

Learning To Feel Like a Teacher

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Abstract

An important, but neglected psychological issue in teacher education is the difference between identity as felt or experienced, and identity as attributed by others. This article explores the nature of the difference and the limits it places on what teacher educators can hope to accomplish in preservice teacher education programs. Common pedagogical strategies, such as reflective writing and the organization of students in cohorts, have built-in limitations that instructors and administrators need to recognize.

Personal Identity from Within and Without

In this postmodern age, searching for identity has become a risky business. Who am "I," and how do "I" compare to the various "me's" which others (hopefully) notice? Erik Erikson described how individuals gradually become able to answer this question, at least when all goes well (1950/1967)—though as optimistic as he was, even Erikson admitted that developing a *felt* identity was fraught with risk. In Erikson's world, shadowy clouds of "identity diffusion" lingered in the blue skies of self-knowledge, even for the best of us. Others of a psychological bent have echoed his description, often with more detail about the cloudy weather: descriptions are plentiful about factors that frustrate identity development, about how the self as experienced can go wrong even when it *looks* healthy enough (see, for example, Marcia, 1993; Waterman & Archer, 1990). Identity goes right, it seems, in more singular, predictable ways than it goes wrong. So personality psychologists often end up echoing Leo Tolstoy: "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way" (Tolstoy, 1912). As with families, so with individuals when viewed as examples of identity development: individuals tend to *look* more similar when happy, positive, and successful, than when doubtful, anxious, or unsure. At least that is how they are portrayed.

While we might therefore complain that psychology has not tried hard enough to describe the diversity in positive identity, we could just as easily decide that "identity development" is simply an ambiguous and partial concept. There may be no such thing, or at least nothing very stable, when experienced from within. It may be one thing to look like "I" have my life together, and something else to *feel* that I do. In slightly roundabout ways, psychologists with a post-modern bent may simply be making this distinction, and claiming it as a "fact" of life. Kenneth Gergen, for example, has suggested this possibility in describing a "saturated self" (1991). There is no singular, stable "me," he asserts; there are only various "me's" activated in diverse contexts and witnessed by diverse others. I am saturated with identities that I and others call my own. It is not that I am "full of myself," so to speak, but that I am burdened by the confusion of experiencing so many selves. For all practical purposes, when seen by others, I am Person #1 at school, Person #2 at home, Person #3 alone with my spouse or partner, Person #4 with my parents, and so on. Each persona is too complex to be considered a mere role in the conventional sociological sense.

We could call the selves "mega-roles," I suppose, except that the name would be awkward, and perhaps less accurate than calling them "multiple identities."

Generally, the complexity of my identity is not a problem for others, since each persona is activated in a distinct social context inhabited by a distinct community or group. But the complexity can deeply challenge the one person who not only sees, but also experiences *all* of the selves: the individual him/herself, the experiencing "I". How can "I" reconcile the differences and contradictions I witness myself enacting from one situation to the next? Where is the stable autobiography in all of these transformations? "I" would like to believe that the fluidity of my behaviors and roles is mere surface appearance, and that a deeper, steadier core lies within if I can just find it—just "identify" with it. As psychoanalysts and even neurologists keep point out, finding a transcendent, existentially based identity feels crucial, in spite of my difficulty in naming or describing it (Damasio, 1999). Otherwise "I" feel out of control, empty on the inside, a victim of the changing circumstances that trigger performances of the various "me's."

Reconciling Stability and Flux: The Future Teacher's Dilemma

Imagine, therefore, how teachers-in-training might experience this state of affairs. More than usual, they seek control and stability in their work: classroom management is, without a doubt, their most serious concern about their professional future (MacDonald, 1999; Rosenblum-Lowden, 2000). Will "I" be in charge, and keep control well enough in spite of the flux of classroom events? The sheer diversity of children, activities, and daily surprises makes "me" unsure. As a teacher, it looks as if I will have to tailor my actions, behaviors, and roles constantly. I worry about striving to be all things to all people, as they say, and expect to be at least many things to many students. The behavior that I enact prominently with one student may not be what I display prominently with another, even if I value consistency in teaching. Because of the inevitable diversity of students' experiences of me as a teacher, there can easily get to be one student who sees (or "identifies") me as a somewhat angry or stern person, for example, but another student who sees me as a supportive and nurturing person. Still another may come to see me as changeable, or even moody.

The diversity of others' perceptions, responses, and experiences will defy easy to characterization of the teacher who performs them all. But it will most especially challenge the teacher himself or herself, at least if the teacher takes an honest look. Who am "I," I ask myself after seeing me behave so differently with different students and situations? How can the same "I" criticize or even punish one student's behavior, but praise and enjoy another's? How can "I" nearly fail one student's academic effort, but reward another's effort handsomely? At times "I" seem to contradict myself in class; and even when I do not, "I" often seem like an eclectic conglomeration of behaviors, as if I have been guided incoherently by an eclectic internal committee.

On the surface, inconsistencies in the performance of teaching can be interpreted easily: seemingly diverse behaviors are simply expressions of the single role of teaching, not expressions of conflicted personal identity. Distinguishing between the personal and professional allows for radical reinterpretation of anomalous behaviors, and a consequent rescue of the image of "my" self—meaning both the impressions that I make on others, and more importantly my felt, lived experience of who "I" am. Just as a soldier who shoots at an enemy need not consider himself a murderer, so a teacher who (for example) scolds a student need not think of herself as a cruel person. That, at least, is what we are told by social convention, and that is what is often assumed in third-person descriptions of professional identity(ies). As long as I distinguish the personal from the professional, "I" am not an uncaring person even if I sometimes reprimand a student, nor am I inconsistent or conflicted if I reprimand one student but praise another, nor uncommitted if I take less time with one student than with another. I am simply performing my duties—enacting my "professional identity" as externally defined.

That much seems easy to accept. The problem is that distinguishing the personal from the professional may not be appropriate when being professional tends to mean "caring personally" about others (Hansen, 2001). Good teaching, it seems, is heartfelt by definition: it is partly about caring for others sincerely, and not just about looking like you care. Yet heartfelt feelings, to be heartfelt, cannot be commanded into existence. They must appear of their own accord. For the newcomer to teaching, this requirement can be especially worrisome. Whatever my performance as a teacher may suggest, who do I actually *feel* about my work? And what, if anything, does my performance—my externally visible identity—show about how I actually feel and what my

professional motives actually are? How can "I" describe myself as a teacher, not just to others, but to myself? Watching myself in action over many days and weeks, across many students and situations, I can easily fret about my identity. "Don't just do something; stand there!", goes the aphorism, and privately I may sense the wisdom in it.

To be effective, those of us involved in teacher education need to understand the troubling vividness of these questions, even though they are by nature experienced inwardly. Future teachers are worried about *more* than outward "professional identity," about how they look in the classroom. They worry as well about whether they *feel* committed to teaching as a calling. This is not merely a practical concern about employability, but a more intimate anxiety. In private moments it is expressed in terms of whether they feel "sincere" about teaching, whether they "actually like students," or whether they can "be themselves with students." In the short term, such doubts can be banished, covered and quelled by performing outward signs of professionalism: I can distract myself by saying and doing what others "identify" as good teaching. But in the long term, merely looking professional is not good enough. The problem is that satisfying others with good teaching performances does not, by definition, encourage mindful attention to *self*-identification.

It is here that we teacher educators can make important contributions to preservice students' identity development, if we can just be sensitive to the complexity of students' lives and to our own limits in being helpful. Our challenge is not to coach or entice future teachers to perform particular acts of teaching; like budding artists in other fields, most will pick up performance skills to a respectable degree. The true challenge is to help novices *feel* like teachers and to love as many moments of teaching as possible, even while they unfold. Giving this sort of help calls for a more counseling-like approach: we must invite students to talk and reflect on how they feel about themselves as teachers, while at the same time providing a stable and safe environment for doing so. As in any successful counseling experience, the "client" (student) does much of the real work of discovering her true passions (teaching or whatever). The "therapist" (teacher educator) primarily provides mindful attention—attention that focuses, reflects back and interprets the client-student's efforts. At its best, this approach promises deep satisfaction and value for both the student and teacher educator: the student feels cared for, and the teacher educator feels

valued (Noddings, 2002). But as with other counseling-like relationships, there are also real limits to what it can accomplish.

Sorting Through the Confusion of Discourses

The limits come from the sheer variety and magnitude of influences on preservice students, and from the fact that teacher educators may be prone to underestimating the variety and magnitude. In particular, in sorting through their experiences, both the student and the teacher educator encounter a variety of *discourses* relevant to teaching and learning in general, and to professional identity formation in particular. A discourse is a pattern of thinking and speaking that socially constructed over time and that is used by a particular community or group of people, such as a family, a occupation (like teachers), or national society (Bahktin, 1981). Discourses contain and express beliefs, values and perspectives, and they are used by individuals to communicate with each other. To participate in a group, in fact, individuals need to adopt one or more of the discourses used by that group. Using the local discourse(s) successfully makes mutual understanding possible, and also allows the individual both to self-identify with the group, and to be identified as such by other members.

In teacher education programs for the younger grade levels, for example, two of the most prominent discourses used by instructors might be called the discourses of *progressive education* or *developmentally appropriate practice*. These are beliefs about good teaching based on assumptions about the nature of "normal" and/or preferred individual development and relationships with families, coupled with beliefs about the importance of basing teaching on real, lived experiences of both teacher and students (Egan, 2001; Bredekamp, 1997). These discourses are promoted heavily to preservice students by faculty members in early childhood or early years education, and in a sense become major "languages" for communicating with and among individual faculty members. Preservice teachers in these programs must therefore learn the discourses of progressive education and of developmentally appropriate practice if they also wish to part of the teaching profession, or at least of the early childhood/early years branch of the profession. Those few teachers who happen to move from early childhood teaching to secondary teaching experience an interesting change of "languages." The discourses of progressive education and developmentally appropriate practice that circulate so prominently in early

childhood education become somewhat less prominent in secondary education. In their place, a *curriculum* discourse—beliefs about the importance of "knowing the subject matter"—takes on added importance.

As teacher educators, it is tempting to believe that the above description tells most of the story about discourses in teacher education, and perhaps therefore about the professional identity development of novices. After all, talk about developmentally appropriate practice, progressive education, and curriculum occupy most of *our* working time, and a good deal of our encounters with preservice students. Our job, it would seem, is to help individual students to acquire these discourses—to help them learn to "talk like us educators," so to speak. Unfortunately this view of our mandate overlooks a multiplicity of additional discourses that impinge on students' lives in a variety of ways, and frequently are at odds with the officially privileged discourses of teacher education. The competing discourses are largely beyond our control as teacher educators, and perhaps as a result they frequently go unnoticed.

Consider a relatively pointed example in order to understand this point clearly. In addition to working amidst beliefs and assumptions about "developmentally appropriate practice," teacher educators and preservice teachers also live among particular beliefs and assumptions about sexuality and sexual orientation—beliefs and assumptions that might collectively be called a heterosexuality discourse. In this discourse, personal relationships that are intimate, long-lasting and mutually supportive are also assumed both to be heterosexual and to be appropriate topics of everyday conversation. Homosexual relationships that have these same qualities are generally excluded from this discourse, or more precisely are included by being dismissed as inappropriate or worse. Unfortunately, the widely assumed and/or spoken heterosexual discourse directly clash with elements of progressive education promoted by the discourses of developmentally appropriate practice. It clashes, for example, over whether teachers should be "authentic" with students, and should therefore share their personalities and personal lives with students. The contradictions thus created create serious, chronic challenges for teachers with same-sex orientations, both during their teacher education programs and later when working in schools (Evans, 2002). From the point of view of a teacher education student, the contradictions are a problem not just because of common discourses about sexual orientation create social prejudices.

The contradictions are also a problem because they are rendered invisible to everyone except one person—the individual who prefers an intimate partner of the same sex.

Discourses about sexuality may be especially marked in their impact because teacher education programs tend to deal with them so little. But similar conflicts occur even with topics that do have a nominal role with preservice programs. One of these, for example, is *multicultural education*. Although this term is grammatically singular, it really contains (and sometimes conceals) several competing and partially contradictory discourses about the nature of and relationships among people of diverse race, ethnicity, and language (Marsh, 2003). In a version that is reminiscent of anthropology, for example, the discourse of multicultural education refers to a relatively innocent celebration of selected differences among peoples—comparisons of their holidays, their clothing, their living arrangements, and the like (Britzman, 1991). In a version more reminiscent of politics and social criticism, however, the discourse calls attention to fundamental, institutionalized injustices of one people against another. This version is about the privileging of one race over another, the existence of real or *de facto* slavery, the "necessity" of poverty for certain groups within society, and the like (Grieshaber, 2001). In a third version of multicultural education, the discourse circumvents the anger implicit in social injustice by emphasizing the importance of positive individual human relationships; in this view, racial prejudice has not been institutionalized by society, but exists merely within (quite a few) persons individually (Levine-Rasky, 2002).

These three versions are supported and contradicted in various degrees both within and without teacher education programs. The resulting position—and self-identity—of students will therefore vary depending on individuals' exposure to the different discourses. Within teacher education programs, for example, the human relations version of multicultural education might indeed be supported within foundations courses—some version of it may be expressed in courses on educational psychology and foundations of education, and may be implied in curriculum classes as well. The "celebration of selected differences" version, on the other hand, might find a compatible home in certain curriculum courses. But the political/social critique might be more problematic. While a foundations course might call attention to it, it is unlikely to sit comfortably with the usual emphasis on individuality found in educational psychology, nor with the commitment to positive human relations necessary for the smooth functioning of a classroom

curriculum (Kincheloe, 1999). Psychology, furthermore, is especially likely also to promote what might be called a discourse of normalization: the idea that children and youth "normally" develop through a series of predictable steps that lead to a particular identifiable outcome in maturity. An exemplar of this viewpoint that is widely studied in educational psychology courses is Jean Piaget, but there are numerous others as well (Seifert, 2001). Although the discourse of normalization seems innocent enough on the surface, it can be inconsistent with multiculturalism when taken seriously. Normalization has two problematic implications: first, that cultural differences are psychologically unimportant (mere window-dressing for more fundamental uniformity among individuals), and second, that differences are really deficits of some sort (more or less adequate versions of being human). Ironically, therefore, preservice education students are "normally" exposed to contradictory discourses in their professional education. Understandably, therefore, the effects on novices' identity development are both variable and challenging for individuals.

The variability and challenge is compounded when individuals' experiences outside their programs are taken into account. No matter how hard preservice students work at their assignments and classroom teaching responsibilities, they experience a variety of important discourses *outside* their programs—beliefs and attitudes that circulate in family and society, or that students carry forward from their pasts. While some of these fit comfortably with beliefs and attitudes promoted publically within teacher education, it is likely that others do not, and teacher educators' knowledge of them is correspondingly obscured. In addition to discourses about queerness, about developmentally appropriate practice, and about multiculturalism, for example, preservice education students are likely to experience discourses about gender roles, about family rights and responsibilities, and about the significance of economic disparities. All of these are double-edged "preparation" for teaching, sometimes supporting beliefs and assumptions promoted by teacher educators and sometimes contradicting or undermining them. What all the discourses share is a tendency to cause some experiences or feelings to remain hidden, from both peers and instructors. Table 1 lists some of these experiences and feelings, in no particular order. To some degree, every item poses a challenge to its possessor about how, when, and whether to "come out" about the information (to borrow a term from the queerness discourse), precisely

because every item in the table contradicts some part of more officially sanctioned discourses about teaching and personal development.

Table 1:

Personal Information Which Students Might Not Share in Reflective Writing

(not in order of frequency or importance)

Queerness: "I'm gay/lesbian/bisexual/etc."

Health conditions: "I have colitis, lupus, fibromyalgia, eating disorder, etc."

Weight problems: "I'm overweight."

Visible disabilities

Unwanted pregnancy, recent or current

Self-assessment of "wrong" personal qualities:

"Privately, I think I'm too shy to teach."

"Privately, I think I'm too intellectual to teach."

"Privately, I think I am the 'wrong' gender (e.g. male teaching kindergarten, female teaching physics)

"Privately, it seems like I believe in the 'wrong' [i.e. minority] religion" (e.g. Judaism, Islam, or some versions of Christianity)

Shameful stories of relatives (e.g. a parent or sibling in jail or on drugs)

Immigrant family background: "I'm self-conscious about their manners or lack of money."

Serious money problems: "I'm on welfare," "My family has just gone bankrupt."

Personal divorce, recent or current

Divorce of parents, recent or current

Physical or sexual abuse: in family or origin or in current marriage/partnership

Victim of recent rape or personal assault

Perpetrator of undetected crime (e.g. shoplifting or minor theft)

While the items in Table 1 vary in severity and frequency, they suggest that preservice teachers, as a group, have much more to think about than getting a grasp of the discourses sanctioned officially by teacher education programs. Developing professional identity, it seems, amounts to more than understanding developmentally appropriate practice, multicultural education, or Piagetian stages. It also includes reconciling these public discourses with private and personal experiences and discourses. If teacher educators can recognize the need for these reconciliations, as well as their extent, then they might have more success at encouraging students to adopt the official discourses. Yet how can teacher educators do so if the alternate discourses are by definition personal, private, and sometimes mutually contradictory?

The Possibilities and Limits of Being Truly Helpful

Teachers educators have two general strategies available for influencing education students: they can select and modify academic assignments, and they can arrange for students to have particular social experiences. Although both strategies can be helpful under the right conditions, they also have limitations and unintended consequences. The limitations and consequences, at bottom, come from the impossibility of establishing a vantage point about teaching that is truly outside of all prior social discourse or influence. There is no such thing, in other words, as a haven for reflection that is reliably and fully authentic, real, or "objective."

Assignments Meant To Foster Professional Identity Development

Can we encourage preservice students' to develop professional identities—especially to "feel like a teacher"—by giving assignments that encourage thoughtful reflection? It would seem, at first glance, that the widespread practices of journal writing and of autobiographical writing might do so. On the face of it, these activities would seem to require new and future teachers to confront their personal histories and assumptions about teaching, learning, and students, and thereby develop awareness and self-identity. A closer look, though, suggests that reflection and reflective writing is usually serves too many purposes to guarantee these results (Rodgers, 2002; Fendler, 2003). In teacher education, reflective and autobiographical writing is variously used to demonstrate students' self-consciousness, to plan teaching systematically, to explain a general perspective about the value of education, to recommend ways of remedying social inequities, and

to express an "authentic inner voice" that is somehow independent of its social context. While it is possible that these activities can stimulate thinking that is genuinely new and therefore a basis for personal development, the tautological quality of reflection makes this outcome problematic. The difficulty is that the mental furniture and "space" available for reflection has itself been molded and constituted by the very practices and discourse which it is supposed to critique (Foucault, 1997). Without even realizing it, students (and their instructors) may write about what they already know and believe.

When this logical problem is coupled with the differential privileging of discourses described earlier in this chapter, it is easy to imagine reflective writing to have effects that are at best unpredictable and diverse. Imagine, for example, the ways that individual students might perceive an assignment to write reflectively or autobiographically. At one extreme, for example, will be students whose life experiences or private beliefs are seriously at variance with his or her peers and instructors, and who therefore consider reflective writing to be unsafe as a forum for personal expression. These students' reaction will not depend on whether the instructor actually gives a formal mark for journal writing, but simply on the accurate expectation that the students' ideas and activities will be evaluated informally. Such students are risk of dropping out of the program, either psychologically or literally, without their feeling safe enough to explain why. But even if such students complete the reflective writing assignment, they are likely to withhold their most important concerns. Either way, they must deal with alienation from teaching.

At another extreme will be students whose experiences and beliefs, by good fortune, coincide almost fully with peers and instructors, and who find their voices magnified, so to speak, by reflective writing. For these individuals, such writing will not be a burden, but an opportunity simultaneously to be recognized and to see themselves: the perfect combination, in other words, for developing identity that is both personally felt and socially conferred. Like others in privileged, dominant circumstances, however, these relatively fortunate students may not develop empathy with classmates who struggle more—and sometimes much more—to reconcile personal and social identities. The privileging of certain discourses over others, and silencing of certain non-dominant discourses, may escape their notice. Classmates who do experience discourse conflicts may seem deficient, rather than embodiments of useful insights about the limitations of teacher education.

In between these extremes will be many others who experience varying mixtures of partial success (and failure) at reflective writing. Some of these students, for example, may decide to share their thinking through reflective writing, but only selectively. In following this path, they help to create the impression held by many preservice students that education assignments include a lot of "busy work," or thoughtless, ritualized tasks. Others in this group may accept the requirement to write reflectively, but approach the task too literally, only to find themselves later regretting certain private information they have disclosed. For them, the eventual result is private anger, anxiety, and/or apprehension. If the instructor-reader of their reflections does not respond to such "overdisclosures" appropriately and respectfully, these students may end up feeling *less* confident of their ability to teach, and even of their worthiness as human beings.

Note that these speculations assume that reflective writing will lean toward an introspective style, with perhaps a measure of social criticism thrown in for spice. As other commentators have pointed out, however, there are no logical or empirical grounds for assuming that introspection is especially effective for promoting the identity development of preservice students (Feldner, 2003; Zeichner, 1996). Teachers who reflect primarily on technical questions (e.g. "How can I prepare my students for a multiple-choice test more efficiently?") may be guided by educational philosophies just as humane as those guided by psychological or philosophical questions (e.g. "What is the best way to assess my students?"). Both may be motivated by deep concern for students' welfare. Yet the technically oriented thinking would not be considered reflective by some educators, perhaps including the majority of teacher educators. As Kenneth Zeichner has summarized this problem, "there is no such thing as an unreflective teacher"—only teachers whose reflections may not be recognized as such (Zeichner, 1996, p. 207). If teacher educators can understand this possibility more fully, they may teach students a bit more effectively.

Administrative Arrangements Meant To Facilitate Identity Development

The considerations just discussed suggest a need for additional ways to support the development of students' personal and professional identity. Other than by giving academic assignments, however, there really is only one other strategy at the disposal of teacher educators: they can organize how students spend class-related time, and with whom they spend that time. Program

leaders can arrange, in particular, for preservice teachers to spend more or less time in classrooms, or they can arrange for preservice teachers to spend more or less time with each other. To a limited extent, they can also try to guide or constrain what happens when these contacts are arranged. As discussed below, though, instructors' guidance and constraint decrease markedly once students' interactions focus on persons *other* than the instructors themselves.

Much has already been written and studied about how practice teaching affects preservice teachers (see for example Cecilia, Buttery, & Gatton, 1996; or Bullrush & Griffin, 2001), and about how initial teaching experiences affect novice teachers (see Bullrush & Bagman, 1997). For purposes of understanding students' professional identity development, the research can be summarized by saying that 1) time in classrooms easily overwhelms the emotional impact of other aspects of teacher education, and 2) practice teaching has highly individual or idiosyncratic effects on new teachers' confidence and self-image. In a general way, the reasons stem from the same considerations discussed earlier in this chapter: student teachers face conflicting discourses and expectations about teaching and about what it means to be a "good teacher." Although nearly all preservice education students do in fact complete their certification programs and most do complete practice teaching in particular, job statistics following completion are typically mixed (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2003). This chronic statistical fact suggests that many preservice teachers either do not become or do not remain committed to teaching. They learn to *perform* as teachers, it seems, but necessarily to *feel* like teachers. Because this topic has already been researched so well elsewhere, however, it will not be discussed further here; interested readers should refer to the reviews cited above.

Instead, consider one other administrative arrangement that might influence students' identities: teacher educators might arrange for students to spend more time with each other. A cohort model is the idea here: a group of peers who take many or even most of their courses together (Dika & Singh, 2002). Fellow students therefore share both the stress and the excitement of learning to teach. Because of their class schedules, furthermore, they even share much of their *non-class* time. Hopefully, these arrangements might make individuals feel less alone and more able to give and receive support from each other. In addition, students would not have to deal with the usual powers of instructors individually. Instructors could still require assignments and other teaching-related "performances," and they would still have the power to evaluate the

performances. By belonging to a cohort, however, individual students would have others to consult for advice and support about these matters. In this way a cohort would resemble a professional association or (more debatably) a labor union.

When it comes to developing professional and personal identity, in particular, cohorts could (theoretically) offer an arena safely away from instructors. Peers could assist individuals to sort through personal reactions to and beliefs about teaching—assist individuals to ask themselves what kind of teacher they really want to be, or even *whether* they wish to teach. The cohort might even offer a safe place to lose one's composure (literally) when courses, practice teaching, or instructors become especially stressful or confusing. These features, it would seem, might help students to clarify their personal commitments, and perhaps eventually to perfect their classroom performances as a byproduct.

Presumably peers *would* still exercise influence on individuals, of course, because of individual students' desire to belong to and be accepted by the community. Whether such influence would create its own problems is an empirical question, but it seems reasonable to expect that peer-generated problems would at least have the advantage of *differing* from professor-generated problems (Dika & Singh, 2002; Bennington, 2002). It seems reasonable to expect, therefore, that teacher education organized around student cohorts might offer a more balanced social diet to its members, even if the diet amounted only to mutual limitations on the influences of instructors and peers. With a cohort organization, the stage should be set—or at least a stage should be set *better*—for individuals to "identify themselves" as teachers, as well as to be identified as such by others. That, at least, is the theory.

But do cohorts really work this way? Do personal and professional identity really develop more effectively if students have greater contact with each other? Much the literature of the social sciences argues for the wisdom of cohorts of various forms, although it does not always justify the experience by its benefits for identity development. In sociology, the benefits are often described as gains in *social capital* (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000; or Mandzuk, Hasinoff, & Seifert, in press): improved information because of contacts with others, and greater access to services because of exchanges of favors. In psychology, the benefits are seen as increases in emotional and intellectual support, and as reductions in isolation and alienation (e.g. Slavin,

1995; Salomon and Perkins, 1998). In education, group work—whether temporary or long-term—has been tried experimentally and often found to be successful, though there are also examples where it has not worked well (Dika & Singh, 2002; Melnychuk, 2001). But most of these benefits, including even the psychological ones, are not about identity in the sense discussed in this chapter. They do not, that is, concern whether an individual develops a stable *feeling* of self from spending a lot of time with a group, nor do they concern whether cohorts might lead *others* to identify an individual member as a stable self.

There are other cautions about the impact of cohort groups as well. Much of the theory and research, for example, assumes groups much smaller than typical in teacher education cohorts. The reviews by Slavin and by Salomon & Perkins, cited above, really refer only to handfuls of students (4-6 individuals) working together. The "communities" assumed in social capital theory are usually larger—in fact similar to classroom-size groups—and therefore more appropriate for comparison to experiences in teacher education. But the "capital"—the ties and favors—exchanged in such groups tends to be immediate and specific, and rarely permanent or institutionalized. These qualities make it easier for classroom-sized groups to be "democratic," in the Deweyan sense of allowing and encouraging appropriate responses by individuals to the needs of the group (Porter, 1995; Schultz, 2001). But this sort of democracy also has limitations, both as a test for the benefits of community and as an avenue for individual identity development. In particular, and perhaps paradoxically, the "democracy" of moderate-sized groups also promotes shallow homegrown or group self-stereotyping (Prentice & Miller, 2002). Individuals, that is, talk themselves and fellow group members into simplified individual and group identities—a sort of "school spirit" effect. The identities thus assigned are definitely not the kind that are the focus of this chapter, because they obviously overlook the internal complexity of individuals, the diversity among group members, and the diversity within and between other comparable groups. As research reviewed by Prentice & Miller suggests, the constraints and alienation on individuals from homegrown stereotyping are very real, but usually poorly acknowledged by the group itself.

When cohort program experiments are tried in teacher education, therefore, the evaluations of the programs need to take these cautions into account. Given the cohort and cohort-like experiences in other domains of human activity, it seems likely that cohort organization of

preservice education may often be successful, but not for the reasons often thought. Cohorts may work, in particular, in spite of their interpersonal cost, and not only because of their interpersonal benefits. In an earlier review of cooperative learning, for example, Slavin (1983) noted that successful cooperative learning has generally been embedded in non-cohort, individualistic contexts, a circumstance that gives individuals respite from peer pressures between group-oriented "opportunities." Similarly, cohort models in teacher education may work best when they are not overdone.

What about identity development in and by cohorts? How would the promises and constraints of groups affect how future teachers make peace with the complexity of their own classroom and personal behaviors? The research on cooperative learning and on non-education cohorts, described above, does not really answer these questions directly, even though it implies that cohorts at least tend to be positive experiences and do not *interfere* with identity development. Research specifically about cohorts in preservice education has not focused directly either on students' sense of self development or on their felt sense of professionalism. In a combined survey and interview study of one cohort program, for example, Mandzuk, Hasinoff, and Seifert (in press) found that students reported liking assignment to class-sized groups, because, as expected, they felt supported by peers and therefore better connected to the teacher education program. These are obviously positive outcomes, but they are not precisely equivalent to students' reporting that they feel more like *teachers* as a result of support from cohort members. A number of students in the Mandzuk study also reported that cohorts constrained their individual behavior; but in the data reported so far, they did not indicate whether the constraints limited their eventual professional self-identification. Individuals commented, for example, that peer influence in cohorts sometimes became *too* strong, but they did not clearly indicate whether the excesses were about social, academic, or personal matters. They also spontaneously mentioned factors that inhibited participation in the cohort to some extent, such as being a "mature" or older student, being a parent, and living out of town, among others.

In any case, students' opinions in single interviews and on written surveys cannot be taken as reliable indicators of their thinking about a matter as central as personal and professional identity. The reasons are reminiscent of the problems surrounding reflective writing, discussed earlier. In essence there are competing discourses affecting individual students, many of them are

mutually contradictory, and a few are—strangely—expected to remain "unseen" (or more accurately, unheard though known). In various combinations, individuals must confront and sort out beliefs and expectations about queerness, about gender roles, about multiculturalism, about socioeconomic class, and the like. In this case, however, they must do so orally and in the intellectual and social company of peers more than of instructors. Given the likelihood that individuals will bring rather different backgrounds and starting points to these dialogues, it seems more likely that the results will be unpredictable and diverse. As Table 1 (see page xx) suggests, many students will have *something* to hide, and some may feel they have much to hide. Individuals will also have various ideas and experiences they wish to share with peers, but their meanings and motives for sharing will be diverse and often unconscious. Under the circumstances, it seems likely that much of the learning will simply reproduce existing preconceptions of the preservice university students. This unfortunate result has already been found, it might be noted, among cooperative work groups of elementary-age children (Cohen, 1994). The children within such groups express and enact prejudices—about race, gender, and the nature of schooling and of intelligence—toward each other that parallel those found in society at large.

Assisting Identity Development in Spite of It All

If identity development really is so fraught with risk, unpredictability, and diversity, what then is a teacher educator to do? The simplest answer may simply be to cultivate a taste for ambiguity and to proceed with humility and respect for students when trying to influence them. Although the idea of diversity is easy to accept with regard to children and youth, it seems harder for us to accept when applied to ourselves, including when applied to the next generation of ourselves, the students enrolled in teacher education programs. But we need to move away, it seems, from unified conceptions of our identities as a profession and as individuals—away from difference models of teachers and toward the diversity models we urge our preservice students to use.

Will this shift limit our role as teacher educators? In spite of any impression possibly given earlier in this chapter, teacher educators *can* sometimes be helpful when preservice students struggle with whether they feel like teachers yet. But for the diversity-related reasons already indicated, teacher educators may not be able to influence students' identity development in major

or sweeping ways, even if we can point to success stories with selected individuals (Danielewicz, 2001; and in this issue, see [Serebrin & Rhz](#), [Sorensen](#), or [Youens & Bailey](#)). Efforts to exert influence too strongly or comprehensively, in fact, may sometimes hurt or interfere with students' real struggles to decide for themselves how, why, and whether they wish to teach. As the medical doctors often remind us and each other, our guiding professional ethic must be this: first of all, to do no harm.

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