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## Student Reflections On Teacher Identity Development In A Year-Long Secondary Teacher Preparation Program

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*Abstract: This preliminary case study examines qualitatively the experiences of 20 participants enrolled in an international English-medium secondary teacher preparation program at a university in Finland and analyzes reflections on their teacher identity development. Multiple measures of data with triangulation were collected from course work, including reflection essays from 20 pre-service teachers and a focus group interview with four of the pre-service teachers. The data were analyzed with thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in order to find categories of factors that influenced the pre-service teachers' teacher identity development. The results indicate that the support especially from mentors and positive feedback from pupils during two teaching practicum periods, and the student teacher's passion for their own subject, were incremental in building confidence in one's teaching abilities. The participants also realized that they were in the beginning of their teacher identity development and were committed to lifelong learning.*

### Introduction

It is argued that teacher identity greatly influences the decisions that teachers make in relation to teaching practices, content of teaching, teacher-student relationships, and professional development (e.g., Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, & Bransford, 2005). Teacher preparation programs are considered one of the most important stages for teacher identity development (Izadinia, 2013). The formation of teacher identity is, however, not stable and teacher identity is created and recreated through the years of learning to teach and teaching (Trent, 2010). Being cognizant of one's teacher identity is important so that a teacher can set clear goals and better know how to reach them (Izadinia, 2013).

Finland's educational system has garnered a significant amount of world recognition for its continued success on an international scale (e.g. Niemi, Toom, & Kallioniemi, 2012). There are several factors indicative of this success, including teaching being a high-status profession and a system that is committed to equity without punitive accountability measures, such as high-stakes testing (Sahlberg, 2015). The aim of Finnish teacher education is to educate autonomous, reflective, and research-oriented teachers (Hökkä & Eteläpelto, 2014). All teachers are required to have a Master's degree, and student teachers practice research skills during teacher education (Maaranen, 2009). Given this culture of support and professionalism, it is not surprising that

there are low rates of teacher attrition in Finland (Ostinelli, 2009). However, secondary teachers (or subject teachers as they are referred to in Finland) only spend one year in pedagogical studies, which is a short time for developing their teaching skills and teacher identity. Although the reputation of Finnish education is partly credited to well-prepared teachers (Malinen, Väisänen, & Savolainen, 2012), the professional development of pre-service teachers remains a complex practice.

Research indicates that there are areas in which Finnish teachers may benefit from additional training and support. For instance, while early career teachers report feeling confident in their ability to enact pedagogical practices in their classrooms, they also report that negotiating the social aspects of a classroom is a challenge (Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, & Hökkä, 2015). Another area that is reasonably new for teachers in Finland is working with pupils from diverse cultural backgrounds (Ostinelli, 2009). Finland, along with many other countries, has recently experienced a rapid growth of not only immigrant pupils but also immigrants wishing to become teachers, which adds to the diversity of school personnel (Hahl & Paavola, 2015). Teacher preparation is thus experiencing change in terms of the demographics of pupils and aspiring educators. As the development of teacher identity is central in a teacher's work, this study examines pre-service teachers' teacher identity development within an international secondary teacher preparation program in Finland, with the following guiding question:

*What factors influence pre-service secondary teachers' teacher identity development in a year-long preparation program in Finland?*

## **Teacher Identity**

Teacher identity is considered a strong factor in teacher motivation, satisfaction, and commitment to teachers' work (Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons, 2006). Nevertheless, it is also considered a complex issue (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009), and no consensus exists for its definition (e.g., Beltman, Glass, Dinham, Chalk, & Nguyen, 2015). When developing teacher identity, student teachers adopt or reject information based on their visions of good teaching (Horn, Nolen, Ward, & Campbell, 2008). The idea of good teaching may come from student teachers' own school experiences or from images and representations they are given, for example, during teacher education.

Teacher identity is increasingly viewed from the postmodern perspective as an ongoing process that is created and re-created through dialogues in various contexts and relationships. Teacher identity is thus not stable, but continuous and changing (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop 2004; Trent, 2010). This also means that teacher identity does not only form from acquiring predefined skills, competencies and roles, offered by, for example, teacher education or school teachers, but rather involves an ongoing process in which individuals are active agents. (Pre-service) teachers are active agents by engaging in continual reflection and interpretation between the teacher and the surrounding social context (Arvaja, 2016; Vähäsantanen & Billett, 2008).

Within one's teacher identity, there are various positions that a teacher can have for the different roles that he or she takes (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). A person's identity is multiple and includes different dimensions that relate to one's professional and personal identity (Day et al., 2006) and to one's identities in different situations and contexts (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). The postmodern stance on identity has also been criticized for the discontinuity

and multiplicity of the dimensions in a person's identity (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Arvaja, 2016). Researchers argue, however, that constant self-dialogue (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011) or internal dialogue (Linell, 2009) upholds the unity of the self (Arvaja, 2016). The multiple dimensions of identity may be experienced as independent or even incompatible, but they interact and overlap within an individual (e.g., Friesen & Besley, 2013). The dialogical approach considers "identity simultaneously as multiple, discontinuous and social as well as unitary, continuous and individual" (Arvaja, 2016, p. 393; see also Akkerman & Meijer, 2011).

### **Reflection as a Tool for Teacher Identity Development**

The development of teacher identity is influenced by multiple factors including teachers' personal lives, technical and emotional aspects of teaching, and the interaction between teachers' personal experiences and the social, cultural, and institutional environments in which they are situated (Day et al., 2006). Such an approach employs a personal perspective, and it emphasizes the relevance of knowing oneself in order to develop and construct one's teacher identity (Arjava, 2016; Meijer, Korthagen, & Vasalos, 2009). It is imperative that pre-service teachers have a conception of their current self-image and work on their professional identity to learn what kind of teachers they want to become so that they can form a roadmap of how to develop towards the desired goal (Bennett, 2013).

Reflection can be a beneficial tool for developing one's professional knowledge and teacher identity when it is carried out in a systematic and structured way (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005). Therefore, reflection is an integral part of teacher preparation programs in many countries (e.g., Husu, Toom, & Patrikainen, 2008). Prospective teachers are guided to focus on their personal perspectives and to examine how they themselves make sense of their teacherhood (of becoming and being a teacher) and teaching practices (e.g., Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005). Reflection is, in fact, often closely connected to lesson planning and discussion of the implementation and success of the lesson plan during practicum periods. Research also shows that during the practicum, student teachers' reflection is usually more concerned about practical aspects of teaching and on their own feelings, opinions and beliefs about teaching, than on issues and insights that actually influence their sense of professional identity (Husu, Toom, & Patrikainen, 2008).

Tirri and Ubani (2013) state that teacher educators must guide pre-service teachers to reflect on their educational purposefulness from different points of view in a way that fosters contributions to the larger community. One example of this is described in the work of Korhonen, Heikkinen, Kiviniemi, and Tynjälä (2017), who found that providing a weekly meeting opportunity for pre-service and in-service teachers resulted in a sharing of expertise, providing tools for teacher identity development, and allowed for creating a definition of school community and a sense of purpose for all participants. One of the aims of reflection is reconciling the personal and professional side of being or becoming a teacher in order to develop one's teacher identity (Pillen, Beijaard, & Brok, 2013). As Pillen, Beijaard, and Brok (2013) claim, sometimes there are internal struggles or tensions in an individual between the teacher as a person and the teacher as a professional, and these can challenge the individual's personal feelings, values, beliefs, or perceptions of being a teacher. Nevertheless, teacher identity is not only a professional construct but it is intertwined with one's personal histories (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Arvaja, 2016).

An essential aspect of developing one's teacherhood and professional identity is to find a balance between the differing views and expectations of what it means to be a teacher: On the one hand there are one's own views and experiences of what a teacher is, and on the other hand there are the professional, cultural, and societal expectations set on teachers (Pillen, Beijaard, & Brok, 2013). Researchers emphasize that pre-service teachers need guidance from teacher educators and school-based mentors to learn to reflect on their teacherhood (Husu, Toom, & Patrikainen, 2008; Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005). Understanding about pre-service teachers' current teacher identity is important for teacher educators and mentors so that they can properly guide pre-service teachers towards their future careers and the kind of teachers they want to become (Beltman et al., 2015; Stenberg, Karlsson, Pitkäniemi, & Maaranen, 2014). Although the teaching practicum may be a challenging and even frustrating time during teacher preparation (Bloomfield, 2010), it is yet considered to be one of the most influential and rewarding times for developing one's teacherhood (Ferrier-Kerr, 2009).

## Methodology

The participants in this study were Finnish and international students who were enrolled in a one-year English-medium secondary teacher preparation program in a Finnish university. The participants represented a variety of educational, disciplinary, and linguistic backgrounds, either with or without prior teaching experience. The program is offered annually to both Finnish and international students who are Master's students at the Finnish university or who have previously completed a Master's degree at either a Finnish university or abroad. The one-year program consists of 60 ECTS credits (European Credit Transfer System, 1 credit is equal to 27 hours of student work) of teachers' pedagogical studies for secondary teachers and provides them with a general competency for subject teaching (with a Master's degree and sufficient subject studies). In addition to coursework, students complete two 7–8-week practicum periods during the program when they are guided by an experienced mentor teacher.

This study uses a case study approach (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). A case is a bounded system (Merriam, 1998) and a "phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 25). Case study research is appropriate here as the study context fits the definition of a bounded case in the sense that it represents the intersection of a particular time and space, that being the reflections by student teachers on teacher identity development in a year-long secondary teacher preparation program. Case study research also draws on sociology in that it examines social institutions and roles people have in a community (Merriam, 1998). Data for this preliminary case study were collected over the course of the year-long program. For triangulation of data, multiple measures of data were collected from course work that consisted of reflection essays from 20 students before and after each of the two practicum periods, classroom observations of the practicum experiences by the researchers, and an end-of-program focus group interview with four students. In the pre-practicum reports, the student teachers were asked to discuss their expectations, worries, or learning aims for the practicum period. In the post-practicum reports, the student teachers were asked to reflect on their experiences and the development of their teacherhood. The guiding questions for the last post-practicum report were more specific: Do you feel like a teacher? How do you know it? How would you describe yourself as a teacher? What is important to you in your professional identity? What are your strengths and weaknesses as a teacher?

While one of the authors was responsible for the reflection courses (that included the reflection reports) in connection to both of their practicum periods, the other author administered and facilitated the focus group interview. Both authors observed lessons taught by the research participants, as support for teacher reflection and as supplementary data. The data were analyzed with thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in order to find recurring themes and categories of factors that influenced the pre-service teachers' teacher identity development. Both authors first read and examined the reflection essays and the transcription of the interview to make note of the recurring themes and categories of factors. Afterwards the authors compared their analysis and annotations multiple times in order to negotiate an agreement of the common categories and factors.

## Findings

Common themes were identified throughout the data that describe the participants' experiences in the program over the course of the year, including challenges and successes, and considerations of the development of the student teachers' teacher identity. This section highlights the main findings of the study that are grouped into the following categories that were found to be the key factors to influence the student teachers' teacher identity development: Plans to Become a Teacher; Becoming a 'Good' Teacher; Self-Confidence and Self-Efficacy; Passion for Own Subject; Support from Mentors and Peers; Feedback from Pupils; Lifelong Learning; and, Teacher Identity vs. 'Facework'.

### Becoming a Teacher

#### *Plans to Become a Teacher*

The data revealed that many of the student teachers' plans of becoming a teacher were quite recent. Only two out of 20 student teachers mentioned that they had wanted to become teachers since childhood. Some had previously been of the mind that they definitely never wanted to become teachers but, after they started to study their majors, their thoughts changed. A couple of the students had even disliked school as children or did not have particularly good memories of their own school years. However, more than half of the student teachers had tried out teaching as a job as they had at least some teaching experience prior to starting the teacher preparation program, mainly from short substitute positions or tutoring. One of the students (A5F) explained that, in spite of her wish to become a teacher, its realization felt distant and unreal at the time of being interviewed for the teacher education program:

*But I kind of remember that it felt funny to be interviewed because I didn't feel like I would ever become a teacher. I wanted to become a teacher but it felt so distant and also the whole thing about graduating felt so distant so I was like well uh whatever. It felt weird. I didn't feel like a teacher then, no way. (A5F<sup>1</sup>)*

Prior to going to the school-based practicum, the student teachers were sometimes worried about their own competencies and how challenged they would be in their knowledge of

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<sup>1</sup> The first letter of these codes refers to either the Arts (a foreign language or philosophy as teaching subject) or Science (either mathematics, physics, or chemistry as teaching subject) group to which the student belonged. The number denotes a running number of the 20 students. The last letter denotes the gender.

subject content. Some of the students mentioned that they had not realized how much they had developed since their own school years until they started their teaching practicum and comprehended how far they had come:

*And it was in some respects surprising because for us it happens so gradually, we're constantly learning and it happens over a gradual pace so we don't even realize how much we've actually learned since graduating from [high school] [...] This was also the point that I started to feel more like a teacher because I began to become aware of my own abilities and the progress that I've made over the years. (A8M)*

Seeing their own progress through school students' development also supported the student teachers' teacher identity development. When teaching students at school and guiding discussions and classroom activities, the prospective teachers realized how much they had learned without having stopped to give credit to it before. Although the student teachers often marveled at the students' level of skills and knowledge, they yet realized how they had developed their own abilities in, for example, seeing the bigger picture or discussing ideas on a conceptual level. Many of the student teachers specified that the main goal from the first practicum was to get a feeling of confirmation that teaching is in fact the right career choice for them.

### ***Becoming a 'Good' Teacher***

The student teachers usually discussed the desire to become a good teacher, or even an excellent teacher. Some student teachers discussed what a good or an excellent teacher is when describing their mentor or a teacher from their own school years, or when describing their own good qualities or features that they considered beneficial in the teaching profession. One student teacher recalled that, "my past teachers, the ones that I consider being good were the ones that were nice and reasonable" (A4F). It was usual for the student teachers to regard a good teacher as one who got along well with pupils and, for example, was able to relate the content at hand to the pupils' daily lives. The student teachers also often thought very highly of their mentors and provided information about the mentor's friendliness or other positive personal qualities. Although they did not often discuss the mentors' excellence in terms of detailing their used pedagogy, many student teachers brought up how the mentors skillfully used their knowledge of the pupils when teaching their lessons and choosing activities:

*She [the mentor] was so committed, firm, open-minded and believed strongly in what she was doing. I think she also has a good idea of what effective teaching and learning looks like and did not spare her energy in sharing her knowledge. (S5M)*

Most of the student teachers in the study thus voiced their wish to not just become good teachers but excellent teachers. Some had realized that the expectations they set on themselves often increased their stress levels. A student (A5F) illustrates an all-too-familiar situation to her when she demanded perfection of her own actions while knowing that she is more lenient on her students and would not expect perfection from them:

*As a teacher, you wouldn't ask your students to be perfect so sometimes I wonder why I'm so hard to myself, that I'm always trying to overachieve and trying to do a good job and blah blah blah blah and then I get stressed out because I'm not perfect so yeah. (A5F)*

The student teachers understood that they had to stop demanding excessively of themselves, as they realized no teacher is or has to be perfect and students should be taught to appreciate and learn through mistakes as well. Some of the student teachers were also comforted when comparing their own characteristics and qualities to the traits of teachers at different stages of their career (novice, advanced beginner, competent teacher, proficient teacher, and expert teacher, see Berliner, 1988). As one of the students described (A12M), it is “normal” to not possess the traits of an expert teacher when one is only starting his or her career as a teacher:

*It was actually really encouraging to read (...) what are the characteristics of novice teachers because I have probably had them all as a temporary teacher. Now I think that perhaps I was not so bad then in that sense, and I can think in relief that if those mistakes/characteristics start showing up it is only normal at this stage in my journey towards teaching as my career. (A12M)*

It could be seen from the data that the student teachers’ confidence in their abilities as a teacher increased throughout the year of pedagogical studies and there was a clear difference between their reflections before the first practicum and after the last (second) practicum.

### *Self-Confidence and Self-Efficacy*

It was usual for the student teachers to express a lack of self-confidence in their abilities to function and work as teachers prior to the start of their first practicum, even for those who had prior teaching experience as substitute teachers. Most of the student teachers mentioned the theoretical courses they had had in the teacher preparation program prior to the first practicum, either in ways how they found the content useful in relation to their teacherhood, how it contributed to their competencies as a teacher, or how or whether they would be able to apply it in practice. For many, the thoughts about the practicum were on a very practical level in teaching and they referred to the theoretical content only in passing. Some discussed the theoretical courses only in relation to a mock teaching session that they had conducted in a course:

*I am still worried that I am going to get just as nervous and just as scared for my first lesson [as for the mock teaching session], if not all lessons during my basic practice. What I really hope to gain from this practice is more self-confidence and assurance that I am doing the right thing, and learn to plan more efficiently. (A6F)*

For some, the short mock teaching session lasting only about 10–15 minutes during a didactics course was the first time that they had actually stood in front of a classroom and taught others. In a mock teaching session, the other student peers took the place of ‘real’ students or pupils and acted their part accordingly. However, this in-class activity was sufficient to give the prospective teachers some confidence to step in front of an actual school class, albeit with a nervous expectation of how they would manage in planning the lessons, connecting with the students, and facilitating learning.

Regardless of the complexities of the work ahead of them, after the final practicum the student teachers all recognized that they felt an increase in their confidence in terms of developing lessons, trying new activities and methods in their classrooms, and their ability to become successful teachers.

*I certainly know more how to deal with students effectively. I know what works and what does not. Furthermore, I do not think that the teaching skills that I*

*have learned are useful to teenagers only. I think I would be a lot more convincing in front of a group of adults as well. I know how to get the attention of the audience and connect with them. I feel confident and capable of being in charge of the classroom situation. (S15M)*

The student teacher (S15M) felt very comfortable and confident in his abilities as a teacher. He also believed that he had not gained pedagogical skills to only deal with certain class levels but is able to transfer and apply his knowledge and skills to other contexts with learners of different ages.

### ***Passion for Own Subject***

The student teachers were unanimous in their opinion that it is important for a teacher to show passion and excitement toward his or her own teaching subject in order to engage and encourage the pupils to learn the subject. They also considered this passion for own subject as an important factor of their own professionalism.

*The thing I'm still most confident about is my love for my subject and the fact that I know there's still plenty to learn. (A9F)*

Although the students were passionate about their own subject and confident in their subject knowledge as “experts in their field” (A6F), they yet realized that there was a need to continue as lifelong learners and continually update their competence in their own teaching subject. They also wondered whether they were able to explain subject matter at the right level for the pupils. However, they felt that being passionate and possessing content knowledge gives pupils “the impression that the teacher knows what she is talking about” (A13M) and thus gives them authority as a teacher in the eyes of their pupils.

It is this love for a particular subject area that also provided the motivation for the participants to engage in their practice outside of school. For instance, some students mentioned how they had started to feel like teachers outside the school environment. When coming across different material or ideas, they thought of how these would fit in the school context. One student (S16M) explained his “teachery feeling” and how a new movie inspired him to add it as part of lesson content:

*I had a very teachery feeling a week ago when I came from watching the newest Spiderman movie and after the movie I thought about some scenes that it had and how they might be cool and beneficial to show in a physics class. Of course everything teaching related has quite well filled my days during the spring, so it is not a big surprise that this kind of things arise in my mind, but still it was good feeling somehow. (S16M)*

The student teachers agreed that it was very important that teachers always consider the relevance of lesson content to real life so that they can make studying and learning more meaningful for their pupils. They did not consider this an easy task but felt it was necessary in order to motivate pupils and make them understand why they are learning the particular topics.

### *Support from Mentors and Peers*

One of the major factors to strengthen a student teacher's teacher identity development was through the guidance and support they received from an experienced teacher and a trained mentor in the school. Many students also mentioned the support they received from their peers who were going through the same stage in their teacher preparation. Although the student teachers had had varying experiences during their practicum periods and they felt their mentors had been very different from each other as teachers and as mentors, they yet appreciated the support they had received:

*From the very beginning she was very straightforward and practical, creating an atmosphere which allowed no room for too much worrying. (A3M)*

*I feel grateful for having had [X] as my mentor as it turned out she was just the kind of mentor I needed at this point in my journey towards teacherhood.*

*Naturally, she was not perfect, but she was nice and supportive and what she told about her own developing as a teacher was a great encouragement for me. (A12M)*

Having different kinds of teachers also showed the students that there is not just one teacher model to aim for and that there are "very many ways of being a good teacher" (A4F). The issues that the students appreciated from their mentors were, for example, encouragement even after lessons that had not gone so well, suggestions for doing things in different ways, small practical tips, and in particular, assurances from the mentor that the student teacher would become a good teacher. It was also helpful for the student teachers to hear of the mentor's "journey towards teacherhood" (A12M) and that they may have struggled with classroom management or even subject content.

Besides the support from the mentors, many student teachers also valued the constant support from their student peers. Seeing their peers go through similar experiences gave a more realistic perspective of how one's skills develop gradually:

*It was also helpful to see my peers teach and hear about their experiences.*

*Sharing thoughts and feelings about the practice was like therapy, because it was extremely important to have the reminder that all of us were going through the same thing. It was crucial to talk about it with people who got where you were coming from. (A9F)*

The student teachers were encouraged to observe each other's lessons during the practicums and give constructive feedback afterwards. Some mentioned that, although they learned a lot from the lessons run by their peers, it was also helpful to see and remember that they were all just learning a new profession and should thus not expect to create and implement complex lesson plans.

### *Feedback from Pupils*

The pupils were also an important factor of influence for the development of the student teachers' teacher identity. The student teachers explained how connecting with the pupils, knowing what kind of learners they were, and developing a mutually respectful relationship were incremental for successful teaching. The student teachers described how rewarding it was when they were able to form a relationship with the pupils, when they felt the pupils enjoyed their

lessons, and when they were able to create a rapport within the classroom. Having pupils call them “teacher” was also a reinforcement for their teacher identity. The student teachers asked their pupils for written feedback at the end of the practicum periods. When the feedback was given anonymously, the pupils were more open to give negative feedback if applicable. However, the genuineness and positive encouragement in the feedback gave the student teachers a clear sign that they had chosen the right career path:

*Getting all this feedback has been a great reinforcement for me that I'm going in the right direction and am in the correct field. (A6F)*

When describing themselves as teachers, many of the student teachers used the qualities and traits with which their pupils had described them. Some of the student teachers mentioned, however, that there is a danger of letting their teacher identity rely excessively on pupil feedback or pupil responsiveness in lessons. The success of a lesson is after all based on multiple factors.

*I already had a chance to discover that I am pretty dependent on their reactions and responses to my lessons, so there is still a lot for me to learn in terms of establishing boundaries and priorities in forging student-teacher relationships. (A10F)*

While the student teachers recognized positive feedback as an indicator that they were doing well in the classroom as well as understanding that boundaries were important, a desire that the pupils should like them was common. Many also accredited their good social skills for getting along with different pupils in the classroom in order to further develop good teaching.

### *Lifelong Learning*

Most of the students in this study answered the question “Do you feel like a teacher?” affirmatively at the end of their final practicum. Receiving the official teacher qualification after having completed the required 60 ECTS credits and “the sheer self-confidence arising from this official recognition” (A13M) also supported their feeling of being a teacher. However, they also realized their journey to teacherhood was not yet complete and some expressed concerns about what skills they still had to develop to be successful. They also recognized that being a teacher requires lifelong learning and updating of one’s skills.

As the student teachers reflected on what comes next for them after their year of intensive preparation, many identified concerns with managing a classroom on their own. For some, being too strict in the classroom was a concern, while others felt that they would not present themselves with enough authority in the classroom. Some student teachers were also worried that they were too friendly with their students and could thus not manage the classroom properly. Sometimes the students seemed to identify being friendly to being the opposite of being an authority in the classroom.

*I like to think of myself as a friendly and understanding teacher, but sometimes even too much. For instance, in marking student exams I noticed that I did not reduce the points as much for the same mistakes as my mentor did, so I had to become stricter in that sense. Furthermore, as to student behaviour, forgetting books or not having done homework, I understand that in the future I could react stronger and be firmer about those things. (A1F)*

Consistent with the challenges identified by Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, and Hökkä (2015), some student teachers, as the student (A1F) above, also realized that the goal of being a friendly

figure in the classroom also raised concerns when assessing pupils' work. Some of the students were worried about being too lenient on mistakes when grading tests and not strict enough when dealing with misbehaviour. Thus, part of teachers' professionalism is finding a balance between being too strict or too lenient and also understanding that establishing authority in the classroom does not exclude being friendly and fair to the pupils.

At the end of their final practicum, some student teachers considered the situation in the future of being in their own classroom without the security of a mentor teacher. While the student teachers reflected on this with optimism and enthusiasm, there was the realization that they would be solely responsible for lessons and pupils. Furthermore, they had begun to recognize the complexity of a classroom and some wondered how they would know if they are successful:

*Speaking from an experience, my job was to carry 50 boxes upstairs within 4 hours. That would be quite easily assessed, can I do it or not... Then, you know to do a good job you have to give it the best you can... and that actually resulted in me preparing one 45 minutes of lesson for 30 hours... I have to concentrate on the kind of disciplinary aspect and following my plan and uh getting across the lesson and it's really hard to juggle the methods... and my free time and the social time of it... I'll probably never be ready to be a teacher or feel that I am ready and perfect. I'll never have the 50 boxes upstairs as a teacher. (A3M)*

The student teacher (A3M) explains the difficulty of assessing one's work as a teacher. One can always improve teaching and develop as a teacher, but it is also important not to expect perfection and to set realistic limits, for example, on lesson preparation.

### ***Teacher Identity vs. 'Facework'***

Most of the student teachers felt comfortable with the development of their teacher identity and they were certain they were going in the right direction, albeit knowing they still had a lot to learn and continue learning as a lifelong goal. The majority of the student teachers felt like teachers at the end of their final practicum. They were happy to be able to call themselves teachers. They had learned to think of their own positive qualities and strengths as features that they could rely on as teachers and that contributed to their teacher identity. They were also able to specify some weaknesses that they wanted to still work on. Most of the student teachers felt that they exhibited similar qualities as a teacher than as a human being outside of work. Yet many of them explained that being a professional required them to have an identity that differed from who they were at home and this front helped in distinguishing between their personal and professional lives:

*As a teacher, I am like an actor. My personal involvements and problems do not overflow into school activities. The school is quite distinct from my personal activities. (S18M)*

However, there were a couple of student teachers who felt that having a teacher identity 'separate' from their personal identity would not allow them to be who they are as a person. This is similar to the internal tensions of the teacher as person versus teachers as professional described by Pillen, Beijaard, and den Brok (2013). One student teacher (A3M) described professional identity as "fake" and as "facework" that he did not want to support by his actions:

*Some people enjoy adopting a professional role, but in my life, I have learned*

*that I am not one of those people. I am a person with flaws, feelings, and moody days, and I do not intend to disguise this fact for the sake of any system. (A3M)*

Nevertheless, having a personal identity and a professional identity does not mean that one is not one and the same person but they are different dimension of a teacher's multiple identity (e.g., Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Day et al., 2006). As some of the student teachers explained, they had realized that having a professional identity can be helpful for a teacher and it can work as a shield to confront and deal with some more negative aspects of a teacher's job. As a student teacher (A1F) mentioned, having a professional identity separate from her personal identity can be an important aspect of one's teacher identity:

*Of course, some personal features are part of my teacher identity too: honesty and fairness, for instance, and being myself with my students makes up a big part of my teacher personality. But, like one of the field school mentors said, sometimes negative feedback and student critique (which can be harsh at times!) are best handled when we remind ourselves that it is targeted at our teacher personality and not the personal side. (A1F)*

Some of the students also discussed whether teaching is a profession or a vocation (a calling) for them. Those who had wanted to become teachers since childhood or who had since felt a calling for teaching, considered their profession now as a vocation. Being a teacher was a big part of their identity. However, a couple of the student teachers wondered whether they could become good teachers when they do not feel that teaching is a calling for them and they did not consider it a vocation. Nevertheless, the student teachers had observed a great number of teachers during their practicum periods whom they considered good teachers but who were yet very different as teachers.

## Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the development of a teacher identity is the result of an active process of successes and challenges in becoming a teacher. The findings show that the student teachers have been active agents in developing and reflecting on their teacher identity (Arvaja, 2016; Vähäsantanen & Billett, 2008). In this section, we turn back to the guiding question of this study: What factors influence pre-service secondary teachers' teacher identity development in a year-long preparation program in Finland?

The results indicate that one factor in the development of the participants' teacher identity was their own previous experiences and their reasons for entering the program and becoming a teacher. The student teachers also discussed the idea of becoming a teacher versus the actualization of this goal. Similar to Reeves and Lowenhaupt (2016), the participants identified a variety of reasons why they chose to pursue teaching as a career, such as previous teaching experience, and memories and experiences from personal school histories. The experience of feeling one's teacher identity as controversial or separate from one's own identity, as described by some of the study participants, is discussed in prior literature on teacher identity (e.g., Friesen & Besley, 2013; Pillen, Beijaard, & Brok, 2013). The multiple dimensions of identity interact and overlap within an individual (Beltman et al., 2015; Friesen & Besley, 2013). However, a year is a short time for one to develop one's teacher identity and, as the findings in this study show, the tensions between one's various identities may also cause confusion for some.

There were a number of internal factors that influenced the development of a teacher

identity, such as being passionate about their subject, and negotiating the development of self-efficacy in teaching. During the practicum periods, the student teachers seemed to mostly concentrate on the more practical aspects of teaching, which is supported by other studies as well (e.g., Husu, Toom, & Patrikainen, 2008; Stenberg et al., 2014). Guided reflection allowed the participants to engage in the process of constructing their identity by discussing their successes and challenges (Giboney Wall, 2016). These dialogues also provided the participants with the opportunity to negotiate developing self-confidence and teacher self-efficacy (O'Neill & Stephenson, 2012), and eventually professional agency (Nolan & Molla, 2017). The student teachers reported that after two practicum periods and a year of pedagogical studies, they were confident in their abilities and skills to move towards leading a classroom of their own. Nonetheless, they also discussed the importance of continuing to develop their practice as well as subject knowledge. In committing to being lifelong learners, the participants recognized that teacher identity is not a static process, and would be impacted by both personal and professional tensions throughout their career (e.g., Pillen, Beijaard, & Brok, 2013; Oolbekkink-Marchand, Linor, Smith, Helleve, & Ulvik, 2017). The student teachers indicated that their strengths included having confidence in being experts in their subject area and knowing effective pedagogical practices to impart this knowledge with their pupils. They felt important knowing how to connect to their students in order to share their passion and enthusiasm for their subject content. The student teachers also recognized the need to be kind to themselves in terms of being the 'good' teacher in order to continue to develop confidence in themselves and their practice.

Finally, the participants were influenced significantly by external sources such as working with their mentor teachers and peers, and their pupils (Izadinia, 2013). Previous research has found that the student-mentor teacher relationship is a crucial one during the preparation process, as the in-field cooperating teachers are instrumental in not only providing guidance and support, but also explaining aspects of the job that can only be experienced in practice (McMahan & Garza, 2017). Furthermore, working with mentor teachers and engaging in a community of practice allows for what Nolan and Molla (2017, p. 14) describe as "professional validation", experiences and feedback that let pre-service teachers know that they are making the right decisions. For some of the participants, the feeling of readiness came when they connected their own daily experiences and interactions with their teaching practice, and how they might incorporate these two. Previous research emphasizes the importance of not only mentoring, (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010) but also the degree to which the mentor engages in directive communication with the pre-service teacher (Mena, Hennissen, & Loughran, 2017). The student teachers rejoiced of their accomplishments of designing well-working lesson plans, getting positive feedback from their pupils, and receiving confirmation from their mentors that they were progressing well.

Although the student teachers shared factors that supported their teacher identity development, the resultant teacher identity at the end of the one year was unique to each student teacher. Furthermore, they all realized that the year of pedagogical studies was just the beginning of their development as teachers. Some of the research participants felt that being a teacher is part of their core being. Some respondents saw it as the face they put on when they enter the classroom that was not the same as their personal identity. Therefore, the results from the present study support the notion that teacher identity development is a very personal journey, and one will not be the same for every pre-service teacher (e.g., Arvaja, 2016; Day et al., 2006; Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005). Finally, the student teachers identified several challenges to becoming a teacher, although these appeared to be mixed with their successes. For instance, the

student teachers discussed how they felt that their work would never be finished, they did not yet have the tools to assess their own work, and the delicate balance of being a teacher and a person, both in and out of the classroom (Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, & Hökkä, 2015; Pillen, Beijaard, & den Brok, 2013). These challenges, however, did not present as detrimental to the student teachers' development of an identity, but rather as facets of it that they had not yet considered. This could be the result of never having been confronted with the realities of becoming a teacher until this program. Secondly, as the student teachers were still in their preparation phase, it is possible that they were yet unaware of what challenges lie ahead or lacked the experience to articulate them. Nonetheless, these challenges were not sufficient to deter the student teachers from pursuing their chosen career path.

This study presents several implications for teacher education. First, pre-service teachers benefit from guided reflection throughout the preparation process to aid in their development and moving from learner to professional. However, reflective writing is a skill that requires practice and feedback (Cohen-Sayag & Fischl, 2012). Furthermore, assignments in reflection must be purposeful, and support pre-service teachers to bring together the influences of their previous experiences, the internal and external factors that contribute to their identity development, including temporal ideas of 'self', such as a past self, a present and shifting self, and a future self (Lee & Schallert, 2016).

The findings presented here lend themselves to further research and examination. For instance, a future study may explore how previous experiences in school contribute to the development of a novice teacher's identity. In addition, this future research may also take into consideration the intersectionality of gender, race, ethnicity, and language as other significant contributing factors to the development of, and changes within, one's teacher identity. This research could even go so far as to take a longitudinal approach to understand if and how one's teacher identity changes and shifts over time spent in the classroom.

There are several limitations to this study. The participants represented only one small group of students in a year-long international teacher preparation program that in itself is exceptional in the Finnish teacher education context. Furthermore, as this was a preliminary case study, the results may not be generalizable to other groups in different contexts.

## **Conclusion**

This article has followed the development of pre-service teachers' teacher identity from an initial lack of confidence in one's abilities to stand in front of a classroom to acknowledging that they have the passion for their subject and they have the drive and abilities to eventually become good or even excellent teachers. The article also highlighted some of the challenges and successes that the pre-service teachers faced during their teacher preparation year and what remained for future development. The findings indicate that student teachers must have the opportunity to reflect on their learning experiences in order to make sense of them and incorporate them into their developing identity (e.g., Stenberg et al., 2014). As Izadinia (2013) argues, it is also important to reveal challenges in student teachers' teacher identity development. The findings in this study showed that it may be challenging for some student teachers to develop their teacherhood sufficiently to get a strong sense of teacher identity by the end of the year of teacher preparation studies. The findings showed as well that it was important for the student teachers to have their reflections and teaching practicum supported with feedback and

dialogue from mentor teachers and peers. This emphasizes the role of school-based mentors and the importance of their training so that they have the competencies of mentoring. It could be argued that the reflection reports are an effective tool for allowing space and format for student teachers to reflect on their teacher identity development. Further studies should, however, be conducted to shed light on the meaningfulness on how reflection reports or alternate ways of reflection guide student teachers' journey to teacherhood. Finally, teacher educators must recognize that the trajectory of teacher identity development is dynamic and requires constant input, reflection, formation, and reconstruction. The end result may not be the same for each student teacher. However, the process can help to guide them there.

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