

Being, Becoming, and Belonging: Professional Identity of Teacher Educators

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Abstract

Teacher education plays an essential role in shaping the quality of education, and teacher educators are central to this process. The paper explores the personal and professional aspects that constitute the professional identity of teacher educators, shedding light on their journey from classroom teachers to facilitators of fellow educators' growth. This article delves into the intricate model of professional identity of teacher educators, examining the dimensions of being, becoming, and belonging within this dynamic role. The concept of 'being' a teacher educator encompasses the multifaceted roles and functions these educators undertake. The aspect of 'becoming' a teacher educator focuses on the transition from classroom teaching to teacher education. The paper examines the two prominent pathways into this role: the academic pathway, driven by advanced academic pursuits, and the practitioner's pathway, chosen by experienced educators seeking a shift from schools to training institutions. The concept of 'identity shock' during this transition is explored, along with the heightened intellectual engagement that emerges as teacher educator's grapple with new challenges and opportunities. The theme of 'belonging' uncovers teacher educators' affiliations with various communities, each shaping their professional identity. The paper highlights the role of collective affinities in shaping teacher educators' teaching methods, research endeavours, and leadership approaches.

Keywords: professional identity, teacher educators, teacher education, school communities.

Быть, становиться и принадлежать: профессиональная идентичность педагогов высшей школы

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Аннотация

Педагогическое образование играет важную роль в формировании качественного образования, и преподаватели высшей школы занимают центральное место в этом процессе. В статье рассматриваются личностные и профессиональные аспекты профессиональной идентичности педагогов высшей школы, их профессиональный путь от классного руководителя до фасилитатора.

В статье анализируется сложная модель профессиональной идентичности преподавателя через призму «бытия», «становления» и «принадлежности». Понятие «быть» включает в себя разные роли и функции, которые выполняет педагог. Аспект «становления» сосредоточен на переходе педагога от классного руководителя до педагога высшей школы. В исследовании рассматриваются два основных пути перехода на эту роль – академический (с акцентом на научные исследования) и практический. Вторым вариантом выбирают опытные педагоги, желающие перейти из школы в высшие учебные заведения. Изучается понятие «шок идентичности» при переходе на новую роль, а также повышенная интеллектуальная активность, возникающая по мере того, как преподаватель решает новые задачи и использует новые возможности. Аспект «принадлежность» раскрывает включение педагогов в различные сообщества, которые формируют их профессиональную идентичность. В статье исследуется роль трудовых отношений внутри коллектива в формировании методов преподавания, исследовательской деятельности и подходов к управлению.

Ключевые слова: профессиональная идентичность, педагоги высшей школы, педагогическое образование, школьные сообщества.

Introduction

Teacher education stands as a cornerstone of educational advancement, playing a pivotal role in shaping the quality of instruction, student learning outcomes, and the overall development of societies. It equips educators with the knowledge, skills, and competencies required to effectively navigate the complexities of modern classrooms. Teacher education serves as a platform for educators to gain a deep understanding of pedagogical theories, methodologies, and best practices (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). During their training, teachers gain insights into evidence-based instructional strategies that cater to diverse learning styles and abilities. As a result, they are better equipped to create engaging, inclusive, and effective learning environments that promote student engagement and active participation (Darling-Hammond, 2017). A well-structured teacher education program equips educators with the tools to design dynamic lesson plans, employ innovative technologies, and differentiate instruction to meet the needs of every student (Zeichner & Conklin, 2008). But unfortunately, teacher education was seen at times “as a marginal part of the university, criticized for its lack of rigour, but discouraged from trying to be anything else” (Lanier & Little, 1986, p. 565). Teacher education is not given the due importance in university life then how the role of teacher educator, one of the important factors of teacher education, can be perceived?

Teacher educators are not only skilled teachers themselves, but also play a crucial role in cultivating the skills and dispositions of aspiring teachers. The professional identity of teacher educators is a dynamic amalgamation of pedagogical expertise, scholarly inquiry, and a deep commitment to shaping the future of education. Their identity is rooted in a rich tapestry of experiences, encompassing both classroom teaching and the scholarly pursuit of educational research. Teacher educators serve as role models, imparting not only subject knowledge and instructional strategies, but also fostering a reflective and growth-oriented mindset among their students. This multifaceted identity is further defined by a dedication to staying attuned to the evolving landscape of education, adapting their approaches to align with new methodologies, technologies, and cultural shifts. As conduits of knowledge and transformation, teacher educators wield significant influence in shaping the standards and practices of education, leaving an indelible mark on both individual educators and the broader educational ecosystem. A teacher educator's journey involves self-discovery, continuous growth, and a sense of connection to the larger educational community. This article delves into the concepts of being, becoming, and belonging in the context of teacher educators' professional identity, highlighting their profound impact on pedagogical practices, professional development, and the overall enhancement of the education system.

Literature Review

A substantial body of literature emphasizes the significance of teacher cognition, expertise, and decision-making within the educational context (Elbaz, 1983, 1991; Schon, 1983 Shulman, 1987). Considerable attention has been given to teacher identity (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Day, 2004; Korthagen, 2004), the intersection of professional and personal aspects in teaching (MacLure, 1993a; Palmer, 1998), and the socio-cultural dimensions of classroom dynamics (Bishop & Glynn, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nuthall, 1999). In other words, what school teachers think, what they value, the pedagogies they believe in, who they are as personalities, and how they relate to learners and to one another as a professional community affect student outcomes. By extrapolation, it is reasonable to infer that these factors are significant in the context of teacher education also. If the effectiveness of school teaching is substantially influenced by both the identity of the teachers and their methods and content of instruction, it follows that the quality of teacher education is likewise susceptible to influenced teacher educators' identities, instructional approaches, and subject matter.

But what do we know about teacher educators? How do teacher educators play a vital role in preparing and empowering the teachers of tomorrow?

When considering the fundamental aspects of teacher educators, there seems to be a noticeable deficiency in the foundational comprehension of the social attributes that constitute teacher educators as a professional collective across most regions. Lanier and Little (1986, p. 528) assert that there even exists uncertainty among researchers regarding the very definition of this group, labelling them as an “ambiguous and inadequately grasped” entity. However, contemporary research endeavours concerning teacher educators often prioritize qualitative insights into their professional encounters and engagements over quantitative demographic data. This tendency is particularly pronounced when it comes to narratives that hold potential for shaping a nascent pedagogical theory specific to teacher education or for fostering a broader scholarly comprehension of teacher education. These narratives build upon established conceptual, theoretical, and methodological frameworks.

The significant and indispensable contributions of teacher educators have endured a period of being undervalued and insufficiently recognized (Turney & Wright, 1990, p. 6). Nearly a generation ago, Lanier and Little (1986, p. 528) asserted that “studies on teacher education frequently overlook the attributes, actions, and perspectives of teacher educators”. In the 1986 edition of the *Handbook of Research on Teachers* (Wittrock, 1986), only a single chapter is devoted to examining research pertinent to teacher education, and this chapter paints a grim and unflattering portrait of the state of teacher education at large. It characterizes teacher education as simplistic, devoid of intellectual rigor, lacking in challenge, incapable of attracting adept individuals, and existing within an environment that hampers scholarly pursuits.

Collectively, these factors contributed to the perception that teacher education occupied a peripheral status within the university system. It was criticized for a perceived dearth of rigor while simultaneously being discouraged from pursuing transformative changes (Lanier & Little, 1986). Subsequent editions of the *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education* (Ball et al., 1990; Gold et al., 1996) also provide limited coverage of teacher education, allocating only one chapter each to practitioners in this domain.

Ironically, despite a renewed enthusiasm for teacher education as a subject of both policy discourse and research, a persistent void persists in empirical investigations pertaining to teacher educators themselves. Although a wealth of knowledge has been amassed regarding various aspects of teacher education, particularly its contentious curriculum (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005) and formal practices of teacher educators

(Loughran, 2013; Loughran et al., 2007), evident gaps remain within the existing body of literature.

As a profession inherently knowledgeable about its function, methodologies, and underlying rationale, teacher education should empower teacher educators to advocate for themselves, shape their own trajectory, and grapple earnestly with the expectations, prerequisites, and pressures they encounter. A comprehensive understanding of the roles undertaken by teacher educators mandates an exploration of their professional identity, given its profound impact on the calibre of their contributions. For new and inexperienced educators, critical aspects of identity research encompass the connections between their identity and the phenomenon of teacher turnover (Cochran-Smith et al., 2012), the conflicts arising when teachers grapple with the demands of their early profession (Pillen et al., 2013), and the impact of emotional events on the formation of their professional identity. These recurring themes highlight the exploration of how identities shape the personality of teachers and are shaped by the experiences and decisions of novices within their new educational environment.

Method

This article is based on the review of related research on professional identity of teacher educators and the author's own experiences as a teacher educator.

Professional Identity

Professional identity refers to the beliefs, values, and actions that define a particular profession and its practitioners. It encompasses both personal and vocational dimensions of an individual's identity, incorporating their background, skills, and expertise. Within the realm of teacher education, professional identity carries particular importance. It moulds the self-perception of teacher educators and plays a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of education. Additionally, it influences their ability to prepare and guide the next generation of educators.

Identity is a complex and abstract notion that has been explored theoretically across a variety of disciplines. Identity is negotiated within a social environment. Discussions of identity often focus on constructing the self; however, an individual's identity is also affected by the interaction that he/she has with others in particular contexts (Sfard, 1998). Professional identity is a multifaceted concept that plays a crucial role in shaping the trajectory of individuals within various fields, including education. Professional identity development is influenced by a complex interplay of personal experiences, social interactions, and the broader societal context.

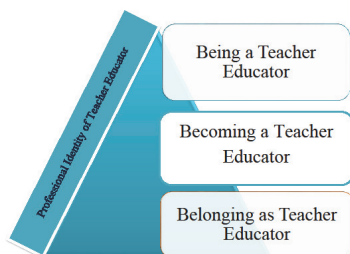
As Nickel & Zimmer (2018) highlight, professional identity is not solely about adopting a role, but it involves an ongoing process of negotiation and reflection. This process involves aligning personal values and aspirations with the norms and expectations of the profession. Furthermore, the authors emphasize that the development of professional identity is not linear but rather dynamic and constantly evolving as individuals engage in various professional experiences and contexts. Professional identity is negotiated within a social environment. Discussions of identity often focus on constructing the self. Social interactions, mentorship, and collaborations with colleagues all contribute to the construction of a professional identity (Beijaard et al., 2004). According to Beijaard et al. (2004), teachers' professional identities are influenced not only by their personal beliefs and values but also by the expectations of their peers, administrators, and the broader educational community. In the realm of education, teacher professional identity holds particular significance. As researchers Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) emphasize,

teachers' identities are shaped by their experiences in the classroom, their relationships with students, and their interactions with colleagues. These interactions contribute to the development of a sense of belonging and professional purpose.

Professional identity also influences educators' instructional practices and pedagogical approaches. As Day and Kington (2008) assert, teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning are deeply intertwined with their professional identity. How teachers perceive themselves within the larger educational landscape significantly impacts their instructional choices, their interactions with students, and their overall effectiveness as educators. In the field of education, teacher professional identity is not only a product of individual reflection but also an outcome of interactions with colleagues, mentors, and students. It plays a pivotal role in influencing educators' instructional practices, shaping their professional aspirations, and ultimately impacting the quality of education they provide. The professional identity of teacher educators is a multifaceted concept that involves a complex interplay of beliefs, experiences, and roles within the education field (Day, 2004; Korthagen, 2004). This intricate blend of personal attributes and academic expertise shapes their teaching practices, instructional approaches, and interactions with both aspiring and practicing teachers. Teacher educators' professional identity acts as a guiding force, influencing their dedication to nurturing a community of reflective educators and facilitating the cultivation of effective teaching (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Zeichner & Conklin, 2008). This identity goes beyond the transmission of subject knowledge; it encompasses their roles as mentors, researchers, and proponents of innovative teaching methods, all of which contribute to the advancement and transformation of the educational field (Feiman-Nemser & Carver 2012; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). The intricate nature of this professional identity underscores its profound impact on the quality of teacher education and the educators it produces.

Model of Professional Identity of Teacher Educators

What are the key components of a teacher educator's professional identity? I believe there are three: being, becoming, and belonging.



Being a teacher educator

Our identity is perceived differently by others as compared to how we perceive ourselves. To others, our identity is often defined by our actions and knowledge. Yet, to our own selves, our identity is shaped by our thoughts, emotions, and beliefs. In a way, professional identity is a publicly observable concept, as it reflects the professional aspect of our identity. This is evident in the literature that explores various dimensions of teacher educators' professional identity, such as their career transitions, perceptions of their roles, and their specialized expertise. However, in the initial phase of teacher educators' identity development, it is essential to delve more deeply into the personal dimension of professional identity. Therefore, any exploration of teacher educators'

professional identity that solely focuses on career history, tasks, and expertise is incomplete. For teacher educators, understanding the relationship between their personal and professional aspects is essential. This involves examining how the “personal” aspect intertwines with the “professional” aspect. Teaching and teacher education inherently involve interactions with others, emphasizing the social and external orientation of these activities. Nevertheless, professional identity remains a profoundly personal experience. While it may be expressed outwardly, its core is situated within our inner selves.

It is shaped not only by external pressures but also by our internal sense of self and emotions. Our professional identity emerges from our personal sense of existence, as well as our emotional responses to external influences. This interplay between personal and external factors can be understood through Mead's concept of the ‘I’ and the ‘Me’ - the dialectic between our individual experience and our societal roles. This includes delving into their self-perception, self-image, and their general sense of ‘being’ in the role of a teacher educator.

Being a teacher educator encompasses various roles and functions, including that of a teacher, researcher, scholar, and community leader. However, merely listing these roles falls short of capturing the holistic experience and conceptualization of being a teacher educator. While performing these roles, what different “personae” they adopt, and how these “personae” emotionally resonate with them? This aspect of “being” involves exploring their evolving self-perception, beginning with an examination of the diverse roles they embodied in their professional lives. The exploration entails understanding how teacher educators perceived their multifaceted professional roles, shedding light on the challenges and conflicts that arose, ultimately shaping the emotional landscape of being a teacher educator. This discussion captures the intricacies of their evolving self-identity and the emotional complexities intertwined with the role.

Professional Personae: Identity as a ‘Lived Life’

The concept of professional personae embodies the dynamic interplay between personal identity and professional roles, illustrating how individuals navigate their roles and responsibilities within a specific context. As Goffman (1959) suggests, these personae are akin to “front-stage performances” in which individuals strategically present themselves to meet societal expectations. This notion is echoed in the realm of education, where teachers often adopt different roles, such as instructors, mentors, and classroom managers, to effectively engage with students and fulfil their pedagogical duties (Bullough, 2015). Moreover, the concept of professional personae is not limited to teachers; it extends to teacher educators who wear various hats, including that of a teacher, mentor, researcher, and leader. Just as Goffman's theory underlines the idea of managing impressions, teacher educators similarly navigate their professional personae to align with their multifaceted roles and the expectations of their field. Understanding the intricate balance between personal identity and professional roles sheds light on the complex nature of education as a “lived life”, where individuals harmonize their personal selves with the demands of their profession.

A prominent theme in research on school teacher cognition revolves around the challenge of teachers effectively differentiating their personal identity from their professional identity. Teaching in schools is often described as a form of performance, akin to a theatrical act, albeit with a distinct difference. Unlike the mere analogy of assuming a different persona for a play, teachers perceive their role as an authentic fusion of their personal and professional facets, incorporating both emotional and cognitive dimensions (Denzin, 1984; Hargreaves, 1998; Nias, 1996). In contrast to professions like law or medicine, where detachment and objectivity are upheld, teachers embrace

emotional engagement with their students. They view emotional involvement as integral to their role, as captured by Berci's concept of "teaching who they are" (Berci, 2007, p. 73). Palmer (1998) further underscores this connection between teaching and the teacher's identity and integrity, affirming that teaching emanates from the core of who the teacher is.

The identity literature introduces the concept that our sense of self is not a singular entity; rather, it is better understood as a complex interplay of overlapping, dynamic, and relative aspects. This perspective acknowledges the existence of multiple "selves", each undergoing constant reconstruction and finding expression in the various roles and personas adopted throughout our professional endeavours. This notion of multifaceted identity emphasizes the ever-changing and context-dependent nature of our identities. Future research on teacher educator's professional identity must focus on: What 'possible selves' emerge from the professional lives? How they see themselves as being teacher educator? And what are the consequences when these selves are at odds with the expectations of others?

Becoming a teacher educator

"Becoming a teacher educator" signifies a profound journey, in which educators evolve from classroom teaching to becoming facilitators of fellow educators' growth. This transition involves adopting fresh roles, responsibilities, and viewpoints within education. As pointed out by Berci (2007), this process is beyond the transfer of teaching methods; it necessitates a complex interplay of personal identity, professional expertise, and the ability to mentor and guide aspiring teachers. Navigating this shift demands an understanding of adult learning and pedagogy, along with the skill to model effective teaching practices and encourage reflective thinking in future educators (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). The path to becoming a teacher educator is a dynamic expedition requiring ongoing self-reflection, adaptability, and an unwavering commitment to advancing the teaching field. Socio-culturalists believe that an individual's professional identity emerges from continual social negotiation. It is an amalgamation of career history, experiences adapting to new contexts, and intrinsic attributes. However, despite this societal interplay, an individual's professional identity is primarily rooted in their own psychological lens. It is constructed by their perception of self within their professional domain, rather than being solely determined by external viewpoints. Essentially, one's professional identity is a convergence of past experiences and future aspirations, akin to Mead's 'Me' and 'I' dialectic. My own professional identity is shaped by my previous roles and experiences, while also being molded by my professional motivations, goals, and aspirations. It is an amalgamation of these aspects, rather than being singularly defined.

This segment of the teacher educator's professional identity model emphasizes the facets of professional identity that emerged through discussions about teacher educators' past professional trajectories, their choice to transition into teacher education, and their initial encounters and perceptions of the role. I delved into their current standing as a result of their past journey, considering their career background, experiences, motivations, aspirations, expectations of the role, and the "identity shock" commonly reported during their move to teacher education. In historical Western contexts, there appears to be two main discernible pathways into the role of a teacher educator—or three, if a part-time combination of these two is considered as the third route.

The academic pathway

The initial route, referred to as the "academic pathway", is pursued by both seasoned and novice educators who opt for advanced academic pursuits such as a Master's or a

doctorate at a university. This decision can be driven by the desire to enhance teaching practice in preparation for a return to the classroom or with the aspiration of entering an academic career as a teacher educator. Essentially, individuals embark on the journey towards teacher education with the ultimate goal of becoming a teacher educator.

Practitioner's pathway

The alternate route, referred to as the 'practitioner's pathway', is pursued by skilled and accomplished educators, frequently holding middle or senior managerial roles within schools. This path is especially prominent among individuals entering secondary teacher education. In such cases, experienced educators transit directly from their positions within schools to roles within teacher training institutions. These institutions may include universities or, historically, special colleges of education. This choice is often made as an alternative to pursuing further advancement within the hierarchical structure of schools.

Developing Professional Identity: a pathway to becoming teacher educator

Identity shock

Several studies focusing on the transition to becoming a teacher educator underscore the intricate nature of this shift and the frequently overlooked challenges it presents (Acker, 1997; Acker & Feuerverger, 1996; Ducharme, 1996; Kremer-Hayon & Zuzovsky, 1995; Murray & Male, 2005). For individuals who carry their identities as teachers into their new roles, this dynamic often triggers a crisis in their professional identity (Dinkelman et al., 2006) as they grapple with reconciling new social and professional responsibilities, norms, and values within an unfamiliar institution.

Induction

The challenges encountered by numerous teacher educators during their transition to this role are frequently linked to inadequate or unsuitable formal onboarding upon entering the academic realm. These difficulties are also commonly associated with the persisting issue, as indicated by Loughran et al. (2007), of the prevalent culture of intense individualism and professional isolationism that defines the conventional norms within academia.

Transition

The reaction to the identity shock during the transition phase can also manifest as a "heightened intellectual engagement", a period in which the opportunity to formulate a distinct philosophy, expand one's knowledge, stay current, and advance professionally is welcomed as a stimulating challenge rather than endured as an obligatory task.

Belonging as a teacher educator

Teacher education embodies a dual nature. On the one hand, it confronts the demands of classrooms and schools, necessitating practicality, competence, and technique. On the other hand, it faces the realm of academia and research, emphasizing scholarly pursuits, theoretical richness, and disciplinary rigor (Taylor, 1983, as cited in Maguire, 2000). Teacher educators find themselves entangled in a landscape of poorly defined and often conflicting practices, serving numerous and sometimes contrast authorities (Sindelar & Rosenberg, 2000).

From the standpoint of "belonging", this perspective delves into the elements of teacher educators' professional identities that emerge in response to their social and

institutional contexts. It explores the communities they feel a sense of belonging to and those they do not, along with their collective affiliations and loyalties. The focus is on the individual and collective tensions they experience while navigating the expectations, responsibilities, and professional loyalties of various groups. This perspective also examines how they view themselves not only as individuals with inherent value but as integral members of an esteemed professional collective. The following elements describe their belongings as teacher educators:

Collective Affinities as Professional Identity:

Teacher educators are not isolated entities; they are deeply embedded in various communities that shape their professional identity. These collective affinities play a crucial role in defining who they are as educators. These affiliations extend beyond mere association, encompassing shared values, beliefs, and goals. Teacher educators find their professional identity intertwined with these collective groups, and their interactions within these communities significantly influence their teaching approaches, perspectives, and aspirations.

The 'Multiple Mandate' Revisited:

The concept of the “multiple mandate” underscores the multifaceted roles teacher educators undertake. They are simultaneously mentors, researchers, scholars, community leaders, and subject matter experts. This intricate mandate introduces a layer of complexity to their professional identity. Straddling these diverse roles requires teacher educators to adeptly navigate varying expectations and responsibilities. As they engage with these roles, their identity continually evolves, shaped by the demands of these different facets of their profession.

Academic Communities:

Within the academic realm, teacher educators find themselves immersed in communities of scholars and researchers. These communities emphasize theoretical depth, rigorous inquiry, and intellectual exchange. Engaging with academic communities fosters the cultivation of scholarship and the pursuit of knowledge. As teacher educators contribute to and collaborate with these communities, their professional identity evolves to encompass scholarly rigor and a commitment to advancing educational understanding.

Communities of Fellow Subject Leaders:

Teacher educators often belong to communities of fellow subject leaders. These communities focus on specific disciplines, fostering a deep connection to subject matter expertise. Collaborating with peers who share a passion for the same subject enriches their professional identity by emphasizing mastery of content and pedagogical innovation. These communities provide a platform for refining teaching strategies and staying current with subject-specific advancements.

School Communities:

While teacher educators may have transitioned from traditional classroom teaching, their connection to school communities persists. These communities bring a practical perspective to their professional identity. They bridge the gap between academia and real-world classroom dynamics. Engaging with school communities maintains their awareness of practical challenges, teaching realities, and the evolving needs of educators in the field. This connection to school communities ensures that their professional identity remains grounded in the practical implications of their work.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the professional identity of teacher educators is complex and multifaceted. Being, becoming, and belonging are essential components of this identity. As teacher educators, we must embrace our role as teachers of teachers, continually work to improve our skills and knowledge, and collaborate with others to shape the future of education.

The professional identity of teacher educators is an intricate amalgamation of collective affinities that span academic, subject-focused, and school-based communities. Their engagement with these communities shapes their multifaceted roles and responsibilities, influencing their teaching methods, research endeavours, and leadership approaches. This dynamic interaction with various collectives contributes to the evolution of their professional identity, reflecting their commitment to scholarship, teaching excellence, and the holistic advancement of education.

It is important for the future of any profession that we document and learn from the experiences of those currently in the profession (Cooper et al., 1999). Let us work together to create a future where all students have access to high-quality education and all teachers have the support and resources they need to succeed.

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