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Understanding teacher identity: an overview of issues in the literature and implications for teacher education

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While literature on teaching emphasizes the importance of identity in teacher development, understanding identity and the issues related to it can be a challenging endeavour. This article provides an overview of the issues revealed in recent discussions of teacher identity: the problem of defining the concept; the place of the self, and related issues of agency, emotion, narrative and discourse; the role of reflection; and the influence of contextual factors. A particular focus is placed on identity in pre-service teachers and new practitioners. Implications of an understanding of these issues for programmes of teacher education are highlighted.

Keywords: teacher identity; professional identity; pre-service teachers; teacher reflection; teacher education

Introduction and purpose

Much recent literature on teacher education highlights the importance of identity in teacher development (see Freese, 2006; Hoban, 2007; Korthagen, Kessels, Koster, Lagerwerf, & Wubbels, 2001; Olsen, 2008; Riopel, 2006; Sachs, 2005). Clearly, student teachers must undergo a shift in identity as they move through programs of teacher education and assume positions as teachers in today's challenging school contexts. In addition, further identity shifts may occur throughout a teacher's career as a result of interactions within schools and in broader communities. Yet the concept of identity is a complex one, and even a cursory examination of the literature reveals that there is much to understand if one is to appreciate the importance of identity in teacher development.

It is worth pointing out that recent literature contains arguments for attention to identity for different reasons. It can be used as a frame or an analytic lens through which to examine aspects of teaching: the ways in which students integrate a range of influences, the necessary confronting of tensions and contradictions in their careers (Olsen, 2008). It can also be seen as an organizing element in teachers' professional lives, even a 'resource that people use to explain, justify and make sense of themselves in relation to others, and to the world at large' (MacLure, 1993, p. 311).

In our own efforts to understand the growing literature on teacher identity, we note that identity in teaching has been explored in a variety of very different ways: in terms of the constant 'reinventing' of themselves that teachers undergo (see Mitchell &

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Weber, 1999), in terms of the narratives that teachers create to explain themselves and their teaching lives (see Connelley & Clandinin, 1999; Sfard & Prusak, 2005) and the variety of discourses teachers participate in and produce (see Alsop, 2006), in terms of the metaphors that may guide or result from a teacher's understanding of the role (see Hunt, 2006; Leavy, McSorley, & Boté, 2006), and in terms of the influence of a wide range of contextual factors on teachers and their practice (see Chevrier, Gohier, Anadon, & Godbout, 2007; Flores & Day, 2006). Reaching a full understanding of the important aspects of identity and the ways in which they are related can be challenging.

However, gaining a more complete understanding of identity generally and teacher identity in particular could enhance the ways in which teacher education programs are conceived. Our own research (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2006; Thomas & Beauchamp, 2007) into the shift in identity as student teachers move into the first year of practice shows the need to more effectively address identity as a component in teacher education. We are therefore interested in what we might need to learn about teacher identity from the literature to better design our own teacher education programs. The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the issues related to teacher identity stemming from recent literature and to suggest the implications for effective teacher education embedded in the discussion of these issues. Within the scope of such a paper, we will of necessity elect to present a breadth of ideas and issues, rather than an in-depth exploration of each one.

Challenges in understanding identity

A major hurdle in gaining an understanding of identity is resolving a definition of it, as a variety of issues surface in any attempt to reach a definition. One must struggle to comprehend the close connection between identity and the self, the role of emotion in shaping identity, the power of stories and discourse in understanding identity, the role of reflection in shaping identity, the link between identity and agency, the contextual factors that promote or hinder the construction of identity, and ultimately the responsibility of teacher education programs to create opportunities for the exploration of new and developing teacher identities.

The scope of this paper does not permit a comprehensive review of the literature on teacher identity; it does, however, permit us to provide what we consider an overview of the issues noted in the previous paragraph and the ways they are explored in recent literature on teaching and teacher education. At the same time, we acknowledge the challenge of reaching a full understanding of identity as a concept, realizing that it has been explored across different disciplines in addition to education – for example, in philosophy (see Taylor, 1989; Mead, 1934); in psychology (see Erickson, 1959); in anthropology (see Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998) – and that notions of identity thus range across approaches from these disciplines, even within the literature on teaching and teacher education.

We want to interject the further caution that while it is possible to discern some of the issues highlighted in the literature on identity, such as those noted in the preceding paragraph, it is not always possible to clearly delineate one from the other. And so any discussion of emotion and identity, for example, overlaps with discussion of the self and also with discussion of the factors that enter into the shaping and the expression of identity. In this paper we have chosen to explore the issues noted previously, but will point out along the way the interlinking of some issues with others. We will refer

throughout the paper to teacher identity, noting the combination of both the personal and professional aspects of identity inherent within that of a teacher.

Defining teacher identity

The literature on teaching and teacher education reveals a common notion that identity is dynamic, and that a teacher's identity shifts over time under the influence of a range of factors both internal to the individual, such as emotion (Rodgers & Scott, 2008; Van Veen & Slegers, 2006; Zembylas, 2003), and external to the individual, such as job and life experiences in particular contexts (Flores & Day, 2006; Rodgers & Scott, 2008; Sachs, 2005). These understandings about identity are helpful, yet defining the concept has often proved difficult for authors.

In a study of research on teacher professional identity, Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop (2004) note the absence of a definition in several works. The result of their systematic investigation of literature about teacher professional identity from 1998–2000 is the articulation of four features of professional identity stemming from the works studied. They determine that identity is an ongoing process, and therefore that identity is dynamic rather than stable, a constantly evolving phenomenon. It involves both a person and a context: within a context teachers learn professional characteristics that are adopted by individuals in unique ways. Within a teacher's professional identity are sub-identities, which may be more or less central to the overall identity and must be balanced to avoid conflict across them. Professional identity comprises the notion of agency, or the active pursuit of professional development and learning in accordance with a teacher's goals. These authors point to the problematic nature of the various understandings of identity, in particular the connection between identity and self, and the unclear distinction between personal and professional identity. Indeed it appears that a clear definition of identity is not easily reached, but that there is general acknowledgement of its multi-faceted and dynamic nature.

At a basic level, Gee (2001) recognizes that identity suggests a 'kind of person' within a particular context; while one might have a 'core identity', there are multiple forms of this identity as one operates across different contexts (p. 99). He identifies four ways that identity might be perceived: nature-identity (stemming from one's natural state), institution-identity (derived from a position recognized by authority), discourse-identity (resulting from the discourse of others about oneself), and affinity-identity (determined by one's practices in relation to external groups). The emphasis is on the multifaceted nature of identity and its changing shape in terms of external influences.

The definition of identity can also be understood within a sociocultural perspective (Olsen, 2008; Sfard & Prusak, 2005). A view of teacher identity as both product (a result of influences on the teacher) and process (a form of ongoing interaction within teacher development) suggests the dynamic that takes place:

I view identity as a label, really, for the collection of influences and effects from immediate contexts, prior constructs of self, social positioning, and meaning systems (each itself a fluid influence and all together an ever-changing construct) that become intertwined inside the flow of activity as a teacher simultaneously reacts to and negotiates given contexts and human relationships at given moments. (Olsen, 2008, p. 139)

In the same way, recognizing also this same dynamic in terms of discourse, identity is connected with 'how collective discourses shape personal worlds and how individual voices combine into the voice of a community' (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 15).

We have found the following statement a useful starting point in the overall perception of identity, one which shows the centrality of the concept for teaching and indicates the dynamism inherent in it:

Teacher professional identity then stands at the core of the teaching profession. It provides a framework for teachers to construct their own ideas of 'how to be', 'how to act' and 'how to understand' their work and their place in society. Importantly, teacher identity is not something that is fixed nor is it imposed; rather it is negotiated through experience and the sense that is made of that experience. (Sachs, 2005, p. 15)

This view of identity not only points to its importance in the profession, but also to the multiple dimensions of identity in the inclusion of 'how to be', 'how to act' and 'how to understand' as elements for attention; it encompasses both the personal and professional aspects of identity to which we will return in the next section of this paper. It also includes the importance of the ongoing negotiation of identity and its reshaping within experience. Yet while we can accept this definition as a way to begin an understanding of identity, the literature reveals notions that stand in the way of clarifying the meaning of identity and reaching a completely satisfying definition. The next sections of this paper provide an overview of these notions: the link between the self and identity; emotion and its relation to identity; and the narrative/discursive aspects of identity. All of them are inter-connected.

Before proceeding to this overview, however, we want to point out that despite the apparently common perspective that identity can be represented in multiple ways and has a dynamic, shifting nature, the language used to describe the dynamism that shifts in identity imply can vary. One of the complicated aspects of understanding identity is grappling with the notion of how identity shifts and reshapes. The terms used to characterize this shaping of identity are inconsistent across the literature, which contains references to the 'development' of identity (see Watson, 2006; Olsen, 2008), to the 'construction' of identity (see Coldron & Smith, 1999; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Søreide, 2006), to identity 'formation' (see Rodgers & Scott, 2008), to 'identity-making' (see Sfard & Prusak, 2005), to 'creating' an identity (see Parkison, 2008), to 'shaping' an identity (see Flores & Day, 2006) to 'building' identity (see Sfard & Prusak, 2005), and even to the 'architecture' of teacher's professional identities (Day *et al.*, 2006, p. 612). Each term adds a slight nuance to questions that could be posed about the nature of progress through a teacher's career: How does an identity shift and change? How do we characterize this change? What happens in the shifting from one identity to another? Who or what influences the change? We have chosen to use the term 'shaping' identity throughout this paper, acknowledging the role of the self and external forces in the dynamism of identity.

The self and identity

One of the most complex issues in the determination of what identity is revolves around the notion of the self, or self-concept, and its relationship to identity. Identity development for teachers involves an understanding of the self and a notion of that self within an outside context, such as a classroom or a school, necessitating an examination of the self in relation to others, much as Mead (1934) proposed in his exploration of the self in relation to society. A teacher's identity is shaped and reshaped in interaction with others in a professional context. Within literature specific to teaching, a number of authors consider an understanding of self as a key component

of teacher development, and therefore of the shaping of identity. Lauriala and Kukkonen (2005) recognize identity and self-concept as the same, explaining that the term identity has been more commonly used with respect to teachers, and the term self-concept with respect to students. They consider both identity and self-concept to be stable and dynamic at the same time. In their discussion of teacher identity, they present a model of self-concept formation in which the self is composed of three dimensions – the actual self (the one that currently prevails), the ought self (the one recognized by society or an external group as the goal), and the ideal self (the one set by the individual as possible target for achievement) – with a dynamic interaction among these different selves. They argue for increased study of these identities within situational contexts. Borich (1999) draws on Mead's ideas to discuss the aspects of the teacher self that have a bearing on the effectiveness of a teacher's actions; Hamachek (1999) emphasizes self-knowledge as key to a teacher's successful practice. This notion of an inner teacher self obviously has links to teacher identity, placing a focus on the more personal aspects of the individual self.

Yet identity can be viewed not just in relation to the personal dimension of the self, but also with respect to the profession itself: a professional (in this case, teacher) identity. Conceiving identity in this way suggests a focus on the professional aspects of teaching. The title of a recent article containing the phrase 'our teacher selves' suggests something of this nature (Freese, 2006). Some authors, for example, look at identity in terms of the professional knowledge teachers need to possess and act on: subject matter knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and didactical knowledge (Beijaard, Verloop & Vermunt, 2000). Both ways of looking at identity, through the self and through the profession, can help us to think more clearly about identity in terms of teacher development. Therefore a combined view of identity would seem to be important, provided a balance is struck across these personal and professional dimensions of teaching; in fact, it appears necessary to consider the two together in developing an understanding of identity in teaching (Lipka & Brinthaup, 1999). This may be the case because of the personal involvement required by teaching which leads to the 'unavoidable interrelationships between professional and personal identities' (Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons, 2006, p. 602).

Perhaps the clearest summary of this interplay between the personal and professional aspects of identity is provided in Rodgers and Scott (2008), who explore the notions of self and identity. They note the external aspects (contexts and relationships) and internal aspects (stories and emotions) of 'identity formation', with 'awareness and voice' being a place 'where the normative demands of the external encounter the internal meaning making and desires of the teacher' (p. 733), somewhat akin to the 'ought self' and 'ideal self' others have suggested (Lauriala & Kukkonen, 2005, p. 200). They arrive at the following definition of self in relation to identity:

Self, then, might be thought of as the meaning *maker* and identity as the meaning *made*, even as the self and identity evolve and transform over time. The self in its completeness, however, remains unknowable... Still, despite the inevitable discontinuities and change and the intangible nature of self, there is a belief that there exists over time a 'Self' that is recognizable and a coherence that allows one to move in the world with a certain confidence. For the purposes of this discussion, then, *self will subsume identity(ies) and will be understood as an evolving yet coherent being, that consciously and unconsciously constructs and is constructed, reconstructs and is reconstructed, in interaction with the cultural contexts, institutions, and people with which the self lives, learns, and functions.* (Rodgers & Scott, 2008, p. 739, emphasis in original)

The 'actual' and 'designated' identities mentioned by Sfard and Prusak (2005, p. 14) resonate with the 'actual self' and the 'ought self' as well, although they define identities in terms of narrative: 'discursive counterparts of one's lived experience' (p. 17). For them, it is 'our *vision* of our own or other people's experiences, and not the experiences as such, that constitute identities' (p. 17, emphasis in original). Such a statement raises further questions about the connection between self and identity. The narrative/discursive aspects of identity will be addressed in a subsequent section of this paper.

Wenger (1998) makes a clear link between the personal and professional self of a teacher. His position links identity very closely with practice. They are 'mirror images of one another' and the same five characteristics apply to both: identity is the negotiated experience of self, involves community membership, has a learning trajectory, combines different forms of membership within an identity, and presumes involvement in local and global contexts (p. 149). By participating in a community of professionals, a teacher is subject to the influences of this community on identity development. It might be expected that new teachers, whose identities are only tentative, will particularly feel the impact of a community context and will need to be aware of the shaping of their own identities that will take place in this context. Further along the same lines in this linking of the personal and professional self is the deeper sense of 'embodiment' related to identity (Alsup, 2006, p. 185), the full adoption and expression of a professional identity through the person, or the self.

Evidently, the inextricable link between the personal and professional selves of a teacher must be taken into account in understanding teacher identity. Some of the complex factors involved in this link are the interplay of emotion as a part of the self and identity, the narrative and discourse aspects of the self and the shaping of identity, the role of reflection in understanding the self and identity, and the connection between identity and agency.

Emotion and identity

Emotion enters the discussion of identity as a dimension of the self and a factor that has a bearing on the expression of identity and the shaping of it. Emotion may alter a teacher's identity in relation to the profession, but may also be altered by aspects of the profession. Work on the nature of teaching stresses emotion as an influential factor in teachers' approaches to their professional lives and to their identities (see Hargreaves, 1998, 2001). The caring aspect of teaching, often highly valued by those entering the profession, has received attention in the discussion of identity; the caring teachers want to demonstrate implies a particular perspective they take on their professional identity (see O'Connor, 2007). In addition, some periods in a teacher's professional life, for example those involving educational reform, may particularly affect teacher identity, both the personal and the professional aspects of it, because of the high level of emotion involved (van Veen, Slegers, & van de Ven, 2005; van Veen & Slegers, 2006).

In a deeper sense, the emotions teachers experience, and in some cases are encouraged or forbidden to experience in particular contexts, may 'expand or limit possibilities' in teaching (Zembylas, 2003, p. 122). There are therefore important implications in the study of emotion for an understanding of teacher identity. This appears to be an expanding area of the literature on identity, and will probably deserve increased attention in future discussions of identity.

Narrative and discourse aspects of identity

An important topic of discussion in the literature on identity revolves around its narrative and discursive aspects and the ways in which narrative and discourse shape and are shaped by identity; evidently the narratives of teachers about themselves and their practice, as well as the discourses in which they engage, provide opportunities for exploring and revealing aspects of the self. Considerable importance is placed on the understanding that stories are a way to express identity, and literature in teaching stresses this way of conceiving identity. The power of teacher narrative to express identity within 'a changing professional knowledge landscape' is articulated in important work on teachers' stories, considered indicative of their growing understanding of their professional identities within changing contexts (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 120). The expression of multiple identities is possible through a teacher's narrative position, as for example, the identity of a caring or a creative teacher (Søreide, 2006).

In one view of the storied dimension of teacher identity, 'identifying' can be seen as 'a discursive activity', and 'identity-making as a communicational practice' (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 16). What this suggests is that 'identities' are 'collections of stories about persons, or more specifically... those narratives about individuals that are *reifying, endorsable and significant*' (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 16, emphasis in original). This definition of identity as narrative finds resonance in other work as well. Watson (2006) notes the narrative aspect of identity: 'telling stories is, then, in an important sense, "doing identity work"' (p. 525). The idea of narrative can be expanded to include not only the person telling the story, but also those who are told the story and those who in turn tell the story, drawing these others into the shaping of the teller's identity; in other words, 'collective storytelling' produces identity (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 21). There are obvious links in this notion to the individual self and its relationship to the larger social context, as previously discussed in the section on the self and identity.

Linked to, and perhaps inseparable from the notion of narrative is that of discourse; the study of teacher discourse is not only revelatory of identity but also indicative of the way in which identity is negotiated by an individual within external contexts (Beynon, 1997). In addition, the discourses in which teachers engage contribute to the shaping of their identities and may ultimately have something to do with changing traditional configurations of power (Miller Marsh, 2002). Studies of teacher discourse (see Cohen, 2008) bring to the surface both explicit and implicit understandings of teacher roles as ways to discern and appreciate teacher identities; the study of teacher talk can lead to a heightened understanding of these identities.

Using the term 'borderland discourse', for the kind of interaction that has the power to confront teachers' ideas about themselves and their profession, Alsop (2006, p. 187) shows that the preservice teachers' in her study expanded their identities, both personal and professional, through engagement in discourse that provoked transformation in their thinking; this discourse allowed them to confront their existing notions of their identity in formative ways. Such discourse she considers 'affect related' in the form of 'language, actions, emotions, feelings, ideas and appearances' in which these teachers engaged (p. 187). There is a strong argument here for the impact of discourse as powerful in the shaping of identity.

Embedded with narrative and discourse as central to the discussion of identity is the use of metaphor to explore and give expression to identity. Examinations of the metaphors used by student and practising teachers to explain their understanding of

their identities are much reported in the literature (Ben-Peretz, 2001; Goldstein, 2005; Leavy, McSorley, & Boté, 2006; Martinez, Salueda & Huber, 2001). One study (Leavy, McSorley & Boté, 2006), for example, monitored student teachers' changing expressions of metaphors for their teaching across time, noting the more behaviourist metaphors early in the student teachers' development (the teacher as a possessor of knowledge as in the north star guiding explorers) as opposed to more constructivist metaphors later in the development (the teacher as a cook, combining ingredients and techniques). Ben-Peretz (2001) reports on a study asking teachers to identify their own teacher identities with one of a series of occupations (e.g., judge, zoo keeper, orchestra conductor, etc), in an attempt to highlight the difficulties encountered by teachers in matching self-image with school context. Connected to the previous discussions about the personal and professional sides of identity, work has been done on metaphor as a way to come to terms with the space between the two, in particular as a component of teacher reflection, which will be discussed in its relation to identity in a further section of this paper (Hunt, 2006). And the recognition of metaphors which provide 'resonance' between past and current experiences through teacher storytelling, helping teachers to gain understanding of their identities, has been documented (Conle, 1996). The links across areas of the literature on identity become evident here: metaphor in terms of the narrative and discourse aspects of identity also can be situated within the reflection that teachers frequently use to reach understandings about their identity, both its personal and professional dimensions. But it may be that despite the obvious power of metaphor as a vehicle for considering teaching, the metaphors we have come to associate with teaching need reconsideration, as Lesnick (2005) points out. In suggesting that previously used metaphors may lack the power to describe teacher identities today, she argues for new metaphors for conceiving the profession and the identities within it.

It is clear that the discussions of narrative and discourse as important ways to perceive identity draw on notions of the self as well. They must be viewed together within the narratives and discourses produced and engaged in by teachers, and perhaps considered one within the other (self as containing identity) as Rodgers and Scott (2008) suggest.

The role of reflection in exploring and shaping teacher identity

In considering teacher development, it is clear there are valued ways for people to probe their teaching existence so that they understand their position within their practice. Reflection is recognized as a key means by which teachers can become more in tune with their sense of self and with a deep understanding of how this self fits into a larger context which involves others; in other words, reflection is a factor in the shaping of identity. Reflection in itself is a broad topic, the exploration of which would require a scope not possible here; however, certain fundamental points about its connection to identity in teachers may clarify its importance.

The role of reflection in teacher development has been acknowledged for some time (see Larrivé, 2000; Korthagen, Kessels, Koster, Lagerwerf, & Wubbels, 2001; Rodgers, 2002). In fact, it has been recognized as the very core of effective teaching (Jay, 2003). Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) suggest that 'core' reflection, directed at identity and mission, is what is needed to tap into a sense of self (p. 53). Therefore, when we consider identity in the development of either student teachers or beginning practitioners, we must include the notion of reflection as central to this development.

In addition to reflection that requires a looking back at thoughts or practices and considering their value or effectiveness is the idea that reflection might be anticipatory or prospective. It might allow for the looking ahead at a future practice or a future way of thinking that could inform teacher development (Conway, 2001). While this notion of reflection appears to have been linked primarily to considering teaching actions in a future sense, it might very well also provide a way of considering the shaping of teacher identity – the establishing of a goal or vision of a future identity, perhaps the ‘ideal’ self noted previously (Lauriala & Kukkonen, 2005). This idea is reinforced in the notion that teachers’ discourse, when it is intentionally future-oriented, reveals reflection that projects a prospective identity (Urzúa & Vásquez, 2008).

The typology of reflection recently developed by Luttenberg and Bergen (2008) may be helpful to the understanding of reflection as prominent in identity development for teachers. They propose three domains of reflection: pragmatic, ethical and moral. For each domain, there may be differences in the nature (depth) of reflection and the content (breadth) of reflection. In addition, reflection may be more or less open or closed, depending on its separation or connection to the self that is reflecting. In terms of identity, reflection in the ethical domain may draw on a teacher’s values about what is good: ‘Certain values may touch upon the teacher’s own self-understanding, identity and manner of living’ (p. 551).

It must be noted that at least one author (Lesnick, 2005) suggests that reflective practice needs redefining, as it represents a more static approach than the ‘ongoing movement, change, confusion and interaction’ that modern contexts imply (p. 46). While this caution may indicate a need for rethinking the way reflection is conceived in the shaping of a teaching identity, reflection nevertheless continues to be acknowledged as a powerful way for students and practising teachers to delve deeply into their teaching identities.

The link between identity and agency

While the foregoing discussion has highlighted the importance of understanding identity, and has noted some of the complicating factors in coming to an understanding of what identity is and how identity may be expressed and shaped, a further notion, that of agency, is critical to developing a full picture of identity as well. We mention it here, acknowledging the connection between agency and psychological constructs of self-efficacy and self-concept, as it cannot be ignored in a discussion of identity. The inextricable link between the two – identity and agency – is noted throughout literature on identity in teaching (see Day *et al.*, 2006; Parkison, 2008), and even beyond in broader literature on identity and agency (see Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). What may result from a teacher’s realization of his or her identity, in performance within teaching contexts, is a sense of agency, of empowerment to move ideas forward, to reach goals or even to transform the context. It is apparent that a heightened awareness of one’s identity may lead to a strong sense of agency: ‘human beings are active agents who play decisive roles in determining the dynamics of social life and in shaping individual activities’ (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 15). One view of the link between identity and agency is that the narrative definition of identity, as discussed in a previous section, allows for the dynamic and agentic dimensions of identity to be recognized fully (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). Understanding that a teacher’s identity will have multiple dimensions, some stable and some unstable, suggests that agency may be involved in the maintenance or further shaping of these identities and

the attention to tensions among them (Day *et al.*, 2006). Furthermore, accepting the potentially crucial role that teachers can perform within institutions and society, the sense of agency permitted by their identities can be a powerful force for good (Parkison, 2008). The agency that can be associated with the shaping of identity has a clear connection to the ways teachers are influenced by and interact within a variety of educational contexts.

Identity and the influence of contextual factors

It is important in addition to defining identity and understanding the notions linked to it to consider, even if only briefly, the influence of context on the shaping of identity. Situating the shaping of a teacher's identity within the context of practice implies the necessity to be aware of the effects this context might have on the shifts and changes in a teacher's identity. Studies reported in the literature note the impact of context on the student teaching experience in the shaping of identity (see Smagorinsky, Moore, Cook, Jackson, & Fry, 2004) and on the experience of new teachers in their beginning practice (see Flores & Day, 2005). The school environment, the nature of the learner population, the impact of colleagues and of school administrators can all be influential in shaping a student or new teacher identity, as of course are their own experiences as learners in schools. As well, the emotion brought to the context and that generated by the context will affect this identity. Some literature suggests that the choice of teaching discipline may also affect identity, as disciplines may tend to have particular teaching cultures of their own (see Barty, 2004; Pennington, 2002; Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, Johnson, 2005). It is the exposure to these formative contexts that results in important confrontations with one's identity as a teacher. Arguments have been made before for providing as wide a range as possible of situations in which teachers can interact and develop and become aware of their possible identities (Coldron & Smith, 1999). The role of teacher education programs can be considered crucial to this exposure.

Addressing identity in teacher education

While it is clear from the previous discussion that shifts in identity are an acknowledged part of becoming a teacher, overt attention to these shifts within teacher education programmes has not always been evident. Recent literature in teacher education confirms the importance of identity development (see Britzman, 2003; Hoban, 2007; Riopel, 2006), yet it is unclear how recognition of this importance translates into concrete action in the form of teacher education programme design and activities. Hammerness, Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) make the following statement about teacher development:

Developing an identity as a teacher is an important part of securing teachers' commitment to their work and adherence to professional norms... the identities teachers develop shape their dispositions, where they place their effort, whether and how they seek out professional development opportunities, and what obligations they see as intrinsic to their role. (Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, & Bransford, 2005, pp. 383–384)

Although the notion that identity shifts are central to the development of a teacher is apparent in their statement, the authors also note that the allowance for the exploration of one's identity within teacher preparation programmes may not always be

intentional, and that identity may not always be an explicit part of the plan for teacher development.

As an example, 2 of 12 teacher competencies established as outcomes for Quebec student teachers include reference to students understanding themselves and their practice as key requirements for becoming teachers (Ministère de l'Éducation, 2001). These two competencies are designated as the professional identity component of teacher development. Our study within the Quebec context of the development of a teaching identity in the transition from student to new teacher (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2006; Thomas & Beauchamp, 2007) points out that identity development in pre-service teachers cannot be taken for granted. Students interviewed as they graduated from two different four-year teacher education programmes could articulate only a very tentative sense of their identities as teachers and while this tentativeness might be expected at this stage in their development, their comments from this study suggest that identity development needs more overt attention.

Finding ways to make this attention to identity more overt may be a challenge. There are complexities inherent in the shifting identity student teachers must undergo as they prepare for teaching practice.

The construction of the real, the necessary and the imaginary are constantly shifting as student teachers set about to accentuate the identities of their teaching selves in contexts that are already overpopulated with the identities and discursive practices of others... Within such contexts, where desires are assigned and fashioned, student teachers strive to make sense and act as agents in the teacher's world. Indeed, much of their time is taken up with negotiating, constructing, and consenting to their identity as a teacher. (Britzman, 2003, p. 221)

Clearly the challenges are many as student teachers make their way through teacher education and into initial practice: negotiating within shifting conceptions of what teaching is or should be, relating to the identities of others, becoming agents of their own identity development. Britzman's idea of 'consenting' to an identity may be somewhat troubling here, and may highlight the complex pathway for students and new teachers. Does consent suggest acquiescence to an identity that may not be totally desirable, or may represent too much an imposed or institutional idea of identity, even though it results from negotiation and construction within a context?

Freese (2006) is particularly interested in allowing student teachers to discover their 'teacher selves' (p. 100) through reflection and practice, and Smagorinsky, Cook, Moore, Jackson, and Fry (2004) emphasize the importance of placing students in teaching contexts that provoke tensions to challenge their identities, and thus allow for questioning of themselves and their beliefs. Korthagen (2004) includes the level of identity as one which can be influenced in people, but mentions as well that 'fundamental changes in teacher identity do not take place easily: identity change is a difficult and sometimes painful process, and often there seems to be little change at all in how teachers view themselves' (p. 85). Vanhulle's (2005) description of a case study also points to the need for emphasizing individual identity in the education of a teacher. Danielewicz (2001) points to the impact the pedagogy adopted within teacher education programs can have on students' identity development.

It may be that alternate shapes must be given to the teacher education experience, and that along with more traditional ways of involving students in courses there are put into place more opportunities for individual designing of a pathway through the experience. In this way, the path might more adequately allow for deep consideration

of the self in relation to educational contexts. Hoban (2007) leads us toward a revised view of teacher education with his description of a 'multi-linked conceptual framework' for teacher education design (p. 182). The essential links in this design are conceptual, sociocultural, theory–practice and identity aspects of teacher education; he argues for increased coherence across these aspects to enhance the experience of those in preparation for teaching. The designated link for identity in his framework reinforces our idea that its development deserves an explicit place in teacher education.

It may also be that alternate forms of interaction within educational contexts need to be promoted. These might, in our own context in North America, include more school-based teacher education programs such as those being experimented with in some locations (see Hopper & Sanford, 2004; ten Dam & Blom, 2006). Allowing for teacher education within schools appears to provide an opportunity for close examination of the self and interaction with the context: an ongoing reassessment of a teacher's participation in the discourse of the context and the additional contextual factors that may affect the shaping of identity.

Riopel (2006) sees the work of teacher educators as closely connected to what happens in early practice. In a report of a study of professional identity development in teacher education, she raises provocative questions about the links between initial teacher education and beginning practice, suggesting that these links need strengthening. A possible focus for research might be, she points out, an exploration of the relationship between success and failure in beginning practice and the preparation provided previously in a teacher education programme, or a study of the ways in which the demands of beginning practice draw on competencies developed in previous preparation. Such research topics might very well help to reveal the needed links across preparation programmes and beginning practice in terms of identity development.

Conclusion

While it is clear to us that further identity development will take place in actual practice later on, a teacher education programme seems to be the ideal starting point for instilling not only an awareness of the need to develop an identity, but also a strong sense of the ongoing shifts that will occur in that identity. In order to anticipate the reshaping of professional identity that will come, we must continue to consider the situation of teachers in the early years of practice, where the influence of their surrounding context – the nature of the educational institution, teacher colleagues, school administrators, their own students and the wider school community – is strongly felt. We must then try to incorporate what we know about the contexts and communities and their influence on the shaping of teacher identities into our teacher education programmes to prepare new teachers for the challenges of developing strong professional identities in positive ways.

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