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Identity construction through narratives: An analysis of student teacher discourse  

Introduction  
In this chapter, our aim is to examine the experiences recounted in the shared professional discourse of student teachers during their teacher education programme. This is done against the belief that ‘experience becomes linguistically and socio-culturally transformed through narrative genres and through the activity of recounting experiences for, to, and with particular interlocutors’ (Ochs, 2006, p. 64). The ultimate goal is to investigate the ways in which the interactions provide scope for the sharing of experience, and in turn, the co-construction and development of knowledge and identity. This is a unique chapter in this volume in that it draws on a corpus of teacher discourse, which is a new endeavor in LTE.  

We see identity and narratives as being pivotal to an evidence-based analysis because ‘[i]ndividuals may tell narratives in order to entertain, to resolve tensions, to justify or explain their actions, to demystify and make sense of life events, to complain, to instruct […]’ (Vásquez, 2009, p. 260), therefore we may examine how people shape and re-shape their identities via their narrative (Georgakopoulou, 2006). It has been suggested that ‘different people experience the world through different eyes, different bodies; they have different life stories; they have different names’ and therefore have ‘individual human identities’ (Johnstone, 2008, p. 158). As a result, identities are complex and plural (De Fina, 2006), dynamic and not fixed (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006), and ‘the selves we present to others are changeable, strategic, and jointly constructed’ (Johnstone, 2008, p. 155). Hence, from a Labovian perspective (Labov and Waletzky, 1967; Labov, 1997), this chapter examines narratives found in discussions between student teachers and tutors on an MA TESOL programme through two different modes of communication: online and face-to-face. Drawing on discourse analysis techniques, our investigation begins with a codification of the narratives found, followed by an investigation of the topics under discussion, and, in turn, the narratives are scrutinised further to trace the nature of the identities projected by the student
teachers as they move from peripheral to full and legitimate participation (see Lave and Wenger, 1991) in the professional teaching community through the duration of their programme. Our analysis highlights the importance of having both formal and informal discussions to allow student teachers differing ways of making sense of themselves as teachers in order to develop professionally. The following section provides a background discussion of the concept of identity, a theoretical account of narrative analysis and the ways in which both frameworks can come together to help us better understand the process of identity construction through language.

**Background**

*Identity and LTE*

Identity has been referred to as ‘the outcome of processes by which people index their similarity to and difference from others, sometimes self-consciously and strategically and sometimes as a matter of habit’ (Johnstone, 2008, p. 151). Identity has been described in terms of something belonging to an individual or something which is socially constructed, something dwelling in the mind, or realised within social interaction, something tied to an individual or a group, and as something which is either personal or relational (De Fina, 2006). Identity is thus shaped by the context of interaction, but at the same time shapes the context within which the interaction is set (ibid). As this chapter discusses identity construction via linguistic communication, we must also reiterate that identities can be both individually and co-constructed (Clarke, 2008), and what is of utmost importance is that language is a strong medium for the projection or expression of specific identities (De Fina, 2006; Johnstone, 2008).

In terms of LTE, from about the 1970s, there was a move away from behaviourist views of learning, and more focussed attention was placed on teacher situated cognition, whereby ‘the thought processes of teaching included a much wider and richer mental context’ (Freeman and Johnson, 1998, p. 400). It was acknowledged that ‘[t]eacher learning is not viewed as translating knowledge and theories into practice but as constructing new knowledge and theory through participating in specific social contexts and engaging in particular types of activities and processes [thus known as practitioner knowledge]’ (Richards, 2008, p. 6). This
transfer spanned from teacher learning being cognitive to that of situated and socio-cognitive, making the physical and social setting in which learning occurred important to the learning itself. This move encouraged dialogue and collaboration, and draws on sociocultural theory, social learning, and, of importance to this chapter, identity construction. Within this process, what is significant is the inclusion of teacher roles, the discourses they create, the activities that take place and the artefacts used, and that ‘[l]earning is seen to emerge through social interaction within a community of practice’ (ibid, p. 7).

While various methods have been proposed for teachers to reflect on their professional identities (Korthagen, 2004; Richards, 2008), it was highlighted in 2004 that only recently had teacher identity been researched (Korthagen, 2004), while there is now a stronger and growing interest in teacher identity (Vásquez, 2011). Korthagen (2004, p. 85) expresses how a professional identity can take the form of a gestalt, ‘an unconscious body of needs, images, feelings, values, role models, previous experiences and behavioural tendencies, which together create a sense of identity’, or as Richards (2008, p. 9) puts it: ‘[i]dentity refers to the differing social and cultural roles teacher-learners enact through their interactions with their lecturers and other students during the process of their learning’. For the student teachers in this research, their narratives with their peers and tutors around theoretical and practical pedagogic issues are used to gain an insight into the identities they assume and build. We now turn to a brief discussion of narrative analysis and identity.

**Narrative analysis and identity**

A narrative has been defined as a way of ‘reporting past events that have entered into the biography of the narrator’ (Labov, 2001, p. 63). Narratives can be viewed in ‘a narrow sense to specify the genre of a story or in a broad sense to cover a vast range of genres, including not only stories but also reports, sports and news broadcasts, plans, and agenda […]’. However, what they have in common is the depiction of ‘a temporal transition from one state of affairs to another’ (Ochs, 2006, p. 68, italics in original). They can therefore be a chronicle of events reflecting past, present, future or hypothetical time (ibid), where the person narrating takes control of the floor for a longer length of time than other interlocutors (Labov,
The framework adopted for this chapter derives from the work of Labov and Waletzky (1967), and has been extended by Labov (1997; 2001). In their framework, there are a number of elements which can be traced. The first and most obligatory of elements is the minimal narrative, which is made up of a sequence of at least two clauses (narrative clauses) which are temporally ordered, in that if their format is changed, the meaning and resulting interpretation of the narrative changes (see Labov, 1997). As well as this obligatory constituent, there are other features which can optionally be included in a narrative, and have been discussed by many (for example, Benwell and Stokoe, 2006; Labov and Waletzky, 1967). These include Abstract, Orientation, Complicating Events, Evaluation, Result/Resolution and Coda.

Inasmuch as the narrative allows the narrator to let the listeners see their story through their eyes, the narrators can also work through the narrative with their interlocutors in terms of how they feel about a certain situation. This is of importance to us in the context of the present chapter as narratives are often co-constructed and the listeners are urged to reflect on issues arising from the shared stories. Of relevance to us is that a narrative ‘is not only a genre, it is also a social activity involving different participant roles’ (Ochs, 2006, p. 77), thus raising the importance of the notion of identity, whereby via the narration of an event, we construct identities (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006). The significance of narratives in indexing identities has been further highlighted by De Fina (2006) and Johnstone (2008), with the former noting that ‘they afford tellers an occasion to present themselves as actors in social worlds while at the same time negotiating their present self with other interactants’ (De Fina, 2006, p. 275). Narrative analysis thus creates a space for looking at both the personal and shared identities people create, which, as we will see in the analysis, is appropriate and important for investigating the student teacher discourse. As was noted, language is key as it is a powerful mediating tool, whereby people appropriate varied discourses depending on the roles they see themselves in (Clarke, 2008). It must also be stressed that working through a narrative is interpretative because a discourse analyst can only make tentative claims about

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1 Labov’s original motive was to elicit narratives from people through spontaneous everyday storytelling, in order to reduce the effects of the Observer’s Paradox.

2 This framework has its critics (see Georgakopoulou, 2006) as a result of it being interviewer-led. However, it is used here merely for the initial codification of narratives.
parts of a story as the speaker’s talk is only one aspect within an interaction, the other two being the reception and reaction to that talk (Johnstone, 2008, p. 94). However, ‘if we wish to take seriously the study of situated social identities of language teachers and learners—the time has come for the field to also recognize and value the potential that sociolinguistic small story narrative analysis can contribute to TESOL’ (Vásquez, 2011, p. 536), which is precisely our aim in this chapter. We will now outline our data and methodology in more detail before moving to the analysis.

**Methodology**

**Context and setting**

We draw on a corpus collected in a third level LTE setting, namely what we call the Teacher Education Discourse (TED) corpus which is data gathered from an MA in TESOL programme and consists of student teachers engaging in a range of reflective discussions about teaching. The data is collected from five different cohorts of student teachers over a ten year period. This corpus contains approximately 163,440 words, and consists of spoken interactions including Teaching Practice (TP) Feedback and Group Discussion sub-corpora. TP Feedback includes dyadic TP feedback (the feedback offered to student teachers after they have taught their practice language lessons) between a cohort of student teachers and tutors who are also lecturers on the programme. The Group Discussion corpus consists of interactions between a peer tutor and student teachers informally discussing language teaching and pedagogy in a face-to-face setting. As well as the spoken sub-corpora, the other part of TED contains online discourse, consisting of two sets of blogs. The first set of blogs are individual blogs written by a cohort of student teachers as a weekly reflection on specific practice lessons. The second set of blogs are from the same three cohorts of student teachers as in the spoken Group Discussion. These were used as private blogs by individual student teachers for the purposes of general reflections on teaching and their LTE programme, and were only read by the peer tutor. The peer tutor’s task in these blogs and the Group Discussions was to facilitate informal and pedagogical interaction and discussion, and she was not in an authoritative position. Table 1 summarises the data for the following analysis.
Once corpus data is collected, and if relevant, transcribed, it is then available for a range of quantitative and qualitative types of analysis. In other related research we take a more automated and corpus-based approach through the analysis of frequency and keyword lists, as well as concordances (Farr and Riordan, 2012), but for the investigation of identity construction through narratives, a more manually driven qualitative approach is more suitable and will be used in this chapter. Traditional discourse analysis techniques are used to examine some illustrative transcripts for each of the modes. The first stage of this research consisted of manually tagging all of the narratives within the discourse using Labov’s framework. The following section offers examples and corresponding analyses of some of these narratives found within the online and face-to-face modes both formally (between student teachers and lecturer), and informally (between student teachers and peer tutor).

**Findings**

**Face-to-face discourse**

This section examines two narratives in some detail, one from the informal pedagogical discussions that the student teachers had with each other and a peer tutor in a group setting, and the second where the individual student teachers are in a feedback meeting with their tutor/lecturer, based on a specific recent lesson they taught. Due to the asymmetrical relationship and the institutional evaluation requirement surrounding the TP on which the feedback is based, it can tend to be relatively more formal in nature. The first example of a narrative presented here contains all features from Labov’s framework (coded in square brackets in this instance for exemplification). Here the group of teachers are discussing (with

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>TED Corpus</strong></th>
<th><strong>Face-to-Face</strong></th>
<th><strong>Online</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>(163,440 words)</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TP Feedback</strong></td>
<td><strong>Group Discussion</strong></td>
<td><strong>Blogs (tutor)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82,000 words</td>
<td>51,000 words</td>
<td>12,220 words</td>
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<tr>
<td>One cohort of students</td>
<td>Three cohorts of students</td>
<td>One cohort of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA TESOL Tutor - Student Teacher Discussions</td>
<td>MA TESOL Peer Tutor – Student Teacher Discussions</td>
<td>MA TESOL Student Teacher Individual Reflections</td>
</tr>
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Table 1: Overview of TED corpus data
the peer tutor) dealing with tension in the classroom, and Dyne (pseudonyms used) is narrating an event about a disruptive student in class, how she addressed the issue, and what the result was. Dyne has completed a postgraduate diploma in teaching at secondary level and therefore has slightly more experience than some of the other members of her MA group.

Extract 1: Group Discussion

1   <Dyne>   [ABSTRACT] If it became threatening towards yourself then it is essential to get someone else because you can't deal or get into a shouting match or anything with students

[ABSTRACT] [ORIENTATION] one instance I was teaching in a secondary school and it was all girls and they were all about fifteen sixteen and one girl in particular I was warned about

5   …[ORIENTATION] [COMPLICATING EVENT] she came in one day and I corrected her for talking and she stood up and started cursing very confrontational person she started cursing and everything like [COMPELLING EVENT] [EVALUATION] so I was a bit shook up [EVALUATION] [COMPELLING EVENT] and then she actually started moving up the room…

10  <Peer Tutor> Mmhm.

15  <Dyne>   …so in that case I knew not to start shouting back cos it was just gonna…

Peer Tutor> You can't.

18  <Dyne>   …yeah so I just told her to step outside and sat down and just let her to shout it out of her system she ran outside and then I sent another girl for the vice principal [/COMPELLING EVENT] cos [EVALUATION] she was actually very intimidating [/EVALUATION] like you

20  know…

Peer Tutor> Mmhm.

Dyne>   …[COMPELLING EVENT] very so that's when I got the vice principal involved cos she deals with the discipline in the school like [/COMPELLING EVENT] and [EVALUATION] at the end of the day it's not my job to put myself in danger either

25  [/EVALUATION]…

Peer Tutor> Mmhm.

Dyne>   …because of a student like that.

Peer Tutor> Mmhm.

Shovelyjoe> How did it work out?

28  <Dyne>   [RESOLUTION] Am she was out of my class for two days and then she came back and apologised ….. so I was like and I can't even remember now cos it was so long ago but I never ever had a problem with her again. [/RESOLUTION]

Peer Tutor> I was act= I was about to ask that.

Dyne>   I couldn't get over [CODA] I couldn't get over the transformation in her like and she

30  was not a model student but…

Peer Tutor> Yeah.

Dyne>   …but such improvement to her she looked like a model student so it was…
If we take the example narrative presented in Extract 1, we see a serious event which happened in a school with a confrontational student, and from lines 1 to 18, Dyne relays the issue and depicts her position as a novice teacher needing assistance from the principal (although we do recognise that this is the role of the principal). While offering this information, she appears to be outlining reasons or indeed justification for her needing assistance from the principal. This includes addressing negative characteristics of the student in question, such as ‘I was warned [about the student]’, she was ‘a confrontational person’, and ‘she was actually very intimidating’; the student teacher’s own feelings such as ‘I was a bit shook up’; and the role of the principal in that ‘she deals with the discipline in the school’. There is duality here in that she is up-keeping a professional identity in the presence of her peers by explaining her rationale for the actions she took, while depicting an inexperienced identity having difficulties in class. Dyne does, however, become more assertive in her role in line 19, when she notes ‘it’s not my job to put myself in danger’. This demonstrates her role as a practising professional teacher, who is knowledgeable and confident in her position, or who has learned through experience. In line 24, we see an example of the co-construction of a narrative, as Shovely Joe, a complete novice, asks Dyne what the outcome was. Here he could be using her narrative as a means of learning for his own future role as a teacher, but also as a curious social listener wanting to hear the end of the story.

While thus far, Dyne offers ample description of events, in line 26, she notes that she does not remember the conversation between her and the student after the event. Either she genuinely does not remember, or there are parts of the story she wishes to withhold, once again to save face in front of her peers and the peer tutor. From line 29 onwards she appears to offer a balanced view by explaining that the particular student had transformed, but ‘she was not a model student’. By the end of the final turn, Dyne presents a very good understanding of her students, and therefore her identity here is of a more independent and

We define novice as someone who is in training or who has recently finished their training and has minimal classroom experience.
experienced teacher who knows how to react in certain situations. By retelling this story, she is thus offering the listeners information/advice, which they may reflect on and draw upon for their future roles, while also allowing herself to look through a window into past experiences depicting her journey as a teacher. This is important for novice teachers in terms of shaping their identities because at the beginning of their learning they ‘position themselves along various continua of control, authority, and expertise’ (Urzúa and Vasquez, 2008, p. 1944).

An example of a narrative from the TP feedback can be seen in Extract 2.

Extract 2: TP Feedback

1 Tutor: Yeah well how did it compare with other classes, you… I haven't seen you teach before
ST: No it was okay before I think I just get before if they asked me a question I would be able to answer it straight off but now I'm getting more conscious of the ‘right’ answer and solely the right answer so I am thrown every time they ask me something, which is kind of, I don't know, because when I talked to Mary teaching the week last, before last, the, my lessons went really well and like I I everything I assumed came up and when they asked me questions I was able to answer them and you, it was fine and then last week I think something happ… was it last week? I think, whatever group I had last week I got rattled again and now I am kind of shaking when they ask me a question I'm going ‘no’ (laughing) so I'm not in the best of form with confidence of them asking me….

5 Tutor: No I thought you were very confident in the classroom, I thought your personality came across very nicely in the classroom and you struck me as being somebody who was confident…
ST: Yeah
Tutor: …in the classroom.
ST: Yeah that is what I wanted, well, I don't tend to feel as nervous but when they ask me to explain something it's like ‘oh my god no’ like and my mind goes blank and it usen't go blank before like when … and they both sounded right…

10

15 This extract provides quite a comparison against Extract 1. Here we see the student teacher presenting herself as novice and expressing feelings of fear and uncertainty (lines 8, 9, 14) in a discussion with her tutor. The student teacher is not trying to justify or excuse these feelings but is very open and honest. She may feel that this is what is expected, a critical appraisal of her performance. She may be very honest as she is not in the presence of her peers and is canvassing the support, validation and advice of the more experienced mentor. And indeed, the tutor provides this by reassuring through denying the identity presented by the student teacher (lines 10 and 11) (the paradoxical role of the tutor is also important here as she is both
a facilitator and assessor - see Farr 2011). This is illustrative of strongly guided co-construction between the teacher and tutor where the more experienced ‘other’ is helping to shape a novice teacher’s identity. It is possible that this other (more experienced tutor) voice may need to be internalised by the student teacher but it is certainly a legitimisation of the identity formation and presentation of a confident and capable teacher.

An interesting phenomenon evident in this extract is the reporting of mental states and thoughts through hypothetical direct speech. In line 8 the teacher reports thinking ‘no’ and in line 15 ‘oh my god, no’. This is an important resource in identity construction as it allows the teacher to represent her emotional state through the urgency of her thoughts at a particular time. This makes it more directly accessible to the tutor. Some writers have recently started to examine direct quotations used to represent thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and perceptions in professional identity construction (Vásquez and Urzúa, 2009). Such constructions ‘tend to highlight uncertainty or insecurity, lack of knowledge, or even negative feelings and emotions’ (ibid, p. 13), which is exactly what we see in this extract. In general, Extract 1 represents a teacher in the presence of her peers representing herself as a novice in the past but more experienced and knowledgeable at the time of the TESOL programme, and a possible model for others’ behaviour. She takes strong control over the expression and formation of her identity. In Extract 2, the teacher plays the novice by highlighting her uncertainty and insecurity. By doing this, she predisposes herself to having her identity strongly co-constructed by the more experienced tutor. Of course these two contexts differ and therefore the student teacher with the tutor in TP feedback may feel as if she is doing what is required of her in this context. The following section now addresses the discourse from the blogs.

**Online discourse**

A blog, or a weblog, is a website that contains posts, presented in reverse chronological order. They ‘have evolved to encompass any subject matter and they reflect worldviews that range from the private world of the writer to the public world of culture and current events, and everything in between’ (Blood, 2002, p. 6). Blogs are easy to create and maintain, do not require any technical background, and for these reasons are very attractive to the education arena (Ray and Coulter, 2008). As a result, there has been a shift from writing in diaries and
journals to that of blog writing (Higdon and Topaz, 2009). If we examine the informal blogs the student teachers wrote privately, which could only be read by the peer tutor (and were not assessed), an example of a narrative can be seen in Extract 3. Here the student teacher is reflecting on her experience of observing another fully qualified teacher’s class.

**Extract 3: Blog Lostdog (for the peer tutor)**

1. Reflecting on teaching observation

   I forgot to mention last Friday I had my first chance to observe a teacher instructing an elementary ESL class in the Foundation Building. The teacher was a substitute, and she had no idea I was going to be there, but she was very nice, and young. Her class was made up of 4 students, 2 Chinese, 1 Japanese, 1 French --- 2 girls and 2 guys. It was an extremely boring class and the French kid kept yawning. Talking about countable nouns and how much water you should drink every day (?). The teacher kept telling the quiet Asian girls that they were “Good girls,” which sounded a bit childish to me, since they were at least 18 years old, and when the 2 guys said something right, the teacher would say “Good man!” Sounded a bit sexist, but I'm probably overreacting. The students were extremely quiet. When the teacher left the room, they didn't make a sound, and when she asked them to do pairwork, they didn't! At the end of the class while the students were still sitting there, the teacher came up to me and apologized. “These students never say anything,” she said, while they were sitting there listening. It seemed rather insensitive. The teacher told me to observe another class because I'd probably have a better experience. The teacher was a substitute, so I know it wasn't a typical class, but I think she could've done more to engage the students and draw them out. Easy for me to say since I've never tried it! But that's my take on it. Just wait until next semester when I try student teaching and I'll be eating my words.

This is an interesting extract because Lostdog, who is a mature student and a complete novice, is depicting a novice identity of herself, because although she is quite aware of important issues in teaching, she hedges her opinions quite a lot (for example, *I'm probably overreacting*, and *it seemed rather insensitive*). She begins her discussion of her experience of observing another teacher by noting that this teacher ‘was very nice and young’ (line 4). As her narrative goes on to softly criticise this teacher’s approach, this positive character description is used to lessen the force of what comes later, and shows the student teacher’s will to critique the teaching and not her as a person. She then goes on to describe the class which was ‘extremely boring’ (line 5), and reflects on the teacher’s actions which were at times patronising to the students (lines 7 and 8) and other times ‘sexist’ (line 9) and ‘insensitive’ (line 13). From a pedagogical perspective, the examples she offers are indeed justified, which shows this novice teacher has an awareness and understanding of teaching
and learning contexts but she finds it difficult to criticise the lesson, for example, she notes in line 9 that ‘I’m probably overreacting’ and in line 14 that ‘I know it’s not a typical class’. Therefore this novice makes some good arguments, and offers valuable insights into what she has observed, but she ends her turn relinquishing her opinion, stating that it is ‘easy for me to say since I’ve never tried it’. She thus has sufficient knowledge to make assessments of another teacher’s teaching, but her position as a novice makes her question her own judgements, at least publicly for the peer tutor’s sake. This echoes Copland’s (2010) study, where she found that novice teachers in feedback sessions often lack confidence in their knowledge, and therefore withhold sharing opinions. Copland (2012) also discusses the notion of student teachers not feeling legitimate in voicing their opinions, which could be the case for Lostdog here, resulting from her novice stance. Vásquez and Urzúa (2009) support this by noting that novice teachers may often be unsure of their roles, their knowledge, and various aspects related to teaching.

An example of a narrative from the blogs written for a lecturer (and assessed) following each TP lesson can be seen in Extract 4. As this blog is written for a different audience, it offers a different opportunity for identity work as is seen below.

Extract 4: Blog (for the TP tutor/lecturer)

1 I was pleased with the student’s use of fixed phrases during this lesson, I think they understood the concept quite well and that fixed phrases aren’t to be taken literally in meaning. I was also pleased with the grammar section of the lesson, I think the students understood the tense that was being taught very well for the level that they are at. ….

5 However, I wasn’t pleased with the last exercise of the my lesson plan as I ran out of time and the students didn’t get to complete it. …. I think I achieved four of my five lesson aims and outcomes. Students practised and revised reading skills, listening skills, the past perfect aspect and fixed phrases in the English language. …. The fifth aim/outcome was not achieved as I ran out of time and students didn’t get to practise accuracy and fluency skills in terms of speaking.

10 After watching the DVD recording of the lesson and after receiving feedback from the supervisor, I think I came across very abrupt when correcting certain exercises and activities during the lesson. I didn’t give the students the credit or validation that they deserved for their efforts. I would like to develop my correction techniques - I find that it is very boring for the students and that sometimes I come across as being quite abrupt with their answers and therefore I don’t give them the validation and credit that they deserve for their contribution.
Finally, I think pronunciation is the biggest problem I have noticed amongst the EFL students. However I don’t think I give it enough time or consideration during class. I need to focus on this area more in the future and correct any pronunciation errors to prevent fossilization. In the case of intermediate students, I would like to focus more on pronunciation as well as tenses and aspects as these students tend to mix them up.

The scenario here is quite different, and in many ways the identity being constructed is that of a successful student who should pass the course. A student teacher has researched, prepared and taught a lesson. She has done some focused reflecting, has had a feedback conference and has had a couple of days to reflect further and complete a weekly blog. The blog counts as 10% of the overall grade for the TP module on the programme. Given these factors, there is an expectation among all parties that the student teacher will assume and project a more confident and knowledgeable identity in her narratives and indeed this is very much the case. This student teacher displays pedagogic knowledge (as evidenced, for example, through her use of metadiscourse). She presents a lot of insight into the specific teaching and learning context under scrutiny, rightly or wrongly. Towards the end of the narrative (line 10 onwards), the student teacher discusses evidence she used in terms of an audio-visual recording and also what has been discussed post-lesson with the observer, and uses both of these as a scaffold to co-construct her own identity. This in itself is further evidence of professional conduct befitting what she understands to be her role as a novice teacher well on the way to becoming a part of the mainstream community.

While in both blog extracts presented here, the student teachers have a fair deal of insight into teaching and learning, in Extract 4 the feedback from the tutor in the TP meeting also appears to play a role in shaping the teacher’s identity, while in Extract 3, the student teacher is less comfortable critiquing the teacher’s class because she is less experienced. This scaffolding once again reiterates the importance of the experienced ‘other’ in helping student teachers to define themselves as teachers, and this may be more explicit in the formal student teacher/lecturer dialogues than those with the peer tutor, where in the former they are making a more conscious effort to display an identity. The following section attempts to summarise the findings in terms of reflection and identity formation.
Reflection and identity construction

What we have attempted to depict in this chapter is the expression of identities by our student teachers. In the face-to-face dialogues (Extracts 1 and 2), we saw evidence of novice identities from the student teachers (although the first extract shows the teacher with a professional identity at the time of speaking), while simultaneously depicting their knowledge of the field. We also saw that the student teacher in the group discussion is conscious of her peers listening to her, and wants to portray herself in a positive light, while also offering the more novice teachers scope for future reflections. The student teacher with her TP tutor is reflecting backwards on her teaching, and being very open and honest, as is expected in this context and potentially motivated by the formal assessment of the practice around which the discussions take place.

In the blogs, we found the student teachers are again showing novice identities, while demonstrating their knowledge of teaching. However, in Extract 3 the teacher is uncomfortable evaluating someone’s teaching, whereas in Extract 4 the teacher is more confident in her evaluation. The presence of the tutor/lecturer is important here as they facilitate the co-construction and creation of the student teachers’ identities, and therefore play an important role in their learning and reflections. From our narrative analysis, we have shown how more experienced teachers are able to reflect backwards and see how they dealt with issues via their narratives, while novice teachers can reflect on the experienced teachers’ narratives for forward projecting, which is what is expected in such contexts. We also note that novice teachers have professional knowledge but are not confident in this, and they are quite aware of the presence of their peers during the discussions. The final section outlines some conclusions drawn from this research.

Concluding remarks

What our narrative approach to this data has reaffirmed is that the student teachers depict novice identities, but show evidence of knowledge and understanding, and other issues within the context (for example, the formality of the interactions, the presence of peers) play a role in the identities they project at any point in time. We therefore support Vásquez’ (2007, p. 671) findings based on student teachers’ identities, which she notes are ‘less stable, less certain or less consistent’ (Vásquez, 2007, p. 671), than those of expert teachers (see also Urzúa and Vasquez, 2008). For LTE, offering student teachers opportunities for dialogue
allows them to self and co-construct knowledge and move in their transition from peripheral to legitimate participants of a teaching community. The student teachers are individually and jointly negotiating their identities, in order to grow and develop as teachers, and we suggest that both formal and informal discussions allow student teachers differing ways of making sense of themselves as teachers in order to develop professionally.

We also stress the importance of a more experienced ‘other’ in assisting in scaffolding and co-constructing knowledge and identities, and in relation to this, it has been noted that teachers who are in the core of the CoP should work to encourage the peripheral participants to move towards further participation, and that we should cultivate CoPs at novice level so student teachers can participate in them, which may encourage them to be more willing to participate when in their future teaching professions (Fraga-Cañadas, 2011). With this in mind, we suggest that educators employ techniques and strategies that add to and further the experience and quality of learning and practice for student teachers. Results such as these should encourage teacher educators to implement policies for mentoring, scaffolding, fostering communication, and community building for student teachers to assist them within their practice of and identification with teaching. We need to continue to find ways of promoting and advancing the learning experience for student teachers, and we need to encourage supportive and scaffolded dialogue between members of such a teaching community.

References


