

Imagination Development as a Construct for Professional Identity of Early Career English Teachers Working at Public Schools: Contributions of Interactions With Learners

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Abstract—This paper reports on a study that explored the professional identity development of two early career English-language teachers in Vietnam. The data collected for the study included the observation notes from classroom teaching and recordings from semi-structured interviews in which the participating teachers reflected on their work and their interactions with students. Findings suggested that they demonstrated a certain degree of devotion and vulnerability, adopted an orientation towards openness, and considered themselves as learners in the process of learning how to teach. Implications regarding the necessity of teacher agency are then discussed in the context of teacher education programmes.

Index Terms—teacher identity, imagination development, early career teachers, teacher training

I. INTRODUCTION

With the burgeoning emergence of identity in educational research in general, identity of teachers has received significant attention from scholars in the field of language teaching (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard et al., 2004; Varghese et al., 2005). Central to research on language teacher identity is the discussion of continuous process of constructing and reconstructing meaningful values which helps raise social awareness of what it means to be a language teacher (Varghese et al., 2005). The significance of teacher identity to language teaching has been emphasized with the argument that “in order to understand language teaching and learning we need to understand teachers; and in order to understand teachers, we need to have a clearer sense of who they are” (Varghese et al., 2005, p. 22). Moreover, since the language teachers who are non-native speakers of the language taught have been found to face stress and burnouts (Holliday & Aboshiha, 2009; Miller, 2009), an analysis of their identity development can help figure out factors contributing to language teachers’ decisions of staying or leaving the profession (Howard & Johnson, 2004). At the core of this developmental process is imagination which refers to teachers’ interpretations of their experiences to construct an image of themselves, of the teaching community to reflect on their experiences, to orient towards future, and to explore different choices and actions (Wenger, 1998).

For the group of early career teachers, developing identity is normally connected with teachers’ learning route to become a teacher, witnessing a transition from being a student at one university to a teacher at a school. That is basically a critical period of situated learning through social experiences within a community as teachers interact with different agents inside and outside their classrooms (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). It is noticeable that among the factors affecting teachers’ professional identity development, student-related issues have been identified as a significant source, though both positive and negative (Beijaard, 1995; Jones, 2006; Hong, 2012; Jo, 2014; Anspal et al., 2012). The experiences in interacting with students in both didactical and pedagogical events exert a great influence on teachers’ job commitment, self-efficacy, motivation, and willingness to learn (Beijaard, 1995). Take the issue of managing students’ misbehaviour as an example. If a teacher has certain success, he or she then develops a stronger sense of self-efficacy while if a teacher experiences constant failure, he or she may suffer from tensions and doubt about their pedagogical capabilities (Hong, 2012).

Additionally, teachers with ability to maintain positive relationships with learners are more likely to have a strong sense of suitability and enjoyment (Jo, 2014) whereas those with persistent disappointment in problematic situations

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with students may not fully develop necessary skills to regulate students' learning via classroom interactions or get low perceived level of teacher agency. Anspal et al. (2012) assured that tensions caused by efforts to manage students' behaviour and simultaneously establish a connection with them can challenge teachers' sense of role and identity. Thus, it is possible that teachers who consider leaving the profession might have some negative experiences in teacher-student interactions. Therefore, conducting a study on how early career teachers develop professional identity in relation to their interactions with the learners as the current research is of the essence in contributing to their career development sustainability.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Professional Identity of Early Career Teachers

Despite the agreement in educational studies that novice teachers' awareness of their own identity affects their teaching practice, their pedagogical decisions, their commitment to work and their adaptability, the concept of teachers' professional identity has been defined differently (Korthagen, 2004; Beijaard et al., 2004; Korthagen, 2004; Hong, 2010). Conceptualizing teachers' professional identity development as a process of learning to become a certain teacher, the current study defined this concept as the teachers' continuous process of interpretation and re-interpretation of professional experiences with their students. The personal side is not within the scope of this study as it involves teachers' daily life and their interaction with other people, rather than with their students.

Moreover, the professional identity of early career teachers might be different from that of more experienced teachers. This argument implies that teachers at different stages of their career might hold different beliefs about teaching responsibilities and students. More importantly, recent studies have showed that the group of novice teachers generally face challenges of negotiating identity as metaphorically described in a statement of Fantilli and McDougall (2009) that "new teachers spend a disproportionate amount of time and effort simply [keeping] their heads above water" (p. 814). This conclusion is in line with Howard and Johnson's (2004) that early career teachers indubitably suffer from significant levels of individual stress and a high rate of burnout. In other words, if these challenges are not successfully managed, these teachers can be at risk of leaving the profession.

However, such experiences can also have positive consequences, including inspiration to learn and motivation for change (Galman, 2009). Accordingly, teachers' professional identity development, to some extent, relates how they respond to difficulties and conflicts in the transition period from student teachers to in-service teachers with certain roles, tasks to fulfil in a new community of practice. Due to the vulnerable nature of this stage, more attention should be given to the early career teachers, instead of the experienced ones as they are at a more stable status in teaching profession.

B. Development of Imagination as a Construct for Professional Identity

Driven by Wenger's (1998) theory, teacher's professional identity development is conceptualized as an experience in terms of modes of belonging in social learning, including engagement, imagination, and alignment. Despite their essential roles in shaping a teacher's identity, engagement and alignment are not within the scope of this study. As the focus of engagement is on teachers doing things together, it can help create a shared reality, but participants do not necessarily understand the community or others' experiences. Furthermore, the focus of alignment is on the interaction between teachers and school culture because alignment requires teachers to make sure that their local activities are sufficiently aligned with other processes. Meanwhile, imagination refers to teachers' interpretations of their experiences which helps differentiate one teacher from the others. Specifically, with imagination, teachers construct an image of themselves, of the community to reflect on their experiences, to orient towards future as well as to explore different choices and actions. Wenger (1998) emphasized that "at the level of engagement, they may be doing exactly the same thing. But it does suggest that their experiences of what they are doing and their sense of self in doing it are rather different. This difference is a function of imagination" (p. 176).

The notion "imagination", as an act of belonging to a teacher community, "refers to a process of expanding our self by transcending our time and space and creating new images of the world and ourselves" (Wenger, 1998, p. 176). At the risk of oversimplification, imagination is a teacher's capacity to see teaching from different perspectives. Imagination can make a great difference in teachers' experiences of constructing identity and potentials for learning inherent in their activities. Take two cases in Dang's (2013) study as an example, while Hien targeted her teaching practicum at student learning with a certain level of flexibility in addressing students' learning needs, Chinh expressed her faithfulness to lesson plans. Both stances are correct and meaningful, but they reflect different interpretations of the same event. Additionally, the dissimilarities in these answers do not reveal that one is a better teacher than the other, but what are of these teachers' concerns, instead. Obviously, with the same activity, different teachers may get different learning points, resulting from their imagination process. Imagination then comprises the competence in moving "beyond the immediate world of experience" (Clarke, 2008, p. 98). According to Wenger (1998), imagination consists of four components: images of the world, images of ourselves, images of possibilities as well as images of the past and the future. The concept *image* in this statement is similar to Elbaz's (1983) definition. Specifically, *image* refers to a teacher's feelings, beliefs, values and needs regarding what teaching should be. In this study, the phrase "images of the world" is changed into *images of the community* as teachers' world means their teaching community in this context.

To have multiple perspectives on an issue, imagination requires teachers to disengage, to look at their engagement through the eyes of an outsider which could help them reconstruct the images of themselves and envision new presentations of their internal and external images of the community. Wenger (1998) also stressed that imagination is a collective process involving products of overgeneralizations, namely fantasies and stereotypes, which can project a teacher's experience beyond the board of mutual engagement.

C. Teacher - Student Interactions

Originally derived from the *Didaktik* tradition in Germany, the teaching – studying – learning process is viewed as a set of relations established by three elements, namely teacher, content, and student (Herbart, 1835; as cited in Harjunen, 2009). Notably, Klafki (1970; as cited in Kansanen, 1999) asserted that the relation is the interaction by nature, which allows other researchers to use the two terms *relation* and *interaction* interchangeably. Stenberg (2011) emphasized the crucial role of interactions between the mentioned aspects in teaching practice, and consequently in teachers' professional identity development. Several researchers (Harjunen, 2009; Stenberg et al., 2014) agree on the use of a didactic triangle developed by Kansanen and Meri (1999) to describe these interactions in detail.

Kansanen and Meri (1999) stressed that although the didactic triangle should be viewed as a whole, it is almost impossible in teaching. It is common to explore the triangle in pairs, including the interactions between teacher-student, teacher-content and student-content. As this study focused on teachers' interactions with students, the relation between teacher and content is ignored. Kansanen (1999) asserted that the teacher - student interaction is perceived as an immediate pedagogical interaction and an indirect didactic interaction.

(a). Pedagogical Interactions

Van Manen (1991a) defined the term *pedagogical* as a "relationship of practical action between an adult and a young person who is on the way to adulthood" (p. 31; as cited in Harjunen, 2009). In other words, the pedagogical interaction is a personal relation based on trust between two human beings (Bollnow, 1989; Kansanen & Meri, 1999). As a result, from the perspective of a teacher, authority and love are the two powerful forces responsible for the quality of pedagogical interaction. In educational settings, pedagogical interaction refers to the personal interaction between a teacher and students. Teachers' strategies to establish and maintain relations as well as handle moral and ethical dilemmas in the classroom are the centre of the pedagogical interaction.

This pedagogical interaction is asymmetrical in nature (Kansanen, 1999) does not indicate an undemocratic relationship between teachers and students as it works on a voluntary basis. More importantly, this interaction manifests its own historical context as instability may arise at time of change. It is implied that teachers and students may not keep the same pattern of interaction throughout the courses. In addition, as the pedagogical relation helps a child grow towards independence and autonomy, it is future-oriented. Although what the teachers are doing with students is in present time, they are pursuing the aims of a specific future version of their students. This work requires trust building, treating students as human beings and ethics of justice (Harjunen, 1999). If Kansanen (1999) emphasized the importance of teachers' trust on students, Harjunen (2009) focused on teachers' trust in themselves and students' trust in teachers.

However, Harjunen (2009) found that initially, early career teachers could not arouse the feeling of connectedness, just teachers performing their tasks. Their values and classroom practices are affected by prior perceptions of roles of a perfect teacher. Later, these teachers are more open to students, using more humour in their lessons. Ethics of justice refers to teachers' willingness to cope with issues about right and wrong as well as teachers' personal ability to transmit ethical meanings and moral lessons to students. It includes teachers' love, gentleness and emotions expressed through their classroom behaviours. Although a teacher and a student are equal as human beings, teachers are in charge of transferring norms and values to their students.

(b). Didactical Interactions

Another pivotal determinant is didactical relation or interaction which refers to a teachers' relation to students' studying processes. Kansanen and Meri (1999) used the term *studying* as he argued that "teaching in itself does not necessarily imply learning" and "while learning takes place in students' minds", "it is this studying we can see and observe in the instructional process" (p. 8). In other words, it is possible for teachers to control students' studying, and evoke their learning. Kansanen (2003b) asserted that there is a relation between student and content, aimed at attaining the outcomes in a curriculum; thus, didactic relation is a teacher's relation to the existing relation between students and content (Kansanen & Meri, 1999). This interaction type is the heart of a teachers' professional identity development.

Harjunen (2009) suggested three characteristics contributing to didactical interaction. First, teaching is conceptualized as listening to students and interaction. Specifically, teachers should show their patience and helpfulness to the learners by walking around, smiling, or talking to them. In their interaction with the learners, teachers should respond verbally or non-verbally to avoid the position of power. Second, didactical interaction includes the need to maintain students' motivation to study. Strategies to achieve this aim vary, ranging from building a good class climate, giving praise and encouragement or arranging group dynamics. The final feature is the development of students' basic skills, namely problem-solving, thinking, social interaction and autonomous learning. The argument is that students can

learn from their peers in collaborative activities with different sitting arrangements and teaching techniques adopted by the teachers.

Furthermore, teachers want to keep the relationship to be friendly and approachable, but most emphasize that they also desire to keep the relationship professional, clearly defining the boundaries between professional and personal relationships.

III. METHODOLOGY

To obtain an in-depth understanding of how early career teachers develop their imagination in relation to their interactions with students, this study adopted a qualitative approach with a case study design. Yin (2014) argued that case studies enable researchers to capture sufficient details with multiple data resources, permitting thick descriptions and explanations of complex phenomena.

A. Context and Participants

The present study focuses on two early career teachers working at public primary and secondary schools in Southern Vietnam. These two teachers of English have worked for two years at different institutions. Their stage of professional career is consistent with the so-called early career in the literature. For example, Cameron (2017) uses this term to refer to “those who are within a three-year window including the initial (pre-qualification) period of training and education as a teacher (typically lasting one year) and the first two years as a qualified teacher”. Other researchers such as Weldon (2018) and Joseph (2011) also adopted the term “early career teachers” to indicate those within their first five years in role.

Two different working contexts from the participants were deliberately chosen to better reflect the diversity of teacher identity development in social interactions with the students. According to Hargreaves (2000), secondary and primary teachers perceive interactions between teachers and students differently, but they both consider these relations to be the most meaningful source of changes in their teaching philosophy. Although the experience in interacting with students may differ, the influence it has on early career teachers’ instructional practice stands regardless of the group taught.

The participants graduated from a TESOL program and spent some courses with the first researcher, so the relationship was close enough for them to share their teaching stories. They were all in their early twenties with full energy and passion. For ethical concerns, the participants’ names were pseudonymized and presented in alphabetical order for reading ease.

Chi was a traditional type of teacher with a simple style of dressing and demure manner of speech. However, she did not intend to pursue teaching career at the time of graduation. The job opportunity came to her by chance, and she wanted to give it a try. Regarding Chi’s background, she was born and raised in an urban area, giving her early exposure to English. She desired to help pupils improve their English language competence. Chi has been teaching kids for 2 years. During the research period, she was teaching part-time at a public secondary school and an English centre in a big city. This was the first time she had worked with the group of adolescents.

Duy adopted the style of a traditional and passionate teacher with strong leadership. He considered himself to be extremely passionate about education activities and human development. However, he had never experienced working as a teacher during his college time. In fact, he spent more time on campaigns or projects developing a range of skills than those promoting the development of language skills or teaching methods only. He was born and raised in an urban area, giving him early exposure to English. At the time of joining this current research, he was working for a not-for-profit organisation. His specific responsibility was to teach English for students at the level of grade 3 at two public primary schools in a rural area. The course content strictly followed the national curriculum set by the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam. There were around thirty students in the classes.

B. Data Collection and Analysis

Data used for this paper were collected from semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. One initial interview was conducted one week prior to the semester, and three post-teaching interviews for each participant were conducted within 48 hours to enhance data reliability (Nunan, 1992; Silverman, 2005). The interview was semi-structured with guiding questions whose design was open enough to inspire participants “to elaborate on the issues raised in an exploratory manner” (Dornyei, 2007, p. 136). In the interviews, the participants were required to recall events or experiences related to their teaching or their interactions with students and how these interactions impacted their identity development. Additionally, three classroom observations were conducted for each participant to examine how the early career teachers performed their didactical and pedagogical interactions in an authentic classroom context.

The process for data analysis in this study was inductive as researchers start with specific sets of data and end with categories or patterns (Creswell, 2013; Lichtman, 2013; Punch, 2009). The analysing procedure for this multiple-case study combines within-case and cross-case analysis (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014). At within-case stage, the entire collected data were first coded for each participant separately. As suggested by Kwan and Lopez-Real (2010), the full transcript of each early career teacher was read three times and data which related to the four constructs of imagination were extracted as key themes. At cross-case analysis, the early career teachers’ experiences were compared, and

individual themes were grouped into larger clusters. The two researchers independently checked the classification of data and then had discussions with each other.

IV. RESULTS

A. Case Study 1: Chi

(a). Orientation Towards Openness

Throughout the observed period, Chi's performance marked a significant shift to become more open in her interaction with students. In the first interview, Chi considered herself as a teacher who adopted an authoritative manner. She often exercised power over her students and expected them to be obedient. It is important to notice that Chi had never experienced any teaching for the group of teenagers, she was familiar with teaching kids instead. In the past, being a strict teacher helped her manage classrooms effectively and direct kids' attention to the lesson. Her typical techniques included an immediate warning to the students who did not collaborate or did private things in a bid to force them to respect and listen to her words.

Classroom observation at the beginning of the semester disclosed that Chi sometimes smiled with the pupils but whenever there was a misbehaviour, she showed her response immediately. For example, when students were doing a grammar exercise, while everyone was doing well, one girl started whispering something to her peer. Both then laughed and kept sharing personal stories. Chi said aloud "Hey, Hang" (name of that student) with firm eye contact and a strident tone of voice.

Toward the middle of the semester, Chi appeared to be less strict and more open instead. She saw herself exercising less power on the pupils, making strenuous efforts to be friendlier to get a better understanding of students. She admitted that with the teenage students, she was trying to be their friends, rather than a teacher, to solve problems together. Obviously, there was a change in Chi's perception of her relationship with the children. She decided to get rid of the image of a powerful and distant teacher and simultaneously oriented herself towards openness. The second post-teaching interview revealed the underlying force leading to her decision to make a change.

In the beginning, they were well-disciplined but then, when they felt the friendliness of the teacher, they got into the situation of indiscipline again. At this time, students were no longer afraid of my strictness, and no better changes happened.

Chi's existing beliefs about the appropriateness of being strict were challenged by her didactical interaction regarding classroom management. The authoritative manner no longer helped her control students' activities. Chi had experienced this failure for some weeks before she decided to better her interaction with the pupils by listening to them. She tried to chat with students during the break time or support them in doing exercises to grasp their minds, interests, and aspirations. However, toward the end of the semester, Chi has not successfully appropriated the selected meaning of being open. She was on the way to adopt that image. Accordingly, she saw herself seeking help and being open for learning through professional activities with her community members.

I think that as a teacher, I must learn a lot, so I wish to have more opportunities to observe and learn from my colleagues, to be consulted when having troubles, as well as to understand the psychological characteristics of the teenage group to improve the quality of teaching.

Chi's experiences with the pupils within the semester contributed to her perception of characteristics of effective teachers at secondary school. She believed that teachers at secondary schools should be friendly to students and adopt effective techniques to keep learners' mind in the lectures, with a wholehearted and caring manner.

(b). Internal Tensions

By using the metaphor *a torch in the rain*, Chi saw herself stranded in a continuous struggle with internal conflicts. Despite her strong desire to be more open and generate more learning motivation for students, Chi could not manage to fulfil these tasks successfully. Regarding the student cohort, Chi's pessimism about their development and learning motivation was growing week by week. She admitted that students' learning ability was quite high, but they did not pay much attention to their language skills. Instead, they focused on vocabulary and grammatical items to prepare for tests. They were also frustrated. Additionally, Chi perceived her students as those with a high level of passivity because there was not much students' engagement in classroom activities.

Meanwhile, Chi's reflection at the first post-teaching interview indicated a slight thought and personal feeling of dissatisfaction with the experiences. No explanations or justifications were provided. Regarding reflection on the effectiveness of her authoritative manner, Chi believed that she should be strict and show off power to increase students' level of attention to her lessons. However, when realising that this technique did not work, she felt hesitant to make decisions for what to do. Chi's state of being in conflict may result from her inability to figure out the underlying reasons for students' passivity or her loose connection with the pupils. In detail, she saw herself perform enough strictness in class while students said that Chi was too gentle. Consequently, her students did not concentrate on the lesson but sent greetings to her in break time. All these circumstances triggered Chi to think although she did not figure out the reasons and this led Chi to the state of being stressed.

Chi's internal conflicts occurred continuously from the middle to the end of the semester. Her concern was about learning activities. For example, she sometimes felt that due to time constraints, she could not organise many engaging activities for students; however, if they study with traditional methods, they might be boring. When she actually conducted an interesting task, her students were extremely excited, which made noise and affected other classes. Therefore, Chi was still in the process of finding ways to balance her desire and reality.

The results disclosed that Chi did make her effort to explore some alternatives when the existing interactions did not work throughout the semester. However, she would easily stop thinking about other choices and actions if her first try was not successful. Therefore, at the end of the semester, Chi still felt stuck in finding appropriate delivery methods to fulfil an effective lesson that helped her students develop English language skills.

(c). *Outbound Trajectory and Sense of Isolation*

Another significant feature of Chi's self-image was her negative development of learning trajectories in the local community. In detail, at the beginning of the semester, Chi expressed a sense of enjoyment and a high level of self-esteem. Especially, she used the metaphor *a flaming torch* to talk about herself as a teacher at this period. Chi saw herself getting more and more passionate about teaching career as the kids were obedient and treated her with proper respect. This all gave her the feeling of having power.

Some weeks later, she experienced several lows in generating teenage students' motivation to learn which led to the status of vulnerability. She started questioning her pedagogical competence.

The class was too noisy, I lost my voice when trying to manage the class, so I was feeling incredibly stressed, confused whether to continue or not, or I should then be an office worker when this program finished. I see that teaching teenagers is quite different from teaching kids.

Chi's outbound trajectory resulted from her failure to build up a close connection with the pupils. Her students did not feel free to share with her their thoughts and difficulties "when I tried to ask and to help, they even did not know what the problems were".

As this was her first time teaching English to the group of teenagers at a public secondary school, Chi commenced the development of images of the school community with little background knowledge. After some weeks, she felt a sense of isolation as the teacher cohort's beliefs about teaching and their practice were different from hers even though her colleagues were very helpful. When asking other teachers in the team for advice, she realised that each teacher had different management methods, some were extremely strict to students while other teachers were gentler. However, this was not what Chi wanted to do with her students.

B. *Case Study 2: Duy*

(a). *Enhancing Perceived Role of a Whole-Person Educator*

Duy started his first teaching experience at two primary schools in a rural area with a vague image of whom he was as an EFL teacher but with a clear development path.

From the beginning, Duy perceived himself as an educator, rather than an EFL teacher. He determined to take up the role of an agent helping the pupils to develop a wide range of values and skills needed for everyday life and lifelong learning. He considered these children as "the next generation of this country" and wanted to help them develop three aspects, namely proficiency, awareness, and deposition. His belief was that only wisdom or knowledge could not be sufficient if a child gave up early or showed poor behaviour to others.

Duy's consistent self-image resulted from his thinking about significant characteristics of students at the age of nine and ten. Duy believed that this age group was able to absorb most of the values delivered by the teacher to adjust their behaviour properly and develop some basic skills necessary for their future learning. For him, teaching English was to equip the children with a tool. He put the emphasis of his teaching on building learning spirit, showing them how to study on their own. Duy believed that with these strategies, his pupils could better their learning in other subjects or at the next grades.

The image of an educator who promoted whole-person development of the students was expressed through Duy's practice, as in the following piece of field note.

Teacher is going to read some vocabularies for students to copy into their notebooks. So, he asks them to put the materials on the table so that they can conduct the act of writing. After repeating the instruction three times, he goes around to check and there is one student who has not prepared anything.

Teacher: Where is your notebook, Quoc Anh?

Student: I don't have any notebook.

Teacher: What did I say? If you don't have a notebook, what should you take?

Student: A draft paper. But I don't have any draft paper too.

Teacher: So, what should you do?

Student: I should ask my friend to give me a piece of black paper.

Teacher: I gave you a lot of choices; you should get something to write in.

In the post-teaching interview, Duy explained that he wanted to help his students to be more active in their learning. Thus, he tried to elicit as many possibilities for the students to think as possible. This experience was also an example to demonstrate his care and respect to the pupils.

Towards the middle of the semester, Duy admitted that his interaction with students encouraged him to expand the image of an educator. Week by week, his students showed progress in developing the predetermined values. They started paying attention to the ethics of justice, being able to differentiate the right and the wrong and adjust their behaviour. Fewer students threw their sandals to the board or punched on their friends.

Towards the end of the semester, this positive progress from the pupils encouraged him to conduct more activities to reinforce the values. His assessment system often included a range of criteria. In addition to students' improvement of knowledge and skills, their willingness to join learning activities, kindness to others, and efforts in conducting tasks were included. In light of a desire to reinforce these values, Duy repeatedly spoke out what criteria to be awarded when he gave praise. Overall, Duy's interaction with students and students' learning facilitated the development of his image as an educator and agent of change.

Moreover, Duy's perceived role as a facilitator for students' autonomy positively developed throughout the semester. He considered himself as a piece of the puzzle and students should be responsible for their own learning, especially with the aid of information technology. This development in Duy's self-image was influenced by his observation of students' progress. He was pleased to see his students making progress in using information technology for the sake of self-study. That these students could catch the fish by themselves, instead of frequently calling his name, was deemed to be a success in Duy's opinion.

(b). Being a Reflexive Teacher

The case of Duy is an example of reflexive teachers who devote their critical thinking to classroom activities. At the beginning of the semester, he was advised to exercise teachers' power over the students to keep classes disciplined and quiet. He then did give it a try but immediately felt inappropriate. Duy tried to think about the reasons why this technique failed, instead of just giving a slight thought of the overall feeling. After applying the technique, he realised that it was only effective in that moment and did not help to change the students' thinking. Students followed obediently because they were afraid to be scolded. Sadly, they were unaware of the fact that making noise would affect people around or learning activities. In reality, when he applied this technique, after the silent time, most of students started making noise without realizing that they should not do that in class time.

Another source of information was Duy's habit of observing students during class time and break time, especially for those in exceptional cases. What he could do was simply looking at them when they were in the playground. He gradually realised that they were good neither in lessons nor in the stereotype of a good student; instead, they were good in their way: catching birds, trapping and other kinds of stuff. Some of them were not good at English but particularly good at coloring. Duy admitted that observing taught him how to attract students' attention based on their learning styles and strengths.

Especially, Duy observed his teaching practice via the act of videotaping several lessons. Throughout the semester, he had the habit of shooting video clips to look back, as a practice only. These clips helped him figure that sometimes he taught in a quite abnormal and weird fashion, due to personal feelings. After watching them, he promised himself not to repeat that and do something different.

Towards the end of the semester, his act of reflection was expanded to the act of challenging the established beliefs or existing procedures. For example, Duy started questioning the appropriateness of the paper test. He had believed that he should make paper tests that were close to the level of students and could assess their ability accurately. Then, Duy realised that paper tests might be more appropriate for those who took the university entrance exams than for kids at elementary schools. He found a mismatch between testing methods and their backwash effects. In details, Duy believed that the current testing system was mainly for grading purposes, rather than for improving students' learning process. However, the things his pupils were good at mainly resulted from their failures.

Obviously, Duy's act of conducting this transformation reflection came from his didactical interaction with students. He claimed that in his practice, students did not learn much from doing paper tests because they were provided with the scores after the tests. Thus, he raised the question "Are scores really important to this grade? Or teachers should focus more on the learning points that students get?". At the end of the semester, he decided to make use of information technology to convert the paper tests into online tests which allowed students to do several times and get the explanations for incorrect answers.

(c). Inbound Trajectory With Teaching Career but Sense of Isolation With Local Community

Instructional experiences provided him chances to develop clearer images of the community at a primary school in rural areas but generated a sense of isolation. Duy perceived the teacher cohort at the two primary schools as those who focused too much on students' scores, rather than their students' language skill development. He felt a bit weird to talk about the fact that his colleagues were extremely familiar with the grading system and knew how to achieve the goal with special methods of forcing students to cram as a preparation for exams. Therefore, in the process of positioning, he felt a sense of isolation. However, his optimistic viewpoint towards the student cohort was enhanced throughout the semester.

V. DISCUSSION

Early career teachers' interactions with students in the teaching-studying-learning process significantly contribute to how these teachers interpret the meanings of their experiences in educational settings. As the results of this study suggest, a great part of teachers' self-image, their reflection on or orientation to teaching practice related to pedagogical and didactical interactions. Although the teachers got involved in different activities with different student cohorts, there were some shared features in their imagination development. First, a certain degree of devotion is reported in the two participants. The teachers showed their care, love, and respect to the pupils, meaning a rejection to an authoritative manner. The development of this image is facilitated by teachers' treatment to students as human beings and students' emotional response to the teachers.

Generally, it is the mutual interaction between early career teachers and their students that offers the teachers a sense of enjoyment and satisfaction. This argument lends support to Nguyen's (2016) findings that social interactions in a community particularly influence teachers' emotions, which can in turn "alter a teacher's identity in relation to the profession". Second, although there were some difficulties in the development path, all of the early career teachers orientate to the image of an open teacher. In detail, openness refers to teachers' willingness to answer students' questions and welcoming attitude towards their intellectual curiosity. It is in line with Harjunen's (2009) argument that initially, early career teachers may not arouse the feeling of connectedness, just teachers performing the tasks. Their values and classroom practices are affected by prior perceptions of the roles of a perfect teacher. Later, these teachers are more open to students, using more humour in their lessons. This finding is consistent with the conclusion of several studies (e.g., Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Zembylas & Chubbuck, 2018), suggesting that teacher identity changes with time and context.

Last, from the perspective of professional development, all the teachers identify themselves as a learner in the process of learning how to teach. It was reported in the metaphors that the teachers used to describe themselves, including "a torch in the rain" or "learners learning how to swim". This argument corresponds with Writh's (1966; as cited in Su, 2008) idea that interacting with students would allow teachers to obtain the "attitude and skills" to continue learning about teaching.

Notably, the two teachers, at certain periods of the semester, experienced a state of vulnerability. Specifically, while Chi sometimes intended to leave the profession, Duy suffered from continuous lows. These reactions occurred in response to a sense of powerlessness, betrayal, or defenselessness which confirmed the findings of Korthagen (2004). Interestingly, early career teachers' reflection of past events is encouraged when they experience challenges in relation to students and students' learning. When negative signs occur and interfere in teacher – student interactions, teachers opt to observe more and put more efforts into finding out valid reasons as well as possible solutions. Thus, the contributions of pedagogical and didactical interactions between teachers and students to the development process might be positive or negative. This finding, viewed from the broader social and political perspectives, reflects the complex interplay of "the social and structure, [...], of the agency and structure" (Zembylas & Chubbuck, 2018, p. 188) in teacher identity. It refers to teachers' ability to achieve predetermined goals and the external influences or power in this instance.

The findings of this study also indicate that the development process differs from one to the others. Specifically, while some early career teachers enhance their established images and make a few adjustments that do not influence much on the nature of these images, others experience many challenges leading to internal conflicts and experiences of constant lows in a long period which could lead to a change in the images. Two sources should be taken into consideration when considering the discrepancies. The first source of difference is the types of pedagogical and didactical interactions that teachers have in their classrooms, which play a possible role in determining whether the participants could achieve their pre-determined goals or not. Especially when the feedback is positive, there is a tendency to expand the adopted images. Otherwise, if negative comments are collected, these novice teachers would consider other options. Another explanation for differences in process development is the teachers' interpretation of classroom practice. There is a possibility that some similar critical incidents occur in class; however, distinction was exemplified through the fact that one teacher holds the opinion that it is beneficial for students' learning while the other believes it should not happen in the classroom contexts. In other words, the way teachers interpret influences their self-image, images of school community, and their reflection on past events and orientation towards future actions.

However, teachers' interaction with students is not the only determining factor to affect the process of selecting and adopting meanings of early career teachers. Teachers' agency or their ability to take responsibilities and initiatives serves a decisive role in the success of meaning selection and negotiation.

VI. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The present study aims to examine how early career teachers develop their imagination, as a construct for professional identity development, with the contribution of teachers' relation to students and to students' learning. The results have shown that these social interactions positively and negatively contribute to how early career teachers construct images of themselves, of the community to reflect on their experiences, to orient towards future as well as to

explore different choices. Several practical implications can be drawn from the study for the improvement of teacher education programme.

First, early career teachers should be conscious of their professional identity development. Reflection on instructional practices, classroom behaviour of teachers and students might be a source for teachers to think over their decisions in practice as well as affect their process of learning how to teach. Second, teachers should attempt to build a close relationship with students. It is of great importance because the student cohort is an important part of the school community. Feedback from students can remarkably influence the appropriateness of the images that teachers adopted and the effectiveness of their teaching activities. Third, teachers should be active in the process of developing their imagination. Should they fail, attempting to find out the reasons and try new techniques are top priorities. It is worth noticing that the teachers' perspective on challenges should be changed. In other words, such challenges should be considered as sources for development, which leads to discovering new experiences.

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