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9. DEVELOPING TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES

Weaving the Tapestry of Professional Working Theory

A strong professional identity is an important resource and guide for the teacher or administrator in a demanding job. In this chapter we describe our work with student teachers and experienced educators in a master's course in the School of Education at the University of Iceland. This is a self-study research of three teacher educators collaborating on teaching and developing the course *Teaching a Diverse Group of Students* (TDGS). In this course, working on the students' Professional Working Theory (PWT) is a core assignment permeating the entire course using Dalmau and Guðjónsdóttir's (2002) PWT Instrument (PWTI) for guidance and support. Data consist of our journals, discussions and meeting transcripts, as well as students' data from online discussions, TOCs (tickets out of class) and their assignments in different forms—graphic, 3-dimensional, and written. Our findings show that students struggled with uncovering their PWT, but most of them found the process empowering and felt that the process had given them an important tool to realize and develop their professional identity to start their work as new teachers or to continue their work as experienced educators.

INTRODUCTION

Salka (pseudo names have been used for all students quoted in this chapter) wrote the following words in a personal narrative composed as part of her PWT assignment in the TDGS course.

In this course I have better realized what inclusive education is all about. I do not need to wait for it to arrive. It is already here and the success of its implementations depends on teachers' attitudes and approaches towards it.
(Salka, PWT, 2015)

Teaching in inclusive schools today is a demanding job and a strong professional identity is an important resource and guide for teachers to respond constructively to different challenges. Teacher education plays a vital role in helping students discover and develop their professional working theories.

We are three teacher educators who have been teaching and developing a graduate course on teaching in inclusive schools from 2012–2015. Two of the three teacher educators are authors of this chapter, and have worked in collaboration with the third teacher educator. We do not focus solely on the importance of student teachers and in-service teachers developing their PWT but also on the importance of self-study of our own work through reflecting on our teaching and making clear who we are as teachers. We believe we can make our teaching more influential if we find out how students experience our teaching, and in this case, we look at how we supported students to uncover and develop their PWT within the context of a graduate course addressing effective teaching of diverse students in inclusive education. In this chapter, we describe our self-study research on teaching and developing our practice and seek to answer the question, What are we learning about our teaching through exploring students' PWT assignments?

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Two major factors influencing teachers practice involve the educational values they have adopted and the kinds of experience they have. It is important for teachers to realize which ideologies they build upon in their practice and the influence those ideologies have on how they teach (Engelsen, 1993); in other words, teachers need to realize which theories impact them knowingly or unknowingly. Eisner (2002) claims that teaching is an artistic act, led by educational values, personal needs, and various truths to which teachers ascribe. These emerge as different variations of professional identities and can be seen in different views of teachers and within multiple teaching styles (Bjarnadóttir, 1993). We claim that a strong professional identity is an important resource and guide for teachers in a demanding job. The personal variations of teachers' professional identities have been described as their *practical theory*, (Handal & Lauvås, 1987) that is a personal construct about their practice, continuously developed through a series of diverse events (practice, experience, reading, listening or learning from others' practice). According to Handal and Lauvås, practical theories are private, constantly changing integrated systems of knowledge, informed by experience and values relating to teaching. Practical theories possess three components: (1). "personal experience;" (2). "transmitted/mediated knowledge, experience and structures;" and (3). "values (philosophical, political and ethical)" (p. 10).

Teachers' practical theories are often unarticulated and subconscious. Many scholars emphasize the importance of making teachers conscious of their individual and collective practical theories in order for educational transformation to happen (Aðalbjarnardóttir, 2007; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Day, 2004; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992; Guðjónsson, 2007; Guðjónsdóttir, 2004). In grounding teachers' exploration of their practical theories in the experiences and challenges they confront in practice, they become a source of empowerment and open up processes for individual and institutional change and development to happen. Thus, they

encourage teachers to use their experiences as a focal point to reflect on their views on education and their actions in practice.

Dalmau and Guðjónsdóttir (2002) use the term *Professional Working Theory* (PWT) to symbolize professional understanding that evolves through the constant interplay of professional knowledge, practical experience, reflection, and ethical or moral principles. Explicit PWT is developed through systematic and comprehensive critical reflection and collegial dialogue, and also contributes to the professional identity, the creation of professional knowledge, and the development of collegial approaches to practice. Dalmau and Guðjónsdóttir developed a step-by-step frame to help in-service teachers and student teachers reflect on and uncover their professional working theories. They present and explain the use of the PWTI (the PWT instrument) as a framework in three steps to engage teachers in deep reflection on their profession as a personal construct.

In this study, we explored the emergence of student teachers' and in-service teachers' professional working theories as they took part in our TDGS course about inclusive education. We were interested in knowing how working with the PWTI and other assignments we designed to support their PWT development influenced our TDGS students' awareness of who they are or who they want to become as teachers (Korthagen, 2013). We wanted to gain insight into our students' processes of working on their PWT so that we as teacher educators could learn from their experience to improve our teaching.

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Since 2012, three of us in teacher education in the School of Education at the University of Iceland have been teaching and developing together the TDGS graduate course (Guðjónsdóttir & Jónsdóttir, 2012). A main focus in the course is on inclusive education (IE) and how we can organize schoolwork to meet new challenges in teachers' work.

The course is designed for students to take responsibility for developing their professional identity by identifying and expanding on areas important for their professional growth. We organized the course into five themes: (1) Ideology of inclusive education and innovation education; (2) Inclusive education in the classroom; (3) Individualized education and assessment; (4) Parent-teacher collaboration; and, (5) Leaders in inclusive education. Within each theme, students read and discussed one or two pre-determined readings. Additionally, students were required to choose two to three readings within each theme on a topic of their own interest. Students had to complete three major assignments as well as actively participate throughout the course and complete a self-evaluation of their learning. In developing these assignments, our intention was to create a learning process that would enable them to capture their different experiences, concerns, teaching approaches, and beliefs and values.

Working on the students' PWT is a core assignment permeating the entire course using the PWTI (Dalmau & Guðjónsdóttir, 2002) for guidance and support. Since 2012, we have realized that working on the PWT is a challenge for students (Guðjónsdóttir & Jónsdóttir, 2012). We have been strengthening the use of the PWTI and supporting assignments and approaches that we find helpful to realize both the requirements of IE and to discover or develop students' PWT. The group in the course is a diverse mix of students who are native to Iceland and students who are immigrants to Iceland with varied nationalities. This group involved student teachers and in-service educators, including administrators, pre-school teachers, compulsory school teachers, physical education teachers and teachers with different specializations. All participants focused their work on issues of teaching and engagement. For the purposes of this chapter, all experienced educators will be referred to as teachers.

METHODOLOGY FOR OUR SELF-STUDY

Through engaging in this self-study of our teaching, we wanted to understand how the overall organization of the course and the assignments put in place for our students allowed their professional identity to emerge through uncovering and developing their PWT as teachers working within IE. Our research was driven by the question, What are we learning about our teaching through exploring students' PWT assignments? We gathered data about this course each spring from 2013 to 2015. In this chapter, we focus mainly on data from spring 2015, although we consult and are informed from older data. One of the changes we made in 2015 was to emphasize more decisively than before the opportunity for students to present their PWT in other forms than as written essays. Data consisted of our journals, discussions and meeting transcripts, as well as students' online discussions, anonymous TOCs (tickets out of class) providing student feedback on class meetings, and their assignments in different forms—graphic, 3-dimensional, and written.

As we read through the data from 2013 and 2014 we realized that although students were challenged by the PWT assignment, it was an important step in taking on the IE ideology in a constructive way. For the analysis of the data from spring 2015, we describe our two methods for addressing the data.

Svanborg's Analysis of Data

I, Svanborg, read the data with the inductive approach of grounded theory, marking and coding items and issues of interest without a specific theory in mind (Creswell, 2003). In the second round, I gathered issues and codes into themes and patterns that started to emerge, and the third time I sorted the themes in relation to our research question (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Karen's Analysis of Data

I, Karen, read and reread the data through the experiences and educational knowledge I had previously gained from working as a teacher researcher. I used this prior knowledge to guide me in identifying life experiences, values and beliefs, and critical incidents from the school site that student teachers declared important to the development of their PWT (Hubbard & Power, 1999). From there I explored patterns and themes, pieces of data, leading to flashes of insights into benefits and challenges students experienced in working with their PWT.

FINDINGS AND EMERGING THEMES

After these first rounds of analysis, we compared our emerging findings and started to write up the themes that emerged from the data we had analyzed, expanding and deepening our themes with direct quotes, as well as examples and stories from the data. Finally, we met and discussed the influences our findings were having on our understanding of the process we wanted students to go through and what implications they might have for our teaching.

A core theme in the findings shows that working on the PWT was a challenging process although most found it gave them strength and power. We describe and analyze the experience of students in two sections: (1) The different wefts [the horizontal threads interlaced through the warp (vertical threads) in a woven fabric]—how the different steps and assignments helped them along the way and how it was a step-by-step process; and, (2) The influence the PWT development had on students—what kind of professional identities appeared in their work. Finally, we conclude our findings by describing and analyzing what we learned as teachers about our teaching and discuss potential implications.

A Challenging and Empowering Process

Our data from 2013 and 2014 indicates that students found the process of working on their PWT to be important, and at the same time difficult. As we discussed students' conflicting experiences, we realized that many of the steps we had implemented in the course were working well. We decided to expand on those, developing additional tasks and experiments, encouraging students' critical engagement with their PWT.

For the purpose of this chapter we used mainly data from 2015, focusing on our collective efforts to develop the course to support students' engagement with and development of their PWT. Looking more closely at the data from students, we could see that using the PWTI and other assignments, tasks, and our approach all helped students to develop their PWT. One of our students in 2015 used the image of a tapestry as a symbol for making her PWT visible. From there she goes on to name the different influences on her PWT.

My professional working theory—who I am in my work and what I want to stand for—consists of many influences from different sources. These threads of influence weave together into the tapestry of my professional working theory. Each thread is important but individually fragile. When woven together with the others, each thread is strengthened, can bear more strain, and progresses towards its fullest potential. However, many threads are hidden; meanings I still need to uncover. Some I will never recognize, but I realize nevertheless they have shaped who I am, both in my work and in my private life. Some threads have yet to be wound and dyed, let alone woven into this tapestry; they represent the experience and knowledge I will gain through the rest of my life.
(Hanna, PWT assignment)

We found this metaphor useful in realizing how complex and intricate this important theory (PWT) is in the making and visualizing one's own professional working theory, presenting one's own professional identity.

The Different Wefts: Developing the PWT Step by Step

Throughout the data students identified elements in the course that helped them situate themselves in the reality of IE and thus excavate their PWT. They described what moved, informed and pushed their thinking about IE as it became a part of their PWT. Analyzing data, we recognized that students' experience of learning about and working within the context of IE and on their PWT were tightly intertwined, and that the course design and approach were woven into and around these two. Throughout the data we saw how the IE philosophy was in a way the warp in the tapestry of students' PWT and the different influencing elements make up the weft.

Practicing what we preach. As teachers educators we want to practice what we preach. We agree that learning takes time and that it is important to use various methods and strategies in working with students; we wanted to model for them that what we were telling them was useful. Therefore we made sure we both planned a time for students to discuss the issues being addressed and created tasks for students to experience these firsthand. After each session we asked students to help us name the teaching and learning methods we had used during that day. The list after one of the sessions contained the following methods: Presentations (lectures), discussions, collaboration (team-teaching), walk-and-talk, discourse analysis, group work, student presentations, narratives from teaching, visual presentations (drawings), active listening, looking for needs, analyzing needs, problem solving, and book fair (where students had choice according to interests and specializations) (Brainstorming List from Class, 2015). Students declared that the emphasis and approaches in the course had convinced them that it was important in their own teaching to offer a variety of teaching and learning methods. At the end of the second session a student

wrote, *I have not only read about teaching strategies, but experienced them. I would like more of this* (TOC, February 16th, 2015).

Throughout the course we gave mini-lectures on various topics. Many students mentioned that different lectures had inspired them, such as lectures about IE, literacy, innovation education and about being a leader (PWTs & Self-evaluations, 2015). Líf, a young teacher in a rural town, described her reaction to a lecture about innovation education: *The lecture was an inspiration for me in my working environment and I started to experiment with the ideology of innovation and other ideas that have been presented in this course* (Líf, Self-evaluation, 2015).

In getting students engaged with their readings, we asked them to write an editorial about a topic of their interest within each theme of the course. These editorials were to be posted on the online environment Moodle and discussed online in small groups. Many students described how this work had influenced their thinking about IE. Lísá describes her gain from the course's readings:

Many of the topics I have read and written about have directly influenced my job, sometimes to make my co-workers think about how our body language and how we apply our voice can avert children from conflicts towards solutions.
(Lísá, Self-evaluation, 2015)

In the second on-campus session, students asked for an opportunity to meet and continue their online discussions. As we responded to that request they described how this face-to-face interaction with either their peers on similar school levels or in groups with professionals from different levels and different specializations sparked greater discussion once they met online (Notes from Talks, 2015).

Throughout the course we had a strong emphasis on creativity and individual expression. Many students found the openness of some of the tasks to be challenging, especially in the beginning of the course. We strongly encouraged students to use original ways of presenting their PWT for the final form of that assignment.

Personal engagement with PWTI. A major approach in PWTI is to engage students personally and to draw on the life experiences that have influenced who they are as professionals. In the course, we designed different steps that were a part of or intertwined with using the instruments. In the first on-campus session we had students do a triple step interview working in groups of three. The aim of the interview was to get students to think of the practical aspects of their work. We arranged times for the interview and observed students actively doing the interviews on-campus, somewhat hesitant at first but as they continued, becoming more alive, the interviewee talking vigorously and the interviewer nodding and prompting when needed.

After the first on-campus session, students wrote in the TOCs how they had "learnt about what a professional working theory is," how they *needed to be proud of themselves as professional*, and how they realized *the importance of writing about and reflecting on one's work*. One person mentioned how she had never thought of

what kind of teacher she was and now she needed to allow herself to think of and put into words who she is as a teacher. As pleasant as this feedback from students were, we worried that the interview would not work as well for students who had not attended the on-campus session and had to conduct it online. These students were instructed to find a partner online to interview, organize an online meeting (for example, on Skype), and to record the interviews. The results of this type of interview process worked better than we had expected. Auður wrote in her self-evaluation report:

Having to find a partner to interview and discuss my PWT helped me develop my theory. Discussing it with another student, who also took this course, like me, mostly online helped me to get better in touch with the course. The points I wrote down during the interview helped me to work on my PWT. It was helpful to be able to listen often to the recording, both to hear my own talk and my partner's. (Auður, Self-evaluation, 2015)

From there we asked the students to bring an object to on-campus session two that could symbolize who they were or wanted to be as teachers. Salka explained to her group what she had brought:

I discussed this with my colleagues in the teachers' room in my school and got them to reflect on their PWT. I suggested bringing a chili pepper. The spice symbolizes my effort in teaching where I am identifying needs – like tasting food – where do I need to do more, how can I spice things to get better results? (Salka, PWT, 2015)

Another task students engaged with as a part of the PWTI was to complete a written response to the prompt “I remember...” highlighting their experience of being students or teachers. This was a task developed for students to identify moments in their lives or work they related to IE. From there, students were to write out the full account of that moment in order to explore the multiple factors influencing their actions and thoughts at that time. An example of “I remember...” writing is this description from Sif:

I remember my first students and the feeling I got when I first met them. I thought to myself after the first day: How on earth am I going to tolerate these other people's kids for a whole winter for many hours each day? Then something happened... I felt this abundant compassion towards them that emerged in that I wanted to do everything I could to ensure that they felt as good as possible. (Sif, I Remember, 2015)

Other assignments and tasks were similarly designed to get students to develop a PWT that enabled them to both problematize their understanding of IE and identify professional strengths within themselves or their professional community to respond to different situations in their work.

Reflecting on the PWT assignment. The student data repeatedly showed that uncovering or developing their PWT was a process and the scaffolding and ignitions we provided helped them along in that challenging journey. Hanna, a pre-school teacher, reported:

Early in the course I bought a journal to write down my thoughts about schooling and education. This has been helpful for me as a professional. I will continue recording my thoughts and ideas. It has been useful to reflect on and develop ideas that come up in the business of the day. (Hanna, Self-evaluation, 2015)

Póra, an experienced teacher, admits that in the beginning of the course she did not know what a PWT, action research or reflection on one's own work was about: *I have to admit that I have built my teaching on an invisible PWT. I am realizing that everyone has a PWT, some parts can be hidden but others visible.* (Póra, PWT, 2015) Throughout her PWT assignment she describes a strong and caring professional using the frames of the PWTI to present the core elements of her work. Auður looks back on her PWT work in the course in this reflection:

In the first assignment I was asked to reflect on what kind of teacher I wanted to be. When I look at my answer I see that my ideas have developed and changed in only three months. I have realized that my ideas about what kind of teacher I want to be must be supported by a strong rationale and power; they cannot just be exclamations. I have understood that I must know why I want to be this kind of teacher, what's behind that aspiration. (Auður, PWT, 2015)

Through students' self-evaluation reports and the PWT assignments, we could see that the work with PWTI and other assignments on-campus and online helped students to get in touch with, uncover, and strengthen their developing PWT. Some students mentioned the PWTI as an influence in this process. Arna, a student teacher, expressed in her self-evaluation report the value of the PWTI for guiding her thinking:

I have deeply reflected on my PWT all term and it has been in the back of my mind in everything I have been doing. I have thought about what Hafdis said in her lectures and I have used the guidance and questions in the PWTI that we got in the beginning of the course to help me reflect on these issues. This work has given me a clearer picture of my PWT and how I want to explain what my profession entails. (Arna, Self-evaluation, 2015)

Drawing together these findings, it is evident that the process of working on the PWT was a continuous journey throughout the course, guided by the PWTI, and addressed across many steps and through different assignments, tasks, and readings. Gradually, the tapestries of their PWTs emerged and were presented in the final version they handed in.

PWT Influence on Students – The Tapestry Appears

Most of the students experienced the PWT assignment as challenging but also found the process useful and empowering. Some students found it to be invigorating and that it strengthened the PWT they already had realized, and through the overall process in the course they were able to develop their PWT further. Others were developing or uncovering their PWT for the first time, throughout the course using the PWTI and other assignments and tasks related to IE to help their PWT to emerge.

Challenging and inspiring assignment. Working on the PWT was difficult for most of our students, especially the ones with little or no experience of teaching. Gustaw, an immigrant to Iceland who focused at the pre-school level, was one of those who found the PWT both challenging and useful:

It was a huge challenge to work on my PWT and yet the one I learned the most from. It made me stop and reflect on my situation. It was a very personal assignment, I have never written such a piece and I feel so much lighter after doing this. (Gustaw, Self-evaluation, 2015)

Another pre-school teacher was bewildered in the beginning, but working on her PWT through the course, she discovered how theoretical knowledge supported her.

First I was meant to look at my PWT, but I didn't understand what was expected of me. I had of course read about theories but they were just kept up "on the shelves" so to speak. But now I see how they support my work. (Jóhanna, PWT, 2015)

Other students described the PWT assignment as enjoyable and useful. Anna, an inexperienced but motivated student teacher, reflects on her PWT:

It is not complicated to write your PWT... It is more demanding to act it out, especially when times are tough. I have still no experience of that. But I want to understand myself and that is not a job for one person, so I have accepted the help of influential others, that is, of academics and theorists. (Anna, PWT, 2015)

Several students talked about enjoying the PWT assignment and were pleased with being allowed to leave the traditional frame of writing an essay. Ólöf was one of these students. She presented the core of her PWT as a series of drawn pictures depicting her development as a professional (see [Figure 1](#) below):

I appreciated working on the PWT assignment. I was surprised how much I enjoyed leaving the academic frame and working it out in a creative visual way. I enjoyed and learned a lot from thinking about my profession in this way. (Ólöf, PWT, 2015)

Salka, a young teacher in primary school with a little teaching experience, talks about how working on the PWT helped her mapping what she has been learning



Text translated to English:

Upper section:

Build on theory
 Research, inquire, build up, engage.
 Point out new routes
 Opportunities for learning
 Work with teachers, administrators, students, officials
 School development
 Lead people together
 Professionalism.

Lower section:

Professional – schoolwork
 Teacher – learner – inquirer – administrator – teaching guide.
 Learning community
 Support
 Inclusive education
 School development, flexibility, respect, learn from others, collaboration, team teaching, guidance, courses, adjust learning and teaching
 The student in the first place
 Building up the child

Figure 1. Ólöf's Professional Working Theory in 2015

and how she has matured and developed. Now, she feels more ready than before to develop further (Salka, PWT, 2015).

Looking at the data, we see how students experience being empowered by their participation in the course and have developed stronger professional awareness. This emerged in their PWT as well as in having a direct influence on their working conditions (for those who were practicing teachers). Practicing teachers were able to bring their understandings from their PWT to their teaching and this raised their awareness of how IE is realized in their schools. We recognized the work on the PWT as influential in expanding students' knowledge, skills, and confidence to work in IE. They gradually realized what was needed for implementing this ideology; and this understanding was depicted in their PWT, reflected as: solid knowledge, positive attitude, collaboration, and creative thinking.

Knowledge and positive attitude. Many students mentioned that they had acquired more knowledge or deeper than they had before about IE. Hjördís reports in her self-evaluation report:

My knowledge about IE has increased enormously in the course. I feel ready to ensure that all children in the playschool I work in have the opportunity to enjoy everything it offers and I celebrate the diversity and its potentials and I will focus on every child's strengths. (Hjördís, Self-evaluation, 2015)

Students' ongoing discussion in relation to their readings and writings helped them develop knowledge of IE. Ólína reports that Moodle discussions were rewarding: *There is a huge amount of experience and knowledge in the group, so many ideas that I have got through the discussions and responses to my writings (Ólína, Self-evaluation, 2015)*. Radomila describes the overall influence of the course:

The course gave me increased academic knowledge about my profession in IE and an opportunity to discover new ways and approaches to diverse ways of teaching (tangible ways of expression, TOCs, and different forms to deliver assignments). (Radomila, Self-evaluation, 2015)

As a part of their PWT, many of the students analyzed what is at the core of IE. Aðalheiður states the foundation of IE lies in the teachers' attitudes and that *everyone can learn, whatever age, sex or race, but it is different between individuals how they learn (Aðalheiður, Online discussion, 2015)*. Anna talks in a similar voice: *We are all individuals and we can all learn, all the way to our last breath (Anna, PWT, 2015)*.

Collaboration and conversations. One of the realizations students identified as a key to making IE work was collaboration between colleagues, between teachers and students, and between school and parents. In her PWT, Katrín discusses the importance of collaboration and conversations in approaching complications that can be difficult to solve alone. She points out that it is possible with a positive attitude and working with good people to ensure the welfare of students:

It is important to work with good colleagues It's important to be able to discuss issues with co-workers. When discussions take place often new insights emerge that lead to solving the problem. (Katrín, PWT, 2015)

Auður argues that for teaching and learning to be successful a collaboration with students, other teachers, principals, and parents is needed. She claims the keys to good collaboration are *positive interactions, respecting others, their ideas and talents, weaknesses and personal properties (Auður, Online discussion, 2015)*.

Nína finds it imperative if a school is to work well that colleagues listen to each other and collaborate on meeting challenges and working on tasks. Salka concludes in her PWT assignment that solid collaboration is one of the keys to a successful teaching profession. She points out that collaboration is an important issue in modern society and that it needs to be trained. She also finds this thinking applies

to students' learning: *Students must understand their roles in connection with others and experience teamwork* (Salka, PWT, 2015).

Creative thinking. Developing a working theory is a creative process that reinforces the realization that creative and resourceful thinking is a necessity in the teaching profession. Our emphasis on creative thinking and seeing challenges as opportunities to move teaching and learning further with new or known solutions was often discussed in our preparation and analytical meetings. We wanted this thinking to permeate the whole course and thus we presented innovation education as an approach. The students embraced and expanded on this emphasis in different tasks and used it to develop their PWT.

Some of the students found the freedom for expressing their creativity to be challenging. Katrín declared in her self-evaluation report that the freedom she had in presenting her PWT in a creative way was daunting but at the same time it was the experience from which she learned most.

It engaged me to express myself in more ways than with words on paper. In my PWT assignment I became very excited about my idea of sorting out the knitting basket tangle as a symbol for my PWT. The tangled basket represents teaching in a group of different students as a complex and sometimes tangled endeavor. (Katrín, Self-evaluation, 2015)

Hanna, a pre-school teacher, believes fostering children's creativity is important. She wants them to become resourceful and inventive.

Problem solving with children and identifying problems themselves, understanding and solving them is important. It is not just useful for them here and now but also to build a society in collaboration with others, because when we take from them the power and solve everything for them, we remove their initiative and skills to solve problems independently. (Hanna, Self-evaluation, 2015)

Students repeatedly expressed how they wanted to emphasize problem solving in their teaching and to think about problems as challenges and opportunities. They expressed belief in creative teaching methods and approaches. They stated it would be more constructive to use available materials in a creative way rather than only complain about what is not available (e.g., accepting refugees to Iceland could be seen as an opportunity rather than a problem).

Development of the PWT Throughout the Course

Working through the PWTI and other assignments and tasks in the course supported students to form and make their professional identities visible. Analyzing the data from the beginning of the course to the final assignment and self-evaluation report we saw development and progression of the students' PWT. In the beginning many

of the students expressed doubts about IE. These views were altered according to the PWT assignment and self-evaluation report.

Clarifying the PWT in light of inclusive education.

I found everything about this policy that wasn't working and expressed my doubts about it. My feeling was that people were obsessed with practicing it according to one strict model. Fortunately my views gradually changed. ... I now think that each teacher must find his or her own rhythm to work in inclusive education with the students' needs at heart. (Ingunn, Self-evaluation, 2015)

Póra, another experienced teacher, talked in her self-evaluation paper how she had not expected much from this course: *I thought this would be yet another sermon about specific theories and teaching methods that would make me feel bad about what I was lacking (Póra, Self-evaluation, 2015)*. In the first intensive on-campus session, she slowly realized this course was different. *It was about looking at ourselves as professionals, our teaching, our attitudes and values. Reflect on why we teach like we do and what we can do to meet the needs of all students (Póra, Self-evaluation, 2015)*.

Most students were more upbeat and more positive towards IE by the end of the course. Prior to the course, Sigríður, a student with a psychology background, knew a lot about the IE policy and ideology but always thought it was complicated and difficult in practice. Looking back she felt she had been stuck in a rut:

I was stuck with the cliché that "it is impossible to meet each student's needs because of lack of time and money." After reading all the articles in this course, listening to the lectures and writing down my thoughts in a research journal I have realized that this does not have to be so complicated in practice. (Sigríður, Self-evaluation, 2015)

These changes in students indicate that students' preconceptions of IE can change and that they may not be as deep-seated as they appeared in the beginning of the course.

Renewal and Empowerment

Students' views on IE either changed or became clearer through their PWT assignments. Some of the in-service teachers found the process and the course to be invigorating, giving them renewed energy and interest in their work. Many discovered their professional confidence and felt increased respect towards their work.

Increased professional awareness with theories and reflection. Working on their PWT and other assignments helped students to realize what kind of professional they

wanted to be or become. Through the process they strengthened their professional image. Hrönn, a pre-school teacher, claims that the course and the work on the PWT helped her to develop her professional identity as a leader in her school: ... especially in my department where there are different individuals with different needs (Hrönn, PWT, 2015). Heiðrún, a primary school teacher, explains in her self-evaluation report: I am now more professionally aware and a better teacher than before (Heiðrún, Self-evaluation, 2015).

Through our own self-study we often discussed that many students have not experienced being empowered by theories, often finding them to be an unsettling obligation in their studies. Therefore we were pleased to see how many students had discovered the power of theories for strengthening their professional image and how they played an important role in their PWT.

Ingunn, an experienced compulsory school teacher, has found connections with theories that she did not expect.

I have learned a lot, my vocabulary relating to theories has increased enormously. Today I have words for so many things I did not know there were words for – and certainly not theoretical words. (Ingunn, Self-evaluation, 2015)

She adds that she leaves this course *thick with theories and armed with many more tools to teach than in the beginning of the year* (Ingunn, Self-evaluation, 2015). Linda, a pre-school teacher, expresses how she found support in the theories she previously had thought had little relevance for the day to day work in pre-school:

I have got theories that helped me to think more deeply. They support my rationale and my views and give me professional confidence. The theories have helped me to name the methods I have been using in my work. (Linda, Self-evaluation, 2015)

Anna claims that she highly doubts that it is possible to write about one's own PWT without connecting to theories and writings of others. Una reflects in her PWT assignment: *I saw that I had been busy in my everyday work and reading again about the ideology behind the theories I found that I was better equipped and stronger in doing my job* (Una, PWT, 2015).

Over and over we saw that the course and the tasks were enabling students to realize how their work was already theorized; by gaining the words they needed to talk about their profession and their actions, they felt empowered. Brynhildur, a pre-school teacher, described her increased lexicon for describing practice:

I simply didn't realize that I knew so much and I just lacked the right words to describe. I try to work in the spirit of the multiple intelligences theory – before this course I knew I was doing a good job but I could not put the theories I was working by into words. (Brynhildur, Self-evaluation, 2015)

A majority of the 2015 group expressed that they experienced the importance of self-reflection through working on their PWT, using the instruments provided in class

to support them. The PWTI led them to reflect and think carefully about the three core elements in their PWT. Several of them dug deeply into their life histories and presented in their assignments deeply touching stories from their background. Linda started her PWT assignment by stating: *In order to describe my professional theory I had to dig deep into my own life's history to scrutinize everything that has influenced me and how I am now* (Linda, PWT, 2015). Hrund, a compulsory school teacher with 10 years of teaching experience, stated she realized the importance of constant reflection. *I need to allow my doubts to be aired and use them to convince myself I am doing the right things. My self-discussions are a part of my PWT. It is ready – but will be constantly scrutinized and reevaluated.* (Hrund, PWT 2015)

Ólína stated that she found the PWT assignment useful *to look inward, reflect and look at yourself as a professional* (Ólína, Self-evaluation, 2015).. Þóra, an experienced compulsory school teacher, said she did not have a clue about her PWT before this course. She discussed how reflecting on her actions helped her realize that she is a different kind of teacher depending on which subject she is teaching. She admitted that she did not do a proper reflection in her job, but throughout the PWT assignment she provided deep reflections on the many issues, facets and duties of her work.

Inspiring and empowering. Hanna, a pre-school teacher, remarked on the PWT work and the course as a whole: I could not have gained more from a course than in this one, it ignited a passion in me that had been diminishing (Hanna, Self-evaluation, 2015). Ingunn described influences in a similar vein:

The course and assignments pushed me as a teacher and taught me that I am professional and theoretical in my work. I have learned a lot of practical things that I will use in my work; approaches and ways of working in the intensive sessions were powerful and it was really bad to miss them when I could not attend. (Ingunn, Self-evaluation, 2015)

Our teacher hearts were joyful when we saw how many of the students found the course and the PWT assignment empowering. Lovísa stated she could now recognize and celebrate her own strengths through working on her PWT: *I have acquired a new outlook on myself as a professional. My self-efficacy and my competence to meet different children's needs has expanded in the course* (Lovísa, PWT, 2015). She describes how the work on the PWT gave her an opportunity to reflect on her ways of working: *It has helped me to know my strengths. Working on the PWT has strengthened my respect for myself as a pre-school teacher.* (Lovísa, PWT, 2015)

Brynhildur spoke to the impact her experiences in the course had on appreciating the professional self: *This course has taught me to value myself more highly, my own resources* (Brynhildur, Self-evaluation, 2015). Heiðrún, a pre-school teacher for eight years, used her reflection in the course and a part of her PWT to identify unknown spaces for learning in her work. She discovered that her favorite time was the time in the dressing room with the children:

You have relaxed quality moments with the children, talk to them quietly and talk about different things. You can support their acquisition of knowledge and use opportunities that arise. Instead of telling the child to put on certain mittens, you can ask if they would like to put on the green or the black mittens. Simple things are important. (Heiðrún, PWT, 2015)

Overall the data from spring 2015 shows that students were influenced by the course as a whole and in particular by working on their PWT. They described how they were empowered by elements of the course that included hard work, self-reflection that required digging deep into their personalities and life experiences, experiences of different assignments, and the teaching and learning methods that are effective for inclusion education. Through these experiences they saw a shift in their professional selves as individuals who not only have increased knowledge about IE, but who also aspired to be the very model of resourceful teachers in inclusive education.

IMPACT ON OUR TEACHING IN A COURSE IN TEACHER EDUCATION

Inspired by Freese's (2006) approach, we reflected on our findings to draw out what is "usable, applicable and informing" in order to tease out what might make a difference in our teaching in teacher education or possibly in teacher education in a larger context. Our research question was: What are we learning about our teaching through exploring students' PWT assignments?

The underlying aim of our course is to increase student teachers', in-service teachers', and administrators' awareness of how their habits of minds (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) influence the development of their PWT. A key to responding to the social and cultural diversity of students is the ability to explore one's practice from alternative perspectives. Thus, all the tasks developed within the course were meant to increase students' awareness of who they are or who they want to become as teachers (Korthagen, 2013). During the course we used TOCs from the on-campus intensive sessions to adjust our teaching and organization of the course elements to the different needs within the versatile group of student teachers and in-service teachers. For example, after the first sessions we decided in the next intensive sessions to draw out more clearly how physical education teachers and pre-school teachers might use creativity and an innovation education approach in their work. We also responded to students' suggestions of being able to work on campus in the same groups as they were arranged in Moodle discussions, and to work sometimes in groups according to the school level in which they were working as teachers or administrators, or being prepared to work as student teachers.

In our meetings, reading TOCS and discussing the various assignments and tasks in the course, we realized that we experienced a similar engagement as the students in our own PWT. We constantly asked ourselves: Are we enacting our own PWT? Are we practicing what we preach? And does it work? By reflecting regularly on our

data we verified that we were applying versatile teaching methods and adjusting our teaching to students' needs.

By using self-study, we systematically scrutinized our teaching, adjusting it from year to year. It allowed us to look closely at our own ideals, intentions and plans and how we enacted them in practice. We gathered data of different kinds and used students' own descriptions, discussions online and on-campus, and reflective assignments to extract their experience of our teaching and the influence it was having on their professional identities. This was useful for us; it challenged us to respond and develop what we had designed for them and also empowered us to continue doing what worked well. Informed by these data and our regular conversations and reflections, we realized that our students brought different experiences and knowledge into developing their PWT. We needed to respond to them as individuals, paying attention to their different experiences; but we also needed to respond to them as a group and as sub-groups. Although we recognized that the creativity and flexibility of some of the assignments and tasks were difficult for some students and they needed more support to complete them, we saw this focus on creativity and flexibility as important for students' individual and collective development of their PWT (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Throughout the course we noticed how these students grew in their skills to use creativity as they tried out different forms in representing their PWT. Students who preferred a more structured approach in completing assignments were able to articulate their fears of having weak frames (Bernstein, 2000) as the structure for their creative work.

Our collaboration and continuous conversations have inspired and empowered us to keep developing this course. The self-evaluation reports and PWT assignments of students were an inspiration, providing us insights into how the whole process of students working on their PWTs was both professionally empowering and professionally enabling in preparing them as teachers to work in inclusive education. The following are excerpts from our journals discussing the impact we have seen for our students using PWTs as a venue for professional growth, and the understandings we have gained.

Reading two stories of immigrant Icelanders in their PWT assignment gave me an understanding of what kind of background they came from and what kind of lives they might be carving out for themselves in Iceland. I feel honored to be able to contribute to supporting them to become strong, confident professionals in Icelandic schools. I was also moved to tears when I read the life histories of three Icelandic women in the class and how they used destructive experiences to become professionals who displayed the opposite of what they had endured. (Svanborg, journal, May 2015)

In looking back at students' awareness of the role of the PWT in how they view and respond to their working situation as it has emerged within the content of the course, I feel they have grown so much. Through the course I have seen them move from not realizing they have a PWT to naming the different sources

of influences and values in their lives to identifying how this increased sense of professional identity has empowered them to respond to their situation. I have learned so much about the importance of PWT through students' work and I know I will have to continue exploring to support this important work. (Karen, reflective journal, May 2015)

We have realized which ideologies we build on in our practice by doing self-study on our work. We see our ideologies crystallize within inclusive education and the social justice it represents. We try diligently to implement our ideologies into practice; we want to practice what we preach. Our teaching is in many ways similar to artistic acts, led by the educational values, personal needs, and theories to which we ascribe (Eisner, 2002). Our artistry emerges in the versatile ways we respond to students' needs, we interact constantly with them online and on-campus, and we use different teaching styles and approaches. Teaching in this way is a challenging endeavor, but we realize that our professional identities have strengthened through looking closely at our work with our students. Self-study of our teaching has helped us better understand our students' experiences, and through the examination of those experiences has informed our practice as teacher educators.

We have seen, as we have presented above, that working on PWT with the PWTI and other assignments and tasks creates a strong tapestry in students' professional identities. The work turned out to be inspiring and empowering. We acknowledge that it is important and challenging for teachers to become conscious of their professional identities. We have seen through our data that with the help of PWTI and carefully planned activities and approaches it is possible to help students make visible and strengthen their PWT, which in turn provides insights and understandings that inform their professional lives.

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