in teaching. This argument is captured poignantly in the following way: "human beings who lack an awareness of their own personal reality cannot exist in a 'we-relation' with other human beings [...] which is at the foundation of all possible communication" (Greene, 1978, p. 29). In other words, relating to others begins with *self-knowing* and *self-understanding*, which are essential qualities of teachers who educate, teach, and shape future generations.

9 Conclusion and implications

Teacher identity is an intricate and tangled web of influences and imprints rooted in personal and professional life experiences. Much of the literature describes teacher identity from a professional dimension which has not always incorporated a holistic research perspective. I argue that teacher identity reflects not only the professional, educational, and pedagogical aspects of teaching but – more importantly – the imprints of the complex interconnectedness of one's cumulative life experiences as a human being. My research provides a rationale for some of the intricate influences of personal experiences on teacher identity that have not yet received much attention from this particular area in the literature. I present a strong argument in support of the exploration of teachers' personal and professional experiences in an *integrated fashion* that goes beyond the current standpoint of drawing "a line between students' private lives and their professional development as teachers" (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005, p. 67). Due to the small number of participants, I recommend further research to explore the development of teacher identity with a larger group of participants; ideally with both male and female teachers

who are both native and non-native speakers of English. Another recommendation is to extend the scope of the research to include teachers of other modern languages.

These results highlight the need for an *integrated* approach and the examination of both personal and professional life experiences in order to gain a holistic understanding of the dominant influences on teacher identity and instructional practice. This research has clear implications for language teachers' professional development. The findings suggest it would be useful to develop a special type of professional development program for in-service teachers with the purpose of addressing the interconnectedness of both the professional and the personal aspects of teaching. In so doing, such a program would enable teachers to further enhance their understanding of themselves and to develop a more empathic stance towards their students and colleagues.

Proofread for the use of English by: M. L. Catherine MacNeil, School of Linguistics and Language Studies, Carleton University, Ottawa.

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APPENDIX A

Autobiographical journaling, guided visualization, and interviews Overview

A. Autobiographical Journaling

The goal of keeping an autobiographical journal is to help research participants remember and reflect on their experiences in a systematic and guided manner. The autobiographical journal is conceived of as a preparation tool for the in-depth detailed interviews with the researcher. In this sense, journaling facilitates the recall of participants' experiences; it allows them to reflect on them on their own so that they will be able to participate in the interviews more fully. It is, therefore, viewed as a tool for preparing the groundwork for the interviews.

Participants will be provided with each set of activities well in advance of each interview. For example, participants will receive the first set of guidelines in preparation for the first interview about one month prior to the first interview. The second set of guidelines will be handed out to them on the day of the first interview and they will have about two months to work on the activities before the second interview takes place. The third, final set of activities will be distributed on the day of the second interview and participants will be able to spend about two months on the activities before the final interview.

1. Journal Themes in Preparation for the First Interview

Rationale:

The goal and intent of the following activities are to trigger your memories about your life experiences. They will help you recall your memorable life experiences and will also greatly facilitate your preparation for the first in-depth interview with the researcher.

The first interview will build on the material you cover in these activities so please make sure that you spend quality time on these activities. The interview will provide you with an opportunity to further elaborate on your experiences, the significance you assign to them in your life, and it will facilitate uncovering some of the unconscious or hidden beliefs that might be rooted in them.

General Activities: Preparation for the Journaling

Rationale:

The following general activities (A/1, A/2, and A/3) have a broad framework to allow you to create a repertoire of your life experiences, which is considered as a pool of information that can be drawn on when you work on the more specific, autobiographical writing activities (e.g., A/4, B/6, and C/1) during the entire research process.

It is important to go as broad as possible with recalling your life experiences so that later you can select from them for the more specific autobiographical journaling activities related to (1) the development of your professional self (Activity A/4) in preparation for the first interview, and to (2) the development of your personal self (Activity B/6) in preparation for the second interview. Finally, you can also draw upon the pool of information to work on the autobiographical writing related to (3) the connections between and synthesis of the professional and the personal selves (Activity C/1) to prepare for the third interview.

Activity A/1: Creating your life line

Activity A/2: Synthesis of your life line

Activity A/3: Key events, turning points, significant people, and insights

Specific Activities: Development of the Professional Self

Activity A/4: Autobiographical Writing

Narrow your focus on your experiences as a student/learner from early childhood on up to university/graduate studies/professional education both in formal and informal learning scenarios.

Suggested topics:

- Early childhood experiences;
- Experiences as a student in primary school;
- Experiences as a student in high school;
- Experiences as a student in college or university;
- Informal learning experiences;
- “Best” and “worst” language learning experiences;
- My “best” and “worst” courses/teachers; Influential teachers as role models;
- “Best” and “worst” teaching experiences.

2. Journal Themes in Preparation for the Second Interview

Rationale:

The goal of the following activities is to assist you in the preparation for the second in-depth interview, which will focus on your personal life experiences and the potential beliefs rooted in them. These activities have been designed to facilitate the process of raising awareness of recurring themes, patterns in your personal life, and the possible underlying belief systems that may be connected to/may have influenced your beliefs, assumptions and perceptions as a teacher. The activities are situated in the bigger framework of your life as a whole (including various facets of your personal life and not only your professional life as a teacher).

General Activities: Preparation for the Journaling

Rationale:

The following general activities (B/1, B/2, B/3, B/4 and B/5) take a broad perspective on your personal life in general allowing you to explore your beliefs and assumptions originating from various aspects of your personal life. The broad perspective also helps you to explore how your personal beliefs may influence your views and beliefs of who you are as a teacher. The objective of these activities is to help you become aware of recurring topics, issues, themes, character traits in your life and to uncover the underlying hidden beliefs and assumptions rooted in them that may have influenced the development of your teacher identity.

Activity B/1: My past preoccupations

Activity B/2: Going deeper - more preoccupying ideas

Activity B/3: Where in my life am I going through the motions?

Activity B/4: Finding new paradigm alternatives to your old preoccupations

Activity B/5: Analysis of significant people’s influence (e.g., parents/caregivers)

Specific Activities: Development of the Personal Self

Activity B/6: Autobiographical Writing

Reflect on any important personal life experiences that stand out in your memory (that may have been triggered by the general activities above). Try to find personal events and experiences that seem to be connected directly or indirectly to how you see yourself as a teacher

at the moment, or to any professional characteristics or issues in your professional life that you may have at the moment.

As time goes on, you may want to keep track of any insights, dreams, coincidences and interesting situations (both personal and professional) that come up. You might want to note in your journal any instances when you find yourself in situations that somehow might help you find some answers to the questions or feelings that have been raised or triggered as you are working your way through the activities.

3. Journal Themes in Preparation for the Third (Final) Interview:

Rationale:

The goal and intent of the final interview are analysis and synthesis of the experiences and work done in the first two interviews and the journaling activities during the elapsed time. The analysis will include

- finding the underlying meaning of both personal and professional experiences in relation to teacher identity;
- uncovering and connecting forgotten or taken-for-granted beliefs, assumptions and perceptions; and
- connecting the intuitive activities with the rational reflections and insights.

The ultimate goal of the last interview is to come to a synthesis and re-construction of

- insights, connections and relationships among events, interpretations, beliefs; and
- the interconnectedness of those with your perceptions about your identity as a teacher in at present.

Specific Activities: Re-constructing and Integrating Teacher Identity

Activity C/1: Autobiographical Writing

Reflect on your perceptions and views about the relationships and connections between your professional and personal life experiences explored to date in your journals and during the interviews with the researcher.

B. Guided Visualization Activity

Rationale:

The “Guided Visualization” activity is meant to engage your tacit/intuitive/empathic way of knowing allowing for the exploration of connections and aspects between your personal life and the way you see yourself as a teacher in a less-constrained way than an interview provides.

This activity will allow you to explore the use of an alternative intuitive technique so that - based on first-hand experience - you can subsequently reflect on the relevance and meaning of your experience of the visualization exercise in relation to your teacher identity. This alternative intuitive technique is meant to complement the more rational reflective/thinking process carried out in the journaling activities and interviews.

Guided Visualization

This activity is designed to allow you to have an intuitive experience followed by reflection on the meaning and significance of the experience and the information. The activity begins with a relaxation exercise followed by the guided visualization exercise. You are asked to do the guided visualization activity on a regular basis throughout the data collection period. It is recommended that you do it once a week; it will take about 20 minutes.

In the guided visualization process you will be asked to write down two questions prior to the activity. These might be some burning questions/puzzling thoughts related to

- the general activities that you are working on for this research project; or
- the educational and professional experiences that you recall and reflect on in your autobiographical writing; or
- some beliefs, assumptions, perceptions about your teaching/teacher identity; anything that you are frequently thinking about (triggered by the activities and reflections) and can't find plausible or satisfying answers to; or
- any feelings, emotions that the activities evoke in you and you want to know more about their significance related to the issues and topics you are reflecting on.

As you listen to the tape, please follow the instructions in it. Be open to receiving answers to your questions. Believe and trust that you will receive an answer. Let it happen. Acceptance is important. Write down any answers that come to your mind as you pose your first and second questions *even though you may feel you are making them up*. Do not evaluate.

You are asked to document the answers in journal for future reference. AFTER having completed the activity, put it aside and move on to doing something else. Later on, you might want to have a look at the answers again and reflect on them to see how you can make sense of the information. Write a short entry in your journal about this conscious reflection.

C. Interview Themes

First Interview: The Development of the Professional Self

- Educational experiences as a student (e.g., schooling and professional education)
- Professional experiences as a teacher (e.g., teaching experiences)
- Uncovering professional beliefs about good teaching/good teacher and good learning/good student

Second Interview: The Development of the Personal Self

- Personal life experiences (e.g., childhood, family, friends, and significant other people)
- Uncovering personal beliefs that may be connected to professional issues

Third Interview: The Re-Construction of Teacher Identity

- Finding relationships between personal and professional experiences
- Re-connecting personal and professional selves with beliefs, assumptions, interpretations and perceptions
- Re-constructing the various selves of your teacher identity (e.g., mental self, emotional self, enacted self, and the intuitive self)
- Synthesizing teacher identity at present