

Imagined future teacher self at the point of entry to teacher education

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A growing body of literature has focused on teacher identity development, but very few of these target students at the beginning of their studies. This article discusses the future teacher selves that first-year undergraduates imagine for themselves before receiving any instruction on teaching-related subjects. Results suggest that students are, nevertheless, able to envisage a surprising variability and detail in their essays that underwent mix-method analysis. The most commonly occurring traits were grouped under five larger themes, focusing on personality and teacher self, teacher-student interaction, classroom teaching abilities, becoming members of a community of teachers, and altruistic goals. These teacher selves are mostly realistic and positive, with a clear understanding of the dynamism that teacher identity is formed as an ongoing process. It is argued that learning about freshly admitted students' views related to teaching serves as valuable information to enhance pre-service teacher education programs.

Keywords: teacher self, imagined future teacher self, teacher identity, teacher training, transition to higher education

Introduction

The choice of a university education program is a decisive moment in a young adult's life. This step is often difficult and is influenced by many factors. Research has found that students who make good educational decisions and have high specialty satisfaction show higher self-esteem and have better chances to perform well in school (Alsalkhi, 2018). A growing body of literature has discussed how students start their university education with initial images of university life and their student and adult selves and what challenges the transition may imply (see e.g., Gale & Parker, 2014; T. Balla & Bajnóczi, 2015; Money et al., 2020; Vosniadou, 2020).

Some university systems and programs leave educational and life choices open for some years, such as specialization after an introductory year, choosing or changing majors or minors during the course of study or a large selection of further study options after a BA degree. On the contrary, in many educational systems, some professions (typically e.g., medical, engineering and legal) have a determined course of long years of study and students not only choose a study program, but also their career options

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when they apply for university. Teacher education falls into this latter category in Hungary, where students in recent years apply for a five or six-year program towards a certificate of elementary or secondary school teachers in two subjects. Earlier, students interested in English received first a BA degree in English or American Studies and then could choose to continue with the same at the MA level, to choose from other degree programs in teaching, translating and interpreting or international relations or even take a gap and gain job and life experiences. The system is now changing again to allow for enrollment in a short-track, single major teacher training program after or in parallel with a disciplinary MA program.

Students enter teacher training programs with attitudes towards teaching, beliefs about what makes good teachers, and expectancies about the study program, all influenced by their student experiences, their families' and society's expectations and attitudes towards teachers. These beliefs will continuously be challenged and shaped by their university courses and instructors, their pre-service teaching practice, school environments and teaching-related educational policy changes (Chong et al, 2011; Day & Kington, 2008; Glodjo, 2020). While numerous studies have focused on teacher identity formation during and after university training (especially of pre-service and novice teachers), the discussion of the initial stage at the entry point is largely missing. Nevertheless, it is important to know what students bring with them to their teacher education as this will largely influence also how they react to course content, how much they benefit from their pre-service training and how they will later manage to deal with the frequent conflicts between imagined selves and real-world experiences. This study discusses the imagined future teacher selves (IFTS) of a cohort of first-year English language teacher trainees at a large Hungarian university through a mixed-method analysis of essays written about their study choice and imagined teaching career.

Background to the study

The present study draws on research on language teacher identity development, beliefs about the effective language teacher, students' motivation to choose teacher training and, finally, the transition to higher education and student retention. Each of these areas has direct influence on how freshly admitted students to a teacher education program may see their future career and teacher selves.

Language teacher identity development

At the beginning of a teacher training program, students mainly think about themselves as students and by the end of the program they develop a teacher identity as well and navigate between student and teacher selves. Teacher identity, as much as other career identities, should be considered as socially constructed and culturally embedded influxes of change. Teacher identity has different disciplinary understandings and many

definitions (for a review see e.g., Gray & Morton, 2018; Li & DeCosta, 2018). For example, Barkhuizen and Mendieta (2020) offer an understanding of *teacher identity* as socially constituted, constantly changing, tied to context, enacted or performed and including various parallel identities.

The term *teacher self* refers to a personalized understanding of what makes teachers who they are; the navigation between their different identities. *Future teacher self* refers to the way teachers-to-be envisage themselves as teachers. This is a *possible self* that may contain elements of *actual self* (attributes someone possessed in a given moment), *ideal self* (qualities someone would like to possess) and *ought-to self* (obligations and responsibilities), but with great emphasis on the ideal self (Hiver, 2013; Kubanyiova, 2009). The difficulty of student teachers in constructing a teacher identity early on in their student career (or before it) lies in the fact that identity formation requires the practice of teaching, the discovery of how subject knowledge, ideal teacher selves and prior classroom planning need constant adaptation and reaction to the teaching context. They, therefore, use *imagined identities* compared to the *practiced or professional identities* (Xu, 2012). When picturing themselves as future teachers, they may rely on positive and negative role models they have had as students, their limited volunteer tutoring or working with children and, later on during their studies, on their pedagogy and psychology classes. In a narrative study carried out among second and third-year Finnish teacher trainees, Kalaja and Mäntylä (2018) found visible differences in the imagined ideal classrooms of those with no teaching related courses and those with already some of these.

Day and Kington (2008) distinguish between three dimensions of teacher identity, namely *professional identity*, *situated located identity* and *personal identity*. The first one is an ideal picture about the good teacher that may be influenced by social norms and policy expectations. Situated located identity is context bound and adds to teachers' long-term identity formation. The environment it shapes includes students, colleagues and the given school or classroom. Day and Kington point out that the ideas concerning the ideal teacher self may have conflicts with professional development, roles, responsibilities and workload demands teachers face. The third dimension is the personal self which is connected to outside of school roles.

Drawing on earlier research on teacher identity development with reference to social, psychological, anthropological and political science perspectives, Friesen and Besley (2013) discuss the identities (student) teachers may have. Teacher identity is situated in the trajectory of *personal*, *role* and *social identities*. Someone may choose to fulfill a teaching role without experiencing a psychological identification with the given role. This will not have a meaningful result on a personal level, neither on a social level in the form of a shared feeling of union with colleagues. However, in order to develop a professional identity one needs to view themselves as teachers, as part of a teaching community. Through this, they invest their personal self in the work, think about their

beliefs, values and inspirations and also closely consider these in their colleagues and monitor how these influence their own beliefs and values.

Danielewicz (2001) offers an excellent picture of the complexity and delicacy of teaching, its demand to constantly consider and adapt to “variables such as students, texts, knowledge, abilities, and goals to formulate an approach to teaching, and then to carry out – every day, minute to minute, within the ever-shifting context of the classroom” (p. 9). She stresses also the difference between playing a role and developing a teacher identity as follows:

Roles are flimsy and superficial, transitory and easily adopted or discarded. They seem to be whole and complete, like a ready-made set of clothes that one can put on before class and take off after. I wouldn't be a very good teacher if I felt I was playing a role (and neither, I believe, would my students). Identities require the commitment of self to the enterprise in a way that acting out a role does not. A teacher must rise to the occasion time after time; the self goes on the line every day. (Danielewicz, 2001, p. 10)

Compared to this quickly growing body of literature on teacher identity development, very few studies target students at the beginning of their studies. In one of these Friesen and Besley (2013) used a questionnaire study with first-year students at a New Zealand university involving questions on teacher identity, personal identity, student identity, ethnic/cultural identity and generativity (connection to other people, responsibility for others, transition of knowledge to others and contribution to the community). They found relatively high levels of perception of teacher identity, personal identity, and student identity. Results showed that increased levels of personal and social identities and generativity were associated with increased teacher identity. Likewise, increased age, parenthood and experience working with children also led to higher levels of teacher identity. They concluded that younger students (without children and extensive work experience with children) must rely on their memories of teachers that have had. This is visible in our data as well as first-year students often draw on positive or negative teacher examples to find role models and to build these into their teacher selves.

As stated above, one aspect of teacher identity is the reflection on what good teaching entails (for a review see e.g., De Costa & Norton, 2017). However, it is not only the teachers themselves who reflect upon this question and compare it to their self-efficacy beliefs. Participants in the learning-teaching context (students of various ages, parents, teachers, school directors, policy makers, teacher trainers) may have fundamentally different views of teacher efficacy. As for the effective English language teachers, studies have found both similarities and differences between the views of secondary school students, teacher trainees at different stages of their education and practicing teachers (for some recent studies see e.g., Alzebaree & Hasan, 2020; Bremner, 2020; Çürt Aşıkferki et al., 2018; Külekçi, 2018). Alzebaree and Hasan (2020), for instance, noted that Kurdish secondary school students placed the most

emphasis on English language proficiency, followed by self-confidence and self-control, listening to student's opinions, being fair, having good classroom management and being prepared. Bremner (2020) used a narrative study with Mexican university students. In contrast with the previous study, students did not highlight language proficiency as the most important trait, but marginally mentioned the problem with the lack of it. Results also revealed that the participants placed high importance on modern and engaging teaching approaches and positive student-teacher relationship, including personalized attention. Interestingly, for almost half of the reviewed teacher cases, students discussed negative teacher examples to illustrate what is lacking in ineffective teachers. In earlier studies with Hungarian students we could also see a difference between the perceptions of first-year students, those close to graduation and in-service teachers (Doró & T. Balla, 2014, 2019). Students in the first-year group suggested a student's perspective rather than that of a prospective teacher. Also, while MA level teacher trainees found most of the listed traits and characteristics essential, drawing an ideal picture of the good language teacher, in-service teachers were more aware of the limitations daily work may entail.

Students' motivation to choose teacher training

The selection of a student's specialty is influenced by many interrelated factors. These are often led by their interests, good grades in given subjects, and the perceived difficulty to get into and finish a study program. Many also consider financial aspects, such as educational expenses and the social and economic benefits the degree promises (secure job, social mobility, good salary, balanced family and professional lives). Many are advised or otherwise influenced by family members, friends or teachers, but also the availability of certain study programs, distance from home, social prestige and imagined career self. Many students change their decisions or give up their studies after admission because they cannot envisage themselves in a certain career. The early school and life experiences that push young adults to apply for teacher education serve as crucial first steps in teacher identity formation. They also have an impact on students' expectations of their future teacher selves.

However, not all students enter teacher education with a strong commitment to become teachers, which entails that they do not at this point have a strong imagined future teacher self. Miskiniene and Rodzeviciute (2005) conducted research among Lithuanian students entering a prestigious pedagogical college and found that the majority of them had influencing teachers and loved children or the idea of working with people. They also wished to get better in the chosen area that was often their favorite school subject. However, many chose the institute itself rather than the specific program and signed up for teacher education as a necessity due to the teaching profile of the college. This was reflected in the fact that over 40% of the students considered becoming a teacher of minor importance. Many simply sought opportunity to become a

tertiary student and to enjoy the benefits of higher education or ended up in teacher education by chance, thinking that the given school was easier to get access to than others. Very little research is available on Hungarian students' motivation to become teacher trainees or English teachers. Bosnyák and Gáncs (2012) interviewed MA level students and found that some are lacking intrinsic motivation to become English teachers and "regard teaching as a fallback career or as a stepping-stone to other professions" (p. 75). In addition, in a questionnaire study with second-year students in the 6-year teacher training program, Smid (2018) found his participants to be more intrinsically than extrinsically motivated both towards learning English and becoming English teachers.

Transition to higher education and student retention

The transition from secondary school to higher education or the switch from one study program to another may imply a drastic change in a student's academic, personal and social life, their level of independence and coping strategies, which is affected by a variety of factors. Research has shown that apart from students' socio-economic status, grades and subject knowledge, non-cognitive factors such as attitudinal, affective and personality variables also play an important role in their rate of success and graduation (Witkowsky et al., 2020). Often there is a mismatch between students' beliefs, expectations and the academic and life demands they face. Those who are more college-ready and have a so-called *growth mindset* show a higher success rate compared to those who have a *fixed mindset* (Dweck, 2006; Korstange et al., 2020). Members of the earlier group are more successful because they believe that their academic abilities and social skills are changeable and, therefore, look at challenges as opportunities to grow. Those with a fixed mindset, on the other hand, treat their abilities and skills as something given and they soon lose their motivation if they face difficulties (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Haimovitz and Dweck (2017) found that children's mindsets about intelligence, which means their perception of intelligence as a quality they can improve versus a trait they cannot change, directly influence their motivation and academic and non-academic achievements.

Gale and Parker (2014) note that research on student transition to higher education and university practices have shown three distinct typologies. The first one (*transition as induction*) looks at transition as periods of adjustment during which students need to learn about new institutional and disciplinary context, norms and procedures. The second approach (*transition as development*) follows the maturational stages of student and career identities during which students navigate socio-cultural norms and expectation. However, this second view still largely treats transition as a linear change and development of distinct identities. The third type (*transition as becoming*) views transition as an ongoing, whole-life experience during which parallel identities are formed and negotiated in a non-linear way. Teacher trainees' identity formation of adult

selves, student selves and future teacher selves has been seen to pertain to all three of these types, but best fits the third view of transition as becoming.

Studies have documented that the academic success of undergraduates greatly depends on their first academic year. Castleman and Meyer (2018, p. 249), for example, found that a “student’s freshman year of college is pivotal for determining the trajectory of their postsecondary success”. They argue that intervention programs can be best tailored early on in student careers. Doró (2011) also concluded that those English majors at a Hungarian university who struggle with their first semester language courses are likely to show low completion rate of their first year. Korstange and colleagues (2020) have also rightly pointed out that the documentation of students’ ideas at entry point is more valuable for student retention than doing retrospective data collection with successful higher-level students. It can be concluded, therefore, that learning about students’ beliefs and expectations at the entry point to undergraduate programs and during their first semesters offers an important starting point for assisting students to make the most out of their studies and for designing successful study programs.

Methods

Participants

Participants in this study were 63 first-year teacher trainees at a large Hungarian university, participating in a so-called undivided five or six-year teacher education MA program which begins directly after secondary school. Although participation in the study was voluntary, this number covered all students in the English teacher training program of the given year. Participants had double teaching majors, English language and literature and another one from a large pool of subjects (e.g., another language, History, Music, Physical Education, Math, Media Studies).

Data source

As part of a longitudinal study, in September 2016, during their first weeks of study, students were asked to write a take-home essay in English of at least 500 words with the title “My professional future, the way I see it at the moment”. Based on earlier studies (e.g., Doró, 2010, 2011; Dupák, 2019) and the researcher’s own experience working with similar student populations, it was foreseen that some of the students would be at B2 English proficiency level or lower, had not written long essays in English and would have difficulty elaborating on the topic without some guidance. Therefore, the following optional orienting questions were suggested from which they could focus on as many as they wished and were also free to add other focal points.

Why did you choose teacher training and your specific subjects? Have you had inspiring teachers? Is a teaching career attractive today? What are your

main goals as a future teacher? If you are not sure you want to be a teacher, why is it so? What other career options do you have? What makes someone a good teacher? Do you have these qualities? Do you have any experience working with people? What would you like to learn during your studies that help you in your career choice?

This proved to be useful as students were given an extra focus to their narratives, could write about similar subtopics of teacher identity, educational and career choices and even those with language difficulties reached the requested length.

Data analysis

A grounded theory approach to the data was taken, looking first for general themes in the narratives, using the qualitative data analysis program QDA Miner. These, driven by the subquestions provided to students, included reasons for choice, evaluation of choice, people influencing choice, teacher identity, experience working with people and career goals. As a result of a double round of analysis, the initial coding scheme developed into a rich coding pattern with added main themes and several codes for each theme.

As the present analysis focuses on the explicitly stated imagined future teacher selves of the participants, our current analysis was then narrowed to sections of the essays in which students stated how they envisage themselves as teachers, using first person singular forms. The majority of these sections started as follows: *I would like to..., I (can) imagine myself..., My main goal is..., One day I want to be a teacher who is..., As a teacher I want to...* As an alternative writing strategy, many reviewed characteristics of a favorite teacher and then added sentences like this one: *This is the type of teacher that I intend to become*. This called for a careful reanalysis of not only the data with the the code of “future teacher self”, but also “influencing teachers” (to see if students stated they would like to be or act as the mentioned person) and “career goals” referring to teaching a selected age group or working in a specific school. The additional code of the “uncertain teaching career” was also established, as this data serves us with useful information concerning the strength of the imagined future self. A discussion of a good teacher, the general evaluation of a teaching career and motivational themes for choosing the teacher training program were excluded from this analysis, although they also influence teacher identity formation.

Segments with the code “imagined teacher self”, “specific career goals” and “uncertain teacher identity” were further analyzed. This meant 103 text segments. While some students had more than one text segment referring to their imagined future teacher selves, eight students of the 63 did not specifically refer to themselves as future teachers, but discussed good language teachers or life goals in general. The extracts fulfilling the above criteria were then further analyzed for themes. These text segments were also searched for frequently occurring verbs and adjectives using the text analyzer tool Sketch Engine as the imagined selves referred to almost always to the teaching

practices they would employ and the character traits they would have. The concordancing function of the same tool was used to manually check the referents of the adjective and verbs in the text segments and eliminate those that do not describe the students' imagined identities.

Results and discussion

This section presents the patterns of future teacher selves that emerged from the essays. Some of these patterns could be grouped under five larger themes, such as personality and teacher self, teacher-student interaction, classroom teaching abilities becoming members of a community of teachers and altruistic goals. Several excerpts were selected from the corpus to illustrate the diversity of the data. The excerpts are quoted verbatim without making any change to them. Some students had language difficulties, but this rarely interacted with the understanding of the intended meaning.

1. Personality and teacher self

Personality characteristics

Almost all the essays that in some form referred to imagined teacher selves listed positive personality characteristics. Students often gave long lists of the characteristics they would like to have, while others selected only one or two as in Excerpts 1 and 2 versus 3 below.

(1) *I would like to be a really good teacher. I mean I would like to be kind, smart, patient, creative.* (SZ16)

(2) *I want to be a good teacher, who is patient, responsible, have good communication skills, likes people and is able to understand the youth.* (SZ28)

(3) *I want to be as an inspirational teacher for my future pupils as my principal was for me.* (SZ19)

In order to get a fuller picture of these characteristics, the text segments referring to the imagined future teacher selves first underwent a frequency analysis of adjectives. This analysis revealed that apart from a few more frequent adjectives, many were used only once or twice to refer to future selves. The two adjectives that top the list are *good* and *patient* teachers (each referring to the imagined self six times). Being *strict* is mentioned four times, after which come the following adjectives with only two examples: *fair*, *successful*, *creative*, *reliable* and *self-confident*.

A number of other adjectives describing positive teacher characteristics appear only once in the corpus and these are *perfect*, *suitable for children*, *smart*, *funny*,

friendly, hard-working, humble, validated, beloved by students, popular, precise, open-minded, enlightened, inspiring, inspirational, responsible, kind, and consistent. Less positive adjectives occur very rarely, and example is *stern*. This shows that students imagined a variety of positive selves, but none of these stood out as a must.

The corpus was also search for verb phrases describing teacher characteristics. Only a few of these were found, but with no recurring elements. This again suggests that students were not simply reproducing a set of clichés, but choose from a large set of personality traits and characteristics. Examples for these teacher characteristics are the following: *have good communication skills, have great problem-solving skills, have special relationship with students, want my students to be hard workers, want the best for everyone or be good communicators.*

Self-fulfillment and self-growth

A positive personal gain coming from the teaching job is voiced by only some of the students. The excerpts below reflect on a sense of achievement, positive change in personality, constant influences and job satisfaction.

(4) *I think in this field I will have a lot sense of achievement, a lot of good experiences and many clever student all around me that will be my responsibility. That is the way I see my future at the moment. (SZ29)*

(5) *As I imagine my work, the basis of it will be leading by example through the positive changes in my personality. I want to solve every conflict in school with mediation. (SZ34)*

(6) *To sum up teaching is one of the best jobs I can have in my life because helping people makes me happy, it satisfies me on it's own. (SZ57)*

Specific career plans

Four participants expressed a plan to go back to their former school and enjoy the known and friendly environment. This definitely offers them a secure career goal and a clear future teacher self, even though plans may change with time. Student in Excerpt 8 was the one with a surprisingly detailed, step by step plan for his future teaching career; however, the goal of becoming a principal in 5 years is a bit too ambitious and will likely to be modified as time passes.

(7) *I'd like to be an English-History teacher in my secondary school in K. (SZ30)*

(8) *I would like to go back to my gymnasium and get a job there. The atmosphere was joyful and I had an excellent relationship with my teachers. After 3 years of teaching I will start an institution management course which will take 2 years. After 5 years I fill in all the requirements to become*

a principal, because this is my final plan. I want to be the head of my old school. I have so many ideas how can I make a school even better, and how can I make the students learn more efficient. (SZ6)

Others expressed preference for a chosen age group or form of education (high school versus elementary school, mandatory education versus language school or private teaching). Examples for this are below in Excerpts 9 and 10. It is important to point out that all of these students are being trained to be teachers of two subject areas, English and something else, and therefore develop either two parallel teacher selves or a merged one. Language teacher identity research almost exclusively target English teacher identity in which case there is little or no reference to other teaching experiences. The author of Excerpt 10 was the only one making explicit distinction between being an art teacher and an English teacher, imagining herself in an elementary school for the first one and oscillating between the same for English or doing private tutoring (which is a very common scenario for language teachers).

(9) But there is one thing I know right now: I want to be a teacher in a high school, not in a primary school. I don't know why, I just feel better when I have to teach older students. (SZ5)

(10) As a future [art] teacher I would like to make children like drawing lessons ... As an English teacher maybe I would become a private teacher or I would teach only at school. (SZ60)

Unclear teacher self

While the above examples indicate that some students come to teacher education with clear plans, many voice some uncertainty about working as a teacher, having necessary skills or being successful in their career. A third of the students discussed alternative career plans that included mainly jobs closely connected to one of their majors (such as kindergarten teacher, journalists or interpreter), but unrelated jobs were also mentioned (such as beekeeper or musician). Some degree of uncertainty is understandable from 18-year-olds in the case of a program that lasts for at least five-six years, not mentioning those who get delayed with their studies. This is such a long time and some cannot imagine what the training is going to be like, while others feel that they should have a clearer teacher self from the beginning, which causes stress (see Excerpt 11 vs. 12).

(11) At the moment I think I will be a teacher ... in my opinion I will not be mad or angry if I won't be a teacher. (SZ2)

(12) To tell you the truth, at the moment I am so nervous and confused. I absolutely like being at such a famous university like ..., but I am the type of person who can panic in a few situations. This situation is one of them. In my opinion I am self-confident, but I keep asking myself the question: am I going to be successful at this university and at this profession? (SZ32)

2. Teacher-student interaction

An important category in teacher identity research is teacher-student interaction. In our corpus participants also emphasized the importance of positive, respectful teacher-student relationships (see Excerpt 13). Some long for a relatively equal relationship between students and teachers, but one that is born out of mutual respect. This may lead to creating a positive teacher view in students (as in Excerpt 14) or being liked by students (Excerpt 15).

(13) *I would like to be not just a teacher but a good teacher. I will respect my students as much as my best teacher did. (SZ23)*

(14) *The other one is achieve that if they think about teachers, teacher's work, they have some positive opinion. (SZ43)*

(15) *My main goal as a future teacher is to be successful and respected in this profession. The most important for me is to like and be liked by children. It could be the best pleasure when you feel that you are important for them and the person who they admire. (SZ40)*

Others emphasized good relationship to the point that teachers become personal guides or mentors for students and show availability after class to discuss non-teaching related topics. This need for personalized attention was voiced also in Brehmer's (2020) study.

(16) *I would like to achieve that students can trust me and turn me with their problems, good news, everything what they want to share. (SZ43)*

(17) *Before and after our lessons she talked with me a lot about my life and plans. And I felt then that she is not just my teacher she is more, because she helped me a lot and I felt that she is really interested in her students' lives. So I hope I can be somebody like her. Somebody who is for the students, always. (SZ21)*

Interestingly, none of them envisaged to develop a more equitable teacher-student relationship in which a very friendly and relaxing atmosphere may jeopardize teacher authority. This overtly relaxed atmosphere was found by Li and DeCosta (2018) for one of their novice Chinese teachers and is something that both students and young teachers seem to often long for.

3. Teaching skills and abilities

Another larger category of the teacher self is teaching skills and abilities in which several smaller themes were identified.

Subject knowledge and teacher as life-long learner

Subject knowledge seems to be taken for granted as only very few students mentioned it in some form. One referred to the positive example of former teachers who “had a command of their subject matter content”, next to being humorous, motivating and being good communicators. Another one complained about the English proficiency level of a substitute teacher in his bilingual secondary school who was unable to teach History in English. A very positive finding is that two other students discussed their teacher selves as life-long learners (see Excerpts 18 and 19).

(18) *Learning would not end for me by finishing the university. I plan to take part in teacher training programs and get to know the new teaching methods. To my way of thinking, a language teacher should improve herself all the time as languages are always changing and I want to keep pace with the changes in grammar or in vocabulary. (SZ62)*

(19) *I believe that we can learn much easier if we do it with some creativity but most of the schools do not provide this kind of education... There are many different ways to teach the same thing and it is a challenge to discover which method has to be used for each classes. We can say being a teacher is a lifelong learning because it is important to keep up with technology what the student use in their everyday life. (SZ20)*

Choice of methodology

Having observed teachers from a students’ perspective for years and with no methodology classes yet, it is of no surprise that the participants expressed vague ideas about what made the classes of former teachers enjoyable or how methodology should be selected. Examples for this is teaching in an “understandable way” or having “so impressive” teaching methods. Two students reflected on using modern technology versus traditional methods. They may find this important to state as they themselves experienced the sharp differences in using one or the other. The importance of the use of computers and other modern technology was also reported by Brehmer (2020)

(20) *In my opinion, we have to make balance between the current technology life and the traditional education. We have to find out the benefits of the computers and the smart phones and take advantages of these. (SZ35)*

(21) *Maybe this is the one thing what cause that when I become a teacher I want to teach students in a different way too. At the moment I don’t really know what will I do about this but I am working on it. I have already got some ideas, for example I want to teach the language with the help of the electronic things that 21st century got (like interactive table or laptops, maybe mobile phones too) and on the other hand I would like to maintain*

awareness by telling unusually stories and strange details about the people and the topics they have to learn about. (SZ5)

Curriculum management

Two students also reflected on curriculum management. Drawing on her student experience, student in Excerpt 22 would change art classes and offer students more creativity in regular and also in extracurricular classes. Excerpt 23 reflects on how to make the curriculum more enjoyable and interesting for students with the use of technology or realia.

(22) As a future teacher I would like to make children like drawing lessons, because as far as I can see it now, they almost hate it. I think it is because of the art history and because they can't draw or paint whatever they want, but what they have to because of the curriculum. If I will have the opportunity, I will definitely make an after school drawing course where everyone could draw what they wanted. (SZ60)

(23) If I'm going to be a teacher I would like to teach the students in a way which will make the curriculum more exciting. We live in the ages of the Internet so I'd show them videos and pictures which will make the studies more colourful and interesting. (SZ16)

Making students like the subject/school

A number of students expressed the wish to make students like the given subject or school (educational system) in general. The excerpts below show various degrees of liking, from not hating to loving a given subject. Liking or not liking subjects seems to be a crucial student concept and could come from their own experience or that of their classmates.

(24) One of my goals is to achieve that most of the students of my class like or do not hate the subjects which I teach. (SZ43)

(25) I don't want to be one of the teacher who can't motivate and listen to his students saying: "Oh, no English again". (SZ45)

(26) As a teacher I would like to have my pupils to master my subjects fairly easily with my help while also develop a love for the given subject. (SZ19)

(27) I would like to give my experience to the future generation and I may be able to change some pupils' opinions about the educational system. (SZ32)

Helping students achieve academic goals

Two students also voiced specific academic goals their students should be achieving. The first one is having outstanding students performing well in a nation-wide academic competition. This may be a school culture that some students are bringing with themselves from their high-standard secondary school. In contrast, the idea of helping students pass language exams (as in Excerpt 29) is a general requirement from language teachers in Hungary, built into the education system, let it be in public schools or private language schools or while working as private tutors.

(28) *I would also like to have student who could excel in competitions and bringing home sweet results like a TOP 30 position in the OKTV. (SZ19)*

(29) *I think it should be fantastic to help a kid to speak an other language and help to take a successful language exam. (SZE54)*

Being a good teacher

A very interesting aspect of the corpus is the few references to the “good teacher” as imagined identity, not only as part of a general discussion of teacher efficacy. We can see a continuum between the denial of the existence of a good teacher (as in Excerpt 30) and the self visualization of a brilliant one (as in Excerpt 33). Excerpt 31 warns against perfectionism and sees the primary characteristic of a good teacher in trusting students and forming a good academic relationship with them. The author of Excerpt 32, on the other hand, visualizes herself as the live example of a good teacher, someone with all positive traits, a role model.

(30) *There is one question which is really annoys me which is Will you be a good teacher? I hate this question because in my opinion “good teachers” are not exist. We are all humans and we all make mistakes. There is no good and bad or right or wrong in this job we always had to find the middle way. (SZ18)*

(31) *Nobody is perfect, and personally I don't want to be a perfect teacher. I wanna be a good teacher, who can trust all of his students, like being a member of a team. (SZ30)*

(32) *This is exactly what my goal is. To become a teacher somewhere in a High School, and when someone asks my students, they tell all these thing. listed above about what makes a teacher a good one, and at the end they say: that's Ms. M. (SZ37)*

(33) *I have a lot of dreams. One of them is connected to my professional future because I want to be a brilliant teacher It is easy to say that in 6-7 years I will working as a teacher and making a very good income. (SZ49)*

4. *Becoming part of a community of teachers*

As the literature above indicates, a significant aspect of teacher identity is the social interaction with other participants of the teaching-learning context. Two students expressed this in their future teacher self which reflects a mature view, not a student experience-based one.

(34) I'm really looking forward to practicing what I learnt in school in real life but in my opinion being able to work together with others and help each other out is also a very big aspect of this career in order to be successful. (SZ50)

(35) As I will finish my university studies I would like to go back to my former high school to teach, because I am keen on the atmosphere of that building, and according to my personal opinion teachers in my high school have a unique community, they can rely on each other, help the others, and it would be a specific occasion to get to know my former teachers as my colleagues. (SZ52)

5. *Altruistic goals*

Some of the imagined selves reflected on aspects that go well beyond teaching a given subject, helping students going to school or participate in classroom work. These were named altruistic because they do not offer a direct gain for the teachers themselves as in the case of good student-teacher relationships or improved teaching skills.

Helping and motivating people

Through the example of former teachers who had a significant positive influence on their lives, three students talked about wanting to help others overcome their difficulties or to become a source of motivation for students to dream big and achieve their goals.

(36) I want to help the others. I have a lot of inhibitions, and it is still difficult for me to speak. I want to show, that we should enjoy the process of learning instead worrying about the oral part. And in my opinion we should concentrate on what we know already, instead of what we don't know yet. (SZ44)

(37) The teacher career is attractive for me, because I can help people or students to achieve their aims. (SZ27)

(38) It inspires me that maybe I can be a motivation for them once, as my teachers motivated me when I was just a butterfly-chaser little girl. (SZ47)

Ability to influence lives for good

Similarly to the previous category of helping and motivating, some students aim for assisting students to find life or career goals, “finding their path” or talent or becoming successful. Several examples are listed below to show the diversity in the way these aims are voiced.

(39) *So I would like to be a teacher who can help kids find their path.* (SZ22)

(40) *I want to care about other people, mainly youngsters. I would like to help them during their teenager years when lots of them do not know what they want to do with their lives and who they want to be.* (SZ38)

(41) *In addition, I would love to be a teacher and I know I wouldn't do this for the money, but for the pride it gives you, when you see your former students becoming upstanding, successful people and environmentalists.* (SZ4)

(42) *I strongly claim that teaching is always needed for people to get more and better opportunities of work, and for this reason I also would like to help youngsters – to find their own way, and find the profession they like – as my teachers done in high school.* (SZ52)

(43) *Each of the students is different and everyone is talented in something. I believe in this and I would like to help them to find this, because it is also a teacher's job, and this is what makes a teacher a good teacher.* (SZ56)

Contribution to the society

Even more general altruistic goals are expressed by two students who seem very determined about making our society or the world better. These may seem to be very general or even idealistic goals, but the way they are expressed shows that these students really believe in this altruistic, world-changing future teacher self.

(44) *I ask myself, what better job could there be. My answer is none because teaching is more than a job. It is an important contribution I can make to better our society, and I am excited about the opportunity to do so.* (SZ17)

(45) *I see myself as an enlightened, open-minded, precise, independent woman, I have great problem-solving skills and I am determined as hell! I am full of energy, I can't wait to start a life as a teacher, and my main aim is to make our world a better place.* (SZ47)

Conclusions

This paper had the aim to capture the imagined future teacher selves (IFTS) of a cohort of first-year English language teacher trainees at a large Hungarian university. The literature reviewed above suggested that teacher identity formation begins before entry into a teacher training program and that, before enrolling into teaching related university course and doing teaching practice, students envisage the teacher career strongly based on the models they have experienced at school or at home. This and the long years of teacher training ahead of them may imply that students have difficulty voicing a professional identity. What we found, in contrast, is that the participants were able to discuss a future teacher self in the majority of the essays in a surprising detail. They reflected on various areas of teacher self, including a long list of personality traits and abilities, positive teacher-student interaction, mentoring students to love their subject (and school in general) or even assisting them in reaching out of school goals. The picture of the future teacher selves they draw are mostly realistic and positive, with a clear understanding of the dynamism that teacher identity is formed as an ongoing process, in relation to social interactions with students and colleagues. Those who are not certain about the teaching career also provided a rich picture of their uncertain teacher self and reflected on the skills they need to improve at and alternative career options.

This study contributes to a greater understanding of the complexities of the emerging teacher identity at the point of entry to teacher training. Although it is limited to one specific university and one chosen year, it is a good starting point to understand what beliefs, goals and concerns students enter their higher education with. The data reported in this paper are valuable for instructors in teacher training programs to better understand students and to frame how they can contribute to their personal and professional development. As the essays contain reflections on a number of other identity related issues and reasons for study choice, further analyses will provide an even more comprehensive picture of the topic. The present study also offers a firm ground for longitudinal observations on how identity and beliefs change over time. A longitudinal study is planned to compare the essays written at entry point with those that students wrote on the same topic in their fifth year, with a large proportion of the training behind them. The results may be used to enhance pre-service teacher education programs of the given university or elsewhere, in the form of classes on identity formation (with a growing number of programs adopting it as part of the curriculum) or in individual or group meetings between students and university instructor or mentor teachers in schools.

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