



A closer look at the role of mentor teachers in shaping preservice teachers' professional identity



Mahsa Izadinia

Edith Cowan University, 2 Bradford Street, Mount Lawley, Perth, Australia

HIGHLIGHTS

- The impact of mentoring relationship on professional identity of seven preservice was examined.
- When the mentoring relationship was positive the confidence level grew in the participants.
- But some participants experienced negative mentoring relationship and they felt less like a teacher at the end of the course.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 22 January 2015

Received in revised form

27 July 2015

Accepted 4 August 2015

Available online 13 August 2015

Keywords:

Teacher professional identity

Mentoring relationship

Preservice teachers

Teacher education

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the extent to which mentoring relationships played a role in creating changes in the professional identity of seven preservice teachers. Semi-structured interviews, observations and reflective journals were used to document the changes experienced by participants as they went through their two placements during their one-year teacher education course. The data indicated that when the mentoring relationships were positive and expectations were met, preservice teachers felt more confident as a teacher. However, for some participants, who experienced a partially negative mentoring relationship, their confidence declined and they felt they did not improve. Implications for practice are discussed.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Statistics show a 50% attrition rate for beginning teachers within their first five years of teaching in developed countries (Ingersoll, 2003; Jonson, 2002; Ramsey, 2000). In Australia, Ewing and Manuel (2005) observed that up to one third of teachers left the profession in their first three to five years of service. While factors such as workload, school situation, and salary have affected the teachers' decisions to leave (Smithers & Robinson, 2003), early positive experiences in teacher education have been considered strong motivational forces in continuing to teach (Ewing & Manuel, 2005). For instance, feeling valued, the perception of success, and a sense of worth correlate with retention (Blase, 2009; Dyson, Albon, & Hutchinson, 2007).

According to He (2009), the mentoring experience is a key factor in the success of beginning teachers. It is also believed that the presence of a mentor increases the retention of beginning teachers

(Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Lortie, 1975; Odell & Ferraro, 1992). The literature abounds with studies on the teaching practice unit (practicum) and within that the role of mentor teachers (i.e. those who supervise preservice teachers in their practicum setting, Beck and Kosnik (2000)) in early professional development of preservice teachers (Chaliès, Ria, Bertone, Trohel, & Durand, 2004; Glenn, 2006; Leshem, 2012; Martin, Snow, & Torrez, 2011). The extensive research on mentoring suggests that mentoring as one factor impacting retention has deserved a great deal of attention of researchers at international level. Pascarelli (1998); for example, writes about the different roles of mentor teachers changing from showing empathy and giving advice to empowering the mentees and highlighting their personal strengths. Other researchers discuss the components of good mentoring programs, such as communication, authenticity, encouraging gestures, honesty, trust, constructive feedback, and emotional and academic support (Izadinia, 2015; Beck & Kosnik, 2002; Zanting, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2001).

As there is broad agreement on the important role of mentor teachers in preservice teacher education (Beck & Kosnik, 2000), it is

E-mail address: Mizadiniya2006@yahoo.com.

of utmost significance to research the dynamics of “this sometimes fraught relationship” (Patrick, 2013, p. 209) and its contribution to the professional lives of preservice teachers. Recently, more research has focused on the interaction between mentors and preservice teachers (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010; Bradbury & Koballa, 2008; Ferrier-Kerr, 2009), yet little is still known about the role of mentoring relationships in the development of teacher identity in preservice teachers (Izadinia, 2013).

Teacher identity as a determining factor in teacher motivation, satisfaction, and commitment to work (Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons, 2006), also contributes to teacher retention and lack thereof leads to teacher stress and burnout (Hellman, 2007; Scheib, 2007). The dynamic and constantly evolving nature of teacher identity (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004) shapes in an examination of the self in interaction with others in a professional context (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). For instance, research shows that involvement of preservice teachers in learning communities and activities such as reflective writing and collaborative reflection inform preservice teachers' professional identity (Cattley, 2007; Estola, 2003; Vavrus, 2009; Webb, 2005). The growing number of studies on factors contributing to the formation of teacher identity in preservice teachers suggests that the development of a teacher identity is a central process in becoming a teacher (Alsup, 2005; Friesen & Besley, 2013). Moreover, having a strong sense of identity, as discussed above, contributes to teacher retention as it helps beginning teachers to gain a sense of control and remain resilient (Bieler, 2013).

Johnson (2003), argues that the relationship between a mentor teacher and a preservice teacher can transform the teachers involved. In other words, mentor teachers can inform the development of teacher identity in preservice teachers by instilling in them a sense of confidence, power and agency (Liu & Fisher, 2006; Ticknor, 2014; Williams, 2010) or, conversely, inhibiting the development of their voice (Beck & Kosnik, 2000; Patrick, 2013; Pittard, 2003). There are a handful of studies on the impact of mentoring on identity formation of preservice teachers. For instance, in the US, Bieler (2013) used a holistic mentoring approach with four student teachers to explore all the factors that contributed to their professional identity development. She described how three holistic mentoring moves—creating an opening for the new teachers' voices, listening for and inquiring into holistic possibilities, and cultivating holistic, agentive teaching, and learning practices—helped her students to forge and voice their identities.

Pillen, Den Brok, and Beijaard (2013) explored the tensions in the professional identity of beginning teachers in the Netherlands and found that the support and activities provided by teacher educators and mentor teachers reduced or altered their tensions. In another case study conducted in the UK (Liu & Fisher, 2006), positive changes in three foreign language student teachers' conceptions of their identity and classroom performance were observed; the preservice teachers perceived that they made improvement in their teaching practice throughout the year and they felt more like a ‘real’ teacher due to factors such as accumulation of experience and support from their mentors. This study, among other things, showed the impact of a positive relationship between teacher educators and student teachers on teacher change and professional growth. In previous research in Australia the author examined the impact of mentoring relationships on eight preservice teachers' teacher identity during a four-week block practicum and it was found that positive mentoring relationship and mentors' feedback significantly contributed to changes in aspects of professional identity such as the participants' teacher voice, confidence and vision.

The present research aims to further investigate the changes in

the above-mentioned participants' teacher identity as they moved through their subsequent seven-week block practicum and experienced a different mentoring relationship. By comparing the dynamics of the mentoring relationships and the changes in participants' teacher identity in the two placements, the author sought to identify the significance of the mentor teachers' roles in the professional lives of the preservice teachers. It was also assumed that by giving voice to preservice teachers' mentoring experiences, extra caution will be exercised by teacher education programs to train mentor teachers who are well aware of their crucial role in shaping preservice teachers' professional identity. The key question raised in this study is: How does the relationship between mentor teachers and preservice teachers influence the development of preservice teachers' professional identities during a one year Graduate Diploma of Education-Secondary program? The sub questions addressed in this study are:

1. How did preservice teachers characterize the mentoring relationship in the first and second practicum?
2. What changes occurred in the preservice teachers' professional identity following the second placement?
3. To what extent did mentor teachers in the two placements play a role in shaping the preservice teachers' teacher identity?

2. Theoretical framework

Professional identity construction as a learning-to-teach process (Smagorinsky, Cook, Moore, Jackson, & Fry, 2004) occurs as preservice teachers interact with significant others such as their teacher educators (Johnson, 2003). Such a view is based on social constructivism, which assumes learning happens in a social process in which learners gain new skills and knowledge through interactions with other people such as teachers (Vygotsky, 1978). It was assumed that a social constructivist approach would adequately guide the study to examine how pre-service teachers' professional identity would be affected by their interactions with mentor teachers because its three main tenets could be easily applied to a mentoring relationship (Graves, 2010). In other words, the three tenets of (1) knowledge is constructed by learners; (2) learning involves social interaction and (3) learning is situated (Beck & Kosnik, 2006) can be interpreted as: pre-service teachers go through the learning-to-teach process and gradually construct their teacher identity in their daily interactions with significant others, such as their mentor teachers in the context of the practicum.

3. Method

3.1. Context of the study

The study was conducted in the Graduate Diploma of Education-Secondary (GDE-S) Course, in the School of Education at a university in Western Australia. The programs offered by the School of Education are informed by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), which is responsible for the development of a national curriculum, assessment, and a data collection and reporting program that supports learning for all Australian students. Along with ACARA, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) also provides national leadership for Commonwealth, state and territory governments and promotes excellence in teaching and school leadership.

The GDE-S, the context of the study, is designed to prepare students for the Secondary Education profession and the graduates are eligible to teach in secondary schools. This course is a one-year

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/373857>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/373857>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)