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Student Teachers Experiences of Teachers' Professional Identity within the Context of Curriculum Change

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I. INTRODUCTION

In 1997 the Minister of Education announced the launch of Curriculum 2005, which marked a breakaway from the apartheid curriculum to democracy. Bhana (2002) argued that the new curriculum aimed at riding the educational system of dogmatism and outdated teaching practices and make way for democratic nation building. The new curriculum redefined teacher professional identity in the classroom (Parker, 1999) and made the delivery of lessons problematic. Singh (2001) agrees with this as he postulates that the large amount or number of policy ideas seeking to be implemented in South Africa is by and large conflicting with teachers' beliefs and as such bring controversy into the teaching and learning process. Cross and Teruvunga (2012) opine that every new minister of education in South Africa has brought a new curriculum. These included Curriculum 2005, National Curriculum Statements (NCS), Revised National Curriculum Statements (RNCS) and Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS). These changes also mean change in the professional identity of teachers thereby creating multiple identities as the curriculum changes.

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According to Schwab (2012), South Africa's education system was graded 140th out of 144 countries that were graded. As the quality of teachers in the field are problematic and for there to be improvement, student teachers experiences of what it means to be a teacher needs to be investigated and necessary guidance provided such that when they become teachers they will be able to deal with the hurdles or challenges that come with it. Recent studies (Akkerman & Meijer, 2010; Soudien, 2001; Flores & Day, 2005; Carrim, 2001; Cohen, 2009; Samuel, 2001; Chong, Ling & Chuan, 2011) at a more generic level attempt to 'get inside the minds' of teachers to understand how teachers develop conceptions of themselves (identity) and how they understand their actions, duties and responsibilities (roles). However, little or no research exists in South Africa on how student teachers experience or understand teacher professional identity as the curriculum changes. Hence, the present study provides a vantage point from which to view teachers' professional identity. Teachers' professional identity in South Africa is problematic to a large degree because it is embedded within experiences accumulated from the days of apartheid to democracy, as such the findings of the research may inform stakeholders, policy makers, teacher educators, teachers and all those who participate in the development of student teachers, of the experiences student teachers have of teachers' professional identity within the context of changing curriculum and may also serve as a springboard for the improvement of teacher education since it is the role of the teacher educators and teachers to guide, encourage and help develop student teachers by ensuring that they are prepared for their future profession.

II. REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

This section reviews literature through the themes of defining teachers' professional identity, and determinants of teachers' professional identity.

III. DEFINING TEACHERS PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

Day (2007) postulates that teachers' professional identity is all about being an accountable

and responsible teacher who exhibits compliance to externally imposed policy imperatives with consistently high quality teaching, which is measured by externally set performance indicators. This means that teachers' professional identity according to Day (2007) is all about being competent and producing results that are universally accepted. She adds that in this identity, teachers will be firmly concerned with creating and putting into place standards and processes which give students democratic experiences. In this light, Yamin-Ali and Pooma (2012) argue that teachers' professional identity is basically about knowing oneself as professional, setting standards of professionalism and performing one's duties using the same guiding principles. As such teachers' professional identity deals with the teacher's discharge of his or her duties and his or her perceptions of self.

Hollin (2011) argues that teachers' professional identity can be referred to as a dynamic and changeable relation or relationship spanning over their entire life situation, including the negotiation and renegotiation of personally and socially designed imperatives within the educational system. As such identity is negotiated by the teacher and certain factors determine the direction of the negotiation. Furthermore she also defines teacher professional identity as an ongoing process of integrating educational knowledge, experience and practices within the concept of self. This identity therefore is not static but keeps changing as the content of educational knowledge keeps changing due to changes in curriculum.

In this paper teachers' professional identity will be defined as teacher's sense of self or what it means to be a teacher (Stenberg, 2010). With this knowledge of what teachers' professional identity is, it is necessary to look at what makes up teachers' professional identity.

IV. DETERMINANTS OF TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

From the nature of teachers' professional identity it is clear that teachers' professional identity isn't stable but constantly in a state of flux. As such there are certain factors which determine when it should change and what direction it should take. Some of these factors are; curriculum change, relation and experiences.

V. CURRICULUM CHANGE

Curriculum change is one of the major determinants of teachers' professional identity (Seetal, 2006). Once the curriculum changes in any educational environment, the way in which teachers see themselves also changes. For example Cross and Teruvinga (2012) opined that Curriculum 2005 posited the notion of the 'disappearing' teacher as learners emerged as the initiators and creators of learning. The teacher ceased from being the all-knowing teacher as in the days of

apartheid and became a facilitator in the teaching and learning process. Cross and Teruvinga (2012) continue that Curriculum 2005 was laid aside in favour of the National Curriculum Statements (NCS) and later as a result of its failures and challenges the Revised National Curriculum Statements (RNCS) was formulated (Cross & Teruvinga, 2012), and presently the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). This frequent change of the curriculum and the curriculum policy document has led to a constant change in the professional identity of teachers, what they represent in the classroom, and has caused diverse problems in terms of lesson delivery and professional development for teachers (Cross & Teruvinga, 2012).

Furthermore, within the context of curriculum change, teachers more often than not are constantly in a frustrating position of being simultaneously both the subject and the agent of change (Seetal, 2006). They are often obliged to change themselves, their practice and take the necessary steps to meet specific objectives or laid down directions and principles outlined by policymakers who themselves know neither how to meet such objectives or the contexts in which the objectives are supposed to be met. At certain points in time teachers are required to make changes which they believe on the basis of their professional experience, to be unreasonable, inappropriate or impossible and this inevitably changes the way they see themselves and the very fact that they are required or expected to implement these imposed changes means that their professional identity fluctuates and their freedom and autonomy are further curtailed (Seetal, 2006). Teachers are continually required to alter their administrative and organization systems, their pedagogy, curriculum content, the resources and technology they use and their assessment procedures to meet new standards set up by the changing curriculum.

Cross and Teruvinga (2012) postulated that Curriculum 2005 brought with it an almost new professional identity for teachers and an educational discourse with a range of new demands in terms of teaching and learning, with which most teachers are unfamiliar. They add that the rearrangement of school subjects into eight learning areas and the introduction of the new forms of assessment have hampered the implementation of the curriculum and the way teachers see themselves. The merging of knowledge into learning areas means a recreation of identity for teachers and also the collapsing of the traditional boundaries and subject disciplines. This means that teachers who were used to teaching single subjects have to change their thinking, approach and what they know so as to meet the demands of the new curriculum. Seetal (2006) adds that during the apartheid era, the educational system had school subjects which enjoyed hallowed status. But in the new educational system teachers are expected to work together in teams, cooperating with one another to

promote a collaborative culture of learning amongst pupils, and encourage a problem-solving mentality and a project approach to the curriculum. As such teachers' professional identity is determined by curriculum change since it dictates what direction the teaching and learning process should take. Before the introduction of curriculum 2005 teachers were loners within the educational system. Once the curriculum change was introduced, not only did what was to be taught change, but also how it was to be taught and the person of the teacher was redefined. Due to this, it was noticed that the training required to support teachers perform their duty was inadequate (Seetal, 2006) and their performance drastically dropped leading to a failure of the curriculum change and consequently the introduction of a new curriculum with a new professional identity for the teacher.

Teachers' professional identity therefore has and always will be determined principally by curriculum change. The dictates of curriculum change in all academic systems, whether partial or complete change, has an impact on what teachers are to do in class and their professional identity. Much has been said on how curriculum change affects teachers' professional identity but there is a gap as to how student teachers experience teachers' professional identity and the changes that accompany it. This research therefore investigates this gap of how student teachers experience teachers' professional identity within the context of curriculum change.

VI. RELATION

Relation is another major determinant of teachers' professional identity. Stenberg (2010) defines relation as the constant interactions with other teachers, the school governing body, government and the society around them. This is due to the fact that teachers make sense of themselves as a result of their relations to the world around them. Stenberg (2010) continues that the teacher relates to his or her learners or students (the pedagogical relation), his or her content, to students' studying and learning (the didactical relation) and to the teacher's personal work theory. The teacher's relation with his content includes the actual content of teaching or what actually transpires in the classroom. Relating to the content therefore embodies subject matter, instructions and classroom management amongst other things (Kemp, Blake, Shaw & Preston, 2009). To a larger extent it also involves the bigger content of the curriculum, the manifold settings in which teachers work and the school environment (Stenberg, 2010), as such his relation to these multiple settings aids in determining who he or she is or who he or she eventually turns out to be. The didactical relation refers to the teacher's relation to the students' relating to content or how teachers aid and support students' learning. This cannot be done by

following a specific set of rules. Instead, each teacher determines his or her approach or theory to use depending on the circumstances around him, because students learn in diverse ways and at various paces. The pedagogical relation shifts the focus from teaching and learning to the communication between the teacher and learners or students and to how the teacher aids and supports the learner or students' personal growth. The teacher also relates to his or her personal working theory which more often than not is derived from the teacher's professional and personal experiences, involving his inner values, understandings and beliefs that ultimately guide and determine his professional identity (Levin & He, 2008; Kansanen, 2009). Therefore as MacLeod and Cowieson (2001) postulate, it is most likely impossible to split the twin elements of the professional and the personal aspect of the teacher.

According to Rodgers and Scott (2008) the relations in the classroom between the teachers and the students involve more than just participants in the teaching and learning process and it is a complex process of meaning making for both the teacher and the learners or students. As such what transpires in the classroom is more than an exchange of knowledge but the reproduction of self by both parties and a rub off of this self. The issue of emotions nurtured by the complex relation between teachers, learners, coworkers, mentors, school, community and state is more and more being scrutinized as a critical aspect of teachers' professional identity (Timostsuk & Ugaste, 2010). This relation inadvertently impacts how the teacher treats or reacts to the students in his/her class and also the quality of his or her teaching. The relation with the professional community of teachers also influences their understanding of complex practices, and the understanding of self. Since other teachers also go through this process, it is therefore an exchange of who they are rather than an impartation, making relations a critical determinant of teachers' professional identity.

Therefore, the teacher's relation with his/her learners, content, colleagues and environment at large determines his/her professional identity. The teaching and learning process is a very complicated one in which the teacher has to relate with the curriculum, its designers and the stake holders to support the smooth functioning of the school. The exchange between the teacher and the rest of the contributors or partakers in the teaching and learning process therefore has a great impact in the meaning making process for the teacher about himself. Relation is therefore a significant determinant of teachers' professional identity.

VII. EXPERIENCES

Since teacher professional identity is not static but rather involves the creation and recreation of meaning through experiences or stories over time

(Timostsuk & Ugaste, 2010), experiences is another major determinant of teacher professional identity. The teacher uses his experiences to construct and reconstruct his professional identity over time, owing to the fact that meaningful learning only builds upon previous knowledge and knowing who we are is the first step of knowing or determining who we want to be. Timostsuk and Ugaste (2010) consider teachers' professional identity to be a product of experience by seeing it as a process of practical knowledge building characterized by an ongoing integration of what is individually and collectively seen or experienced as relevant to the teaching field. Geijssel and Meijers (2005) attempt to model this integration, by treating the formation of teacher professional identity as an ongoing learning process, in which each professional experience is re-thought against a backdrop of mutual interactions of emotions and knowledge and where experiences can be both individualistic and one experienced with other colleagues. Thus, teachers' professional identity is determined by experience and this experience is a continuous learning process in which behavior amongst other things, like the creation of related meaning (Rodgers & Scott, 2008) and social context in a broader perspective, is the focus.

As Feistritz argues, not only do the educational experiences shape the teacher's professional identity but also political, social and cultural experiences (Feistritz, 2007). Seetal (2006) maintains that the relation between curriculum change discourses and teachers' professional identity provides insights to curriculum developers and theorists into how teachers' experiences determine or shape teachers' professional identity, teachers' practices and the meaning they make of it. Teachers therefore actively interpret and re-interpret their life experiences, creating their professional identity as teachers. It is therefore clear that teachers' professional identity cannot be complete or fully shaped without the teachers' experiences. With this understanding therefore, for student teachers to fully develop into practicing teachers, their experiences of what it means to be a teacher should be investigated and the results used in teacher education.

VIII. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The research design for this article, aimed at answering the following questions.

1. What experiences do student teachers have of teachers' professional identity within the context of a changing curriculum?
2. How can these experiences shape or not shape their professional development as teachers of tomorrow?

This study is a qualitative case study of student teachers in a university in KwaZulu Natal. Neumann (2006), defines case study as "an in-depth study of one

particular case in which the case may be a person, a school, a group of people, an organization, a community, an event, a movement, or geographical unit" (p. 40). Neumann (2006, p. 41) opines that most case studies utilize a variety of data generation methods such as photos, interviews, observations, maps, documents, newspapers, and records in a single case. The researcher in this case aimed at capturing the lived experiences, thoughts, perceptions and meaning making process (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011) of student teachers about teacher professional identity. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) state that the benefit of the case study is that it presents a real life experience and offers a complete account of an example or a phenomenon and an insight that would provide the reader with visible experiences of the participants.

Neill (2007) argues that qualitative research provides a platform to gain insights through the unearthing of meaning by increasing comprehension. This approach explores the depth, richness and difficulty of situations and is often associated with interpretivist paradigms (Lowe, 2007) in which the main projector of meaning is the content (Henning, 2004). Again as Gonzales, Brown and Slate (2008, p. 3) put it, qualitative research provides intricate details and distinct understanding of meaning and observable as well as non-observable situations, phenomena, attitudes, intentions and behaviours. Therefore, this study is justifiably qualitative and this approach is employed to explore and explain the experiences student teachers have of teachers' professional identity. This is achieved by using evidence from their relationships, practices and perceptions (Henning, 2004). Their understanding or interpretation of teachers' professional identity aided the researcher in understanding the kind of experiences student teachers have while acting as teachers and how these experiences can be used to improve the quality of teacher education from their point of view (Sprat, Walker & Robinson, 2004).

The qualitative data of the study were generated using two methods: semi structured interviews and document analyses. For the research to be corroborated, more than one method needs to be used to gather data. According to Khanare (2012) semi-structured interview makes it easy to extract insight about what an individual (student teacher in this case) knows or has experienced and what he or she thinks (Sarantakos, 2005). The semi-structured interview provides the researcher with opportunity of probing deeper, asking clarifying questions and discussing with participants their understanding of the phenomenon. In this research a semi-structured interview was used to generate data for the first question. The participants for the study were sampled using non-probability purposive sampling. This method of sampling enables the researcher to hand pick participants based on prior knowledge or recognition and with the full knowledge

that it doesn't represent the entire population. A total of eight student teachers participated in the interview. Also ethical standards were upheld by ensuring that participants knew their rights and signed consent forms. Permission was also obtained from the university where the interviews were to be conducted. The participants were also code named using the NATO phonetic alphabet; Sierra, Tango, Uniform, Victor, Whiskey, X-ray, Yankee and Zuluto maintain anonymity. Document analysis was another method used to generate data. The documents were analyzed with the aim of answering the second question. Documents provide the researcher with meaningful and already organized data which has been generated by relevant authorities in the field (Henning 2004) and Creswell (2008) add that the importance of document analyses lies in the fact that it generates good data for qualitative study. Two articles; Key experiences in student teachers' Development (Meijer, Graaf, & Meirink 2011) and Teachers' professional development in schools: rhetoric versus reality (Gemedá, Fiorucci, & Catarci, 2013) was analysed. Trustworthiness was attained in the study by using different sources of data which provides the researcher the opportunity of checking one source against the other (Creswell, 2008). Creswell adds that using diverse sources of data enhances credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability in the study. The study is limited in that the results were a reflection of all the student teachers at the University but will be limited to the selected participants.

The data generated were made sense of use the social constructionist theory. The social constructionist philosophy of education articulates that the society needs a reconstructing and schools are the ultimate utensil to foster such changes (Harguindéguy & Gouin, 2012). The basic tenet of social constructionism according to Young and Collin (2004) comprises the focus on the collective rather than the individual construction of knowledge. Nawaz and Kundi (2010) argue that social constructionism focuses on learning as a process of understanding and the creation of meaning where learning is considered to be the construction of meaning based on experiences in and around the school environment. Khalid and Azeem (2012), postulate that social constructionists see the teaching and learning process as an active one and this point to the fact that student teachers can and do experience teachers' professional identity as a learning experience and make sense of it due to the wealth of knowledge they come into the teaching and learning process with. Experiencing teacher professional identity by student teachers in this case is learning by doing under the guidance of mentors or teacher educators and these experiences shape the kind of teacher they become in future.

IX. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data generated was analysed thematically, where the data is coded and categorised into themes and sub-themes. The experiences provided by the student teachers were grouped into two main recurring themes. The themes are: complicated demand on self and professional development. These two themes were again divided into sub themes: individual self, multiple self, becoming a teacher and teaching skills. This analysis also includes diverse direct quotations from participants. Slavin (2007) argues it is of utmost importance to utilise direct quotations from data to illustrate and substantiate the arguments. In analysing the data, findings are also discussed.

X. COMPLICATED DEMAND ON SELF

This refers to the nature of work the student teacher is expected to do when he or she assumes the role of teacher. Since teachers' professional identity or what it means to be a teacher is on-going and ever changing, according to Timostuk and Ugaste (2010), the student teacher who is new to such a role finds it complicated. Lamote and Engels (2010) argue that teachers' professional identity is made up of three different sub-identities or roles and these three are based on different contexts and relationships. Puurula and Löfström (2003) concur with this as they see the three sub identities as the role the teacher takes upon his or herself. The first sub identity they identify deals with a teacher's personal understanding of the demands upon him or herself as an individual which ultimately leads to professional growth. The second sub identity deals with a teacher's perception of his or her skilled multiple self and this produces efficiency in the teacher. The third and last sub identity deals with a teacher's membership in a professional community, which generates commitment. Assuming the role of a teacher consequently places a complicated demand upon both the individual self and the multiple self of the student teacher. In order words, being a teacher is not just about teaching, but also about assuming different roles.

XI. INDIVIDUAL SELF

Experiencing teachers' professional identity places a complicated demand on the individual self of the student teacher. Sutherland, Howard, and Markauskaite (2010) postulate that teachers' professional identity can be considered one facet of a multitude belonging to an individual which comes as a result of his understanding of self. Assuming the role of a teacher therefore places a demand on the student teacher as a teacher to ensure that teaching and learning process takes place effectively. The student teacher no longer sees him or herself as a student but as a teacher. The student teacher carries the personality

of the teacher and acts as the teacher. He has the responsibility of teaching and ensuring that his message is well understood. Sierra, one of the participants, stated that "being a teacher means developing lesson plans and developing teaching aids constantly. It is also about a perfect delivery of the lesson to one's learners and making a difference in their lives". This is the core of the teaching profession, since teaching and learning is all about knowledge construction between the teacher and the learner. Another participant Tango added that;

Knowing what to teach is one thing and actually teaching it to the perfect understanding of your learners is another. Being a teacher is about re-enacting what you have learned to your learners and ensuring that they understood what you wanted them to.

Since no meaningful learning takes place without understanding, it is the student teacher's duty to ensure that there is perfect communication between him or her and his or her learners. Rodgers and Scott (2008) articulate that communicating in the classroom between the teachers and the students involves more than just participants in the teaching and learning process but it is a complex process of meaning making for both the teacher and the students. Most student teachers described this task as a complicated demand on the individual self. The student teachers environment also dictates or shapes the nature of the demand.

Chong, Ling and Chuan (2011) postulated that what actually takes place in the classroom, especially during teaching practice, has a significant impact on the professional development of the student teacher and their sense of identity. They add that teacher education programmes should focus more distinctly and efficiently on the issue of identity since "quite often during teaching practice a great deal of focus is directed to the delivery of lessons and feedback by supervisors who focus on issues of knowledge and skills of teaching. On the contrary, teachers' identity is not measured purely by how good or bad they perform in the classroom. The student teachers' experience and understanding of the teacher's work and professional role is what ultimately shapes identity and fosters professional development"(Chong, Ling and Chuan, 2011p. 34). As such, it is clear that in fostering professional development for the student teacher, issues of teachers' professional identity should be taken into consideration in teacher education programs coupled with lesson delivery and responsibilities.

Another participant, Uniform, opined that taking up the role of the teacher places a complicated demand on her individual self as a student teacher. She stated that;

for me to be successful in this task, means that I must have an understanding of how learners learn, a critical understanding of the learning area or subject, and be able to arrange, categorise and

present it to my learners in ways which will better enhance their understanding within that particular context of the teaching and learning process. And secondly to continuously review my strategy and develop new ways of improving learning.

For this reason experiencing teachers' professional identity or assuming the role of the teacher comes with diverse responsibilities for the student teacher. It is the student teacher's response to such responsibilities that leads to professional development or frustration in the teaching profession. Cole (2004) postulates that student teachers fail to develop professionally because they focus on why they need to change and what they need to change but neglect learning how to negotiate and implement change. Adding to this, he argues that professional development is perfecting practice (or teaching as far as education is concerned), by acquiring new strategies, skills, ideas and attitudes required for meaningful change to occur. Without these tools, the student teacher's professional development is therefore far-fetched. Experiencing teachers' professional identity therefore provides the student teacher with the opportunity to encounter and respond to challenges first hand thereby building a platform upon which he or she should be guided to develop. But this seldom happens according to Britzman (2003) who postulates that teacher education establishments and programs provide students with fragmented knowledge and theories in ill-designed courses while the school environment gives the student teacher the platform to apply this knowledge. Student teachers therefore have the uphill task of utilizing their fragmented knowledge and adequately delivering lessons to learners when they assume the role of the teacher. Britzman (2003) adds that these traditional or ill-designed courses have proved ineffective in terms of equipping student teachers for their future profession. It is clear that experiencing teachers' professional identity is an asset to the student teacher and teacher educators. Teacher education programs should use the feedback provided by student teachers to design courses and to improve pedagogy. It is therefore clear that this experience lays a complicated demand on the individual self of the teacher.

XII. MULTIPLE SELF

Experiencing teachers' professional identity also places a complicated demand on the multiple self of the student teacher. The multiple self of the teacher refers to the multiple roles the teacher assumes or plays to the learners. Some of these roles include: caregiver, parent, social worker, counselor and many others. Owing to the fact that these roles are professions in themselves, has made the participants see them as multiple or different faces of the teacher. For this reason the teacher has an individual self which has to do with teaching and a

multiple self which has to do with the different roles he or she performs within the school environment.

Victor another participant stated that the different responsibilities which she had to cater for when experiencing what it means to be a teacher were very complicated. Having specialized in the Foundation Phase, she is expected to become a parent to her learners. And being a parent, she added, meant different things to different people and her learners also expected her to care for them as their parents would. Due to the fact that the learners all come from different homes with different parents who treat them differently, it becomes very complicated for her to become a parent to all her learners. Whiskey also corroborated Victor's story with his own experience. He stated that:

I had to be very sensitive and vigilant as a teacher since some of my students were experiencing diverse challenges and chose to speak to me instead of the school counselor because I was younger. Some told me deep and dark secrets while others wanted advice on how to win a girl they believe they are in love with. Counseling or advising them on what to do was very complicated especially when some of the troubles they were going through were bigger than me. To further complicate the situation, some made me promise not to tell anyone what they told me therefore it was difficult getting help for them from the school counselor or other members of staff.

These multiple tasks of teaching, counselling, parenting and the rest become very complicated for the student teacher to handle, as it places demands on the multiple self of the teacher. Naidoo (2012) postulates that teaching is more often than not a socially constructed exercise which requires elucidation, negotiation and renegotiation of meanings built around the classroom. Therefore teachers develop professionally when they build up and implement personalised meanings of issues and phenomena in their practice. For, as Cole (2004) puts it, accumulating new knowledge, experiences and skills would be useless for a teacher until it is put into practice. For this reason the student teachers' experiences of teachers' professional identity should be used to improve modules in teacher education programmes, their strengths and weaknesses should be taken into consideration and necessary steps taken to make sure that their challenges become stepping stones for them to grow in practice.

These experiences accumulated by the student teacher can be used by teacher educators to redesign teacher education courses to make provision for basic training to be provided to the student teacher to handle such circumstances. In such circumstances the student teacher therefore develops professionally as he or she gains new skills and is able to handle the challenges he or she faced before. Experiencing teachers' professional identity therefore places a complicated demand on both

the individual self and the multiple self of the student teacher. He or she doesn't only teach but also assumes diverse roles.

XIII. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Stenberg (2010) defines professional development as the process of expanding and increasing self-knowledge. She adds that the more the self-knowledge of the teacher increases, the more apt his or her decisions will be in the teaching and learning process. This is because self-knowledge empowers teachers to recognize how, why and when they teach the way they do. The lack of self-knowledge will cause a teacher to be lead or controlled by unexamined ideas, beliefs and cultural myths not forgetting fear. Gameda, Fiorucci and Catarci (2013) postulated that professional development comes as a result of all learning experiences and the structured and organised activities which are meant to be of benefit whether directly or indirectly to the student teacher, teacher or any organ or person within the teaching and learning process who contributes to the quality of education. Student teachers therefore need to develop professionally to become teachers and also to gain a variety of teaching skills and these comes as a result of learning experiences and a deep sense of self (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

XIV. BECOMING A TEACHER

The ultimate aim of teacher education is to produce teachers and this is done by training student teachers until they graduate or phase out into the teaching profession. As such experiencing teachers' professional identity is all about becoming a teacher in the classroom; disposing of your statues as a student and assuming that of the teacher and performing the duties associated with it. Meijer, Graaf, and Meirink (2011) postulated that student teachers are required to use every resource at their disposal such as portfolios, mentor reports and feedbacks, teachers' lesson plans, their reflection-reports and many others to monitor and foster their development into teachers. Experiencing teachers' professional identity is what provides the student teacher with those resources. To the participants of the study experiencing teachers' professional identity was all about becoming a teacher. Yankee one of them stated that;

Once I stepped into the class I didn't want the learners to see me as a student teacher who is learning how to teach, I dropped everything both physically and psychologically that associated me to a student and fully became a teacher. I believed that this will improve my performance and increase my knowledge about the responsibilities and processes a teacher is involve in as he or she becomes involve in the teaching and learning process. Also owing to the fact that one of the teachers in the school abandoned

his class to me once I arrived the school, I had to be to be the teacher of the class.

Schepens, Aelterman and Vlerick (2009) argued that student teachers often consider development to be the ability to do things better than before and those aspects which improved in their practice or the things they were able to do better and neglect how those things were improved. Teacher education and everything about it aims at helping the student teacher to become a teacher. As such when he or she goes into the school and assumes the responsibility of the teacher, his or her drive is growing in the practice and becoming a teacher. This progress or improvement in practice is what guarantees professional development for the student teacher.

XV. TEACHING SKILLS

Experiencing teachers' professional identity is all about the exhibition or utilization of the teaching skills learned during teacher education. Wragg (2005) defines teaching skills as the strategies utilized by teachers to enhance learners' learning in the teaching and learning process and which are recognized by curriculum experts or assessment experts as skills. He continues that every skill has the capacity to be repeated time and time again and concludes that these skills should be analyzed from a broader perspective of activity such as classroom management, questioning, explaining, flexibility, versatility.

Tangoone of the participants of the study, believed that assuming a teacher's role is all about demonstrating his thinking skill in the classroom. He believed it is quite necessary for meaningful learning to take place in the classroom because;

There are times when you plan a lesson and write down examples you are going to use but while in class you discover that your examples have not been well understood. As such your thinking skills have to come in play so that new examples can be constructed which will ease learners understanding.

As such thinking skills are of outmost importance as far as experiencing teachers' professional identity is concerned. Student teachers therefore need to develop a strong thinking mentality or habit which will enable them to stand tall in the face of any challenge.

Cognitive skills are other teaching skills which are of vital importance as far as experiencing teachers' professional identity is concerned according to Yankee, another participant in the study. He stated that;

In the classroom, this skill enables the student teacher to make quick and precise decisions based on changing circumstances and also amend lesson plans and teaching strategies to accommodate certain unforeseen circumstances. This is so because its development or cultivation provides the student

teacher with a wealth of information about the processes and random circumstances that might occur during the teaching and learning process. It makes him or her aware of what might or might not happen in the classroom and equips the student teacher with the necessary tools to deal with them.

Kyriacou (2007) argued that teachers build a catalog of reactions and behavioral patterns from which they pick the most suitable to deal with impromptu situations ranging from learners not being able to do the work they are supposed to do, to the broader prospects of disruptive behavior or failing in an assessment task. He adds that the teacher's profession is quite tedious in its early years to beginning teachers because they have to develop their expertise of "knowing what to do and being able to do it" (Kyriacou, 2007, p.3). And this explains why many teachers leave the professional during their first few years of practice. Therefore teacher educators need to ensure that the development of these skills or expertise becomes part of the teacher education program such that student teachers will be fully equipped with these skills which will in turn ensure their smooth functioning in the teaching and learning process. The development of these skills by the student teacher ultimately leads to his or her professional development.

XVI. CONCLUSION

To complete the teacher education program without experiencing teachers' professional identity is like being immersed in water but not getting wet. Experiencing teachers' professional identity is of vital importance for every student teacher since it helps build their arsenal of knowledge and approaches. In experiencing teachers' professional identity, the student teacher becomes entangled in the proverbial web of teaching. He or she becomes acquainted with what happens in the classroom and starts preparing his or herself for the eminent change of phase. Experiencing teachers' professional identity psychologically prepares the student teacher for the complicated task that awaits him or her in the future. Before fully becoming a teacher, he or she is given a glimpse of what it means to be a teacher and the kind of demands it places on the teacher as well as the kind of responsibilities he or she has to take on as a teacher. Through this experience, the student teacher also knows and understands how to handle the diverse challenges he might or will go through when he or she becomes a teacher. Teacher educators and stakeholders should consider the challenges student teachers go through when experiencing teachers' professional identity and take the necessary steps to meeting these challenges. The reports of student teachers' mentors should be treated on an individual basis and adequate steps taken to ensure that the student teacher develops professionally.

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