



Research Article

TEACHER IDENTITY THROUGH THE CREATIVE METHODOLOGY – A CASE IN NGUYEN TAT THANH UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents the findings of a qualitative research project to explore the emergence of teacher identity in Nguyen Tat Thanh University. Through a lantern making workshop at Nguyen Tat Thanh University in April 2019, the creative methodology offered six participants opportunities for “deepening reflection engagement and discussion. Multiplicity and continuity were identified as characteristics of the teacher identity. Based on the interviews, short essays and lanterns, the participants shared their thoughts, personal identity in relation with professional identity, teacher roles and the glowing moments in the development process. Moreover, the teachers also appreciated the experience of the creative methodology as lantern making in helping participants overcome the language barrier to share, explore and reform their teacher identity. The findings suggest some recommendation for using qualitative research in general to study the teacher identity. In particular, the creative methodology was a useful way to learn “hidden,” unspoken things and to offer people opportunities to reflect, engage and discuss deeper and link to personal identity.

Keywords: creative methodology; teacher identity; Nguyen Tat Thanh University

1. Introduction

Over the years, the two terms teacher identity and identity have been evolved. According to Ibarra (1999) and Schein (1978), teacher identity was first defined as “one’s professional self-concept based on attitudes, beliefs, values, experiences, and motives” or “in connection with situational expectations and external conditions regarding teachers’ work (Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop, 2004, p.110; Vahasantanen and Billett, 2008, p.37). In addition, as the policy changes over the time, the role of the teacher also merges (Swennen and Volman, 2019). However, the identity term seems very “vague and abstract” (Gaunlett, 2007, p.138) so it’s quite weary, self-conscious, or bored to present thoughts about our identity by verbal. Moreover, there are some things cannot be said and even it’s very difficult, painful and impossible to “put things into words” (Leitch, 2006, p.550). In order to overcome the limitation of language, creative methods provides a powerful tool

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for researchers engage “naturally with and understand more insightfully teachers’ lives as they act, reflect and develop in their complex social and cultural institutional contexts” (Leitch, 2006, p.550).

This study described research with higher education teachers by using a creative method called lantern making as a means of accessing, exploring and understanding various aspects such as “teachers’ past and present, their values, perceptions, feelings and the intentions that they may hold with regard to their professional” (Leitch, 2006). Six participants had opportunity and spent time in the “reflective process” to make pictures, visual images to show their information, ideas and reforming their own identity. In other words, this study was a process of embodied experimentation which focus on: (1) the experience of higher education teachers with creative method or lantern making; (2) and the teachers’ identity through creative activities.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Teacher Identity

There are a lot of previous studies related to terms of identity and teacher identity with various methodologies and wide-ranging themes. Among many studies from the 1970s up to now, teacher identity has been used in common terms such as “one’s professional self-concept”, “kind of person”, “a particular sort of person” (Ibarra, 1999, p.766; Gee, 2001, p.102; Walkington, 2005; Arvaja, 2016, p.394). Those terms have been used to describes the way that teachers build their own ideas of “how to be”, “how to act” and “how to understand” their work. Moreover, all of concepts always stressed that teacher identity based on attitudes, beliefs, values, experiences and motives “in a particular context” at a “particular time” (Gee, 2000, p.99). In general, according to Olsen (2008), teacher identity can be understood as a group of impacts and effects that teachers has had from situation they have experienced.

However, “teacher identity is not simply who teachers think they are” (Kress, 2011, p.8) or “just what makes every classroom ‘look’ different” (Walkington, 2005, p.63) and “teacher identity is hard to articulate, easily misunderstood and open to interpretation” (Olsen, 2008, p.4). “Ongoing process, unstable, shifting, changing and dynamic” have been common terms used to describe the nature of teacher identity construction (Rodgers and Scott, 2008, p.45; Zembylas, 2003, p.220). In other words, teachers continually shape and reshape their “professional identity” through their work by the interactions with the world (Swennen and Volman, 2019). Therefore, teacher identity can be seen as the dynamic result of “knowledge, goals and self-understanding” that is shaped by daily practice (Olsen, 2017). There are various factors involve to the ongoing process of teacher identity in previous researches such as motivation, commitment, work demands and social positioning. According to Ibarra (1999), the changes of work role would change the identity due to the demands of new skills, behaviors, attitudes and pattern of interactions. According to Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004) situation expectations and external conditions had relation with personal factors in the way teachers shape their identity and

understand “themselves as professionals”. Avalos and De Los Rios (2013, p.155) also pointed specific concepts including “motivation and commitment, work demands and satisfaction, self-efficacy, and perception of society’s views of teachers” that were very important to the teachers’ identity construction. In a systematic review of developing a teacher identity in higher education context, Van Lankveld et al. (2017) found five psychological processes that play important role in the teacher identity development: a sense of appreciation, a sense of connectedness, a sense of competence, a sense of commitment, and imagining a future career trajectory. Moreover, present and previous generation; other stakeholder groups (including researchers and policy makers) are the foundation that construct and reconstruct teacher identity (Swennen, and Volman, 2019).

2.2. Creative Methodology

As mentioned in Kara (2019, p.1), creative research method has been known as “visual, performative or arts based methods” that is very useful in many contexts such as “people who speak different language”, sensitive, emotive and personal topics. Gauntlett and Holzwarth (2006, p.85) presented creative research methods as a process that make participants taking time, using their hands, body as well as the mind and let them “generate interesting theories themselves”. Therefore they stated that “It’s not ‘just’ methodology – it’s all about how we gather and develop knowledge about the social world: the very heart of social science” (Gauntlett and Holzwarth, 2006, p.83). They argued that due to the variety in people thinking so by using their hands, it “leads to a deeper and more reflective engagement” (Gauntlett and Holzwarth, 2006, p.84). In other hand, Pink (2015) also suggested that it is the way to understand the world and how it is experienced, to learn “hidden”, unspoken things and to offer people opportunities to reflect, engage and discuss deeper. Therefore, this method link to personal identity and change in positive way.

In the book of “Creative explorations – new approaches to identities and audiences”, Gauntlett (2007) proposed “a visual and creative research” called Lego serious play to let participants spend time building up a “metaphorical model” to reflect their identities. This approach offered participants comfortable time to use their hands, as well as the mind and play with the Lego pieces until “conscious or previously-not-quite conscious ideas emerged in the formations of Lego shapes, figures and animals” (Gauntlett, 2007, p.136). Gauntlett (2007) presented that creative and visual methods provided a powerful alternative to let participants communicate with various kinds of information. In the other study of (Leitch, 2006), “creative narrative”, which combined arts-based methods with narrative inquiry was used to explore six female teachers’ identity. Through “artistic, visual images”, the researchers could captured teachers’ stories of their “past and present, their values, perceptions, feelings and the intentions that they may hold with regard to their professional and, indeed, personal lives” (Gauntlett, 2007, p.138). The findings implied that the arts-based research methods could be applied to overcome the barriers of language and “capture the meaning of lived experience in in more holistic ways” (Gauntlett, 2007, p.138).

By reviewing the previous studies, it can be concluded that creative activity is very useful to engage participant involvement and detachment process and offer opportunities for deeper reflection.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. The lantern making process and data collection

In the context of TNE project, the creative methodology was conducted through lantern making workshop. This workshop provided the researchers the opportunity to explore some of the initial data emerging from the survey using creative, qualitative methodologies to explore the experience of teachers with creative method and discover how people view their own identities. The workshop was conducted on 9th April 2019 with 18 participants who are teaching in higher education. The researchers had a detailed script for two-hour process as followings. Before the workshop, the researchers sent invitations for teachers at NTTU; prepared materials for lantern making (lanterns and non-representational crafting materials), introductory slides in English and Vietnamese and equipped the camera at the workshop room. After sending 10 invitations, we received 6 acceptant from the teachers of Faculty of Business Administration, Faculty of Pharmacy, Faculty of Foreign Languages and Department of political theory. On 9th April 2019, the workshop was facilitated by three members of NTTU team who introduced the project and the methods as well as the materials (as figure 1). After greeting and introduction session, the researchers turned the camera on to film and participants began the lantern making with 1.5 hours and concluded with walking intra-views to be recorded by participants on their own devices and shared with facilitator. After the workshop, the researchers collected all the “making” – lanterns/ intraview recordings submitted to store on one-drive shared file plus and stored on one-drive shared file plus. The participants also shared the projects team about their thinking, feeling through writing short essays.



Figure 1. The beginning of the workshop

In order to explore the experience and how participants reflect their identities, these was also used as questions to reflect upon during the walking intra-views although participants but **not** as a checklist:

- **Feeling:** How are you feeling about working with the materials? How did you feel before you started? How did you feel at different points in the process? What

feelings do you have about working in the space? What feelings did you have about working with the materials? Working with others?

- **Thinking:** What new thoughts, ideas, connections or observations did you make? What did you notice about what other people were doing? What sorts of conversations and interactions did you have? Are there any associations you make within your own experience? What memories are drawn upon and invoked?

- **Sensing:** how are your sense engaged? Which are most engaged and how does this influence the making you are doing – what do you hear, smell? How does the space (the room layout, objects in the room) interact with how you are working, what you're thinking about and what people are making?

- **Moving:** Be aware of the act of making itself for you and of the people around you. How are people moving around the room? Interacting with the materials? Making? Interacting with each other? Are there speeds/rhythms/ comfort/ discomforts during the workshop?

- **Making:** How do the materials themselves influence your thinking/ making? What about what others around you are doing? How do the interactions/ sharing of space/ ideas/ influence your own making? How does making connect with feeling/thinking/sensing/moving? Were all aspects of your making 'conscious'? What was the relationship between thinking and making? Did you make whilst you thought? Think before you made?

3.2. Data analysis

After the workshop, we conducted transcribed the recordings, analyzed the data from recordings, essays and the metaphor from the lanterns. The researcher responded to the data individually and then identifying our data ‘hotspots’ to consider what ‘glows’ in the data for the study and why these moments or incidents stand out for that (as Table 1).

Table 1. The hot spots findings

The hot spots which pulled out from the material (include quotes)	Explanation: - Why did this moment feel like an important one, why did it stand out or glow? - Why did it ‘snatch’ researchers’ attention or abduct researchers’ thinking?
By doing same kind activities, it help us find out our identities	It reminds me remember the term “entanglement” that we learn together. I understand that term deeply, that if we can make the participants join as a part of our study, we can explore and motivate them share their experience.
The world is beautiful because of different colors	In my education system, everything until now has not changed much. We still dare to

Let's creative, escape from "comfort zone" and maybe you will surprise with your potential	jump out the box, to overcome the framework. We still follow the traditional way, force our student reach the high score at all subjects...
Student can play a role in our class	I think about my job and my duty. How I can help my student can join as a part in my lesson.
Let people join in a few activities then linking to their objectives, their journeys, their lives will make them understand and explore themselves better	
"I'm not afraid that I can't not completed my lantern because I'll not receive the bad mark"	How we can make student feel comfortable and share their experience?
When I saw the lantern in the workshop, I have a little bit of nervous and pressure	I think about my job, the way that I face and be acquainted with new things.
So I thought the other people can do that, why I am not? No, I can do that because nothing is impossible	
First moment was a difficult moment because I could not express ideas to my students	I had the same feeling when I first came to teaching because when I received the job at the university, I told my boss that I would not be teaching the students.
If we want to teach the students well, we need to get student experience something	It make me thinking about my teaching activities. Instead of following the traditional way, going to class, open the laptop, ask student open notebook then talk continuously, I need to study and design more activities to get my students join and experience.
Painting is the way I remind about my dream and my job	I remember the time that all participants join the lantern making. All of them looked very comfortable to draw, to talk, to share their feelings. How can students be passionate in class? What should I do for my students? How to design those creative activities like lantern making or river journey?
Each lantern has its own meaning I can't imagine the outcomes which all white lanterns turn out beautiful	Each individual is different, the way they think influence on the products they made, it comes to a cause and effect relationship. Yes we talk about creativity and comfort in space and time but we are unconsciously shape ourselves to the set expectations of other internal and external factors.
Thinking and making has a tight relationship Comfortable is very important in creativity, especially in education	
The colorful materials also remind me of the journey that I spent before becoming an HE teacher	Creative method is actually the good way for us to reflect our journey

Besides using intraview recordings to analyze the data, the researchers also analyzed the images, pictures and lanterns to capture the participants' set of data, feelings and understand their own stories about their identity. Finally, the qualitative data from hot spots, lanterns and short essays were coded and analyzed into two chosen major themes. Regarding multiplicity, the sub-identities of teacher identity were explored. With continuity (referring 'ongoing process of construction'), the changes in emotions, thought and teacher's roles through the workshop was highlighted.

4. Findings and Discussion

The data analysis presented different views of teacher identity were shaped in higher education teachers during the workshop.

4.1. Multiplicity

The multiplicity of teacher identity was manifested in sub-identities including personal identity and different roles in addition to subject matter expert.

Firstly, the teacher's personal identity was expressed through the way of interacting with materials and creating lanterns. There are many differences from their lanterns, from the way they made and decorated but through those visual images, the researchers can engage "naturally with and understand more insightfully teachers' lives as they act, reflect and develop in their complex social and cultural institutional contexts" (Leitch, 2006, p.550) as followings stories. As a lecturer teaching marketing, while making lanterns, Teacher 1 remembered the time she worked as marketer in the printing industry with "the smell of printing ink was spreading into the air". So she drew pictures of PUMA and other colors to tell the story of her experiences before becoming a higher education teacher (as figure 2)

"The world is beautiful because of different colors" (teacher 1)

For her, activities in the classroom would not only be encapsulated in a pattern, such as forcing students to follow a framework or reach high scores, but also create glowing moments for them to explore and perceive the knowledge by themselves.



Figure 2. Teacher 1's lantern

Moreover, personality was also demonstrated by the way Teacher 2 made a very unique lantern.

“Should I pick up one white lantern frame and use the available materials to decorate as other members do? Then, I decided to “make a difference” by creating the lantern my own way” (Teacher 2)

After observing the materials that were prepared, she chose to “make a difference” for personal identity positioning (as figure 3). That individuality has shaped her own style in the classes she is in charge of and reflects the creativeness that she always create in her career.



Figure 3. Teacher 2's lantern

As a teacher teaching with the online learning method, Teacher 3 felt confused, worried when seeing the materials and white lanterns. After overcoming the initial obstacles and barriers, she looked relaxed to use paint brushes, water colors to reflect herself through the lantern. The image of “computer”, “a face of a happy teacher” seemed to be drawn unconscious, but really reflected the enthusiasm even though just via online method.

“I'm a teacher who teaching by e-learning, and I want to be a great and enthusiastic lectures” (Teacher 3)

Besides the personal identity, when experience with creative methodology like lantern making, teachers' identity was discovered through variety roles, not just a subject matter expert.

“By doing same kind activities, it help us find out our identities” (Teacher 1)

By using their hands, interacting with materials, the participants overcame the initial passive state, immersed in space, colleagues and colors to explore, express themselves. They really had a chance to experience an "entanglement" status to build the link with their role in the class. The participants no longer saw their primary role as being the ‘king’ or ‘queen’ of the classroom. Instead, they found that they would accomplish more if they adopted the role of educational guides, facilitators and co-learners.

“If we want to teach the students well, we need to get student experience something” (Teacher 2)

Thus, it can be seen that the identity of the teacher is not simply a subject matter expert who enter the lecture hall, open books and talk the concepts and definitions for many hours. Now, teachers' identities are more diverse and also more challenging in their roles of guiding, accompanying and inspiring students to participate, experience and accumulate knowledge. In other words, teachers' identity can expressed through many roles in class, sometimes they can play as IT consultant, designer of learning content, facilitator of learning, member of a learning team, mentor and co-learner (sharing with students as a fellow learner). But almost of our lectured shared that their role now focuses on guiding and inspiring students. They had a lot of thinking to remember the time making the lanterns. All of them looked comfortable to draw, to talk, to share their feelings so how they can make students be passionate in class.

“Comfortable is very important in creativity, especially in education” (Teacher 4)

4.2. *Continuity*

In relation of the notion of continuity of teacher identity, the study described the teacher identity as an ongoing process of construction. In other words, the lantern making activity reflected changes in emotions, thoughts and especially the answers to the question "who am I at this moment".

For all participants in this workshop, the first feeling came to them was “confused”, “surprised” and “nervous”. Even the researchers tried to introduce about the projects, the purposes, the activities that TNE projects conducted and some emergent themes from the survey, but six participant felt quite nervous with many questions such as “where I will begin?”, “How my lantern will be?” and “How I can start?”. As the results of previous and present educator generations, the policy makers (Swennen and Volman, 2019) so almost participants thought that everything would follow by basic way to get the data.

“I supposed that they are too basic ways to make your interview first. Secondly, they make some data and we use some software to do the research” (Teacher 1)

Then, overcoming the barriers at the beginning, all participants began to “entangle” and felt comfortable. Many sounds of whispering, panting, ideas and emotions surrounded us. Someone began to draw, cut; someone else wrote some words and the others painted the lantern with many beautiful colors. All of us together spent many emotions during the same time.

“If we continue to teach the student in tradition way like in the past my teachers usually go to the class and just focus to the books that just open the books and learn about the concept learn about the way to divide marketing activity it is like very boring” (Teacher 1)

“Student can play a role in our class” (Teacher 5)

By that way, something had changed in their identity. They found that instead of following the traditional way, going to class, open the laptop, ask student open notebook then talk continuously, they need to study and design more activities to get students join and experience.

Moreover, the research was applied creative research methodology but due to the impacts of traditional thinking so “creative” accidentally became a pressure for participants at the beginning. It had some conflict in thinking process because they’re not familiar with this term so they still need other factors to shape our creation.

“When I saw the lantern in the workshop, I have a little bit of nervous and pressure. I did not know how to do with this.” (Teacher 2)

“The work forces me to create” (Teacher 5)

One of members told that she was not confident with every creative activity because of bad memories in her childhood. She spent lots time at the beginning to decide what she should do to complete a lantern. With the first lantern, she just used brush to write her thinking. But with the second one, she was more comfortable and confident to use color papers, crayon to decor her lantern. When the time was over, she absolutely felt happy with two lanterns. As Swennen and Volman (2019) mentioned, teachers continually shape and reshape their “professional identity” through their work by the interactions with the world. And by interactions with the creative method, the teachers had chance to reshape themselves by escaping from “comfort zone” to find potential of them.

“I can’t imagine the outcomes which all white lanterns turn out beautiful” (Teacher 6)

“I’m not afraid that I can’t not completed my lantern because I’ll not receive the bad mark” (Teacher 5)

Or “I realized something may be change my mind...let’s creative, escape from “comfort zone” and maybe you will surprise with your potential.” (Teacher 3)

It can be said that the transition from the pressure of creativity to the state of comfort, fear-free because of that low score is a clear reflection the nature of the teacher identity as “ongoing process, unstable, shifting, changing and dynamic” from the moment to moment and the context from context.

4.3. The experience of higher education teachers with creative method/ lantern making

Like previous studies of identity through “Lego serious play” (Gaunlett, 2007) or art-based narrative method (Leitch, 2006), through unknown, unconscious of creative process as lantern making, building up metaphorical models, the participants’ biographies were presented almost without their conscious awareness. In other words, creative and non-verbal activities allowed the participants can making some things meaning (or not) that presented themselves. Based on their perceptions of images and symbolization, each participants could “expressed the view in different ways and to differing degrees that” (Leitch, 2006, p.560) so creative method brought more “inherent potential for storying their identities” than ask them to generate a verbal account of identity.

“We called that time was the ticket to returning the childhood, to make us closer, to explore ourselves, to remember our journey to become higher education teacher” (Teacher 2)

“Painting is the way I remind about my dream and my job” (Teacher 1)

Similarity, when the participants prepared a visual presentation of identity- such as self-system pictures (Leitch, 2006) or metaphorical Lego model (Gaunlett, 2007), they had opportunities to take time to prepare something as a whole. For instance, when making the lanterns, six participants had time to thinking, to present their ideas, feelings and their stories in various way.

In conclusion, similar to the use of metaphorical images as in Gaunlett's study through Lego serious play or the use an arts-based creative narrative activities on research of Leitch, (2006), the creative method in general and the lantern making in particular enables teachers to "go beyond the descriptive and analytical to explore what called the 'deeper layers of meaning'" (Leitch, 2006, p.566) and was actually useful way to learn "hidden", unspoken things and to offer people opportunities to reflect, engage and discuss deeper and link to personal identity.

5. Conclusion

As Swennen and Volman (2019) study, teachers continually shape and reshape their "professional identity" through their work by the interactions with the world. In order to let the teachers having time to look back, explore themselves, and "generate interesting theories themselves", creative research methods is the suitable methodology to make participants taking time, using their hands, body as well as the mind. Especially, in the context of TNE project, the creative methodology was conducted to help participants which speak different languages overcome the language barriers and be more entangled, comfortable to express their thinking or feeling. More specifically, the lantern making workshop at Nguyen Tat Thanh University in April, 2019 actually provided six participants opportunities for "deepen reflection engagement and discussion" (Gauntlett and Holzwarth, 2006, p.90). Overcome the nervous, confused feelings at the beginning, the participants had a chance to reflect, rethink, and reformed their teacher identity in an unexpected way which happened very naturally. In other words, the participants have gone from very vague feelings to entangle moments to explore something. The utmost part of this activity was yet giving the participants the opportunity to stop and think but think of a glowing moment that had changed and shaped them to become a better teacher.

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**ĐẶC TÍNH CỦA GIẢNG VIÊN THÔNG QUA PHƯƠNG PHÁP NGHIÊN CỨU SÁNG TẠO
– TRƯỜNG HỢP NGHIÊN CỨU TẠI TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC NGUYỄN TẮT THÀNH***Trần Hoàng Cẩm Tú*, Lưu Nguyễn Đức Hạnh, Huỳnh Tân**Trường Đại học Nguyễn Tất Thành, Việt Nam***Tác giả liên hệ: Trần Hoàng Cẩm Tú – Email: thctu@ntt.edu.vn**Ngày nhận bài: 20-5-2020; ngày nhận bài sửa: 28-7-2020; ngày duyệt đăng: 25-02-2021***TÓM TẮT**

Bài viết trình bày kết quả nghiên cứu định tính nhỏ nhằm khám phá “đặc tính” của giảng viên tại Trường Đại học Nguyễn Tất Thành. Thông qua hoạt động “trang trí đèn lồng” tại Trường Đại học Nguyễn Tất Thành vào tháng 4 năm 2019, phương pháp sáng tạo đã mang đến cho sáu người tham gia – là những giảng viên đang công tác tại Trường Đại học Nguyễn Tất Thành – cơ hội hòa nhập để bày tỏ suy nghĩ hoặc cảm nhận về bản thân, nghề nghiệp cũng như những trải nghiệm đối với phương pháp sáng tạo. Kết quả nghiên cứu đã phân ánh tính đa dạng và liên tục khi mô tả về đặc tính của giáo viên. Thông qua các dữ liệu thu được từ các cuộc phỏng vấn, bài luận ngắn và các sản phẩm, các giảng viên đã chia sẻ những suy nghĩ, nhận định về bản thân trong mối liên hệ của một nhà giáo, các vai trò của họ đối với sinh viên, và những điểm sáng trong quá trình phát triển nghề nghiệp. Bên cạnh đó, giảng viên đánh giá rất cao những trải nghiệm họ có được thông qua phương pháp sáng tạo như hoạt động trang trí lồng đèn trong việc giúp những người tham gia vượt qua các rào cản về ngôn ngữ để hòa nhập, bày tỏ suy nghĩ hoặc cảm nhận của bản thân. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy nghiên cứu định tính nói chung được đánh giá cao trong việc nghiên cứu đặc tính của nhà giáo và nghiên cứu sáng tạo được xem là phương pháp thực sự hữu ích để giúp những người tham gia có thể diễn đạt những suy nghĩ khó diễn đạt thành lời trong hành trình xác định và định vị các đặc tính bản thân và nghề nghiệp.

Từ khóa: phương pháp sáng tạo; đặc tính giảng viên; Trường Đại học Nguyễn Tất Thành