

0653

An interpretive study on the professional identities building processes of student-teachers---from the situated learning and sociocultural theory perspective

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Background

Educational interests on teacher learning and development has been mostly aroused and endured for last decade, mainly because the research paradigm or focus of learning theories shifted from individual to collective, from cognitive learning to learning in and through social practice.

One of those contemporary learning theories is situated learning theory, which offers us a different lens to see the learning process, especially for workplace learning. The purpose of this study is to investigate the nature of student-teachers' learning during teaching practice in the authentic school context.

The theoretical background to this paper holds a conception of the learner as a cultural subject, interact with a network of social relationships and the culture they belong or pursue (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1962, 1978; Wertsch, 1991); and learning is rather a process of meaning making via kind of social practice and identity building in the context of community on the social practice than acquisition or transmission of knowledge (Cole, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1994; Wenger, 1998).

Research Questions

The specific research goals for this study are:

- I To extend the understanding of the process of leaning to be a teacher in the sociocultural persepective.
- I To examine the factors related to the professional identity formation of student-teachers in the jointly social practice contexts.

The research goals can be approached through the inquiry of following research questions.

Research questions

- I How student-teachers evaluate themselves as learners of teachership in the course of joint teaching practice?
- I What are the processes of student-teachers' identities formation in the teaching practice?

Methods

Socio-cultural approaches to education draw on the tradition of Vygotsky (e.g. Holland, Rogoff, Lave, Wenger, also drawing on Bourdieu) and often also on post-Vygotskian Activity Theory (Luria, Leont'ev, Davydov etc). Latterly called 'Cultural-Historical Activity Theory' (CHAT) by Cole and Engestrom, this framework also draws on the Bakhtinian tradition and Western cultural anthropology. A common thread among the diverse approaches is a focus on learning as developing through social interaction. These approaches thus have strong links with the study of discourse and social interaction, drawing on the work of Bernstein and Halliday (e.g. Hasan, Wells, Lemke, Lantolf and Gee).

This qualitative case study is grounded on the sociocultural learning theories, which highlight the meaning-making and identity-formation's nature of learning. And the paper aims to illuminate how student-teachers act in the course of teaching practice and evaluate themselves as learners of teachership.

Discourse analysis and interpretation is applied in this study to investigate the process of the student-teachers' professional identities formation in the teaching practice.

The key unit of analysis is the situation and interaction episode, which embedded in the social life of student-teachers' teaching practice.

Frame

Three steps are taken to collect data for this study, which are self-narrative before the teaching practice, in the process of practice, and after the practice.

Videotapes, transcriptions, direct observations and the student-teachers' written and oral narratives are the main means of data collection.

The theme for the pre-narrative is "myself as a learner of teachership in the university".

The theme during the practice is "myself as a learner of teachership in the school"

The theme for the post-narrative is "my future as a real teacher in the school"

The analysis of the narrative data applies interpretive research methods. The narratives contents is categorized into three, which are reflection on "teacher as a profession", "teacher as a life", "teaching as kind of interaction with other participants in the school, including pupils, peers, mentors, administrators...".

The videotaped and transcribed episodes of their instruction and social interaction with other participants in the community of practice are used to triangulate the findings from the narratives discourse analysis.

Research findings

- The key concepts from the sociocultural theory of learning are highlighted which provide useful constructs for enhancing our understanding of the learning process of pre-service teachers.
- Through discourses analysis the study reveals in an in-depth way how future teachers construct their sense of professional identity in and through their intensive, collaborative work in the community of learners.
- It will contribute to constitute a rich environment for student-teachers' professional learning and development and explore the means of enhancing the quality of initial teacher education.

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