HONING A PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY:
The Outcome of a Teacher Education Programme

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This study examined the outcome of an in-service postgraduate professional development programme for secondary school teachers in a developing country. It investigated the influence of the programme *after* completion, with a focus on the professional identity of three modern language teachers three years after they had completed the programme. This qualitative phenomenological case study used interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis to collect data from the participants. The data were analysed using codes, categories, and themes. The findings revealed that the three participants were influenced by the programme in a positive and enduring way, in that they all showed growth in terms of their professional identity. School context was found to have a determining role in the extent and longevity of the influence that the programme had on the participants.

Introduction

The Postgraduate Diploma in Education (Dip.Ed.) Programme of The University of the West Indies (UWI), St. Augustine, Trinidad, was initiated in 1973, and continues to provide professional development for in-service secondary school teachers on a part-time basis. Currently, teachers are admitted into the secondary school system without teacher preparation, and the Dip.Ed. is not compulsory, except in cases of promotion to the positions of Dean, Head of Department, and Vice-Principal or Principal. UWI is the only local institution that offers the Dip.Ed. for secondary school teachers. "The programme attempts to ensure that classroom practice is informed by a solid theoretical base in the foundation disciplines, curriculum theory, and methodology" (The University of the West Indies. Faculty of Humanities and Education [FHE], 2011, p. 54). Ultimately, it is hoped that the teachers would develop the desire for the "continued use of sound practice and the sustained search for professional excellence beyond the end of the programme that will ensure the high professional status of the teacher" (FHE, 2011, p. 54).

Both researchers are interested in foreign language teacher education specifically, and teacher education generally. Thus the study, while using a sample of foreign language teachers from the Dip.Ed. programme, also looks at teacher education holistically as it relates to professional identity.

There is no formal follow-up to the Dip.Ed. programme to ascertain how it impacts upon teachers. As such, the intent of this study is to acquire concrete feedback about three Modern Language teachers' perceptions of the influence of the Dip.Ed. programme on them, as it relates to their sense of professional identity. It seeks to answer the following question:

- *What are the teachers' perceptions of the influence of the Diploma in Education experience on their sense of professional identity?*

For the purposes of this study, the term *professional identity* refers to teachers' sense of self and who they are as teachers, including their sense of self-efficacy as it relates to teaching; how they see themselves as teachers in terms of teaching philosophy, conduct, competency, and preparedness.

Literature Review

The Ministry of Education (MOE) of Trinidad and Tobago believes that "teacher training for quality teachers is…a high priority" (Trinidad and Tobago. Ministry of Education [TTMOE], 2010). It is the MOE's view that as Trinidad and Tobago strives to meet the challenges of the 21st century, "the need for teachers who demonstrate not only academic excellence but also dedication to the profession and integrity will become increasingly pre-eminent" (TTMOE, 2010). Thus, high demands are made of teachers, not only by their employer but also by parents and students, and the society at large. As such, teacher professional development is highly valued in Trinidad and Tobago.

The beliefs held by the MOE are also similar to those of education agencies across the globe. One such agency is the Florida Department of Education in the United States of America. It notes that "just as knowledge and skill requirements are changing for Florida students, so, too, are those for Florida educators" (Florida Department of Education [FLDOE], 2000, p. 22). Furthermore, it is of the opinion that:

> Schools and districts must be committed to offering the highest quality professional development opportunities for their teachers. Learning opportunities must be provided in which pre-service

> teachers as well as more experienced teachers can develop or acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to deal with change and pursue lifelong learning. (FLDOE, 2000, p. 27)

The FLDOE (2000) sees professional development as "a continuous improvement process lasting from the time an individual decides to enter education until retirement. It encompasses the processes that educators engage in to initially prepare themselves, continuously update themselves, and review and reflect on their own performance" (p. 30)

At the School of Education (SOE), UWI, St. Augustine each year, teachers pursue the Dip.Ed. The programme aims to create in teachers a desire for "continued use of sound practice and the sustained search for professional excellence beyond the end of the programme that will ensure the high professional status of the teacher" (FHE, 2011, p. 54). Morris and Yamin-Ali (2006) conducted a study of a group of foreign language teachers on this programme, which is significant because it is the only one that looks at foreign language teachers' reflections on their experiences of the programme. That study began with the understanding that "the programme aims to produce a teacher who considers herself to be a lifelong learner and who understands that critical reflection is at the heart of professional development" (Morris & Yamin-Ali, 2006, p. 288). It investigated the concept of the professional teacher, and asserted that there was a clear and undeniable link between the teacher as individual and his or her practice, which includes beliefs. The study asserted that "the beliefs that teachers bring to the classroom determine their actions…[and] to a great extent, it can be said that those beliefs contribute to how one may see one's professional identity" (p. 288). Teachers' sense of self-efficacy, then, is linked to their personal and professional identity and, by extension, their classroom practice. This view was also shared by Korthagen (2004), who, according to Morris and Yamin-Ali (2006, p. 288), supported the view that "self concept is inextricably linked to professional identity and informs teachers' behaviour" in the classroom.

Morris and Yamin-Ali (2006) further explored the notion that teachers' experiences on professional development programmes, coupled with those in the classroom and school contexts, help to shape a teacher's professional self or identity, and that through the training programmes teachers are able to "test their prior tacit and unexamined beliefs, attitudes and knowledge" (p. 288) as they try to figure out their mission as educators. In addition, it was concluded that the tensions and challenges which teachers meet in their school context "lead to the dynamic formation of their professional identity" (p. 288). The study also

found that one's own self-concept, very often, is a defining factor in the formation of a teacher's personal and professional identity. The teachers involved in the study showed "that there was still room for growth but that they were on the way to being professionals, conscious of and committed to continuing the process of reflection and self-examination" (p. 288).

Education researchers are now viewing professional development as an opportunity for growth, exploration, learning, and a more profound development in the teacher. Some researchers now believe that it is a lifelong process which could either be formal or informal. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2001), as well as Walling and Lewis (2000), describe this era as a revolution and a new paradigm in teacher education and professional development. These thinkers and others like them have identified some new tenets of teacher professional development which include:

- It is a lifelong or long-term process.
- It is related to classroom experiences and is not disconnected from it.
- Schools are now seen as communities of learners, communities of inquiry, and caring communities.
- It is linked to school reform.
- The teacher is seen as a reflective practitioner.
- It is a collaborative process among teachers, administrators, parents, and the community at large.

They believe that adherence to these tenets can make any teacher development programme effective.

Much of the literature has also placed a great deal of emphasis on why teacher professional development is important, placing focus on its value as it relates not only to classroom practice but also to teacher professional identity. Villegas-Reimers (2003) cited three areas in which teacher professional development has an impact: teacher beliefs and practices, students' learning, and the implementation of educational reforms. In a study involving Norwegian teachers, Kallestad and Olweus (1998) showed that teachers' attitudes, preparation, and practices all showed strong, positive, and significant growth, which was sustained for several years following their involvement in the training programme.

Professional development programmes have been seen to be important in educational reform, but not so much as having an impact on teachers' beliefs and attitudes, which are so intertwined with teachers' professional identity. For the purposes of this study, professional identity includes sense of self and sense of self efficacy as it relates to teaching,

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teaching philosophy, conduct, competency, and preparedness. However, all these are not disconnected from one's experience as professionals engaged in learning and knowledge creation, which is inextricably intertwined with being able to interact with all kinds of situations and people. A sense of professionalism assumes membership of a learning community, which is transformative (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Bandura (1997) posits that efficacy beliefs help to determine the amount of effort, perseverance, and resilience of the teachers in the face of adverse situations. As such, school context may be seen to play a significant role in teachers' realistic response on the ground to professional development. Such context includes active support of teacher development by principals and administrators, which can enhance teacher efficacy. According to the Rand Change Agent Study, such support is critical to the success of any change effort (McLaughlin & Marsh, 1978). The Rand research sets the role of the principal as instructional leader in the context of strengthening the school improvement process through team-building and problem-solving in a "project-like" context. It suggests that principals need to give clear messages that teachers may take responsibility for their own professional growth. Furthermore, Stallings and Mohlman (1981) determined that teachers improved most in staff development programmes where the principal supported them and was clear and consistent in communicating school policies. Likewise, Fielding and Schalock (1985) report on a study in which principals' involvement in teachers' staff development produced longer-term changes than when principals were not involved.

If teachers' development of their professional identity is to be enabled, then relevant interventions have to be carefully considered. With regard to the type of staff development considered useful, Joyce and Showers (2002) suggested that a stand-alone workshop has less than a 5% chance of actually changing teacher practice in the classroom. However, if you add ongoing and embedded professional development, provide professional learning communities where teachers interact with their colleagues, and ensure ongoing support from coaches and administrative staff, the chance of really affecting teaching and learning increases dramatically to nearly 90% (Wolf, 2009). However, such professional development contexts do not necessarily ensure adequate provision for meaningful growth or learning. Unless we engage practitioners in reflecting on their beliefs and practice, we are denying them the opportunity to develop their sense of self-efficacy.

This concept of the teacher as a reflective practitioner who reflects in action and on action is promoted by Donald Schon (1987). One of the benefits of being a reflective practitioner is being able to think on your

feet as you implement your practice. This implies that teachers must be able to adapt their classroom practice to the unexpected occurrences. Reflecting on action occurs after the action has occurred and can be linked to teachers reflecting on lessons that were taught during the course of the day, for example. The impact of Donald Schon's work on reflective practice has been significant, with many training and education programmes for teachers and informal educators adopting his core notions, both in organizing experiences and in the teaching content.

One study conducted among a small group of pre-service teachers enrolled in a Bachelor of Education degree programme at Flinders University, South Australia, reports that links were found between guided reflective writing in the context of the practicum and the development of a professional identity among pre-service teachers (Cattley, 2007). The author recommends that supportive structures be put in place to promote reflective writing as a tool for the emergence of novices' professional identity within the professional development experience.

In another study involving in-service teachers enrolled in an online Primary Teacher Education course at the University of Padua, Italy, it was found that narrative and discursive processes can, in fact, activate the process of professional identity construction. Teachers positioned themselves and negotiated between the different possible identities emerging not only within the formal professional development context, but also in their everyday school environment (Grion & Varisco, 2009).

The studies cited above have focused on the impact of professional development on teachers' practice. However, professional identity has not been a main theme in much of the literature on teacher development. In light of the important role that professional identity plays in decision-making in the profession, this paper fills a small part of the vacuum created by a lack of research, not only in the area of teacher development programmes and their outcomes in terms of professional identity generally, but also in programme outcomes specific to the foreign language teacher education component of the Dip.Ed. programme at the SOE, UWI, St. Augustine.

Methodology

This study sought to acquire feedback about three foreign language teachers' perceptions of the influence of the Dip.Ed. experience on them, as it relates to their sense of professional identity. The Foreign Language group consisted of 10 students who, apart from their curriculum

specialization, shared a common core curriculum with approximately 130 other students pursuing varying specializations.

Thus far, local researchers have conducted studies on this programme while the programme was in progress. No study has been found where the students were studied after the programme to ascertain what influence the programme had on them. The study recognizes that whereas all teachers may have completed the programme in the same year, they each would have had their own subjective and unique understanding of the programme and how it impacted on them. The intention, then, is to use the words of some participants to find evidence of their varied as well as shared perspectives.

The study is characterized by a phenomenological case study design and is particularistic in nature. It focused on a particular programme, group, and phenomenon. Its heuristic nature allowed exploration of the lived experiences of three foreign language teachers who completed the Dip.Ed. programme to see what influence it had on their sense of professional identity, thereby elucidating our understanding of the phenomenon of professional identity, at least in this context. Purposive sampling was used to select three teachers who had all completed the programme at the same time and who were committed to the study and willing to share openly their experiences and thoughts. The latter was a contributing factor to the choice of participants in the study.

All three were female teachers of Spanish as a Foreign Language and each had at least 10 years of teaching experience at the secondary level. The latter was another main reason for selecting these three teachers out of the total of 10. They were all in their thirties and had completed the Dip.Ed. programme in the same year. They taught in very different school contexts. One taught at a single-sex denominational school, another at a recently transformed senior comprehensive school that was changed to a seven-year government secondary school, and the third came from a composite five-year school. The uniqueness of each school context was an important consideration in this study and it may have impacted on the influence of the Dip.Ed. programme on the teachers.

The qualitative paradigm offered the opportunity for the participants to share their subjective perspectives on issues related to their experiences and understandings during and after their professional development (Dip.Ed.). Participants completed a questionnaire specifically designed for this research, which informed the preparation and conduct of semi-structured interviews. The teacher questionnaires were administered before the interview in order to encourage the teachers to reflect on their Dip.Ed. experience, so that when they came to the interview they would not have difficulty recollecting information about

their experience. The responses from these questionnaires guided the elaboration of the semi-structured interview, which in essence was designed for clarification of information on the questionnaire.

The Teacher Questionnaire focused on professional identity and included questions on professionalism, professional identity, and teaching philosophy. Further, more probing questions were compiled for the interview component. The interview questions focused on the same issues as in the questionnaire but were meant to explore and clarify information that was given in the questionnaire. Teachers were also asked to bring documentation samples of their lesson plans, assessments, and philosophy statements to provide concrete examples of what they were saying. Additionally, documents such as teachers' reflections and their written teaching philosophy were examined. Excerpts from these are included in the emerging themes elaborated below.

Data Analysis

Coding, establishing categories and themes, member checking, and peer review formed the methods of data analysis used in order to arrive at conclusions.

The questionnaire focused on professional identity including professionalism, professional identity, and teaching philosophy. Samples of their lesson plans, assessments, and philosophy statements were used only to verify points that were being made and were not used for analysis.

Once the interviews were done, data collected from the questionnaires and the transcribed interviews were then analysed to find categories and themes. These themes were then explored to find similarities and differences in terms of the teachers' perceptions of their experiences. Common themes were noted. The questionnaire, interviews, and teachers' written reflections and teaching philosophy were analysed, with results being presented according to the following eight themes which, according to the results, were seen to have a role to play in the construction of a teacher's professional identity:

Factors that play a role in a teacher's professional identity

- ***Sense of professionalism*** – Teachers' interpretation of what it means to be a "professional"

- ***Recognition of professional identity as evolutionary*** – Awareness that one's professional identity grows along a continuum

- ***The nature of one's teaching philosophy*** – One's teaching philosophy determines the decisions one makes in the teaching/learning context
- ***Being able to redefine one's role and purpose*** – The concept of "re-definition" requires reflection and evaluation
- ***Individual school context*** – Each person's experience and growth are determined by individual circumstances specific to his/her school
- ***Reflection*** – the ability to reflect signifies the potential to analyse, critique, and grow
- ***Sense of self-efficacy*** - The extent to which a person feels that s/he has the capacity to exercise personal control over his/her behaviour, thoughts, and feelings
- ***Collegiality and/or collaboration*** – Engaging with others in the field and valuing the role of such engagement

Findings

The primary focus of the study was to consider the three participants' perceptions of the influence of the Dip.Ed. programme on their sense of professional identity.

Sense of Professionalism

An intrinsic part of professional identity is professionalism. All three participants expressed the belief that the Dip.Ed. programme clarified and enhanced their sense of professionalism.

Participant 1, AM, felt that her sense of professionalism was enhanced: *"I think as a teacher it reinforced the whole idea of being a professional."* In her view, the programme stressed that professionalism was important for *"the performance of one's duties"* and *"developing one's credibility."* She admitted, though, that professionalism was always important to her as she came from a family of teaching professionals, so that *"it* [the Dip.Ed.] *reinforced the whole idea of professionalism, looking at how you do things, what you do, when you do it, being on time and things like that."*

The second participant, SS, also felt that the Dip.Ed. influenced her sense of professionalism. Her idea of it was clarified and she endorsed the programme for giving her the professional qualifications that made her the professional that she is today:

> *The course was crucial in making me a better Foreign Language teacher and I can quite readily answer 'yes, I am a*

> *professional'... I have been exposed to knowledge and skills and undergone a process ... that has impacted upon my identity.*

LC, the third participant, saw professionalism as consisting of *"some core and fundamental concepts but also something that each person makes into his/her own…. It is a product of mindful interior blending of pedagogical proofs with one's distinctive personality."* Having completed the Dip.Ed., LC was able to further define and understand her sense of professionalism: *"In my case, knowledge of the scope of education as the program presented did chisel out, in greater detailed grooves, the concept of being professional."*

All participants viewed professionalism as important in the conduct of their duties as teachers.

Professional Identity and Its Evolution

In addition to clarifying and enhancing these three teachers' sense of professionalism, the Dip.Ed. experience also allowed them to define, re-define, and develop a clearer understanding of their professional identity.

AM saw professional identity as:

> *knowing oneself as professional, setting standards of professionalism and performing one's duties by the same guiding principles…one should continue to pursue relevant developmental courses or seminars to continue shaping one's professional identity, so that the identity is constantly evolving.*

In her view, the experience also helped her to build on her personal strengths, which form part of her professional identity. These include *"flexibility, time management, decision-making, creativity, a sense of purpose and sense of direction."* AM was equipped to develop her own sense of professional identity, which she admits she still continues to maintain until this day.

> *The things that came out of the professional identity seminars…what it meant to be a good teacher, how students perceived you to be, what you really want for yourself… the emphasis placed on being on time, being prepared, being regular, being punctual and of course being human to the students and those that you interact with. I think I implement all of them. I still use all of them in my teaching practice when I'm teaching.*

She felt that prior to the Dip.Ed. her sense of professional identity was *"a bit incomplete."* Consequent to the programme she felt that her

"purpose as an educator became clearer and so did [her] *teaching philosophy."* She believes that her purpose as an educator is *"to make language learning more relevant in a meaningful way."*

Similarly, SS sees professional identity as *"my understanding of who I am as a teacher."* She feels that it is *"made up of the qualities a person has and how he applies them to his job."* In her opinion the quality that characterizes her professional identity is her *"love for children, for education and for country."* SS elaborates further by indicating that her professional identity both before and after the programme was similar, except that after the programme she knew more about the art of pedagogy.

SS confirmed that the knowledge and skills she was exposed to during the Dip.Ed. had impacted on her professional identity: *"I have been exposed to knowledge and skills and undergone a process with other members of my teaching fraternity that has impacted upon my identity."*

Participant 3, LC, viewed her sense of professional identity as ill-formed prior to the Dip.Ed.: *"I believed myself to have the raw materials but was lacking a laboratory or refinery to tap into the true worth of what I detected within myself."* It was not that her professional identity was non-existent. It was that she was able to refine what she had known deep within herself. According to her, the Dip.Ed. made her see her image as a foreign language teacher in the following way:

> *I am to embody the language that I teach. Persons whom I instruct must be enervated not only by the techniques I use in the classroom but ought to be infected with the passion for the language. I am an instrument in the foreign language tool kit with a task to keep myself, my teaching and love for the language sharp.*

Clearly, the professional development that these teachers were exposed to during the Dip.Ed. had served to refine their understanding of their professional identity. It was not that their professional identities did not exist prior to the experience, but that it was polished, refined, and clarified, and continues to evolve as the years progress.

Teaching Philosophy

Another key theme that was identified as an important part of professional identity for these teachers was the importance of having a teaching philosophy that was a reflection of one's professional identity.

Participant 1, AM, indicated that her purpose as an educator became clearer and so did her teaching philosophy. In her beginning years as a teacher, AM believed her teaching philosophy to be simple: *"It was simply to do my best to be the best teacher to my students."* Her experience on the programme redefined this for her so that her teaching philosophy evolved. She felt that the experience:

> *redefined my role as a FL teacher, equipped me with the theoretical underpinnings of different approaches to FL instruction. It also gave me a broader perspective on my role as an educator and my role in preparing students to be good citizens, inculcating good values and morals.*

Since completing the Dip.Ed. programme, AM has started a master's programme by distance, to which she attributes the evolution of her teaching philosophy.

SS, the second participant, felt that prior to the Dip.Ed. she did not consciously have a teaching philosophy, but if she were to put it into words she would say her philosophy was *"always trying to do better, learn from my mistakes and considered it important to build relationships especially with students."* In SS's view the Dip.Ed. had a great impact on her teaching philosophy. She stated:

> *This served to make me consider that it is important that as teachers, we have only one chance at the first impression, and it is a lasting one…Made me aware that I have a special ability, talent for teaching Spanish to English students and it gave me the confidence to be more of a leader in the class.*

She adds that since completing the course of study three years ago her philosophy has not really evolved, but has taken on other meanings, which she attributes to her school context:

> *My philosophy has not so much evolved as taken on other meanings and understandings…the challenges of teaching have lent a bit of disillusion to the job, affecting my self esteem and motivation at the worst of times, especially in comparison to a feeling of wasted specialised knowledge…no resources in the classroom kind of take away from the Diploma in Education goal of training you to be the best teacher under the best of*

circumstances and really I am back in the reality of being the best teacher under the worst circumstances.

She did, however, manage to elaborate on her mission, which is also very much similar to her teaching philosophy and reflects her strong sense of self-efficacy. As a teacher she believed that she had:

1. *To be self-motivated to do my best and to be a source of motivation to others to do their best*

2. *To be a good listener and observer*

3. *To be a skilled and interesting teacher*

4. *To serve as an example of a good citizen and to impart the morals and values of the unwritten curriculum that I teach*

5. *To render utmost assistance in improving the functions of the Spanish Department at my school*

What SS demonstrates is that in the same way that one's concept of professionalism and professional identity is ever evolving so is one's teaching philosophy. So that the programme helped her to discover her philosophy, but her actual experience impacted on it and shaped it into what it is today.

Like her colleagues, LC says that she was unable to articulate her teaching philosophy before the Dip.Ed. She had basic thoughts about it, which were confirmed during and after the programme: *"It confirmed what I knew. It gave me that assurance that I was on the right page as regards my approach to pedagogy."* Since completing the programme, LC admits that her students have a greater role to play in her class, and in this way her philosophy has changed to accommodate their input.

Redefined Role and Purpose as (a) Educator and (b) Foreign Language Teacher

As a foreign language teacher, AM sees herself:

> *as the competent person in the classroom, as an ambassador of the language and culture that I teach. It is a huge responsibility, and I am constantly trying to be the role model for my students - using the language and getting them to use it in a meaningful way.*

In her view, her mission is *"to get students to achieve a good level of communicative competence in the TL [Target Language]."* She accredits

her discoveries to the Dip.Ed. programme as *"it gave me an introduction to methodologies, approaches and unit and lesson planning."*

AM is very confident in herself as a foreign language teacher. She says with much conviction:

> *I consider myself a linguist in my own right of a very high calibre and I think that for me is very important, you know, knowing the language and passing it on to younger folks. I think as a teacher I strive to be organized because I think that being organized is a very important part of the delivery of whatever topic or communication structures you are passing on.*

She learnt many key things about herself. She realized she was not as shy as she had imagined herself to be. She also discovered her own teaching style and understood what was meant by *"professionally trained teacher"*: *"What I enjoyed most as well was discovering my own teaching style and discovering what it really meant to be as a professionally trained teacher in the foreign languages."*

As a consequence of the programme, SS takes her role as an educator seriously as well:

> *I think I have a very heavy responsibility in the reinforcement of attitudes and values. As a teacher, I am here to serve as an example to the students of what it means to be a good citizen and well-rounded individual, someone whom the young students can look to for help, advice, and comfort and also as someone who delivers her duty with thoroughness and capability.*

This is influenced by her school context, which demands this outlook because of its challenging nature. As such, SS also sees her role as a change agent and she believes *"that as teachers we have the right and also the vocabulary to speak up and voice opinions about matters concerning the school."* She admits that although the programme was tough she believes that it has made her a better teacher: *"It was stressful if you couldn't organize yourself properly, but more than anything I can say I came out of the programme a better teacher."*

LC views her role as a teacher and a foreign language teacher in the following way:

> *My role as teacher is to make my students experience learning as an enjoyable thing. My role as foreign language teacher is to allow students to either fall in love with the language or feel engaged in the class even if they have minimal interest in languages.*

She feels that they are not mutually exclusive terms and/or identities. According to her, the Dip.Ed. helped her to realize that teaching was her calling. It enriched other aspects of her life. She became confident that she could handle all levels of classes. She became confident in her abilities to lead her students where they needed to go. She grew in confidence:

> *As a person I believe I became more aware of what my calling was. I became more convicted that this is where I needed to be and this is how I can serve not only in my school but also in my church... As a teacher I think it has allowed me to be confident enough to take on a Form Five class.*

The three teachers mentioned many epiphanies. According to them, they each came out of the experience knowing more about themselves as individuals, educators, and foreign language teachers.

Role of Individual School Context in Shaping Professional Identity
The literature has identified school context as having a significant impact on teachers' sense of professional identity. According to the literature, school context can shape it in a positive or a negative way, nurturing the teacher's professional identity or eroding it.

AM's school context, in her opinion, definitely nurtures her sense of professional identity because:

> *We are always encouraged to be professionals in what we do, say, wear, our regularity, punctuality etc. Excellence and quality is our ultimate goal as educators in our institution and our administrators invest heavily in our professional development through workshops, reading and audiovisual resources.*

SS adds that since completing the Dip.Ed. three years ago, her philosophy has not really evolved but has taken on other meanings. She attributes this to her school context, which contributes to her de-motivation. Her school context shapes how she sees her role.

LC is very much willing to continue to do the things she learnt during the Dip.Ed., but because of administrative changes at her school she sometimes feels hindered by a lack of time:

> *I think the theory is good, the policies are good but in reality I feel that what is happening during the course of the day is militating against that… like feedback or correcting papers …supervision has taken away a lot of my time.*

All three participants clearly confirmed the role school context plays in empowering or debilitating teachers. In AM's case, it nurtures her sense of professional identity as a teacher, while it has the potential to debilitate the sense of professional identity for both SS and LC.

Reflection and Professional Identity

Reflection is a critical element in classroom practice today. It breeds growth in teachers and if taken in the right stead it can bring about a myriad of positive changes.

SS indicated that reflection was in some way part of her professional identity, whether directly or indirectly: *"I was like a Scientist – able to assess and evaluate what I was doing wrong, and able to go back and fix it. That's one of the consequences of the Diploma in Education, it makes you reflective."*

LC also infused reflection as part of her practice. She does it regularly. Again she attributes this to the Dip.Ed.: *"Also the importance of reflection and looking at your day's work and looking at ways that it could have been better…maybe trying to reverse and switch gears and see if another method could be applied."*

Sense of Self-Efficacy

The belief that you are a competent teacher and that you have what it takes to do an excellent job is a key part of teacher self-efficacy. The three participants in the study reflected this competence and showed that self-efficacy was important to professional identity.

AM was consistent in her responses, both in the questionnaire and the interview, leaving no doubt that she possesses a strong sense of self-efficacy:

> *I think that I am dynamic because I am not really stagnant I am highly motivated by choice... I think too that I am very autonomous. I find ways and means of finding out and then trying to practise it. I am a good teacher.*

Some of the key characteristics that she highlighted about herself were that she is dynamic, highly motivated by choice, very interested in how students learn the foreign language, very autonomous, and a good teacher. All of these descriptors aptly reflect her high sense of self-efficacy. She acknowledges that her confidence has increased as a result of the Dip.Ed. experience. She has confidence in terms of the method that she uses and she is also confident in using the target language in the classroom. She therefore sees herself as a capable and competent teacher, and this she accredits to the programme.

Her high level of teacher self-efficacy is reflected in the fact that she has chosen to continue to improve her craft by furthering her studies. AM is one who has chosen to continue her development so as to ensure progress in her job. She obviously sees continuous training as part of her professional identity and performing her job competently: *"I found that this programme* [a Masters in Spanish] *that I've been doing, it has been very rewarding. I feel a lot more competent in what I am doing."* She admits at the end of it all, *"I feel a lot better about myself and what I am doing now."*

Participant 2, SS, shows her strong sense of self-efficacy when she says *that "as teachers we have the right and also the vocabulary to speak up and voice opinions about matters concerning the school."* This shows her desire and willingness to change things. She sees her role as a change agent. On the other hand, though, she admits that she feels inadequate for not using the instructional strategies and methodologies that she learnt during the programme to teach her students. This is connected to her sense of self-efficacy as well. She believes that she would and could use it but her school context constrains her efforts. She says it *"makes me feel inadequate for not meeting the needs of all the students in the optimal manner."* SS seems very despondent when she thinks about her present school predicament, which has eroded her sense of self-efficacy somewhat. This is clearly reflected in her words:

> *Dip Ed right now just feels utterly useless….it buoyed you up with the feeling of being in control of your classroom and feeling that as teachers you are empowered to make decisions regarding the direction of your school, without taking the specific context of your school into consideration... all we are is a person to carry out decisions that have been made above our heads without any input from us.*

Her school context notwithstanding, SS really wants to teach: *"I really, really enjoy the job. I really enjoy teaching."* This is confirmed by a strong sense of who she is in the classroom: *"I would say that I am entertaining… and able to get the interest of the kids and get the kids involved."* SS is of the opinion that her sense of who she was as a teacher improved after completing the Dip.Ed.:

> *Well, it made me take myself seriously as a professional. Completing the programme, I felt I came out of it having learned a lot – being exposed to the theories, pedagogies and the actual experience of learning about teaching as a Science, it made me*

> *take myself more seriously. It felt like an art form and I realized that I had a lot of abilities, capabilities.*

She continues further: *"During the period of Dip.Ed. and afterwards, I really felt like I walked into the classroom with that knowledge and confidence that I was an authority on what I was doing."*

LC describes herself as an entertainer and a counsellor. These descriptors speak loudly of how she sees her role as a teacher. She believes that she can capture the interest of the students and that she can help them through situations that they encounter daily. The Dip.Ed. programme helped LC to find her calling and enriched other facets of her life. Her words reflect her strong sense of self-efficacy:

> *As a person I believe I became more aware of what my calling was. I became more convinced that this is where I needed to be and this is how I can serve not only in my school but also in my church... So I think it has made my other facets, it has enriched the other facets of my life. As a teacher I think it has allowed me to be confident enough to take on a Form Five class... So it gave me that assurance that I could take them to where they needed to be and I didn't need to be afraid of it, afraid that I would let them down.*

All participants felt empowered as a result of their experience on the professional development programme. It is something that they have taken with them three years after having completed it.

Collegiality and/or Collaboration

AM spoke with certainty when she spoke about the relationships that she had developed with her colleagues on the programme: *"What I enjoyed most about the programme was really, I think, the relationships that I developed with the people in my year group and really seeing other people teach."* AM feels that at her school the amount of pressure and the hectic pace that teachers are forced to work at prevent a lot more sharing from taking place. She confesses that while they do collaborate on certain things in her department, there can be more collaboration amongst them: *"We collaborate on the schemes of work and on exams and on what we do, where we are at, but I must be very honest and say there could be more sharing."* She feels, too, that the older, more experienced teachers are not as open to sharing since they are quite set in their ways:

> *Some of the senior teachers they are not very flexible in terms of change…So I think the relationships are linked to my*

professional identity in the sense that it can either interfere, it can either impact on me.

AM clearly indicates how staff relations can affect her sense of professional identity.

Just like AM, SS also attributes much credit to her colleagues from the programme:

The Dip.Ed. course material did not do anything to impact on my mission – the people who were on the course with me – especially my curriculum group were and remain my inspiration to want to do my best to uphold the nobility of teaching profession.

She corroborates this in her interview.

It was cool because we really developed close friendships – it was a sisterhood and a brotherhood – there was only one guy on the programme and our Curriculum Supervisors… really went out of their way to be there for us on the programme and to assist us in every way that they could have.

Like her two colleagues, LC views the collegiality and coaching or collaboration of her curriculum group as the most enjoyable part of the Dip.Ed. programme. This was one of the things that she took away from her experience. The collegiality and collaboration that she enjoyed during the programme continues to exist in her relationship with colleagues at her school. She admits that they collaborate, swap, and share ideas. She finds this enlightening.

Discussion

From the analysis conducted, it is clear that the Dip.Ed. programme had a very positive influence on the three participants' sense of professional identity, especially with regard to their sense of professionalism, their sense of self-efficacy, their ability to analyse their school context, their ability to reflect, and the awareness that their professional identity was constantly evolving.

Sense of Professionalism and Self-Efficacy

One of the first things that can be noted is the teachers' high sense of professionalism and self-efficacy. It is hoped that SS, who faces the most challenging school context out of all three participants, would be able to withstand the feelings of demotivation and demoralization by relying on her underlying passion for what she does. This may very well be possible

as not only is teacher efficacy linked to student achievement, but it is also linked to teacher persistence in the face of obstacles, and to teacher effectiveness (Bandura, 1997; Cantrell, Young, & Moore, 2003).

In the cases of SS and LC, the support of the principal can impact on whether these teachers continue to have a positive outlook and continue to use what they have learnt from the Dip.Ed. programme (Fielding & Schalock, 1985; McLaughlin & Marsh, 1978; Stallings & Mohlman, 1981). It is clear that in order for these three teachers to continue to improve professionally, there is need for continuous professional development, the design of which should be carefully considered by the school's administration (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Wolf, 2009).

Ability to Analyse School Context

School context clearly has a determining impact on these teachers' sense of professional identity. Morris and Yamin-Ali (2006) explored this fully in their study of in-service teachers on this same programme, and found that:

> the different contexts in which they taught influenced the way in which each of these teachers responded to the demands of the programme and how they negotiated and constructed their professional identity in a way that allowed them to deal with the specific issues which arose in their school environment. (p. 291)

Clearly, the contexts in which the participants teach have influenced their professional identity. In reviewing the interview with SS, it was obvious that there was an internal struggle going on which was impacting on her teaching philosophy. Although she has a passion for the job, this passion is constantly being eroded by her very unstable school context. As this struggle is taking place, SS's belief system about herself as a teacher is being challenged and changed.

Reflection

One of the strengths of the influence of the Dip.Ed., viewed from the perspective of the three participants in this study, is that it has made them reflective practitioners. It may be because of their "reflection-in-action" and "reflection-on-action" that they have been able to grow in the profession, and may very well continue to do so. It was very evident from their feedback that this is very much a part of who they have become. This endorses Schon's (1987) position on the value of reflection in the practice of the professional teacher.

The Evolution of Professional Identity Over Time

The three teachers involved in this study all showed strong, positive, and significant growth, which has been sustained in the three years following their involvement in the professional development programme. This reflects one of the goals of the programme, which is the "continued use of sound practice and the sustained search for professional excellence beyond the end of the programme that will ensure the high professional status of the teacher" (FHE, 2011, p. 54). The data analysis showed that several factors contributed to the ongoing professional identity of the three teachers. Above all, they recognized their professional identity as evolutionary, they were able to redefine their role and purpose through reflection, and their sense of self-efficacy continued to be strengthened.

Conclusion

This study focused on three modern language teachers' perceptions of how the Dip.Ed. professional development programme had influenced them as teachers. It concentrated specifically on the programme's influence on their professional identity. This study has revealed that there was indeed a definite and enduring influence of the programme on the three participants in terms of their professional identity.

With regard to professional identity, several elements remained with the three educators in the three years after completion of the programme. One was that professional identity was constantly evolving. Beliefs held during the Dip.Ed. were refined and new discoveries were made. Having completed the programme, the same processes have continued to shape each participant's perception of who they are as teachers.

A specific area of professional identity that showed definite influence was the conception of professionalism. This was reinforced by the programme, resulting in each participant having a clear and comprehensive understanding of what the term meant to them personally. For them it has evolved into a concrete concept, which they have embraced as an asset to them as teacher professionals.

Not only had their beliefs about professionalism changed, but they also discovered and defined what their individual teaching philosophy was. They each realized their purpose as teachers and ascertained what was important to them. Teaching philosophy was no longer an abstract idea; it was given form and shape. Additionally, the three educators were able to outline, with precision, their role and purpose as educators and,

more specifically, as foreign language teachers. They are convinced of their roles and responsibilities, and this drives their teaching.

Furthermore, it can also be said that what was learnt during the Dip.Ed. experience has continued to have an influence on these teachers because of their reflection on their profession. Since completing the programme, it has been reflection that has allowed them to improve on their craft. This was something that they were always encouraged to do during the programme, as the established belief was that reflection equalled growth. Even relationships and the collaborative spirit were a consequence of the programme, as this was one of the most memorable areas noted by all three teachers.

The areas of influence discussed have all contributed to each teacher's sense of self-efficacy. They all exhibited a strong sense of confidence in their abilities as foreign language teachers. The programme empowered them and has left a lasting belief in them that they possess much of what it takes to be effective foreign language teachers and educators in general.

What is very clear with regard to these teachers' perceptions of the programme's influence on their professional identity is that school context had a lot to do with the extent and the longevity of the influence. It was, and still is, the determining factor. For instance, in the case of Participant AM, the school environment supports and promotes a lot of what she has learnt from the programme. It is part of the school's culture and, as a result, AM continues to utilize much of what she gained from the Dip.Ed. SS, on the other hand, feels somewhat demotivated and demoralized, and much of it is as a result of her school setting. As a consequence, SS feels that some of the ideals of the Dip.Ed. are not relevant to her because of her situation. LC speaks about a similar administrative upheaval at her school, although she admits that it is not all bad. All three teachers' professional identity has been affected in one way or another, either positively or negatively, by their school context. It is a factor that one cannot ignore when ascertaining the influence of a programme like the Dip.Ed. on teachers.

Therefore, it can be concluded that, external factors notwithstanding, the Dip.Ed. programme has served a useful purpose for the three teachers. For all three teachers it was the initial teacher preparation that they received, and while it may not be the last, its influence seems to have laid the foundation for the construction of their professional identity.

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