Research Study

On Nurturing Our Teacher Identities through a Polyethnographic Lens

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ABSTRACT. This article examines teacher identity from different perspectives and contexts where personal histories, diverse teacher's roles, and pedagogical factors impact its construction. Four scholars in higher education from four countries met during an International Doctoral Research Forum and shared the construction of their teacher identity using a polyethnographic approach. Concepts of teacher identity and three aspects of social theory (social structure, situated experience and identity) form the basis of the investigation. Following the tenet of "currere", this polyethnography involved reflective conversations through regressive, progressive, analytical and synthetical processes. This article contributes to the body of knowledge of teacher identity and enables teachers to align with some perspectives of what it means to be or become a teacher. It is also an example of the value of sharing experiences from transdisciplinarity and transculturality and the importance of building communities for university teachers that promote reflection and change.

RÉSUMÉ. Cet article examine l'identité de l'enseignant à partir de différentes perspectives et divers contextes pour lesquelles les histoires personnelles, les divers rôles et les facteurs pédagogiques ont un impact. Quatre chercheurs de quatre pays différents se sont rencontrés lors d'un Forum international de recherche doctorale et ont partagé la construction de leur identité d'enseignant à l'aide d'une approche polyethnographique. Nous avons utilisé trois aspects de la théorie sociale, soit la structure sociale, l'expérience située et l'identité pour situer notre étude. En suivant le principe du « currere », nous offrons des réflexions à travers différents processus attribués à la polyethnographie (processus régressifs, progressifs, analytiques et synthétiques). Cet article contribue à l'ensemble des connaissances sur l'identité des enseignants. C'est également un exemple de transdisciplinarité et de transculturalité. Nous démontrons l'importance de créer des communautés de pratique qui favorisent la réflexion et le changement.

Keywords: *teacher identity, higher education, social theory, polyethnography, currere.*

INTRODUCTION

In 2019, during an International Doctoral Research Forum in Calgary, Canada, three doctoral students and their mentor met and discussed how they could come together to construct intercultural capacities and knowledge building. Although we were from three different universities with different backgrounds and scholarly focus, we needed to write together in the activities of the forum. It was not an easy task, as our experiences and work did not match at the start. After several months of discussion (online and face to face in Calgary), we decided to talk about our teacher identity; who we are, how we became teachers, and our goals for the future. We then decided that linking experiences and our learning were central to our understanding of our teacher identity. To dismantle crucial concepts about identity, we drew attention to the processes behind learning, meaning-making and knowledge. For us, learning is not an individual journey but a collection of people sharing and making meaning through active engagement in their world. We knew that by coming together, we would bring our ideas and experiences into discussions of our teacher identity.

During our learning and meaning-making, we understood that it was a dynamic process of interacting in a context to gain knowledge that enabled us to competently interact in social endeavours (Twiner, Littleton, Coffin, and Whitelock, 2014). Meaning-making is never straightforward and takes unexpected turns in our learning journey. The focus of our article would then be on teaching and learning experiences in order to discuss our teacher identity. In this article, by making sense of teaching and learning experiences, influences and relationships which help us articulate our teacher identity, we answer the following question: How have our teaching and learning experiences and diverse contexts influenced our teacher identity? In the following pages, we will define teacher identity, introduce ourselves, describe the polyethnographic methodological steps and share our discussions and final remarks.

Defining Teacher Identity

Our definition of teacher identity stems from a general definition of identity as "a way of talking about how learning changes who we are and creates personal histories of becoming in the context of our communities" (Wenger, 1999, p. 5). We use the term 'teacher' in this article to encompass those who have an active role in providing learning experiences for higher education students, which is where most of our experiences lie. Other terms such as 'educator', 'teacher educator' and 'instructor' may also be used. 'Teacher' is our collective term for all these roles.

As mentioned, teacher identity is nurtured by teachers' lived experiences with others. According to Ryder, Lazar, Davis, and Gibbs (2016), the development of teacher identity is influenced by pedagogic factors (being a student, learning from teaching colleagues and mentors, theory, and critical incidents) and aspects of prior identity (professional identity, disciplinary/research identity, and professional values that provide a sense of purpose) in addition to personal identity (language, culture, gender, race). No single factor works alone to influence teacher identity. Van Lankveld, Schoonenboom, Volman, Croiset, and Beishuizen (2017) agreed that several factors contribute to teacher identity. They also explain that some aspects strengthen and others constrain identity development. Wenger (1999) posited that there is a paradox of influence. He suggested that "one needs an identity

of participation in order to learn yet needs to learn in order to acquire an identity of participation" (p. 277). Teachers in higher education form their identity from prior learning experiences and their identities as teachers enable them to participate in teaching and learning contexts.

Unlike primary and secondary school teachers, academic staff in higher education often hold multiple competing identities, where teacher identity may not be the most prominent one (Van Lankveld et al., 2017). Higher education teachers have other duties tied to their roles, such as lecturer, researcher, service commitments to the university, administrator, leader, and manager. Although Van Lankveld et al. (2017) have conducted a substantial literature review of teacher identity in higher education, we offer a different perspective using a transdisciplinary lens and polyethnography as a methodology to inform and to investigate how our teaching and learning experiences and diverse contexts have influenced our teacher identity. The principles of polyethnography, especially currere (Pinar, 1975; 1994), allow us to reflect on our journey. Currere is an autobiographical method that provides a broader understanding of our lived experiences. We demonstrate our reflectivity in dialogues which constitute our data for this article. The dialogic form of this article, providing some of our experiences, contributes to the body of knowledge of teacher identity in teacher education programs, pre-service and in-service teachers. Our dialogic exploration of teacher identity is informed by our four different first languages (French, Mandarin, Spanish, and English) and by our cultural differences. We are living in spaces where our languages are dominant, except in the case of French where it is a minority language in an English-dominant province. But French is also a majority language elsewhere and is recognized as such in the world. The dialogic approach also addresses a knowledge gap on this topic through a polyethnographic lens, which has never been done before. We hope to enable teachers to align with some perspectives on what it means to be or to become a teacher.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Researchers conceptualize teacher identity from diverse theoretical approaches. For example, from a postmodern perspective, Gee (2001) recognized that identity suggests a 'kind of person' within a particular context. Although one might have a 'core identity', there are multiple forms of this identity as one operates across different contexts (p. 99). From a sociocultural perspective, Sfard and Prusak (2005) posited that "collective discourses shape personal worlds and how individual voices combine into the voice of a community" (p. 15). It is a back-and-forth construction of identity when the world around us makes us who we are, while we are the ones building our local, national and global communities. Social, cultural, and political contexts influence identity construction; identity is constructed through language and discourse (Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005) and also shaped and maintained where individuals live (Hu, 2024). Finally, Akkerman and Meijer (2011) add and describe teacher identity as unitary and multiple, continuous and discontinuous, individual and social. Research on teacher identity is evolving and is expanding to investigate what happens within and beyond the classroom: identity is transformational and transformative.

To make sense of our identity as teachers in higher education, we will also discuss Wenger's (1999) social theory of learning. He believes that the social theory of learning is relevant to several disciplines and traditions in educational theory and practice. This approach creates common ground for our group of researchers, from different countries with different intellectual and cultural traditions. As stated by Wenger (1999), theories of social structure emphasize institutions, cultural systems, discourses and history, with less regard to agents or individuals. On the other hand, theories of situated experiences give primacy to individual experiences and interpersonal events such as conversation (see highest and lowest branches in Figure 1). Wenger (1999) suggests that:

> Learning as participation is certainly caught in the middle. It takes place through our engagement in actions and interactions, but it embeds this engagement in culture and history. Through these local actions and interactions, learning reproduces and transforms the social structure in which it takes place. (p. 13)

Wenger (1999) deconstructs this dichotomy between two theories (*theories of social structure* and *theories of situated experiences*) by adding other categories (or theories) that might better explain the complexity of practice and identity.
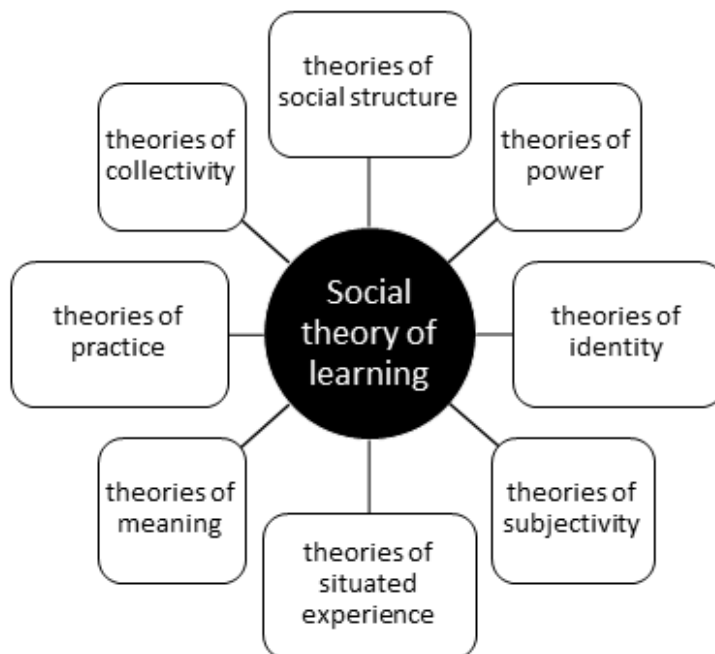

Figure 1. Social Theory of Learning (adapted from Wenger, 1999, p. 14)

Wenger (1999) described all of the theories shown in *Figure 1* to make his point, but it is his definition of identity that is of most interest for this article:

Identity formation is a lifelong process whose phases and rhythms change as the world changes. From this perspective, we need to think about education not merely in terms of an initial period of socialization into a culture, but more fundamentally in terms of rhythms by which communities and individuals continually renew themselves. Education thus becomes a mutual developmental process between communities and individuals, one that goes beyond mere socialization. It is an investment of a community in its own future, not as a reproduction of the past through cultural transmission, but as the formation of new identities that can take its history of learning forward. (p. 263)

As stated in the introduction, our identities come from our histories, interactions in the communities in which we live, the connections we make, and the growth that emerges from experiences in specific places and times. To explore how our identities, especially teacher identity, are nurtured, we use polyethnography, which is a conversational method of exploring our understanding of ourselves and others (Arthur, et al., 2017, Norris, et al., 2012; Sawyer, & Norris, 2012).

WHO ARE WE?

The context for our research is the International Doctoral Research Forum, the result of a formal partnership between faculties of education at Beijing Normal University (BNU, China), Queensland University of Technology (QUT, Australia) and the University of Calgary (UCalgary, Canada). Since 2016, this partnership has promoted research collaborations among doctoral students and faculty members at these three universities. The collaborative initiative involves a joint annual face-to-face forum hosted by partner universities in alternate years. Participating doctoral students engage in collaborative, interdisciplinary and scholarly writing activities. The forum activities include workshops, student presentations, field trips and related cultural activities. The 2019 International Doctoral Research Forum from which the data for this article were drawn was held in Calgary, Canada, with the theme "Transforming pedagogies and diverse learning: Empowering identities and changing societies". During the Forum, we visited a school where most of the students are learning English as a second language in Calgary, Alberta, where English is the majority language. We also visited Nose Hill, a park on Blackfoot territory. to observe and learn from a Medicine Wheel. Similar work that has resulted from different editions of this event has been documented by Fedoruk et al. (2018), Hanson et al. (2014), Ko et al. (2019), and Czuy & Hogarth (2019).

Our group, a subset of the larger group of 2019 forum participants, consists of three doctoral students and one professor. We are all from the field of education but in different countries: Canada, Costa Rica, China and Australia. Throughout our learning and teaching careers, we have been immersed in unique subfields and had varying years of teaching experience. In the following, we introduce the team to give a short background for each of us before we discuss our teacher identities.

- Lena's area of research is teacher agency of English as a foreign language instructor. She has eight years of experience teaching in primary schools (grade 1 to 6) and more than 20 years of experience at the university

level in Costa Rica. She was an international student in Calgary during the International Doctoral Research Forum.

- Jonathan's area of research is higher education students learning creativity in extra-institutional places. He has 30 years of teaching experience in schools and universities in New Zealand, Australia, Hong Kong and Fiji. He lives in Queensland, Australia.
- Li's area of research is teachers' professional identity, learning and socialization in communities of practice at the university level in China. She lives in Xi'an, China.
- Sylvie's areas of research are sociolinguistics, teaching and learning a second language, discourse analysis, and bilingualism. She taught in two Canadian provinces for four years (Ontario and Alberta) before becoming a faculty member at UCalgary in 2001.

Our differing yet overlapping subfields of research and teaching experiences form the basis of this article. In the next section, we explain how we decided to proceed with an investigation of the nurturing of our teacher identity.

A POLYETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH TO INVESTIGATING TEACHER IDENTITY

In guiding our reflections on our teacher identity, we used a polyethnographic approach. Drawing on duoethnographic research developed by Sawyer and Norris (2012), polyethnography is a form of collective autoethnography where the site of the research is the examination of personal experiences in the form of conversations. We believe polyethnography is a suitable research methodology to present our experiences of learning from dialogue, as it allows for intersections between transdisciplinary and transnational perspectives on learning (Sawyer & Norris, 2012). Polyethnography also enables us to explore diverse approaches to being learners, designing learning, and facilitating learning. We decided that this approach is ideally suited for the dialogic, reflexive work required of researchers engaging in collaborative writing (Arthur, Lund, Russell-Mayhew, Nutter, Williams, Sesma Vazquez, & Kassan, 2017). We followed polyethnographic principles to use ourselves as sites of study and interrogation, and we constructed dialogic transactions that illuminate our teacher identity. By answering our research question through the tenet of currere (an autobiographical examination of experiences) we were able to generate deep and meaningful critiques of ourselves and our societal contexts.

Currere is a reflective method used in polyethnography. Pinar (1975; 1994) introduced the concept of currere as an autobiographical method that provides a broader understanding of our lived experiences. Pinar (1975; 1994) claimed that a person's abilities, skills, knowledge, and beliefs acquired and learned through life form a curriculum (derived from the Latin word *currere*). For us, currere contributes to viewing a person's life through an act of self-interrogation. Pinar (1975; 1994) also defined four steps of currere that are useful in a self-interrogation of one's teacher identity, through a process of remembering the past, imagining the future, analyzing, and synthesizing themes. These characteristics are regressive, progressive, analytical and synthetical (Norris, Sawyer, & Lund, 2012). For the first step, regression, we return to our past and remember significant events. In the second step, the progressive, we investigate the future (what is not yet present). For the analytical step, we need to prompt a direct

interpretation of our present. We look at the connections between our memories and ideas about the future to identify connections between these two stages. Finally, through a synthetical step, we pull the themes together and use them as new self-knowledge to make conscious, informed explanations about our teacher identities.

In the next section, we use the four steps of currere to stimulate and delineate our discussions. Throughout the four steps, we draw on our experiences from the 2019 Doctoral Forum which provided a space for intercultural activities and writing. For example, we chose to reflect on our visit to the Aboriginal Wheel located in Nose Hill Park (Calgary, Alberta, Canada) in traditional Blackfoot territory. There are multiple sets of four in the wheel and we are showing them in brackets: the stages of life (birth, youth, adult or elder, and death); the elements of nature (fire or sun, air, water, and earth); and the seasons (Spring, Winter, Fall and Summer). The wheel pays tribute to the historical and spiritual connection between the people and the land. Aspects of the wheel align with the steps of currere. We embrace our pasts and surroundings throughout our conversations and envision our futures.

Polyvocality (also known as dialogue), another key tenet of polyethnography, became important in our search for knowledge. Polyvocality offers a rich opportunity for conversation, more specifically "the use of natural, informal, everyday conversational structures serves as thresholds to past experiences by providing rich details to which the Other can connect" (Norris et al., 2012, p. 28). On this account, our conversations are presented in this article in the form of edited transcripts, held in an online setting and followed by our reflections through our participation in the International Doctoral Research Forum in 2019. The analysis of our discoveries is embedded into our conversations, but we also offered a more traditional analysis of what we discovered by focusing on social structure, situated experiences and identity (from Wagner, see framework). In our role as polyethnographers, we reviewed our transcripts and edited them for clarity, length and limits of confidentiality. As the process unfolded, each participant added thoughts and responses to clarify experiences.

We started collecting data virtually in the months leading up to meeting face-to-face for the first time in Calgary at the 2019 International Doctoral Research Forum. Our research team was given the research question as a prompt. In line with a polyethnographic approach, this question represented the starting point of our reflexivity conversation. Our polyethnographic conversation took place at a Doctoral Research Seminar held in a Western Canadian university. We met face to face as a research team for a 2-hour period and took turns sharing our insights. We continued our conversations online through synchronous discussions and asynchronous interactions in a shared online document. We all played the role of editor when constructing the discussion and analysis. Spread across the globe (Canada, China, Australia), we used synchronous and asynchronous methods to accommodate our geographic locations. We collected data through online conversations, face-to-face conversations, observations and personal reflective entries. Through our virtual discussions, we agreed on our driving research question: How have our teaching and learning experiences and our diverse contexts influenced our teacher identity? We used this initial question to fuel our discussion of our social, cultural, and political contexts.

THE CONVERSATION

In this conversation section, we are using the four characteristics of the currere, which are regressive, progressive, analytical and synthetical as explained earlier (Norris, Sawyer, & Lund, 2012) to dialogue on teacher identity and to discuss our teaching and learning experiences. For the first step, regression, we return to our past and remember significant events that formed our identity as teachers. At the end of the conversation, we will include a discussion and reflection on our process to explain why we chose this avenue in discussing teacher identity.

Regression

In this step, we think back as far as we can and record our memories as learners and teachers. We focus on events, surroundings, and people that were vivid to us and that informed our beliefs.

Jonathan: The first influence on my teacher identity is family. Family learning and teaching feature predominantly in my upbringing and early career in New Zealand. My family is rich with teachers who have helped me form my identity. My paternal grandfather, my maternal grandmother, my father and mother, my aunt, my brother's wife, my wife, and my wife's brother have all helped me calibrate my professional identity. This approach is consistent with the suggestion by Ryder et al. (2016) that identity is formed from interactions with other teachers. Informal learning in a family setting has also imbued me with an appreciation of the broader possibilities of where learning can take place. When I was 12 years old, my maternal grandfather, an avid amateur photographer, involved me in the creative and scientific 'magic' of the photographic darkroom. My grandfather's pedagogy was informed by apprenticeship methodology, books, magazines and real-world experiences.

Sylvie: That is interesting, Jonathan. My grandmother was also a teacher in rural Québec in Canada where she taught all grades in a small house. I was always fascinated by the passion that my grandmother had when she talked about her career. My sister is also a teacher. She worked several years with special needs children. When I was preparing future teachers in the BEd program at my university, I would call her sometimes to hear how she was doing in her schools. She would often have some stories about the children and how she had helped them, and I always thought she was a great teacher, who did influence my own teacher identity. Both my sister and grandmother were great teachers, and they were loving people who loved all children.

Lena: My grandparents had a positive influence on my early learning experiences and teacher identity. They were farmers in a remote Costa Rican rural town with no access to formal education, but my grandpa understood that his kids were deprived of this opportunity. He decided to leave their farm so that his kids could get an education. He left a heritage of strong commitment and passion by drilling his message, "I have nothing to leave you, but good education." My mom and three aunts were primary school teachers. When I grew up, respecting educators was familiar to me. I recognize that my connection with my rural context is strong as it shaped my career stability. Just as the earth in the Wheel that we visited during our time on Nose Hill park in Calgary during the Forum represents the element of stability and groundedness, now that I have passed the stabilization stage in my teaching career

cycle (Huberman, 1993), I strongly recognize that my teacher identity is grounded in contributing to my rural community.

Jonathan: Yay, grandmothers and grandfathers.

Li: I find common factors in nurturing teaching and teacher identity: family context, formal and informal teaching and learning context, especially the transition from school to higher education contexts. First, in my teacher identity as an educator, I'm seeking humanity and social justice arising from my family context. My cousin died of suicide at age 19. He was a normal village boy, further still, a happy boy in his childhood. He attended school with his friends, learned two courses, played all kinds of games, accepted being punished by respectful teachers, and spent long joyful days in school. Yet, all the happiness came to an end. When he finished attending his village's primary school and was not qualified to attend junior high school, he was marginalized in the education system and suffered being treated as a 'poor country boy'. He suffered when his father pushed him to leave farm work and live in a booming city requiring labor workers. He suffered from education inequality and social injustice.

Jonathan: Li, you call for learning to address social justice and an end to what Freire (2005) and Khan (2017) described as the dehumanization of learning in school education. Your heart-wrenching story of your cousin makes it so clear that education can tragically neglect the needs of a learner. Regarding your identity, Ryder et al. (2016) referred to such events as critical incidents in the development of one's teacher identity.

Sylvie: Critical events, such as those you mentioned Li, help us to develop our identity. The education system should also include learning outside of schools which I am sure your cousin would have experienced like Jonathan did with his grandparents. The fact that all of us come from a rural part of our countries explains how, as teachers, we might want to offer opportunities to children that need more support.

Jonathan: A combination of facilitating learning in informal places and teaching in formal institutions has stretched my teaching identity. In this second aspect of my past, I taught in secondary schools and tertiary institutions in New Zealand and Australia, a primary school in Hong Kong, and a maximum-security prison in New Zealand. Outside of formal education institutions I have instructed people in snow skiing, visual art practice, experiential outdoor learning, and creativity. My teaching identity evolved to become part consultant, part provocateur, part mentor, and part instructor.

Sylvie: Those are great examples, Jonathan. When I started to teach in an inquiry-based program at university using questioning and critical thinking, I was lost at the beginning because it was less directive and more discovery-based than I was used to. I couldn't understand how I would fit into the program that asked me to be more of a guide than an instructor and where students are the center of the learning more often than the teacher (Shore, Aulls, & Delcourt, 2017). I felt lost in this new teaching practice but learned to like it, and now I think it is the best way of teaching and also learning. Learning through questioning with others allows us to grow.

Jonathan: Sylvie, a change of context, according to Wenger (1999), necessitates altering approaches to learning and teaching. Van Lankveld et al. (2017) posited that having a prior professional identity when transitioning into higher education teaching can create uncertainty, even for those with teaching experience in other sectors. The phrases used to describe this are "expert becomes novice" or "a loss of expertise" (Van Lankveld et al., 2017, p. 329).

Sylvie: I agree, Jonathan. It did take a few years to learn this new way but now my teacher identity has changed because of this new knowledge.

Jonathan: Sylvie, your experience of guide versus instructor is common amongst academics. University teaching currently favors the 'guide' approach.

Lena: I felt sad that when I started university, the 'Teaching Program' I enrolled in was my only choice and I did not enjoy many classes. A year later, with the support of my parents, I changed to a new English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching program. From that moment on, I developed a more profound passion for my profession. My institution gained relevance to me through its commitment to not only be a content provider as Wenger (1999) explained, but it engaged me with my context through the opportunities offered. And now, only having worked in my town, I have a strong sense of belonging and commitment to my community in Costa Rica. Teaching at a public university is where I feel I belong. I not only identify myself as a language teacher but most deeply as an adult educator.

Li: My teacher identity as a teacher researcher and teacher educator arises from my learning trajectory in higher education. I am a doctoral student majoring in teacher education. I do not have any formal teaching experience, except for some home teaching in my extra time. Two doubts emerge in my identity: the first one is how does a teacher researcher without teaching experience become a teacher educator; the second is how does a teacher researcher without practical teaching knowledge facilitate student teachers' professional learning in a teacher education program.

Lena: Your last comment is interesting Li and brings us to how we see ourselves in the future. Let's turn to the second step of currere.

These reflections on our past including our extended family, living in a rural space, tragic experiences and adaptation of new ways of teaching and learning, inform how we became and worked as teachers. Although we come from various countries, our group represents the rural side of the urban-rural divide, where communities are usually defined in terms of deficit and lack of representation and participation (Cuervo, 2016). Our awareness of our sense of place (groundedness), our experiences of social justice and commitment to our work have helped us legitimize and appreciate our identities in each of our situated experiences. We realized we have constructed our teacher identities over solid foundations that make us resilient, self-aware and passionate about what we do and aspire to be. In the next section, we turn to our perceptions of how our future might unfold.

Progression

In the second step of currere, we investigate the future (what is not yet present) and project ourselves into that future, predicting events based on our previous experiences and how that could influence our teacher identity.

Jonathan: When I consider my future teaching identity, it seems firmly situated in higher education learning and teaching. Lena, your phrase "where I feel I belong" is such a good expression. When I reflect on belonging, for the foreseeable future, I belong in a place working with academic staff designing learning experiences for higher education students. The role has two major outcomes: enhancement of the teaching capabilities of academic staff; and improvement of learning outcomes for higher education students. My future as an experienced researcher will increase my ability to advise academic staff on curriculum design and learning design, informed by evidence. I will have expert knowledge of learning creativity in alternative places. My approach will be to broker methods of developing solutions to the wicked problems of higher education: unbundling programs and courses; student agency; student self-efficacy; life-long and life-wide learning; students learning dispositions such as critical curiosity, openness to change, strategic self-awareness and resilience (Deakin Crick & Goldspink, 2014).

Lena: Well, Jonathan. It seems that we share commonalities in the way we project our future. I also situate my teaching in higher education. Being an international student, I plan to return to my country, Costa Rica, after completing my PhD, to continue with my academic responsibilities as a university professor on a rural public university campus. My academic role includes designing and developing outreach programs, doing research and disseminating information. My PhD journey has opened a door for self-transformation. My research topic on professional agency has guided me to place high importance on issues that I did not purposefully acknowledge in my past teaching experiences, like the role of teacher-teacher reflective dialogue (Priestly, Biesta, & Robinson, 2015), power in rural higher education (Cuervo, 2016), collaborative work (Wenger, 1999) and belonging and identity of rural EFL instructors. I want to open spaces for reflection through narrative research (Goodson, 2017; Priestly et al., 2015). My participation in the Doctoral Forum had a significant impact on this transformation. In a very direct way, the stories that ESL teachers shared during the high school visit during the Doctoral Forum in Calgary made me reflect on the connection between passion, sense of mission and teacher identity. A true passion for serving students impacts our construction of who we are as teachers and our affective selves.

Li: Jonathan and Lena, I find one common thing in the imaginings of your future teacher identities: stay in higher education. By learning to become a university teacher, my identity roles may include designing and developing programs, doing research, preparing teachers and disseminating information. I find similarities in learning to become a university teacher in teacher education: to be a teacher researcher, and to be a teacher educator. In learning to be a teacher researcher, I could do teacher research in the field. Based on my research findings, I could contribute to student teacher preparation by clearly pointing out how student teachers learn. Cognitively, I recognize the different roles of two groups of teacher educators: university-based teacher educators and school-based educators; I would mentor work-place learning in student teachers' practical knowledge learning through reflective practice. Pragmatically, I could do research-oriented guiding in student teachers' learning; cooperate with

school-based teacher educators to research practical knowledge learning. This, I think, would allow me to be more confident in my role because I didn't teach in the school system in China.

Sylvie: I agree that we have a place in higher education to inform practices in schools. I am in the same position as you, Li. I'm not comfortable because I didn't teach long in the school system. I have been at the university level so long that I forget my school teaching experience. However, we need to stay close to the field, close to people who work in the schools. That is why my research is always in schools. I like to conduct ethnographic research in schools. The Doctoral Forum allowed me to reflect on diversity and how people act differently based on their experiences and history. My past experiences were concentrated on being a white woman in a working-class world. My future will go beyond that past and look towards a future of diversity and marginalization for all human beings.

Lena: Now that we are looking ahead from our past experiences and our future in higher education, we can turn to a more explicit link between our past and ideas of the future. The analysis step of currere will allow us to do that.

Our experiences of being graduate students and a professor in postsecondary education allow us to think that we can make changes in our future by connecting our past experiences to our present work. In this case, we have projected that our personal worlds would be influenced by our commitment to support university students, our disposition to do collaborative work, and our interest in reflective practice. These assertions prove that our teacher identities are directly influenced by our ability to experience and engage in our worlds by recognizing the opportunities and limitations in our contexts. We have clearly identified the ways we pursue social participation by taking action and by belonging in academic community practices, more specifically, in higher education.

Analytical Process

For the analytical step, we need to prompt a direct interpretation of our present. We look at the connections between our memories and ideas about the future to identify connections between these two stages. We identify some common themes and connections between our ideas in the first two steps connecting to our teacher identity.

Jonathan: Recognizing and reflecting on the experiences that have shaped my teacher identity and then foretelling my future teaching identity have given me a new perspective on my current context. My employment as a Learning and Teaching Consultant at an Australian university requires me to engage with several groups within the higher education context. My teacher identity manifests itself in two ways while working with these groups. First, when consulting with academic teaching staff, I am a custodian of student learning interests. Second, when collaborating with teaching staff, I am a custodian of their professional learning. Lena, as you have suggested, our conversations involve 'teacher-teacher reflective dialogue' and 'collaborative work'.

Lena, your future of 'designing and developing outreach programs' and 'disseminating information' has also become common in my current role and will continue to increase in the future. Context has a strong influence on shaping my teacher identity. I regard context as the people, places, resources, and processes that impact on my role as a teacher. My work context has the biggest influence, but I also reflect on my role in family and community

contexts. My mother is visiting us from New Zealand at present. Every day she spends with my sons has elements of teaching that I recognize from my childhood. Tonight, I asked her how she reacted when I was naughty as a child. Her reply was rich with recollections of people, places and the process of learning; learning from mistakes; understanding responsibility; and consideration for others.

Li: Jonathan, your analysis part is focused on the influence of context on your teacher identity construction. I surely agree with this idea since teacher identity is shaped and reshaped by context. As our focus during the doctoral forum is on 'transnationality' and 'transdisciplinarity', I will try to analyze my identity nurturing story from these two perspectives.

Sylvie: How do you do that, Li?

Jonathan: Li, I find it interesting that you have identified context as having such an influence on teacher identity. Van Lankveld et al. (2017) identified the enabling and constraining impacts of context.

Li: Yes. Thank you, Jonathan. As for your question Sylvie, first, from the 'transnationality' perspective, I want to analyze the unique social-cultural context in China, which nurtures my identity in pursuing educational justice and humanity. China, a country familiar with people's ability to fight against oppression and to construct a socialist regime, a country familiar with the 'cultural revolution' yet suffering from it, a country emerging as a new global power yet facing the radical challenge of social inequality. In my cousin's story, there are at least four aspects to be analyzed: education as a tool to realize social reproduction, choosing specific people for specific work; non-conformist students who are marginalized in education; education inequality between countryside and cities — the lack of educational materials and 'good quality' teachers in countryside disadvantages village children when competing with city children; education inequality between academic-oriented higher education and work-oriented training schools — not only social attitude and prejudice towards the two kinds of education systems, but also the students as subjects involved in them, identifying themselves as either superior or inferior — my cousin experienced a sense of despair when he entered training school, since he identified his future as a worker in a roaring factory, doing boring work in assembly lines, far worse than his previous farm work.

Second, from the 'transdisciplinary' perspective, I want to analyze the division and incorporation of theory and practice in nurturing my teacher identity. I majored in English teaching in my bachelor's degree. I learnt English teaching knowledge from books. Due to limited internship opportunities, I didn't learn through English practice teaching. Thus, I feel I have a division between the theory and practice of English teaching. Later, I pursued a master's degree in teacher education and now a doctoral degree in teacher education. I learn teacher research knowledge, yet still, I do not do school teaching and am not a schoolteacher.

Sylvie: This is interesting, Li. Your observations and understanding of the realities are also very important and contribute to what it means to learn in schools. I am in the same position as you, Li. I taught years ago in schools but now I discuss with teachers or future teachers about theories more than practices, especially in language

education. My teacher identity at the university is shifting, though. I reflected on my past and my future but looking at the history of my country and how we treated marginalized groups, I wonder why I was always afraid to speak up more. Very often, I tried to explain to my colleagues that the university entrance privileged only those who spoke English with a high competency, but I did nothing about it. I am in the language specialization, and I thought others would understand that people who speak English as a second language might not be admitted based on a test score. I always thought that the system should change, not the people. Now in my position as a senior academic, I might be able to do something about it. I don't teach as often, but I am able to bring changes as a leader. As Van Lankveld et al. (2017) discussed, more studies are needed to examine the role of leaders in postsecondary institutions and the way they can bring change. This is how my teacher identity will change or transform in my near future.

Lena: My teacher identity has been shaped through my mediation with my surroundings. I regard context as the places I have been, which are incredibly different in all possible ways. My town, in my past, and Calgary, in my present, have had a tremendous role in my language teacher construction and reconstruction. I was situated in a rural community in the poorest region in my country. This community was usually defined in terms of deficit of resources in general. However, at the institutional level I find favorable conditions that motivate me to achieve high agency. Pennington and Richards (2016) defined this as context-related identity which, drawing on Richards (2012), referred to the extent to which different contexts for teaching create diverse potentials for learning, providing different kinds of constraints and opportunities for teachers' practice. Even though opportunities were limited, my commitment to my formal education opened a door in higher education. Once in my "experimentation teacher stage" (Huberman, 1989), my efforts to increase my impact in my school and community forced me to move to Canada to complete a PhD. From my past, my role as an EFL university teacher for almost 20 years has engaged me with learners who inspired me to be a better professional. Now in my present, in my full-time graduate student role in Canada, I have experienced a strong and deep yearning for teaching that has made me value my teacher role. The warning expressed in the old saying "Absence makes the heart grow fonder" speaks to my discomfort after not teaching for three years. Today I am more aware and certain of my teacher identity.

Jonathan: Lena, regarding nurturing an identity connected to teaching and learning and language teaching, Wenger (1999) discussed creating personal histories within different communities. Your histories are significant factors in the formation of your identity.

Lena: Our great discussion on context brings us to 'synthesis', the last step of currere that we are using to describe our personal experiences. We are answering our question: How have our teaching and learning experiences and diverse contexts influenced our teacher identities?

Once again, our teacher identities are informed by our active participation in collaborative work that requires our deep commitment to pursue equality in education and a strong sense of commitment from us. We have acknowledged the enabling and constraining impacts of context in our day-to-day decisions as determined by our institutions, our cultural systems, and our family histories. At a more personal level, we have recognized the

influence of context in the fluidity of identity. Even though we want to protect our sense of self-meaning and purpose in education, we know that our identities are meant to be dynamic. We have identified and established patterns within ourselves that we want to maintain; however, we are aware that as our future is uncertain, our identity might change.

Synthetical Process

Finally, through a synthetical step, we pull the themes together and use them as new self-knowledge to make conscious, informed explanations about our teacher identity. As a final step, we combine our thoughts from the previous steps and self-interrogate the way we plan to use the new self-knowledge in our practice as learners and educators. We also connect with previous work done by scholars on the topic.

Li: Jonathan, you say that you might take the idea of 'learning centeredness' for your 'synthesis' step. I also find that I can use "identity learning" by the adoption of Wenger's (1999) situational learning and communities of practice theory. Both the social-justice oriented identity and teacher researcher and educator identity nurturing are identities learning in cognitive and pragmatic format, in an educational context.

As for the social-justice oriented teacher identity, my identity learning arises from my cousin's tragedy and is shaped and reshaped in my learning in university courses. I clearly remember Paulo Freire's (2005) first few lines of his famous book, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, expressing his standpoint on caring for the 'humanization' of human beings. Yet, what is the relationship between 'humanization' and 'social justice'? Which is the approach, and which is the end? Can a researcher become an authentic humanist and simultaneously an authentic social revolutionary? I dare not claim that Paulo Freire (2005) told us that through "praxis", that is, "reflection and action upon the world to transform it" (p. 51), we can fully realize 'humanization'. I feel doubt about the function of a social justice approach in liberating human beings, based on my relative youth. When I read Paulo Freire (2005), Bell Hooks (1994), Sondra Hale (2014), and Carlos Torres (2009) in my courses, my identity learning happens in the dialogue between my literature reading and my reflection on my cousin's tragedy. My cousin came to make sense of the inequality in education as a kind of oppression when his own life was deeply involved in the modernization context, in which he suffered, struggled and resisted, as a powerless individual.

Now, let me talk about the teacher researcher and educator identity learning. To nurture a teacher educator identity from a research-based approach to a research-practice-incorporated approach, my identity learning goes through two stages: cognitive learning (identity construction in knowing), and pragmatic learning (identity construction in doing). In identity cognitive learning, I learn in three ways: literature reviewing in the domain of 'teacher educator roles' and 'student teachers' professional learning'; cognitive reflections by matching the literature and my PhD study; knowing how the research-based teacher educators facilitate student teachers' learning. In identity pragmatic learning, I do research on student teachers' practical knowledge learning through fieldwork; facilitate student teachers' learning by creating a reflection learning atmosphere through narrative story, reflection writing, and stimulated recall interview; facilitate student teachers' learning by consciously guiding student teachers to elicit and know their mentors' practical knowledge.

Jonathan: Li, it seems that you and your students are transitioning into teacher identities. For you, the transition is from graduate student to teacher educator. Van Lankveld et al. (2017) found that uncertainty is common amongst PhD students transitioning to teaching roles. This situation is not dissimilar to those transitioning from professional roles to teaching in higher education.

Lena: My analysis of my past and future teacher identity has helped me understand the elements behind identity itself. I must admit that never before have I devoted so much time in deep reflection on the topic. This analysis has clarified vital elements of identity. Here, I can recognize my sense of responsibility and organizational skills. Also, my affinities take an essential role as they reflect my deep sense of commitment to the institution where I work, my community and mostly to my students, who are my source of inspiration. My teacher identity is also a reflection of my past and present context. I have both witnessed and lived vulnerability. Back in my country, rural higher education comes with concerns for social justice and power, and I have witnessed the way my students strive to succeed. Here in Canada, I am a visible minority, and that comes with concerns of self-image and self-awareness. I directly relate to issues of social justice, power differentials and vulnerability, as you mentioned, Li. In my future practice, I identify a need for responsive teaching skills and ongoing critical social reflection in my practice to integrate personal and contextual characteristics. I will focus on my ability to be responsive to the different circumstances of teaching and learning through flexible and tailored pedagogical reasoning (Pennington & Richards, 2016). In my interest to reinforce critical social reflection, I am also acknowledging my institution's philosophical orientation, humanism.

Jonathan: Thank you, Li, for referring to my email, when I suggested using learning centeredness as a theme. I see it as a way of synthesizing my thoughts on my teacher identity. I will also focus more on how my teacher identity has been nurtured by me and others.

Sylvie: I am really impressed with your reflections, Lena and Li. I like to continue to be a learner and a teacher at the same time. This combination is what I can summarize from my past connected to my future. We, the people we meet, grow together in specific contexts at specific times. However, the world is changing and I think my idea of being a teacher is changing too. Do I need to be loud to be heard? I don't think so, but I think being critical and inclusive will go far. To do that, the system has to change and the people in that system. Identity is a lifelong process and will change as the world changes (Wenger, 1999).

Jonathan: A question that often guides my actions as a teacher is 'Do my actions, decisions, designs, and consultations positively impact on learning?'. If the answer is 'yes' or at least 'most likely', then I feel confident to continue to develop the ideas and approaches I'm using. If the answer is 'No' then I need to seek a way to nurture my idea. Over time this has led me to nurture my teacher identity.

DISCUSSION

Social Structure

Most of our discussions focused on how we were raised, who helped shape us and how our social structure (family, country) influenced our teacher identity development. Wenger (1999) mentioned these influences in theories of social structure that emphasize institutions, cultural systems, discourses and history with less regard to agents or individuals. Our contexts allow us to be and become who we are but they also impact our teacher identity. We all came from rural communities where our goals were to move from those communities and become agents of change because of those past experiences. We all experienced changes in living, learning and teaching in different social contexts, regions (rural and urban) and countries (culturally and linguistically diverse). Teacher identity is also impacted by learning and teaching in diverse educational sectors (primary, secondary, and tertiary). We had constraints in those spaces when opportunities were not present (see Li's example with her cousin) but those constraints allow us to become better teachers for the future. Where there are social structures with barriers and challenges, there are also agents that reflect on them to bring changes. That is what happened to us, to our teacher identity transformation.

Nurturing Identity through Situated Experiences

From social structures, the findings from the "currere" discussion in this study also reveal the situated experiences that nurture teacher identity. Situated experiences give primacy to individual experiences and interpersonal events. The findings also suggest that identity is nurtured by projected situational experiences. Teacher identity is formed to prepare for experiences in future situations.

Significant events in a variety of situations occur over time to influence teacher identity. The findings in this study extend Nguyen and Dao's (2019) concept of "situated, interactive, and continuative features" of teachers' professional identity development. The findings show that identity is not static. Teachers' identities change and develop through the situated experiences they collect as they move through careers in educational contexts. Further to Nguyen and Dao's (2019) study of identity construction, limited to a preservice TESOL program, the findings in this study indicate that lifelong shifts in living and teaching contexts and the ensuing learning, teaching, and life experiences, continuously impact teachers' identity.

Teachers' identity emerges from their experiences in specific places and times. The findings support the notion that it is experiences that influence identity, not merely changing places and contexts (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2020). Identity is nurtured in situated experiences such as conversations, storytelling, listening, collaborative problem solving, and reflection. These situated experiences are influenced by the interplay between contextual, cultural and biographical factors that shape teachers' identities, including their individual and community voices in their worlds.

Dialogic Identity Nurturing

As the findings of the study revealed, teacher identity is under the influence of institutions, cultural systems, discourses, and historic factors. This influence is strongly tied to what Pennington and Richards (2016) defined as context-related identity. Such context is determined in terms of social conditions, whether favourable or unfavourable. Some of the favourable factors that have supported our teaching and learning come from our families' influences, our sense of belonging and our projected futures, which are situated in higher education. The negative influences that have come from disfavouring conditions are a result of our experiences of social injustice in the form of exclusion and limited resources.

There is a core element running through the identity-nurturing process presented in this paper, which is, identity learning as shaped by two interacting factors: individual identity experience and social-cultural setting. Wenger's (1999) social theory of learning stresses that individual actions and interactions are embedded in social-cultural settings, which explains why a polyethnographic approach to investigating teacher identity is a personal struggle constructed in a social-cultural context. Furthermore, by adopting the reflection method "currere", lived identity experience was a vehicle for self-reflection and critical reflection of each other. The dialogic polyethnographic approach gave each author different perspectives on the others' teacher identities and, therefore, a deeper insight to how teacher identity is developed and nurtured.

The importance of understanding and nurturing teacher identity relies on the fact that teachers should not be seen as mere technicians who complete a task without reflection on the influence of what they do. Teacher identity is not constructed in a vacuum. Instead, it is constructed and nurtured through dialogic spaces such as the pedagogy of liberation proposed by Shor and Freire (1987). The purpose of these reflective dialogic constructions is to allow teachers to explore and to understand their fluid identity at all stages of their careers (Barkhuizen, 2016). Similar reflective identity research activities are resources that teachers may "use to explain, justify and make sense of themselves in relation to others, and to the world at large" (MacLure, 1993, p. 311). There is no possibility for teachers to detach their professional identity from their life histories, their ideologies, their worldviews, and the way people around them perceive them.

FINAL THOUGHTS AND CONCLUSION

When we decided to research teacher identity for our collaborative writing in the Doctoral Forum, we didn't envisage it becoming something very powerful to reflect on. We were challenged by the process of researching with colleagues from different countries. Our conceptual framework on teacher identity and parts of Wenger's social learning theory in addition to the use of currere in polyethnographic method guided us through complex discussions of our teacher identity. We discovered that identity formation is a long-term endeavour influenced by context, relationships, and social experiences. Our work and study contexts, the places we inhabit and the circumstances that surround each of us, all impact how our teacher identities are nurtured. Discussion and

reflection enabled deeper exploration of our teacher identities, often prompted by concepts discussed before and during the Doctoral Forum.

Our meetings before and during the Doctoral Forum were opportunities to share our experiences in diverse disciplines, institutions, and countries. The polyethnographic conversations conducted online and during the shared face to face experiences in the Doctoral Forum uncovered our teacher identities and amplified our collective understanding of learning and teaching. Conversations about teacher identity may be limited if they only occur between scholars within disciplines, institutions and countries. Understanding teacher identity resides in discovering the similarities and differences between our disciplines, institutions, cultures and nations. Engaging in transnational and transdisciplinary learning helped us better understand our teacher identities.

Why are our discoveries important to share? Our experiences, before, during and after the Doctoral Forum, demonstrate how a group of scholars can choose a theme that connects them. We are from different contexts with different thesis and research foci. At first, it took some time to find a common thread and to choose polyethnography. Not everyone in the team was familiar with this methodology, which is used more and more in communities that value dialogue and communities of practice instead of data collected and discussed by individuals. Using currere, we were able to focus on specific aspects of our experiences from past to future and to reflect on the intersection of them. Currere became our guide in this polyethnography while keeping in mind our question on teacher identity. Through pre-forum online meetings and a week of formal and informal discussions at the Forum in addition to going back and forth several times in our discussions, we were able to find a common thread to work together. This collaboration is an example of the value of sharing experiences from transdisciplinarity and transculturality. The collaboration has been the catalyst in better understanding of our teacher identities. In this global world, we are not so different, and discussion of difference has enabled teacher identity discovery. More importantly, we have learnt more about others and others have learnt more about us. Relationships were fortified, more so than at other international scholarly gatherings we have attended, because we met online prior to the Doctoral Forum. Lastly, we believe that our experiences using polyethnography and currere could inspire other teachers to find a common theme to investigate aspects of teaching and learning. As Van Lankveld et al. (2017) mentioned, it is important to build communities for university teachers where they can support each other and identify possibilities for change. They also suggested to look for connections between teacher identity and other identities such as intellectual, professional, researcher, or academic. With this article, we demonstrate those connections.

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