Examining Identity of Novice Teacher Educators

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Abstract

Novice teacher educators can provide valuable insight into the question of professional identity and how it informs practice. Interviews highlighted how work-related experiences of novice teacher educators, contributed to their professional identities. This study identifies specific qualities of teacher educators who are former classroom teachers and analyzes qualities to determine how lived experiences shape their identity as teacher educators. Additional attention will be provided to how these lived experiences can help enrich the teacher education program. Phenomenological methodologies were used to gather and analyze data from seven novice teacher educators. Individual responses were categorized using Wenger's (1998) Modes of Belonging model. By understanding identity, it is the hope that the knowledge gained brings confidence and competence to novice teacher educators.

Keywords: novice teachers, teacher identity, teacher educator, modes of belonging, mentorship, collaboration, and mentorship

"Who's there?" (Hamlet, Act 1, Scene 1, Line 1).

When the vigilant Bernardo calls out into the blackness, Shakespeare's Elizabethan audience would have sharpened their senses and strained to hear the answer. "Who's there?" It is likely that at some point in their lives, most educators have read, seen, or even perhaps taught the Shakespearean play, *Hamlet*. But have they considered the opening line with regard to their profession: "Who's there?" Have they thought about their identities as teacher-educators? Have they studied what factors come together to shape those identities, and to inform their practices?

Teacher educators are unique: "Teacher educators constitute a group of teachers with a special role in the education enterprise: they prepare future teachers. Is this special role the basis for a distinct professional identity" (Ben-Peretz, Kleeman, Reichenberg, & Shimoni, 2010, p. 114)? Izadinia (2014) argues that teacher educators do in fact have a distinct professional identity. She identifies how both self-support and community support influence teacher educators' identity, and that these same teacher educators contribute lived experiences that constantly influence their identity. Figure 1 explains the activities that support teacher educator identity.
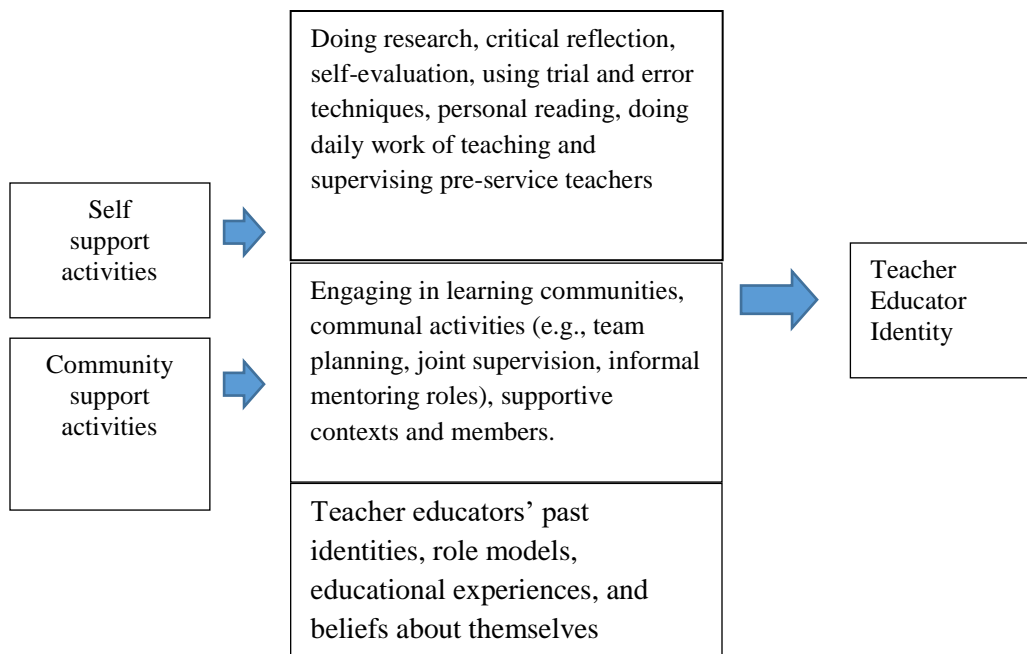
Self support activities	→	Doing research, critical reflection, self-evaluation, using trial and error techniques, personal reading, doing daily work of teaching and supervising pre-service teachers	
		Engaging in learning communities, communal activities (e.g., team planning, joint supervision, informal mentoring roles), supportive contexts and members.	→ Teacher Educator Identity
Community support activities	→	Teacher educators' past identities, role models, educational experiences, and beliefs about themselves	

Figure 1. Factors influencing teacher educators' identity development.

Figure 1 presents several qualities resulting from two distinct sources of support activities. The activities and qualities produce one teacher educator identity. Past experiences and beliefs must not be forgotten as they also contribute to the identity of the teacher educator. This process is multi-faceted and complicated. Saito (2013) and Dinkelman (2011) agree that constructing multi-dimensional identities is no easy task, and Dinkelman extends his description of complex teacher educator identities by pointing out that those identities that are claimed by the educators themselves, and also given to the educators by the roles and institutions that frame the profession.

Novice Teacher Educators

The real work of understanding one's teacher educator identity begins in the novice years. Novice teacher educators are faculty members who have been in the field for one to six years. Many novice teacher educators have transitioned from K-12 educators to teacher educators. Their identities now face shifts, changes, and unique needs of novice teacher educators. An assumption exists that competent schoolteachers will automatically be proficient teacher educators, but this assumption does a disservice to new teacher educators as they may have specific needs that are not being met (Williams & Ritter, 2010). Saito (2013) notes three types of struggles experienced by the novice, former K-12 teacher educators: the need to formulate and develop a new identity, to adjust to a new working environment, and to engage in research activities. Knowles and Cole (1994) and Pinnegar (1995) concur with Saito that these struggles lead to "a sense of isolation" (p. 193).

According to Lankveld, Schoonenboom, Volman, Croiset, and Beishuisen (2016),

> [the] first years were experienced as a stressful period characterized by feelings of uncertainty, self-double, and inadequacy – even for teacher educators with significant experience in primary or secondary education. The teachers realized that their professional expertise was not sufficient for their new role. (p. 329)

Tack and Carney (2018) stress that teachers in training need spaces in their education devoted to examining challenges and misconceptions about their professional identities, which if left unaddressed can cause distress when their perspectives go challenged by those who do not share similar views.

Adjusting to a new environment is challenging on any front. The post-secondary arena offers a more isolated approach to teaching. Gone are the K-12 grade level teams of support and teacher educators are given more academic freedom. This can be liberating, but intimidating. In addition to new freedom, teacher educators are often expected to research their field:

> The amount of literature on teacher educators' professional identities is minimal, but available sources suggest that the development of a personal pedagogy for teacher education and the development of scholarship are two key elements on the identity of teacher educators. (Lunenberg, Korthagen, & Zwart, 2011, p. 416)

Williams and Ritter (2010) and Izadinia (2014) agree that there has been little research regarding the needs of new teacher educators and that even though there has been a heightened interest in the concept of teacher educator identity, the topic is still under-researched. Dinkelman (2011) depends on his practice and experience to inform his stance on the importance of teacher educator identity. His extensive work with the teacher educator self-study community gives him considerably more experience with teacher educator identity than is typical among those in the field.

Need for the Study

Izadinia (2014) conducted a "thorough analysis" of available literature on existing tensions and challenges faced by teacher educators. Her purpose was to reduce said tensions and

also to recognize the process of identity formation in teacher-educators, and how it can be facilitated: "The tensions experienced by teacher educators toward constructing their professional identity seem to be still unresolved" (p. 427). She raises three research questions:

1. What challenges and tensions do teacher educators experience during their academic induction?
2. What factors influence the development of teacher educators' identity?
3. What might high-quality induction programmes of teacher educators entail? (p. 428).

Izadinia (2014) focused only on teachers' professional identities. Fifty-two articles were chosen after an analysis of applicability, and a limitation is that her focus is on teacher educators' identities. A related topic is professional development, and while there are connections between teacher educator identity and professional development, her review focuses strictly on articles concerning teacher educator identity. Beginning and novice teacher educators are occupied with constructing their professional identities following the transition from K-12 educators to teacher educators. Izadinia further cites studies exploring teacher-educator identity "during academic induction or introduction to academia" (p. 429). This still leaves a population of teacher-educators out of consideration. Novice teacher-educators, with approximately five years of experience at the post-secondary level, are still under-represented in current research.

There tends to be a noticeable gap between practitioners and research. Teachers in the field often find formal studies in education to be out of touch with their practice. Research seems so separate from actual practice. This conundrum presents a need for teachers to feel more connected to their studies. Novice teacher educators can provide valuable insight into the question of professional identity and how it informs practice.

Research Purpose

This study explores how novice teacher educators construct their professional identity. Times of transition can be full of turning points. In their study on transition, Bullock (2011) wrote that data indicated turning points, which challenged the authors' prior understandings of a situation, in other words, "being at a loss." Turning points share the following characteristics: Transition to being a teacher educator involved an effective element; new teacher educators face a problem of practice. Collaboration or help from a critical friend is present, and since data is "bounded by the action-present, there is still time to take action on the problem" (p. 175). Bullock focused on identity problems faced by new teacher educators, as opposed to problems with developing pedagogy.

Constructivist Theory

Maxwell (2013) notes that in epistemological constructivism, "Our understanding of this world is inevitably our construction, rather than a purely objective perception of reality, and no such construction can claim absolute truth" (p. 43). Novice teacher educators are a unique subgroup within the realm of teacher education. Former experiences in the classroom certainly

help to define the teacher educator's understanding of the world, but Goodwin et al. (2014) suggests that to be a teacher educator is a "purposeful commitment" to a professional life, and a deep commitment, of teaching how "to teach" (p. 285). This is a unique construction of the world, one that is specifically reserved for the teacher educator and the novice teacher educator as well. Constructivism best describes this research because of the identity study and the understanding that identities are constructed over time, in a variety of ways, depending on a variety of factors (Wenger, 1998).

Phenomenology

Our conceptual framework is based on a social constructivist or interpretive worldview. Creswell (2007) defines this subjective perspective where "individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work" (p. 24). Because this can lead to multiple perspectives on a singular phenomenon, the "purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence" (p. 75), which arise from their social "interactions with others" (p. 24). This is the basis for the phenomenological perspective from which we conducted this study. We chose to use a phenomenological methodology because we wanted to analyze the "essences to shared experience" (Patton, 2002, p. 106) that these teachers had with regard to their professional identities and new teacher educators.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study include the following:

1. How do novice teacher educators describe their perceptions of professional identity and teacher identity?
2. How do teachers' K-12 experiences shape their teacher identities?
3. How do novice teacher educators' experiences shape their teacher educator identities?

Participants and Context

According to Creswell (2007), "participants in the study need to be carefully chosen to be individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon in question, so that the researcher, in the end, can forge a common understanding" (p. 62). Creswell suggests "a heterogeneous group is identified that may vary in size from 3 to 4 individuals to 10 to 15" (p. 76) are used for a phenomenological study. Seven novice teacher educators, who all had approximately five years of teacher education experience, participated in this study. The novice teacher educators, from two Upper Midwestern cities, were interviewed twice, initially by e-mail, followed by a face-to-face interview in the general area of respective universities. Three of the participants teach in a medium-sized, research institution, one in a private college, and the others in small public institutions.

Data Collection

Interviews

Creswell (2018) notes phenomenological "data collection procedures…typically involves interviewing individuals who have experienced the phenomenon" (p. 77). For this study, seven former classroom teachers who have transitioned to teacher-educators were interviewed in private settings. The first interview (see Appendix A) was sent out via email and asked the participants to reflect on specific aspects of their professional identities. Questions for the second interview (see Appendix B) were written with the intent of digging deeper into the identity of each novice teacher educator. Before the second interview, the participants were asked via e-mail to bring a meaningful item with them to the second interview, one that represents their personal and professional identities.

Data Analysis and Findings

Since former classroom teachers who are now teacher educators seek a sense of belonging when forming their new identities, the interview responses were evaluated according to Wenger's (1998) Modes of Belonging:

1. Engagement (E) - Active involvement in mutual processes of negotiation of meaning. The bounds of engagement help individuals shape and strengthen the connection to the chosen tasks and relationships.
2. Imagination (I) - Creating images of the world and seeing connections through time and space by extrapolating from our own experience. Through imagination, people can connect themselves to the world while considering other perspectives and meanings, and while doing so construct an identity.
3. Alignment (A) - Coordinating our energy and activities to fit within broader structures and contribute to broader enterprises. This mode concerns directing energy and therefore concerns power. (pp. 173-174)

Wenger's concept of Modes of Belonging (see Figure 2) was used to code and categorize the participants' responses from the interviews. All interviews were carefully read and each statement evaluated against the three modes of belonging. Which mode of belonging is most important to the novice teacher educator's sense of identity? Do these modes of belonging help to explain common themes that novice teacher educators use when developing their identity? If so, what are some of these common themes?
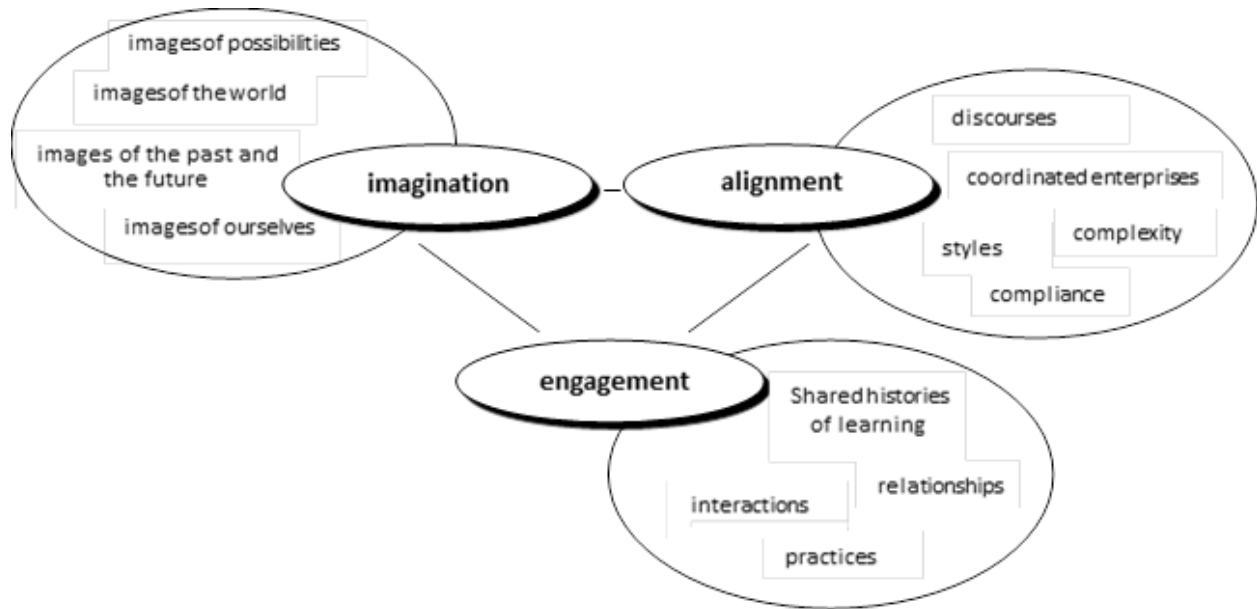
Figure 2. Modes of belonging. Produced by Wenger (1998).

All seven interviews were examined, and statements were labeled: Imagination (I), Alignment (A), or Engagement (E). Some statements fit into more than one mode and therefore were labeled with more than one letter. Participants' similar responses were organized into categories. After careful analysis, four themes describing identity emerged which included the following:

1. **Context for Identity:** Titles, Balance
   - Modes of Belonging: Imagination (I), Alignment (A), Engagement (E)
2. **Mentorship/Collaboration:**
   - Modes of Belonging: Engagement (E)
3. **Contribution to Field:** Teaching Practice, Scholarly Practice
   - Modes of Belonging: Alignment (A)
4. **Conflict:** Inside Department, Outside Department
   - Modes of Belonging: Alignment (A), Engagement (E)

Theme 1: Context for Identity

Context for Identity is an important theme because it is so applicable to the novice teacher educators interviewed. All three modes of belonging: (I), (A), and (E) applied to various "contexts" of identity used by the teacher educators. Titles and Balance were the categories that emerged under this theme.

Titles. One novice teacher educator with two years experience as a full-time adjunct professor and three years experience as a tenure-track professor weighed in on the different contexts of her professional identity:

It depends on who asks me or the context in which I find myself. If I'm at a conference, for example, where there are a lot of teachers, I tend to identify myself as a teacher too.

> They'll ask where, and I'll explain that I teach now at the post-secondary level, but tend also to feel a need to explain that I'm a former middle and high school teacher. When I meet someone I don't know, and they're not in the education world, I'll identify as a professor. Often they'll ask which department, and I'll say that I work mostly in teacher education.

She later explained that she wanted to feel "on the same level" as her K-12 language educator colleagues, so when discussing things with them, she refers to herself as a "teacher," even though she feels like they are not on the same level. She wants to feel equal to the K-12 teachers, even though she believes they are not quite equal. She is on a higher level but does not like to feel superior in any way.

Another novice teacher educator weighed in on the different contexts of her identity by noting:

> For those outside of academia I often just say that I teach at University X or that I work at University X. In part, this is because I don't want to come across as snobby and in part, it's because I have found that those outside of academia don't really know and/or care about all the different labels and rankings in academia. It's funny though that sometimes when I introduce myself as teaching or working at University X, I don't feel like I always get the type of response that that deserves, which makes me sound snobby, doesn't it?!

The desire for leveled communication rang true for all participants, perhaps due to a propensity for modesty and "Midwestern" categorization. Two novice teacher educators admitted they "don't like to talk about themselves," and/or "don't like to admit they do things well."

One novice teacher educator shared:

> I always identify myself as a teacher. I feel strongly that I love talking to people in any social situation. I want people to feel comfortable when talking to me. I think the title *professor* evokes certain responses. People can feel intimidated or turned off. People apologize for not being "good in school" or people don't want to talk to me.

The other teacher educator shared:

> I am also intimidated by higher ed. I don't know if it's my personality or what, but I like to fly under the radar. I am not a fan of academic recognition. My favorite response is, "I'm a teacher at a college in the education department. I get to teach teachers." I can't help but smile when I reveal this fact because I love it so much! When I applied to law school, the thought of changing my identity terrified me. No one likes lawyers. People like teachers, especially female teachers. Something about being a female lawyer scared me too. I don't like potential intimidation. I love teaching. I love it more than researching. So, identifying myself as a teacher, even though I'm in higher education, makes the most sense to me.

Just one participant identified as a researcher before teacher educator. His career has been grounded in research, and he considers it to be integral to his teaching: "Because my doctoral training included extensive and varied research elements, in addition to training as a teacher

educator, I place significant value on being a researcher and actively incorporating research into my teaching." His situation was somewhat unique among the participants. He had a methods instructor who became a research mentor, and as a secondary teacher, he conducted research that led into master's level work, and eventually doctoral work, all the while continuing to teach. He is confident in the research he contributed to his field but discussed feeling limited in teaching practices because of his role as a researcher. He found teaching as a graduate student to be "limiting, because, I often had less than full control of my teaching." Now, as a novice teacher educator, he maintains a balance between his subject area and teacher education: "Rather than [being] discipline-specific or isolated, [my subject] instead is multidisciplinary and integrated. Likewise, teacher education in my education in my mind involves marrying content and pedagogy with a host of other considerations."

Balance. Maintaining a healthy balance of work obligations and personal life fits under the Engagement (E) mode of belonging because it involves practices, interactions, and relationships. One novice teacher educator, who has 20 total years of experience in education with five years in teacher education, spoke of finding balance by learning to say "no." She said:

> Coming from K-12, you're never allowed to say "no." Then you go to higher ed, and people are reminding me I should be saying no. But early on you just don't, regardless, especially as you made that transition… To whom do I say no? The chair? The dean? The president? The athletic director who is asking me to do things? That stretched me in ways, my inability to say no, where I was doing a whole lot of things average. Which drives me nuts! I hate doing anything halfway, so that still becomes a challenge for me. I'm more selective, but it's not a good thing to be saying no at this point. I think the link to that is time, finding that balance.

The inability to say "no" in the K-12 setting plagued more than one participating novice teacher educator. One research participant described a feeling of helplessness when teaching high school. Not only did she have to teach a class in which she was not comfortable, or familiar with the curriculum, she also felt pressured by the student population in that class: "And one year, I was forced to teach a regular education junior English class, which was tough for me, especially having one of the assistant principal's stepdaughters in my class."

Another participant talked about her identity as a "high-achieving person." Because of the large workload of her teacher educator position, she had to learn that, "Sometimes being okay is good enough." She outlined the path to her current position. She liked teaching K-12 special education in public schools. Her master's degree and doctoral degree happened by chance. She did not plan her position as a teacher educator. An opportunity presented itself, and she took it. She was used to excelling in courses, but her teacher education job had her feeling a bit overwhelmed:

> So one of my difficulties as we were talking about, is maintaining a demanding schedule. So, our teacher preparation program is pretty large, and we have a lot of overlapping programs. The advising load is pretty heavy, because I'm advising not just special ed., but elementary as well. Learning how to balance that I guess would be one thing I've learned about myself is that I can probably do more than I thought I could when I first entered the job.

A focus on a "heavy load" was echoed by another participant. This novice teacher educator noted her balancing act with time:

> Time is another challenge. For those who are outside of academia, my schedule sounds great, as this semester I am only teaching three courses. But I am so busy. I don't feel like I ever have enough time to get everything or anything done. I don't know what to make a priority as everything seems like a priority. The tenure cloud is looming over me. I don't have enough time just to teach and go to meetings, let alone work on writing or research. I am ALWAYS behind on grading, which is bad for me and my students. I have had complaints from students about being behind on grading; which makes me feel terrible and also reflects poorly on my evaluations. It makes me feel like a failure.

Unfortunately, the ticking clock of each day in academia affected many of the participants. One novice teacher educator commented that he could easily check out and watch Netflix every day, but that would be a career disaster! He must be a steward of all of the independent work time he is given in the higher education arena because it differs so greatly from the overly scheduled work of K-12.

Another novice teacher educator shared the balancing act in this way:

> I love the teaching part of teaching, but the paperwork, (correcting, recommendations, etc.)…that takes me too much time. I know students are waiting for feedback and recommendation letters and such. I tend to spend too much time finding new ideas and trying them in class, and not enough time on feedback. So…while they (students) are energized by the actual class time, and they may be frustrated while they wait for their papers back. I have three kiddos at home and a dissertation, and sometimes grading takes a back seat. I've had to just accept that. I want to be the best at everything, but something had to give. At this point in my life (mid-30s), there is too much happening (family-wise) to be on-top of everything. I guess it teaches my students that teachers are real people with real lives, and that time management will be a part of their lives and careers as well. (Perhaps that view is through rose-colored glasses. They are probably really annoyed!)

Theme 2: Mentorship/Collaboration

Mentorship and collaboration appeared in every single participant's interview. These activities are of high value to novice teacher educators, or at the very least, to the novice teacher educators participating in this study. Mentorship and collaboration fall under the Engagement (E) Mode of Belonging because they include: relationships, practices, interactions, and shared histories of learning (Wenger, 1998).

Five of the seven participants described (in detail) the effects of mentoring on their practice. For some, the mentoring came early:

> I had a wonderful teacher educator for my teaching…methods course. It was he who first introduced me to readings on the broader goals of education and the nature of…the philosophical underpinnings of [my subject area] as they relate to [my subject area] education.

The positive interaction with a more experienced instructor influenced the career and teaching outlook of this novice teacher educator.

Another participant aspired to teach and approach life in the same way as his colleagues in K-12 education. As a young teacher, he was amazed at their ability to be "this laid back and still get a lot done." Now, he feels the pride to be working alongside many of his mentors in teacher education. His advice to seek out mentors is metaphorical, but also direct:

> Teaching is like playing golf. Until you shoot an 18, you haven't mastered golf. And that's exactly what teaching is like, Always, always seek out those who have been identified as true masters of the craft and do anything you can to sit in the classroom, take them out for beer and wings, whatever. Just be a part of their class, pick their brains.

He does caution that teacher educators still stay true to themselves, but to seek out experienced mentors with the intent of improving practice and life in general. One other participant recommended seeking out mentors as well, but not necessarily departmental mentors.

Another teacher educator values her connections with mentors in a national organization for her field. She looks to those mentors for collaboration on projects, for affirmation on best practices, and to give her another identity as an educator. She does describe the foundation of support provided by a few members of her department. They collaborate on professional writings and celebrate each other's professional successes. She does not look for that sort of professional collaboration and mentoring support from all members of the teacher education department.

Two participants identified the need for mentors in their workplace. They both felt lost and confused as new faculty members, and specified struggles with items such as: navigating the tenure process, and "being the new person." One reflected:

> I describe my first year as people speaking in Japanese as I didn't understand what was going on at all, but the end of my first year, it felt like people were speaking Spanish and I could pick up a few words here or there. At the start of my third year I feel like I have a better sense of what is going on, but not always.

This novice teacher educator went on to describe the desire for more peer support, but hesitation because of the competition amongst faculty. She did say that some members of her doctoral program have tried to start a "productivity support group" but have had little success thus far. She revealed, "I am extremely insecure and could use some support, but I haven't found it yet." She also mentioned the word *failure* four times in her interview, and showed self-awareness of this lack of mentorship when she stated, "What would help [me] would be some support."

The second participant, who identified the need for mentors in the workplace, talked about feeling "lost" during the tenure process. She is aware of her novice teacher educator status, and she mused, "If I feel lost, having the advantage of being part of the department as an adjunct or fixed term before tenure, I can't imagine someone who just comes from somewhere." She started a "little work group" for the "whole idea of mentoring." She explained:

> I think that entering into a department that has lots of complex things like accreditation, maintaining licensure in the state, and as well as contributing to university things. All of these things are new right? New faculty. So I think that should be something that we support new teacher educators in as they enter the field.

Another teacher educator experienced both extremes of mentorship:

> At my current job, I feel extremely supported. The department head is compassionate and dedicated to meeting the needs of faculty. Other faculty members are kind and helpful. The administration seems forward-thinking.
>
> At my former job, I was all alone. I identified more with staff than with faculty, especially faculty in my department. I didn't feel "smart" enough to contribute to the faculty discussions, and felt overwhelmed by the "busywork paperwork" of the Education division. I was (and still am) close with one faculty member (young, forward-thinking.) Her academic confidence paired well with my confidence in the classroom. I have more years teaching experience, but I consider her to be a far more experienced academic. She publishes frequently and knows the ropes of academia. Her peer support means so much to me. I don't have confidence at all when it comes to research and writing. Her encouragement helps my teaching and writing performance without a doubt.
>
> We also navigated tricky workplace scenarios together. I didn't feel supported by the administration but felt supported by her. Even though administration holds the winning card, at times, her support was much more important because of the close, personal level, and helpful feedback.

Theme 3: Contribution to the Field (Teaching Practice and Scholarly Practice)

All participants discussed the contribution to the field in some way shape or form. Contribution to the field involves the alignment (A) mode of belonging because alignment concerns are directing energy, and so it concerns power. The process of alignment transcends time and space to form a connection to something bigger than oneself (Wenger, 1998). Contribution to the field fits into two categories for the novice teacher educators: teaching practice and scholarly practice. Teaching practice refers to connections and views shared and/or gained in the classroom, and scholarly practice refers to connections and views shared and/or gained in the professional realm of academia, outside of the classroom.

Teaching practice. Responses containing great enthusiasm came from each participant when discussing their teaching practices. Participants' faces lit up, their smiles became wider, and most sat forward in their chairs when describing life in the classroom, much like this novice educator:

> Oh gosh! The classroom. The interactions. The students. And all that's involved with that. I think just, just to hear from my students that they're so excited to enter this profession, that they feel prepared. That they enjoy whatever capacity in education, they are. That, to me, gives me immense amounts of pride that I some way, shape, or form, even in the tiniest way I may have helped build that foundation to create that same sense of passion for this profession that I love so much.

Other responses echoed this novice teacher educator's excitement. Two participants remarked that their evaluations almost always revealed a strong sense of student-teacher connection. Their teacher education students feel supported, and even though one educator lamented that she, "wasn't an extrovert in the classroom," she still felt pride when explaining the connections she

makes with students.

Another participant uses the success of her graduates to cheer herself up during times of career stress. She knows she has sent out some great teachers and that makes her tremendously happy. She stays current with national standards and trends so she "knows what's going on in the world of education." She shared that her students benefit from this teaching practice because they display confidence and competence, even when dealing with other, more experienced teachers in their field. Another teacher educator described it in this way:

> I feel confident in my teaching. I don't remember the last time I was nervous in front of a classroom full of students. I can plan for a super-organized lesson, or put one together in 15 minutes, and I don't know if the actual presentation is any different. I genuinely love people, and I love talking to people. Class discussions are a favorite of mine. I also love student-led presentations. It's so fun watching them move from one side of the desk to the other. I am passionate and excitable. I love to share insights with my students. I love hearing about their lives, their clinical experiences. I think my excitement affects my students. It wears off on them! Students in the past have shared in their evaluations that they are inspired and energized by my class. I think it makes them excited to teach, and that makes me happy!

Scholarly practice. One novice teacher educator was originally inspired to teach by her love for languages. Her path toward teacher education included inner-city school teaching, graduate school, suburban school teaching, two years of leave, and back to middle and high school teaching in the Midwest. After just one year in the Midwest, she set her sights on higher education. She admits to feeling jaded about public education at that point, and she worries that she passed those negative feelings about teaching onto her teacher education students. For this reason, she joined a professional organization, and that membership helped her to remember her love for teaching. Her membership gave her support that she did not have on campus, or at home. Being connected to other teacher educators in her subject area energized and inspired her. She encouraged her teacher education students to join and even helped them to present at a conference. It gives her great pride to see the contributions that she makes to the field and that her students are making to the field. She shared a personal experience:

> I took three of my students with me last year to an educational conference. They were just, it was just so cool to see them interact there and nobody could believe that they were undergrad students. They thought that they were teachers in the field because, you know, they could, they could carry on conversations about actual things going on in our field and they helped present, and they were amazing, and it was, it was just really, really rewarding. It was really fun.

One participant, in a more pragmatic manner, placed a much higher value on scholarly practice. In fact, professional study and publication are integral to his identity as a teacher educator:

> After teaching high school for a couple of years I met other faculty who were in cohort graduate programs. While exploring my options I had a chance to meet the man who would become my graduate advisor and dissertation chair. [He] contacted me after an

initial meeting, where we had discussed graduate school options…his follow-up included an invitation to come work on a 5-year funded project that aimed to improve [subject area] teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical expertise. For the next few years, I worked, to varying degrees with this project and taught courses in [subject area] pedagogy for in-service teachers.

This participant continued to describe his contribution to his research field as the most important part of his identity as a novice teacher: "the courses I teach, which now directly relate to my position as a [subject area] educator, situate me in a way that students are inclined to view me as a resource."

Both of these novice teacher educators possess confidence when contributing at a higher level in their fields. They derive great joy from observing the successes of their teacher education students at this level as well. Having a strong sense of identity and purpose is very important to one research participant. She spoke about advocating for one's field, and contributing to scholarly work or presentations, or offering professional development. She stated, *"So in that way, maybe it is important to identify what is your purpose for being here beyond just your classroom teaching."*

Other participating novice teacher educators discussed briefly the importance of scholarly practice but spent more time explaining their contributions to practice in the classroom. Two participants only mentioned scholarship in the context of applying for tenure and another voiced honest feelings of inferiority on the subject. This was shared in this way:

> I do not feel confident with scholarship. I think my career path has something to do with this. I have a BA in English, so one would think I'd feel confident in researching and writing, but I worked at a teacher college, so no research required. My former doctoral advisor did not encourage me to publish either, so I did not have support that way. I would like to grow more in this area. My dissertation project helped with my understanding of scholarship and research. I know it's not the best work ever, but the process has helped so much with my confidence. I now know I can do this side of academia and that's exciting. I give all the credit to my advisor for giving me wings and gently supporting me until I found out I could do the work myself!

The novice teacher educators involved have contributed much to the field, both inside and outside of the classroom. To arrive at a productive place in their careers, a place where they felt like they were contributing, many of the participants experienced (or are currently still experiencing) times of conflict.

Theme 4: Conflict (Inside Department and Outside Department)

Analysis of the data revealed that the participants encountered two main types of conflict: conflict inside of their teaching departments and conflict outside of their teaching departments. The conflict involves two modes of belonging: Alignment (A) because of the coordinated enterprises, complexity, and compliance issues in teacher education programs and Engagement (E) because of the involved interactions, relationships, and practices (Wenger, 1998).

Conflict (inside department). "I was bullied by another faculty member." This admission was direct, heartfelt, and one aspect of the departmental conflict that this novice teacher educator shared. One interviewee conceded that although "higher ed. is pretty cushy" (compared to K-12), she felt severe apprehension and stress because of the conduct of someone in her department. There were disagreements over curriculum, a power struggle, and at one point, even a door slammed in the face of the novice teacher educator. Other faculty aligned with the senior member, and as a new faculty member, the participant felt isolated. She kept to herself, concentrated on best practices and relied heavily on her connections with a national teaching organization. She reported that her department chair encouraged through the tough time, so she was not completely alone. The senior faculty member has since retired, and now her relations with the rest of the department are healthy. She feels relieved and can concentrate better on her students and their success.

Another novice teacher educator talked about being the "only new person." She felt alone and unsupported. Now, three years on the job, she is no longer technically new, but currently is, "fighting against the mentality of 'this is how we've always done it' when I suggest a change or question things." She admitted to feelings of jealousy and isolation when referring to another group of faculty members who started as teacher educators at the same time. She views them as a cohort, where she does not have that peer support: "I've been put into the role of being a mentor, in some ways, as I am the only tenure-track faculty member between them and the associate professors. I am the test subject in many cases." As a novice teacher educator, she is not comfortable in this role. She feels alone herself and is still searching for personal and professional support from her department.

Another participant made a short, yet poignant comment about department members:

> There are those at both levels who have made being a professional very challenging and have almost made me leave the profession. Although I try hard not let negativity shape what I do, they have created spaces that made it difficult to do my job and even come to my job at all.

This comment is quite serious, but the nonchalant presentation of it during the interview is worth noting. This participant is describing conflict severe enough to quit the profession, yet the statement was followed with very little explanation. The researcher describes the potential career-shifting conflict as well.

Another described the conflict metaphorically:

> The English department at was made up of two islands. One island favored strict grammar rules and no modification. The other island favored teaching grammar through writing and differentiated instruction. Faculty relationships were strained at times, and when I left, I was either going to law school or to teach in a new environment. I got a job at [another school] and fell in love with teaching again. I felt like a member of a team. People were happy at work. Teachers loved teaching, they loved their students, and they were passionate about their curriculum. I am so thankful for that experience because it helped to reignite my passion.

> In one case, conflict within a department prompted this novice teacher to treat new colleagues in an encouraging manner:

My very first year of teaching I was sitting in the English teacher's office area, and a veteran teacher said to me, "Your first year, huh? I remember my first year. I didn't know shit! In fact, I didn't know shit for my first five years!" This comment offended me. I remember thinking, "So because I am a new teacher, I have nothing to offer? Am I no good? How do I fix that? Just time I guess." I would *never* say that to a new teacher or a pre-service teacher candidate, but I guess the cynic wasn't completely wrong. I hadn't had many authentic teaching experiences when I started in the classroom. I learned *a lot* the first five years. I guess that's why I'm so passionate about authentic experiences. I want my future teachers to get out of my class and think, "My experiences have prepared me for the 'real' work of my classroom."

Conflict (outside of department). A couple of the participants discussed the educational system. One reported feeling such severe conflict with "the neoliberal approach" of "cutting and not replacing" that exists in the educational system today, which he left his former position in favor of working in a different state. He *philosophically* disagrees with the system to the point of feeling bad after a day's work. He felt as if he constantly owed his students an apology for things beyond his control. He made a point to describe his conflict as having "nothing to do with whom I'm around." His conflict was most definitely outside of his department.

One novice teacher educator discussed conflict working with diverse learners. Her undergraduate experience left her with "rose-colored glasses," and she could not understand why her students in a culturally and economically diverse school were not responding to education in the same way that she had. In total, novice teacher educators reported little with regard to conflict outside of the department.

Summary

After analysis of data and establishing categories, the researchers determined that the greatest categories affecting the identity of novice teacher educators involved both mentorship and collaboration. This requires someone being an inspiration, offering encouragement, and working cooperatively with colleagues in classroom and scholarly practices. In settings where mentorship and collaboration occurred or when it did not, the novice teacher educators' identities were certainly affected. Mentorship and collaboration most definitely provided confidence-building support that aided in the formation of successful teaching practices inside the classroom and the realm of scholarly research.

Reflections of positive mentors and positive collaborations swam through the interview participants' minds. Novice and experienced teacher educators should use the findings from this research to strengthen and improve their teacher education programs, and the professional and personal psyche of the novice teacher educators themselves. The healthy formation of a strong identity in novice teacher educators can assist them in building the confidence they need to succeed with best practices in teaching and research.

The following two recommendations are suited to provide the support for novice teacher educators. The first is to provide new faculty members with a mentor within the department. There are several helpful ways to achieve such mentorship, but data from this research suggests that this mentorship should be formal. Both mentor and mentee should have a clear sense of focus on the goals of the professional mentorship. Department study groups should be given the opportunity to create an agreed upon and research-based format for such mentor programs.

Within these mentor programs, a platform for reflection should be followed between mentor and mentee. Useful reflection topics could include: connecting subject area and K-12 experiences with the process of teaching future teachers, learning the tenure process, finding balance, managing time, and understanding how publishing works. Both parties could benefit from this collaboration. Experienced faculty benefit from new energy and new ideas, and newer faculty benefit from the professional experience and a broader view of academia.

The second recommendation is to provide opportunities for ongoing professional collaboration. Again, faculty from all levels of experience could find benefits from working together. The much-repeated adage of "two heads are better than one" certainly finds a home in teacher education departments. According to this data, novice teacher educators who have collaborated in the past, are currently collaborating or planning future collaborations with colleagues inside or outside of their department, report feelings of confidence, satisfaction, and enthusiasm. Some of the participants found collaboration outside their departments to be the most beneficial, while others sought comfort closer to home by working with departmental colleagues. In either instance, participants reported that collaboration, or the lack thereof, directly impacted their confidence, their ability to perform, and their very identity as a teacher educator. Teacher education programs must be aware of the need for faculty to collaborate and professional development opportunities should be available and accessible.

The authors began this article by asking the question, "Who am I?" The intent was to dissect how teacher educators use their sense of purpose and identity to inform their practice. Identity is important for all people, but for teacher educators, who work with future teachers, a confident and competent self-assurance is paramount.

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Appendix A

First Interview Questions

1. When you meet someone new and are asked about your career, how do you identify yourself? Explain why you identify yourself that way.

2. Describe your career. What inspired you to teach? Where have you taught? At what level? How many years of experience do you have at each level?

3. Reflect on your transition from K-12 education to post-secondary education. Identify and describe two to three challenges you experienced around that transition time.

4. How have you been influenced by other faculty? Can you identify any mentors among faculty? Explain. Can you identify other faculty members who have not provided you with peer support? How important do you believe peer support to be in the post-secondary education environment? Explain.

5. Explain the process of connecting your area of concentration to teacher education. How does this process shape your professional identity?

Appendix B

Second Interview Questions

1. Introduce your meaningful item. Why did you choose this item to bring today? Explain what it means to you and how it represents your personal and professional identities.

2. What are the top two difficulties you face as a teacher educator? Explain. What are your top two favorite parts about being a teacher educator? Explain.

3. Please identify your strengths as a teacher educator and your weaknesses as a teacher educator. Explain. Do you feel your strengths and weaknesses affect your students, future educators themselves? If so, how?

4. Describe a scenario when you have felt proud to identify as a teacher educator. Describe a scenario when you have not felt the pride to identify as a teacher educator.

5. Do you feel confident as a faculty member? Explain.

6. Having a strong sense of identity and purpose is undoubtedly important for educators. Do you think it is any more important for teacher educators? Explain.

7. Compare this year to the very first year of being a teacher educator. How have you changed? Have you learned things about yourself? About your students? Explain.

8. What advice do you have for new teacher educators? What advice do you have for older/more experienced teacher educators? Are you an experienced teacher educator or a new teacher educator, or neither? If you are "neither" what advice do you have for the "neither" teacher educators?

9. What, in your opinion, should be stressed in the professional development of teacher educators? What are the needs?

10. What, in your opinion, should be stressed in teacher education programs? What are the needs?