EXCERPT FROM:

Investigating Teachers' Identity Development in a Hybrid Course to Prepare Online Teachers

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Chapter 7: Implications and Conclusions

Introduction

In this concluding chapter I will provide an overview of my dissertation study, summarize the key findings regarding my two research questions, discuss the contribution of my study more generally to understanding online teacher identity and its development, and then share some recommendations for designing and implementing professional development for preparing online teachers. I will also discuss the study rigor and limitations of my study, and directions for future research. I will conclude this chapter with my final thoughts on and take-aways from this research experience.

Overview of the Dissertation Study

The ultimate purpose of my dissertation research was to provide recommendations for designing and implementing effective courses and programs to prepare online teachers. Therefore, the overarching question motivating my study was- *How can we positively affect the identity development of novice online teachers?* To answer this question, in this study I investigated the identity development of online teachers in a higher education course designed to prepare online teachers.

Research shows that because online education is growing fast, it is critical that we prepare competent online teachers to teach our students better. The literature on teacher identity suggests that supporting identity development also supports teachers' self-efficacy and competence (Beijaard, Verloop & Vermunt, 2000). Yet a review of the literature showed that not as much research is done on programs preparing online teachers and on the development of online teacher identity. Therefore, I expect that the findings from this study will help us find ways to support the identity development of online teachers in a professional development context. On a personal level, this study will also help me prepare myself to promote online education by supporting online teacher development in my own country, where online education seem to have potentials but is still in its infancy.

As a theoretical framework for this study, I chose to use identity theory as proposed by Gee (2000-2001) and explained and used by Luehmann (2007). Consistent with their definition of identity, in my study I focused on identifying *the kind of online teacher* each of my participants aspired to be and how that concept was influenced by specific experiences in the course. In particular, I was interested in exploring the opportunities for *participation* in activities and discourse about online teaching and for *recognition of that participation from self and others* (Gee, 2000-2001) offered to the participants, and how each participant utilized such opportunities.

My study context was a section of a 3 credit hybrid online course preparing online teachers offered at the Warner School of Education, attended by eight students, and where I was a Teaching Assistant. All but one of these students elected to participate in my study. They came from diverse backgrounds and various fields of specialization with various teaching experiences.

The research questions informing my dissertation research were:

Research Question #1: What kind of online teacher did each participant aspire to be at the end of the course, and how did it differ from where they started?

Research Question #2: How did the participants take on the opportunities for participation and recognition offered in the course to support their identity development?

In this qualitative study I adopted a case study approach for data collection and analysis because it would allow me to effectuate "understanding" that I expect to influence and contribute to improving "practice" (Merriam, 1998, p. 41).

The data for this study came from multiple sources: the participants' online posts and written assignments from the course, two semi structured interviews, other documents from the course and researcher memos. Utilizing these data and adopting a case study approach, I have produced individual cases for each of the seven participants (reported in Chapter 5) and a cross-case analysis (reported in Chapter 6).

Summary and Discussion of Key Findings

Research Question 1:

A. For all the participants, their online teacher identity was an integral part of their overall teacher identity – not a distinct identity.

One of the most significant findings of this study is that none of the participants looked at their online identity as separate from their teacher identity. Rather, because they saw teaching

online and face-to-face as complementary to each other, being an online teacher became a part of their overall teacher identity. While they recognized that teaching online might require somewhat different practices and training, they also believed that the fundamental principles of good teaching – such as developing a good relationship with one's students, providing opportunities for deep learning, backward design, providing informative and timely feedback on students' work, just to mention a few – cut across both modalities. And they strived to become the best teachers they could be in both online and face-to-face settings.

While this finding is consistent with the acknowledgement in the identity theory literature that identity is multifarious, it is interesting that most of the studies reported in Chapter 3 had instead tried to study online teacher identity as separate from "traditional" teacher identity, and in several cases reported a tension between the two – as for example, in the study by Baxter (2012) and Johnson, Ehrlich, Watts-Taffe and Williams (2014). In contrast, even the most experienced of my participants, who had been face-to-face teachers for over 10 years, felt that what they learned in the course to become an online teacher would enrich their face-to-face teaching as well. Based on the evidences reported in all the case narratives, it was clear that their own experiences as learners in EDE 484 − a hybrid course – as well as key readings in the course had profound effects on their perception of the complementary values of online and face-to-face teaching and learning. This also shows that the kind of training provided to novice online teachers will have powerful effects on their identity development.

B. **There was need for "repair work" for several of the participants.**

Five of my study participants had very negative prior experiences with online education; as a result, they had preconceived negative ideas about its effectiveness when they entered the course. The course had to offer some "repair work" for them and succeeded in doing so. Lupin, Peony, Laurel, Ren and Tulip all discussed in detail their prior experiences and how the course impacted changes in their perceptions.

This finding is consistent with the identity theory proposed by Gee (2000-2001) and advocated by Luehmann (2007) that discussed the need for repair work for developing a new identity, especially if that identity is *against the norm*. The course was trying to prepare online teachers with specific mindsets and skills which were different from their initial perception of what a typical online teacher should be like; therefore, the participants needed to be supported with what Gee called "repair work," and the course was designed to offer such experiences.

C. At the beginning, some participants were concerned about whether they could have the kind of close relationship with students that they valued, but by the end of the course this concern was resolved.

As they entered the course, most of the participants expressed their concerns about building close relationship with their students in an online class, since face-to-face meetings would be missing. But the data showed that their experiences in the course led all participants to realize that building close relationship with students is possible in online courses. They learned strategies and techniques to build relationship with their students in and online context. However, some participants still preferred a hybrid format as they felt that some face-to-face time would help them build relationships with students and create a learning community.

Some of the studies I reviewed also reported similar concerns among their participants, which got resolved for some but not for others. Therefore, it is worth looking into what this course did to achieve this result for all participants.

D. At the beginning, most participants were concerned about the effectiveness of online courses, but by the end of the course this concern was resolved for all participants.

Most of the participants entered the course with significant doubts about the effectiveness of online education, which resulted from their prior negative experiences with online classes. All of them reported to have experienced a positive change of perspective in this regard and started to believe that online education could be equally effective; one participant even said that she thought online education could be more effective than face-to-face. This change seemed to have been achieved as a result of their overall experiences as learners in the course, as well as from reading texts that reinforced their beliefs.

A few studies in the reviewed literature also reported negative perceptions about the effectiveness of online education among their participants, which resolved eventually.

E. At the beginning, several participants were concerned about their ability to master the technology needed to be a good online teacher, but by the end of the course all participants recognized that only a minimum of technology skills was needed to be the kind of online teachers they aspired to be.

This is one of the major findings of my study. The participants came to the class with concerns related to the use of technology and the adequacy of their knowledge and skills related to technology, but by the end of the course they all reported to have realized that though

technological skill is important for online classes, content and pedagogical knowledge, combined with best teaching practices are even more important for online classes to be successful. They consistently ranked technology skill less than the other items mentioned in the list during the pre-interview survey. Some of them thought that they needed to acquire more technology skills, but they did not show any fear of technology and wanted to keep learning. They did not consider technology skills to be a big challenge for them to be the kind of online teachers they aspired to be.

On the contrary, some of the studies in the literature I reviewed (Johnson, Ehrlich, Watts-Taffe & Williams, 2014; Thanaraj, 2016) reported their participants to have fear of technology; some of those participants thought they needed to be experts in technology to become online teachers, some others thought that technology was the biggest obstacle for them to become successful online teachers. Even an experienced face-to-face teacher started to doubt her competence as a teacher because of her lack of technology skills, and another person also found it challenging to teach effectively because of lack of technology knowledge. One study (Thanaraj, 2016) reported that one of the participants thought online teaching required more than content knowledge. There was just one participant in another study (Johnson, Ehrlich, Watts-Taffe & Williams, 2014) whose good technology skills made her feel competent. This indicates that the approach taken in this course had a significant impact and we should learn to address this common impediment.

F. **By the end of the course, all participants developed a much greater appreciation for the value of collaborating with other teachers, which became part of their identity as a professional.**

This is another interesting and unexpected finding of my study. All the participants developed greater appreciation for collaboration among colleagues which became a part of their professional identity. The Group Project experience mainly caused this result. Each participant talked highly of their experience in the Group Project, where they learned from the group members, appreciated the value of distributed expertise, felt more ready to take risks and appreciated dividing responsibilities among the members. They said they were able to create better products because of the collaboration and the support they received. As a result, they said, in the future they would like to collaborate with their colleagues when they design online courses since they thought it would allow them to have better ideas and better perspectives.

The studies I reviewed did not explicitly involve collaborative experiences, therefore, did not discuss *being collaborative* as a part of the participants' identity development as online teachers.

G. The participants expressed their preference for teaching hybrid online courses.

All the participants of my study reported to have a preference for hybrid online courses. While teachers might not always be able to choose the type of online courses they would teach, their preferences might have significant implications. Although all the participants of my study reported their belief that online courses could be equally effective as face-to-face courses, they expressed their inclination towards teaching hybrid online courses. For some of the participants it was because of their personal style of teaching, for others it was because they thought a hybrid course would allow them to benefit from the unique affordances of both online and face-to-face learning by allowing them to choose the best modality depending on the content and goal. This preference for hybrid courses might also have been influenced by the fact that they experienced a well-designed hybrid online course which they reported to have impacted them significantly in shaping the kind of online teachers they wanted to be, and to have become their model for future online teaching.

The studies I reviewed did not discuss any issues related to the participants' preference of a hybrid online course over a fully online one, as the participants in those studies only worked in fully online contexts.

H. For all participants, the kind of online teacher they wanted to be by the end of the course was very much in line with the online teacher identity the course aimed to support.

The course aimed at creating a specific type of online teachers, and the participants seemed to have achieved at various levels all the key components of being effective online teachers the course wanted them to achieve. This helped them to understand the kind of online teachers they wanted to be, how to enact the best practices, the challenges to enact those, and strategies to counter the challenges. It is evident that all the participants internalized to a great extent the key components of being effective online teachers the course had implicitly set as targets:

1. Recognizing the complementary value of online and face-to-face learning
2. Using online learning to increase access and promoting equity and social justice

3. Developing relationships with one's online students, and student-to-student

4. Increasing students' motivation and engagement by leveraging digital resources and tools

5. Promoting deep learning leveraging digital resources and tools

6. Promoting collaborative learning by leveraging digital resources and tools

7. Using technology to meet students' individual needs

8. Using good instructional design to design online instructional units

9. Developing effective assessments and providing valuable feedback to their students by leveraging digital resources and tools

10. Seeing technology as a tool to enhance students' learning, not as the goal.

None of the studies I reviewed in chapter 3 studied identity development in the context of an intervention; therefore, this study represents a new contribution to the literature.

I. **For some participants, their professional identity (as a TESOL teacher, special education teacher, counselor, instructional coach) impacted the kind of online teachers they wanted to be.**

Another important finding of my study is that the participants' identities as a counselor, special education teacher, TESOL teacher and others seem to have impacted the kind of online teachers they wanted to be. They had concerns and considerations related to their fields which they felt needed to be taken into account for becoming the kind of online teachers they aspired to be. For Ren, not having enough opportunities to teach online in his field of counseling brought challenges to implement the things he wanted to achieve as an online teacher; therefore, he decided to be an advocate for online education in his field. For Iris, a special education teacher, it was especially important to leverage the affordances of online learning for students with special needs. Instructional coach Lilac especially valued the flexibility that online professional development offerings would provide to working teachers, and therefore she was willing to learn how to teach online even though her personal preference continued to be face-to-face teaching. In his field of human development, Lupin thought a hybrid course would be more beneficial to ensure the opportunity for sharing perspectives immediately on complex theories. Tulip, a TESOL teacher, saw synchronous Zoom sessions to be useful for teaching speaking and she also thought online courses would create opportunity for her students to connect with native English speakers globally. The participants with an international background also shared concerns

specific to their country's situation about technology availability, as well as pre-conceived notions among people about the effectiveness of online education, class size, settings, cultural expectations which also impact the kind of online teachers they wanted to be and the kind of practices they could enact.

This finding is consistent with the idea of identity being multifarious (Danielewicz, 2001; Han 2017; Luehmann, 2007; Soreide 2006). Identity theory suggests that existing identities might impact individual's new identity development in a positive or negative way. However, none of the studies I reviewed addressed or discussed the implications of the fields of the participants in their identity development.

Research Question 2

J. The participants' *experiences as online learners* in the course were very impactful for their understanding of the kind of online teachers they wanted to be.

The opportunities created in the course for having *experiences as online learners* impacted the identity development of the participants most significantly. As stated by one of the participants, Ren, teachers teach the way "they were taught," so the learning experiences in the course created a lasting impact on the participants' understanding of the kind of online teachers they wanted to be. Each of the participants explicitly mentioned their appreciation for the course design and implementation, as well as the course teacher; and they mentioned that they would like to use the course and the teacher as their models for teaching online in future. They also contrasted their past bad online learning experiences with the current one and shared that they now had a better idea of what online courses should look like.

This finding confirms Luehmann's (2007) claim that *experiences as learners* are an important form of "participation" towards developing a teacher identity and an important complement to more obvious forms of participation involving teaching. My study context was unique and no other studies that I reviewed reported the impacts of *experiences as learners* on the online teacher identity development of the participants.

K. The *scaffolded experiences as online teachers* in the course were also very impactful to help participants confirm the kind of online teachers they wanted to be and gave them confidence that they could be it.

The course created opportunities for *scaffolded experiences as online teachers* in the group as well as Individual Projects. In the Group Project they worked in teams to design and

teach a module to their classmates, in the Individual Project (which followed the Group Project) they instead just designed (but did not implement) their own online module for a topic and audience of their choice. In the Group Project they received scaffolding from their teacher as well as from their group members; in the Individual Project they only received feedback from a thinking partner and from their teacher. These experiences allowed them to experience success, and the participants reported to have gained confidence and felt accomplished; they felt they were capable of teaching online. They recognized that the two projects allowed them to put into practice what they had learned throughout the course and acknowledged the value of doing the Group Project first.

This finding confirms the important role Gee (2000-2001) and Luehmann and Borasi's (2011) concept of participation plays on identity development. Luehmann and Borasi, referring to the work of Nasir and Hand (2004) also contended that participation activities might be especially conducive to identity work if they included distribution of expertise and receiving meaningful feedback, which was indeed the case in the Group Project.

L. All participants made good use of the many opportunities for reflections provided in the course as "recognition by self."

My study shows that the participants engaged in reflections throughout the course because of the opportunities created in the weekly journals and final reflections. They reflected on their experiences, their practices, on what worked and what did not, thus making sense of their *participation experiences* in the course. They also reflected on the course readings, which were chosen to invite the participants to make connections between the theories and best practices reported by experts in the field as well as their experiences – thus engaging in *professional discourse*. These critical reflections helped them make meaning out of their experiences and make sense of the kind of online teachers they wanted to be. Though none of the participants talked about the reflections as a means for self-recognition, and though they did not specifically say "this is the kind of online teacher I want to be," the reflections indeed provided them with rich opportunities for "recognition by self" as they started to see themselves as a specific kind of online teachers.

This finding supports Gee's (2000-2001) concept of "recognition by self" described in Luehmann (2007) and Luehmann and Borasi (2011) and how it can contribute to teachers' identity development – as discussed in detail earlier in chapters 2 and 6.

M. All participants made good use of the many opportunities for "recognition by others" provided in the course.

It is evident that the participants utilized the opportunities for interacting with and receiving feedback from their peers as a means of "recognition from peers" which had significant influence in their identity development. They interacted with and provided feedback to each other in the discussion boards, in the Group Project and in class – and in the course of these interactions, they agreed with each other, asked questions to each other, encouraged each other. In combination, all these worked as recognition for the kind of online teachers they wanted to be within the community of practice of the course, as participants validated each other's practices and identities.

The course also offered significant opportunities for recognition from the teacher, which influenced the participants' identity development. The teacher interacted with the participants constantly in class and via blackboard, and provided them feedback. All these interactions worked as recognition for the kind of online teachers they wanted to be, even if the participants did not explicitly talk about the teacher's feedback or interactions with her as a means of recognition for them as aspiring online teachers.

The importance of "recognition from others" (Gee's, 2000-2001; Luehmann & Borasi, 2011, Luehmann, 2007) for identity development is confirmed by this finding. Congruous to this finding, Luehmann and Tinelli's (2008) study also showed that, when their participants were given opportunities for interaction through blogging, it contributed significantly to their identity development as "reform minded science teachers."

N. The perceived *stigma* of online teaching in one's field negatively affected some participants, although it also turned some of them into advocates!

One of the surprising findings of this study is that almost all the participants reported to having felt some negativity and stigma surrounding online education in general, and specifically in their fields. Though in most cases this affected them negatively, by the end of the course all the participants reported to have found ways to deal with this challenge. In fact, recognizing the value and affordances of online education and its effectiveness, in spite of the negative perceptions about online teaching in their fields, convinced several of them to become advocates for online education.

Stigma surrounding online education was mentioned in the literature, but the studies I reviewed did not examine how stigma impacts online teachers. It is also worth noting that this stigma might act as a *negative recognition* from the field, in the spirit of Gee's identity theory.

Contributions to understanding online teacher identity and its development

In this section I will build on the findings related to my two research questions, as summarized above, to further discuss what new insights they may contribute about what constitutes *online teacher identity* and what may influence its development – and why it matters.

The following diagram identifies key factors that my empirical findings suggest to have contributed most to the online teacher identity of my participants, as well as influenced its development throughout the course. I have divided them in two groups: (a) "internal" factors and (b) "external" factors.
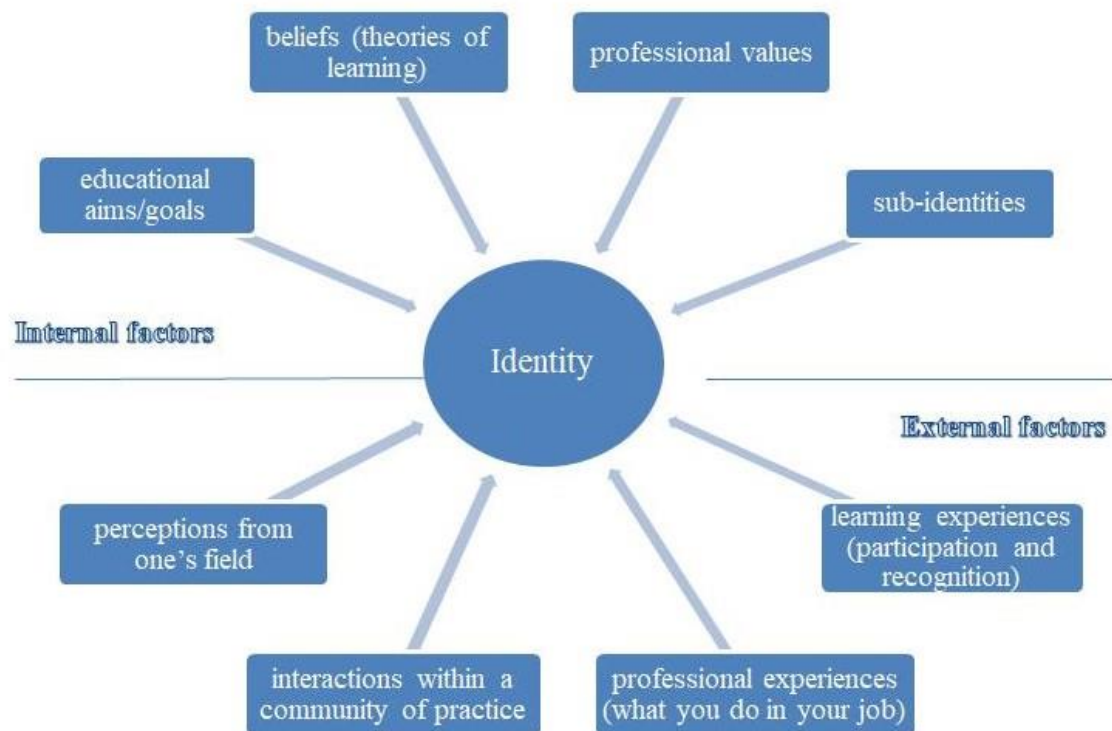

Figure 7.1: Factors contributing to online teacher identity

In what follows I will discuss in more detail what I have learned from my study about how each of these factors may impact the identity development of online teachers. It is my hope

that this additional analysis will contribute to a more *operational* and usable definition of what constitutes an *online teacher identity*, as well as to the identification of the types of experiences that may most influence online teacher identity development – and thus, courses or other interventions aiming to prepare high-quality online teachers should consider including.

Internal factors

a) *Lessons learned about how teachers' **educational goals/aims** may affect their approach to online teaching*

What teachers hold as their larger aims for education has a considerable impact on whether and why they may want (or not) to engage in online teaching in the first place. It will also affect what they will be most concerned about as online teachers, thus impacting the kind of decisions the teachers will make when teaching online; and what aspects of their online teaching practice they want to improve and thus are willing to spend effort on. Below I have reported some notable illustrations from my study that support this conclusion.

A concern for social justice – and, therefore, access to educational opportunities – was shared by most of my participants. Given this concern, once my participants realized that online courses could increase access, they became much more interested in providing this opportunity to students, even if this required them to make some compromise – such as overcoming their own discomfort with technology, or giving up the personal feeling of satisfaction they got from face-to-face interactions with their students. Valuing the access to education online courses could provide to all students, especially the most underprivileged ones, also led several of my participants to show concern about internet accessibility and other infrastructural facilities which might not be available to people everywhere in the world. It is also important to recognize the connection between this personal commitment of my study participants to social justice and the fact that social justice is one of the key values of the Warner School, the institution all these participants chose for their graduate study. Contributing to increasing equitable access to education through online teaching, therefore, may not be such a powerful motivating factor for students in other institutions.

Similarly, one of the participants showed a strong concern for providing educational opportunities that would help students compensate for specific disabilities– and saw online

learning as a way to achieve that goal by letting the students avail the time and flexibility affordances.

b) *Lessons learned about how teachers'* **beliefs about how people learn best** *may affect their approach to online teaching*

Whether teachers would teach online or not, as well as the kinds of practices they would strive to become proficient at as online teachers, seem to be impacted by teachers' beliefs and assumed theories about how people learn. The learning theories teachers assume are also likely to greatly impact many decisions they will make in their everyday online teaching practices.

For example, as mentioned earlier, the desire to establish a relationship with their students was also common to several participants of my study. As prior experiences or common perceptions made them question whether it was possible to establish close relationships with students in an online course, many of them initially expressed their reservations about wanting to teach online, as well as their effectiveness as online teachers. It was only after they personally experienced the course and realized it was not the case, that they more fully embraced teaching online as something they wanted to do and thought they could be good at. This value also led them to proactively search for ways to establish relationships with their students in an online environment – for example, by making use of synchronous sessions, posting video introductions of the instructor at the beginning of the course, or opting for a hybrid format whenever possible so as to have some opportunities to meet their students face-to-face.

Most participants of my study seemed to value the social aspects of learning – probably influenced by the social constructivist theories of learning they encountered not just in this course, but also in all of their other Warner School courses. Because of this belief, they looked for tools and strategies that would allow them to offer students opportunities to interact with their peers online. And once they realized – because of their own experiences as online learners in the course – that online could offer some unique opportunities for collaborative learning, some of which could even enhance what may take place face-to-face, it was a major turning point for them.

The participants also realized that establishing teacher to student relationship and student to student relationship could make students feel connected and create a sense of belonging that ultimately contributes to motivation since the students learn from each other as well as struggle together.

The importance of eliciting and building on students' prior knowledge (which is another core tenet of constructivist theories of learning) was another major take-away from the course for most participants, and it motivated them to explore ways to leverage online spaces to elicit students' prior knowledge (e.g. through journals if privacy was called for to encourage greater honesty and because of vulnerability, or discussion boards when students could benefit from what their classmates could contribute).

c) *Lessons learned about how teachers' **professional** values may affect their approach to online teaching*

The kind of things teachers value as professionals might also have a major impact on what types of practices they would like to engage in and what type of decisions they would make as online teachers.

For example, by the end of the course most participants stated that in future they would proactively seek opportunities to work with colleagues in designing instruction and to get their feedback on their online courses, which is often not the norm in today's schools and colleges. They wanted to do so because they believed that this would make their instructional unit and lessons stronger, especially in an online context that is less *forgiving* of poor planning than face-to-face instruction and where teachers may benefit from the product of multiple people creating instructional materials to support an agreed-upon design. It is worth noting that this appreciation was a direct result of their experiences in the Group Project and Individual Project, where they personally experienced the value of collaborating with colleagues in designing instruction.

The participants developed a similar appreciation for an iterative approach to instructional design involving multiple revisions, so as to achieve a better final product. Once again, they especially appreciated this practice in the context of online teaching, as in this case investing in a good plan and good online instructional materials may be critical to the success of the learning experience, and could also be beneficial in future offerings of the course, as well as being continuously improved upon after each implementation.

My study participants also recognized that being a teacher, especially an online teacher, required being a lifelong learner as well. They acknowledged that, as technology changes and new best practices are developed, their practice as online teachers will also need to change. Another factor requiring continuous change is responding to the needs of one's students. As a

result, my participants realized the need and value of continuing to learn new things to be more effective teachers for better student outcomes and were willing to commit to this practice.

It is also evident from the data that the participants of my study felt that they were a part of a community of practice (i.e., the teaching community in their field of specialization) which was especially reflected in the negative feelings some of them reported as a result of perceiving that their professional field did not value online learning ("stigma"). This might impact the teachers negatively; however, while my participants acknowledged the negativity surrounding online education in general and in their fields specifically, this did not impact them negatively and many of them even decided to be advocates for online education in their fields and in their own contexts.

d) *Lessons learned about how teachers' **existing sub-identities** may affect their approach to online teaching*

My study reinforced the key tenet, common in the identity theory literature, that a person's identity is the result of several sub-identities that coexist and interact with each other and sometimes may even be in conflict, thus causing tension. There were several illustrations, as already reported earlier in this chapter, that were consistent with this assumption – most notably the fact that each participant's field of specialization (i.e., counseling, TESOL, special education, etc.) affected the kind of field-specific learning goals the participants had for their students, and therefore, the kind of online activities they thought would be most valuable and appropriate for them. My participants were also affected by the pre-conceived notions regarding online teaching in their fields – especially when it was negative. The participants' nationality also impacted their evaluation of the opportunities and limitations of online learning and, thus, what they aspired to be and do as online teachers.

The data from this study, however, did not show any conflict between the participants' new identity as online teachers versus their previous identity as face-to-face teachers as reported in other studies in the literature; rather, all participants felt that being able to use technology and teach online was just another tool in their tool box.

External factors

e) *Lessons learned about **what kind of learning experiences** may affect the development of an online teacher identity*

Since my study took place in the context of a course preparing novice online teachers, it can provide valuable information about which of the many learning activities designed for the course seemed most impactful for the participants' identity development. Overall, my study supports Gee's claim that "all learning…requires identity work" (Gee, 2003, as cited in Luehmann & Borasi, 2011, p. 22), as indeed, the participants' desire and willingness to learn specific online teaching practices and tools was always grounded in an appreciation that doing so would help them realize their vision for the kind of online teachers they wanted to be.

The learning experiences in the course that most impacted the participants' identity development can be identified as follows:

- o *Readings* – whether it involved reading about research results or accounts of experiences involving online learning and teaching, learning theories and pedagogical approaches, and whether the documents read were traditional texts or multimedia products.
- o *Experiences as learners* – where the participants engaged with specific online teaching techniques and tools in the process of learning content related to the course.
- o *Experiences as teachers* – where participants took on the role of the teachers in designing and implementing online experiences in scaffolded and supported situations.
- o *Reflections* – where participants engaged in a number of different tasks designed to help them make sense of their experiences as learners and as teachers through a combination of shared reflections in journals and discussion boards, participating in in-class discussions and making connections with the readings.

It is worth noting that most of the course's *learning activities* included a combination of several of the above mentioned components. As a result, it was difficult to separate the effects of the "participation" versus "recognition" component of any one specific "learning activity" (following Gee's theory), or the experiencing vs. learning vs. doing identified in Wenger's (1998) theory. Rather, I would suggest that the strength of specific activities came from the combination and synergy among these complementary components.

f) *Lessons learned about **what kind of professional experiences** may affect the development of an online teacher identity*

The *experiences as teachers* in the course (that is, the Group Project and the Individual Project) clearly had a major impact on the participants, suggesting that their future online teaching experiences would continue to affect their identity development. However, since my

study took place in the context of a graduate course, the participants engaged in these teaching experiences as students rather than as part of their professional practice. So I would like to recognize that my study context did not truly provide the conditions to study the impact of professional experiences on the participants' identity development.

g) *Lessons learned about **what kind of interactions within a community of practice** may affect the development of an online teacher identity*

Once again, since my study took place within the context of a graduate course, the only community of practice I could study was the class itself – as I did not collect data about each participant's interactions with his/her own professional community. It is evident, though, that interaction among the students in the class, and between students and teacher, were very important and influential in shaping each participant's vision for the kind of online teachers they wanted to be. This is revealed not only in the online discussion boards, but also in the conversations that took place in class and in their groups.

This interaction was important not only to provide feedback on specific products (although that was the most obvious and visible outcome and benefit) but also in reinforcing the values and beliefs the participants were grappling with – as for example, values such as social justice and theories such as social constructivist learning theory that the whole Warner School community embraced.

h) *Lessons learned about **perceptions in the field** may affect the development of an online teacher identity*

As mentioned earlier, the stigma surrounding online education in the participants' fields did affect them negatively at first – as several participants expressed their concern about how their practice as online teachers would be viewed by colleagues who did not believe in the value of online learning; or the limited opportunities to teach online offered in their fields. The participants, however, did not seem to be discouraged by any of these challenges; rather they decided to be advocates for online education to tackle the stigma and negativity surrounding online education.

Recommendations for the Preparation of Novice Online Teachers

Based on the findings of my study, I would like to offer the following recommendations to teacher educators preparing online teachers:

1. Teacher education or professional development programs for online teachers should be intentional in supporting their participants' identity development – explicit discussions of the kind of online teacher each participant wants to be and how to achieve it may be valuable, but will not be enough.

2. There should be interventions to help support the identity development of the participants with programs that create opportunities for participation and recognition for their participants; and the most powerful activities will combine both of these elements, in a synergistic way.

3. Anticipated challenges to become the kind of online teachers the participants want to be and ways to address those challenges should be identified. The participants need to be equipped with strategies and tools to cope with these challenges, so they will not feel discouraged early on.

4. The online teacher development programs should offer opportunities for *experiences as learners* to enable novice online teachers to experience what an effective online teacher and an online course can and should look like, along with opportunities to discuss what worked and what did not so as to determine their own path as future online teachers.

5. Hybrid online courses are particularly valuable for teacher development programs, as they can give participants the chance of experiencing as learners best online practices and thus help counter prior negative experiences and perceptions. This will also help them create their online teacher identity as an extension of their general teacher identity, rather than generating tensions between these two identities.

6. Effective online teacher preparation programs should include activities where the participants actually engage in designing and implementing online learning experiences. To ensure the success of these experiences and thus a sense of confidence and affirmation that will contribute to identity development, these experiences should be carefully designed to include sufficient support and feedback. Nasir and Hand's (2008) analysis of what makes activities especially conducive to identity work should be taken into consideration in designing such experiences.

7. While participants should be equipped with appropriate technology skills and knowledge, the focus of programs preparing online teachers should not be on teaching technology skills only. Rather, programs should also address important competencies

online teachers need to be good at, such as content development, content delivery, design and implementation of the course, assessment, feedback.

8. The designers of programs and courses preparing online teachers should take into considerations the participants' fields of specialization within education and the implications of those in their identity development.

9. Since the negativity and stigma surrounding online education seem to have implications for online teachers' identity development, these should be acknowledged and addressed to allow the participants to discuss their concerns and learn ways to deal with those.

10. There will be value in including a discussion or an assignment where participants explicitly talk about the kind of online teachers they want to be. Although this was not done in the course I studied, my participants' appreciation of the reflections opportunities during my interviews suggest that such an explicit assignment may allow the participants to think more explicitly and deeply about what practices they value, and what practices they want to avoid. If done at the beginning and at the end of the program, it will allow the participants as well as the instructors to better see the changes that resulted in their identity development.