

**Annotated bibliography on online teacher identity**  
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**Richardson, J., & Alsup, J. (2015). From the classroom to the keyboard: How seven teachers created their online teacher identities. *The International Review of Research In Open And Distributed Learning*, 16(1), 142-167.**  
**doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v16i1.1814>**

In this study, Richardson and Alsup (2015) investigated the professional identity construction of seven new online teachers from the US using qualitative interview method to explore “online teachers’ perceptions of their own identity as online instructors in college settings” (p. 146). They used Beijaard et. al.’s (2004) “four characteristics of teacher professional identity” identified earlier which are: a) “professional identity as an ongoing process of interpretation and re-interpretation of experiences,” b) “professional identity implying both person and context,” c) “a teacher’s professional identity consists of sub-identities that more or less harmonize,” d) “agency is an important element of professional identity” (p. 146). Their participants came from various backgrounds and were assigned to teach online courses for the first time by their institutions; six of the seven participants already had positive perceptions about teaching online. The participants expressed that their challenges were mainly related to interacting with the students, providing feedback, planning the lessons, and managing time.

Based on the findings, Richardson and Alsup (2015) argued that in an online teaching role compared to traditional one, the instructors must “re-design course content and re-think his or her teacher behaviors” (p. 153). They argued that online is more student-centered- therefore, teaching role and identity shifts in a different direction in an online setting. They also concluded that teaching online requires that teachers “re-think, or engage” in an internal “dialogue” with the various prejudices, or “beliefs” that are related to traditional teaching (p. 152). They contended that, to effectively teach online, teachers sometimes have to “deconstruct and re-build a traditional teacher identity or some traditional assumptions about effective teaching and learning” (p. 152). Initially, the participants in their study wanted to be the same teacher online as they were in their traditional classes. Later, they recognized that teaching online was different, and they shared their concerns regarding connecting and building relationship with the students in an online setting. To meet the challenges, they utilized “instructor videos, student-driven videos, and Skype” (Richardson & Alsup, 2015, p. 152).

**Baxter, J. (2012). The impact of professional learning on the teaching identities of higher education lecturers. *European Journal of Open, Distance and E-Learning*, 2012(2), 1-11.**  
**Retrieved from <http://oro.open.ac.uk/34717/>**

In this 3 year study based in Open University UK, Baxter (2012) qualitatively investigated how higher education distance learning teachers approached professional development and learning, and the “type of learning” that might be most impactful “in creating and sustaining an online teaching identity” (p. 1). She also investigated the “expressions of resistance discourse in the formation of online teaching identities” and its implications for professional development (p. 2). Phenomenological research methodology was used to interview twice 12 students working with a single faculty that was moving from blended to fully online teaching. The transcribed interviews were analyzed based on the research questions and professional identity framework.

The study identified several areas in which the participants were “attempting to find new online teaching identities” (p. 5). The first resistance was visible in grading the student papers,

where the teachers were concerned about grading students who they haven't met face to face. The teachers argued that it was difficult to grade students without knowing them much. To solve this, one participant browsed the Facebook group of the students, which helped him to understand the students' character a little. The teachers reported that it was difficult to get meaningful feedback from the students about their teaching to feel that they were doing a good job, the students' feedback felt very impersonal to them. The other area that was challenging to them was the facilitation of virtual group work and making sure that all students engaged in those group works. The participants felt that they did not facilitate the online group work as effectively as they did in face to face environments, which impacted their professional online teaching identity negatively. One participant mentioned that she felt like a beginner teacher again though she was an experienced face to face teacher, which "compromised an important part of her professional identity" (p. 6). The other area of their concern was conveying online presence through texts and visuals. To fill out the gap of body language in online contexts, the participants argued for the use of avatars. Baxter concluded that her findings indicated the "changing nature of professional teaching identities" and awareness among the participants of "the ways in which they present and manipulate these online identities" (p. 8). She argued that identifying the resistance discourse among teachers will allow us to ascertain the professional learning needs of teachers and to intervene accordingly to support their identity formation and development as teachers.

**Thanaraj, A. (2016). Making a transition: The development of academics' role and identity in online teaching, *Practitioner Research in Higher Education Journal*, 10(2), 40-53.**

Using semi-structured interviews and case study methodology, Thanaraj (2016) examined how three academics moved from being traditional teachers to online teachers and if their definition of themselves as academics changed in an online context. The participants, who had teaching experiences ranging from one year to twenty years, were interviewed three times – before they started teaching online, after the first year and 20 months after their online teaching. Thanaraj used Margaret Archer's (2000, 2003, 2012) reflexivity theory that proposes that "personal identities are created through the various internal conversations we have with ourselves" (Archer, 2003, as cited in Thanaraj, 2016, p. 41). Findings show that the teachers were nervous about the new teaching approach as they had four months to prepare themselves before teaching online. Participants 1 and 2 wanted to replicate classroom lectures in their online classes, whereas participant 3 recognized the need for change but did not know "what role she should adopt" (p. 45). The author states that the three participants "were challenged in recognizing [*sic*] their identity" in the online space (p. 45). After their first year of teaching online the participants reported to be "more confident and comfortable" (p. 45). Participant 3 reported to have made significant changes in her practices and approach, participant 2 reported to have realized that online teaching requires "knowledge and skills" beyond content knowledge (p. 45). Participant 1 reported to have benefitted from readings about good online teaching practices and from reflections. Participant 3 discussed how her identity was challenged from being an expert face to face teacher with authority in her subject area to be someone whose limited technological skills made it difficult for her to impart knowledge online. Participant 2 felt that in the online context, "her role was more of a learning space architect" (p. 46). Thanaraj concluded that the participants realized that their "role and identity changed significantly" while teaching online (p. 47). He also reported that after 20 months, participant 1 "described herself as a 'facilitator of learning,'" participant 2 "described himself as 'an instructor and manager of

discussions” and participant 3 “described herself as an ‘interaction facilitator’” (p. 47). Thanaraj concludes that though the three participants experienced challenges in the beginning, as they continued to involve in their new roles and examined the “expectations” of that role, they started “to develop new expertise, knowledge and skills for online teaching” (p. 50) and developed a new identity.

**Hurst, B. (2015). Making the move to online teaching: One reluctant professor’s informal self-study. *TechTrends*, 59(6), 35-40.**

Hurst (2015) used equivalency theory in her informal self-study to find out if “student outcomes and student perceptions of learning and enjoyment and learning” in her online classes were comparable to her F2F classes (p. 37). She examined her identity as an online teacher by comparing student works and student evaluations from 7 online and 7 face to face courses that she taught. Hurst reported that at first she had extremely negative perceptions about online classes and was very reluctant to teach online, because she believed that “social interactions” were most important in education and they do not take place in online contexts. She was also concerned if she would be able to “achieve the same goals” in online classes as she did in traditional classes (p. 36). After her first class she was surprised to see that the student quality and their work quality were good. She also received good evaluation from her students about their learning. She developed strategies to design her face to face classes as online ones and checked what activities and assignments could be used online. From her experiences and findings she posited that “based on the students’ perceptions and coursework, their learning and enjoyment of learning did not seem to be tied to whether I was in the room with them or not. But it did matter that I was there” (p. 39). She looked at this self-study as “a paradigm shift for herself” (p. 39). In terms of her professional identity, she concluded that she “did not have to change as a teacher just because the format of delivery changed,” for her, teaching online was “still teaching” (p. 39).

**Johnson, H., Ehrlich, S., Watts-Taffe, S., & Williams, C. (2014). Who am I here? Disrupted identities and gentle shifts when teaching in cyberspace. *Journal of Instructional Research*, 3, 43-54.**

Drawing on reflective case studies Johnson, Ehrlich, Watts-Taffe and Williams (2014) reported identity shifts among four faculty members at a US university who were learning to teach online. They argued that exploring online teacher identity “allows for a greater understanding of teachers’ relationships to the modality” (p. 43). Reflections, peer evaluations of course designs and informal notes were used as data, analyzing what the authors “identified four distinct identities” of themselves as online teachers (p. 45). Within their community of practice the four faculty members emerged as “the doubting perfectionist,” “the critical facilitator,” “the accessible pragmatist” and “the absent framer.” Paula, “the doubting perfectionist” who had 20 years of teaching experience in traditional classes, continuously felt the need to “make things right” and felt that she had become a student while learning to teach online (p. 45). Technology was a barrier in the beginning for her to be an efficient online teacher. Loreen, “the critical facilitator” acknowledged the importance of online classes, but had negative perceptions about those. She felt that online classes caused distance between the teacher and the students. She lacked skills in technology use as well to be effective as an online teacher. “The accessible pragmatist” Anna viewed online classes to be an “opportunity” as well as a “challenge” (p. 47). Anna moved from being an “observer of online teaching” to someone who achieved and

practiced new skills. The authors report that she experienced a shift in how she valued online classes, but “the overall value she placed on constructing meaningful and engaging learning experiences had not changed her identity as a teacher educator” (p. 47). Maggie, “the absent framer” had fairly good knowledge about online teaching learning and she was considered very tech-savvy by her colleagues. The authors note that her identity was connected to “her colleagues’ perceptions” (p. 48) and her “identity was grounded not in her teaching ability but rather in her expertise and facility with technologies that could be used for teaching online and developing online programs” (p. 48). She looked at online teaching to be “professionally fulfilling” (p. 48), and she gradually moved from being a “framer” to a “teacher” emphasizing more on the quality of teaching using technology. Based on their analysis, the authors conclude, “The continuum of our teaching identities replicated our stances toward technology” (p. 49).

**Comas-quinn, A. (2011). Learning to teach online or learning to become an online teacher: An exploration of teachers' experiences in a blended learning course. *ReCALL*, 23(3), 218-232. doi:10.1017/s0958344011000152**

Using surveys and interviews, Comas-quinn (2011) explored in what ways participants’ of a blended Spanish course valued “identity and notion of self” and how they learned to undertake their new roles as teachers of blended courses in a teacher training program (p. 4). The participants were required to teach the blended course by their institution and attended two mandatory hands on training sessions. Comas-quinn (2011) argued that online teachers need special skills and personalized trainings, not ‘one size fits all’ kind of professional development. The findings showed that the training sessions were more focused on the use of technologies and did not emphasize helping teachers to “reconsider their professional identities as teachers” in an online setting (p. 25). The author argued that such trainings should focus more on supporting the teachers as well as learners to re-conceptualize their new roles in an online environment and how they “co-construct understanding through synchronous and asynchronous online interactions” (p. 25). She contended that teacher identity is a concept that plays a central role in determining the success of professional training for online teachers. But such training programs often disregard the “understanding and transformation” of the learners, and become courses “about learning to teach online rather than learning to become an online teacher” (p. 26).