A Narrative Inquiry of a Vietnamese University EFL Teacher's Assessment Identity

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: narrative inquiry, teacher assessment identity

This research uses a narrative inquiry approach to explore the teaching and assessment practice of a lecturer working in one university in the northern part of Vietnam. To collect data, the research has adapted the Tree of Life activity (Ncube, 2006) as a narrative frame enabling the teachers to reflect on and share their stories about their assessment practice as well as the world in which they live and work. The theoretical framework is grounded Dewey's (1938) notion of experience and Clandinin and Connelly's (1990) three-dimensional space of narrative inquiry, while the conceptual framework is based on Xu and Brown's (2016) framework of teacher assessment literacy in practice and Looney, Cumming, Kleij and Harris (2017)'s reconceptualization of teacher assessment identity. The findings underscore the dynamic nature of language teacher identities, including their assessment identities, highlight the role the working context plays in shaping these identities, and illustrate how teacher assessment identities influence their assessment practice.

Introduction

It is undeniable that teachers are not only cognitive beings, they are also social beings (Barkhuizen, 2016): Inside the classrooms, they interact with their learners and develop relationships with them, and together they construct sociocultural worlds in which they live their teacher's lives with their learners. Outside their classrooms, teachers engage with other teachers, learners, and administrators in their schools. And even further afield, they are members of many other communities, personal and professional, local and global. Teachers perceived as thinking and social people are not merely implementers of a syllabus or instructors of a linguistic skill like robots in a factory. In addition, as one species of mankind, each individual teacher possesses their own differences (Hoang, 2021). Accordingly, they do not simply perform their classroom practices, including assessment practices, as a cognitive being, and they do not perform their assessment practices in exactly the same way as any other teacher.

Rather, they bring their own past, present, and future experiences and even personal, social, and professional experiences into the process of developing their own identity as an assessor of language. However, such a topic has received little attention in the context of teacher education in Vietnam.

Literature review

The theoretical framework for this research was grounded on two pillars, namely Dewey's notion of experience and Clandinin and Connelly's three-dimensional space of narrative inquiry landscape, while the conceptual framework of teacher assessment identity is based on Xu and Brown's (2016) framework of teacher assessment literacy in practice (TALiP) and Looney et al.'s (2017) reconceptualization of teacher assessment identity.

The experience takes a central role in Dewey's philosophy and his epistemology. Dewey (1938) considered the nature of human experience as having these two characteristics: continuity and interaction. Experience is an encounter with nature, with other people, and with the self. Each person's experience will influence his/her future experience, creating continuity between past, present, and future experiences. Through interaction with nature and with other human beings and with oneself, one obtains knowledge and experiences, which eventually influence the way one perceives nature and his/her encounter with other people and him/herself. In this way, Dewey's concept of experience is transactional, which corresponds well with the exploration of teacher lives (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). From the narrative inquirer viewpoint, teachers' exploration of the experiences via narratives allows them to (re)formulate their identity. By exploring the relationship between teachers and their experiences, the researcher and participants can understand what was happening, creating new experiences that then become part of future experiences.

Using Dewey's theory of experience as the conceptual and imaginative backdrop, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) argue that narrative inquiry embodies theoretical ideas about the educational experience as lived and told stories. For them, the study of narrative is "the study of the ways humans experience the world" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p.2). Narrative researchers seek to view the lives of their participants and themselves as a whole into which the fragmented parts of narratives can be integrated and embodied (MacIntyre & Dunne, 2002). To cover multiple aspects of participants' life experiences, narrative inquirers are placed within a three-dimensional space of temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Temporality or continuity is the central dimension of the inquiry process. Each event being discussed must be seen as having a past, a present, and an implied future (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In this way, the narrator needs to look backward to earlier experiences, connecting them with current happenings and looking forward to the future and experiences that might be anticipated. The second dimension of the inquiry space, sociality or interaction, combines the personal and social experiences, involves sharing life experiences through which the storyteller looks inward to their feelings, hopes, and desires and outward to existential environments. The

last dimension, place or situation, attends to the "specific concrete physical and topological boundaries of inquiry landscapes (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.51). In other words, this concerns the locations in the storyteller's geographical spaces, which provide added meaning to the stories being told.

The research adopts Xu and Brown's (2016) six-component framework of teacher assessment literacy in practice (TALiP) regarding the conceptual framework. The six components within the framework of TALiP are interrelated, and the framework is cyclical in nature. Changes occurring in one component are contingent upon changes in another as the framework has multi-directional flows.
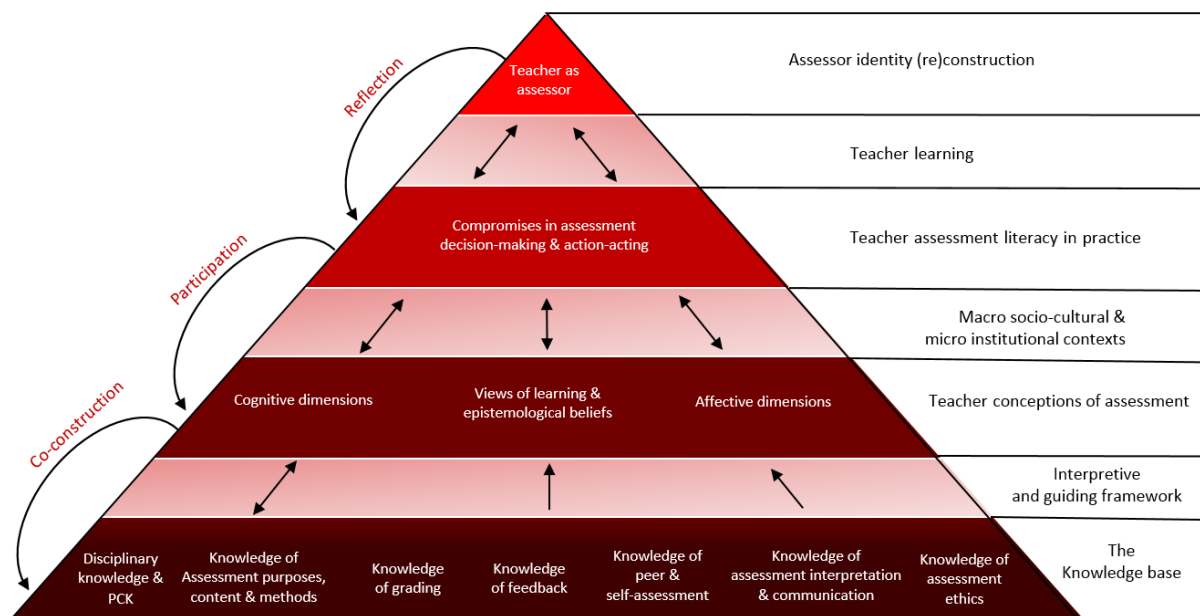

Figure 1: Teacher's Assessment Literacy in Practice (Xu and Brown, 2016, p.15)

The previous framework has informed this framework of teacher assessment literacy (e.g., Willis et al., 2013; DeLuca, 2012). The position the knowledge base as the first component at the foundation of the pyramid acknowledge the importance of having relevant knowledge (7 types) for effective assessment practice. The second component of the framework is the teacher's conception of assessment as an interpretive and guiding framework. Teacher conceptions are both collective and individualized. They are influenced by policy embedded in specific socio-cultural and institutional contexts (Brown, 2008; Smith et al., 2014) while also subjected to an individual's personal and educational experiences (Hill et al., 2010). The cognitive dimension of teacher conceptions of assessment denotes what teachers believe is true and false about assessment, while the affective dimension denotes emotional inclinations that teachers have about various aspects and uses of assessment. The third component of the framework is the micro- and macro- contexts, which function as the boundaries for TALiP. Teachers are bound by their immediate workplace community and also the larger social, political, and cultural contexts. Micro- and macro-contexts' policies, norms, rules, regulations,

and conventions in micro- and macro-contexts influence teachers' assessment practices. The tighter the boundaries, the less space there is for professional autonomy. Teachers are forced to make compromises to exercise their TALiP, which is the fourth component and the center of the framework. TALiP is a dynamic, complex entity consisting of various compromises which teachers make to reconcile tensions between teachers' conceptions of assessment and the sociocultural, micro institutional contexts and expected knowledge base (Xu & Brown, 2016).

The last two components of the framework, namely teacher learning and teacher assessment identity, play an important role in improving TALiP. As the dynamic, interactive, and contingent nature of classroom-based assessment changes the environment in which assessment literacy is operationalized, and because teachers have their own concerns and queries emerging from their classroom practices, they need to constantly reflect and adapt. Teacher learning occurs via reflective practice (Schon, 1983) and participation in community practices (Westheimer, 2008).

At the top of the framework is the teacher as assessor identity (re)construction. Although there is no ideal assessor identity, having a clear identity as an assessor will make teachers better authors of their own assessment practices with an enhanced agency to make more justified compromises in their assessment practices.

Research Questions

The present study is a part of an ongoing Ph.D. research project that aims to explore the (re)construction of teachers' assessment identity through narrative at a university in Vietnam. By investigating the teachers' shared stories about their language assessment work as part of their teaching career and situating such stories in multiple contexts, the project aims to explore how EFL university teachers, both experienced and novice ones, construct their assessment identity and how that identity influences their assessment practices.

Specifically, the present study is designed to seek answers to the following research question:

> *What does the teacher narrate about his experiences of language teaching and assessment practices?*

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

The study was conducted at the Faculty of English, hereby referred to as the Faculty, at a public university in Hanoi, referred to as the university. The university was officially established in 1951 and since then has served as one of the leading institutions for the training of teachers, lecturers, and educational managers in the country. It plays a key role in and has a good reputation for educational research and innovation. The Faculty, however, was relatively new as it was established in 2003. In 2021, the number of teaching staff currently working is 33. Despite the small number of teaching staff, the Faculty is responsible for conducting a variety of English courses and classes for all students in the university, including English majored &

non-majored undergraduate and postgraduate students, non-majored English classes for master degrees & Ph.D. students, in-service teacher courses, as well temporary and short teacher professional workshops and training programs under the regime of the National Language Project. Therefore, the teaching staff at Faculty always have to cover more classes than necessary. Also, due to short working trips and training programs, the teachers frequently have to travel and skip class quite often, and there is no chance for make-up class due to the rigid timetable of the credit-training system. In addition, due to the lack of teaching staff and shortages of classrooms, most of the classes run at the Faculty have to be merged, which means an average language class size is at least 40 students of mixed abilities.

The participant of the study, referred to as Mr. Green, is a middle-aged university lecturer at a teacher training institution in Hanoi. He graduated from the College of Foreign Languages, Vietnam National University in 2004 and was employed to teach English at the College for two years before he enrolled in an MA in Applied Linguistics overseas. When he returned to Vietnam in 2008, he started working as a freelance English tutor but was soon recruited by the university. Since then, he has been working in the Language Proficiency Development Division, where he currently teaches academic English subjects. In addition, he occasionally delivers the Teaching Methodology and Language Testing & Assessment for undergraduate students for the ELT Division of the University. He participates in the faculty work; however, as he prefers to "explore the world outside the academia," he also works under contract terms with a private school in Hanoi and runs his private language classes at home.

The researcher has been acquainted with Mr. Green for more than ten years. We had experience working together in writing materials for new courses, various invigilating exams, and even co-teaching several courses. With a long history of collaboration, it is easier for the researcher to recruit Mr. Green for data collection in this study. The selection of the cases was based on four main criteria: nationality (Vietnamese), qualification (Master's degree in English language teaching), experience (teaching experience in the context of Vietnam), and teaching status (in-service). The participant was not intended to represent any teacher population, institution, or culture as my interest was in the uniqueness of an individual teacher.

Data collection & analysis

The data in this study were collected via individual, semi-structured interviews (conducted in English, the participant's choice). First, a 90-minute background interview was conducted with the participant to establish a profile of his educational and professional background, motivation to follow the teaching profession, and views on language teaching and assessment. At the end of the interview, the participant was introduced to the Tree of Life (adapted from Ncube, 2006), an exercise based on using different parts of the tree as metaphors to tell stories about one's life (Ncube, 2006). Originally, the tree of life was created for professionals working with children affected by HIV/AIDS in southern Africa. The activity helped professionals get children to talk about their past in a non-traumatizing way and helped build a positive identity. In this study, the activity was adapted, and it served as an oral narrative protocol that supported the participant in reviewing his personal life experiences and articulating his stories (Farrell, 2007; Merryfield,

1993. It also allowed the researcher to have more in-depth data than what the background interview can provide. This activity aims to let the participant reflect and construct a visual manifestation of his teacher assessment identity. I started by asking the participant to think of the root of the trees, which symbolizes the values and beliefs that the participant has about language testing and assessment. Next, he reflected on the most important role he was playing in language testing and assessment. These roles were visualized as the ground on which their tree of life grows. There might be high and low grounds, referring to the importance of these roles to the participant. Next, the participant was asked to reflect on what he knew of language testing and assessment and what he was most confident doing. To investigate how interactions with different people in different places and over time, I asked the participant to also think about the leaves of the tree as those playing an important role in the participant's testing and assessment professional development and practice, the branches as the hopes and goals he wants to achieve in the future, and the fruits and flowers representing, respectively, the gifts he received from others and the legacies he wants to pass on to his students, colleagues, and etc. The challenges that the participant experiences, e.g., the various constraints in his different workplaces, are visualized as the storms in the picture. The vertical axis of the tree represents the timeline with different critical incidents, while the horizontal axis represents the various contexts where the participant conducts his assessment work. The leaves, flowers, and seeds represent the interaction dimension in my version of the tree of life. The following figure represents a model of the tree of life.
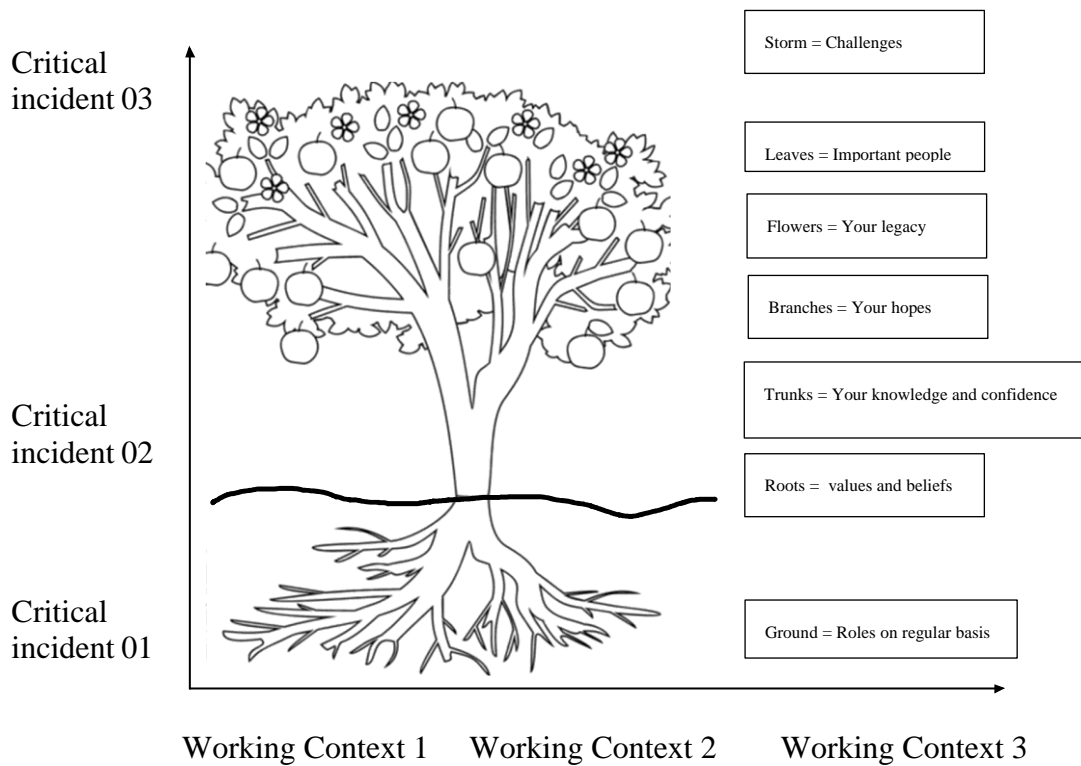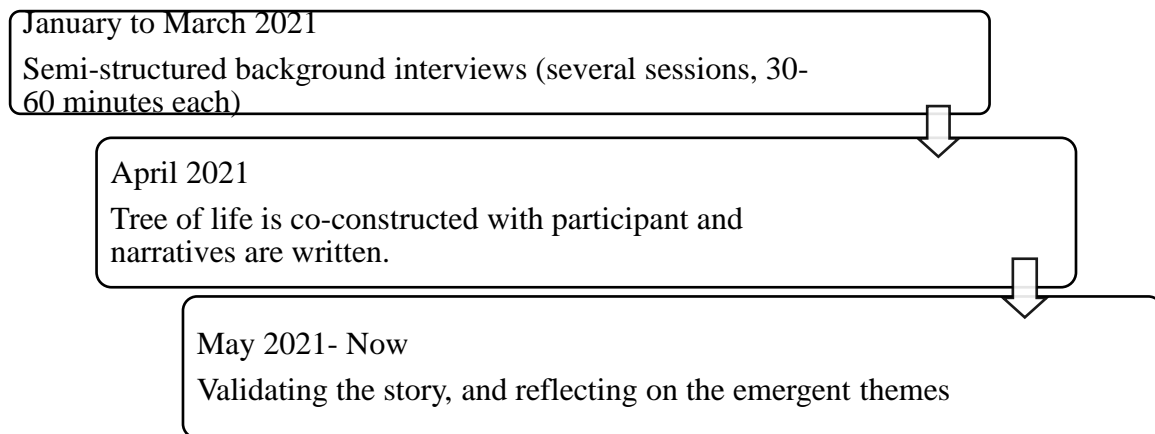
Figure 2: The Tree of life template

After the tree of life was constructed, the participant took time to reflect on it and then presented it to the researcher with a verbal explanation of the different components of the tree. During the process, the researcher asked questions about the tree and discussed with the participant about the critical incidents, important people, and contexts of assessment practice with the participant. The participant was allowed to modify his drawing of the tree during the discussion. As a result, the tree of life, to some extent, was the participant's co-constructed and narrated assessment identity. In addition, the use of this Tree of Life frame allowed the participants to locate themselves in the three-dimensional framework of temporality, sociality, and place.

The following chart documented the procedure of data collection with Mr. Green. However, the procedure is not conducted in a linear manner, as the tree of life and narratives of the participants were constantly revised, and the stories were co-constructed during the process as new data were collected.

January to March 2021

Semi-structured background interviews (several sessions, 30-60 minutes each)

April 2021

Tree of life is co-constructed with participant and narratives are written.

May 2021- Now

Validating the story, and reflecting on the emergent themes

The participant's stories and narratives were first recorded. Based on the participants' reflection on their Tree of Life, I provided an interpretation (also known as the re-storying process) of his narratives by using the three-dimensional inquiry space: interaction, situation, continuity (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) before discussing the emerged themes. In other words, the construction of narrative texts in this stage followed the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space framework.

Design of the Study

The study followed the story-telling path of narrative inquiry research (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000).

All data underwent thematic, cyclical analysis. First, the participant's answers were transcribed and then coded according to the five dimensions of Looney et al.'s (2017) framework and that of Xu and Brown (2016). After that, I analyzed data iteratively throughout the period of fieldwork, using Dewey's notion of experience and Clandinin and Connelly's three-dimensional space of narrative inquiry landscape as the theoretical framework to explore how teacher assessment identity has been constructed and reconstructed over time in different places, and in relation with the interaction with other important figures in the participant's life and work experiences.

In order to ensure the trustworthiness of the data, informed consent was obtained from the participant. His anonymity was maintained throughout via the use of a pseudonym and omission of identifying details. The participant was allowed to refuse to answer any questions he deemed intrusive. I briefed the participant before every interview and performed member checking at the end of the project by asking him to read through the data and analysis and identify any misrepresentation of the data.

Findings and Discussion

The article reports on the formation of teacher assessment identity formation of Mr. Green based on the analysis of a background interview (BI) and life interview (LI). The findings are written in chronological order using a narrative style. The presentation includes quotes from the participants and additional comments from the researchers.

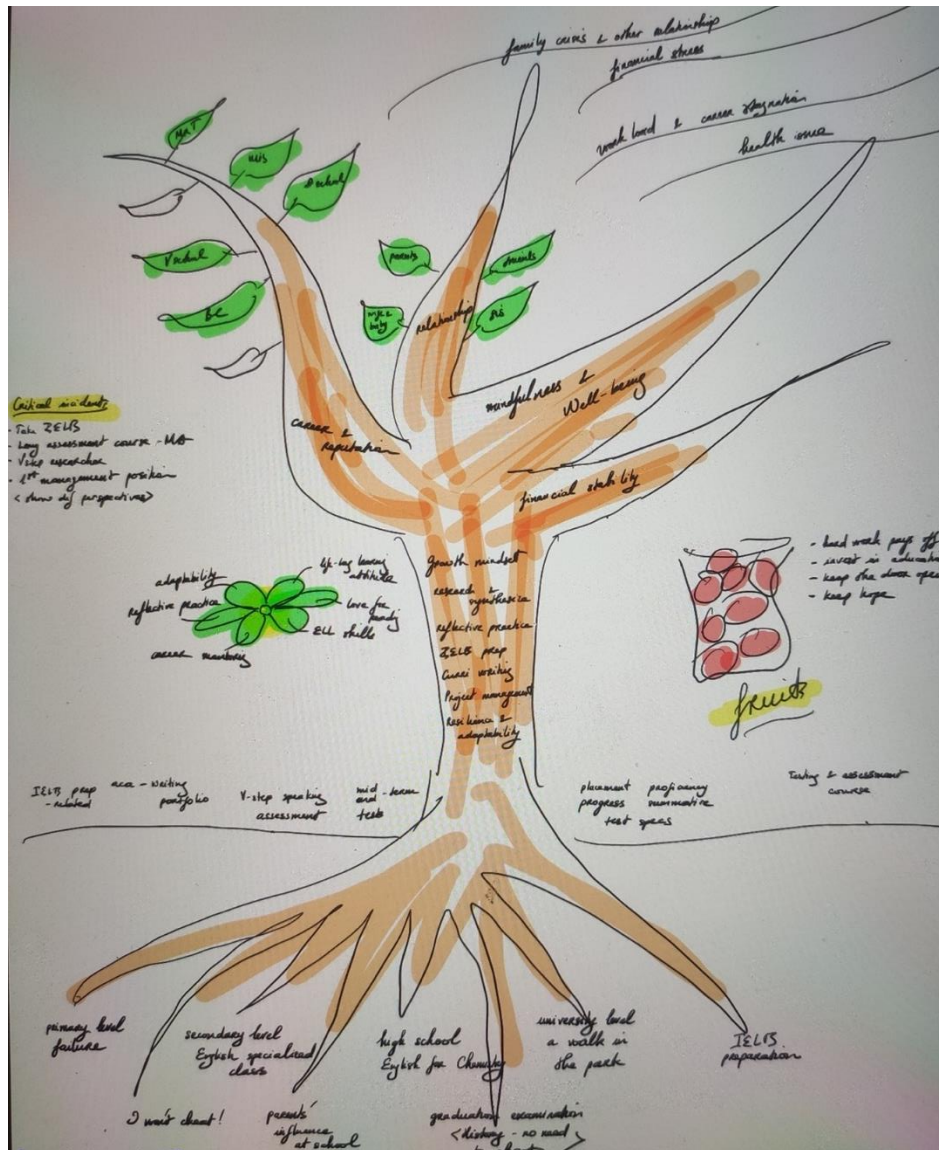The following figure represents Mr. Green's Tree of life.

Figure 3. Mr. Green's Tree of life

The following section presents Mr. Green's Tree of life and his assessment identity using the three dimensions as suggested by Clandinin and Connelly: temporality, sociality, and place

The temporality dimension

From a student perspective

From his Tree of Life, it can be seen that Mr. Green's assessment was influenced profoundly by his educational experience. He recalled the first failure during the examination to a specialized school in grade 3, in which he got less than 3/10 points for Mathematics. Although he did not describe the experience as having a negative impact on his confidence, he acknowledged it as the earliest memory of testing and assessment.

> "I don't think I was sad or disappointed. Rather, I was surprised as I thought I did quite well during the test. I told my parents there must be something wrong. My father did not say anything, though. I think he was disappointed to some extent."

During his primary and secondary education, Mr. Green did not do very well in different kinds of tests and assessments. The fact that his mother worked as a teacher at his school did make his life a little easier, as the teachers tended, as he claimed, to be more lenient towards marking his paper. He recalled several times when he and his friend submitted a similar piece of writing during a 15-minute written test. His scores were always higher. For Arts and Crafts, he sometimes received extra help from the teachers who were also his neighbors. Recalling these stories, Mr. Green reflected that he was not grateful for this extra help. In fact, he sometimes "rebelled" against it. Exams were a stressful experience for him.

> "I was not doing very well during these English examinations. One teacher frankly told me to copy the work of my deskmate. The boy was also willing to let me do so, as I often let him copy my answer in the Math examination. I refused right away. Although I was quite small, grade 5 or 6, I had my own pride. It was ok for me to let him copy my work, but I did not want to rely on his help. Getting low marks was ok for me at that time."

This rigid attitude towards fairness started to change as the participant entered high school. As he realized that each person has strong and weak points, he actively participated in "trading his English answers" for his friends during the Chemistry examination. This period boosted his confidence about language ability since he is considered the best student in English in his class.

The participant's more flexible attitude towards testing and assessment is also clear in his narrative episode presented below about the graduation examination. He lacked time to prepare for the History test properly, so for the first time in his life, he decided to make a mini cheat book of the materials he did not learn by heart. Putting the cheat book in his pocket, he nervously walked into the exam room.

> "This was a stupid and risky decision. I did not use such a mini cheat book before, so there was a high probability that I would be caught red hand. That would be a shame, not just for myself, but for my family as well. Luckily, I did not need to use the cheat book. I swore to never do it again, and I have kept my promise until now."

The first critical incident in Mr. Green's narratives happened in the last year of his tertiary education. Right before graduating from his teacher training program, he decided to take the IELTS examination to prepare for job hunting. With thorough preparation and hard work, he scored an overall 8.0 score. In 2004, there were not so many students with a score of 8.0, and his name was featured on the board at the front door of IDP, one of the two IELTS examination organizers in Hanoi. This incident undoubtedly boosted his confidence greatly and contributed positively to his identity formation.

> "I participated in several English examinations before, but IELTS was an international testing system this time. Students were sitting at least one meter away from each other, and there was no cheating. I was proud of my score, and, for the first time, I could proudly see myself as a successful language learner. I realized that I am worthy."

So far, Mr. Green's narratives have shown that he had shifted from having a rigid attitude towards testing and assessment to having a more flexible, even unethical, attitude to some extent. In addition, his perspective of exams as a stressful experience also started to change as the critical incident plays a crucial role in shaping his identity as a successful language learner.

From a postgraduate's perspective

In 2005, Mr. Green enrolled in his MA degree program overseas. The very first course he took was Language Testing and Assessment. Being an international student, he was nervous at first. This was also his first time alone, far away from his family.

> "The course book was Language Testing, written by Tim McNamara. The course changed my understanding of testing and assessment completely. During my pre-service training, there was only a book chapter about Testing and Assessment. My understanding of the concept was vague. The course helped me to see that there was much more [in Testing and Assessment] than giving students different labels. I learned about Test Washback and Critical Language Testing. It was an eye-opening experience."

This incident was a positive experience for Mr. Green, marking a milestone in his professional development. He became more interested in testing and assessment and read widely about the subject. The teacher assessment identity now plays a larger role in his identity formation than a language teacher and a successful language learner.

From an item writer for VSTEP

VSTEP stands for Vietnamese Standardized Test of English Proficiency, the first standardized English proficiency test in Vietnam. The test specification and format were developed by language testing experts from the University of Languages and International Studies (ULIS), Vietnam National University, Hanoi (VNU, Hanoi). It was released nationally under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) on 11 March 2015. Mr. Green, after completing his MA study, was invited to be part of a VSTEP research team at one university in Hanoi. He was involved in item writing and conducting pilot tests. The experience

was generally not positive, as Mr. Green realized that there were several shortcomings to the test specification design, the item writing process, and the implementation of the test. While he acknowledged the usefulness of the exam, he withdrew from the team to do, in his words, "more meaningful work."

> "I remember sitting in a small room with a group of six to seven experts. They were high-profile people holding high positions at the university. We were arguing over word choices for MCQ questions. There were no native speakers in the room, so we had to refer to the dictionary constantly. That did not make sense to me. After all, we were all non-native speakers of the language. The meeting went on for the whole morning, and I frequently asked myself whether what I was doing really benefited my students."

In this episode, the incident has left a negative impact on Mr. Green's teacher assessment identity development as he believed he could do more to support his students instead of wasting his time working on item writing for the standardized test. Thus, conflicts emerged between the assessment identity and the teacher identity. As Mr. Green withdrew from the research group, his assessment identity diminished.

From a management position's perspective

In this fourth critical incident of his teacher assessment identity formation, Mr. Green shared how becoming the manager of the English program at a school changed his perspective and reconfirmed the importance of having good assessment and standardized tests. As he was in charge of designing the curriculum, recruiting teachers, coordinating the teaching and learning of the subject, and conducting quality assurance and quality control, Mr. Green now had the larger picture of English teaching and learning at a school level. He was responsible for the learning of thousands of students in the school, while previously, he only cared about the small number of students in his class at the university or at home. The following quotation reveals his belief about the importance of placement tests.

> "I came to learn about the importance of having good quality placement tests. If students are not categorized and grouped into classes with students of their similar level, teachers will struggle with a class of mixed abilities. Students in the class will suffer as well, as teachers will mostly adjust their teaching based on the average level in the class. It is easier to talk about differentiated instruction than do it. Not all my teachers are of that level. Few of them are familiar with the concept. As a manager, I have to minimize such a challenge."

From the temporality dimension in Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) framework, Mr. Green's assessment identity has changed over time as he experienced the four critical incidents presented above. The incidents also allow featuring his attitudes towards standardized testing and assessment from four different perspectives.

The sociality dimension

Mr. Green's Tree of life has two leaves symbolizing the two important people who have contributed to the construction of his assessment identity. The first important figure is his father, who is a retired secondary and high school teacher. Mr. Green was channeled the love for teaching by his father, who believes that teaching is the noblest job. He sat in his father's literature class for students of different age groups, including those from grade 6 to grade 12. An important belief about assessment, greatly influenced by his father, is that the most important purpose of assessment is to help students to improve by providing the teacher information about the weakness of the students. In other words, formative assessment is what he embraces. His father downplays the role of summative tests and often be generous with the marking of such tests in order not to disadvantage his students as the Vietnamese culture values students with high scores in academic transcripts.

> "I [Mr. Green] recalled that he was a strict marker, especially in his evening classes. As his student, I also received several bad marks myself. Yet, when the end of the semester came, most students got much better marks. Even those who scored lower than 5, he would give them a bonus or extra tasks to increase their GPA if they requested. Every semester I collected dozens of students' compilation of poems from different Vietnamese poets – his favorite extra task for these underperforming students."

Another important figure contributing to Mr. Green's appreciation of formative assessment is his lecturer and mentor in his MA program overseas. The lecturer employed Mr. Green to work as his tutor in the last semester of his study. Mr. Green's job involved marking undergraduate students' assignments and even theses. He recalled that there were strict procedures to follow and well-designed rubrics to help make the marking objective and fair for all students. Yet, his lecturer advised him to take into consideration that many students in the course are international students who were disadvantaged to some extent in terms of language proficiency.

> "When we [Mr. Green, his mentor, and other lecturers marking students' theses] sat together to discuss the students' grades. Stefan [his mentor] reminded me of the threshold between different grades. 85 is a 7 [the highest score], and 84 is only a 6. 76 makes no difference compared to 84, as they both mean a 6. Yet, the international students will feel much better if they score more than 80. I learned to be more lenient towards these students while still maintaining the standards of the Faculty."

Regarding the fruits of the Tree of Life which symbolize the gifts received from other people, Mr. Green appreciated what he had learned from his colleagues at the University several useful things, ranging from the practical techniques in evaluating speaking proficiency to even mindful practices to keep calm and be objective in his assessment.

> "While the pre-service education only provided me with a theoretical background of testing and assessment, the mentoring program at the Faculty allowed me to shadow the experienced teachers who were willing to share with me tips and tricks as well as valuable knowledge of their assessment practice. I have learned a great deal during these

years. Even after the program had concluded, I learned from the chit-chat with other colleagues during the mid-morning recess. Being in a community helps me grow as a teacher."

Finally, in terms of the legacies or the impact he hoped to create, Mr. Green drew four petals of a flower to represent the knowledge and values he shared with students, colleagues, and those around him. He hopes to contribute to the mentoring program, shares his testing and assessment skills, reflective practice, and life-long learning attitude. He shared how he learned about the long-lasting effect he created when meeting a student whom he taught ten years ago in the following quote.

"We were both in the IT room of the school, waiting to have our laptop fixed. I did not even recognize her as she was a student in one of the first classes I taught in the first few years of my teaching career. She told me of the time she delivered a presentation in front of the class and talked to her after the lesson and gave her a note writing down some sounds she needed to practice. She thanked me for the effort and for making her realize her weakness."

This quote attests to the strength of formative assessment in helping students reflect on their performance to get better. For Mr. Green, in this way, feedback of assessment is a powerful education tool.

The situation dimension

This section presents how different contexts or working environments influence the participant's assessment practice. Mr. Green has included two important places in his Tree of Life. They are the university where he is working full time and the tutoring classes he has at home.

At the University, Mr. Green is responsible for assessing students participating in his courses and also worked as the examiner in several end-term exams and occasionally as a VSTEP speaking examiner. He embraced formative assessment as an assessment for learning in his course and recognized the need to be subjective in assessing students' performance. Yet, he described himself as a lenient marker in standardized exams and summative exams.

"I value the formative assessment tasks more than the end-term assessment as for me it is more important to help students to improve. I tend to be more lenient in the end-term tests as the score will impact the students' future. Another university tends to give students much higher marks, and that practice makes their students more competitive in the job market."

In his tutoring classes at home, his attitude toward assessment changed drastically. As this is his own business, he needs to be responsible for each student's progress in the course, and both formative and summative assessment plays a different role in his assessment practice. He explained this in the following quote.

"Their parents trust me totally with their learning progress. They pay a large sum of money too, so I need to use everything available to monitor their progress and help them improve. The assessment tasks [at the center] are not high-stake tests, so I can be fair and strict. When I conduct an assessment for learning in the lesson, I am their friendly teacher, willing to point out their shortcomings and give them a chance to improve. When I do an end-course exam, I am strict and want them to learn of their true ability."

These different attitudes toward assessment practice exhibit how a teacher's assessment identity shifts and changes according to the working context. This agrees with the growing body of literature spanning multiple disciplines pointing to the salience of place or situation as an active contributor to identity formation.

Discussion

Although the previous section only presents some findings from the narrative of Mr. Green, I have identified the following themes.

First, teacher assessment identity is an integral part of teacher identity. Depending on the different stages of the participants' teaching career and the places of their teaching practices (e.g., at the main workplace, at their private teaching sessions, at the test venues), the assessment identity might work against or support their teaching identity. Mr. Green even considers himself a soft assessor when he conducts assessment work at the university. He believes more in documenting the progress students make during the course rather than relying on the result of half-baked assessment tools created by the institution. From the preliminary findings, I propose below a simple diagram illustrating how one's teacher assessment identity can work together or separately from one's teaching practice. The teacher assessment identity moves back and forth among the four quadrants depending on their career development, the context of their teaching, and the interaction with people around them.
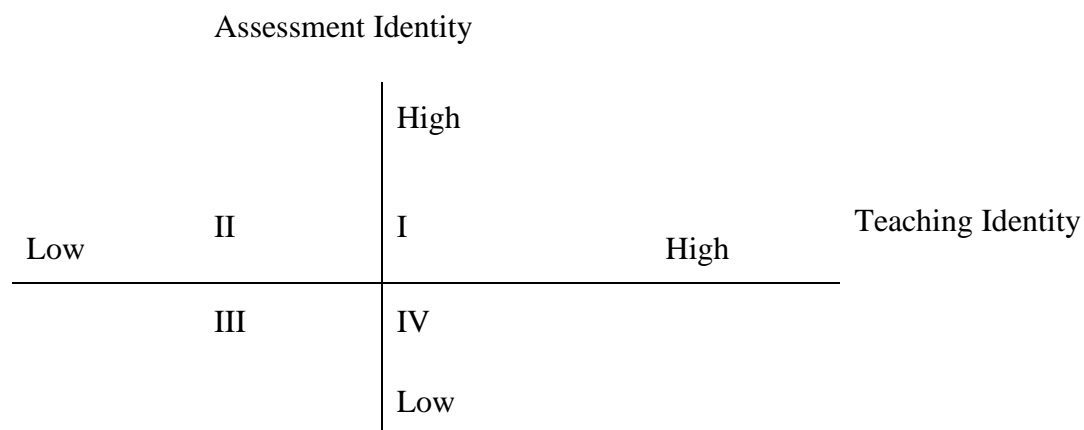
Assessment Identity

High

II   I

Low   High   Teaching Identity

III   IV

Low

Figure 6. Four quadrants of teacher assessment identity

In quadrant, I, teacher assessment identity integrates harmoniously with the teacher teaching identity. Teachers belonging to this quadrant are those who are aware of the benefits of using different forms of testing and assessments to improve their teaching. Teachers who locate themselves in the second quadrant are those who have realized the importance and benefits of testing and assessment in improving their teaching. They, however, align themselves too often with the role of an assessor at the expense of their investment in teaching activities. The third quadrant is for teachers who have low assessment identity and have the weakest teaching identity. They might be worn-out teachers or those who newly joined the teaching profession without proper training about teaching in general and testing and assessment. Finally, in the fourth quadrant are those teachers who downplay the application of testing and assessment. For these teachers, their main responsibilities are teaching or motivating students, and they tend to compromise in the form of soft marking when it comes to assessing their students.

It is important to note that there is no fixed or perfect teacher assessment identity, as depending on contexts and stages of career development, teachers move back and forth among the four quadrants.

Secondly, the participants reported positive and negative assessment-related critical incidents, although the number of negative incidents is more than positive. While the positive incidents help foster a positive self-image with teachers believing in the value of assessment, especially formative assessment, to inform students of their weakness and teach them to reflect on their own performance, the negative incidents were mostly related to institutional policies. These negative incidents diminish teachers' sense of agency, motivation, efficacy, and job satisfaction.

Thirdly, the development of teacher assessment identity is mostly influenced by the teacher's work experience and sharing from colleagues and mentors in the community of practice. Pre-service teacher training has a minimal and short-lived influence on the formation of teacher assessment identity.

Conclusion

The present study has adopted a holistic perspective to investigate the assessment identity of one Vietnamese English teacher, whose narratives indicate that the formation of his assessment identity is a complex process. The findings of the study underscore the discontinuity nature of teacher assessment identity and emphasize the role of different personal and professional factors in the formation of teacher assessment identity.

The findings of the study have clear implications for teacher education. For a long time, teacher education has often been regarded as "separate from the ongoing lives of teachers and student teachers" (Clandinin, 1992, p. 121), which shows the limitations of these programs in developing teacher identity. Therefore, it is recommended that teacher education should pay attention to and cultivate the richness and complexity of teachers' lives. This can be done via self-reflection, using tools such as the Tree of Life to support pre-service and in-service teachers in developing awareness of their assessment identity and the role of various factors in its formation.

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Biodata

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