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The person and the teacher: A case study into language teacher identity formation

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Abstract

Research in mainstream and language teacher education has underlined the importance of understanding teacher identity. As part of a larger investigation, this study examined the identity formation of two Vietnamese English teachers via a case study design using background and auto-biographical semi-structured interviews. The findings reinforce the conclusions drawn in some previous studies about teacher identity formation being a complex process involving professional and personal factors. Additionally, however, the results shed light on the role of formal and informal pre-training learning experiences both inside and outside the classroom, in the formation of *language* teacher identity. The study thus expands our understanding of teacher identity and calls for a more holistic perspective that acknowledges this multiplicity of prior learning experiences as well as the professional and personal dimensions of this construct.

Keywords: teacher identity; language education; holistic perspective; Vietnam.

Resumen

La investigación sobre la formación docente en general y en idiomas ha subrayado la importancia de comprender la identidad del maestro. Como parte de una investigación más amplia, este estudio examinó la formación de la identidad de dos profesores de inglés vietnamitas a través de un estudio de caso, utilizando entrevistas semi- estructuradas de antecedentes y auto-biográficas. Los resultados refuerzan las conclusiones de estudios anteriores sobre la formación de la identidad docente como un proceso complejo que involucra factores profesionales y personales. Por otra parte, sin embargo, los resultados arrojan luz sobre el papel de las experiencias previas de adquisición de una lengua formales e informales, dentro y fuera del aula, en la formación de la identidad del profesor de idiomas. El estudio amplia así nuestra comprensión de la identidad docente y sugiere una perspectiva más holística que reconozca esta multiplicidad de experiencias previas de aprendizaje, así como las dimensiones profesionales y personales de este constructo.

Palabras clave: identidad docente; enseñanza de idiomas; perspectiva holística; Vietnam.

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AS A SOCIAL construct that provides a framework for language teachers to be, act and understand (Sachs, 2005; Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005), language teacher identity has attracted enquiry in recent years (see Fajardo Castañeda, 2014; Trent, 2013). This has added to our comprehension of not only teachers but also teaching. As Varghese et al. (2005, p. 22) argue, "[i]n order to understand language teaching and learning we need to understand teachers; and in order to understand teachers, we need to have a clearer sense of who they are." However, a review of the literature in language and mainstream education indicates that teacher identity has been investigated mainly from a professional perspective and that limited attention has been awarded to the role of personal factors in forming identity (see, e.g., O'Connor, 2008). The study reported in this article contributes to this line of enquiry on teacher identity by adopting a holistic perspective that encompasses both professional and personal aspects. More specifically, it examined how teachers' previous educational experiences as well as their life history were involved in identity formation.

Teacher Identity Formation

There appears to be little shared understanding of what constitutes the formation of teacher identity in both the language and mainstream education literature. Several authors have suggested that teacher identity formation is deeply influenced by prior learning experiences. Lortie (1975) introduced the notion of *apprenticeship of observation* to refer to the way in which teachers' experiences as learners influence their conceptualisation of education and teaching philosophies. Johnson (1994) reported, for example, that her pre-service English teacher participants held and acted out images of their former language educators, classroom dynamics, curricular materials and instructional activities. These pre-training conceptualisations and beliefs about teaching have been found to be resistant to change (Pajares, 1992) and to influence subsequent cognitive development and engagement with professional education (Sanchez, 2013). Professional education (both pre-service and in-service) has also been identified as a source of identity formation. This is well documented, for instance, in studies that investigate how teacher education programmes can support pre-training belief development, ranging from increasing awareness of, consolidating, and elaborating beliefs to redefining existing beliefs, incorporating new ones, and restructuring belief systems (Borg, 2011; Cabaroglu & Roberts, 2000). It has also been suggested that teacher education may facilitate teacher identity development if it involves reflective practice which enables trainees to confront and deconstruct their pre-conceived beliefs and personal pedagogical theories (Cabaroglu & Roberts, 2000; Sanchez, 2013).

These perspectives on teacher identity formation may be, however, limited as they focus on how teacher identity forms and manifests in formal educational settings

and may inadvertently blur the more humanistic, personal aspect of teacher identity. Zimmerman (1998) addresses this issue, albeit not intentionally, by arguing that identity is transferable; that is, it contains aspects that are attached to a person's physical and cultural attributes and thus carried with them. Although Zimmerman's focus was not on teachers, his view is significant to this study as it suggests that teacher identity may encompass sub-identities which are outside professional contexts and which may permeate, or be transferred to, the classroom. Thus, a teacher may be Southeast Asian, female, middle-aged, multilingual, musical and motherly, and these attributes might impact on the pedagogical decisions she makes (e.g. about the selection and use of content, teaching materials and instructional techniques).

The influence of personal factors on teacher identity and its formation has been acknowledged by recent scholarship. Nias (1989) underlines the link between persona and teaching, while Kissling (2014) argues that teachers' living curricula (lived experiences outside educational contexts) is carried into their classroom. O'Connor (2008, p. 119) reported the presence of personal emotionality in professional identity, reflected in the act of caring, and revealed that teachers' "private sphere" tended to be neglected in the rationalist discourse where they are judged based on their classroom performance. Likewise, exploring teacher personal identity from the viewpoint of students, Uitto (2012, p. 293) found the "inevitable presence of teachers' personal lives in schools". She considered this presence an opportunity to build teacher-student rapport and a valuable learning experience for students.

A few studies into language teacher identity have adopted a holistic perspective. Bukor (2015) studied the biography of three language teachers and found that their personal experiences, especially with their families, strongly influenced their career choice and pedagogy. Phan Le Ha (2008) found that her participants, Western-trained Vietnamese English teachers, had to navigate a complex system of identities expected of them. This complexity was conveyed by the Vietnamese metaphor "Daughter-in-Law of a Hundred families" (Phan Le Ha, 2008, p. 191), which depicts a daughter-in-law who has to fulfil numerous roles to please her spouse's family. The author additionally highlights the reflection of national and cultural values in teacher identity and states that identity, while flexible and dynamic, can move towards a state of being tied to those values.

It is this holistic perspective on language teacher identity which helped guide the study reported in this paper, as it sought to investigate the role which pre-service personal and educational experiences played in the formation of Vietnamese English teachers' identity.

The Study

Design, Context and Participants

The present study is part of a larger, multi-method investigation into the formation and manifestation of language teacher identity. It followed a case study design and examined the cases of two individual English language teachers born, raised and trained in Vietnam, a context which has not featured strongly in the teacher identity literature. The small number of cases suited our research purpose, as we aimed to obtain depth rather than breadth of responses concerning the participants' teacher identity formation. The small sample also facilitated our data collection, based on self-reflection and narrative.

The selection of the cases was based on four main criteria: nationality (Vietnamese), qualification (Bachelor's degree or above in English language teaching), experience (teaching experience in the context of Vietnam), and teaching status (in-service). The participants were not intended to be representative of any teacher population, institution or culture. Our interest was in their uniqueness as individual teachers.

The participants were Lam and Hoang (pseudonyms). Lam was a Vietnamese lecturer at a university in Saigon. He taught English language skills and teaching methodology mainly at university level, but also worked at language centres and had recently organised one private class. He had over eight years of teaching experience and held a Bachelor's degree in English language teaching and a Master of Arts in Applied Linguistics. Hoang was an in-service, Vietnamese English teacher with three years of relevant teaching experience and a Bachelor's degree in English language teaching. He had recently registered for a Master's course in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages at a university in Saigon. He taught at a high school and language centre managed by the university where he had trained as a teacher. He also taught private classes at home.

The study was conducted at a university language centre in Vietnam. The language centre had branches spreading over various districts in Saigon and offered English language courses on General English, Language Skills, Academic English and Exam classes. The criteria for selecting this country and institution were our intrinsic interest in Southeast Asia, familiarity with the education system in Vietnam, and access to participants, one of the researchers having been born and educated in this context.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data for the study reported in this paper were collected using individual, semi-structured interviews (conducted in Vietnamese, the participants' choice). First, a 90-minute background interview was conducted with each participant to establish a profile of their educational and professional background, their motivation to follow the teaching profession, and their views on language teaching. At the end of the

interview, the participants were introduced to the *Tree of Life* (Merryfield, 1993), a self-reflection tool divided into three parts: the root—early background, the trunk—learning and teaching experience, and the limbs—critical incidents (Farrell, 2007) (See sample in Appendix). The tree analogy provides a graphic representation of a teacher's personal and professional growth and supports them in reviewing their life experiences, identifying and reflecting on their beliefs and conceptualisations, and articulating their stories (Farrell, 2007; Merryfield, 1993). A second, auto-biographical interview based on the Tree of Life was conducted three days later and lasted approximately 120 minutes each. The participants showed their trees and chronologically recounted their stories, while responding to some probing questions which facilitated our understanding of their accounts.

Data analysis was performed first within each case, in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants as individual teachers, and then across the cases. All data underwent thematic, cyclical analysis. We analysed data iteratively throughout the period of fieldwork, forming as many themes as possible. Themes emerging from one data source informed our collection of subsequent data, and the analysis of the latter helped to confirm or revise the themes previously drawn. Afterwards, we compared and contrasted the themes from both cases to explore the role of personal and educational factors in their teacher identity formation.

Informed consent was obtained from the participants. Their anonymity was maintained throughout via the use of a pseudonym and omission of identifying details. We allowed the participants to refuse answering any questions they deemed intrusive. We briefed the participants before every interview and performed member checking at the end of the project by asking them to read through the data and analysis and identify any misrepresentation of the data.

Findings

This article reports on the teacher identity formation of Lam and Hoang based on the analysis of a background interview (BI) and life interview (LI) with each participant. The findings are written in a chronological order using a narrative style, with cultural information provided where necessary. The presentation includes quotes from the participants (translated by us from Vietnamese into English), verbatim report written in italics to highlight important expressions, and additional comments from the researchers between brackets. The names of the teachers cited by Lam and Hoang (Ms. Tam, Ms. Lan, Ms. Doan, Mr. Tran, Ms. Van) are pseudonyms.

Lam

Lam's story of becoming a teacher began in primary school, with his very first teacher:

> Her name was Tam. She was very just […] She treated everyone the same, conscientiously and with care. (LI)

She was "the one [he] remember[ed] the most" from primary school, leaving a "deep inspiration" that would later motivate him to pursue the teaching profession (LI). Back then, however, Lam did not think he would teach English, partly because "[his] impression of them [English teachers] was that they were very strict and scary." (LI)

The English language only emerged towards the end of his secondary school when Lam attended a short course in a language centre and "developed a passion for English" (LI):

> I was impressed by the fluency of the classmate sitting next to me, and she suggested that we both have conversations in English […] The course greatly improved my grammar. (LI)

This also raised his confidence and led him to apply for the Advanced English class in a famous gifted high school in Saigon, and it was there that Lam met the teachers who, to him, were the "role models" in shaping his teacher identity and from whom he "learned a lot about English, teaching and lifestyle." (BI). The first prominent influence they had on him was related to his career:

> Ms. Lan corrected and explained everything in the Cambridge Proficiency exercise books without any pre-made notes. I was impressed. I wanted to know how it felt to be like her. (LI)

> Ms. Doan told me to apply for the University of Education. Ms. Lan said the same thing. Even Mr. Tran said 'you could be a second Mr. Tran'. (LI)

> They encouraged me to follow that path […] I would stay and talk to them after school, listen to how they went into teaching […] [and] what it was like to be a teacher. (BI)

Lam made his choice of university and future career based on both indirect and direct inputs; he was inspired in subtle ways by observing his teachers and was motivated by their career advice, which was given in the informal, personal context of after-school conversations.

Lam's teachers also exerted an influence on his pedagogical development: "High school exposed me to various ways of teaching and communicating with students" (L1).

In particular, there was one who Lam highlighted as having "the most impact on [his] teaching style" (LI):

> I began studying with Mr. Tran from Grade 11 […] His personality was his greatest teaching asset, not his ELT methodology […] He made jokes […] I liked how he could relate the content to his students […] he was also good at building rapport. (LI)

It was the interpersonal rather than professional aspect of his former teacher's style that captured Lam's attention. This, combined with other factors, would later help Lam to form what he called his own "ban sac": "Ban sac lies in my choice of techniques […] my communication style […] Bac sac stems from my personality, my background." (BI).

Ban sac is a Vietnamese concept that refers to an individual's personal or cultural traits that are unique, special and attractive. As a teacher, Lam believed that he and his ban sac had to stand out: "People compare teachers to ferrymen. Personally I don't like this image because a ferryman is so quiet, so obscure […] I don't want to be like one, silently committing to work […] carrying my bag to school and back" (BI). Lam presented the ferryman metaphor, which, to him, reflected the hard work, dedication and selflessness expected of teachers. His rejection of such analogy indicated that he placed much value on being outstanding. This was further substantiated when he then presented his own metaphor:

> A teacher can be … a popstar, singer. Well teachers also stand in front of an audience, get applauded, have to try their best to perform their song and keep the flame up. And we run from show to show a lot. (BI)

Lam felt that a teacher was also a performer as both stood in the limelight, trying to maintain the energy of their respective audiences, and had to handle high pressure work. Lam then elaborated on his ban sac:

> If my class wanted to party, okay party, I would pay. That was part of my ban sac, a generous benefactor. (BI)

> My mocking does leave an impression. If you ask my students, no doubt many will say I mock a lot. Surely it makes me different from others. (BI)

The greatest lesson Lam learned from his teachers, however, was neither career choice

nor methodology, but one of a more "humanistic" nature:

> Have you ever wondered how your handouts had been made? When I visited Ms. Van's house, her firstborn was still a baby, and she held a book in one hand while rocking the cradle with the other, feeding her daughter now and then. Materials were made from moments like that, so we should have a more con nguoi [humanistic] look at teachers. For example, when we detect errors in spelling or format, we should be less critical. I mean considering all the chores they have to do, producing acceptable original materials is already a feat, much better than photocopying from some resource books. I also talked to her husband; I saw her in her other roles: a mother, a wife. In the end, teacher is just one among all those roles we play in life. (LI)

Lam could visit Ms. Van's house frequently since his "was close to hers. [He] usually went to her house […] to borrow books." (LI). This allowed him, from a personal angle, to see his teacher as a mother and wife, and led him to advocate a more humanistic and holistic view of teachers.

It took Lam a few years into his career to experience the multiplicity of roles he had to fulfil, which changed his ban sac:

> In recent years I've become the breadwinner in my home […] I have to grind my teeth when I hate a class but have to take it to maintain my income […] And I can't party that much with my students anymore […] Exactly since when, I cannot remember, I've thought about materialistic values. It's not that I am … but maybe I've changed, but it's because I have to; otherwise, I wouldn't get by. (BI)

Lam presented his internal struggle with job satisfaction, finance and maintaining his ban sac, which resulted in his unwilling change from a generous benefactor to someone who had to grind his teeth to get by. The excerpt thus shows the extent to which Lam's role as the family's breadwinner redefined his ban sac, and possibly teacher identity.

In addition, Lam found that he could not keep personal matters from affecting his teaching:

> When I'm upset, I inform my students that I might not be pleasant that day and thus if my voice is harsh, they understand why […] I mean we cannot hide our emotions; we are human […] I want sympathy. (LI)

Lam considered the person within him inseparable from the teacher, hence the difficulty in suppressing the occasional negativity brought by "daily matters" and, as a result, the need for sympathy as a human being (LI).

Graduating from high school, Lam entered university and commenced his teacher training. He felt that the training itself "did not have much of an impact" even though he acknowledged "it was good to have" (BI). It seems, however, that Lam judged the impact of his course only in terms of linguistic competence as he later added that "high school had already reinforced [his] English enough" (BI). What really mattered to him was, as was the case of his high school, the contact with his teachers: "I was the president of the English Club, so I had to frequently liaise with lecturers. Thanks to such contact, I could see their ordinary side." (LI).

He mentioned particularly a lecturer of a short-term translation course at another university. This lecturer, although not part of Lam's teacher training programme, was important as he would influence the way Lam perceived his own relationship with his institution: "Now he was a larger than life character […] his style radiated a you-need-me-but-I-don't-need-you-air […] they [his university] had to conform to his requests." (LI). This became evident when Lam asserted that if the university he was teaching at "treat[ed] [him] badly", he would "quit but [not] starve" since he had secured teaching positions at other institutions and, on top of this, established a degree of independence from each: "One way or another I have to tell them I don't teach at their place only […] I mean, make sure that they need us more then we need them." (LI).

Hoang

Hoang embarked on his journey to become a teacher early in his life: "I was born into a family of teachers […] My grandfather was an English teacher, and my father used to teach physics" (BI). He felt that such "family tradition" gave him a "positive attitude" towards teaching (BI). His father, in particular, also had an influence on his pedagogy:

> The way my dad talks is very pedagogical, very structured […] whenever he wants to tell me something, he says 'there are three things you need to know' […] first, second, third. (BI)

Hoang found that, as a teacher, he employed "the same structured instruction style", going from "the general to the specific" with "numbered ideas" (BI).

To Hoang, however, it was one of his teachers, rather than his family, that really oriented him towards the teaching profession:

> I was scared of English … I got nightmares. In Grade 5, I met this teacher

> who transformed my fear into an interest, and then I felt I had the potential to learn English […] He inspired me to become a teacher. (BI)

This teacher was significant as he supported Hoang affectively, enabling him to overcome his fear, and, more importantly, became an inspiration for the latter. Hoang, however, noted that while he wanted "to help other people" (BI) as his teacher had done with him, he "did not consider going for English" (LI). In fact, he intended to teach Maths because he "was very good at it during primary and secondary school, so [he] thought Maths plus teaching equalled Maths teacher!" (LI). This was the case until the end of secondary school when Hoang attended the District selection for the Hoc sinh gioi Thanh pho (City contest for excellent secondary school students):

> I was dreaming about Maths and Chemistry […] my grades [for both] were very high […] When I took the selection exam, I failed at both … pathetically failed. I was devastated. (LI)

Hoang appeared to take the failure with his two favourite subjects very seriously. This, however, became a turning point for him:

> One of my aunts was teaching English […] So my aunt … said one thing that inspired me 'You can study English and you do study it well. If you choose to follow it, you will definitely succeed.' And I tried […] Finally, I passed the entrance exam for the Advanced English class at Phan Nguyen gifted high school. (LI)

His aunt's inspiring words were key to Hoang's English learning. Therefore, influenced by his Grade 5 English teacher and aunt, he developed an interest in the language and, rising from his failure, turned English from something he "could learn but didn't have that much passion for" (LI) into his strongest subject and future career.
As a teacher, Hoang considered inspiration central to his identity:

> I believe teachers should be *nguon cam hung* [source of inspiration]; my teaching philosophy leans towards inspiring rather than instructing […] if we instruct a student one thing, they learn that thing only, but if we motivate or inspire them, they may, by themselves, do further reading and learn at least two-three. (BI)

Hoang seemed to conceptualise instruction as knowledge transmission. Contrasting this

with inspiration, he placed great emphasis on the latter and thus the affective dimension of teaching. He then explained that by motivating and inspiring, teachers could foster autonomy in their students, and this, in turn, would lead to more sustainable language learning.

Entering high school, Hoang soon discovered that he was struggling with the standards of his Advanced English class: "It was the first time I knew what Advanced English was like […] I barely kept my head above water in Grade 10 […] I was nearly at the bottom of the class […] The first semester was so horrible." (LI). To cope with this situation, Hoang used a strategy inspired by his table tennis coach:

> He had a lot of influence on me. The thing about him was that his numerous achievements did not come from natural talent, but from hard work, conscientiousness. He rose from the bottom […] I figured I could do it, just like him. Hard work was my strategy. (LI)

Hoang could relate to the coach as he himself possessed, he believed, no "innate ability or [Advanced English] background" and had to start from the bottom in his new environment (LI). Thus, he decided to emulate how his coach had professionally succeeded: through hard work. His industry was rewarded as he, by the end of the second semester, "moved up" to the "top 10" of his class (LI).

To Hoang, this success shaped his perception of weak students and his attitude towards them:

> I protect the weak […] I feel for weak students since I see myself in them … I also see hope. That is, they cannot be weak forever; one day they will rise. If I can inspire them, they will have hope and become better. (LI)

The struggle with his studies allowed Hoang to empathise with weak students, leading him to believe that, as their teacher, he was also their "protector". He reiterated the importance of affect in his pedagogy, emphasising hope and inspiration in teaching weak students.

In addition to study, Hoang's time at high school was also significant because it was then that he reduced "[his] weight [from] 90 to 72kg", became "noticeably more sociable and outgoing" and began "living independently" (LI). All this, he believed, "enhanced [his] confidence in public and therefore helped with [his] teaching" (LI). In fact, Hoang felt high school played the most important role in shaping his identity as it had "physically and mentally transformed [him] into the person [he] is today." (LI).

By contrast, Hoang remarked that he did not gain much from his teacher training

programme at university:

> I did not learn much as an undergraduate […] To be honest, I was dissatisfied with, not all, but many lecturers in our department. They did not teach properly, and some did not even come to class at all. They changed the way I looked at lecturers. (LI)

The teaching staff quality did not meet his expectations and thus affected both his training and perception of university lecturers. However, he highlighted two positive influences of his undergraduate years. One was that the programme reinforced his belief in the importance of affective factors: "Psychology, and specifically affective factors, was a major part of the theories we learned […] We even had a separate module called Educational Psychology" (LI). The other, more important, impact came from his Microteaching module:

> I hated conventions, so I experimented a lot with my microteaching lessons. Every time I tried something new, I was fortunate to fail […] I feel that experimenting has helped me in some ways because it appears that I'm more creative than my colleagues. (LI)

Hoang found conventional methodology "boring" and questioned why "everyone was doing the same thing" (LI). This motivated him to explore original approaches, though these would often lead to negative results. However, he did not perceive this as detrimental; such mentality allowed him to leverage failures and thus develop his creativity. Yet, he could not have experimented with his lessons had it not been for his Microteaching lecturer, who said: "I will not judge whether you are right or wrong. One day when you have learned too much, you will start to doubt everything you know" (LI). Moved by these "powerful and wise" words, Hoang learned that everything was "a matter of perspectives [and] judging framework" and that teachers should be responsive to "students' level and the context" (LI).

Hoang's perception of himself as creative and context-sensitive later shaped his practice:

> I created new ways of teaching. When I teach word stress on numbers, I tell students that if the number is bigger … like in 15, 1 is smaller than 5, so the stress is on the bigger number 5 … fifteen. But in the case of 50, the front number 5 is bigger … fifty. (LI)

> Students like it when we could integrate content that is relevant to their daily life, like issues on social media. (LI)

He believed that this made him a "successful teacher to a degree", evident in "good feedback from students" (LI). He also found that, as a teacher, his identity was reinforced by his own students: "Many wrote to me on social media that I had made them love learning English […] Those kinds of comments inspire me […] Moments like that realised my dream of making people shine." (LI). He was, once again, inspired, but in this case, by his students.

Discussion

Cross-case analysis shows pre-training learning experiences played a pivotal role in shaping the participants' teacher identity. Their journey to become teachers began in the very first formal educational context—primary school—where both were left with lasting impressions of their former teachers. These impressions then became the projected mental images of the ideal teacher that both participants wanted to become—Lam, for example, wanted to be a just and caring teacher like Ms. Tam (cf. Calderhead & Robson, 1991).

The impact of prior educational history on teachers' identity formation and cognitive development is well documented in the literature (see Lortie, 1975; Sanchez, 2013). However, the findings here reveal that these early experiences, while motivating Lam and Hoang to follow the teaching profession, did not lead them to pursue the English language as their subject matter. This suggests that during the formation of language teacher identity the fondness for teaching and the subject matter (in this case, English) might not necessarily emerge together. Lam and Hoang only started to learn English actively under external influences: while the former was motivated by his impression of a classmate, the latter took the initiative after the incident where he underperformed in his favourite subjects (Maths and Chemistry) in the city contest.

High school appeared to play the greatest role in the participants' *language* teacher identity formation. Lam found inspiration in his English teachers' subject matter knowledge and personality. The teachers additionally shaped his teaching and communication style, which would later become part of his own uniqueness as a teacher (i.e., his ban sac). His high school teachers thus played a central role in Lam's prior learning experiences and in his identity formation, as they provided the source of his subject matter knowledge, motivation and pedagogy. To Hoang, his initial struggle with English learning helped him develop sympathy towards weak students and a perceived need to support them. The influence of subject-specific learning experiences and teachers has been reported in the literature (Johnson, 1994; Sanchez, 2013). However, Hoang,

unlike Lam, was not influenced by his language teachers, but rather his table tennis coach. This shows that a language teacher's identity could be influenced by experiences in another discipline. This concurs with the findings reported by Sanchez (2011), where one of the English teachers in his study associated her concern for "weaker" students with her own previous school experience striving to learn music. Thus, though most recollections of images from prior learning experiences appear to be subject-specific, it is likely that teachers may relate their identity and teaching practices to schooling experiences beyond their teaching field.

Personal experiences also featured strongly in the data as influencing the formation of Lam and Hoang's language teacher identity. Hoang's positive attitude towards teaching came from his family tradition; his structured instruction style, in particular, was strongly influenced by his father. More importantly, these experiences intertwined and complemented educational ones. Hoang's aforementioned critical incident in the City contest would not have been so transformative had his aunt not subsequently offered her inspiring advice; it also contributed to his affect-oriented teaching philosophy. In addition, Hoang stated that his physical and mental transformation at high school included both educational and non-educational factors. His narrative shows that his identity drew heavily on his living curricula (Kissling, 2014) as his lived experiences outside the classroom shaped, inter alia, his positive attitude, pedagogy and choice of subject matter.

In the case of Lam, his language learning experiences were accompanied by episodes of after-class meetings with his teachers where they explicitly advised him to pursue teaching and recounted their own stories. These experiences corroborate the findings of Uitto (2012) that students' personal encounter with their teachers, either in or outside school settings, can become valuable learning experiences. Lam's visits to Ms. Van's house made him aware of the various roles (Phan Le Ha, 2008) that she had, which helped develop his humanistic perception of teachers. More importantly, the participant himself experienced such multiplicity and noted that, as a teacher, his transferrable identities (Zimmerman, 1998) and personal matters permeated his pedagogy and teacher-student relations. This evidence of teacher-student interaction outside the classroom and its impact on teacher identity formation also calls for a more holistic and flexible conceptualisation of apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975) which encompasses not only teachers' *formal* but also *informal* experiences as learners and their role in the development of their pre-training teaching beliefs and philosophies.

The impact of teacher education on the participants' teacher identity seems unclear. Both deemed it of little significance, possibly influenced by what they perceived counted as impact (e.g. Lam assessed impact exclusively on the basis of development in linguistic competence) or by their expectations of teaching quality (e.g. Hoang's dissatisfaction

with many of his lecturers). However, both teachers provided evidence of impact, evident in Lam's view of the teacher-institution relationship and in Hoang's motivation to develop original pedagogical approaches. This might suggest that their perceived lack of impact may have been informed by the way they operationalised impact (Borg, 2011), that is, by their expectation that impact encompassed deep or radical changes, rather than subtle forms of development.

Conclusion and Implications

Teacher identity is a multi-faceted social construct that emerges from both professional and personal experiences. Empirical works, however, have often emphasised the professional aspect of teacher identity at the expense of the private sphere, although these are inextricably connected and the boundaries between them are blurred. The present study has aimed to address this gap by adopting a holistic perspective to investigate the identity of two Vietnamese English teachers, whose narratives indicate that identity formation is a complex process in which professional and personal factors intertwine.

The cases discussed here have clear implications for teacher education and teachers themselves. It is unfortunate that teacher education has often been regarded as "separate from the ongoing lives of teachers and student teachers" (Clandinin, 1992, p. 121), which consequently shows the limitations of these programmes in the development of teacher identity. We thus argue that teacher education should pay attention to and cultivate the richness and complexity of teachers' lives. The present study provides evidence that this can be done via self-reflection, using tools such as the Tree of Life to support pre- and in-service teachers in developing awareness of their identity and the role of various factors in its formation. Our experience using this tool suggests that teachers with limited experience undertaking self-reflection can be guided by prompt questions which encourage them to visualise different parts of the tree in a way that reflects their unique personal, educational, and professional history. Empirical evidence from this and previous studies (e.g. Calderhead & Robson, 1991) also indicates that identifying significant people and critical incidents in previous personal and professional experiences can support the process of retrospection.

Clandinin and Huber (2005, p. 43) have noted that "teachers teach who they are". Evidence is mounting that who teachers are encompasses a wide array of personal as well as professional factors. Therefore, any attempts at understanding teaching practice will require that we adopt a holistic approach which views teacher identity in its full complexity if we expect research and teacher education to promote more impactful and sustainable forms of professional development.

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Appendix

Sample 'Tree of Life' (identifying details have been blurred).