

Developing a theoretical model of professional identity transformation for early career teacher educators

Presentation by Dr Penny Amott for
TEAN Conference 2018

Outline

1. The theoretical underpinnings of this perspective on teacher educator identity transformation.
2. The participants in this study and professional life history method adopted.
3. A theoretical model of teacher educator identity transformation.
4. Evidence of identity dissonance, as suggested by the model and the value of this in shaping identity as teacher educator.
5. The use of narrative approaches in supporting early career teacher educators.

Defining Professional Identity

- Based on definition by Beijaard, Meijer et al. 2004
 - That identity is unstable and constantly changing;
 - that it is constructed within a social context and is therefore shaped by that context and may vary between contexts;
 - and it is a personal interpretation of self which is formulated and shaped for purpose (suggesting that they might not be a single ‘true identity’, but multiple identities constructed in different contexts for varying purposes).

Theoretical perspectives of identity

- Identity as stories that people tell (Sfard and Prusak 2010)
- Situational self and substantial self- *'situational selves are developed from interaction with others whilst the substantial self is a core of self-defining beliefs, relatively impervious to change'*. (Murray and Male 2005, p126)
- Aligned with 'designated identity' and 'actual identity' (Sfard and Prusak 2010)
- Identity dissonance – 'between competing discourses of self' (Warin, Maddock et al. 2006)
- Identity transformation – Based on Mezirow's transformative learning theory (Mezirow 1991)

The Professional Life History (PLH) approach

- An adapted form of Life History method (Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Atkinson, 1998).
- Focus on professional life – sharing of personal information is at discretion of storyteller.
- Incorporating prospective reflection – more likely to reveal identity over recent transitions, supportive of identification (adapted from Conway, 2001)
- Preparation of timeline in advance to form structure for conversation, reducing need for prompting.

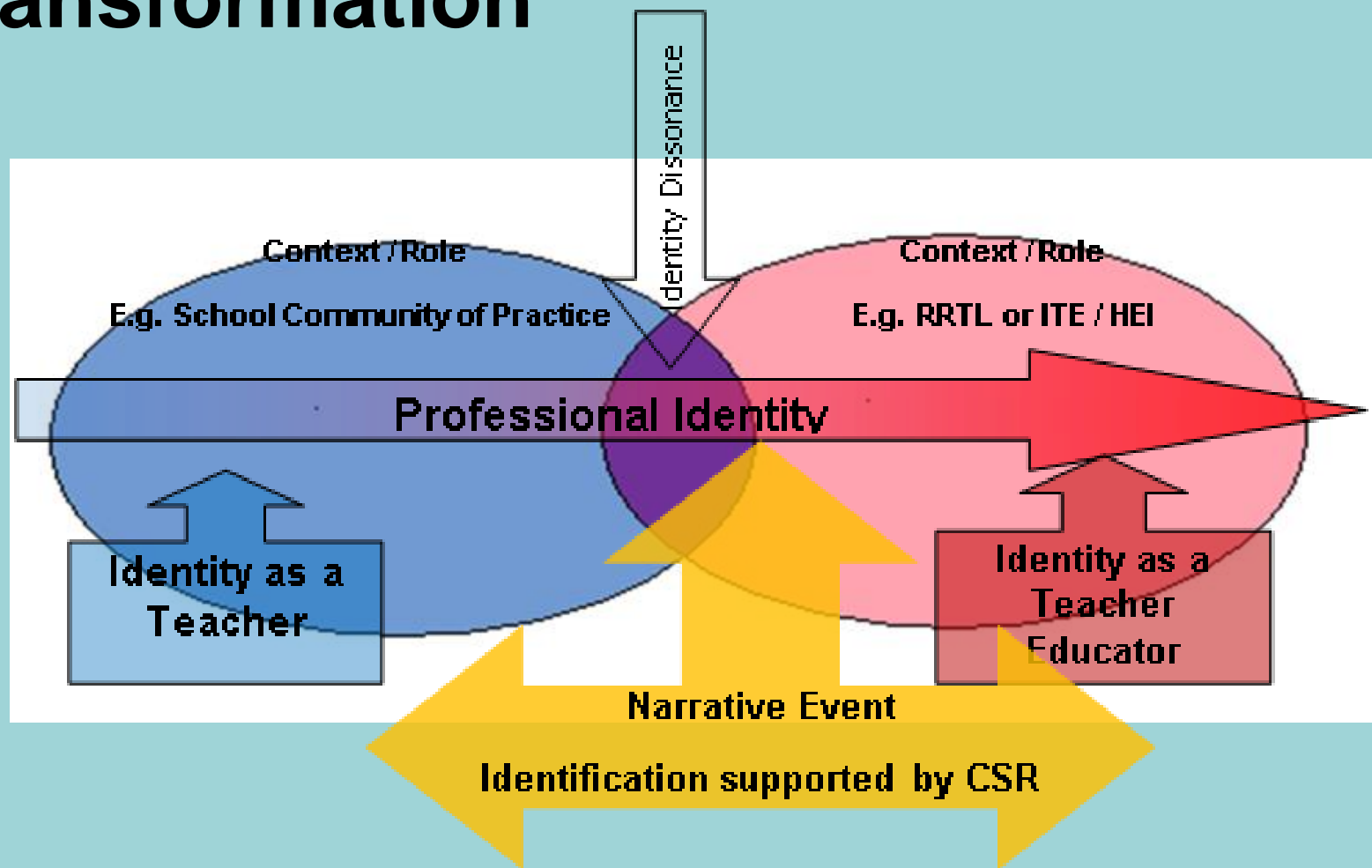
The Participants in this study

- Drawing 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
 - Follow up discussions

Main findings:

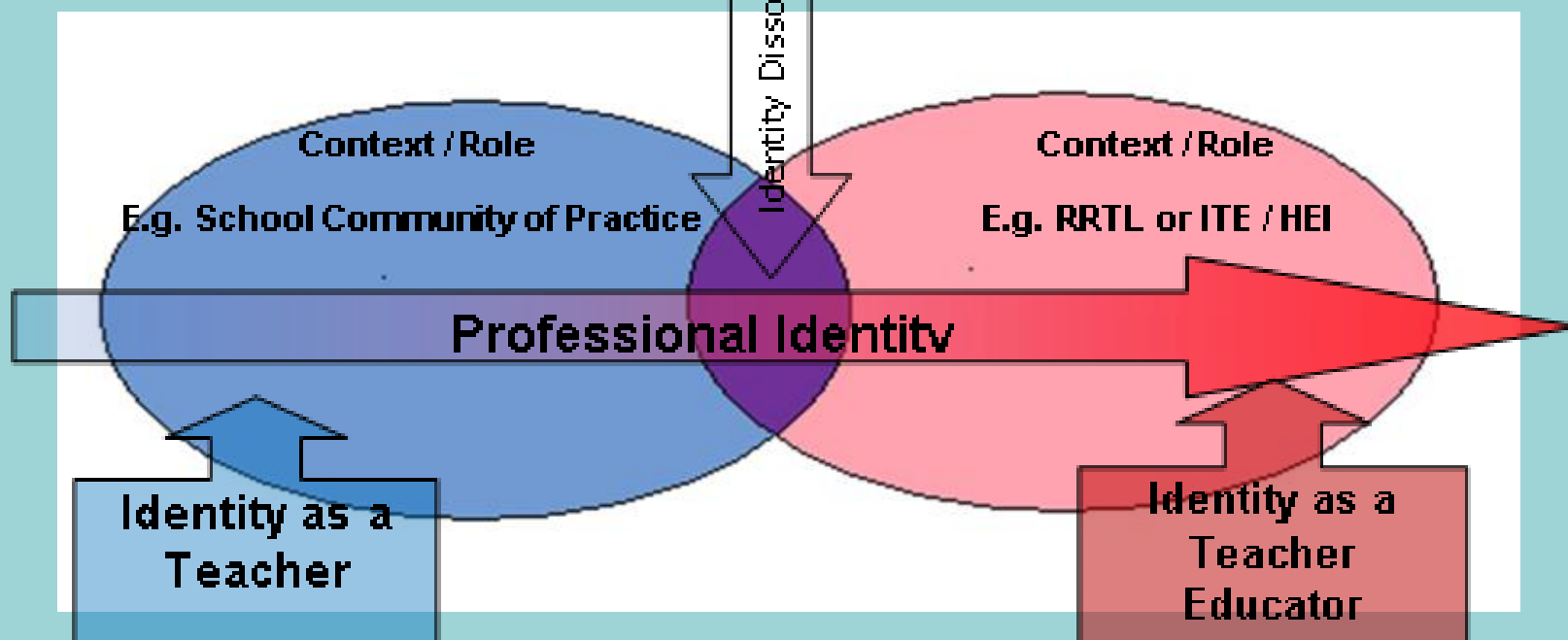
- Identity transformation takes place as education professionals transition into new roles.
- A process of identification evidenced during narrative practices which is supportive of identity transformation. (Amott, 2018)
- Narrative practices, such as the PLH, are supportive of individuals in activating identification.
- Prospective reflection leads to an enhanced experience of identification.

A theoretical model of identity transformation



Two processes in operation:

- The process of identity transformation as an individual negotiates a transition into new role – depicted by interlinking blue and red circles



The process of identity transformation

- Professional Identity - The arrow represents the lived experience of professional identity as an individual moves between two professional contexts.
- Two professional contexts – The school community of practice to context of RR Teacher Leader or university / HEI for Initial Teacher Education
- Identity transformation – The graduation of colour from blue to red where previous identities may be merged or subsumed into the new identity as teacher educator.
- Overlapping section – Shows that previous identities may still be retained for some time as individuals engage with their new professional role – leading to identity dissonance

Two processes in operation:

- The narrative process that supports the activation of identification.



The narrative process

- Activates identification supporting identity transformation
- Positioned some time after the initial transition
- Double arrow – represents the activation of retrospective and prospective reflection

Identity Dissonance

- Praxis shock (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002) for teacher educators:
 - The challenge of working with adults
 - The challenge of engaging with/in research as part of ‘the academy’
 - The challenge of being ‘an expert become novice’ (Murray and Male, 2005)
- The actual identity (as a teacher of children) retained several years into new role as teacher educator (perhaps with a greater sense of credibility with this identity) with the new designated identity failing to be realised fully.

Evidence of identity dissonance

- I was able to identify examples of identity dissonance from the PLHs of all participants and in their follow up discussions.
- Some examples:
 - Jane - repeatedly used the word 'torn' in expressing the challenge she faced as she had to work across two very different work contexts in order to be able to continue in her preferred RRTL role on a part-time basis
 - Joanne - acknowledges that the PLH process was valuable for her in realising the change in her self-understanding as someone who for a large part of her career felt 'that she wasn't capable' to realising that 'I can do it'
 - Elizabeth also uses the PLH process to express the dissonance between 'someone like me, a working class background, a girl' who ends up as a lecturer in a university with a PhD
- Areas of dissonance identified in narratives were between: being a teacher/teacher educator and being a mum; being a specialist in English versus another subject area; working in a school or local education authority and working in teacher education.
- Most impactful was the issue around role uncertainty and funding facing uncertain futures.



The causes, effects and outcomes of identity dissonance

- **Causes** - lack of funding, job insecurity, lack of choice or ambition, health issues, feeling constrained and feeling near the end of a particular role.
- **Effects** –
 - Negative: feeling torn, feeling overwhelmed and being lead by circumstances.
 - Positive: recognising transferable skills and expertise, a new level of confidence or growth, new job satisfaction and a feeling of being proactive
- The **outcome** of identity dissonance is primarily in a sense of moving forward or in the activation to make a proactive change and take choices.
- **Prospective reflection** bringing future choices into focus. Activated a sense of seeking further possibilities; seeing future constrained by factors outside of their control; or taking a 'let fate decide' approach.

The use of narrative practice in supporting new teacher educators

- Use of PLH approach as part of induction for new teacher educators
- May be better taking place after the first year.
- Include:
 - Preparation of timeline in advance of discussion
 - Talking through PLH either 1:1 or small groups
 - Activation of prospective reflection – considering possible futures
 - Follow up discussion, some time later, as an opportunity for ‘reflecting on reflection’
- Can be used as part of induction or review process or linked to CPD planning

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