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CONSTRUCTING TEACHER IDENTITIES IN STORIES

There is now a wealth of research that explores the relationship between identity and foreign language teaching. This paper, by analysing stories delivered by teachers of varied professional experience, is intended to show that teacher identity can be viewed not just in relation to the cognitive dimension of the self, but rather with respect to the professional discourses prevailing in a particular historical period. Conceiving identity in this way requires a focus on the professional aspects of teaching theories and practices, along with issues of individual identity development situated in socio-political contexts and identifications with communities of practice. The paper centers on the contextually embedded factors that are liable to change with the social, cultural and historical discourses of practice.

KEYWORDS: English, generational discourse, identity, identity construction, teacher

MODERN APPROACHES TO IDENTITY RESEARCH

In contemporary discourses on human identity, two dominant yet opposing theoretical perspectives are taken. One regards identity as “an essential, cognitive, socialised, phenomenological or psychic phenomenon that governs human action” (Benwell and Stokoe 2006: 3), while the other, alternative understanding, commonly found in social sciences and humanities nowadays, views it as a public phenomenon, a performance or construction that is interpreted by other people. As Benwell and Stokoe (2006: 4) note: “Crucially, identity has been relocated: from the ‘private’ realms of cognition and experience, to the ‘public’ realms of discourse and other semiotic systems of meaning-making”.

These two major conceptualisations of identity can be represented by adapting Sfarid’s distinction between acquisition and participation metaphors (Sfarid 1998). This binary distinction, albeit referring to language acquisition, can be successfully used to represent a range of approaches to identity. At one end of the scale there are theories that see identity as something that once acquired, remains unchanged for the lifetime of the individual. These theoretical accounts represent identity as self knowledge, that is, as a collection of context-independent symbols accompanied by the rules that specify the relationship between them.

The conceptualisation of identity represented at the opposite end of the continuum can be called the ‘doing’ perspective (Larsen-Freeman 2011) because at this end of the continuum, identity is not a commodity acquired as a result of a mental act, but rather something that is performed by participating in a social interaction. Rather than conceiving of identity as a mental construct, this view instead sees it as an activity in which one participates, that is, “the permanence of having gives way to the flux of doing” (Sfard 1998: 6). Unlike the acquisition metaphor, the participation metaphor rejects the idea that there is a clear endpoint to the process of identity construction.

CONFRONTING CONFLICTING FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING CONTEXTS AND IDEOLOGIES

Teacher identity is both an individual and a social matter, which implies the necessity to be aware of the effects that contexts might have on the shifts and changes in a teacher’s identity. The school environment, the nature of the learner population, the impact of colleagues and of school administrators can all be influential in shaping teacher identity, as of course are the experiences of the teachers themselves as learners in schools. As well, the emotion brought to the context and that generated by the context will affect this identity. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009: 184) claim that “[i]t is the exposure to these formative contexts that results in important confrontations with one’s identity as a teacher”.

Teacher identities are also powerfully influenced by factors outside of the immediate instructional settings. These include curriculum policy (Cross and Gearon 2007), social demographics of the school, institutional practices, access to professional development, cultural differences (Johnson 2003) and bilingual language policy (Varghese 2006).

Moreover, as additional layers of complexity are formed by the predominance of English in the era of globalization, any consideration of teacher identity must take into account such issues as the role of discourse in self-representation, ethnicity, nationality, native/non-native distinction and beliefs about standard language. Teachers are not able to forge a new, situated meaning for teacher or teaching distinct from those described in the wider social and historical context and social discourses. Rather, they have to draw on pre-existing, discursive practices and meanings, relating these to their own situated experiences and context. As Goffman (1971) argues, people can understand and organize their environment only because they are capable of forming schemata on which the mind works. Because these schemata are organised within socio-cultural contexts, they will be shared between the members of a culture, but this cultural framework will differ from that of visitors to that culture. Cultural and linguistic settings affect the self by changing the framework within which the self is to be perceived.

Scollon and Scollon (2001), however, argue that the concept of culture is too broad a social organization to be of any true value in the analysis of either discourse or identity because virtually every culture can be shown to consist of a number of internal, cross-cutting, and overlapping discourse systems, and in addition to these discourse systems, modern cultures participate in the worldwide systems of the production and distribution of goods, as well as the systems of exchange of information, news and entertainment. Therefore in order to understand how individual members take on their identity, Scollon and Scollon (2001: 182) suggest sketching discourse systems within which identities are performed. They argue that most of professional discourse takes place within five major types of discourse system: (i) the corporate culture, (ii) the professional group, (iii) the generational discourse system, (iv) the gender discourse system, (v) the Utilitarian discourse system.

They further note that the corporate culture and the professional group are voluntary or goal-directed discourse systems in the sense that they are motivated by a goal-directed ideology, and participating in them acts as the overriding factor in understanding ordinary communication among their members. The generational discourse systems are not voluntary in a sense, but they can contain unique characteristics that may be absent from other systems. In other words, chronological age seems to be a determinative force that opens some possibilities of professional development while inhibiting others. The generational discourse systems are also believed to relate to different teaching and learning ideologies which are frequently contradictory.

In the case of EFL teacher discourse, two often conflicting ideologies can be noticed. They stem, as Scollon and Scollon (2001) argue, from two opposing views on foreign language teacher competences that can be derived either from practice or formal schooling. About forty years ago, the emphasis was placed on socialization, that is, learning through teaching experience in the classroom. Nowadays the value of education, that is, formal learning through coursework and research, has been highlighted. What has been observed for the last four to five decades is a shift from a more occupational status, with its informal processes of socialization through experience, to the professional status of EFL teachers with the emphasis on their formal preparation and qualifications.

The former ideology benefited teachers who had been in the teaching profession for a long time and as a result had acquired practical pedagogical knowledge, along with the linguistic and metalinguistic competence they needed to effectively pass on content knowledge in the classroom. The latter ideology privileges those teachers who might not have been in the profession for a long time but have possessed both the pedagogical and the content knowledge through formal schooling. Modern EFL teachers are expected to continually upgrade their competence in pedagogy and language through engaging in formal education programs, such as degree courses, in which EFL teachers can receive more advanced formal certification.

As a result, EFL teacher identity combines an identity situated in the corporate discourse system, in which the EFL teacher finds himself or herself employed, and an identity located in the occupational discourse system, in which the teacher has socialised. Therefore, within modern EFL discourse, the acquisition metaphor (Sfard 1998), the approach by which teachers construct who they are through accumulation of experiences, becomes insufficient for understanding teacher identity since it does not account for the complementary identifications of individuals with different discourse systems. Individual teachers can simultaneously be members of many often conflicting discourse systems, and in some cases, membership in one system will tend to undercut or call into question full membership in the other system.

In the past, teachers were viewed as technicians, defined by particular behaviours, knowledge or language teaching methods in classrooms characterized by identifiable variables. Current work on teacher identity highlights that “language teaching cannot be separated from social language use in classrooms, and the centrality of situated meanings within repertoires of social practices, involving specific social and institutional contexts and memberships” (Miller 2009: 173). It has been recognised that teacher identity is powerfully influenced by contextual factors outside of the teachers themselves. These include institutional practices and workplace conditions (Flores 2001), curriculum and foreign language policy (Varghese 2006), cultural differences (Johnson 2003).

Moreover in the career of a single teacher there are often periods of greater or lesser identification with professional goals and of corresponding identification with corporate goals. Individuals may also differently position themselves *vis-a-vis* these systems. What gives EFL teachers a sense of solidarity within the same discourse system is this common experience of participation in the community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998). The EFL teachers are more likely to be accepted as full members because their qualifications and credentials are more like those of other members of these institutional discourse systems. On the other hand, there remains a strong feeling within the EFL discourse system that no amount of research and analysis can replace classroom experience. Johnson (2006) reports an interview with an experienced teacher who employed a rotary hoist metaphor to explain what a notion of good teacher meant to her: the more experience you have, the more clothes (knowledge) you can peg on it. This rotary hoist analogy for effective teaching and learning practice is contrasted with the metaphor of “old grandma’s clothesline” that stands for the linear, more traditional, less effective, unconnected methods of teaching and learning. This example shows that any single community of practice must be seen as “operating within a system of distinction, rather than as an isolated social unit” (Moore 2010: 125).

Another issue that this example illustrates is that teacher identity and practices are subject to change over time. Moreover, teachers are continually fashioning and refashioning their identities, which is reflected in the view of teacher thinking

as “a mélange of past, present, and future meanings that are continually being negotiated and renegotiated through social interaction” (Miller Marsh 2002: 6). However, this process of fashioning and refashioning does not represent the free creation of individuals but it is constrained by social contexts and conditions, which include social organisations such as schools, and such cultural products as language and knowledge.

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL-POLITICAL DISCOURSES ON FL TEACHER IDENTITIES

This study aims to show how generational, professional and corporate discourses exert an impact on foreign language teacher identity construction. Teachers are argued to have developed varied schemata of their collective identity dependant on their past experiences with professional and corporate discourses that are always grounded in broad socio-cultural discourses. The basis of the analysis are extracts from structured interviews with Polish EFL teachers of varied teaching experience. The data is expected to reveal differences in teacher identity as constructed by the individuals who are members of different communities of practice, despite being members of one professional community. Their varied communal membership is argued to be determined by their age and professional experience. Being of different age, they would have been exposed to different discourses of foreign language teaching and language teaching ideologies, as Poland has experienced rapid transformation in its educational systems, following political transition from authoritarian rule to democratic government.

In the process of transition from the old highly controlled education system into a more democratic one, the foreign language teacher’s position has been subject to the most profound changes of all teachers in the course of last decades. The termination of communism and the turn of post-communist states to democracy was accompanied by the opening of these nations to western culture and the values that paralleled the growing use of English as a global language.

In this new era and with the introduction of new educational programmes, the status of a foreign language teacher, especially the EFL teacher, has transformed from the marginal to the most required and sought-after. EFL teachers have become a privileged and highly evaluated professional group. Their advantageous position derived from the knowledge of English that enabled them firstly, to communicate with modern western civilizations, and so they could seize the opportunity to become scholarly, erudite and widely read. Secondly, they took financial advantage of their knowledge, since the FL teacher was most required occupation in the beginning of the transition period, which was reflected in the competitive and highly motivational salaries and benefits offered. As Werbińska (2010: 21) claims:

“It can be said that a lot of foreign-language teachers fall victim to the times in which they live. On the one hand, they have become infected with the greed for earning money because they have more opportunities than teachers of other subjects. [...] On the other hand, many teachers are striving to increase their teaching effectiveness through indiscriminate assigning of grammar tests. [...] Using this approach, the teacher hopes to be less exhausted by her regular work at school and reserves energy to conduct interesting and activity-demanding tasks during her afternoon private jobs.”

Such social positioning of EFL teachers in the period of political and social transition frequently led to neglect of ethical issues in the classroom, where teachers were sole educational autocrats who determined learning directions and methods of content delivery.

Another problem that teachers have faced in post-transition years is the need to accommodate to the requirements of the newly-restructured Polish school. Szempruch (2010: 41) argues that “[t]eachers hold the responsibility for preparing students to ask questions, identify and solve problems, exercise self-control, reflect on own actions, plan the future and learn to cope with stress and failures”. To comply with the requirements of the reformed educational programmes and to meet the demands of the new generation of learners, EFL teachers should possess not only an excellent command of the language and subject knowledge, as well as first-rate teaching skills and expertise in IT, but also the ability to exchange knowledge and experiences between different institutions and improve school management by opening it to the local community and collaborating with parents. All these aforementioned requisites lead to a redefinition of teacher identity across professional contexts.

In particular, the context of classroom learning and teacher competences have been affected profoundly. In post-transition years, the social contexts of being a teacher of EFL have altered the image of an EFL teacher compared to teachers of other academic subjects. They are no longer teaching autocrats, rather they are expected to be facilitators of learning. With the changing ideologies of learning, the discourse of teaching as well as views on teacher roles have altered. Current emphasis is on instructional settings, where the locus of learning is focused on learners and the way they learn. As a result, the contemporary vision of learning is one where learners are empowered because their autonomy is preferred and they take large degrees of responsibility for their own learning progress.

In addition to the local social-political transformation, the issues of globalization and spread of English as a global language have to be acknowledged since they encouraged the rise of the professional discourse system of EFL teachers which is shared by the teachers of English throughout most of the world. Since Poland opened its borders to western culture, the professional discourse of EFL teachers has also infused the Polish system of education. Most countries have seen a tendency to abandon the previous discourse of teaching as a “socialisation into the occupation” in favour of a new discourse that stresses “formal education into the profession,

schools, corporations” (Scollon and Scollon 2001: 212). As individuals may live and play their social roles in various discourses that are based on specific ideologies, they may experience conflicting professional identities and “they will need to resolve how he or she is going to deal with this conflict in personal values and belief systems, teaching and learning ideologies, relationships and attitudes to learners as well as the external problem of communication with those who are members of a different discourse system” (Scollon and Scollon 2001: 238).

THE STUDY: CONSTRUCTING EFL TEACHER IDENTITIES

The present study focuses on the construction of professional identities in a number of structured interviews on ‘*What it means to be a teacher*’. conducted by the author with ESOL teachers possessing various degrees of teaching experience.

AIM / HYPOTHESIS

The study aims to delineate those aspects of teacher identity that surface in the conversational narratives delivered over the course of an interview. The hypothesis to be verified is that identities constructed and performed by teachers of different age and consequently with varied teaching and learning experiences vary as far as their content is concerned. In particular, differences should be observable in views expressed by the teachers on their role in the classroom, the way they should respond to student needs, the dominant professional ideologies that influence their classroom performance and the form of the preferred classroom instruction.

THE PARTICIPANTS

The four participants whose stories are the subject of the analysis are graduates from the extramural TESOL studies at the University of Łódź. The participants of the studies come from different educational and academic backgrounds. Some of them are in-service teachers of other school subjects who started teaching ESOL and had to retrain (Mila and Cathy). Others are undergraduates with no teaching experience who come from small towns where there is no university to continue MA studies (Samantha and Sandy). Originally there were sixteen participants who gave their consent to be interviewed. The participants had been informed a week before their interview that they would be asked to tell a short story about a memorable

learning experience connected with a figure of their teacher in addition to other more survey-like questions. The four participants whose contributions are analysed were all females, because males (few students) were unwilling to take part in the study. This could be a source of gender-biased outcomes. Nevertheless the present study aims to uncover generational variation in teacher identity therefore gender was not considered a variable to be controlled. Because of the article space constraints, out of the group of sixteen participants, the contributions of the four participants have been selected as representative of the two generations of teachers: novices and in-service teachers with teaching experience longer than twenty-five years. The author is aware of the limited possibilities of any generalization of the results, yet she aims to point at certain aspects of generational diversity in teacher identity that may become a subject of further research.

THE CORPUS

The corpus for the present study has been collected from a number of structured interviews conducted by the author with graduates of extramural TESOL studies at the University of Łódź. The corpus contains transcriptions of sixteen, twenty-minute-long interviews on the question of “What does it mean to be a teacher”. The participants were asked to justify for their arguments by presenting episodes from either their own school life or teaching career. The interviews were conducted in the participants’ non-native language - English, and the mistakes they made were not corrected. Altogether 54 stories were collected. Due to space limitations, this article contains an analysis of the stories whose subject recurred in the participants’ responses, namely: the teacher’s influence on student’s life and career choices, teacher roles, classroom instruction and the learner’s needs.

ANALYSIS

This section contains an analysis of six stories presented by the four participants over the course of the interviews. The stories ensued as a response to the interview questions. In this paper, discourse analysis of the interview stories follows their presentation and subsequently leads to the final conclusions.

Mila: *I can remember my teacher of Polish in my secondary school and it is not a high-value memory of this teacher, because when I left primary school I wanted to be a teacher of Polish and then I changed my mind because we had such a poor Polish teacher at the grammar school. My primary*

school teacher of Polish was very demanding and strict but also knew how to pass the knowledge we would need later in our school life, and I must say thanks to her efforts to pour her knowledge on us, I passed not only matura exam in Polish but also university entrance exams. This teacher was not interested in our lives but dedicated to teaching her beloved subject. My grammar school teacher, in contrast, was very empathetic and involved in our personal life but she did not know how to get us engaged with the subject. Her lessons and the amount of knowledge she passed to us disappointed me so much that I turned to another subject and another language. I can't say that my English teacher influenced my choice very much. Rather my choice of academic course was based on negative selection impacted by what I could learn at school. If my teacher of English was so poor as the Polish teacher I'd turn to another subject whose teacher could get me interested.

Samantha: *I can remember our high school English teacher. She was a very good teacher and had a vast knowledge of the subject she taught as well as methodology of teaching. No surprise that many students from our class wanted to study English at the university level. When we told her that we wanted to study English Philology she said: don't do this subject, it's too hard, you won't be able to graduate. You'd better try something else. It wasn't very nice of her. She lowered our self-esteem, but only in this situation, otherwise she was quite a good high school teacher. Obviously we learned a lot because she knew how to encourage us to study and she also had a very high command of English. She knew how to present not only the intricacies of the English grammar but also the nuances of its use. I wonder why she tried to discourage us. She might have been afraid that she'd lose her job or something if we did not get to the university.*

The two stories are presented by the members of the two generations of teachers. The two stories are similar in their theme as they both concern the school transition period and they both portray teachers who had a profound impact on the students' lives.

Mila's story presents two teachers of Polish who had a varied impact on her academic career. The primary school teacher is reported as a good, demanding teacher of high content and pedagogical knowledge and is contrasted with the grammar school teacher who is said to possess low teaching skills. It is impossible to tell whether the teacher of Polish lacked adequate subject knowledge or pedagogical knowledge since she is presented as *a poor teacher of Polish*, yet her low professional expertise had an impact on Mila's life, insofar that it made her choose another subject to study. With this story, Mila is attempting to present herself as an actor who was determined to direct her life and agentively selected the path of her career despite the poor qualifications of the teacher who seemed to have a decisive role in her career choice.

Samantha presents a story of a group of learners who expressed a desire to become teachers of English. They had planned to enrol in a teacher education program and expected that their English teacher would be supportive and undertake the job of helping them get there. Instead, they found her discouraging and advising against

such a career development. In contrast to Mila's story, Samantha describes a teacher whose qualifications are not questioned. On the contrary, Samantha evaluates both her knowledge and pedagogical skills as very high (e.g. *she was very good teacher; obviously we learned a lot*) but her involvement and concern about the students' future welfare are presented as unsatisfactory. In Samantha's opinion, she was a good and dedicated teacher only because she cared about her own personal wellbeing. By performing her professional duties well, the teacher tried to secure her work position, which guaranteed personal fulfilment and life stability. In contrast to Mila, Samantha foregrounds an image of a teacher who is a knowledgeable person but not the one who is a deeply invested and empathetic person.

The primary aim of the story is to explicate how the inability of the teacher to effectively respond to learner's needs brought confusion to the life of the students. Implicitly, however, in presenting the story, Samantha accomplishes two other goals. First, she displays her attitude toward a specific type of discourse related to education: she favours the one in which teachers are supportive, caring and invested, and in doing so, rejects that of formal, and neat instruction, solely targeted at student cognitive development. Second, she develops her identity of a person who is an active and effective agent at the real point of a college education. The story presents a discrepancy between who she considered herself to be and who she was expected to be at that particular moment.

The struggle to decide which course of action to take, faced by Samantha in her story, is an example of the clash between the primary and secondary "*habitus*" (Bourdieu 1991). Samantha comes from a family with a teaching profession tradition (information supplied in another part of the interview), which must have provided her with an opportunity of an early primary socialization with the discourses of teaching and learning. These discourses of teaching and learning clashed with those she recounted in the story. It would seem that Samantha had grown into the primary *habitus*, where teachers were signified as both knowledgeable and caring, and learners as dutiful but autonomous, and these characteristics clashed with what she encountered in the secondary *habitus* of her own schooling, where the teacher appeared to be knowledgeable, indeed, but not involved in the students' lives. Samantha found herself betwixt these two discourses of schooling and decided to follow the one she had encountered in the primary *habitus*, which further enabled her to contest the teacher's authority and express the student's resistance to the constraints of schooling.

The two stories can also be used to make inferences about the tellers' attitude to the role of the teacher and teaching ideologies. Samantha's contribution portrays a constructivist teacher who is a facilitator of learning, assisting students' performance in socially valued, purposeful activities, rather than transmitting or dispensing knowledge. In the other story, Mila clings to a presumption constitutive of the conventional classroom; that is, there is a body of knowledge to be mastered

and the teacher has mastery of it. It is that mastery which justifies the teacher's authority in the classroom.

The generational views on the role of the teacher are also presented in the two following stories that are recounted below.

Kathy: *I believe that teachers have impact on the life of their students because they are not only instructors of a subject but also moral guides and psycho-social counselor. I can remember my grammar school English teacher who cared not only about the growth of our knowledge of English but also about our emotional and social development. I can remember our field trips, especially the one to the Bieszczady when we could talk to her about our problems. In this informal atmosphere we disclosed and shared our doubts and worries with her. She tried to explain to us that we should learn because this is a way to get respect from others and achieve a higher social status to live a better life, in better conditions and to earn a decent living.*

Sandy: *I believe in teaching it's important to focus on something important in the subject we teach if we want this knowledge to remain in the minds of our students. I also think that students cannot learn by heart and recount verbatim what has been presented during the lesson. I remember my grammar school history teacher who was not so much concerned about teaching facts but tried to present certain historical processes that could be seen in a broader perspective. She used to say that in a few years students would forget factual knowledge if they did not use it but what they had learned meaningfully in a logical way they would be able to use and practice across contexts without limiting or channeling the knowledge to the particular subject. She kept saying that facts can be googled but the skill of using the factual knowledge is more valuable.*

Kathy sees the teacher's major goal, in addition to providing subject instruction, as preparing students for real life situations. While referring to her experience of learning English, she highlights the importance of social skills and moral principles that students should be taught as part and parcel of the school subject and extracurricular activities. She mentions the school trips her English teacher organized to let the students develop academically and mature socially. Presenting a snapshot of a trip to the mountains, she highlights her teacher's involvement in the life of students and her care for their personal development as well as the cultivation of their knowledge. In Kathy's view, the former is closely associated with morality education, making teachers not only educators but also moral guides and counsellors. She emphasizes that teaching the subject is just one aspect of school education, and to develop fully, students need many other skills, for example interpersonal or metacognitive ones.

Sandy contributes a story about learning History, a school subject which students are claimed to master chiefly by rote learning: memorizing dates and events. By telling her story, she brings the issue of problem solving strategies into focus. She notes that the primary responsibility of the teacher is to select and execute

such classroom strategies that will promote the formation of a constructive and conducive learning environment. Mentioning her History teacher and her use of supportive scaffolding, Sandy advocates for the instructional applications that more directly mirror Vygotsky's notion of a zone of proximal development (Vygotsky 1978). This approach to scaffolding is consistent with current recommendations for learner-centred instruction that values learning as a search for understanding, provides opportunities for responsive feedback, and views the educational process as occurring within a community of learners.

The issue of teacher or student-centred instruction recurs in the subsequent stories.

Kathy: *This is also a job where our method of work and some basic technique is really ourselves, so the kind of person we are, what we represent ourselves, this is what they really learn, in addition to the subject content. For me, this is a difficult job and one that is challenging, because not everything can be taught because when you are working yourself that is, the fatigue and sometimes you have a bad day, and it is difficult, simply you cannot separate yourself from the job. It's not like accountancy that you add and subtract numbers and the balance will be fine. Simply we work with ourselves with our person. Here go our emotions and feelings and sentiments that matter and that ability to operate with all this stuff, this is probably the toughest thing.*

Kathy focuses on the teacher as the principal figure in the classroom. She talks of her understanding of the teacher as a whole of a human being. She, using inclusive *we*, says that a teacher is a method and a technique of instruction as well as *a subject content*. For her, the quality of teaching is not determined by the teacher's subject content knowledge alone. Rather, the teacher's expertise embraces both subject matter and Pedagogy.

Kathy's explication that teachers cannot separate their professional life from their social-emotional sphere echoes Atkinson (2011: 143) who says: "[l]ike all organisms, human beings are ecological organisms – they depend on their environment to survive". Similarly Kathy characterizes herself as an adaptive organism that continuously and dynamically is adapting to the changing classroom environment. She implies she is constantly and instantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who she is and how she relates to the social world, i.e., how she forges her identities depends partly on who she is on a particular day in a particular situation and how she relates to the social world.

Samantha: *The teacher does not need to know everything, he has only to show how the child is to learn or where to find the information. I had such a variety of teachers of English in my life, some just came with the book, and even well before the lesson, I knew that on that day we would do the exercise five to eight, because that was the book order and so it was done. However, there were teachers who came to class with something surprising, something new. So take your students by surprise with something that they will not expect.*

It is also important to be perceived as someone who is passionate about the subject, and not only does a job and goes home. The teacher should also be reflective, should react to what is happening, should think about it, should not pretend to know, not pretend that this method is the best that I'm the best, but adapt flexibly to the material. After all there are so many methods we can use. Moreover being a teacher can not only be related to knowledge and its transmission, but also to being a role model, I do not know, for me, it has always been important for example to follow the dress code, to teach the child cultural behaviors as it has impact on a child's whole life, it must be learned at school.

For Samantha the teacher is neither a model nor a source of information, but a facilitator who helps raise the learner's awareness of the relevant issues, gives possible answers to questions and provides feedback on learners' ideas and their output produced. She subscribes to a discourse of education within which teachers are actors whose play aims to grab the spectators' attention and get them involved. Such a view of teaching creates a performative culture which stresses accountability and the public demonstration of professional attributes above teachers' ethical and emotional qualities.

Moreover, when articulating her sense of a teacher self, Samantha is preoccupied with the relationship between teachers and learners and the learner's well-being is her focus. She seems to overlook the fact that teachers are people and as distinct personalities cannot be separated from their craft, and that the act of teaching requires individuals to possess a genuine emotional understanding and empathy, not only towards others, but also towards themselves. Samantha takes a reductionist view on teacher competencies that tends to downplay or ignore the emotional dimensions of teacher identity. She concentrates solely on the knowledge of the diverse needs of students and appears to be ignorant of the fact that teachers personally interpret the demands placed upon them.

DISCUSSION

From the analysis of the stories presented above, it can be seen that both the personal experience and personal practical knowledge (Golombek 1998) of the participating teachers play a vital role in their understanding of learning and teaching. The stories they tell serve as a tool to reflect on particular teaching and learning situations, as well as the characters of the students and teacher participating in them. Undoubtedly, through telling their life event stories, the participants are creating portrayals of teachers that they either admire and respect or despise. The analysis of the stories given above shows that instructional practices favoured or despised by the participants are grounded in their own culturally meaningful experiences, and that the identities the participants are fashioning are based on them.

We can see that the older teachers display concern for the scholastic achievements of their students and the morality of their actions, whereas the novice teachers take student perspective and maintain that schools can and should become places that foster security and curiosity. This will happen when the responsibility for student achievement shifts from the teacher's shoulders to the learner's.

The stories told by the experienced in-service teachers endorse a directive scaffolding which presumes the teacher's primary job to be knowledge transmission and assessment. They talk about "a good teacher who should teach" and "try to explain ... and tell them", which clearly emphasize a directive model of instruction.

A different view on the teacher's roles and instruction strategies is envisaged by the novice teachers. What follows from their stories is a gradual shift of responsibility for the outcomes of learning from teachers to students. They emphasise an active and agentive attitude of the student toward the process of knowledge mastery. Effective teaching and learning occur in collaborative activities with teachers and peers. Such active learning contexts create classrooms where individual differences are respected due to the construction of multiple zones of proximal development and where collaboration as a process of inquiry also enhances the motivation to learn. What they expect of the teacher is explicit and positive feedback intended to guide students on learning.

All the participants seem to approve of the underlying principles of constructivism and acknowledge the role of scaffolding in learning. Nevertheless, they variably emphasise the important learning principles of constructivism. The novice teachers, favouring a supportive scaffold, emphasise learning by doing and regulating one's own learning; building individual meaning in a situation or experience; and learning with and from others. However, more experienced teachers favour directive scaffolding, since their underlying belief is that students first need to know the content and only then can they be taught how to apply what they have learned.

The analysis of the interactional stories shows how social structure is intertwined with individual activity, which further requires that the processes of identity construction be seen as the interdependence of individual creative input and pre-existing institutional or social features of society. Teacher identities are cross-cutting in various discourse systems (professional and generational are majors) and may lead to conflicts and confusion. What is important is to recognize that such cross-cutting identities exist and will be operating within contexts of communication.

CONCLUSION

This paper has concentrated on the analysis of stories about learning and teaching delivered by teachers of varied professional experience. It has aimed to show that stories are an effective tool of investigating professional identity construction. This

tool enables a comprehensive view of teacher identities set at the backdrop of individual cognition grounded in the professional discourses prevailing in a particular historical period. The analysis of the stories, albeit cursory, has uncovered such aspects of teacher identity as teacher roles, attitudes toward teaching theories and instruction that are subject to generational variation in the profession. Therefore, story analysis can be successfully applied as a research tool into discourses of teaching and learning that subsequently can be a subject of methodological appraisal and modification.

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