Telling Stories: A Process of Identification - An analysis of the Professional Life Histories of six neophyte teacher educators

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Outline

1. Introduction to this study
2. One key question – Does identity change?
   - The evidence of identity transformation
3. One key finding – A process of Identification:
   - What is identification?
   - Is there evidence of identification in the narrative events?
   - What supports identification?
     - Reflecting on reflection
4. Discussion about identification

Rationale for this study

- Changing landscape within the field of education. Transitions are very important.
- My own experience of transition from teacher to teacher educator; does identity change?
- Transitions for teacher educators identified as problematic in literature, e.g. Murray and Male (2005)
- Reading Recovery Teacher Leader (RRTL) one year training contrasting with new teacher educators' experience within ITE.
- Need to consider how identity is supported through such transitions.

The goals for this study:

- to understand professional transitions for education professionals moving from being a teacher to a teacher educator;
- to understand how professional identity changes or transforms as such transitions are made;
- to consider ways in which education professionals might be supported during times of transition.

The Research Design:

- Using an adapted Professional Life History method –
  - Where the focus of the discussion is on the 'professional' life (participants do not need to engage in telling about the 'private' life unless they wish to do so).
  - A professional life timeline is prepared in advance of the discussion – provides a framework for the story telling.
  - Participants are asked to engage in prospective (as well as retrospective) reflection in which they project into their possible future professional life.

- Using a grounded theory approach to the analysis of the narrative events.

- Drawing from a poststructuralist epistemology.

The Participants in this study

- Taken from two comparable contexts within Teacher Education –
  - Reading Recovery Teacher Leaders - who after a one year professional development programme start to train qualified teachers as Reading Recovery Teachers working with children at risk of reading failure.
  - Initial Teacher Educators – moving from roles as teachers of children (or other education contexts) into ITE. Induction into this role is minimal (university induction process and possible 'buddying' with more experienced colleague).
- Three participants from each context who had between one and three years in role (using preferred pseudonyms) -
  - Reading Recovery Teacher Leaders – Jane, Rebekah and Joanne
  - Initial Teacher Educators – Annie, Elizabeth and Emily
- Narrative events –
  - Professional Life History discussions (May – August, 2012)
  - Follow up discussions (March – April, 2013)

Does identity change? – The research context

- Murray and Male (2005) first to second-order practitioner (teacher of children to 'teacher of teachers');

- Boyd and Harris (2010) search for credibility; tendency to retain teacher identity;

- McKeon and Harris (2010) influence of social context, link to Communities of Practice theory and boundary crossing.

Does identity change – Is there evidence of Identity Transformation within the Narrative Events?

- Defining Identity Transformation –
  - *It is when an individual's dominant identity (or identification) with a* particular role or profession has changed such that previous roles or identities are subsumed (or rejected) as the new discourse of self is expressed.
- Indicators of Identity Transformation –
  - skills (and/or knowledge),
  - 'doing it',
  - self belief,
  - future aspirations,
  - support and independence.
- Stronger evidence of identity as an expert – link to notion of gaining credibility.

Identification

- **What is identification?:**
  - Coined from Hall (2000) that 'identification is constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group or with an ideal' (p16).
  - My definition - A process of recognition of self or identity realised in the narrative act.

- **Is there evidence of identification in the process of telling the professional life history?**
  - Analysis of follow up discussions where participants reflected on their experience of the PLH process. Did participants attest to coming to a greater self-awareness in this process?

Evidence of Identification

- 'made me more aware of my lack of confidence and now thinking maybe just go for it.' (Joanne, 28-03-13)
- 'it just helped me understand myself a bit more' and gave her a 'clearer understanding of where I wanted to go' (Jane, 08-04-13).
- enabled her to identify the 'very important landmarks of how I became an effective practitioner' (Annie, 15-05-13).
- 'able to reflect on some of those pivotal points and the reasoning behind them' (Emily, 12-03-13).
- 'why hadn't I done this process before?' (Annie, 15-05-13)

May also occur in other contexts:

- '[when] you have to make the decision are you going to move or not, you find yourself talking to various people about what you've done in the past and what you think you might be going to do in the future, and what's brought you to where you are now.'
- And that she had done this 'privately in my head' and 'with family and friends' (Elizabeth, 09-04-14).

What Supports Identification?

An analysis of instances of critical self-reflection (CSR) within the narrative events evidences a link between CSR and identification.

Theme	Linked Nodes
Identifying aspects of professional life of significance	• Identifying change • Identifying feelings • Identifying problems • Identifying skills and strengths • Identifying tensions
Statements of professional identity	• Identity as a teacher educator • Identity as a teacher • Identity with Reading Recovery
Reflections on roles in professional life	• Reflections on current role • Reflections on past role • Reflections on professional life
Recognising influences on professional life	• Influence of context • Influence of others • Job security • Motivation to change
Prospective reflection	• Ambitions for the future • Considering options
Reflections on self and evidence of self awareness	• Confidence • Regret • Self-awareness

What is identification?

- Tentative conclusion - that identification is a process of critical self-reflection which is specific to the context of telling stories or personal narrative.

Triggers for CSR and Identification within the Narrative Events:

1. dissonance,
2. identifying significant events or people,
3. recalling feelings,
4. recalling challenges,
5. recognising skills and expertise,
6. making links,
7. seeing the bigger picture,
8. prospective reflection.

Reflecting on Reflection

- The value of the follow up discussion –
  - Context to reflect on the storytelling process.
  - Supported premise reflection.
  - Linking to identification and identity transformation.

Supporting Identification for Student Teachers, Masters Level Students and Neophyte Teach Educators

Such approaches might include:

- the preparation of a professional life history timeline,

- one to one or small group sharing of professional life histories, and

- follow up discussions as an opportunity for 'reflecting on reflection'.

Discussion

1. Is there evidence that identification is a process activated within narrative practices?

2. Might this process of identification be supportive for individuals during professional transitions?

3. What narrative practices might we engage with in or work with student teachers, experienced teachers, mentors and teacher educators?

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