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ИДЕНТИТЕТОТ НА НАСТАВНИКОТ

Елена Тупаревска¹

Апстракт: Овој труд ги презентира актуелните ставови во врска со идентитетот на наставникот. Во трудот се застапува гледиштето дека идентитетот на наставникот не е утврден и траен, туку е сложен, слоевит, променлив и е формиран од многу различни фактори, како што се контекстот, искуството, професионалното знаење, односите, чувствата, стереотипите, моќта и општествените норми. Исто така, овој труд ги дискутира и различните техники и перспективи кои поттикнуваат самоиспитување и кои може да им помогнат на наставниците да ги препознаат и разберат факторите кои го формираат нивниот идентитет и на тој начин да станат подобри наставници.

Клучни зборови: *идентитет на наставник, контекст, професионално знаење, социјална интеракција, стереотип, односи на моќ, перспективи на образование на возрасни.*

TEACHER IDENTITY

Elena Tuparevska¹

Abstract: This paper presents the current views on teacher identity. It adopts the view that teacher identity is not set and permanent, but is complex, layered, changing and formed by many different factors such as context, experience, professional knowledge, relationships, feelings, stereotypes, power relations and social norms. Furthermore, this paper discusses different techniques and perspectives that encourage self-examination which can help teachers recognize and understand the factors behind their identities and can help them become better teachers.

Key words: *teacher identity, context, professional knowledge, social interaction, stereotype, power relations, adult learning perspectives.*

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Introduction

There has been a growing interest in the concept of teacher identity in the past decade. In 2006, 93 papers presented at a major educational research conference in the USA, 20 in the UK and 24 in Australia dealt with the concept of identity. Many scholars believe that understanding teacher identity can help transform teaching and learning, and can lead to professional growth. Even critics such as Mockler and Sachs who believe that the concept of teacher identity takes the focus away from the task of teaching, maintain that teacher identity is still an important tool for boosting the status of the teaching profession and for organizing teachers, unions, professional associations and school systems.

Since learning to be a better teacher means being a critically reflective teacher who questions taken-for-granted assumptions and who is very critical of one's self, it is very important for teachers to understand the multilayered nature of their professional identity and the different factors that shape it.

Teacher identity

According to Wenger “the work of identity is always going on. Identity is not some primordial core of personality that already exists. Nor is it something we acquire at some point in the same way that, at a certain age, we grow a set of permanent teeth... our identity is something we constantly renegotiate during the course of our lives”. Britzman agrees that identity cannot be fixed and is socially negotiated throughout our lives.

Identity is a complex, changing narrative shaped by our past experiences, professional knowledge, the setting and the wider socio-cultural context, as well as the various relationships we engage in.

The context is a big part of a teacher's identity. Although the constructivists view the individual as separate from his/her context, numerous other authors believe that we cannot divorce ourselves from our wider social, cultural and political contexts. Chappell et al. suggest that we need to forget about the dualism between the individual and the social and treat them as “jointly produced through discursive practices”. Watson maintains that identity is both shaped by the context and shapes that same context, and the situative perspective considers learning inseparable from the context. Beijaard et al. stress that more attention should be paid to the role of the context in the formation of a professional identity. Lasky's findings show that the political and social context together with early teacher development shape the teacher identity. According to Cooper and Olson teacher identity is multidimensional, multilayered and dynamic, at times even contradictory, and is shaped by different factors such as the cultural, sociological and historical context. They



believe that the fact that schools in mid 19 c. Canada were an instrument of social cohesion, as well as the fact that children used to be made silent and passive in low-income schools, and women teachers were not treated equally as men, has played a part in shaping the teacher identity in Canada. Grosvenor and Lawn maintain that teacher identity is influenced by the national education policy. Hence, the country and the school a teacher works in, the political and economic situation, the policies on education and teaching, they all help shape a teacher's identity.

Another factor is experience. According to Watson, our past experiences are an important resource that we draw on in constructing our identities. Malcolm Knowles also stresses the importance of experience. Looking back at our past experiences i.e. our biographies can be seen as a way to learn to read time backwards and thus make sense of our lives. Furthermore, according to Brookfield our teaching practice is based on our autobiographies as learners. J. G. Knowles concentrates on the importance of positive role models, past teaching experiences, and childhood experiences of learning. Wenger views identity as a 'learning trajectory' since we define ourselves by where we have been and where we are going. However, John Dewey, who was one of the first proponents of experiential learning, argues that every experience does not educate. Kolb also believes that "experience alone does not teach". According to Dewey, learning can take place only if there is both continuity and interaction. Kolb suggests something similar – learning from experience with the help of reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. Thus, teachers need to connect the experiences they have gained teaching their classes to what they already know about good teaching practices, as well as test out these lessons on their students.

Identity is also shaped by professional knowledge. The knowledge that teachers gain at university, in teacher training courses, workshops and seminars are the resources teachers draw on in constructing their identities as teachers.

The various relationships that teachers engage in also shape their identities. Chappell et al. propose a relational view of identity - identity as a fluctuating, ongoing narrative formed by the various relationships in our lives. Gergen and Kaye stress the importance of relatedness and "human connectedness". Cooper and Olson suggest that the teacher's identity is shaped through social interaction. The teachers' relationship with their students, their colleagues and the institution where they work contribute towards their identity. However, in the process of creating our identity we sometimes draw a line between ourselves and the others, thus creating an 'other' who gives meaning to our identity. Through this process of othering we can degrade and discriminate against the people around us.



Feelings, especially those of dissatisfaction, are part of the identity. Britzman maintains that the educator's own unconscious desires play a part in the way he responds in different situations. The educator's desire for the love and affection of his students or his desire for authority can provoke him to act in a certain way. The educator must unearth first his own fears, love-hate relationships, conflicts and guilt, in order to be able to help his students with their conflicts and difficulties. The educator can overcome problems by adopting a brutally honest and deeply critical view of oneself, one that will allow him see himself for who he really is, and in this case asking questions like "Am I acting in this way because I want to be liked?" or „Do I have problem with relinquishing control and authority?“ is very important. The constructivist model of David Boud also focuses on feelings and it argues that failing to address our negative feelings could hinder us to learn from our experience. It is not only necessary to recognize the existence of feelings of dissatisfaction and frustration with our job or students, but we also have to tackle them.

Some scholars even point to popular stereotypes as a factor in the shaping of teacher identity. According to Mead, stereotypes from popular culture and childhood have a decisive influence on teacher identity. Britzman notes that stereotypes can suppress the identity of a teacher – male teachers are expected to put on a machismo identity thus denying them the possibility of other identities.

Several other factors are mentioned as well. Zembylas argues that "teacher identity is constantly becoming in a context embedded in power relations, ideology, and culture." Apart from cultural, sociological, and historical factors, Cooper and Olson also mention psychological factors and social norms as shaping agents of teacher identity.

Ways of understanding teacher identity

Reconstructing the teacher identity can be a form of informal learning which can lead to professional growth. The crucial factor in this kind of informal learning is the teacher's agency i.e. the teacher is an independent self-directed learner. Some scholars believe that teacher identity can be reconstructed with the help of ethnographic research.

Other ways are also suggested. Martin and Kompf suggest concept mapping and journaling as a way to help teachers better understand identity, and Mergendoller and Sacks suggest using concept mapping to measure change in teacher knowledge and beliefs caused by experience, education, and innovations.

Different adult learning perspectives such as constructivism, psychoanalytic, situative, critical cultural and ecological/enactivist perspective can be used to address different aspects of a teacher's identity.



Constructivism is part of the humanist tradition - it is “a humanist, learner-centered practice that assists adult learners in reflecting on their experience in order to construct new knowledge”. However, this perspective has some weaknesses. Firstly, constructivism proposes separation between the person and the context. Secondly, it considers experience as something concrete, it focuses on reflection thus depersonalizing the learner, and it ignores power and politics. Thirdly, it ignores social inequities and the fact that not all of us have the same affordances of learning due to our backgrounds.

The psychoanalytic perspective delves deep into the internal life of the individual, prompting one to face the difficult truths which Britzman calls “lost subjects”. Teachers sometimes place too much blame on external factors such as the students themselves, other teachers and prevalent teaching methods, failing to look at themselves with honesty and consider other factors such as their own job dissatisfaction. However, one of the weaknesses of the psychoanalytic orientation is the fact that it overlooks the importance of the context in which the individual finds himself.

Unlike the psychoanalytic perspective, the situative perspective recognizes that learning and the context in which it takes place are inseparable. Wilson says that “if we are to learn, we must become embedded in the culture in which the knowing and learning have meaning: conceptual frameworks cannot be meaningfully removed from their settings or practitioners”. According to the situative orientation knowledge is “part of the very process of participation in the immediate situation. Nevertheless, the situative perspective has several weaknesses. It disregards the possibility for learning to happen with the help of “intellectual concepts produced by reflection”. Wilson states that “adults don’t learn from experience, they learn in it”, thus downplaying the importance not only of reflection but also of past experience.

Power relations are central to the critical cultural perspective. Teachers face the power relations at the school, the power relations between younger and older teachers, between teachers and students. This perspective suggests that not addressing and resisting these power relations could limit one’s possibilities, whereas naming the mechanisms of power takes one closer to finding ways to overcome them and that opens one “to unexpected, unimagined possibilities for work, life and development”. Foley maintains that the critical cultural orientation can help teachers restore their self-confidence, which is the crucial ingredient that a teacher needs in order to be able to experiment, to be innovative and to inspire. Furthermore, this perspective can help people regain lost values. Freire claims that this perspective can turn people into “empowered agents of social change”, thus implying that resisting conventional and widely accepted teaching methods could have greater social impact. However, this perspective



has its own weaknesses. Some critics question a person's ability to learn solely through critical reflection and they criticize the critical cultural perspective for failing to acknowledge the importance of the hidden, subconscious desires in learning and identity. Other critics argue that empowerment efforts can lead to manipulation and repression, and therefore the educator's responsibility has to be addressed.

The ecological/ enactivist perspective deems the person and context inseparable. However, this orientation does not focus on each component of experience separately, but on the relationships that connect them together and bring about their co-emergence. However, an orientation that advocates emergence of the person with the setting does not leave much room for the individual. The ecological/ enactivist perspective also fails to address power relations.

Conclusion

Teacher identity is a complex, changing narrative that is shaped by numerous factors throughout the teacher's entire life. The setting and the wider context that a teacher finds himself/herself in, the past experiences, professional knowledge, the various relationships in the teacher's life, his/her feelings, unconscious desires, fears, love-hate relationships, conflicts and guilt play a part in the teacher identity. Popular stereotypes, power relations and social norms can also shape the teacher identity.

In order to improve one's teaching, a teacher needs to be able to recognize and understand these factors. To do so, a teacher can use different methods and adult learning perspectives that encourage self-examination such as constructivism, psychoanalytic, situative, critical cultural and ecological/ enactivist perspective, as well as ethnographic research, concept mapping and journaling.

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