

2017

## Preservice Teachers' Identity Development during the Teaching Internship

Tran Le Huu Nghia

*Ton Duc Thang University, tlhnghia@gmail.com*

Huynh Ngoc Tai

*Tra Vinh University, hntai86@gmail.com*

---

### Recommended Citation

Le Huu Nghia, T., & Ngoc Tai, H. (2017). Preservice Teachers' Identity Development during the Teaching Internship. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 42(8).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2017v42n8.1>

This Journal Article is posted at Research Online.

<http://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol42/iss8/1>

## Preservice Teachers' Identity Development during the Teaching Internship

Tran Le Huu Nghia<sup>1</sup>  
Ton Duc Thang University, Vietnam  
Huynh Ngoc Tai<sup>2</sup>  
Tra Vinh University, Vietnam

*Abstract. This article reports the analysis of two preservice teachers' narratives to highlight the process of teacher identity development during their teaching internship. The analysis showed that their teacher identities had been shaped before they entered the teacher education program where it continued to be shaped by educational experts. In that way, they formed expectations or imaginations of their professional roles and responsibilities prior to the teaching internships. When entering the teaching internships, these pre-existing expectations or imaginations were challenged by the reality they faced. Their engagement with the internship, resilience and negotiations of professional practices were found to be significant for the development of their teacher identities. The article discusses some important implications for teacher education programs.*

**Keywords:** early childhood teachers; teaching internship; teacher identity; preservice teachers; Vietnam

### Introduction

Professional identity is a theme that has drawn the interest of many researchers for decades. It is broadly defined as 'the various meanings someone can attach to oneself or the meanings attributed to oneself by others' (Beijaard, 1995, p. 282). It is associated with a person's perception of his or her professional capacity, responsibilities, and relationships (Adams, Hean, Sturgis, & Clark, 2006).

Contrary to early studies that considered professional identity to be a set of relatively fixed profession-related characteristics such as beliefs, values, motives and experiences (Ibarra, 1999), recent studies have indicated that professional identity is 'an on-going and dynamic process which entails the making sense and (re)interpretation of one's own values and experiences' (Flores & Day, 2006, p. 220). Wenger (1998, 2010) also observes that our current identity involves our past experiences, relationships as well as practices and it orients ourselves into the future. Identity development can occur across communities at different levels and involves negotiations of meanings or practices that individuals face in their social interactions (Wenger, 2010).

---

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author: Tran Le Huu Nghia, Department for Management of Science and Technology Development, Ton Duc Thang University, 19 Nguyen Huu Tho Street, Tan Phong Ward, District 7, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Email: [tranlehuunghia@tdt.edu.vn](mailto:tranlehuunghia@tdt.edu.vn) or [llhngghia@gmail.com](mailto:llhngghia@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Huynh Ngoc Tai, School of Foreign Languages, Tra Vinh University, Tra Vinh City, Vietnam. Email: [hntai@trv.edu.vn](mailto:hntai@trv.edu.vn)

In the case of teacher education, preservice teachers' identities can be developed through their studies at the teacher college, supplementing their aspirations or expectations that they have prior to entering the teacher education program. However, their experiences with the teaching internship, which is often organized in the final stage of their teacher education program, may significantly influence their teacher identity development (Hong, 2010; Yuan & Lee, 2014). The complexity of social interactions that they experience during the internship may transform their existing professional aspirations or expectations to a new version of their teacher identity or may alienate them from the community of teachers. In fact, several studies have explored challenges that preservice teachers face during their internship (Buckworth, 2017; Fives, Hamman, & Olivarez, 2007; Kokkinos & Stavropoulos, 2016; Yuan, 2016) or teacher identity development in their first years of teaching (Hong, 2010; Pearce & Morrison, 2011). However, there are still a limited number of studies that investigate the impact of internships, especially the challenges, on preservice teachers' identity development.

Drawing from a study that explored preservice early childhood teachers' experiences with their internship, this article reports the analysis of Lan's and Ngoc's narratives, two of the 20 preservice teachers interviewed for the study, about their teacher identity development, with a focus on it during the internship. The analysis shows that teacher identity is a recursive process during which preservice teachers form expectations, challenge these expectations when facing real-life teaching situations, modify them and let a new version of their identity emerge. The analysis also shows that teacher identity development during the internship appears to depend greatly on the power that interns have to negotiate, modify, or align practices related to their teaching profession. This article contributes to a limited body of literature about how teacher identity is shaped and developed at the initial stage of the teaching career.

## **Literature Review**

### **Internships and Teacher Identity Development**

A number of studies have suggested that the teaching internship can positively foster the development of teacher identity. Firstly, it provides preservice teachers with opportunities to develop relevant competence for their teaching profession, an important component that constitutes teacher identity. For example, a study conducted by Mukeredzi (2016) in a rural area of South Africa reveals that the internship helps preservice teachers build a better understanding of schools in rural areas and appropriate pedagogy, discard stereotypes, increase their confidence, improve their teaching skills, and broaden their career prospects in these settings, which may ultimately foster an interest in rural teaching. In addition, Salazar Noguera and McCluskey (2017) find that the teaching practicum enables Australian and Spanish preservice teachers to link what they have learned during the teacher education program to the reality of teaching. That period offers remarkably valuable learning experiences for these interns to develop initial teaching experience, increase the awareness of their profession and facilitate the transition from being students to being teachers.

In addition, the teaching internship also offers preservice teachers opportunities to learn more about the reality of their profession. Many preservice teachers are found to hold idealistic assumptions or expectations of the profession (Hong, 2010). When they experience the internship, it is much different from their expectations or imaginations, so they often struggle with the internships. For example, students may become more disruptive than they can anticipate, they may not be treated and recognized as real teachers in the school, and hidden teaching-related workloads – those that they have never thought of - suddenly emerge

during the internship, or they have to work in harmony with peers and the mentor (Gao & Benson, 2012; Kokkinos & Stavropoulos, 2016; Le, 2014). Generally, the rich, dynamic environment of the internship appears to present preservice teachers many challenges and uncertainties through which they can develop resilience, remove their unrealistic assumptions or expectations and become familiar with real-life practices of the profession. All of them help change preservice teachers' existing, often idealistic, teacher identity and transform it into a more realistic version. If they fail to do so, they may leave the profession, as suggested in Hong (2010).

Moreover, the internship often provides preservice teachers with opportunities to negotiate or align practices related to their teaching professions through which their teacher identity can be transformed. In most cases, preservice teachers go through the internship under the supervision of a senior teacher. The supervision has been found to tremendously influence the development of preservice teachers' identities. For example, Mukeredzi (2016) found that mentors contribute to the success of preservice teachers' teaching practicum by giving curriculum guidance and constructive feedback about their teaching methods. The researcher, consistent with a study by Yuan (2016), reports that mentors, in many cases interfere too much with practices that preservice teachers would like to employ in their teaching. They may also assign tasks that are not relevant to develop the identity that preservice teachers desire (Yuan, 2016). These studies suggest that the power relationship between preservice teachers and their mentors is significant for preservice teachers' identity development. In most cases, preservice teachers submit to mentors due to the dependent relationship, align with the practices that mentors want them to adopt, and that would lead to an erosion of preservice teachers' desired identity. However, that also simultaneously helps them develop a new teacher identity that fits better with authentic teaching settings, if preservice teachers agree with such an adaptation of practices.

Furthermore, linking to the literature about the mentor-mentee power relationship above, some studies found that preservice teachers' self-efficacy can also influence the development of their teacher identity. In the teaching practicum context, those who possessed a higher level of self-efficacy experienced fewer burnout symptoms by the end of their practicum (Fives et al., 2007). Echoing findings by Fives et al. (2007), McLennan, McIlveen, and Perera (2017) that pre-service teachers' self-efficacy can directly predict their confidence about the teaching profession and mediate the effect of career adaptability on their career confidence. The researchers recommend that teacher education programs pay attention to improving preservice teachers' self-efficacy so that they can adapt to changes in their career as well as maintain optimism about the profession. From these two studies, it seems that self-efficacious preservice teachers would be more likely to exercise their power or agency to negotiate practices with their mentor, such as convincing their mentor of a specific teaching approach that they would like to use in the classroom. If they can do it successfully, it can help them develop the version of teacher identity that they desire. However, the extent to which preservice teachers can use their power or agency is likely to depend greatly on where they take the internship or who supervises them, as noted earlier. For example, in the Confucian educational context, mentors are found to hold great power, expect preservice teachers to follow what they believe to be good practices, and treat them with liminal status (for example, see Gao & Benson, 2012; Yuan, 2016). This may also be applicable for the two preservice teachers involved in this study as Vietnam is classified as a country with Confucian educational and cultural values (Pham, 2010).

In summary, preservice teachers' experiences with the internship may strongly influence the development of their teacher identity. However, there are limited studies that focus on investigating the development of teacher identity at this initial phase of the teaching profession – a phase where they are dependent on many stakeholders. Therefore, it is

necessary to conduct a study to explore this issue, which may have important implications for teacher education programs and teacher professional development.

### **The Theoretical Framework: Wenger's Theory about Identity Development**

In the previous section, specific studies about preservice teachers' experiences with the teaching internship have been reviewed with a focus on how these experiences influence the development of preservice teachers' identity. In this section, Wenger's (1998, 2010) theory about identity development will be presented in order to help us better understand how identity is developed through our social interactions. It will also serve as the theoretical framework for the analysis of preservice teachers' narratives in this article.

In Wenger's theory, our identity is lived in our daily activities. He contends that identity is a trajectory that 'incorporates the past and the future into the experience of the present', 'accumulates memories, competencies, key formative events, stories, and relationships to people and places', as well as 'provides directions, aspirations, and [project] images of oneself that guide the shaping of the trajectory going forward' (Wenger, 2010, p. 185). He also observes that identity is a nexus of multi-memberships, i.e. we bring our identity across different communities of which we are a member. Identity, in his view, is constructed at multiple levels all at once. For example, 'teachers can identify (or dis-identify) with the teachers in their school, district, region, discipline, country, and even with all teachers in the world' (ibid, p.185).

Wenger proposes that identities are formed amid the 'tension between our investment in the various forms of belonging and our ability to negotiate the meanings that matter in those contexts' (Wenger, 1998, p. 188). Therefore, in Wenger's view, identity formation is a dual process of identification and negotiation of meanings.

#### *Identification Process*

By identification, Wenger means our efforts in building associations and differentiations. He notes that in this process, we continuously identify, or are being identified, as belonging to a social class, professional sector, or roles. The author observes that it also involves participation through which we accumulate lived experiences of belonging that constitute who we are. Therefore, he concludes that identification is both relational and experiential.

In Wenger's view, identification can occur via three modes: engagement, imagination, and alignment (Wenger, 2010). Accordingly, engagement is the process in which we - as members of a community - invest efforts to connect with other members of that community. It can greatly foster the process of identity formation or development. He notes that through relating ourselves to others, we will gradually define who we are, figure out how to participate in activities and identify competences necessary for our engagement in that community.

Imagination is a process in which we relate ourselves to the world beyond the community of practice in which we are engaged (Wenger, 2010). By this, Wenger explains, we create images of the world, see ourselves in them, and use these images to locate and orient ourselves, to view ourselves from different perspectives, to reflect our situations and to explore new possibilities. Although imagination can help us construct or modify our identity, in Wenger's observation, it can also lead to stereotypes, especially when we lack deep understanding of practices or overgeneralize our practices.

Alignment is a process that allows us - as members of a community - to be better connected to the community by aligning our practices with those in the community or the organization that hosts the community (Wenger, 2010). However, he observes that such alignment is not only about compliance, i.e. submitting to someone's authority or following an instruction. He writes that alignment, in fact, is 'a two-way process of coordinating perspectives, interpretations, actions, and contexts so that action has the effects we expect' (Wenger, 2010, p. 185). As such, alignment involves power and mutual influence between members of a community. Wenger (1998) points out that alignment accomplished through coercion and oppression not only affects our identities but also leads to disconnection with the community, i.e. forming a kind of marginal identity. Nevertheless, through this process of alignment, the identity of a large group, such as an institution or a firm, becomes the identity of its members.

### *Negotiation Process*

The process of identity formation also includes negotiation of meanings, or practices, which determines the extent to which we are able to contribute to and shape the practices that we invest in (Wenger, 1998). Practices in a community do not always occur harmoniously; rather, conflicts present throughout (Wenger, 2010). He notes that practices are created from the process in which we participate in events or actions; some practices are more valuable than others, depending on the power of the practice constructor and negotiations of members. He also realizes that members of a community can claim the ownership of a practice when they can use, modify or appropriate it as their own. To him, ownership of practices increases when many people participate in the negotiation process. Wenger points out that members of a community sometimes fail to negotiate and claim ownership of practices, often due to uneven power distribution between members of a community. These members gradually form an identity of nonparticipation and marginality (Wenger, 2010). The appropriation of practices can also isolate those who produce the original practices, especially when they are unable to reclaim the practices they produce (Wenger, 2010).

In a community of practice, the production and adoption of practices appear to go hand in hand. Wenger (2010) observes that members whose practices are consistently rejected and whose experiences are considered irrelevant will develop an identity of marginality. In contrast, he sees that members whose practices are accepted and whose experiences are valued by a community will move to a central identity. This process sometimes involves much time, effort, and resilience from a member of a community (Pearce & Morrison, 2011).

Wenger's theory of identity formation can provide an appropriate framework for exploring teacher identity development at the initial phase of their career, with a focus on the teaching internship. It allows researchers to explore preservice teachers' complex interactions and interpretations of their lived experiences, which contribute to their professional identity formation and development.

## **The Present Study**

### **Research Question and Approach**

This article will address the following research question: *‘How is teacher identity developed at the initial phase of their career, especially throughout the teaching internship?’*

A narrative inquiry was used to find answers to the research question. In their study about teachers’ professional identity development, Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004) point out that ‘through storytelling, teachers engage in narrative ‘theorizing’ and, based on that, teachers may further discover and shape their professional identity resulting in new or different stories’ (p. 121). Taylor and Littleton (2006) also remark that teachers’ personal narratives can be seen as a version of their identity work. Narratives are continuously constructed, reflect the social contexts in which they are created and involve particular ideologies within the individual’s social environments (Taylor & Littleton, 2006). As a result, in this study, narratives can help explore the complexity of interactions between preservice teachers and the stakeholders, as well as the environment in the nursery school where they took the internship. Through that complexity of interactions, changes in aspects that constitute these preservice teachers’ identities can be revealed.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Data used in this article were drawn from a study that investigated 20 in-depth interviews with preservice early childhood teachers’ experiences with the teaching internship and the impact of these experiences on their career intentions and identity development. All of them were interviewed at the end of their teaching internships. Two in-depth interviews with the teachers, referred to with pseudonyms Lan and Ngoc, were selected to highlight how their teacher identities were developed, with a focus on their development during the internship. Their narratives can best represent the experiences with the internship and how these experiences influenced the development of their teacher identities.

In the interviews, they were asked to share their experiences with the internship: how they prepared for it, what they did during the internship, what difficulties they faced and how they overcame those, how they interacted with other stakeholders (children, supervisors, colleagues and parents), and how they influenced others or others influenced them. They were also asked to indicate whether they would continue to be teachers and explained the reasons for their intention, with a reference back to their former ideas about their dream job and expectations of the teaching profession. By investigating the complex interplay between different aspects involved in the internship, as they struggled to balance what they want to be and what they should do to ‘survive’ the internship - a critical test for any preservice teachers to get credit to become registered teachers - their teacher identity development was unveiled. Their stories help us understand how teacher identity was formed and developed at the very initial stage of their career as well as factors influencing that formation and development.

Each narrative was sorted chronologically and then coded against the themes related to identity development as proposed in Wenger’s theory: engagement, imagination, alignment, and negotiations of practices. Then the codes of the two narratives were compared to identify similarities and differences. Finally, the narratives were reported in light of Wenger’s theory.

## Two Preservice Teachers' Narratives

### Lan's Story

At the time of interview, Lan had just completed her second teaching internship in a small-town nursery school. Since she was a child, she dreamed of becoming a teacher to teach children 'because children are lovely'. Therefore, after finishing high school, she took the national university entrance exam and successfully reserved a place in the Early Childhood Education program in the School of Education at University A. Since 2012, she had studied and passed subjects in that program to be eligible for undertaking both internships, as required by the School.

Prior to the second internship, the School had carefully oriented herself and her peers. She herself reported to have acquired adequate pedagogical knowledge and skills, as well as other relevant information about the school where her internship would take place. As she revealed, such careful preparation was partially from her wish to conduct a successful internship and partially urged by her teachers in the School. She suggested that she expected children at the nursery school to be obedient and teachers to be disciplined and nice to each other as she had often seen at the schools she had attended.

When at the nursery school, she was not allowed to teach right away. Instead, she was taught by the mentor about her duties and what she should and should not do on her role as a teacher. She was offered opportunities to observe the settings of the school as well as how children were taught or taken care of by the mentor. It was also the time when she prepared lesson plans under the guidance of the mentor. In most cases, her lesson plans had to follow the mentor's perspectives with limited application of her own views.

Her primary duty at the nursery school was teaching children. Her experiences with teaching sessions varied greatly. Her first teaching session was good even though she was nervous. She attributed her success to studying the lesson plan carefully. However, in others, she faced difficulties in applying her acquired pedagogical skills, as the children did not listen to her. It was because 'the kids were too young', and she 'was not identified as their real teacher', as she explained. However, toward the end of the internship, she could perform her teaching more smoothly. She acknowledged that her mentor gave a lot of feedback about her teaching, both positive and negative. She admitted that she learned a lot from her mentor and colleagues in the school who had substantial teaching experience. She became flexible and selective of teaching steps and teaching techniques taught at the university that she believed to be useful for the students and simultaneously pleased her mentor.

In addition, she was assigned to taking care of children, which was described as part of the role of a form teacher. Her experiences as a form teacher were generally good. In this role, she had to conduct tasks such as managing documents or records related to the class, feeding the children, playing with them, doing physical exercise with them, showering them and doing other caring chores for the children. She attributed her good performance in this role to her hardworking attitude and good observation of other teachers in the school as well as her anticipation of these tasks prior to the internship. In the role of a form teacher, she also communicated with parents about their children and acted as a bridge between the school and family regarding the children's development. She overheard that parents inquired of teachers in the school about preservice teachers' presence and the quality of their teaching and caring. Lan stated that parents appeared not to trust the preservice teachers at first regarding teaching and caring their children; however, towards the end of the internship, her experiences with parents greatly improved.

Furthermore, she reported that she was involved in organizing different activities at the nursery school, such as a ceremony for female teachers on International Women's Day or a contest about the history of the Youth Union on the Youth Union's Day. This was special



to her because not all interns were involved in these activities. She attributed it to her activeness and agreeable attitude.

By engaging with different roles, she also discovered some hidden truths in the school environment. Contrary to her longstanding assumption, some teachers were not disciplined and nice to each other. She discovered that some of them often talked behind each others' backs and received gifts from interns who were later given better results than others. She was also unhappy because the mentor inconsistently announced and used assessment criteria to evaluate their internship-related performances, resulting in some interns receiving low scores.

Nevertheless, in her opinion, the internship offered her opportunities to apply what she had learned into real teaching situations and to gain authentic experiences in teaching and caring for children. It also helped her improve her weaknesses, such as communication skills, and experience a nursery school environment as an insider rather than an outside observer. She admitted that the negative experiences, to some extent, decreased her motivations to become a teacher; however, these experiences simultaneously helped her adjust her idealistic expectation of the teaching profession and the environment in which the profession functions to more authentic expectations.

### **Ngoc's Story**

Ngoc had just completed her second teaching internship in a nursery school located in a rural area at the time of the interview. She was born into a teacher's family; therefore, her mother oriented her to become a teacher from a young age. Lan was not obsessed with being a teacher because she wanted to do something in line with her vocation in Mathematics, Physics or Chemistry. However, to meet her family's expectations, she enrolled into Early Childhood Education at University A after successfully passing the national university entrance exam.

Ngoc had completed all required subjects to be eligible for the internship. Unlike Lan, she did not hold any expectations about the internship or her teaching profession. However, she was aware of what the teaching profession was like via her observation of her mother. She stated that if she could not teach well during the internship, she would do something else. This meant that the internship was essentially a test of her own competence to see whether she could become a teacher.

Like Lan, Ngoc also spent time at the nursery school to observe, plan the lessons and learn practices in the school. She reported that she did not have any difficulties with that process. She also accepted the mentor's pressure to use specific methods in the class because children were used to such methods and because she understood that the mentor had more experience than her.

Her primary duty was to teach children. She reported that she completed her teaching sessions well although her personal experiences with these teaching sessions were not completely positive. She explained that being an early childhood teacher, she had to teach children to write and different subjects that developed talents for children, such as music, clay moulding, and physical exercises. She admitted that she did not do very well in talent teaching sessions. In addition, she did not expect that the class would be packed with 45 children, and there was a lack of necessary facilities that could support her teaching. She also reported that at the university, she 'did not rehearse teaching with real children', but with her classmates who 'pretended to be children'. These, in her opinion, caused difficulties for her to apply pedagogical practices that she had been taught into the real-life context of the nursery school. They also caused some embarrassing moments for her in her teaching

internship as real children were ‘unpredictable’ and rudely honest, which sometimes obstructed her teaching.

In the role of a form teacher, she was assigned to communicate with children’s parents regarding their children’s development at the school as well as to receive feedback and enquiries from the parents. She reported to have very positive experiences working with children’s parents, including gaining trust and respect from these parents for her role, regardless of their scrutiny at the beginning of the internship. In addition, like her peers, she also had to take care of children. In her opinion, the children in the school were obedient in the presence of their real teacher and accustomed to their routines at the school, so she only had some minor difficulties due to the excessive number of children to care for.

She reported that the working environment in the school was supportive to her. She explained that the principal, her mentor and other teachers in the school were young, so they were friendly, open-minded and close to the interns. All interns were involved in extra-curricular activities. Therefore, she felt attached and part of the school.

Generally, Ngoc stated that the internship transformed her from having no expectation or passion for the teaching profession to working toward being a registered teacher. She revealed in the interview that at first, she just wanted to quit the internship because it was ‘hard, tiring, and uncomfortable’, but then she began to love it due to the school environment, colleagues, children and their parents. She was also encouraged because her effort during the internship was recognized with positive feedback, encouragement and a high score from the mentor. Finally, the internship gave her more than teaching experience because she could develop communication skills in various situations and with different stakeholders; she became more patient and was more skilled at making teaching aids.

## **Identity Development of the Two Preservice Teachers**

This study investigated how teacher identity is developed at the early phase of the teaching career with a special focus on it during the teaching internship. The narratives of two preservice teachers who had completed compulsory teaching internships were used as empirical data for the study. In this section, their narratives will be discussed in light of Wenger’s theory about identity development through social participation in a community of practice. Accordingly, their teacher identity is a complex interplay of different aspects involved in the processes of identification and negotiation of practices. Although the two processes occur side by side and do not exclude each other, preservice teachers’ identity development through these processes will be discussed separately to highlight elements influencing their teacher identity development.

### **Identification Process**

For both of them, the process of teacher identity development began long before they enrolled in the teacher education program. For Lan, her teacher identity grew out of her interest to become a teacher of young children; however, for Ngoc, it was out of her wish to fulfil her family’s expectations. Although it was not completely her interest, Ngoc’s initial teacher identity appeared to have been accepted and nurtured by her family whereas Lan formed hers independently. Since then, they appeared to have formed assumptions or expectations of the profession. These assumptions or expectations of theirs were in line with Wenger’s (1998, 2010) observations of ‘imagination’ beyond the boundary of a community that a member belongs to. In this case, both Lan and Ngoc formed different ‘imaginings’ of

the profession before they entered the teacher education program. Especially in the case of Ngoc, she formed imaginations closer to the real work context of teachers due to her observation of her mother – a teacher. Therefore, she may have been told of or witnessed the workloads and some practices related to the profession from her mother. In contrast, Lan was fascinated with the idea of becoming an early childhood teacher, without any authentic references.

When at University A, both of them were trained in a similar Early Childhood Education program and with similar educational experts. Regardless of differences in their ability to acquire professional knowledge and skills, they met minimum standards at which the university believed they could effectively undertake the internship. However, it seemed that aspects related to their teacher identities, especially motivations and understanding of the nature of the profession, had not fully developed by that time. Lan's narrative suggested that she still held unrealistic assumptions and expectations of the profession until the internship. This indicates that the teacher education program failed to help students become aware of unrealistic expectations of these teachers or lacked connections with the profession in reality. Meanwhile, Ngoc entered the program without a high level of determination for becoming a teacher. For her, it was still to please the family; if she could succeed in the internship, she would continue with the teaching career; otherwise, she would develop a new career path. This means that the program did not highly motivate Ngoc to become a teacher.

During the internship, both interns experienced holding marginal identities as they were not fully accepted as a member of the respective community of teachers in the nursery schools. Based on Wenger's (1998, 2010) notes, the recognition of interns' competence as valued by the community, i.e. other registered teachers in the nursery schools, is an important source of identity formation. However, both interns' competence was not recognized at the beginning of the internship. Although both Lan and Ngoc had satisfied all requirements for the internship set by the university - evidence for having relevant competence to undertake teachers' roles efficiently - and entered the nursery school formally as teacher interns, they were not fully accepted by the teacher community there, an issue recognized in Gao and Benson (2012). Their mentors selectively assigned them tasks at first, such as class observation and lesson planning. Even their students did not consider them teachers, as demonstrated by not listening to them or having disruptive behaviours, which could only be handled by their real teachers in the school. Likewise, their parents did not recognize these interns as teachers at the school at the beginning of the internship. They looked at these interns with doubt; some even inquired of teachers in the school regarding the competence and positions of these interns, as Lan discovered at her school.

This liminal status happened partially because the interns were treated as apprentices or demi-teachers, which has been identified in a previous study by Gao and Benson (2012) in Hong Kong. It could have also been due to the power relationship between teacher/mentor and students/interns in the educational context of Vietnam where the former held power over the latter (Pham, 2010). In this study, the former expected the latter to follow their philosophy of practices of teaching, which will be discussed in the next section. In that situation, at the beginning of the internship, the preservice teachers' membership of the community of practice in the nursery schools was marginal. As showed in the narratives, this marginal membership impacted both preservice teachers a great deal. Both of them felt disappointed by their roles in the school, and felt stressed due to their unfamiliarity with tasks assigned – which they attributed to a lack of practice and theory-based training at the university. They admitted that they sometimes wanted to leave the job after completing the studies.

Nevertheless, their teacher identities grew via active participation in activities in the teacher communities. Both worked hard to get accepted and to be acknowledged for their competence by the children, parents and the teacher community. Ngoc had a much easier

time, as the teachers in the school were friendly and open-minded, as she reported. Lan faced some difficulties as her mentor was not consistent with her words and her behaviours, such as in the case of assessing the interns' teaching performances, and the school appeared not to involve all preservice teachers in their activities as much as the school where Ngoc took her internship. Both preservice teachers submitted to their mentors' viewpoints about teaching and caring children as well as dealing with parents. They also attempted to perform their child teaching and caring duties effectively, and eagerly participated in other extra-curricular activities in the schools. Gradually, their mentors, the other teachers, the children and their parents accepted the preservice teachers. The acceptance was demonstrated by the mentors' positive feedback on their performance of assigned tasks, allowing them to access facilities in the school and involving them in activities of the school. The acceptance was also evidenced by children's compliant behaviours in response to their teaching and the parents' trust. Their effort to engage and align with the teaching community in the school was also acknowledged as both were involved in the school's activities as official members of the schools. Consequently, both felt that they had achieved an adequate level of competence relevant to the teaching profession, and that they were part of the teaching community. In Wenger's perspective, it is the time when interns' marginality membership was removed and replaced by a peripheral membership of the teacher community in the nursery school – a condition for their full participation, which in turn helps develop their teacher identity to the fullest.

In this study, the 'imagination' – one of the three modes of belonging/ identification - of preservice teachers was also demonstrated by the fact that Lan identified what made good teachers and what did not, such as (in)consistence between teachers' words and deeds. It was also demonstrated in both preservice teachers' visions of how their life would be if they followed this career path. Consequently, both of them were encouraged to become teachers; however, they explained that they would also be open to new job opportunities coming to them. This suggests that the internship helped develop their teacher identities to some extent, but they were not strong enough to exclude these preservice teachers from embracing the development of other professional identities, should those opportunities arise.

In short, throughout this identification process, the interns' teacher identities progressively moved from the margin to the centre of the teacher community. The lived experiences of both teacher interns showed three elements important for their identity development. First, their competence with respect to the teaching profession should be acknowledged by those who were considered 'experienced' from a teacher community of practice, in this case their mentor and possibly other teachers in the school. Second, entailing the acknowledgement, they should be offered access to that community of practice as a legitimate member. Finally, identification is a trajectory full of conflicts; therefore, resilience or active participation is essential for them to successfully deal with these.

### **Negotiation Process**

The internship also provided opportunities for the interns to negotiate practices related to their teaching profession. Firstly, it was a time that their idealistic expectations of the profession were challenged. Lan had assumed that working with children was fun because children were lovely and obedient like what she had experienced. Likewise, she admired her former teachers for their benign and kind-hearted attitudes, and she perceived the school environment as safe, cooperative and intellectual. However, by engaging with the community of practice, she discovered that many teachers were not nice and children could be disobedient, unlike her assumption. For Ngoc, she did not hold any assumptions about the teaching profession, except that she considered it an opportunity to test whether she was

adequately competent and could fit in that professional sector. Contrary to her belief that she could do well with things related to her strengths, i.e. Mathematics, Physics or Chemistry, she could integrate into and was quickly accepted by the teacher community as well as the children and their parents. With that, she started to build confidence about her ability to teach and was encouraged to become a teacher.

Secondly, the internship also offered both interns opportunities to become aware of the applicability of the pedagogical practices that they had been taught. As mentioned by Ngoc, the theory-based curriculum with little reference to real-life context and a lack of rehearsal with real children appeared to prevent preservice teachers from developing competence for adapting their knowledge and skills to fit specific contexts. Therefore, in the internships, both Lan and Ngoc faced difficulties applying what had learned into authentic child teaching and caring contexts. As Ngoc explained, it was difficult to apply what had been taught at the university to her class of 45 children and with a lack of necessary facilities. It was also difficult for her because she was coerced by the mentor into using particular methods to teaching children to avoid 'breaking children's habits'. Preservice teachers' inability to adapt their pedagogical knowledge and skills to match specific contexts could also be one of the reasons why their mentors strictly monitored Lan and Ngoc in writing the lesson plans and teaching according to what had been planned, possibly based on the mentors' experiences in working with previous preservice teachers. By conducting duties several times in real-life contexts, the interns could identify and develop teaching methods and skills most relevant to the context of most nursery schools in Vietnam and get rid of their assumptions about pedagogical practices. In other words, this process improved their competence related to the profession, an essential part of teacher identity.

Through the processes above, the interns used power to negotiate practices related to their profession. They began to think and act from the standpoint of a teacher rather than that of a student. They began to see things and handle situations as a member of the nursery school instead of seeing the nursery school via their imagination as before. Their most important source of power was the knowledge and teaching skills that they acquired from their teacher education program. In addition, they also used their personality traits, such as self-efficacy and professional attitudes, to win the trust of children and parents, as reported in the narratives. Unfortunately, to mentors, they had some difficulties using power to negotiate teaching practices. In the Confucian educational context of Vietnam where hierarchy is essential (Pham, 2010), their power was not as strong as their mentor's. Therefore, they had to carefully balance complying with their mentor's expectations and using their own perspectives for teaching rationally to ensure the completion of the internship, as evidence in a study by Le (2014). Regardless of using little power to negotiate teaching practices with their mentors, the narratives indicated that in the internship, preservice teachers did exercise their power on the standpoint of a teacher, through which they own stakeholders' recognition about them as teachers.

In short, the negotiation and appropriation of practices helped preservice teachers' identity become aligned with real-life contexts. In line with Wenger's (1998, 2010) observation, through challenging their assumptions, which had not been removed by the teacher education program, preservice teachers 'alienated' their own assumptions or unrealistic expectations and gained better understanding about the profession and the environment in which their professional practices took place. Breaking these assumptions and expectations helped transform their pre-existing beliefs and assumptions about the teaching profession and replaced it with more appropriate ones. Negotiation of practices related to their professions also enabled them to identify and develop competences that matched better with the settings of nursery schools. However, that depended greatly on their mentor, as at this phase, the participants had not yet functioned as independent teachers. It was also noted

that in the context of having liminal status and having little power, the negotiation of practices of these preservice teachers occurred with substantial efforts and resilience invested, especially at the beginning of the internship.

### **Conclusion, Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies**

The study reported in this article explored the development of teacher identity at the very initial stage of the teaching career, with a special focus on it during the teaching internship. Through the narratives of two interns selected among 20 participants, it was revealed that teacher identity development could be a trajectory that involves different lived experiences. Accordingly, their teacher identity had initially been formed prior to the time the preservice teachers entered a teacher education program, with some idealistic imaginations, assumptions or expectations about the profession. Their initial teacher identity could originate from their aspirations or could be defined by influential people, such as their parents. The preservice teachers carried these images or expectations to their teacher education program where they could be able to modify these, in their viewpoints, to fit better with the career. The teacher education program played a crucial role in shaping their competence for the teaching profession and helping them adjust unrealistic assumptions or expectations of the profession.

When they began the internship, these preservice teachers' identity transformed via complex interactions with the environment and stakeholders in the school. At first, they were often treated with a liminal status and were not outright involved in teaching tasks. It was due to their mentors' intention of checking whether these preservice teachers had attained minimum standards to conduct teaching tasks. This way of treatment left preservice teachers' identity at the margin of the community of teachers in the school. Only by engaging with that community through willing participation and demonstrating relevant competence were these preservice teachers accepted by the community. Upon acceptance, these preservice teachers were involved with and assigned more tasks in the community through which they felt attached and considered themselves a part of. Also through engaging with different tasks, the preservice teachers' idealistic imaginations, assumptions or expectations of the profession collided with reality, and were adjusted using the power they had. This study suggested that only when the interns broke their idealistic imaginations, assumptions or expectations of the profession could their new version of their teacher identity emerge. Through this process, the preservice teachers' identity gradually moved from the margin to the centre of the teaching community.

The study also revealed that the preservice teachers' identity development during the internship involved some imaginations of their selves beyond the teaching community, such as reflection of what they would become or how their job would be in the future. The study also evidenced that the interns - with their liminal status - only had limited power to negotiate practices they faced during the internship, mostly depending on their self-efficacy with their pedagogical knowledge and skills as well as their mentor's support. Therefore, their teacher identity at this early stage appeared to be strongly moulded by the community in which the internship took place, especially their mentor, and a little from their own intention, due to a lack of power and experience in exercising their power.

The findings have some implications for teacher education programs. Firstly, teacher education programs should take into account exploring candidates' expectations of the profession to identify individuals with unrealistic expectations and to help them remove these prior to their internship. Secondly, teacher education programs, despite their mission of preparing preservice teachers for a life-time career, should focus on developing authentic

knowledge and skills for students so that they can better engage with their internship through which they could develop relevant competence for the profession, an essential component of their teacher identity. Thirdly, mentors and preservice teachers should negotiate the version of teacher identity that the latter wishes to become. Preservice teachers should also be given more power in determining their teaching practices – and being accountable for it, be involved in multiple tasks and treated as real teachers in the school. In these ways, they would have better conditions to reinforce their professional competence, imagine their future and align their practices using their own will rather than by the coercion of an authority, which was found to prevent them from full participation in the teacher community. All of these may help produce potential teachers who can enter the profession with confidence and are less likely to leave the sector due to under-preparation.

This study only reports two narratives among the 20 collected in a regional university in Vietnam; however, the two stories clearly highlight key themes in the development of teacher identity at the very first steps of their profession. Future studies should continue to explore this issue transnationally and involve participants from different teacher education programs and backgrounds. In particular, their family and personal traits appeared to be important factors that influenced preservice teachers' identity development in this study, but they must be confirmed with further investigations.

## References

- Adams, K., Hean, S., Sturgis, P., & Clark, J. M. (2006). Investigating the factors influencing professional identity of first-year health and social care students. *Learning in Health & Social Care*, 5(2), 55-68. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1473-6861.2006.00119.x>
- Beijaard, D. (1995). Teachers' Prior Experiences and Actual Perceptions of Professional Identity. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 1(2), 281-294. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1354060950010209>
- Beijaard, D., Meijer, P. C., & Verloop, N. (2004). Reconsidering research on teachers' professional identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20(2), 107-128. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2003.07.001>
- Buckworth, J. (2017). Issues in the Teaching Practicum. In G. Geng, P. Smith, & P. Black (Eds.), *The Challenge of Teaching: Through the Eyes of Pre-service Teachers* (pp. 9-17). Singapore: Springer Singapore. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-2571-6\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-2571-6_2)
- Fives, H., Hamman, D., & Olivarez, A. (2007). Does burnout begin with student-teaching? Analyzing efficacy, burnout, and support during the student-teaching semester. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 23(6), 916-934. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2006.03.013>
- Flores, M. A., & Day, C. (2006). Contexts which shape and reshape new teachers' identities: A multi-perspective study. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 22(2), 219-232. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2005.09.002>
- Gao, X., & Benson, P. (2012). "Unruly Pupils" in Pre-Service English Language Teachers' Teaching Practicum Experiences. *Journal of Education for Teaching: International Research and Pedagogy*, 38(2), 127-140. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2012.656440>
- Hong, J. Y. (2010). Pre-service and beginning teachers' professional identity and its relation to dropping out of the profession. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26(8), 1530-1543. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2010.06.003>

- Ibarra, H. (1999). Provisional Selves: Experimenting with Image and Identity in Professional Adaptation. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(4), 764-791. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2667055>
- Kokkinos, C. M., & Stavropoulos, G. (2016). Burning out during the practicum: The case of teacher trainees. *Educational Psychology*, 36(3), 548-568. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2014.955461>
- Le, C. V. (2014). Great expectations: The TESOL practicum as a professional learning experience. *TESOL Journal*, 5(2), 199-224. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.103>
- Marginson, S. (2011). Higher education in East Asia and Singapore: rise of the Confucian Model. *Higher Education*, 61(5), 587-611. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-010-9384-9>
- McLennan, B., McIlveen, P., & Perera, H. N. (2017). Pre-service teachers' self-efficacy mediates the relationship between career adaptability and career optimism. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 63(2017), 176-185. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.12.022>
- Mukeredzi, T. G. (2016). The “Journey to Becoming”: Pre-Service Teachers’ Experiences and Understandings of Rural School Practicum in a South African Context. *Global Education Review*, 3(1), 88-107.
- Pearce, J., & Morrison, C. (2011). Teacher Identity and Early Career Resilience: Exploring the Links. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 36(1), 48-59. <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2011v36n1.4>
- Pham, T. H. T. (2010). Implementing a Student-Centered Learning Approach at Vietnamese Higher Education Institutions: Barriers under layers of casual layered analysis. *Journal of Futures Studies*, 15(1), 21-38.
- Salazar Noguera, J., & McCluskey, K. (2017). A case study of early career secondary teachers’ perceptions of their preparedness for teaching: lessons from Australia and Spain. *Teacher Development*, 21(1), 101-117. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13664530.2016.1204353>
- Taylor, S., & Littleton, K. (2006). Biographies in talk: A narrative-discursive research approach. *Qualitative Sociology Review*, 2(1), 22-38.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge university press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511803932>
- Wenger, E. (2010). Communities of Practice and Social Learning Systems: the Career of a Concept. In C. Blackmore (Ed.), *Social Learning Systems and Communities of Practice* (pp. 179-198). London: Springer London. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-84996-133-2\\_11](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-84996-133-2_11)
- Yuan, E. R. (2016). The dark side of mentoring on pre-service language teachers' identity formation. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 55, 188-197. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.01.012>
- Yuan, R., & Lee, I. (2014). Pre-service teachers' changing beliefs in the teaching practicum: Three cases in an EFL context. *System*, 44(2014), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2014.02.002>

## Acknowledgements

The authors acknowledge the preservice teachers’ willing participation in this research project. We appreciate the thoughtful comments and advice on earlier drafts from the Editorial Board and the anonymous reviewers. Our gratitude is to all who have supported us with the project.