In Practice

Professional Identity: The Catalyst for Change

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Abstract

Identity is a social construct that is impacted and shaped by the various aspects of our socio-cultural experiences (Moje & Luke, 2009). This article shows how my professional identity as a classroom teacher is also thusly constructed. The findings from the qualitative self-study demonstrate how my personal experiences, interactions with teacher accountability tools, and relationships with students impacted my professional identity in a manner that promoted changes in my pedagogical practice.

Introduction

It was the first day of school. There I stood—the once confident and experienced fifth grade teacher in front of 25 first graders. For the first time in my professional career, my identity as a teacher was at a disequilibrium. I was in a place first year teachers know all too well. Yet, it was a difficult place for me to be in. I had seven years of teaching upper elementary and middle school grades under my belt and was a doctoral student. While I believe teachers always grow and develop their practice, I felt my confidence falter. This uncertainty had a profound effect on my identity as a teacher and prompted me to consider how my own professional identity as a classroom teacher was constructed.

I began to look at existing research about teacher identity. I found that current research indicates there are various factors that impact a teacher's professional identity. Professional identity can be impacted by one's students and the cultural practices of the institution (Assaf, 2008; Lewis, 2001; Twiselton, 2004; Watson, 2006) as being a teacher is "a matter of acquiring and then redefining an identity that is socially legitimated" (Coldron & Smith, 1999, p. 712). This position aligns with the ideologies of identity being a social construct that is inherently plural, fluid, and recognized by others (Moje & Luke, 2009). Thus, professional identity in this article refers to how I viewed myself as a classroom teacher in relation to dominant social norms of an elementary school. Additionally, professional identity demonstrates plurality (Arendt, 1978) and is fluid as it reflects many aspects of one's self and is likely to experience shifts.

The purpose of this article is to address the following research question: *How did my experiences impact my professional identity as a first-grade teacher?* This article will describe the ways in which my professional identity was impacted through my socio-cultural experiences. Although identity development may not be generalized, the research presented in this article aims to examine how professional identity may experience shifts in a manner that is connected to personal experiences, accountability tools, and interactions with students.

Professional Identity

"Teacher identity is largely a constituted outcome of this *continuing* dialog with students," (Zembylas, 2003, p. 223), affirming that many aspects of a teacher's professional identity are dependent on the socio-cultural experiences and collaborative encounters of all the individuals in a classroom, or school, setting. Therefore, a teacher's professional identity may also be shaped by various socio-historical perspectives of the profession.

An Historical Perspective

Teaching has been "defined as a proper and good thing and those who dispense it have a standing which has apparently persisted throughout much of American history (Lortie, 2002, p. 13)." Lortie (2002) discusses how the perception of teaching differs from other professions in which individuals may consider money or prestige. A teacher is one who is expected to dedicate to his or her students in a manner that is selfless. As a result, teaching, as a career, has earned a level of "respectability" in our culture (Lortie, 2002, p. 13). Despite this somewhat significant status allotted to teachers, there seems to be an underlying perception of cynicism pertaining to a teacher's ability to actually teach. From a teacher's viewpoint, their pedagogical abilities may be devalued when they are not permitted to make the day-to-day decisions in their classroom practice and are repeatedly under scrutiny as test scores, which often provide a very narrow view of students' academic progress, are overemphasized. In addition to the socio-historical views of the profession, teachers' identities may also be shaped by the various roles they assume in their professional lives, their interactions with students and colleagues, their personal experiences, their educational philosophies, and institutional requirements to follow a mandated curriculum. It is important to consider these perspectives as the following research studies pertaining to the professional identities of teachers are examined.

New Teacher Identity

Twiselton (2004) describes the varying identities of beginner teachers in a manner that reflected their emerging professional identities and demonstrated a connection to their personal experiences. Her qualitative study was conducted over a five-year period in England. She extensively studied 47 teachers who were in the process of becoming elementary school teachers. She found the student-teachers assumed different roles, or identities, namely those of task managers, curriculum deliverers, or concept/skill builders. She also found the identities they assumed greatly shaped the ways they operated in a classroom. A task manager, the initial teacher identity that emerged, was characterized as an individual who was goal-orientated. A teacher who was a task manager focused mainly on the product of the lesson and used the quality of a completed task to measure success. Curriculum deliverers were the teachers who seemed to regurgitate the mandated sequence of lessons set forth by institutional requirements. They were not as focused on completing tasks; however, they seemed to be overly concerned with following a prescribed order that had been determined by an individual other than themselves. Finally, concept/skill builders were educators who appeared to be more concerned with fostering a deeper understanding of grade-level concepts, using the curriculum or assigned tasks as tools to achieve this understanding. Their outcome for learning was intended to

transcend beyond the lesson and even the curriculum. The latter teacher identity that emerged seemed to be most powerful as it resulted from the teacher's personal beliefs of language and literacy learning.

Twiselton (2004) uses her study to stress the impact a school setting and its literacy practices, namely an overly scripted curriculum, may have on the professional identity of new teachers. While three distinctive identities emerged, it is reasonable to assume many teachers' identities may fall into several of the proposed categories as their identities develop and change. As a result, Twiselton (2004) advocates for teacher preparation programs to allot time for beginner teachers to reflect upon their professional identities in a manner that may extend beyond the confinement of a classroom and connect to their personal, out-of-school identities.

A Socially Constructed Professional Identity

Watson's (2006) study explores how an educator's identities continue to develop after several years of teaching as she examines the professional identities of a more experienced teacher. According to Watson (2006), professional identity is often "imposed upon the teaching profession either by outsiders or members of the teaching fraternity itself. It provides a shared set of attributes, values and so on that enable the differentiation of one group from another" (Sachs, 2001, p. 153).

Watson (2006) explores how a teacher's professional identity is constructed in relation to interactions with students and the school culture. Her qualitative study was part of a larger study that delved more deeply into the professional identities of classroom teachers and their behavioral management

decisions. Although her research was not as extensive as the previous study (Twiselton, 2004), she does present compelling evidence of how professional identities are manifested in relation to one's socio-cultural experiences. Data for this study was collected through a three-hour long interview with an English teacher from a rural secondary school. Additional data was collected through email correspondences the researcher had with Dan, the classroom teacher. Through narrative stories of classroom experiences, Dan revealed how he perceived his professional identity to be "individualistic, distanced from the staff, rejecting 'orthodox' notions of teaching" (Watson, 2006, p. 521). Dan used discourse to distance himself from other colleagues in his school, offering statements such as, "Unlike most teachers, I did not have a prosperous school life" (Watson, 2006, p. 514). At the same time, such a comment indicated a connection with his personal identity as an unsuccessful student and with his professional identity as a successful teacher. The implications of Dan's perceived professional identity as he discussed his management of student behaviors in the interview are multilayered. First, Dan seemed to want to stand out as a unique teacher who cared for his pupils by challenging institutional norms—thereby risking being labeled as a "bad" teacher. He often positioned himself as an outsider as he refused to participate in school sanction activities, such as using behavioral plans to punish pupils. He talked about his lack of lesson planning in a manner that seemed positive as it allowed him the flexibility to adjust his teaching based on his students' needs. Such comments seemed to indicate Dan's desire to distance himself from the institutional identity of the school. Then, Dan shared a somewhat different aspect of

his identity to justify why he wanted to become a teacher—to ensure that his pupils would have a school experience that was different from his own. That is, he wanted to become a teacher so students in his classes would be successful. In this manner, Dan exhibited traditional aspects of what it means to be a "good" teacher, one who cared for his pupils' academic success. Through narratives, Dan was able to create a dichotomous professional identity of a "good" and "bad" teacher that allowed him to make close connections with his personal experiences while challenging the dominant ideologies present in the institutional environment of the school.

Similarly, Assaf (2008) discusses how the school's culture and institutional requirements had a "powerful impact on teachers' decision-making and teaching practices" (p. 239), thereby influencing the identity of a reading teacher, Marsha. Assaf's (2008) ethnographic study involved classroom observations, taped recordings of group discussions with students, and informal conversations with faculty members and administrators. This study was conducted in a large elementary school in Texas that faced intense district pressures to improve test scores. The school's annual rating at the time of the study was lowered from a tier three (the highest score) to tier two. Marsha's initial professional identity at the beginning of the study corresponded to her pedagogical beliefs of promoting life-long learners and making various classroom literacy practices enjoyable. She enacted this identity in several ways. First, in interviews, she talked about literacy as a process of discovery and wonderment, not a task to complete in order to score a passing mark on a test. She also built an extensive classroom library

where she was often observed having conversations about students' experiences with books. In this manner, her professional identity was aligned with what may be considered a "*grassroots teachers' movement*" (Edelsky, 2006, p. 235), as Marsha actively resisted de-professionalizing forces by connecting her pedagogical practices to her personal beliefs and experiences (Edelsky, 2006). However, as testing pressures intensified, Marsha's identity shifted to conform to that of the institution as she altered her teaching to consist primarily of reading test passages and practicing test-taking strategies. Marsha altered the way her professional identity was enacted through her literacy practices in a manner that no longer distanced her from the dominant socio-cultural identity of the school.

Assaf (2008) shows how every part of instruction reflects on the multiple dimensions of a teacher's identity, whether the teacher is reiterating ideologies presented to them by policy-makers or transforming their practice to reflect their own personal philosophy. Thus, when studying the professional identities of teachers, one inevitably examines the literacy practices that teachers participate in and interact within school.

Research Design and Methodology

"Identity is situated. It is linked to institutions of practice and cultural activity settings" (Gómez-Estern, Amián, Sánchez Medina, & Marco Macarro, 2010, p. 233) that occur in a school. Such cultural activities can include relationships with students, interaction with administrators and the evaluative tools they use, and self-reflections of one's own personal experiences. The research presented in this article documents how my professional

identity was constructed and changed through these various cultural settings that existed in the school in which I taught.

Roles of the Researcher

This qualitative research study is a self-study as it examines how my professional identity as a first grade teacher was constructed and altered within the socio-cultural practices in a school (Samaras, 2002). This allowed me to make inquiries into my identity "as part of a socio-cultural context" using a "sociological rather than a psychological perspective" (Glesne, 2011, p. 247) on self-initiated issues that arose from my teaching and personal experiences. I was able to participate fully as a classroom teacher and as a researcher so I was able to give insight into my professional identity while fulfilling my pedagogical responsibilities.

Data Collection and Analysis

As this qualitative self-study demonstrates how my professional identity developed in a classroom over time, this study was conducted over two academic school years, beginning in October 2011 and ending in May 2013. The data presented was gathered from two first grade classrooms.

Data was collected from data sources that are "dominant in qualitative inquiry: observation, [and] interviewing" (Glesne, 2011, p. 48). First, observations of classroom interactions were video-recorded daily as I was the participant of this self-study and could not take field notes on my own actions while teaching. These video-recordings were transcribed every day after school as written field notes. I transcribed only what appeared in the video-recordings. My rationale for keeping a record of such data was to gain insight into how I enacted my professional identity when interacting

with pupils. Secondly, interviews with students occurred bi-monthly. These interviews did not occur during instructional time; instead they occurred during preparation periods (such as art and physical education). Considering the possible negative impacts of removing students from periods such as art, the interviews were no longer than 5 to 10 minutes. Both structured and open-ended interviews (Glesne, 2011) were conducted. Some of the structured interview questions were questions such as, "What do you like about school?" and "What don't you like about school?" Though these questions varied at different points throughout the self-study, the questions were created as the patterns that emerged in the data analysis process unfolded. The students' responses during all interviews were also transcribed to assist with the data analysis process described in the subsequent paragraph. The interviews were conducted to understand how students felt about the pedagogical decisions I made as their classroom teacher. While the students' feelings were not the goal of this self-study, understanding their perspectives allowed me to gain insight into *how* I was enacting my professional identity through my instructional decisions. Finally, to gain insight into my professional identity as it related to the classroom events from the transcribed video-recordings and interviews, I also kept a dialogue journal (Lee & Zuercher, 1993). This allowed me to reflect upon my experiences in the transcribed video-recordings and interviews in a manner that allowed me to monitor my own reflexivity (Glesne, 2011). Namely, the use of a dialogue journal allowed me to

continuously ask questions in a way that assigned an equal amount of importance to the research process as I did to the data collected. Additionally, these questions forced me to consider the sociocultural context in which I asked and answered these questions. Although this journal was primarily open-ended, I considered the following guiding questions as it related to identity formation and my pedagogical decisions when making entries:

> What specifically am I doing in my classroom?
> What does it mean that I choose to do it this way?
> How are the students responding? What does it mean that they respond in these ways?
> How did I come to see and do things this way?
> What do I intend to change? How?
> (Patterson & Shannon, 1993, p. 8)

My data analysis was informed by methods of ethnographic research (Glesne, 2011). I analyzed the data collected using thematic analysis, which is described as using analytical techniques to search through data for themes and patterns (Glesne, 2011). To begin with, I analyzed the transcriptions of the video-recordings and students' interview responses daily. As patterns and themes emerged relating to my research questions, I created codes to better analyze the data using the "initial," or "open" coding method (Saldana, 2009). The codes that emerged related to my identity (coded as 'teacher identity'), the school's identity that was imposed upon me (coded as 'institutional identity'), the identity of students (coded as 'student identity'), and overlaps with the aforementioned identities (coded as 'common identity'). The video-recordings

and interviews were transcribed in a word document. Thus, I was easily able to color-code the patterns that emerged that related to identity construction and the interactions in the classroom or interview responses.

The dialogue journal was also gathered in the form of a word document to allow me to color-code similar patterns and themes that emerged. Since the journal was reflective, I analyzed the entries every few weeks, instead of daily. The same codes that were used to analyze the video-recordings and student interviews were applied to the dialogue journal and similar patterns relating to my identity as a first grade teacher emerged. I continued this analysis of the data in a linear manner throughout the study. However, as themes emerged, I re-analyzed the data to locate commonalities that may have deviated from the initial patterns in a manner that displayed strong connections across the multiple forms of data.

Context of the Study

This research study was conducted in a public elementary school in an urban area in New York City. This study was conducted in a first-grade class that consisted of 21 students, 12 boys and 9 girls. The ethnic make-up of the class included: Latino, Asian, African-American, Guyanese and Caucasian. All student names have been changed to protect their identity. I was the classroom teacher, researcher, and sole participant.

At the time of the study, the academic progress of pupils was the primary means in which the effectiveness of schools and teachers were judged. Thus, various accountability measures were created that assessed student performance and school culture. In an effort to efficiently manage such a large school system, the

evaluative tools that were developed tended to standardized teaching practices and academic environments in a manner that categorized children and teachers (Calkins, Mongomery, & Santman, 1998).

Findings

"It is through the process of deliberately writing down my observations, systematically recording my reflections, routinely collecting and sorting out on paper the patterns of teaching and learning going on around me" (Waters, 1999, p. 44) that, as a classroom teacher, I was able to learn about my professional identity and the various factors that impacted and shaped it. Through the research study, I found that my professional identity was shaped through my interactions with my students, the teacher accountability tools I was subject to, and my own personal experiences.

Personal Experiences

"Identity is one way of naming the dense interconnections between the intimate and public venues of social practice" (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998, p. 270). A classroom space is the typical public venue in which teachers spend much of their time negotiating self-understandings. Much of these self-understandings reflected my own school experiences. As a Trinidadian immigrant, my initial experiences in American schools were extremely difficult. I had relocated to an entirely new climate, a new culture, a new life. Naturally, shifts in my identity as a young girl occurred. There were other aspects of my experiences as an immigrant student, however, that prompted me to pursue a career as an educator. My third grade teacher created a positive, safe learning environment and greatly impacted the way I viewed learning and the social

relationships that developed in a classroom. Many of her assignments were project-based and allowed students to learn about one another in a way that was not always permitted by the mandated curriculum. One way in which my school experiences manifested in my professional identity as a classroom teacher occurred with the types of extra-curricular projects I would assign my students.

In an effort to learn more about my students, the "I Am" project was presented to the class. The "I Am" project was a cultural memoir that asked students to create a poem that reflected who they were. I incorporated this into my pedagogical practice and it became part of my professional identities of what I considered to be behaviors of a "good" teacher, just as my own teachers had done. The following is an example of an "I Am" poem that I wrote:

> I am a Caribbean immigrant that is pursuing of a better life than that of my parents.
> I am the new kid in the class that used words that no one has ever heard of.
> I am the teenager that became inspired by the actions of my teachers and classmates.
> I am the first generation college graduate who made her parents proud.
> I am the new teacher who, in September, thought "why didn't they tell me this in school?"
> I am the teacher of that new kid in the class that used words that no one has ever heard of.
> I am the teacher that continues to learn from her students.
> I am the student that hopes to inspire change…

I assigned more multimodal projects, which offered students the opportunity to have the same types of experiences I had with my primary grade teachers. I was also keenly aware that such personal experiences impacted my professional identities. For instance, I wrote in a journal entry that reflected on my teaching: "I feel that school should be fun. . . I think that I really need to make a conscious effort to do what I feel is best for my students. After all, isn't that why I am there?" (field notes, 11/2012). This statement aligns closely with what I perceived was the priority of my own grade-school teachers.

Teacher Accountably Tools

As a classroom teacher, I was subject to various accountability tools that were intended to improve institutional practices and to further develop engaging and rigorous standards for students and teachers. At times, such measures of teaching and learning categorizes schools, teachers, and students based on a single measure of academic performance. Schools have been made to be more malleable by the implementation of state-led, "high standards" that were "internationally benchmarked" (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) in a manner that resembles the ways in which NCLB (No Child Left Behind) and the whole system of accountability that developed as a result of these reforms "posited on simplistic binaries that sort students, teachers, schools, and whole school systems into those that are 'failing' and those that are 'successful'" (Lipman, 2004, p. 10). As these accountability practices manifested in the school, anxieties and instructional shifts are likely to occur. In the school in this study, there was a huge

push to use data to drive instruction. Such data consisted of formal test scores and other means of assessing students. Assessments are powerful tools to inform instruction. However, such a method to collect "data" was not always beneficial for the students or my instructional practice. Oftentimes, there was too much data to examine in a way that was meaningful and this took time away from other instructional duties. Also, teachers' names were ranked alongside students test scores—the higher your test score, the higher your name appeared upon a list distributed across the grade. This created an uncomfortable environment that seemingly promoted competition. As a result of such accountability tools, my professional identity was impacted. I sought to be a 'good' teacher with regard to the parameters set forth by the school. I dutifully administered every assessment and submitted my data in a timely manner. I prepped students to answer questions posed by administrators in a manner that aligned to the various rubrics and checklists from which I was rated. I became a teacher who was more concerned with the way I was rated than with her own pedagogical beliefs. In a journal entry I wrote the following as I gained an understanding of this aspect in my identity: "When I am asked to present evidence of how I am using data, such as conference notes, I can become over focused on 'getting the paper work done.' As a result, I feel many of my lessons are rushed. . . Many of my personal feelings about teaching are not evident. I worry, are they ever?" (field notes, 11/2012). Early in the school year, my professional identity was greatly impacted by the way I was assessed as a teacher. I felt I was not being true to my professional beliefs, stating "Why does it still feel my

classroom is not the classroom I wanted it to be?" (field notes, 12/2012). This continued several months later. In a later journal entry, I wrote: "they haven't had a chance to 'let their guard down'- and neither have I" (field notes, 12/2012) as my desire to adhere to the teacher accountably tools increased. I believe the shift in my professional identity occurred several months later as a student of mine interacted with his test score. I wrote: "Ronald broke down and began to cry because his level wasn't moving up. It was one of those terrible moments every teacher dreads. We tell our students hard work and perseverance will pay off, but what do we do when it doesn't. There are so many other factors that influence academic performance. Look at Ronald. There has been so much growth, but it doesn't count." (field notes, 2/2013). This instance with Ronald greatly impacted my identity as a teacher. I made more of an effort to adhere to my professional beliefs of how students learn and focused less on what my rating would be. This shift was apparent in subsequent journal entries. One, in which I wrote: "I feel I have maintained my focus to make instructional decisions that benefits my kids socially and academically. I hope that I continue to do so" (field notes, 4/2013). Months later, I wrote: "we have begun a new writing unit. The first day of the unit the children created their own characters. They seemed to bubble over with excitement at the opportunity to be creative," (field notes, 6/2013).

A school's culture and institutional requirements, namely teacher accountability tools, can have a "powerful impact on teachers' decision-making and teaching practices" (Assaf, 2008, 239). Whether the teacher's professional identity

is reiterating ideologies presented to them by policy-makers or transforming their practice to reflect their own personal philosophy, shifts are likely to occur. One's interactions and relationships with students can also contribute to such a shift. This will be explored in the following section.

Students as Identity Shapers

As an educator, I believe that the relationship that teachers and students have in a classroom are important to the social development and academic success of students. For instance, research has indicated that student performance on such standardized assessments tends to correlate with teacher perceptions in a manner that may be attributed to positive relationships between students and teachers (Shappe, 2005). More specifically, the research conducted by Harme and Pianta (2005) explored the effect positive relationships between students and the teacher had on students in a first-grade classroom. They examined both the socio-cultural climate of the classroom, and found that positive emotional student-teacher interactions yielded higher scores on assessments. Many of my professional ideologies of the nature of the relationship between students and the teacher reflected the findings of the above research studies. As a result, I made a conscious effort to foster positive student-teacher relationships in my first-grade classroom. Throughout the duration of this study, there were several notable instances in which my professional identity was impacted by my positive interactions with my first graders.

In an effort to adhere to some of the teacher accountability tools discussed in the previous section, I often attempted to align my professional identity to that which such evaluative measures determine to be a

"good" teacher. One way I did so was by using data to group students by reading level. Students were also expected to be aware of their reading level so they could select their own books from the library. At the beginning of the school year, I found posting of such reading levels to be a positive behavior on my part as it was received in a positive manner by my administration. However, as I reflected upon students' comments about literacy, I experienced a shift in my identity. For example, Stewart stated in an interview that what he liked about reading was he could "*move up levels*" with ease. He also stated that the purpose of reading is to "*go up and up and up in levels*" (Stewart, interview, 2/2013). Another student, Denise, told another participant that iPads were good for children to use because they "*help to you move up a level*" (field notes, 2/2013) in reading. The comments such as the ones above made by students during interviews or classroom interactions demonstrate the impact that teacher evaluative tools also had on students' perception of literacy as I attempted to positively align my identity with behaviors I believed depicted a 'good' teacher in the eyes of the school's administration.

As I reflected on students' comments, I became alarmed. As I wished to adhere to institutional norms, I enacted my professional identity in a manner that forced a linear view of reading upon my students. The things I heard my students say about their reading levels did not reflect my views of student learning or my views of literacy. I realized that the identity enactments that were occurring in my classroom did not align with my pedagogical beliefs. As a result, I shifted the ways in which I used 'data' in instruction. Although I did have to adhere to many practices due to

the manner in which I was evaluated, I actively began to resist de-professionalizing forces by connecting my pedagogical practices to my personal beliefs and experiences (Edelsky, 2006) of literacy and learning. Like the reading teacher in Assaf's (2008) study, I created distance between my professional identity and the dominant socio-cultural identity of the school. First, I ceased to post reading levels because I felt that my students were over-focused on the need to "move up levels." I then began the practice of giving out weekly academic awards in an effort to emphasize the importance of students' strengths as readers, regardless of their scores on assessments. Pictures of students holding their awards were posted on the front door of the classroom. In this way, I used the posted pictures of students receiving awards as a way to challenge the seemingly deficit-view culture that seemed to permeate the classroom due to accountably tools.

Discussion

Findings from this qualitative study indicate my professional identity as a first grade teacher was impacted by a variety of sources. The first way my professional identity was impacted was through my personal experiences as a student. My experiences with my own amazing grade-school teachers helped shape my pedagogical practices and views of what the goals of the profession should be. For instance, this was apparent in many of the projects I brought into my classroom. Secondly, the evaluative tools that were used by the school had a huge impact on my professional identity. In this study, many aspects of my professional identity was impacted in a manner that was similar to the reading teacher's in Assaf's (2008)

study. Assaf (2008) discusses how the school's culture and institutional requirements had a "powerful impact on teachers' decision-making and teaching practices" (p. 239), thereby influencing the identity of a reading teacher, Marsha. Just as I did, Marsha faced increased pressure from administration to align her professional identity to the dominant socio-cultural identity of the school. I conformed to administrative requests as pressures intensified, just as Marsha had done. Clearly, a classroom teacher's professional identity can be easily shaped when a teacher's effectiveness is being so closely evaluated by a measure that does not take into account all of the nuances of day-to-day classroom instruction and learning.

The final factor that impacted my professional identity was my interactions with my students. As I developed close relationships with my students, I became emotionally invested in their academic and social development. My goal as their teacher was to foster the same love and spark for learning as my own teachers have done. As I analyzed and coded data however, I encountered ideologies that did not align to my goal. Essentially, my students were acting as advocates for themselves, for first graders in my future classes, and for myself as I enacted a professional identity that did not truly match my professional beliefs of learning and literacy. Thus, I followed the lead of my pupils and challenged many of these practices that were created as a result of the teacher evaluation tools.

There are several notable limitations to this research study. All participants were selected from a single public elementary school. The findings of the study would be more powerful if participants from multiple schools took part in the study, resulting in a larger population that would more adequately reflect a variety of racial, cultural, and socio-economical characteristics necessary to make the findings more generalizable. The second limitation of the study is that many facets of the classroom were governed by institutional requirements. At times, this limited the spaces my students and I had to fully enact all aspects of our identity. Finally, the recording of informal conversations was not studied in-depth as it was problematic to predict when such conversations would occur and to set up the camera to record these interactions accordingly. Although limitations existed, there were several important implications that evolved from this research study that may inform classroom practice and research into professional identity.

Conclusions

The professional identity of a classroom teacher is very complex as one's identity "as a teacher is partly given and partly achieved by active location in social space" (Coldron & Smith, 1999, p. 711). The various aspects of these social spaces include personal experiences, interactions with evaluative tools used by administrators, and interactions with students. The findings and interpretations presented in this article demonstrate the connection my professional identity had with my socio-cultural life. I also assert the relationships teachers develop with their students can serve as a strong foundation to strengthen aspects of professional identity as students often indirectly offer feedback as to what best practices are. Further research, however, is needed to gain more insight into the identity development of teachers as this is

important to the field of teacher education and directly impacts classroom practice.

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