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From a student to a teacher educator: Becoming better acquainted with my new professional identity through self-study

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Abstract

Acquiring a teacher educator identity can be challenging, especially when one comes straight from being a student of teaching. The purpose of this self-study was to investigate how I got acquainted with my teacher educator identity. The study is underpinned by the socio-cultural theory. The main data source was a reflective journal where I recorded my experience from multiple sources. I analysed the data in a narrative and reflective manner with my mentor. The key finding is that I acquainted myself with a teacher educator through engaging in Discourses with my mentor while interrogating past experiences that resembled student identity and interacting with experienced teacher educators. I narrate these findings and draw conclusions and recommendations.

Keywords: teacher educator; identity; self-study; interactions; mentorship, Discourses

Introduction and background to the study

I am a beginner teacher educator at a South African Higher Education Institution. After going through my undergraduate Bachelor of Education studies for four years, I proceeded into my postgraduate studies. I completed my Bachelor of Science honours degree in science education, then a Masters degree in science education, and proceeded to a PhD in science education. In my second year of doctoral studies, I got hired to teach a six-week long biology content course to pre-service teachers training to be high school biology teachers. I was hired in January for a course that was going to be taught in September. This was done to give me adequate time to prepare for teaching the course as I was doing this for the first time. I was excited to have been given this opportunity but anxious as well, as I had very little school teaching experience and no tertiary teaching experience. As a self-study scholar, I decided to convert this journey into a self-study by documenting and reflecting on everything that I was going to do in teaching this course. In particular, I wanted to understand how I was going to acquaint myself with my new roles and responsibilities as a beginner teacher educator coming straight from being a student for a very

long time. Considering that one's roles and responsibilities define one's identity (Gee, 2001), I argue in this paper that by being appointed to this new position as a teacher educator with new roles and responsibilities, I had also acquired a new professional identity. The study that I am reporting in this paper, therefore, is about how I acquainted with my new identity as a beginner teacher educator. The study was guided by the following research questions.

1. How did I become acquainted with my new teacher educator professional identity?
2. What challenges (if any) did I experience as I was transitioning from a student identity to a beginner teacher educator identity?

Literature review and theoretical framework for the study

Teacher educator professional identity

The notion of teacher educator professional identity is difficult to define because of its situatedness (Dinkelman, 2011). As noted by Gee (2001: 99) 'all people have multiple identities connected not to their "internal states" but to their performances in society' where performance means one's responsibilities within a particular context. Considering the views from both Dinkelman and Gee, an individual's identity is not fixed, but is rather dictated by the context in which the individual is operating. A teacher educator may, therefore, have multiple, fluid and ever-shifting identities as shaped by the broad sociocultural interactions and relationships that exist in their teacher education context. Since identity development and formation are linked to the responsibilities within a particular context (see Gee, 2001), teacher educators' professional identity in the context of preparing pre-service teachers would be defined by their roles and responsibilities. These include curriculum development (Bouckaert & Kools, 2018) teaching, supervising, and mentoring pre-service teachers during teaching practice (Murray, et al., 2008), instructing and guiding pre-service teachers (Koster, et al., 2005) and modelling best teaching practices to pre-service teachers. In this study, the responsibility that I had been given was to teach a biology content course to 3rd year pre-service teachers.

According to scholars that study teacher identity development, professional identity is influenced by one's beliefs and experiences constructed over-time (Lamote & Engels, 2010; Richardson, 1996). Experiences that could contribute to the development of a new identity include personal experiences, experiences from formal education and formal knowledge (Richardson, 1996). Personal experiences influence beliefs in that one perceives the world from what they have personally experienced as children and as students. This assumption aligns with Lortie's (1975) apprenticeship of observation which asserts that what individuals experience as students can have an impact on their teaching practices and how they perceive their roles as teachers thereof. Formal education in this context, refers to structured programmes where one trains to become a teacher. Formal education experiences are experiences about teaching that were gathered from being a student of teaching. Formal knowledge is what one gains when they participate in formal education programmes. This knowledge includes, for example, the conceptions about teaching that are agreed on by a community of scholars, which in this case, is

the knowledge for teaching. These three categories are interrelated because as a student teacher, I participate in formal education programmes in which I acquire established knowledge about teaching (formal knowledge). Not only does one acquire this formal knowledge but also, through interactions and reflections, one gets to make sense of it (personal experience). These interactions and reflections are better suited to take place within specific contexts aided by specific people (Dinkelman, 2011; Murray, et al., 2008). Therefore, identity formation results from combining these layers of experience resulting in a process of 'negotiating the self' through the choices that an individual makes during interactions and reflections (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

The sociocultural theory as the theoretical framework of the study

As discussed above, I view my identity development as defined by learning to be a teacher educator. According to Vygotsky (1978), learning takes place in social settings and that the cognitive functions are formed as we interact with those that are knowledgeable. The social interactions in this study include the engagements I had with the experienced teacher educators and my mentor throughout the year, thus learning the roles and norms of teaching preservice teachers. These roles and norms are what define one's identity (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In these social interactions, an individual further internalises what has been learnt supporting Hökkä, et al.'s (2012) argument that a teacher educator's professional identity is influenced by the interactions that take place in the teacher education space. I, therefore, perceive identity formation as a social process aided by continuous reflections and not an objective characteristic of an individual. As such, the support of the community is necessary to shape self-verification (Izadinia, 2014). Language is an important factor in social interactions as it is the main tool through which dialogues takes places and learning is mediated (Vygotsky, 1981). Vygotsky (1978: 89) argued that 'the acquisition of language can provide a paradigm for the entire problem of the relation between learning and development'. My development of a teacher educator identity would therefore be embedded in the discourses that would take place as I joined the community of teacher educators. Vygotsky emphasised that individuals think in some language that in turn organises the social discourses raising new thoughts and influences the individual's development and understanding of the context. The new thoughts in this study were those pertaining to understanding my identity as a beginner teacher There is a difference between discourse with a small 'd' and Discourse with a big 'D'. The small 'd' discourse refers to language use in everyday conversations (Gee, 2015). In this study, I drew from the Discourse with a big 'D' to mean ways of thinking, acting and interacting in context such that these ways define the identity of a person (Gee, 2015). The identity that I was seeking to develop was that of a teacher educator.

Research design and methodology

Self-study

In this qualitative research, I used a self-study methodology to investigate my practice. Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009: 236) defined the methodology of self-study as:

> the study of one's self, one's ideas···It is autobiographical, historical, cultural and political. It draws on one's life, but it is more than that. Self-study also involves a thoughtful look at texts read, experiences had, people known and ideas considered.

The definition of self-study methodology above resonates with what happened in this study. Firstly, I initiated this study motivated by the opportunity that I was granted to teach pre-service teachers for the first time. Secondly, individual thoughtfulness, through reflection on my experiences, played a major role in the study. Thirdly, as suggested in the definition that self-study is not taken in isolation from the context, while my act of taking decisions pertaining to teaching pre-service teachers was personal in the sense that it involved my thoughts and ideas about practice, the decisions were, not taken in isolation from the social context – the context of teaching pre-service teachers.

Self-study usually draws from approaches like narrative inquiry and reflective practice (Samaras, 2011). In this study, I used the narrative inquiry to re-tell and re-organise the story (Kitchen, 2009) of my identity development as a beginner teacher educator. Reflective practice on the other hand is used by teachers and/or researchers who research their own practice by looking back at an event, understands it and learns from it (Ball, 2000). Its primary purpose is to help sharpen teachers' foci when deliberating on what is going on in their work and looking for steps to take regarding issues at hand (Ball, 2000). In this self-study, I also drew from reflective practice approach as I examined and continuously reflected on my identity development.

Study site

This study took place at a South African university (SAX) that follows a concurrent model of preparing pre-service teachers. As explained by Musset (2010), in the concurrent model, the pre-service teachers study both the content of the discipline and the professional knowledge concurrently. SAX uses a unique concurrent model in which both the disciplinary and the professional components are taught to pre-service teachers within the same School of Education by the same lecturers but they are taught as separate courses (Nyamupangedengu, 2015). The pre-service teachers study the disciplinary component in what is referred to as the content stream and the professional component in the methodology stream. The academic calendar at SAX is divided into two semesters. Each semester has 12 weeks of teaching and learning and about four weeks of examinations. The 12 weeks of teaching and learning are divided into six-week blocks or terms separated by a one-week mid-semester break. The biology Education teaching program, which was the context of the study, is organised around these teaching blocks and/or semesters. Each teacher educator is allocated a block's or a semester's teaching during which they will teach both components. As a beginner teacher educator, teaching pre-service teachers for the first time, I was allocated to teach the disciplinary component only for one teaching block to pre-service teachers training to be high school biology teachers.

Participants

In self-study, the primary participant is the 'self' within the practice who is also the researcher and the researched (Samaras, 2011). I was therefore the main participant in this study. The other participant was my mentor (Author 2) who I was required to work with in that period. A mentor is a person who provides guidance to the mentee and facilitates the novice's development (Wang, et al., 2010). My mentor also acted as a critical friend and asked provocative questions and critiques the researcher's interpretations of practices (see Fuentealba & Russell, 2016). As such, she was involved from the onset of the study and throughout data collection and analysis process. Author 2 was chosen as a mentor because she had done several studies in which she had investigated her own teaching of pre-service teachers using the methodology of self-study and had won the Dean's teaching excellence award in the faculty of Humanities.

Data sources and data collection process

Data collection in this study began at the moment that I got employed (January) to teach the course and ended in October when I finished teaching the course. The main data collection method was the use of a reflective journal. In the reflective journal, I would narrate my experiences of the journey (i.e. what I was observing, hearing and doing) and my reflections on those experiences. The experiences came from a range of sources described below.

Source 1: Reflections on experiences accumulated when I was still an undergraduate student. I decided to revisit and to reflect on my experiences as an undergraduate student so that I could interrogate my assumptions and the beliefs that I had developed.

Source 2: Experiences of planning to teach the course. Here, I recorded my thinking and pedagogical reasoning (Bishop & Denley, 2007) as I was planning the teaching of my course.

Source 2: Experiences of observing experienced teacher educators' lectures and discussing my observations with them. These teacher educators are referred in this paper as John, Gracious, Alice, and Leila (not their real names).

Source 3: Experiences of a one-week planning and teaching practice. At some point, my mentor gave me an opportunity to teach her course for a week. I taught two lectures and after every lecture, I would journal my experiences and reflections.

Source 4: Experiences of teaching the full one block course that I was hired to teach. I recorded my reflections on my planning and teaching of the course.

It is important to note that my reflections from these sources were not linear events but rather back and forth and sometimes laterally. For example, my reflections on the discussions with the experienced teacher educators would lead to reflections on my experiences a student and then would concurrently inform my planning for teaching the course.

Data analysis

Data analysis in this study followed what Samaras (2011: 197) described as a 'hermeneutic process', whereby data collection and analysis were happening concurrently and continuously back and forth. For example, every reflection of my interaction with the other teacher educators

(either through observations of their teaching or discussions) which was a data collection process, was followed by a discussion with my mentor (data analysis). Discussions with my mentor were followed by further reflections (data collection) and insights emanating from the discussions. Below, I illustrate an example of this process using a narrative that I developed from observation of one of the experienced teacher educator's lecture, Gracious.

> **5 Feb 2018***: Today, I attended Gracious' lecture. Class attendance was low. Gracious also noticed the low attendance and she inquired from the students what was happening. She was then told that most of the students were busy working on an assignment for another course, which was due that day. Despite the low attendance, Gracious continued with the lecture. After the lecture, I engaged with Gracious to find out why she had continued with the lecture despite low attendance. Gracious indicated that the absent students would be 'responsible' for learning the content that was covered in the lecture. By cancelling the lecture because some students decided not to attend would be sending the 'wrong' message to the students and not fair to those who attended the lecture.*
> *During the lecture, after observing that more than half of the class was absent, my thinking was that she should have cancelled the lecture, as it did not make sense to continue with less than half of the students.*
> **My brief reflection after engaging with Gracious:** *What wrong messages was she talking about …*

As indicated earlier, all these journal entries (my experiences and reflections) were discussed with my mentor on a continuous basis. Below is an excerpt of the discussion with my mentor of the journal narrative above.

> ***Myself****: Why would the lecturer proceed with the lecture when attendance is poor?*
> ***Mentor****: What would you suggest?*
> ***Myself:*** *Cancelling the lecture*
> ***Mentor****: A university timetable is a contract between the university, the teacher educator and the student, which both the teacher educator and the student should uphold for the smooth functioning of the academic project. There will always be assignments and due dates. Therefore, if Gracious had cancelled the lecture for this group of students, tomorrow another group would expect the same to happen and this will result in chaos.*

Every discussion was followed by further reflections. Insights that were emerging from these reflections were also entered into my journal. Below is a journal entry of my reflections and insights after the discussion with my mentor above.

> ***My reflections****: I didn't know that a time table is such an important document. Could it be the reason why when we register as students at the beginning of each year we are given a copy of the timetable and asked to sign? How come no one ever explain this to us? Before*

my mentor's explanation, I strongly felt that students' reasons for not attending the lecture were reasonable and worth Gracious' consideration? My mentor's explanation of a timetable as a contract has brought in a completely new dimension to how I should view the timetable. It's true that assignment due dates are there on a daily basis and indeed cancelling a lecture for that reason will result in chaos. How come, I did not consider this in my initial thinking? Could it be that I was reasoning with the lens of a student?

Insights from the above reflective piece: I realised that my thinking of what transpired in Gracious' lecture was influenced by my student identity *(student identity taking precedence).* I never stopped to think of what would be the implications of cancelling the lecture. This incident was therefore an eye opener. I realised that there are rules and regulations that as a lecturer I need to enforce for the proper functioning of the institution. I also got very anxious. How do I get to know of these rules and regulations?

The same process was followed with all the narratives that I was generating from sources described above.

Findings

This study was motivated by my desire to understand how I was going to acquaint with my new professional identity as a beginner teacher educator. Findings suggest that acquainting with my new identity was not an overnight transition that happened at the time of appointment but rather a continuous process. While immediately after appointment, I started to say, I am now a teacher educator at this university, I lacked an awareness of my roles and responsibilities as a teacher educator. My appointment only ushered in a teacher educator identity on paper but I had to immerse myself in this new context in order to acquaint myself with the roles and responsibilities of this new teacher educator identity. This acquaintance happened in four ways. I present and describe these below.

1. Interrogation of my undergraduate student experiences.
2. Interactions (observing and discussing practices) with experienced teacher educators.
3. Practicing teaching.
4. Planning and teaching the pre-service teachers.

Interrogation of my experiences as an undergraduate student with my mentor

When I got appointed as a beginner teacher educator, my mentor advised me that I needed to reflect on my experiences as an undergraduate student. Her reason for this was that, through apprenticeship of observation, we unconsciously develop certain views and feelings about teaching and teacher educator practices some of which maybe positive and others negative. If we do not deal with those experiences, they may interfere with one's new identity. In this study, after reflecting on my undergraduate experiences as advised by my mentor, I realised that indeed, some of my undergraduate experiences were influencing my thinking and my perspectives of

teacher educator practices. Below, I present an excerpt of the discussion that I had with my mentor after presenting to her a journal entry of reflections on my experiences of not doing well in my second year Physical Sciences. In this narrative, I was blaming the teacher educator for the unpleasant learning experiences.

> **Mentor:** *I can see in this entry that you are saying you didn't do well because you could not understand the teacher. What exactly caused you not to understand?*
> **Myself:** *I did not understand what he was saying because he would read directly from the PowerPoint slides in lectures which were populated with a lot of text*
> **Mentor***: Do you think reading from the slides was the problem?*
> **Myself***: Yes, it was a problem for me because I did not understand the content and he never provided time for questions.*
> **Mentor:** *I don't think providing time for questions during class would necessarily promote understanding*
> **Myself:** *So, what are you saying?*
> **Mentor:** *I want you to go back into that classroom and listen to your mind and body and try and capture your feelings and experiences as the lecturer was reading his slides one after the other and describe them*
> **Myself:** *I would become overwhelmed with information. In fact, I would quickly get saturated with information. I would struggle to keep pace with the lecturer, struggle to pay attention, get bored and eventually stop paying attention*
> **Mentor:** *Great! Well done. Can you see what the problem was? It was the impact of continuous talk by the teacher educator. Always remember that in a lecture, if you talk continuously for more than 5 minutes without allowing for processing of the information by the students, you will soon lose them as their short memory would be overloaded.*
> **Myself:** *Five minutes! That's so short. What do you do after every five minutes to allow for processing?*
> **Mentor:** *That's for you to find out*

As can be seen in the discussion above, the focus of my journal entry was criticising the teacher educator and pointing to the teacher educator as being ineffective. My mentor then turned this around and focused on the practice itself and its impact on students' learning. I was focusing on criticising the teacher educators instead of focusing on critiquing their practices so as to learn about teacher educator practices from them. It was only when I started interrogating these experiences with my mentor, that I began to see other perspectives. My mentor said that it was "normal" to criticise because your learning was negatively impacted. "However, instead of focusing on the person, I would advise that you focus on the practices and your experiences of those practices. Focusing on the experiences will sensitise you to their negative impact and hopefully deter you from using them as a teacher educator. Focusing on the teacher educator practices will provide a space for you to think of how you can do them better?" After further

reflections on my discussions with my mentor, I realised that the way I had reflected on my experiences had been influenced by a student teacher identity – that since certain practices negatively affected my learning, the teacher educator was ineffective. After this discussion with my mentor, I told myself that I should be continuously asking: Which identity am I using here.

To acquaint myself with my new identity of a teacher educator, it was important to critically look at the past experiences and interrogate them with a knowledgeable other (who in this case was my mentor) in order to learn. It was also important to involve a critical friend (who in this case was again my mentor-played a double role) to bring in other perspectives on teacher educator practices. My mentor as a knowledgeable other and critical friend played an important role of conscientising me to the roles and responsibilities of a teacher educator.

A second example was when I shared with my mentor my reflection on the experiences during teaching practicals in my second year of undergraduate studies.

> ***7 March 2018****: In second year, my teaching practice mentor indicated that I needed to find better ways of teaching the circulatory system. She said that there are numerous videos that one can watch on how to teach certain topics. Although I found her suggestion useful and relevant, it was also surprising for me because it made me question the significance of attending method lessons in the institution if I cannot learn to teach better from those programmes. I did not understand how I can be referred to an internet resource. I expected the teacher educators themselves to show me how to do these things. Isn't it their duty to always show us how to teach biology topics.*
> ***Mentor:*** *Now that you have had a chance of supervising pre-service teachers during teaching practice, do you still see the practice of showing pre-service teachers how to teach specific topics as doable?*
> ***Myself:*** *Yes, but it seems to be difficult.*
> ***Mentor:*** *Exactly, imagine showing more than 100 students how to teach a specific concept in their own specific contexts. Teaching strategies should be informed by aspects such as learner prior knowledge and context. This is the theory that we teach you and we expect you to then use it when you teach.*
> ***My reflection:*** *All along, I thought what the teacher educators are giving us in lectures should be exactly what and how we need to implement in our classrooms. I had no idea that it is theory that I then need to apply in practise.*

As can be seen in the excerpt above, my initial reflection highlights my initial perspective of teacher educator practices, that their role was to provide student teachers packaged ways of teaching various concepts and topics, what Goodlad (1990) described as handbags with discrete bits and pieces of how to teach, a perspective that is common in student teachers. In addition, I again focused on the persons of teacher educators and ended up accusing them of not doing what according to me was what was expected of them. My student teacher identity again took precedence. My mentor, just like in the previous discussion, again, focused on *the* experience

and *the* practice under discussion by asking; "d*o you still see* (experience) *the practice of showing pre-service teachers how to teach specific topics* (practice) *as feasible*?" This way, she again was able to help me understand the practice: it will not be feasible and would not be appropriate for teacher educators to teach a one size fits all curriculum. Teacher educators teach theories of teaching and learning. A competent pre-service teacher is one who then applies the theories appropriately as dictated by the contexts. Discussions of my undergraduate experiences with my mentor became a catalyst for me to start thinking more of my new roles and responsibilities as a teacher educator. In these discussions, my mentor took the role of the knowledgeable other and used my reflections to facilitate my understanding of the roles and responsibilities of a teacher educator. This study showed that the experiences of teaching and learning that one accumulates as an undergraduate student through the apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975) can be powerful identity formation prompts if interrogated with a knowledgeable other.

Interactions with experienced teacher educators

Interactions with the experienced teacher educators became one of the ways through which I acquainted myself with the teacher educator identity. This interaction happened through observation and discussion of their teaching and other teacher educator practices like planning of their lectures. The first example was when, after observing Gracious continuing with a lecture when she had less than half the students in class (see the data analysis section), I initiated a conversation with my mentor.

> *I still do not understand what Gracious did. Some students will be disadvantaged in her course. Perhaps the school has to have a week where students do submissions and write tests. In that way, no lecturer may teach.*

As can be seen with the journal entry above, my view at that point was that it was nonsensical to continue with the lecture because with just about half of the students present, the teacher educator was bound to repeat it. My student identity was influencing my thinking and reasoning. This is because I had experienced this as a student, thus, I knew exactly what the pre-service teachers were going through. Discussing this experience and journal entry with my mentor again revealed that I was still thinking and reasoning like a student – that all that matters is to do assignments and pass. Our discussion again prompted me to remove my student teacher hat and put on a teacher educator hat which facilitated a change of my thinking to that of a teacher educator. This discussion space enabled me to shift from the naïve ways of thinking that I was exhibiting into a space that allowed me to start considering many aspects of the teacher education context that I had never thought about before. I started to review many previous decisions by the teacher educators that I had experienced and to think of how a different decision could have impacted the teaching and learning programme.

A second example of how the interactions with experienced teacher educators contributed to my acquaintance with the teacher educator identity was when I observed both Gracious and

John engaged their classes in deciding dates for assessment tasks. Gracious negotiated the date of assessment with students after some students had gone to her and indicated that they had two tests from other courses in the same week. John also gave students a platform to discuss if they would want to have a lecture instead of a practical activity. This came on the background of a timetable that had a practical period on a Monday which means that according to the timetable, student would start the course with a practical session. My initial reaction to both cases was that the teacher educator has the authority to set all rules without negotiating with students. The excerpt is a conversation that took place between me and Gracious.

> ***Myself:*** *I saw that you discussed the date for the test with your students. Why?*
> ***Gracious:*** *What would you do if it was you?*
> ***Myself:*** *I would just make the decision. I am their lecturer … that is how I was taught by my teacher educators, to be a firm teacher*
> ***Gracious:*** *And do you see that as good practice and being firm doesn't mean being authoritarian.*
> ***Myself:*** *Isn't it the teacher educator's responsibility to decide the dates to students based on her teaching plan like they did when I was an undergraduate student?*
> ***Gracious:*** *How did you feel when you were treated like that?*
> ***Myself:*** *I did not have a problem with it.*

In the above conversation, Gracious had begun to challenge my thinking in terms of certain practices that I had perceived to be a definition of the work of teacher educators – exercising authority and taking decisions in this case. I recorded and reflected on this experience in my journal:

> *… I remember when we were given dates in my studies, we would adhere to those. We did not question anything. Even though sometimes we were swamped, we would rather miss lectures and study for a test. After all, the lecturer should tell us what to do and not the other way round (8 April 2018).*

My journal entry above reveals a student perception of the role of the teacher educator in terms of leading the pre-service teachers and being in authority. This conception was due to how I had experienced the work of teacher educators when I was a student (student identity) and this continued to influence how I view the experienced teacher educators' practices. In the discussion of the above entry with my mentor she uttered "authority is about being able to make sound decisions". This utterance shifted my view of what it means to exercise authority as a teacher educator. I came to understand that even in John's case, discussing with students whether they want a lecture or a practical was done in order to involve students in making decisions of what would impact their learning.

It is important to note that, as I continued to interact with experienced teacher educators as well as my mentor, I found myself continuously slipping back into my student identity. I realised that my experiences as a student were deep-rooted and this continuous interrogation by my mentor and critical friend was a vital process if one was to get rid of the "baggage" developed from the apprenticeship of observation and for one to acquaint with a teacher educator identity.

The third example is an incident that happened just after my one-week teaching stint. The example manifested after observing, discussing and reflecting on Leila and Alice's teaching while also drawing from my experiences of the one-week teaching stint. Leila and Alice were teaching the same topic that I did in my undergraduate studies. I had noticed that the concepts that they were teaching were different from those that I had done in my studies. Leila's response to my question of why this was so was that *"*what you are given in this institution is the topic and a small paragraph that explains the topic. It is the teacher educator's responsibility to develop the detailed course outline and content". When I asked Alice the question, her response was; "I developed the course myself and over the years, I bring in and take out some of the content. It is really about your experiences and the students you are teaching". From my undergraduate studies, I had always thought that teacher educators refer to a readily-made document with well-defined content. My discussion with my mentor on this matter provided me with an opportunity to re-frame my understanding.

> ***18 March 2018:*** *It is so strange that teacher educators are not given a curriculum document that specifies the content they need to teach to the pre-service teachers like the one given to teachers. When I was teaching the human ear, my mentor gave me the content that I need to teach and this contradicts with what I heard from Leila and Alice.*
> ***Mentor:*** *Leila and Alice are right. We do not get that content breakdown.*
> ***Myself:*** *But when I was teaching you gave me the content and I thought there is a document like the CAPS*[1] *document that tells you what to teach and what to not teach.*
> ***Mentor:*** *If there was such a document, I would have given it to you. I gave you the content breakdown because I had already developed the course myself. From your view, why do you think could be the reason for the curriculum document not specifying the content we should teach in detail like the syllabuses in schools?*
> ***Myself:*** *At schools, such a document exists and I think that should be the case with teacher educators. Teacher educators are also teachers.*
> ***Mentor:*** *Now you are reasoning like a school teacher since you were trained to become a teacher. The context is different now. In teacher education, you just do not teach what is readily-available. You develop what you are going to teach in alignment with any new developments in the field as well as in alignment with the school syllabi that the students will be responsible for teaching*

[1] CAPS stand for Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement

As can be seen in the discussion above, firstly, I was still reasoning like a student teacher drawing from what I had learnt when studying to become a teacher (student teacher identity). My mentor referred me back to the other teacher educators to find out why the content seems to be different. In addition, the discussion with my mentor helped me understand why I had the belief that the content she gave me during the teaching stint was readily available. After several discussions with the teacher educators about this and reflections with my mentor, I learnt that one of the roles of a teacher educator was that of curriculum development. If I had not interacted with the experienced teacher educators and reflecting with my mentor, I would not have known this role of a teacher educator as a curriculum developer. My mentor confirmed that part of this curriculum development involves devising a course outline and selecting specific concepts that the pre-service teachers need to learn and this is in line with what is reported in literature in terms of the professional roles of a teacher educator (see Bouckaert & Kools, 2018). The back-and-forth discussions with my mentor and the other teacher educators familiarised me with some of the roles and responsibilities of a teacher educator which supported the development of my teacher educator identity.

Practicing teaching

The teacher educator identity began to emerge during the one-week of practicing teaching. An example of this emergence was when I was putting into practice some of what I had observed in teacher educators' lectures and discussed with them. This example is about using a teaching strategy of free writing.

> ***26 March 2018:*** *I tried the strategy of getting my students to 'free-write' their understanding of a concept and discuss their writings with their peers. In my case, they did not want to share their writing with their peers but they did that with Leila.*
> ***Mentor:*** *Why do you think it did not manifest the same as it did in Leila's lectures?*
> ***Myself:*** *I sensed that they did not see a need … my topic was the human ear and Leila was teaching evolution.*
> ***Mentor:*** *Yes, it can be that. What else could it be?*
> ***Myself:*** *It can also be that the strategy was not suitable at that point. In fact, when I changed and made it whole class discussion, most of the students came on board*
> ***Mentor:*** *Right! Now you get a possible reason but it could be more than that.*

As can be seen in the journal entry above, in line with the apprenticeship of observation, I had decided to use this teaching strategy of free-writing that I had observed without having considered the context in which it was used. I was holding the view that whatever I had observed the teacher educators successfully doing in their classrooms would also work in my classroom. However, the discussion above shows that I was beginning to understand that part of the teacher educator's work is to select suitable strategies for teaching a specific content. Leila asked for free writing in response to a question which had no right or wrong answer as it was asking for

student's views–but in my case, I had asked for free writing in response to a question which had a correct answer. Fortunately, because the teacher educator identity was beginning to emerge, I did not get stuck, I was able to reflect in action (Schon, 1998) drawing from an understanding of the content that I was teaching. Therefore, although I was drawing from the knowledge that I had gained from my interactions with experienced teacher educators, as the teaching practice was providing opportunities for me to think and make decisions independently. This meant that I was beginning to construct my professional identity.

Although the teacher educator identity was emerging in many instances, this teaching stint revealed instances where I was still taking a superficial thinking approach about teaching pre-service teachers.

> ***28 March 2018:*** *My role in this course is to teach the subject matter knowledge since it is a content course. Now I struggle to decide on which textbook to read to get that content.*
> ***Mentor:*** *You seem to think that your pre-service teachers need to learn the subject matter knowledge only in your lectures. Why?*
> ***Myself:*** *Because it is a content course. That is what we also learnt in the content course. Are they supposed to learn something else?*
> ***Mentor:*** *What about the teaching approaches and methods?*
> ***Myself:*** *But they do learn about those in the methodology course.*
> ***Mentor:*** *You see, that is where the misconception is. They also need to learn that in a content course.*

As can be seen in the discussion above, my line of reasoning emanated from my training as a student teacher. I had taken the school teacher identity because in schools, learners are taught only the content. I was also thinking like this because when I was studying to become a teacher, I was never explicitly exposed to teaching about teaching in my content courses. My mentor's question helped me to start thinking of context in a slightly different manner – that I am teaching students who are training to become teachers. My ultimate understanding was that teaching about teaching even in content courses is what defines a teacher educator. Again, my mentor facilitated this acquaintance of my identity as she said:

> *Now you realise that teaching a content course to pre-service teachers is more than teaching the mere content that is found in the textbooks. You need to continuously draw your student's attention to aspects of teaching of the content you will be teaching them e.g. misconceptions associated with the content, concepts that are difficult to understand and why.*

Planning and teaching a full module

Teaching the six-week course afforded me an opportunity to test and to further acquaint with my teacher educator identity while drawing from what I had learnt about teacher educator professional practices up to this point. The first example comes from understanding my role as a curriculum developer.

> ***28 July 2018:*** *Now that I know that I have to decide on the content, I am thinking of selecting concepts that I need to teach from the prescribed textbook. This will make things easier for students when they have to study.*
> ***Mentor:*** *I agree that you have to select this content and arrange it. What else do you need to be aware of when selecting this content?*
> ***Myself:*** *Since I am teaching students who will be teachers, they need to know the basic content that is done in schools. So, I will check the school curriculum and take it from there.*
> ***Mentor:*** *Right! Now you get why, as a teacher educator, you have to develop this content and you know where to start when doing that. Is that all that you consider when planning to teach?*
> ***Myself:*** *Yes, excerpt that I also need to model practice for them.*
> ***Mentor:*** *Besides the school curriculum, you also need to think about what is relevant to the students. This includes varying ways in which you deliver the content and how you package it for students coming from different contexts and going to teach in different contexts*

The discussion with my mentor above shows that I had internalised that part of my work is to select concepts that I want to teach, unlike my previous perception that teacher educators get a readily available curriculum. My mentor confirmed that I was beginning to think like a teacher educator. This kind of thinking emerged due to the insights that I had gained. The discussion also revealed more aspects of curriculum development that I needed to be aware of. For example, getting to know that I needed to consider in my planning and teaching, the pre-service teachers' future contexts. This indicates that being acquainted with a new identity is a continuous process.

A second example manifested in deciding whether to give my students tutorial questions before or during the actual tutorial session. The following discussion happened with my mentor in relation to the journal entry:

> ***7 August 2018:*** *When I was a student, the lecturers used to give us tutorial questions before the tutorial sessions, and the answers would be marked for summative assessment purposes. I used to get high marks because I could get answers on the internet.*
> ***Mentor:*** *Why does this worry you? Do you think giving students the tutorial questions before the actual session is bad practice?*

Myself: *At that time, for me, it did not really bother me because I passed the course well.*
Mentor: *How did that make you feel?*
Myself: *It made me feel good but I noticed that I did not really learn the content.*
Mentor: *What about now? What do you believe in now, since you are also involved as a tutor?*
Myself: *Considering the usefulness of the information that one can get on the internet, giving the students the tutorial questions before the actual session is not a bad practice. What could be bad practice is the kind of questions given in the tutorials.*
Mentor: *What do you learn from that and the implications for you as a beginner teacher educator?*
Myself: *Now, as a teacher educator I learn that it is important to construct and administer tutorial tasks that trigger discussion and interaction among students for effective learning to take place and not objective questions that allow students to copy answers from the internet.*

As can be seen in the discussion above, I had acknowledged that getting high marks was not problematic for me regardless of whether I had learnt or not. The student identity influences were 'dying-out' due to interrogation of my experiences. Thinking of what would be appropriate questions for tutorials instead of focussing on questions that would enable students to get high marks for me revealed that my thinking was now shifting to that of a teacher educator. My mentor did not only validate this awareness of my new identity as a teacher educator. She also probed me to think of the implications of such an awareness leading to my understanding that my identity development is continuously constructed.

The second example was an incident where I let one student do a class activity alone even though I had given them an instruction that they need to work in pairs or groups of three. I had acted in this manner because as a student I never liked to work in groups and was never forced to do so. I never liked to work in groups because of fear of being laughed at by group members for poor answers and language expression. I shared this experience with John after my lecture as he had observed this lecture.

John: *What did you do in that instance?*
Myself: *At first, I let the student work alone but went back to the student to explain why I wanted them to work in pairs.*
John: *Why did you not force the student to work with others?*
Myself: *I do not think this would have helped the student in any way because they would not learn.*
John: *That is what I would have also done. To give the student freedom to do the activity alone but let them know the benefits of working together.*

My conversation with John gave me confidence that what I did was indeed aligned with what he would do and this indicated that I was now thinking like an expert. I had developed in me a conviction that I should never force students to work in groups. However, my developing teacher educator identity, since I now understood the benefits of working in groups, influenced me to think of ways that would enable the student to understand the importance of group work. I realised that the issue of spelling out reasons behind our teaching actions in teaching pre-service teachers (which did not happen when I was a student) does not only serve the purpose of modelling practice but it allows us to also teach them about teaching in a content course (Khoza, 2022; Nyamupangedengu & Lelliott, 2016). My mentor validated this realisation as a resemblance of a developing teacher educator expertise which led me to feel confident that my thinking and beliefs were now aligning with my teacher educator context and hence, professional identity.

Discussion of findings

The purpose of this self-study was to investigate how I got acquainted with my new identity of a teacher educator from being a student. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How did I become acquainted with my new teacher educator professional identity?
2. What challenges (if any) did I experience as I was transitioning from a student identity to a beginner teacher educator identity?

This study showed that acquainting myself with the identity of a teacher educator from being a student of teaching was not a straightforward endeavour. This is because, as a student, through Lortie's apprenticeship of observation (1975), I had developed many assumptions and beliefs about the roles and responsibilities of a teacher educator which were influencing my thinking and reasoning during observations of and Discourses with other teacher educators. These findings confirmed assertions by Lamote and Engels (2010), and Richardson (1996), that one's beliefs and experiences influence professional identity development. I realised that as I was thinking about my new teacher educator self, the "good" and "bad" aspects of teaching pre-service teachers that I had experienced in my undergraduate studies were influencing my view of a teacher educator identity. As such, there was a "danger" that I could unquestionably emulate them or that the beliefs and assumptions that I had built from these experiences, if not interrogated, could become the basis of my actions and decision-making processes. In this study therefore, Vygotsky's (1978) approaches to learning of dialogue, social interaction, and mediation by a more knowledgeable other became powerful tools in promoting my teacher educator professional identity development.

Continuous dialogue (with my mentor and other experienced teacher educators), a key aspect of Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory (1978), provided a space for me to expose my beliefs and assumptions and for them to be interrogated. In addition, continuous dialogue, and social

interaction with the more-knowledgeable others within a cultural and historical context established opportunities that I needed to deal with my competing and conflicting multiple identities – student identity on one hand which was very influential and the new teacher educator identity on the other hand that I had acquired. Observing and interacting with my mentor and other teacher educators in the practice of teaching provided the social space for me to confront my deficit thinking, what Stevens (2016) described as "deficit Discourse" i.e. use of language that suggested that the teacher educators who taught me were deficient in their practices. For example, when I thought Gracious's decision of continuing with the lecture was nonsensical, I was operating within a deficit Discourse emanating from my student identity. This is mainly due to the accumulated student identity Discourses that influenced my perceptions of certain teacher education practices and thought processes. My observations of Gracious' practices and dialogue with my mentor provided me with a space to experience identity tension or conflict through comparing Discourses, thus allowing me an opportunity to negotiate my acquaintance with the new teacher educator identity. The negotiation enabled enculturation into the practices of teacher education. I was being encultured into teacher educator practices through interacting with experts as an apprentice (Wenger, et al., 2002). What came out of these interactions was not only some knowledge and skills about teaching biology to pre-service teachers but also how authentic conversations (Clark & Florio-Ruane, 2001) in non-threating environment of apprentices and experts can promote transformative discussions. As noted by Hökkä, et al.'s (2012), a teacher educator's professional identity is influenced by the Discourses and interactions that take place in the teacher education space. Continuous dialogue with my mentor continued to shift my thinking that was revealing student identity and perspectives. Therefore, what I initially viewed as bad teacher educator practices and unpleasant experiences from the formal education (Richardson, 1996), became a springboard for acquainting myself with my new teacher educator identity. I began to focus my reflections on the affordances and the limitations of the practices that I had experienced, instead of focussing on criticising the teacher educators and their practices (something that a typical student would do). Thus, although one interacts with experienced teacher educators, these interactions need to be interrogated and clarified further with a trusted individual who in this case was my mentor.

Continued interaction with both my mentor and other teacher educators allowed socialisation and enabled what Patton and Parker (2017) described as sharing of values, norms, and standards of the domain which in this case was teacher education. Interacting with experienced teacher educators and practicing teaching for a short period of time allowed me to deal with the challenge of slipping back into a student's ways of thinking as I got more and more acquainted with my new socio-cultural context and its practices. According to Hendry et al. (2014), a practitioner fulfilling the role of an observer gains insights into the domain that they are operating in. In this study, I was more than an observer in a sense that I discussed with the experienced teacher educators, what I was observing. The discussions were very important as Vetter et al. (2013: 233) states that 'individuals construct and enact identities during moment-to-moment interactions'. These interactions contributed to the development of my repertoire of

practices for teaching biology to pre-service teachers, and hence to an understanding of my new identity. As one adds to their repertoire of practices, they start to connect to experiences they 'see in practice' (Orland-Barak, 2009: 23), thus, defining and acquainting themselves with a new identity.

Practicing teaching was one other aspect where I saw the emergence of teacher educator identity in this self-study. The short teaching stint provided opportunities for strengthening my developing teacher educator identity in an appropriate context and boosted my confidence as a beginner teacher educator. Although, as I was teaching, I would experience instances of taking a student thinking approach. I got solace from Izadinia (2013), who asserted that slipping back to the previous identities that one held is expected. However, to overcome this, one requires self-awareness and critical consciousness (Ahmad, et al., 2018). In my case, the self-awareness and critical consciousness was made possible by the continued interactions with the experienced teacher educators followed by dialogue and mediation by my mentor. These tenets of Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory created a conducive space for continuous critical reflections during which good practices, dilemmas of practice and grey areas were shared and discussed. Therefore, when one is acquainting with a new identity, the involvement of a mentor is of utmost importance.

Engaging in the planning and teaching of a full six-week course with less support from the experts (my mentor and other experienced teacher educators) allowed me to move further, in terms of my teacher educator identity. I found myself seldom slipping back to student identity Discourse. I was now drawing on the Discourses that I had been having for over six months with my mentor. As a result of the feedback and support that I had received from the more knowledgeable others in the form of experienced teacher educators and my mentor as a beginner teacher educator, I had developed confidence in my work as a teacher educator. There was no panic anymore when planned activities, for example, did not unfold as expected because I had developed an understanding of the complex nature of the work of a teacher educator, thus agency (Ahmad et al., 2018) and self-awareness (Azadinia, 2013). The longer duration of teaching allowed me to evaluate the appropriateness of fulfilling the roles and making judgements where I see fit, thus, further shaping my teacher educator identity (Dinkelman, 2011).

Conclusions and recommendations

This study, showed that acquaintance with a new identity of teacher educator for a beginner teacher educator, can be promoted through firstly, re-visiting and interrogating one's past experiences as an undergraduate student, secondly, through reflecting on experiences by interacting with experienced teacher educators, thirdly, through reflecting on experiences of practicing teaching, and lastly, through reflecting on experiences of independently planning and teaching a full module. In addition, acquainting with a beginner teacher educator is not a once-off endeavour. It is a continuous process which needs to be supported through continuous social interaction offered with the experienced teacher educators as well as the mentor. These social interactions foster professional learning and reflections, thus enable one to deal with the dilemmas and the constantly challenging tensions (Williams & Ritter, 2010) that arise from the

deep-rooted beliefs, assumptions and attitudes of a student identity. The social interactions serve as a space for the novice teacher educator to engage in Discourses that propel the new identity development. To fully acquaint themselves with their new identity, it is important that they continuously reflect on their experiences with the support of a mentor where Discourses are further interrogated. In this study, not only did the mentor help me to understand the transition to a new identity but also served as an agent through which I started to imagine my work in new environments. As such, the role of a mentor cannot be underestimated as it is through the conversations with the mentor that the beginner teacher educator gets to unpack the Discourses that one would be experiencing.

A recommendation from this study is that, firstly, new teacher educators should be intentionally allocated mentors that will help them to first reflect on their undergraduate experiences to interrogate the views and attitudes that they had developed from the apprenticeship of observation thereby clearing their "baggage' and laying a foundation for the development of a new identity as teacher educators. Secondly, the mentor should play the role of helping the beginner teacher educator unpack the Discourses emerging from interactions in the teacher education space. This is because these Discourses contribute to the identity development of a teacher educator.

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