The Complexity of Teacher Identity: Perceptions of Pre-Service Teachers

Yune Tran[1] & Amy Dee[2]

[1] Providence College, USA

[2] George Fox University, USA

Correspondence: Yune Tran, Providence College, USA.

Abstract

Teacher identity is complex, dynamic, ongoing, and worthy of examination. This study examined the perceptions of preservice teachers' personal identity (e.g., gender, race, religious background, etc.) and how they influence preservice teachers' professional identity as a subject, pedagogical, and professional expert. Participants (N = 81) were preservice teachers from two different Christian-based institutions, one in Canada and one in the United States, who were completing the requirements for initial licensure. Findings from a survey measured the preservice teachers' perceptions based on two scales examining personal and professional identity. Results suggested that preservice teachers did not perceive race as impacting their personal identity as a teacher, nor did they perceive religion as an influence on their professional identity, even though they had chosen Christian institutions. However, preservice teachers did perceive teacher preparation as impacting their understanding of professionalism as they transitioned from learner to teacher in the field.

1. Introduction

Even with ongoing attempts to diversify, the U.S. teaching population has stayed relatively homogenous with most teachers mirroring the identities that reflect female, White European-American, and middle-class backgrounds. (Loewus, 2017; Howard, 2010). While teacher education research has focused on a variety of related topics such as self-identity, teacher development, and knowledge related to the content, pedagogy, and the profession, there have been other studies that have encompassed teachers' professional identity and its influence in the classroom (Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermont, 2000). As preservice teachers prepare for the field, they begin shifting their identities as they move through coursework, student teaching practicum, and finally, assume new roles in today's challenging classroom environments. Thus, given the complexity of the profession and the role that identity plays both internally and externally, or personally and professionally, it is no surprise that the concept of teacher identity has populated the research (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Carinus et al., 2012). However, few studies exist regarding the role of preservice teachers' personal identities and the relationship to professional identities, generally. This research is further lacking with preservice teachers who attend religious-based institutions. Christian institutions largely exist to provide both spiritual and intellectual growth for students; therefore, it stands to reason that a personal faith identity and a professional career identity should be mutually informative, and of great interest to such institutions with missions centered on faith development.

Personal identity is related to the individual characteristics that one gives to the self (e.g., gender, race, religion, etc.) (Stryker, 2007) whereas professional (teacher) identity is interpreted in terms of individual perceptions of themselves as a teacher and the teacher they hope to become (Canrinus, 2011). Given the possible interconnectedness between personal and professional identity within the process of teacher development, there is a continuing need for research within these dimensions. This study explored whether perceptions of preservice teachers' personal identity (e.g., personal and social factors such as gender, race, age, economic status, and religious background) influence their professional identity. The research examined: 1) What perceptions of personal and professional identity exist for teacher candidates at religious-based institutions? 2) How do teacher candidates' personal identities intersect with their perceptions of professional identities? 3) How do teacher candidates define their role as a professional after completing their preparation experience?

2. Theoretical Perspectives

We situate the research within the work of Stryker's (2007) and Mead's (1934) structural symbolic interactionism framework whereby personal identity develops in social settings. Furthermore, identity theory originated from the structure and explains how one acts, thus defining the self, through role choice behavior. Identity theory suggested that social interactions, within various situations, and the resulting interpretations ultimately shape the self. Stryker (2007) contended that identity, as a construct, is used in various contexts and each may hold distinctive definitions of identity. From sociology and psychology, the concept of identity development has found a place of prominence in teacher development and served as a way of viewing oneself as a professional teacher (Murphey, 1998).

3. Literature Review

Identity is a difficult concept to describe definitively and objectively. Complicated by Erikson's (1968) stages of development, personal identity is ever an evolving and dynamic process. The same principle applies to the concept of professional identity. Teacher identity, specifically, then becomes enigmatic and assumes various definitions, thus, providing a compelling subject for study. Two meta-analyses have focused on the descriptions of professional identity and methods used to analyze identity development as multivariate and dynamic (Izadinia, 2013; Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). Moreover, these studies highlighted the importance of continued inquiry into meaning, application, and research.

Of particular interest, Hoffman-Kipp (2008) recognized that a traditional definition of identity is ascending from structural symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934; Stryker, 2002) or social interactions, thereby defining teacher identity as the junction of personal, pedagogical, and political realms. The process by which teachers reflect upon those factors within a social context leads to the realization of identity. Hoffman-Kipp (2008) expounded that identity includes a conglomerate of values, experiences, beliefs, community, family, and personal narratives that intersect with the professional understandings gained in educator preparation programs and professional practice.

3.1 Identity and Christian Institutions

Given Hoffman-Kipp's (2008) definition, other research continued the studies of identity formation in preservice teachers. De Kock (2009) studied teachers in Dutch Protestant Schools to explore how ideological identity manifests when dealing with educational change and found that teachers identified with the school's denomination as a type of social group. However, within that group, they may have different experiences that shape their professional approaches and decisions. In contrast, Blumenfeld and Jaekel (2012) studied preservice teachers who identified as Christians and were enrolled in a teacher education program in a public university in the United States. Their objective was to determine preservice teacher consciousness with the concept of Christian privilege. Given the acceptance of ideology as a factor in identity, it stands to reason that it would emerge as a primary awareness for participants, but the researchers found that the majority of those interviewed were unaware of Christian privilege. The research not only highlighted the lack of understanding of the privileges associated with mainstream ideology, but the ongoing need to investigate how that identity manifests in professional identity and professional practice.

According to Abelman and Dalessandro (2009), 100% of the Christian Institutions studied had either a Christ-centered mission or vision statement defining their Christian Identity in higher education. Christian higher education diverges from secular institutions with the integration of faith and learning. Notwithstanding that the definition of faith and learning integration, like identity, is multifaceted and somewhat elusive, some made the case for addressing the topic as if it were a conclusive and definitive concept (Wolterstorff, 1980). Regardless, in the public sector, faith and learning remain, on the surface, segregated. Christian scholars at non-secular institutions must wrestle with semantics, theology, and pedagogy when attempting to define how, when, and where this integration takes place (Ream & Glazner, 2007), in addition to the task of identifying, measuring, and assessing faith and learning integration as part of the institutional mission. Identities as Christian professors are one place that faith learning integration occurs (Sherr, Huff, & Curran, 2007; Lawrence, Burton, & Nwosu, 2005) and it seems to reason, that it manifests in the identity of students as well, but the literature on Christian identity as related to professional identity after graduation remains sparse.

A Christian university stands as an intermediary for culture and faith. While not exactly formidable, the position of religious institutions to perpetuate faith, or in some cases, a particular denomination, has declined (Benne, 2001; Burtchaell, 1998). Buckley's (2007) work addressed the conflicts between the Catholic Church and its universities, conflicts that are largely the same as those within the denominations in Burtchaell's study. Internal conflicts and the separation of the academic life from the spiritual life seem to form the pattern and cause,

historically, Christian universities to sever ties from denominations. That said, Glassford (2003) spoke of instructing, modeling, training, and discerning in terms of teaching in a kingdom context but was uncertain of the lasting implications of that approach to professional development. Nonetheless, we do know that spiritual development and outcomes according to the work of Bowman and Small (2010) remain an important part of the college experience.

While spiritual development may exist as central to Christian institutions, little research links the personal to the professional. Rogers and Love (2007) studied graduate students to determine the degree of spiritual development in their College Student Personnel program and found that faculty relationships are central to spiritual development, but the study did not address professional identification.

3.2 Relationship of Religion to Teacher Identity, Behavior, and Dispositions

Few studies have examined the role of religion and its impact on teacher identity. Teachers' professional practice impacts student learning; therefore, it is necessary to explore the role of teachers' professional identity and its influence on education and religion. Research by White (2009) examined the relationship between teachers' own conception of religion and the development and enactment of their professional teaching identities. The study argued the notion that teachers were only neutral agents between religion and education but articulated the explicit connections between teachers' identity with professional identity. The study categorized teacher identity in three ways: a) the way individuals "think about themselves as teachers, teaching as individualistic, and it is directly related to the way teachers view and enacts their practice, b) the individual's construction of self and extends how others define that person, and c) the dialogical nature of identity between self and others to include the influence of institutional contexts and constraints in how individuals define themselves.

White's (2009) study further analyzed the study of religion and teacher identity conceptualizing the interaction of public and private spaces and posits that various levels of change are involved in the identity of a teacher. Thus, the outermost levels of the environment and behavior are directly observed by others, whereas teachers' competencies lie beneath individual behaviors since they represent the potential for one's behavior and are determined by an individual's beliefs. The next level refers to the beliefs people have about themselves or their professional identities. White (2009) refers to one's deep personal values that are inextricably bound up in existence as the level of mission and suggested that religious experiences in relation to one's belief, purpose, prayer, and practice interplay with how one views the role as a professional. Thus, the study suggested that teachers need help in exploring how a core level of change such as religion can impact their identity formation as well as how certain institutional and governmental policies that relate to religion and school can affect their work as teachers.

On the other hand, some research found no relationship existed between one's religion and that of being a teacher. For example, Bryan and Revell (2011) conducted a study with 184 subjects at three universities in England and found that participants from all three universities had similar responses in that Christian student teachers did not mention their faith when questioned about their professional qualities of teaching. Furthermore, their research indicated that these emerging teachers felt that while faith may have been an important part of their personal identities, it was not linked to the professional identity or the qualities of a "good teacher" (Bryan & Revell, 2011). On the other hand, a few studies found some relationship between religion and the teaching profession. Anonymous (2016) investigated the interconnectedness of race, religion, culture, and identity of eight preservice teachers who attended a Christian university. Participants in the study alluded to their religious faith as having a significant factor in shaping their identity as they learned how to become a teacher. Findings suggested how religious practices and values of these preservice teachers supported their philosophy for teaching as well as using familiar experiences (e.g., prayer, church attendance, ministry work) to develop their behavior, attitudes, and dispositions as a teacher. Another study by Nelson (2010) explored the difficulty of separating religion and teacher identity, specifically with two public school teachers who were teaching in highly diverse public K-8 school environments. The two teachers had similar religious backgrounds which were derived from Christian Baptist upbringings. Both teachers embodied Christian beliefs and found it difficult to separate their religious identity from their professional duties in the classroom. One teacher, Jada, shared that being a Christian teacher in a public school allowed her to be more open about her religion with curriculum topics by taking ownership and embodying her own religious identity. While Jada understood that as a public-school teacher, she could not proselytize others, she managed to focus on casual conversations about religion and not directly emphasize one over the other. The other teacher, Gwen, believed that not being able to mention religion or talk about it in the classroom proved to be more destructive. Gwen believed that students and teachers were more comfortable when they can associate with others who shared similar religious views as she stated,

There are quite a few people here that pray, that go to church, that believe in God-they may not be Baptist-and who know what I do also. So, there's more freedom to talk, to just say things to each other, like 'pray for me' or 'I'm praying that…' and use religious terms like that. I think that when you come out and it's not this big secret, then everybody feels more comfortable and they come out too (p. 344).

3.3 Professional Identity

Regarding the teaching domain, teacher identity has included student-teacher development, the teaching of subject matter, and pedagogical knowledge. Scholars have noted that teacher identity is often interchanged with professional identity and involves the integration of both personal and professional identities influenced by what teachers have determined as essential based on their experiences in practice along with personal backgrounds (Beijaard et al., 2004; Pennington & Richards, 2016). Komba, Anangisye and Katabaro (2013) also emphasized that within a teaching context, professional identity includes expertise in one's content area, moral integrity, and expertise in didactical terms derived from contextual factors such as family, personal background, apprenticeship, and teaching traditions (Beijaard et al., 2004; Zare-ee & Ghasedi, 2014). After analyzing case studies of eight early-career English teachers in an urban school, Hsieh's study (2010) defined a teacher's professional identity as the beliefs, values, and commitments that allow a teacher to identity both as a teacher and as being a particular type of "teacher." The analysis of these eight teachers suggested three main factors that influence how teachers construct their identity which included their personal experiences as student teachers, practice-based and classroom-related factors such as subject matter, curriculum, instructional planning, classroom goals, and external discourse (e.g., theories and policies) related to teaching and learning. While all these factors played a role, several teachers were oriented towards a particular set of factors in developing their professional identities. Thus, teachers who constructed their identity around individual factors were considered individually-oriented, those who emphasized classroom practice were considered classroom-oriented, and finally, those who had a clear sense of external discourse regarding teaching and learning and how they might affect those practices were considered dialogically-oriented. The data in the study indicated there was a predominance of dialogically based interactions.

Oruc's study (2013) used the concept of teacher identity synonymously with teacher professional identity (TPI) and specified that TPI formation is influenced by many factors and conditions inside and outside of the classroom. Factors inside the classroom included one's self-efficacy for being successful and how successful students believe the teacher is. Factors outside the classroom included whether the teacher has a family or whether the teacher has a second job. Also, other factors include a teacher's attitude, beliefs, mindset, etc. These factors along with how teachers define their roles which could vary according to the various interactions they have with their students, parents, colleagues, administrators, and the wider community can affect their TPI formation (Zare-ee & Ghasedi, 2014; Zhou et al., 2013). Other authors have emphasized that since TPI is not fixed, it is often negotiated through experience (Clarke, Hyde, & Drennan, 2013; Oruc, 2013; Pennington & Richards, 2016; Zare-ee & Ghasedi, 2014). In addition, past experiences affect teacher identity and their pedagogical choices which influence their instructional practice (Keiler, 2018).

A study conducted by Tateo (2012) posited a psychological dimension to TPI suggesting that teachers develop a self-image that included reasons for them entering and staying in the field as well as shaping their future vision given an appreciation of their personal performance in the field. Thus, TPI theory considers the individual, intrapersonal, and cultural levels since professional identities are shaped by teachers' personal narratives that highlight values and are used to construct and maintain a sense of TPI. The study further emphasized the need for teacher training in helping teachers develop TPI since it helps with agency and educational practices. Rather than emphasizing "what is a teacher," many preparation programs focus on "how to teach" rather than "what is a teacher".

Studies on preservice teacher identity remain few. A study conducted by Timoštšuk and Ugaste (2010) on preservice teacher identity investigated how 45 students from the initial stages of teacher education understood and described their professional identity. The students completed semi-structured interviews and provided in-depth responses to questions based on Wenger's (1998) concept of learning. Such questions included a) How do you describe yourself as a teacher? How do others perceive/describe you as a teacher? b) What is intrinsic/non-intrinsic for you as a teacher? What do you like/don't you like about being a teacher? c) Please describe your professional "journey". What have you learned during this journey? What else would you like to learn? d) What other life roles do you have besides that of being a student teacher? and e) What do you manage to influence as a student teacher? What is your impact in your immediate environment, and in wider society? After coding the text units, the researchers categorized responses into four areas from Wenger's (1998) learning theory which resulted in *experiencing*, *doing*, *belonging*, and *learning*.

Experiencing category was the greatest as students noted the opportunities in the program to conduct lessons and deliver instruction as well as the application of skills to pass subject-related knowledge exams. In terms of doing, responses were geared toward the fear of future failure, anxiety with socioeconomic circumstances especially in terms of the need to work to support themselves during school, perceptions of the difficulty of a teacher's work, and the perception that the profession was of low prestige and poor salary. For belonging, students identified the importance of interpersonal relationships with families and friends while coping with their new role and were concerned about harmonizing their personal and professional lives, thus, meeting new people and the importance of cooperation with others in the school context (e.g., with pupils, schoolteachers, university teachers, and fellow students). Some students felt that they belonged in the teaching community; however, most expected acceptance into the community immediately and were treated as equal partners by their cooperating teachers. Students also expressed that they have experienced uncertainty during their teaching practice, thus, they felt that to overcome doubts or hesitations about the profession, they needed confidence and support from university supervisors. For learning, students generally connected with the sensing in one's behavior and described their failures or successes with specific contexts but without any mention of whether they had learned anything from that. The study emphasized that most students were unable to describe their teaching identity or practice. Students often used their emotions to describe experiences and that they perceived university teachers as role models who counted on them to enact pedagogic activities in lesson planning and delivery. As such, the study called attention to how supervisors can support discussions of teacher identity and the ways that initial teacher education can be restructured and organized to highlight important elements of teacher identity.

The studies point to the importance of TPI and the ways that teachers are expected to adopt knowledge, attitudes, and professional characteristics and develop a personal identity that encompasses these professional attributes. Given the interconnectedness between personal and professional identity within the process of teacher development, there is a continuing need for research within these dimensions. Furthermore, when Christian institutions espouse a Christ-centered education and professional preparation, faculty may anticipate the explicit role faith may take in professional identity formation. This study explored whether perceptions of preservice teachers' personal identity (e.g., personal and social factors such as gender, race, age, economic status, and religious background) influence their professional identity.

4. Methods & Data Sources

This study employed a mixed-methods approach given the benefits of integrating both quantitative and qualitative data to facilitate translation and interpretation (Creswell & Clark, 2017). Participants for this study were teacher candidates enrolled at two private institutions, one located in a suburban area of Portland, Oregon (Institution A, N = 41), and the other, in a large urban area of Toronto, Canada (Institution B, N = 40). Candidates in Institution A included students from the traditional undergraduate program completing a Bachelor of Science (B.S.) in Education with initial licensure (60-credit core with field experience) in multiple subjects for PK-5 settings and students completing the Master of Teaching (MAT) with initial licensure (36-credit core with field experience) in multiple subjects in elementary and middle school or single subject in high school. Program length varied across the formats to include the traditional four years of undergraduate coursework; 10.5 months for MAT full-time or up to 20 months for MAT part-time. Candidates in Institution B included students from a post-baccalaureate degree completing a 16-month Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) with certification in Primary/Junior (Kindergarten to Grade 3 and Grades 4 to 6) or Junior/Intermediate (Grades 4 to 6 and Grades 7 to 10 with a focus in one subject area), and Intermediate/Senior (Grades 7 to 10 and Grades 11 and 12 with two subject specialties) given the requirements from the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT).

These institutions were chosen given the common theme of preparing teacher candidates from a Christian faith-informed context to prepare students spiritually, academically, and professionally. Teacher candidates from both institutions had participated in a variety of foundational and content courses (e.g., curriculum design, language and literacy, classroom management, assessment, social justice and equity, math, and science, etc.) including several educational activities throughout their programs that embedded fieldwork several days of the week. The one notable difference that was apparent in coursework requirements was that candidates from Institution B had to complete a three-credit course with a choice between Christian perspectives in education or Catholic perspectives in education. Candidates at both institutions had the required full-time practicum experience. Thus, the study's focus was on preservice teachers who matriculated at both universities who were in their final stage of program completion and fulfilling practicum experiences for state and/or provincial certification during the spring semester of an academic year.

A survey instrument was used as the primary source of data. Eligible participants from each cohort of graduating preservice teachers received an email invitation to offer consent.

A total of 81 surveys were completed. The survey was developed by the authors but adopted several professional identity statements from the Dutch survey with items related to the teacher as a subject matter, pedagogical, and professional knowledge expert (Beijaard et al., 2000). For the professional category of the survey, the authors added statements related to teacher dispositions, character, and ways in which teachers interact with people and issues within their practice.

The final survey consisted of 20 total statements each on two scales related to personal identity and professional identity. Both scales were measured on a five-point *Likert* scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Four statements were allocated to each personal identity status (e.g., gender, age, religious background, race, and economic status) in which responses examined candidates' perceptions of how identity statuses applied during their preparation program. Several items from the personal identity scale were deleted during analysis since those items measured constructs of professional knowledge. The professional identity scale included seven statements each for perceptions of subject and pedagogical knowledge along with six statements on professional knowledge gained during the preparation program. Internal reliability scores from both surveys on the personal identity scale and the professional teacher identity scale were reached using Cronbach's alpha. Demographic information (e.g., gender, race, religion, etc.) was included in the survey with an option in each question to decline specific criteria.

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze demographic data and mean scores from the survey revealed the lowest and highest self-rated items according to statements of personal or professional identity. Inferential statistics were employed in STATA to find whether any correlations existed. Three open-ended questions asked participants to focus on their understanding of what it means to be a subject, pedagogical, and professional expert because of their learning in the programs. Using an inductive coding method, responses were coded using in vivo codes (Creswell, 2013, Patton, 2015) taken directly from participants' comments to the responses. Codes were applied to keywords, chunks of text, and phrases from participants' responses to the open-ended questions. After collating the data into groups identified by the code, initial analysis yielded a longer list of codes that reflected recurring themes. Codes were then grouped based on emerged themes for the three large categories for candidates' understanding of a content, pedagogical, and professional expert.

5. Findings

Candidate demographics (N = 81) from the highest self-identification categories included: (a) gender—78% female, 20% male; (b) age—35% between 20−24 years old, 34% between 25−29 years old, and 30% between 30−34 years old; (c) ethnic/racial background—61% White/Anglo, 13% Asian/Pacific Islander, 6% Hispanic/Latino; (d) religious background—80% Christian, 9% without any religious affiliation; and (e) economic status—27% upper-middle-class, 42% middle-class, 20% lower-middle, and 10% decline to identify. Candidates' practicum experiences included 38% urban, 47% suburban, and 15% rural settings. The types of licenses or certification for all candidates included 38% multiple subjects, 30% primary/junior, 39% single subject (which may include primary/junior), 23% English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) or Teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), and 13% Special Education. The following are tables of mean scores for candidates' perceptions of personal and professional identity.

Table 1. Perceptions of personal identity

Perceptions of Personal Identity (N = 81)	
G = Gender; R = Religion; E = Ethnicity/Race; A = Age; C = Class/Economic Status	
Perception Statement	Mean Score
My gender has influenced my ability to develop as a teacher. (G)	3
Religion plays an important role for helping me be the best teacher I can be. (R)	3.53
I believe my economic status prepares me well to be a teacher. (C)	2.96
My confidence in developing as a teacher is influenced by my own racial identity. (E)	2.84
I believe that a teacher's age helps her/him be more effective. (A)	2.77
To develop fully as a teacher, I think it is important to be a member of a religious community. (R)	2.36
Important to my development as a teacher is being a particular age. (A)	2.44
I believe my family economic status influences my ability to teach. (C)	2.65
I believe that my preparation as a teacher is influenced by my racial heritage. (E)	2.43
The way I look at teaching is determined by the way I belong to a religious community. (R)	2.7
My age allows me to develop knowledge and skills that are critical to the profession. (A)	3.3
My knowledge of becoming a teacher is influenced by the gender of my past teachers. (G)	2.51
Important to my development as a teacher is being from a particular economic background. (C)	2.36
I believe that my strengths as a teacher comes with my age. (A)	2.85
My racial identity is important to how I see myself as a teacher. (E)	2.57
The norms and values I bring to the profession is characterized by my religious identity. (R)	3.26
My economic status allows me to relate to my students. (C)	2.8

As indicated in the personal identity scale in Table 1, the lowest mean averages included perceptions related to the teacher belonging to a religious group (2.36) and attitudes related to the economic background (2.36) whereas the highest mean averages included attitudes related to one's religion as an important role for teaching (3.53) and one's age in supporting knowledge and skills for teaching (3.3).

Table 2. Perceptions of professional teacher identity

Perceptions of Professional Teacher Identity (N = 81)	
S = Subject Knowledge; P = Pedagogical Knowledge; PF = Professional Knowledge	
Perception Statement	Mean Score
It is important to plan lessons where students have interaction with each other. (P)	4.63
In preparing my lessons, I pay a lot of attention to how students are learning the content. (S)	4.53
It is important as a professional to advocate for individual students' needs. (PF)	4.72
The subject(s) I studied has been a deciding factor for my choice for the teaching profession. (S)	3.53
I am conscious about creating good relationships with students. (P)	4.73
It is important to continually serve my school community as a professional. (PF)	4.52
I have a good subject knowledge for my work as a teacher. (S)	4.26
I want students to show me that they are learning the content. (S)	4.52
I use background knowledge of students to plan my lessons. (P)	4.42
I believe that ethical conduct is critical outside the classroom. (PF)	4.52
It is very important to me that students learn the content. (S)	4.42
If I notice a problem in how students are learning, I try to do something about it. (P)	4.64
I support my lessons with as many strategies and tools possible. (P)	4.49
I believe that communication and engagement with families is necessary in my role as a professional. (PF)	4.51
I appreciate discussions with other peers that are oriented around subject-related content. (S)	4.46
I create lessons so that students learn the content well. (S)	4.43
I regularly evaluate what students know and don't know in order to plan future lessons. (P)	4.35
I pay close attention to the identification of where students are in the learning process and adjust the lesson for learning. (PF)	4.42
I place a lot of value in planning lessons to meet students' different needs. (P)	4.47
I believe continued personal development influences my individual professional performance. (PF)	4.64

As indicated in the professional identity scale from Table 2, 19 of the 20 items had an average mean score of over four points except for one statement related to subject knowledge as a deciding factor for teaching. Items from pedagogical knowledge received the highest mean averages (4.73), followed by professional knowledge (4.64), and ending with subject knowledge (3.53).

A comparison of means showed differences in attitudes of religious and economic backgrounds influencing personal identities between the two institutions. The following tables compared the mean averages between the two institutions with candidates' perceptions of personal identity regarding their religious background (Table 3) and economic status (Table 4).

Table 3. Comparison of two institutions on perceptions of religious background

Comparison of Two Institutions on Perceptions of Religious Background (N = 81)		
Perception Statement	Institution A Mean Score	Institution B Mean Score
Religion plays an important role for helping me be the best teacher I can be.	3.44	3.63
To develop fully as a teacher, I think it is important to be a member of a religious community.	2.27	2.45
The way I look at teaching is determined by the way I belong to a religious community.	2.68	2.73
The norms and values I bring to the profession is characterized by my religious identity.	3.25	3.27

Table 4. Comparison of two institutions on perceptions of economic status

Comparison of Two Institutions on Perceptions of Economic Status (N = 81)		
Perception Statement	Institution A Mean Score	Institution B Mean Score
I believe my economic status prepares me well to be a teacher.	3.15	2.77
I believe my family economic status influences my ability to teach.	2.83	2.48
Important to my development as a teacher is being from a particular economic background.	2.49	2.23
My economic status allows me to relate to my students.	2.83	2.77

As indicated above, Table 3 showed candidates from Institution B rated themselves slightly higher than Institution A on attitudes of religious background whereas Table 4 showed candidates from Institution A rated themselves slightly higher than Institution B on attitudes of economic status.

Using a comparison of means, there were differences in attitudes of religious and economic backgrounds influencing personal identities based on the school locale where candidates were completing their practicum experiences. The following tables compared the mean averages of school locale (urban versus suburban) with candidates' perceptions of personal identity regarding their religious background (Table 5) and economic status (Table 6).

Table 5. Comparison of candidates' placement in school locale on perceptions of religious background

Comparison of Candidates' Placement in School Locale on Perceptions of Religious Background (N = 81)		
Perception Statement	Urban Placement Mean Score	Suburban Placement Mean Score
Religion plays an important role for helping me be the best teacher I can be.	3.74	3.55
To develop fully as a teacher, I think it is important to be a member of a religious community.	2.52	2.37
The way I look at teaching is determined by the way I belong to a religious community.	2.90	2.76
The norms and values I bring to the profession is characterized by my religious identity.	3.45	3.29

Table 6. Comparison of candidates' placement in school locale on perceptions of economic status

Comparison of Candidates' Placement in School Locale on Perceptions of Economic Status (N = 81)		
Perception Statement	Urban Mean Score	Suburban Mean Score
I believe my economic status prepares me well to be a teacher.	2.81	3.16
I believe my family economic status influences my ability to teach.	2.48	2.99
Important to my development as a teacher is being from a particular economic background.	2.42	2.42
My economic status allows me to relate to my students.	2.84	2.87

As indicated above, Table 5 showed candidates' mean scores that were slightly higher in urban settings for perceptions of religious background whereas Table 6 showed candidates' mean scores that were slightly higher in suburban settings for perceptions of economic status.

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Several themes emerged from open-ended responses. Topics that emerged almost immediately required analysis using axial coding as a secondary interpretation of the recognizable themes. Participants responded overwhelmingly that a subject expert has a solid background of content knowledge. Emerging themes for *content expert* were (a) various teaching methods for the subject and (b) a commitment to continued learning in the content area. Table 7 below included a selection of responses from participants in their understanding of a content expert.

Table 7. Candidates' responses related to their understanding of a content expert

Candidates' Responses Related to their Understanding of a Content Expert	
Various Teaching Methods	Commitment to learning the content
I have evolved from the traditional way of teaching where the lectures only. I have learned the constructionist way of teaching by involving students as equal contributors through asking questions and adding their voice to the class.	That I will be continually learning, reflecting, evaluating and keeping current.
I need to know the xx curriculum inside and out, be aware of the materials available to me for teaching, and be able to create separate lessons for students with IEP and use different strategies for D.I.	You can never be an expert. There is always room to improve and work towards that elusive aspect of an expert.
I hope to teach mathematics in the future, and I learned that as a "math expert", I must be knowledgeable in the subject area and prepared to teach my students in a variety of ways.	I am also a student, and I will continue to learn. I do not know everything, and I will not know the answers to all of my students' questions. However, as an expert, I know where to go to find these answers. As a teacher, I want my students to learn as much as they can, even if that means they become a more of a 'math expert' than myself.
I need to be aware of the content in the curriculum in order to make sure my students are learning what they need to learn. I also need to make sure that I am teaching my kids to the best of my ability and admitting when I do not know something but then going out and finding out those missing answers. However, I do believe this extends past the curriculum and we need to teach students things about of "academics".	That I continue to practice subject content in order to reach mastery and comfortability with a specific subject.
it is my responsibility to ensure that the learning is accessible to all of my students and to make them feel comfortable, so that they are able to fully be engaged.	I must know enough as a starting point to plan and prepare lessons. I believe strongly that I'm continuously learning, especially during planning and preparation.

For *pedagogical expert*, themes were: (c) teaching for inclusion, (d) teaching involves relevance and adapting to change, and (e) using a variety of teaching methods. Table 8 below included a selection of responses from participants in their understanding of a pedagogical expert.

Table 8. Candidates' responses related to their understanding of pedagogical expert

Candidates' Responses Related to their Understanding of Pedagogical Expert		
Teaching for inclusion	Teaching involves relevance and adapting to change	Using a variety of teaching methods
I must understand the diversity of each student and understand the struggles they face. I must steer away from bias and keep an open mind for open dialogue.	Keeping an open mind when teaching and always welcome new material in their classroom	I will find all necessary information and training to help the students succeed their school year and furthermore.
That I take into account each and every student's needs and teach based on their individual needs. It means I form strong and trusting relationships with each one of them which helps to nurture a safe learning	Children change adults as much as adults change them	I must attempt to develop my teaching skills and practices every year
I bring forth my knowledge of the subject and implement teaching and learning strategies that will ensure student achievement for all.	That I am in the mindset of looking to accompany learners, care for, and about them, and bring learning into life.	Being aware of different ways reaching students on an academic level as well as making the most out of all the resources that are available to me.
I need to be aware of different learning styles and that student have many different needs beyond academics, so it is important to look at the whole child.	I need to be in a continuous growth mindset of learning.	Exploring teaching methods that can help the students most effectively.
	Constantly learning and improving my practice to better serve my students and the community at hand.	I need to be creative and flexible in coming up with personal tools and strategies that best engage my students.
	I need to understand my own worldview in order to teach the content in a meaningful way.	Teaching using all the tools of my craft, so that my students are actively participating and learning.

For *professional expert*, candidates used the same terminology, simply responding to the definition that professionalism means behaving professionally. Only a subset of participants indicated themes related to (f) professional integrity and (g) ethical responsibility/accountability. Table 9 below included a selection of responses from participants regarding their understanding of a professional expert.

Table 9. Candidates' responses related to their understanding of professional expert

Candidates' Responses Related to their Understanding of Professional Expert	
Professional integrity	Ethical responsibility/accountability
Love, community, collaboration, modesty, Love and forgiveness	I am following applying all the OCT standards and its ethical conduct and beyond. Courtesy toward all members of the scholastic community is very important.
That I must be professional at all times. No matter who it may be with, whether it be peers, other teacher, administration of my students, I must also demonstrate a professional attitude and mindset.	I am accountable for my actions and behaviour inside and outside the school community. That I meet and continually maintain all professional standards.
I need to establish good relationships with everyone in my community	Follow the OCT standard of practice and ethical standards. Using my personal and religious beliefs as guidelines to be professional.
Conducting myself in a professional manner, and living up to the expectations of professionalism, even if it means standing up for what I believe is right.	As a professional expert it is my responsibility to embody the ethical standards and standards of practice for the teaching profession as determined by the OCT.
That I am held to a high standard to keep up to date on research relating to my field to best serve my students and the community. I am inclusive, considerate, professional, equitable, collegial, and provide a service that I believe in.	

6. Discussion

This study addresses several limitations which include the small sample size, the lack of resources for data collection, the inability to perform extensive statistical analysis, and the inability to control the environment given that the survey was administered toward the end of the participants' program rather than following participants throughout their program of study. In addition, the study was not able to broaden the sample size to include secular institutions and the inability to conduct interviews or classroom observations to gather in-depth qualitative data.

Despite the limitations, the study extends from limited research on the conceptualization of teacher identity with contextual factors of personal identity that can influence candidates' attitudes and beliefs in themselves, their teaching, and their professional role. The candidates from both institutions, one in the Pacific Northwest (Institution A) and one in Canada (Institution B) were surprisingly similar. As aforementioned, candidates from Institution B were required to complete the Christian or Catholic perspectives in education course as part of their preparation program; however, the slight increase in mean scores with attitudes of their religious background was still not significant. The reflective component of the course might explain why candidates scored only slightly higher than candidates from Institution A. Candidates from Institution A who were likely placed in suburban settings ranked the impact of economic influences on teaching slightly higher than candidates from Institution B.

On the personal identity scale, the lowest mean averages included perceptions related to the teacher belonging to a religious group (2.36) whereas the highest mean averages included attitudes related to one's religion as an important role for teaching (3.53). While teachers perceived their religion as important for their personal identity, the findings revealed that teacher preparation programs in Christian-based contexts do not influence candidates' beliefs that religion plays a role in professional identity. This parallels past research from Bryan and Revell (2011) who found from 184 participants that while individual faith was important to oneself, it was not influential in professional practice or carried out in teacher identity as being a good teacher. According to White (2009), this may explain why participants view religion as part of a personal characteristic and construction of self, but that influence does not extend to how they enact their instructional practice. Perhaps, for teachers to truly understand how their religion intersects in teaching practice, they may need explicit references within teacher preparation contexts (e.g., coursework, field experiences) so that they can explore, reflect, and contemplate on how individual aspects of religion are carried out in practice and distinctively part of their professional identity as a teacher. Additionally, the low overall mean average from the racial identity category (2.43−2.84) revealed that candidates from both institutions do not consider their race as impacting their personal identity as a teacher, thus, raising questions about an internalized understanding of institutional racism and White privilege.

Alternatively, these emerging teachers have separated their personal self and its corresponding identity from the professional identity and the public persona of a teacher along with its accompanying qualities and skills. In the professional identity scale, 19 of the 20 items had an average mean score of over four points except for one statement related to subject knowledge as a deciding factor for teaching. Items from pedagogical knowledge received the highest mean averages (4.73), followed by professional knowledge (4.64), and ending with subject knowledge (3.53). Hence, candidates likely perceived these programs exclusively as career and professional development opportunities.

Findings on the professional identity scale suggested that preparation programs have supported candidates' conception of teaching where the traditional teacher-centered roles have shifted toward more student-centered orientations, thus, changing instructional practice when needed. Current trends in pedagogy and a focus on student growth may account for this change. Preparation programs have supported candidates' understanding of professionalism for continued success in their development as teachers. While a comparison of means showed differences in attitudes of religious and economic backgrounds influencing personal identities between the two institutions and where candidates were completing their practicum experiences (See Tables 3 and 4), the homogeneous population of candidates from both institutions correspond to existing data and trends given that the majority of college education teacher preparation programs are dominated by female Caucasian students (Ramirez, Gonzalez-Galindo, & Roy, 2016), and especially in the United States where 79% of public school teachers identified as non-Hispanic White (NCES, 2019). This could explain why there were no correlations that were found between candidates' personal and professional identity scales.

Several themes emerged from open-ended questions. Topics that emerged almost immediately required analysis using axial coding as a secondary interpretation of the recognizable themes. Participants responded overwhelmingly that a subject expert has a solid background of content knowledge. Emerging themes for *content expert* were (a) various teaching methods for the subject and (b) a commitment to continued learning in the content area. For *pedagogical expert*, themes were: (c) teaching for inclusion, (d) teaching relevant content, and (e) using a variety of teaching methods. For *professional expert*, candidates used the same terminology, simply responding to the definition that professionalism means behaving professionally. Only a subset of participants indicated themes: (f) collegiality and (g) life-long learning suggesting that candidates did not have adequate teaching experience to articulate ideas, expectations, or characteristics of professional experts in the field.

The three knowledge areas contained overlap and not a signal area had unique qualities except for professionalism where participants alluded to ethical behavior and collegiality. Previous literature highlighted the ever-changing nature of teacher identity (Erikson, 1968; Watson, 2006). Candidates in this study ranked themselves lower in personal identity factors (e.g., religion; race) over professional praxis which they view as superseding the affective nature of teaching. These ratings support the convoluted definition of teacher identity from past conceptions that combine dimensions of personal backgrounds to professional experiences (Beijaard et al., 2004; Pennington & Richards, 2016) including the notion that teacher identity is not something that is fixed, but rather, negotiated through experience. Candidates' responses from the various teaching domains of content, pedagogical, and professional experts were considerably definitional suggesting that they had difficulty articulating how their personal identities shape their professional identities. This might be related to the nature that candidates have not had adequate experience as a practicing teacher and therefore had a harder time explaining the relationship between personal and professional identity.

Previous studies pointed to the importance of teacher identity and the ways that teachers are expected to adopt knowledge, attitudes, and professional characteristics (Zare-ee & Ghasedi, 2014; Zhou et al., 2013). Given the interconnectedness between personal and professional identity within the process of teacher identity development, there is a continuing need for research within these dimensions. The study suggests that teacher preparation programs should incorporate places in preparation experiences for preservice teachers that embed intentional reflection of personal and professional identities. Through reflective practice, candidates can be trained to think about themselves, how their personal identities are shaped, and how those influence teaching practice. In this way, candidates can understand that teacher identity is an active process that is continually changing from preparation experiences to professional spaces within various political, school, and classrooms environments.

7. Conclusion

This study began with the question of whether teacher candidates at religious institutions perceive a connection between their personal and professional identities. Unexpectedly, the findings revealed that teacher preparation programs in Christian-based contexts do not influence candidates' beliefs that religion plays a role in

professional identity. Furthermore, these emerging teachers have detached their personal selves from the professional identity and the public persona of a teacher. With candidates likely perceiving these teacher preparation programs exclusively as career development, religious-based institutions might be left wondering about the effectiveness of mission and purpose. This means that teacher candidates do not connect their personal identity with their professional identity which was the second research question. Regardless of these separate identities, these emerging teachers were able to address professional identity and its corresponding categories of content, pedagogical, and professional expertise with ease, thus, suggesting educator preparation programs in these institutions produce teachers with strong professional identities.

Regardless of the data collected in this study, the hope remains that religious-based institutions can still influence the spiritual and faith development of students. The same holds for secular institutions. Teacher preparation programs can ask students to examine what specific content means to them as humans with an ethical mandate, either as teachers who care about justice or as people of faith, to practice inclusion, teach to a standard, differentiate for diverse learners, or present content with which they do not agree. Such conversations add to the identity formation both at a personal and professional level for these emerging teachers. These discussions and questions about how content knowledge influence and touch the soul should cause students to unite the academic with the spiritual in ways that generate growth as students, as future teachers, and as humans. While religious-based institutions must prepare future teachers to teach in all settings and to serve as examples of excellence in practice, they must evaluate how, and if it is even appropriate in an inclusive professional preparation program, to also teach ways to incorporate personal faith identity into professional identity. If deemed appropriate, then they will likely need to grapple with the possibility of limiting applicants and thus the ability to elevate faith within professional settings.

Christian educators recognize that culture and faith can inform one another through deep questioning and a common identity. Because learning requires the assimilation of new knowledge through that already known when teachers identifying as Christian filter new content information through faith, and perhaps even including specific denominational teaching, integration of learning and faith naturally occurs. The spirited and active interaction between faith and professional identity could serve as a crux of the professional preparation programs at religious-based institutions if they are willing to limit, even if unintentionally, enrollment to those professing Christian beliefs. Otherwise, there exists a risk of marginalizing future education professionals who enroll in our excellent programs for professional development and not for spiritual development. The dilemma is not new. Many programs, to remain viable and profitable have abandoned their denominational connections (Burtchaell, 1998).

Ultimately, we see a disconnect between what Christian institutions believe has shaped their students, based on institutional mission, and what those students in teacher preparation programs consider as important professional identity factors based on the study outcomes. Perhaps they have merely done a good job of teaching the importance of the separation of church and state, or they don't influence students in ways in which they believe. Some would argue that Christian education remains paramount in the liberal arts or the core educational program, and that professional skills development remains focused on only proficiencies and professional dispositions that are void of personal ideologies. On the other hand, programs could integrate faith into professional development at a cost of perhaps explicit or implicit exclusion. Whatever it is or whatever is chosen, the results of this study indicate that the attempts at faith integration do not have a lasting influence on the professional identities of our graduates.

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