

Integrating Reflective Practice and Identity Formation in Teacher Education: Emerging Themes from Current Researches

Samina Mustafa (Corresponding Author)

M.Phil. Scholar, Department of Education, PMAS, Arid Agriculture University, Rawalpindi

Email: saminamustafa68@gmail.com

Laquman Rafaqat

M.Phil. Scholar, Department of Education, PMAS, Arid Agriculture University, Rawalpindi

Email: laqmanrafaqat@gmail.com

Saiyida Masooma Jafari

M.Phil. Scholar, Department of Education, PMAS, Arid Agriculture University, Rawalpindi

Email: jmasooma12@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The qualitative study explores the intersection between reflective practice and teacher identity formation within the multifaceted landscape of teacher education. By comprehending that teacher identity is a dynamic and changing construct that is determined by personal beliefs, experiences, and contextual forces, the research aims to provide formal analysis of how reflection is used as a career development path and self-awareness. Specifically, it targets (1) tracing the key themes in the interplay between reflection and identity in teacher education, (2) the analysis of contextual facilitators and barriers that affect the identity work of reflection, as well as (3) propose a conceptual framework positioning reflection as a central identity formation. Drawing on an interpretive analysis of the literature available and the qualitative insights, the study reveals that the reflection process is a transformative one within the framework of which the teachers construct meaning and go against assumptions and negotiate the changing professional identities. Findings highlight that supportive mentoring, collaborative discourse, and reflective school cultures are very facilitating to identity development and policy demands, accountability and absence of reflective time are very strong deterrents. The provided conceptual framework is built with all three personal, professional, and contextual dimensions of reflection and prioritized with the fact that the latter is an output of identity construction and a process at that. Overall, the study argues that teacher education must move beyond technical approaches to reflection toward identity-centered practices that engage the whole person—mind, heart, and context. When reflection as a key element of pedagogy is internalized in teacher education programmes, it can result in self-reflective, agency

and versatile professionals who can manage complexity and create positive changes in education.

Keywords: Reflective Practice, Identity Formation and teacher Education

Introduction

The overlap between reflective practice and teacher identity formation has been cited as such that are both complementary dimensions of teacher education, particularly in the process of preparing school educators with the skills to work in more complex and emergent school environments. Reflective practice enables teachers to subject their beliefs, experiences and practice to critical review therefore leading to increased professional growth. Meanwhile, the teacher identity or the manner in which the teachers establish themselves as what they represent and how they are doing their job is known as a dynamic concept in comparison to the fixed concept (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009). Within the context of teacher education, consideration of reflection as an identity making tool that is intentionally incorporated in teacher education promises a lot to revolutionize the how and the who of teaching.

In studies of teacher education, the concept of teacher identity has been analyzed as an analytic concept and an outcome of development. On the one hand, identity also offers the paradigm, with the help of which one can consider incorporation of numerous personal, cultural, institutional and pedagogical factors by student-teachers (Olsen, 2008). On the other hand, identity can be a structuring factor of professional life of a teacher: this is a resource that people use to describe them with reference to others, defend and justify themselves and the world around them (MacLure, 1993, p. 311). The two-sided view of the concept of identity as both a process and product is especially relevant to the situation of teacher educators who attempt to encourage productive development of the profession, rather than technical mastery.

Reflective practice has been viewed as one of the most vital processes in teacher development and it is suggested through the recent researches that it also plays an important role in terms of developing teacher identity. Reflection also helps teachers to be aware of the inner talk, emotion response and contextual influence, which, in its turn, enables the teacher to give meaning to the emergent professional identity (Rodgers and Scott, 2008). As the case in point, according to recent studies, structured reflection enables pre-service and in-service teachers to articulate their pedagogical beliefs, cope with the tension between personal values and institutional demands, and acquire the more coherent professional identities in the long run (Azim, 2023; Pandey and Mohanty, 2025). These findings underline the importance of introducing reflective opportunities in teaching education not only to enhance practice, but also identity work.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that the correlation between reflective practice and identity formation has been established as an impressive one, the literature reveals that there are enormous gaps and challenges. The definitions of identity of teachers are inconsistent, and some of the terms used in two definitions such as construction, formation, development and making also use interchangeably (Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop, 2004). Besides, despite reflection being an inseparable aspect of teacher education programmes, the reflection practice has been taken in a hasty manner, as an

exercise and not as a catalyst to identity exploration (Lesnick, 2005). The institutional culture, mentoring systems, emotional labour, and overall the socio-cultural environment are the situational influences of both the identity and reflection that are not well-comprised within the programme design. Such a gap requires a research that generalises the emerging new themes and makes a valid implication on teacher education.

The proposed study will thus seek to provide a systematic review of how reflective practice and teacher identity formation have been intersected in current research, emergent themes and provide implications to the way teacher education programmes are designed and executed. Being more specific, the given research project is supposed to assist in (1) mapping primary themes in the interplay of reflection and identity in teacher education; (2) exploring the contextual facilitators and inhibitors of the successful identity work by reflection; and (3) proposing a theoretical framework that can project reflective practice as a pathway through which identity can be constructed within the context of teacher education. Through doing this, the study will help teacher educators, curriculum designers and policy-makers to rethink teacher preparation as a becoming process, and not a doing process.

Literature Support

Objective 1: Mapping Key Themes in the Interplay between Reflection and Teacher Identity in Teacher Education

The interaction between reflection and teacher identity has been a major area of focus in the contemporary studies in teacher education field. Scholars generally agree that the reflective process is an exemplification between educators since they can accumulate on, negotiate and reconstruct professional identities over time (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009; Korthagen, 2017). Within this body of work, several key themes are identified.

First, the meaning-making process, which helps teachers to attribute the personal beliefs, previous experiences, and pedagogical values to the professional anticipation and classroom reality, is referred to as reflection (Schön, 1983; Farrell, 2016). Reflective practice helps teachers to self-reflect, critically search with their suppositions, and explain themselves and their desired image as practitioners.

Second, the authors of the studies pay attention to relational and dialogic nature of reflection, and suggest an idea that identity formation is not a singular process but a social interaction a dialogue and cooperation (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011; Loughran, 2002). Reflexive conversations with mentors, peers and learners provide arenas of negotiating sense whereby newly constructed professional identities are challenged against external perceptions.

Third, reflection is also viewed as a transformative practice that improves agency and resilience. The critical reflection of the disparity between their concept of the teachers and the limitations of the institution can be perceived as a professional re-authoring, which can help them become better capable of acting purposefully in complicated classroom contexts (Mezirow, 2000; Sachs, 2016).

Finally, literature states that depth and quality of reflective varies based on pedagogical plan by the teacher education programmes. A vast majority of the well-designed reflection experiences, in particular those supported by the use of narrative

inquiry, portfolio work, and mentoring, will result in the more profound identity working than the superficial or procedural reflection experiences (Zeichner and Liston, 2014; Beauchamp, 2015).

Overall, it can be stated that studies show that reflection and identity construction are constitutive of each other: as much as reflection enables educators to formulate their professional identities and develop them, identity provides reflection with the prism through which it is perceived and practiced. Mapping of these themes suggests that the teacher education programmes should be geared towards making reflection more than a skill it should be a process of making a teacher.

Objective 2: Exploring the Contextual Enablers and Barriers to Effective Identity Work via Reflection

Teacher identity formation in the context of reflection is not an individual phenomenon, even though it is deeply rooted in the contextual, relational and institutional environment. Research is always eager to point out that sociocultural in teacher training and schooling either favor or constrain the capacity of teachers to experience deep and transformational reflection (Flores and Day, 2006; Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop, 2004).

Favorable professional communities and mentorship relationships are some of the most important enablers. The sense of belonging and the safety to experiment with identity provided by the collegial talk, feedback, and collaborative reflection found in the communities of practice (Wenger, 1998, p. 23; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Izadinia, 2016). Reflective dialogue and narrative, which are grounded on teacher education programmes, are processes that enable pre-service teachers, as well as in-service teachers, to meaningfully make sense of experience in a collective way and understand identity as a collective creation and not a possession (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011; Zeichner, 2020). Furthermore, institutional cultures (where the reflection and autonomy are treasured) assist teachers to experiment and take risks, as well as to integrate personal beliefs and professional needs (Sachs, 2016; Mockler, 2011).

Conversely, deterrents to effective identity work tend to be due to structural and cultural constraints in the educational systems. The high-stakes accountability, prescriptive curricula and performance based testing can limit the agency of the teachers and render reflection as a procedure or compliance-based activity (Kelchtermans, 2009; Day and Gu, 2010). Similarly, hierarchies, school systems where time to participate in professional discussion is limited, are likely to dishearten the kind of profound consideration needed to form an identity in a significant sense (Flores, 2020; Beauchamp, 2015). When it comes to pre-service teachers, it has been identified that tensions exist between the ideals and standards on the university level and the reality of classroom practice that can create dissonance, which, in its turn, may become a barrier to reflective practice (Cattley, 2007; Trent, 2013).

According to the recent study, the contextual congruency of institutional expectation, mentorship, and reflective practices is extremely crucial to the identity formation (Korthagen and Nuijten, 2022). The teachers are more apt to critically reflect on their professional experiences and hold on to a growing sense of self, when reflective opportunities have been included in actual, supportive, and dialogic contexts. Thus,

the skill of the reflection must not be taught only by teacher education but provide the environment which helps to develop the reflective identity work, where the voices, emotions and the professional ambitions of the teachers are not overlooked.

Objective 3: Proposing a Conceptual Framework that Positions Reflective Practice as a Pathway to Identity Formation within Teacher Education

The reflective practice as a way to form identity as a teacher is conceptualized based on the premise that professional learning is not only about the skills acquisition, but it is also an ongoing process of becoming (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009; Rodgers and Scott, 2008). Reflection facilitates the connection between experience and meaning-making, as it allows teachers to explain their actions, beliefs, and contexts in a process of self-reflection and reconstruction which continues and cannot be stopped (Schoen, 1983; Korthagen, 2017).

Within this framework, reflective practice functions at three interconnected levels:

Personal Reflection – Teachers take into account their values and past experiences and emotional response and foster the feeling of self-awareness and alignment between their personal and professional experience (Kelchtermans, 2009; Korthagen and Vasalos, 2005).

Professional Reflection Teachers review with criterion their pedagogical decisions, their interaction with students and classroom affairs in order to achieve the educational objectives and moral responsibilities (Larrivee, 2008; Farrell, 2016).

Contextual Reflection- Teachers put their practice into the framework of broader sociocultural, institutional, and policy structures in which power, culture and systemic constraints on identity and agency are recognized (Sachs, 2016; Mockler, 2011).

The proposed conceptual framework is a blend of these three dimensions which demonstrates the mediating role of reflection in the association between experience, interpretation and identity transformation. Essentially, reflection initiates a recursive cycle of observing, deconstructing, and redefining meaning that accumulates to an educator self-concept and professional mission (Korthagen and Nuijten, 2022).

Besides, this model makes identity an outcome and a factor of the reflection. The aspect of who teachers are influences what they choose to reflect on, how they come to a sense of their experiences and what they make of their knowledge (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011). Conversely, identity develops due to reflective dialogue and narrative expression that cause teachers to gain increased agency, resilience and flexibility (Clarke, 2009; Mezirow, 2000).

It is also relevant that the model sheds light on the embeddedness of reflective identity work in a context. Supportive institutional cultures, relationships with mentors and communities of practice are essential in reflective engagement and identity development (Wenger, 1998; Izadinia, 2016). Repeated reflection of this nature incorporated into genuine and dialogic, emotionally secure, learning environments will enable it to be a transformative process, which will enable teachers to abandon performative compliance and embark into the world of critical self-authorship (Zeichner, 2020; Flores, 2020).

Concisely, the framework conceptualizes reflective practice as an activity and a route through which teachers are able to develop, exercise and sustain professional identities. It requires that teacher education programmes must move to technical reflection, and must move to practices that promote the growth of identity awareness, contextual knowledge and agency, and thereby the development of good practitioners, reflective professionals capable of making change to educational practices.

More emerging themes from Literature Review

Complexities in Conceptualizing Teacher Identity

The identification of teacher identity is another issue that is the most complicated in the study of teacher education. Defining identity is not an easy task; it entails a maneuver in many ways intersecting many dimensions which determine how individuals perceive themselves as teachers. The identity is also related to the concept of the self that comprises personal beliefs, feelings, values, and experiences, which define the professional life of an individual (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009). The emotional dimension of teaching should also be considered in any effort to make the meaning of identity since the sense of belonging, confidence and vulnerability are significant dimensions that define how a teacher perceives himself and others (Zembylas, 2003). Also, the type of stories that the teachers make, stories that they tell about their careers may be considered as powerful lenses with the assistance of which identity is formed in addition to being displayed.

The other place of complexity is the identity development due to reflection. Reflective practice assists the teacher to critically review their experiences, beliefs and classroom activities and consequently recreating self-understanding contexts in regards to professional contexts (Rodgers and Scott, 2008). Through reflection, the teachers carry out what we may term identity work that would entail balancing between the values and the outside pressures of the profession. As it has been demonstrated in this discussion, identity and agency are related and how teachers may exert power over their professional discourses despite limiting institutional and social structures (Eteläpelto et al., 2013).

Contextual factors are important and they assist in the teacher identity formation process. Institutional cultures, collegial relations, policy requirements and sociocultural demands may enable or restrict the sense of self- and agency among teachers (Day et al., 2006). Education programs on teacher education thus play a critical role of providing spaces and pedagogical possibilities that entail exploration, dialogue and these processes of constant (re)construction of professional identity. Unless teachers are actively in favor of such reflective and dialogic practices, they cannot easily bring their personal and professional selves together in a consistent way. Though, this discussion cannot give a full survey of the broad spectrum of literature regarding the concept of identity, it will endeavor to forecast key issues and interdependencies that have been established in the recent studies within the area of teaching and teacher education. The next significant fact that should be mentioned is that the issue of identity has been studied in different areas like philosophy (Taylor, 1989; Mead, 1934), psychology (Erikson, 1959) as well as anthropology (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain, 1998) and introduced certain theoretical perspectives and conceptual frameworks. These cross-disciplinary insights contribute to the

identity definition and workings in the educational field, but they complicate these actions, as well.

Conceptualizing and Defining Teacher Identity

The concept of teacher identity is now one of the most popular questions in the modern studies of teacher education, but it is rather controversial and multifaceted to define it. The identity concept has been very frequent in the literature which is dynamically changing with the various personal, professional and contextual experiences that the teachers go through. Developed factors are internal factors namely: emotion, belief, and self-perception (Rodgers and Scott, 2008; Van Veen and Slegers, 2006; Zembylas, 2003) and external factors which are: institutional culture, policy demands as well as social expectations (Flores and Day, 2006; Sachs, 2005) which is a dynamic process of becoming through interaction, reflection and experience.

According to Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop (2004), there was no hitherto homogenous definition in the literature since identity has been identified to have four major features that comprise identity is continuous and is never fully accomplished, identity is situational, identity is multi-faceted and multi-layered where it is multi-faceted and multi-layered with many and sometimes conflicting sub-identities and tightly correlational with agency that empowers a teacher to act intentionally and bring practices in line with personal and pedagogical interests. It is also contextualized by Gee (2001) as identity of person and he is in a position to reach four types of identity i.e., nature-, institution-, discourse-, and affinity-identity. This can be supported by the sociocultural approaches, where identity is efficacy of external forces and negotiation process (Olsen, 2008; Sfard and Prusak, 2005) and discourse and joint narratives can be the way through which professional knowledge is created. Sachs (2005) reiterates that professional identity helps teachers to make sense of being, acting and knowing work. Although it is admitted that it is dynamic, literature mentions various metaphors, such as development (Watson, 2006), construction (Coldron and Smith, 1999), formation (Rodgers and Scott, 2008), making (Sfard and Prusak, 2005), and architecture (Day et al., 2006), which denotes the self-driven change and contextually mediated change.

Interrelationship between Self and Teacher Identity

The relationship of self-identity is still a debatable issue and question to research as far as teacher education is concerned. Teacher identity is created in a moving dialogue as the process of self-understanding in the social, cultural and institutional setting. The self is developed in association to the other as postulated by Mead (1934) and therefore this social kind of identity development is a significant one. The self of teacher is negotiated daily in the area of professional relations, reflective practice and contextual imperatives in such a way that it is personal and relational in an educational context (Rodgers and Scott, 2008).

The self meaning of teacher identity is a multiplicity of ideas that are formulated by scholars. Lauriala and Kukkonen (2005) introduce three dimensions of actual self, ought self and ideal self and clarify that teachers are always in a negotiation to form an authenticity and professional satisfaction between these selves. The main focus by

Hamachek (1999) in successful teaching is self-knowledge where he attributes the existence of awareness of beliefs, feelings, and motives development to being a successful professional. The difference between personal and professional identity that was once traditionally defined as existing independently (Beijaard, Verloop, and Vermunt, 2000; Freese, 2006) is now actively blurred to embrace emotional labor and personal investment (Lipka and Brinthaupt, 1999) and is, in fact, considered to be inseparable constituents of the holistic identity (Day et al., 2006).

Rodgers and Scott (2008) describe self as a sense maker and identity as a sense made and highlight how the two interact to create the professional discourse of the teachers. Sfard and Prusak (2005) expand on this by adopting a conceptualization of identity as a story which bridges the experience and meaning. The community of practice paradigm offered by Wenger (1998) underlines the significance of identity formation by the means of social participation, negotiation, and recognition, but the theory of embodied identity (Alsup, 2006) offers the concept of teaching as a lived personal and professional identity in the context of relations and institutions.

Narratives and Discourses: Shaping the Teacher Self

The identity of teachers is closely related to the discourse that teachers develop concerning themselves and their practice. Storytelling helps teachers to make their roles, beliefs and their continually developing professional identities apparent, thereby, a reflection of the self and a way of creating the self (Connelly and Clandinin, 1999; Soreide, 2006). Sfard and Prusak (2005) believe that identity is a discursive practice whose emergence is a result of which the story that they are narrating about themselves and are also claiming that the stories are not being constructed by the personal experience but social and cultural context as well. Watson (2006) reiterates that the active process of identity work, which enables the teacher to negotiate and make sense of their personal experience, is the storytelling, and that the storytelling between teachers, mentors, and students enhances the process of identity formation (Sfard & Prusak, 2005).

Teacher identity is also formed in other processes, discourse and metaphor. The interactions, language and communicative practice in the realms of educational settings affect the way teachers identify themselves as well as the way they present themselves (Beynon, 1997), and professional dialogue has been identified to open them to new perspectives and lead them to change identity (Miller Marsh, 2002; Cohen, 2008). Alsup (2006) points out the disjuncture aspect of the borderland discourse whereby the preservice teachers are allowed to scrutinize their past identities with a great sense of necessity. The metaphors help the teachers to conceptualize complex experience and mediate between the personal and professional level and give the reflective space over which to negotiate the tensions between the self-perception and the professional expectations (Ben-Peretz, 2001; Goldstein, 2005; Leavy, McSorley, and Botte, 2006; Hunt, 2006; Conle, 1996). This narrative and discourse and metaphor assists us in comprehending how educators create, explain and re-enact their professional identities in dynamic contextually situated forms (Rodgers and Scott, 2008).

Reflection as a Catalyst for Teacher Identity Development

One of the key aspects of teacher development is the reflection, and it presents an opportunity through which teachers can examine their work and view where they belong within the greater educational environment. Reflective practice enables the teacher to learn more about him or herself as a person as well as the way they relate with the professional community which determines him or her. Though the phenomenon of reflection is broad and multidimensional, its connection to identity in the teaching process is also of particular importance.

Reflection is long known to be involved in development of a teacher (Larriviere, 2000; Korthagen, Kessels, Koster, Lagerwerf, and Wubbels, 2001; Rodgers, 2002) and even come to be known as the heart of an effective teacher (Jay, 2003). Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) cite the reason core reflection must be crucial and that such is identity and purpose-centered and in which a teacher may feel deeply ensconced in a sense of self. The reflection is a key to the knowledge and self-definition in the case of student teachers and novice teachers.

Reflection is not only about looking back in the past but it may be prospective as well. The future-looking allows teachers to have a glimpse into the future in terms of practices or thought patterns and thus it enlightens them on how they can develop their own professional identity (Conway, 2001). This speculative observation relates to the component of ideal self in identity formation in which teachers set goals on what kind of a teacher they desire (Lauriala & Kukkonen, 2005). Moreover, the prospective discourse of the teachers could be regarded as the witness of the reflective processes of formation and creation of the shifting identities (Urzua and Vascaze, 2008).

According to Luttenberg and Bergen (2008), a typology of reflection can come in particularly handy when it comes to the explanation of reflection in identity formation. They isolate three domains, that is, pragmatic, ethical, and, moral. Each sphere has its own in-depthness and breadth and reflection could be less or more connected to the self. One such case is the ethical reflection in which personal values and beliefs of teachers are likely to be brought into play and this directly affects the self-understanding and identity.

Identity and Its Connection to Agency

Teacher identity is the concept that is important, yet to get a full picture of the whole development of the professional aspect, one will have to consider agency, the possibility of a teacher to make a deliberate decision, take intentional actions, and influence the environment in which he or she operates in, either directly or indirectly. Compared to identity which provides us with a structure of knowing who teachers are, agency provides us with structure of what teachers can do with the knowledge (Day et al., 2006; Parkison, 2008). Another sociocultural fact that is highlighted in sociocultural studies is that individuals do not only act but also determine in social systems and vice versa (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain, 1998). A great professional identity can contribute to the agency, enabling the teachers to embrace innovative practices, weaken the conventional ones and facilitate changes. There is a symbiosis between identity and agency: the sense of professional self provides sufficient reasons to the meaningful action, and agency trains and cultivates the sense

of identity (Sfard and Prusak, 2005).

Identity, narrative approach provides an insight into how teachers create conflicts among two or more, and at times contradicting roles e.g. caring/authoritative, innovative/accountable in different situations (Sfard and Prusak, 2005; Day et al., 2006). Management of these tensions is vital as far as it goes in agency where the teachers are given appropriate decisions to bring their identities to practice. This interplay is larger in the society because of the high identity and agency of teachers and their increased capability to become leaders, engage in school activities and stakes in policy making (Parkison, 2008). At the same time education programs that are based on self-reflection and narrative inquiry, as well as critical interaction with teacher context, can not only empower and create identity among teachers, but also make them self-aware and be able to create meaningful change within their own educational contexts.

Identity and the Impact of Context in Teacher Education

This identity of teachers comes about in relation to the contextual relations of teachers. Placements, and first career employment are described as having a substantial impact on professional identity (Smagorinsky, Moore, Cook, Jackson, and Fry, 2004; Flores and Day, 2005). The school environment, the student group, the teacher assistance, the school administration, past school experiences as well as emotional responses influence techniques applied by teachers during instruction (Barty, 2004; Pennington, 2002; Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, and Johnson, 2005). The fact that the teachers are subjected to different contexts place some pressure on them to negotiate their new identities and in the process, they need different formative experiences (Coldron & Smith, 1999).

This is a key issue, but identity development is likely to be implicit in teacher education programs. Professional identity is associated with commitment, professionalism and decision making (Britzman, 2003; Hoban, 2007; Riopel, 2006; Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, and Bransford, 2005). In spite of the fact that self-understanding is formally conceptualized in certain frameworks (Ministiere de l'Éducation, 2001), pre-service teachers typically leave the university on a tentative conception of themselves as professionals (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2006; Thomas and Beauchamp, 2007). Reflecting, putting students in challenging scenarios, individualized attention, multi-linked conceptual framework and school model are few among the strategies that can help teachers to negotiate professional relationship and self-awareness (Freese, 2006; Smagorinsky et al., 2004; Korthagen, 2004; Vanhulle, 2005; Danielewicz, 2001; Hoban, 2007; Hopper and Sanford, 2004; ten Dam and Blom, 2002). The relationship

Results of Key Insights from the Literature

The empirical studies done on teacher identity and reflection have indicated that reflective practice is a potent and dynamic reciprocal process with reflective practice acting as a lens and catalyst to professional identity development. Reflection allows teachers to be critical of their beliefs, experiences, and classroom practice in order to become self-aware and have a steady sense of personal and professional self (Schon, 1983; Korthagen, 2017; Rodgers and Scott, 2008). Through the studies, it has always

emerged that identity development is not an individual process but rather it occurs through a process of socializing, interactions and mentoring in a conducive professional environment (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011; Loughran, 2002; Wenger, 1998). Also, all this reflection becomes deeper and more effective with the assistance of the provided pedagogical and institutional support, and more profound identity work are designed activities, including narrative inquiry, portfolios, and mentoring, as opposed to superficial ones (Zeichner and Liston, 2014; Beauchamp, 2015). The identity in literature is said to be contextualized and multifaceted, which is influenced emotionally, cognitively and socially and in terms of narratives, discourse and metaphors, the teachers have been illustrated as creating, telling, and negotiating their shifting professional identities (Connelly, and Clandinin, 1999; Sfard and Prusak, 2005; Zembylas, 2003).

The contextual factors are the key to supporting or restraining identity development due to the reflection. Supportive institutional cultures and collaborative professional practices and mentoring relations help teachers to resolve the conflict between personal ideologies and professional needs and to engage in transformative professional learning (Flores and Day, 2006; Sachs, 2016; Mockler, 2011). Conversely, the structural aspects such as accountability with high stakes, prescriptive curriculum and lack of time to conduct reflective discourse can kill meaningful identity building, making reflection a procedural action (Kelchtermans, 2009; Day and Gu, 2010). An interaction of identity and agency is also outlined in the literature: identity defines the choice of the teacher and their actions and agency is used to empower and build professional identity of teachers (Day et al., 2006; Sfard and Prusak, 2005; Parkison, 2008). All these findings point to the conclusion that teacher education programs must include reflection as a competence and as a context-dependent systematic practice enhancing identity awareness, relationship-engaging ability, and professional agency, and eventually form reflective, adaptive, and competent teachers capable of transforming their learning environments.

Impact of Current issues on Teacher education

The contemporary trend influencing the education industry in areas of policy, technology, socio-cultural diversity and accountability demand significantly affects the teacher education and the development of professional identity. Policymaking skills and measurable outcomes are more likely to be emphasized in policy demands and standardized accountability systems and reduce opportunities to engage in reflective practice, critical inquiry and identity formation in teacher that are part of teacher education curriculum (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2006; Thomas and Beauchamp, 2007). Similarly, the increasing integration of educational technology also determines that, in reaction to the similar, teachers must create a rapid adaptation to the digital technology, online worlds and new educational activities which can be disruptive as well as expansive in terms of professional identity (Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, and Bransford, 2005). The socio-cultural diversity of pre-service teachers in the classrooms, which results in their inclusive nature, also demands that a teacher should be culturally responsive, sensitive to issues of social justice, and develop inclusive pedagogies that make the process of teacher identity and agency even more challenging to accomplish (Britzman, 2003; Hoban, 2007).

These current problems underscore the need by teacher education programs to extend beyond competency-based models and be directly involved in the establishment of reflective, flexible and resilient teachers. Programs, involving identity-based strategies, such as narrative inquiry, mentoring, school experiences, and critical interaction regarding the policy and problems in society can be used by the teachers as a way of negotiating such complexities and remain a professional agent (Freese, 2006; Smagorinsky et al., 2004; Korthagen, 2004). Teacher education may prepare teachers to meet the challenges of the present day not only by responding efficiently to the specific situations but also by constructing educative situations, policy dialogue and the profession culture (Riopel, 2006; Hoban, 2007).

Conclusion

According to this paper, reflective practice is an influential aspect in teacher identity building and transformative process through which teachers generate meaning, disrupt assumptions, and negotiate the emergent construction of professional selves. Through reflection a fault gets between experience and self-understanding that enables the teachers to be more self-aware, professional and flexible. The outcomes also suggest teacher identity to be dynamic; it is continuously built through the continuous reflection, personal experience, and interactions with people under different educational environments. It was determined that the enabling factors included supportive mentorship, collaborative dialogue and reflective institutional cultures and policy pressures, time constraints and performative accountability were the obstacles to meaningful reflective practice.

In consideration of these findings, the paper gives a conceptual model which locates reflective practice as a source of identity development and introduces a level of development of an individual and a professional and a contextual level of development. Under this framework, the teacher education ought not to be confined to technical or competency based framework so as to bring about identity-focused reflective practices that make the person-mind, heart and context engaging. Teacher education can also prepare the teachers to become resilient, self-aware and capable of navigating through complicated professional settings and make a difference to education.

Reflection, Identity, and Teacher Education: Implications for the Future

Reflection is part of the teacher identity forming process as it enables the educators to match their beliefs and personal experience to the pedagogical values to the professional expectations (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009; Korthagen, 2017; Schoen, 1983; Farrell, 2016). It is relational, dialogic and it can be achieved by means of teacher-teacher and teacher-student interaction because it assists teachers to surmount tension between their ideals and institutional constraints, and transformative identity work (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011; Loughran, 2002; Mezirow, 2000; Sachs, 2016). Structured (narrative inquiry, portfolios, and mentoring) and superficial reflective practices improve the development of identity relative to superficial ones, and reflecting is a process inherent in the teacher education (Zeichner and Liston, 2014; Beauchamp, 2015).

The reflective identity work lies in the conditions. The supportive communities,

mentoring, and institutional cultures that are conducive to autonomy help in co-construction of identity (Wenger, 1998; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Izadinia, 2016; Akkerman and Meijer, 2011; Zeichner, 2020). In contrast, high-stakes accountability, prescriptive curricula, and hierarchies may reduce reflection to compliance limiting agency and growth (Kelchtermans, 2009; Day and Gu, 2010; Flores, 2020; Beauchamp, 2015). A conceptual framework places the process of reflection on personal, professional, and contextual levels deducing the experience, interpretation, and identity change and building agency and flexibility (Kelchtermans, 2009; Korthagen and Vasalos, 2005; Larrivee, 2008; Farrell, 2016; Sachs, 2016; Mockler, 2011; Korthagen and Nuijten, 2022; Akkerman and Meijer, 2011; Clarke).

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