



Article

“I’ll take it with me all my life”: A case study of student teachers’ professional identity development

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Abstract

Substantial evidence has proved that teacher identity significantly influences teachers’ beliefs and choice of actions in their work, and teacher education contributes to the formation and development process. Based on the findings from analysing student teachers’ pedagogical creeds, this article explores the professional identity development of student teachers who have taken an international course at a Norwegian university. The major data sources are the participants’ pedagogic creeds, supplemented by focus-group interviews with one cohort of students. Findings indicate that identity development is an ongoing process, which can be influenced by different factors. Findings also show that the international course has a positive impact on student teachers’ identity development while writing a pedagogic creed can serve as a dialogical tool for their identity development. This case study provides implications for both international and local teacher education programs in Norway and beyond.

Keywords: future preschool teachers, international course, pedagogic creed, teacher identity development

“Developing an identity as a teacher is an important part of securing teachers’ commitment to



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their work and adherence to professional norms.”

Hammerness et al. (2005, p. 383)

Introduction

This study aims to address literature gaps by exploring the professional identity development of both local and international early childhood education (ECE) student teachers who have taken an international course at a Norwegian university by analysing the pedagogical creeds that they wrote. A search for literature on ECE student teacher professional identity development indicates that there is not much literature on this topic and there is almost no literature on professional identity development of student teachers who have been involved in an international course. When the first author (who taught the international course) read the pedagogical creeds written by different cohorts of student teachers, she found that all of them, in one way or another, spoke about how the one-semester immersion programme had an impact on their views of the profession and, thus the development of their professional identity. This motivated the three authors to conduct a systematic study. Moreover, this research contributes to the method literature by using the course assignments of ECE teacher education. Most research on identity is theoretical or qualitative while qualitative studies use drawings, interviews, observations, and document analysis (Hanna et al., 2019).

Teacher identity is a motivating agent for their choice of action and beliefs and provides an orientation to their future (Hong et al., 2016). More important, teacher identity impacts their job satisfaction, effectiveness, and retention (Harlow & Cobb, 2014). Identity ‘provides a framework for teachers to construct their own ideas of “how to be”, “how to act” and “how to understand” their work and their place in society’ (Sachs, 2005, p. 15). Moreover, Identity ‘can be seen as a kind of argument— a resource people use to explain, justify and make sense of themselves in relation to others, and to the world at large’ (MacLure, 1993, p. 311). Furthermore, in their analysis of twenty years’ development of teacher identity research, Zhang and Wang (2022) concluded that teacher identity research in education has practical significance for many aspects of human society.

The concept of teacher professional identity has been studied by at least two different types of approaches one is essentialism which see teacher professional development as something that is “contained” in a teacher’s person or subject influenced by their pre-existing belief and values while the dialogical approach views it more relational and dynamic, dependent on various experiences, relationships, contexts, values, and belief about children and meaning of children upbringing. The present paper employs a dialogical approach viewing teacher identity as a dynamic concept. Teacher identity is shaped by the experiences of teachers (Hong et al., 2017) and teacher education is important for the formation and development of a teacher's professional identity (Lamote & Engels, 2010; Suarez & McGrath, 2022; Zhang & Wang, 2022).

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Some scholars (e.g., Benson et al., 2013; Steinwider, 2016) have pointed out that studying abroad provides opportunities for participants' identity development. 'Yet, the issue of how teacher professional identity, which is at the heart of teacher professionalism, may be shaped and reshaped in response to internationalization and the growth of international students has been little captured in the related literature' (Tran, & Nguyen, 2015, p. 958). Intercultural experiences, as a unique kind of teacher experience, make a teacher more reflexive about the essential values and their cultural origin in making their professional beliefs because one can become aware of one's beliefs and values as culturally shaped only in an encounter with different cultural values and beliefs (Matusov et al., 2007). Therefore, studying abroad provides those who take it with the opportunity for identity development. Internationalisation has been promoted in many European countries including Norway for many years. And there are European policies on international student mobility. It is also stated in the Norwegian National Curriculum Regulations for Kindergarten Teacher Education "International perspectives should be integrated into the study programme" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2012, p. 1)

The course *Aesthetic Outdoor Education* (AOE), which is the context of this article, builds on the national guidelines and is intended for ECE Teacher Education. The course is open for third-year Norwegian students (50 %) and international exchange students (50 %), which realizes the goal of accommodating international students and bringing internationalization home. The composition of students in the course provides a multicultural environment for the participants. With the aim to bridge literature gaps and explore how the course has contributed to student teachers' identity development, the authors address the following research question:

How has multicultural experiences impacted participating international and Norwegian ECE student teachers' professional identity development?

Setting the scene

AOE is an elective course of bachelor programs. The course enrolls up to 24 students for safety and equipment reasons since overnight field trips are included in the programme. The medium of instruction is English. A major aim of the course is to help student teachers further develop their identity for their future profession and become more professional as teachers. At the end of the semester, the student teachers will (hopefully) have improved their skills to facilitate children's participation in creative processes, facilitate children's risk coping, and be able to ensure safety on tours. The course also aims to equip student teachers with knowledge about children's play, and how to include child-initiated plays. At the end of the course, it is also expected that the students can reflect on different multicultural perspectives and see their own culture from a different angle.

The course covers four academic subjects: aesthetics, outdoor education, mathematics, and pedagogy. The

teaching and learning activities are organized both indoors and outdoors. Outdoors, the students will get knowledge and skills within the field of aesthetic and physical activities, and establish the connection between culture, nature, and outdoor activities for their future teaching. The student teachers will improve their knowledge and skills concerning leading outdoor activities and ensuring safety by taking part in the different outdoor activities and field trips.

Participating student teachers need to finish both individual and group assignments. Some of the assignments are academic written essays, and some are practical, like demonstrating how to make a bonfire and find food in nature. Additionally, student teachers are required to write a pedagogic creed focusing on their own development toward their future role as a teacher. Details about the pedagogic creed are given in the theoretical foundations part.

Three mandatory excursions with overnight stays are part of the course. All the excursions include overnight stays in hammocks or tents. In addition to this, the students are required to take part in a 2-week internship in a kindergarten in the Bergen area. The students are part of the teaching staff, and they participate in daily activities with the children, take part in discussions and reflections on play and learning, and get to meet the children's parents. During these two weeks, they also observe and take part in how the Framework Plan is translated into practice.

Theoretical foundations

Teacher identity and the formation and development of teacher identity

Literature has indicated that teacher identity is a concept without an agreed-upon definition. Nevertheless, it is agreed by researchers that teacher identity is both a product and a process. According to Olsen (2016) teacher identity is a term that describes “both the active process of using personal and professional, past, and present influences to enact one’s teaching and teacher learning, and the resulting product: that dynamic assemblage of influences-and-effects that is always guiding a teacher’s perspectives and practices” (p.48). Teacher identity is also a concept that implies affective components beliefs, values, emotions, motivations, attitudes, and success and failure attributions (Frade & Gómez-Chacón, 2009).

The development of identity is “negotiated through experience and the sense that is made of that experience” (Sachs, 2005, p. 15). Furthermore, “over the course of their lives, people are perpetually constructing and reconstructing their identities” (Kimura & Hiyashi, 2019, p. 475). According to Slagstad (2008), professional identity is formed and developed through theoretical and practical education processes. Moreover, professional identity expresses a collective professional identity that can be seen in connection with an established order within a professional field, which always communicates around what

should be professionally recognized values (Heggen, 2008). As a result, professional identity is created and developed together with others of the same profession through a common education. All have pointed to the importance of teacher education in teacher identity development. In early childhood teacher education, teacher professional identity is formed and developed through theoretical and practical education, and it is also linked to an inner self-understanding among the student teachers within the same education. Furthermore, Hong et al. (2016) pointed out that teacher identity development has two common and recurring features: (1) Identity is something established and maintained through the interaction between contextual factors and individuals' inner landscape, and (2) identity changes and develops through the interpretation and re-interpretation of social interactions which evolve over time.

As mentioned in the introduction, teacher identity is studied as a "dynamic assemblage of influences-and-effects that is always guiding a teacher's perspectives and practices" (Olsen, 2016, p. 48) and as a process with the two recurring features as pointed out by Hong et al. (2007), i.e., identity is 1) something established and maintained and 2) something changes and develops. Therefore, in this article, we define teacher identity as what guides student teachers' perspectives and future practices, while identity development means student teachers continually internally and externally (re)position themselves against different frames of reference.

Pedagogic creed as a dialogical and reflective tool for identity development

Alsup (2006) points out that student teachers have different experiences in their teacher education period that convey different, even contradictory, values and beliefs, which may cause unsolved tensions, resulting in teacher attrition. This calls for approaches that help student teachers and practicing teachers negotiate and make meaning of different experiences in their identity development. Conducting a dialogue and reflecting on their experiences facilitate the interactions between contextual factors and student teachers' inner landscapes for their identity formation and development. Pedagogic creed can be used as a dialogical and reflective tool.

The term *creed* originates from the Latin word *credo* which means "I believe", as the term alludes to the fact that educational activities include the total human life horizon. In 1897, John Dewey wrote his own pedagogic creed, stating what he believed in about teaching, and what he saw most important for a teacher. Published in *The School Journal* in January 1897, the pedagogic creed was written in the form of five articles where Dewey pointed out what he believed education should be and what is central to the role of a teacher.

Dewey demonstrated a broad understanding of education and thought it a lifelong process starting at birth in Article 1 titled *What Education Is*. The same article tells us that Dewey believes it is important for the

teacher to really see the child, and to prepare each child for the future, not just to learn subjects like mathematics and to read and write, but to be prepared for life itself (Dewey, 1897). In the second article, *What the School Is*, Dewey comes closer to the social process of education, and that the school is a form of community life. In this social institution, as the school is, the teacher has an important role. In the fifth and last paragraph, Dewey claims to believe that every teacher should realize the dignity of his calling. Dewey sees schools and kindergartens mainly as social institutions. As humans, we are formed and shaped by experiences living in a society, which also applies to teachers' identity development.

In this course, the lecturers, inspired by Dewey, asked the student teachers to write their own pedagogical creed. The pedagogic creed consists of subjective perceptions, attitudes, values, and feelings that are connected to student teachers' professional lives. A lecture was given by the first author, to introduce why and how Pedagogic Creed should be written. In this lecture, the students were instructed that there are few formal academic requirements for the text, but the students need to refer to the literature they are required to read for the course. The text should be around three pages long. Additionally, student teachers were encouraged to conduct dialogues with themselves and critically reflect on their experiences in AOE. The student teachers were given some examples of themes to write on, for example, I as a leader, how to be a leader for the teaching staff, cooperation with parents, and children's participation.

Method

In this project, we use a qualitative case study to explore participating student teachers' professional identity development in an international course they have taken under the exchange program. A case is a bounded system (Merriam, 1998) and a "phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 25). "In general, case studies are a preferred strategy.... when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (Yin, 1994, p. 1). Case study research is appropriate because the research context fits the definition of a bounded case in the way that it represents the intersection of a particular time and space reflected by the student teachers on their identity development in a semester-long international course for pre-service teachers. This is an intrinsic case study (Stake, 1995) since the aim is to understand the case (EC student teachers' professional identity development in the international course they have taken).

Participants

The participants for this study include most of the students in two cohorts enrolled in the above-mentioned AOE course in a university in western Norway. In total, 29 student teachers participated in the research. Table 1 provides an overview of the information of the participants. In addition, three focus group interviews with eleven student teachers were used to supplement and triangulate the findings.

Table 1. Information of participants and program

Years of cohort		2019 & 2021
Duration of the course		August -December
Cohort size	Norwegian	11(2019)
		7 (2021)
	International	11 (2019)
		6 (2021)
Participants of this study	Norwegian	9 (2019)
		7 (2021)
	International	8 (2019)
		5 (2021)

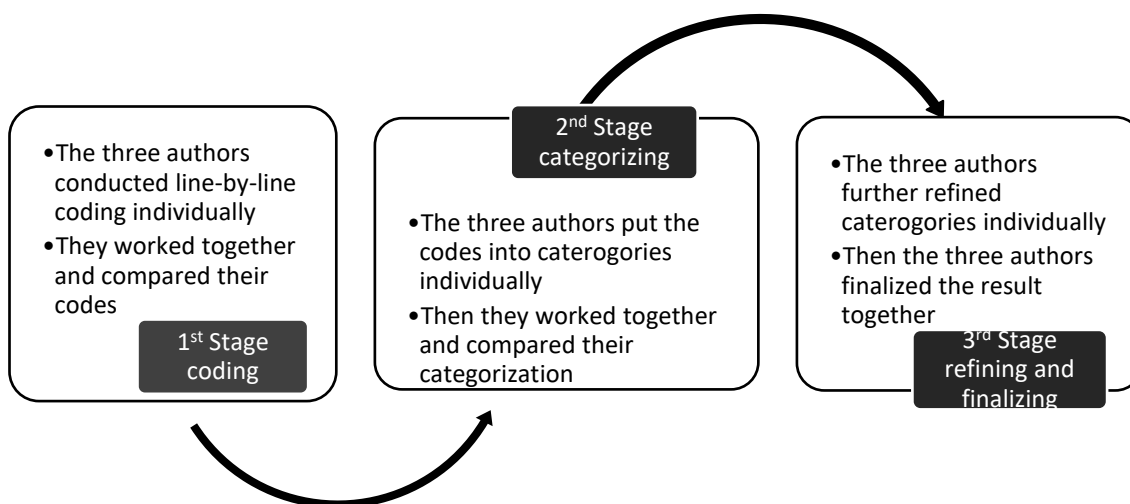
Data and data analysis

The major data source for this article is the participants' narratives in their pedagogic creeds. Narratives have been used as data sources for identity study because they are essential elements to understanding identity development (Barkhuizen, 2016). The cohorts were chosen mainly because they were the most recent cohorts that were asked to write pedagogical creeds, and, thus, their creeds were more readily available. The quotes that supported the findings were selected from the narratives with the consensus of the three authors. For confidential reasons, the samples were coded with the cohort year, a number for the individual, and an indication of where the students were from. For example, 19_1N means a student teacher from Norway and the cohort year was 2019 while 21_2I means an international student teacher from the year 2021. When quotes were from focus group interviews, it was coded as InA_21I meaning an international student teacher while InA_21N denoting a student teacher from Norway.

Though student teachers were asked to write about the whole education process they have had in the teacher education program, the great majority of them focused on their experiences of this abroad experience and the focus of our analysis was also on this perspective. The deductive analysis approach was utilized with a reference to Sachs (2005). Thus, the major themes were the following three: 1) how the

participating student teachers understand their work and place in society; 2) how they understand how to be teachers ;3) how they understand how to act as a teacher. Details are presented in the Findings. Each analysis stage underwent several iterations in dialogues among the three authors. In this process, they adopted a dialogical approach in which they frequently met and engaged in dialogues about their independent analysis of the data. The first author is one of the teachers of the course and thus can provide an insider's view (Bakhtin, 1981). The second author is a Norwegian teacher educator, and the third author is a teacher educator in Norway but is from another culture. Together they could recognize aspects that the insider researcher might not see on her own (Bakhtin, 1981). This contributed to their dynamic and interactive dialogues, which have resulted in comprehensive and trustworthy research findings. Figure 1 below illustrates the analysis process.

Figure 1. The three stages of data analysis



Trustworthiness and ethical issues

Strategies were employed to ensure the trustworthiness of this research. As mentioned above, the three authors each analysed the data independently. Through the ongoing dialogues, the authors triangulated and complemented each other's analyses and findings. The authors have not only been reflecting critically at the individual level but also been reflecting collaboratively and critically at the end of the meetings they held.

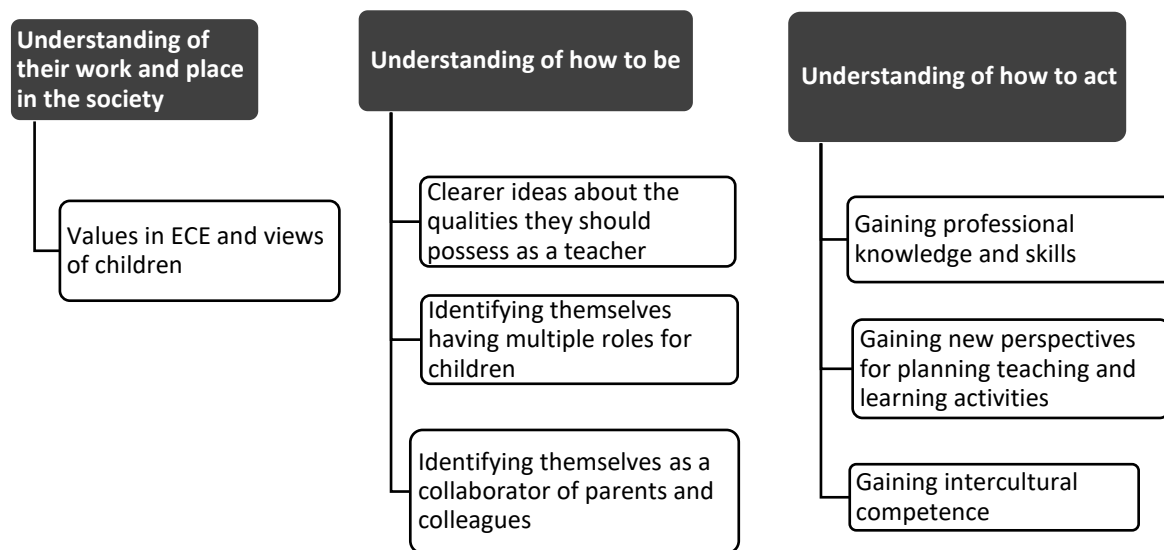
As ethics are central to all research, the authors have considered it at all stages of the study (Kvale, & Brinkmann, 2015). Ethics focuses on both the researchers and the people being studied. In connection with the present research, the three authors wish to look at the ethical aspects of the different roles they play – researcher and teacher educator, outsider, and insider – and how through these roles, they critically analysed the data and critically reflected on the organization of the course. After being informed of how

the pedagogic creed would be used in the research project, the participating student teachers provided consent to use their pedagogic creeds as research data. As discussed above, codes were used to protect participants from being identified.

Results

The student teachers' narratives indicated that different elements have played a role in the process of their professional identity development. The development is presented through the following three themes regarding Sachs (2005) concerning teacher identity: 1) understanding of their work and place in society; 2) understanding of how to be; and 3) understanding of how to act. The quotes that best illustrated the different aspects of student teachers' experiences were selected to support the findings. We did not correct the grammatical mistakes of the quotes to keep them authentic.

Figure 2. An overview of the results



Understanding of their work and place in society

Values in ECE and views of children

The student teachers mentioned the influence of the Norwegian Framework Plan in terms of the values of ECE. The Norwegian Framework Plan states that all kindergartens should operate following the shared values of respect for human dignity and nature, freedom of thought, compassion, forgiveness, equality, and solidarity (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017). Three aspects, namely respect for human dignity and nature, freedom of thought, and equality and solidarity, have been mentioned with a

greater frequency by international student teachers but also by Norwegian student teachers.

In terms of respect for human dignity and nature, the student teachers have mentioned that it is important to accept and respect diversity. Some emphasized the importance of meeting every child's needs for care, a sense of security and belonging, and the need to respect children and treat them as competent individuals with their own backgrounds. One student teacher wrote, "Everyone should have some opportunities despite their special needs, foreign backgrounds" (19_1I).

Concerning freedom of thought, they stressed the importance of allowing every child to express themselves, be heard, and participate. They especially mentioned that children could be prepared for active participation in society by encouraging their participation in kindergarten in different activities. A student teacher shared,

During my semester abroad [in Norway], I was more intensively involved with the topic of outdoor games. Here I learned that it is important to give children the necessary freedom to play and to signal to them that they can trust their abilities...in addition, outdoor play offers children the opportunity to make their own decisions, and through interaction and participation in the games, children can become more democratic citizens. (19_11I)

When talking about quality and solidarity, student teachers point to the importance of laying a foundation for a good future by helping children acquire social and life skills, as well as practices of sustainable knowledge and lifestyles. One of the student teachers mentioned,

As a teacher I will try to provide many opportunities where children can gain experience, skills, and knowledge in a number of areas through movement and sensory impression. (19_2N)

Talking about how to view and treat children, the student teachers not only have emphasized that it is important to treat children differently according to their individualities and their different needs but also have recognized the competence children possess. This view is more obvious among international student teachers. The following statement shared by an international student teacher in a focus interview is quite representative, "Trust children that they can do many things themselves—in my country, we help children a lot. Here children are more independent and can manage many things themselves" (InC_21I).

Furthermore, what an international student teacher from the 2021 cohort has written about changes she/he has made in terms of the views of play, teacher and child relationship/how to be a teacher and a leader in this exchange program, is quite representative of most of the experiences of international students,

Among all the methodological aspects that I have learned and that have meant a change in my thinking, I am left with risky play, free play, the autonomy, and independence that teachers give children and the type of leader that I will want to be. I had never heard of the risky play before and the way of working with it in kindergarten has caught my attention. I really liked seeing how the children are aware of their limits and how

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the teacher observes and accompanies them without pressing, respecting the rhythm of each child. This makes children more self-confident, promoting their self-esteem and empowering them. (21_31)

Understanding of how to be

We present teachers identity development through their views on their teacher identity, which we further elaborate through the following three subthemes: (1) clear ideas about the qualities they should possess as a teacher; (2) identifying themselves having multiple roles for children; and (3) identifying themselves as a collaborator of parents and colleagues.

Clearer ideas about the qualities they should possess as teachers

The student teachers' pedagogical creeds have also indicated that they have reflected in-depth about what kind of teachers they want to be. What most of them have considered is how to be a teacher to their future students. They have mentioned being knowledgeable and flexible as qualities they should possess. One mentioned,

For me one of these essential needs in the exercise as a teacher is to be knowledgeable and up to date, since education is not a linear and stable process, but it is a changing process that must adapt to the changes that are happening in society. (19_10I)

Furthermore, the great majority of them have also mentioned the importance of being a life-long learner.

One of them shared,

Learning as a lifelong process actually forms the whole individual regarding their experiences.... as said before, from my perspective, learning is something neither a precise start nor an ending at all, but a process that keeps going. (19-13I)

Another student teacher from the 2021 cohort not only mentioned that teachers should be lifelong learners but also how she works on it, that is, to actively learn new things through different channels.

She said,

Therefore, it is essential to keep in mind that being a teacher is a process that never ends because as doctors make (for example), we should always look for new perspectives, activities and opportunities that bring advantages to get into our classes and our children will have benefits of them. This is the main reason which made me come to Norway: learning about a new educational point of view, getting all the learning which it can involve for me and how they can improve my ideas as a future teacher adapted into my country. (21_1I)

Furthermore, the student teachers have mentioned the importance of being reflective and also mentioned that writing pedagogical creeds is a good tool for them to reflect. Comments of one of the student teachers' were quite representative,

Really happy to write a pedagogical creed. It's a good way to reflect on your future profession. Previously I had no time to really think what I want to do. But with writing this creed, I reflect on what I'm doing, what I want to do, go ahead with the way I want to follow and be aware of my thoughts. (InB_21I)

Another student teacher followed up by saying "I like writing it because I can go back to my own

thinking. I hope I can continue writing pedagogical creeds in future” (InC_21I).

Identifying themselves as having multiple roles for children

In the Pedagogic Creeds, the student teachers recounted how they have gained insights into their roles as teachers in terms of teachers as leaders and role models for children. Most of the student teachers agreed that teachers were leaders. Concerning their role as leaders, they noted that they should be a leader who can empower children and that they should treat children equally by viewing them as competent individuals. In this respect, some of them highlighted how they were inspired by their teacher’s treatment of them on their field trips. One of them recounted,

I was especially fascinated about the leadership style and group communication at the excursions we did. Our teachers gave us a lot of freedom and, therefore, responsibilities. We had the opportunities to grow on different challenges...We, as students, felt empowered because our teachers trusted us and had confidence in our skills and knowledge. This was eye-opening for me and I hope that I can now improve my own leadership style. (19_17I)

In terms of being a role model, they mentioned that teachers should pass on good values to the children/students. One of them stated,

Kindergarten teachers need to remember that children take after their role models, and kindergartens are for the children. It is then important that you behave the way you want your children to behave. You have to be kind to one another...and give a helping hand when someone needs help...(19_8N)

Besides mentioning the roles of being a leader and a role model, the student teachers have also mentioned the role of a companion and a supporter. One of them shared,

Therefore, I see myself as a constant companion of every child in its development and learning processes to support. In my future educational work in kindergarten, I attach great importance to establish a trusting relationship with each child and to accompanying both the children and their parents individually. (19_11I)

Identifying themselves as a collaborator of parents and colleagues

Collaboration with parents is stipulated as an important part of ECE teachers’ job in the Norwegian Kindergarten Framework Plan and almost all over the world. The student teachers’ narratives indicate that they agreed with this, and they mentioned that the teacher's role bestowed upon them the responsibility of collaborating with parents. While stressing the importance of cooperating with parents, they also emphasized the importance of showing respect to parents, and the need to establish a trusting relationship in order to be able to collaborate with parents. One of them said,

I believe that good cooperation with parents is something that you must set high. It is important that you talk to the parents, show the parents that their children are safe, you as a kindergarten teacher are to be trusted, you see both them and their child... (19_9N)

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In addition to establishing a good and trusting relationship with parents, student teachers also mentioned that it is important to support the parents in family education and to involve the parents in kindergarten education. A student teacher shared,

I would invite parents participate in classes when we are decorating a class, discussing their professions so that children get better picture about different jobs and invite them to performance where children sing or play a game. (19_14I)

Besides collaboration with parents, they have also mentioned the importance of collaborating with colleagues respectfully to create a good working environment.

My role with the staff is to make sure there is good working environment, that everyone is acting professionally, and have the children best as a main focus, also attending their daily needs....it is also important to create an inclusive environment where it is allowed to take part in discussion, coming with their opinions and get to take part in decision-making. To make everybody feel valuable and influencing. (19_16N)

Some student teachers both Norwegian and international ones also said that it was important to share similar aims and values with colleagues so that they are able to work together to create a good environment for the children. And almost all of them have mentioned the importance of it. One of them shared,

With the staff I want a good cooperation between us and get everyone on the same page on how we treat the children. I want to be understanding and help them as much as I can if they need any help. I will try to get through to my colleagues in a soft and good way. (19_8N)

Understanding of how to act

Gaining professional knowledge and skills

Gaining professional knowledge and skills means the student teachers have gained perspectives, knowledge, and skills in terms of what teaching activities to prepare and how to prepare. The student teachers have mentioned how the Framework Plan has inspired them to plan and design teaching and learning activities in three aspects. The first one is that they would incorporate components of the Norwegian Framework Plan into their own curriculum guidelines.

Even if I may teach in XX, I will try to combine XX and Norwegian framework plan because in Norway, the framework plan gives clear guidelines and requirements for teachers on how to implement physical activity in the everyday life of ECE. (19_1I)

The second one is that they would conduct observed teaching and learning activities in their future work, which they said have offered to them new thoughts and perspectives. Some international students mentioned that they have gained new thoughts and perspectives concerning how to organize activities for children/students, especially in terms of how to involve children in the planning and decision-making process. One of them shared.

The given situation during the kindergarten internship gave me a completely new perspective on the guidance of learning process... it was inspiring how the children were taking part in learning processes. (19_13I)

The third aspect relates to what is more important in education—the outcomes or the process. It is pointed out that process is more important and art activities are specially given as an example. One student shared: “It is also important for me not to concentrate on the end product in activities, but to focus on the artistic process” (19_11I).

Gaining new perspectives for planning teaching and learning activities

Most international student teachers pointed out that the internship in the kindergarten and being out in nature made them realize the importance of outdoor activities for children and people in general. Most international students mentioned that there lacked outdoor play and risky play in their home country and they witnessed how important they were for children. In a focus interview, a student teacher said, “Outdoor play is what I gained most. It is new for me. In my country we don’t have so many outdoor activities. It is good and important for children to be in the nature and learn about nature” (InD_21I).

More importantly, they learned how to organize and implement outdoor activities through observation and doing them themselves. For example, they mentioned that they learned to dress children properly for outdoor experiences, as one of them said,

I understand that you want to dress your child nice, but I think it is really bad if clothes have influence on the way a child can play. If I was capable of implementing this change, I would obligate all children to wear rain clothes or at least old clothes while playing outside so that their clothing can no longer stop them from moving and doing whatever they want. During my internship (in Norway) I experience a lot of benefits from the children wearing their rain clothes. (19_3I)

Though outdoor activities and being in nature have traditionally been seen as part of Norwegian life, not all like this lifestyle. A Norwegian male student teacher mentioned in a focus interview that he did not like being outdoors and in nature that much but this course has changed his view about outdoor activities after experiencing how outdoor play and activities helped children in their learning and development. He said, “I’m not a big fan of outdoor, but now I’m more into it after the outdoor courses and doing activities with children in the nature during the field trips.” (InB_21N).

The course literature includes classics on education and early childhood education especially those that are read by student teachers in Norway. What impressed the three authors was that the student teachers quoted the literature they had read for this course and other related ones. The quotations in the creeds reflected that the student teachers not only read the literature but also gained professional support for actions from the reading. Biesta seemed to be the one who was quoted most by them. One shared,

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Finally, I have to point out that in my future work as a teacher my main purpose is going to be taking into account of the three aims of education that Biesta (2016) established which are: qualification, socialization and subjectification. (19_6I)

Besides having recognition and confirmation of their teaching philosophies, some literature has inspired what they could do in future teaching practices.

The play itself has always been important for me, so one of the most important things for my future work as a teacher is that play become a bigger part in the kindergarten and how learning can become a part of the play. This should happen both indoors and outdoors. Ole Fredrik Lillemyr (2016) says that play is important because it has a great impact on children's development and socialization... (19_8N)

This student teacher has made it clear that he/she has gained academic support/insights on what he/she thinks is important for future practices.

I've learned different ways of combining other subjects together. I found new method and inspiration on how to teach children outside. Sometimes, children can do mostly everything themselves. If I just give them the opportunity, they will take it and do something with it. I will say that I am happy that I chose this course, and I don't regret anything. (21_2N)

Gaining intercultural competence

Gaining intercultural competence means that the student teachers have gained an understanding of children of foreign language backgrounds and developed some empathy. One of them shared,

The internship has challenged me with a child who is an English speaker. And because of that, she struggled with interactions with other children. If I put myself in her shoes, it would be terrifying not being able to make contact with other people because it is hard to communicate. (21_3N)

Furthermore, they thought about searching for ways to help. Another student from 2019 cohort shared:

I had a great experience of being a foreigner in a class where everyone speaks a language which I didn't understand. This experience is important for my future as a teacher, because there is a good chance that I will have a foreign student in my class. This experience gives me a better idea of the way in which children who do not speak the language should be guided by both the teacher and the fellow students. (19_3I)

Moreover, one of the student teachers in a focus group interview mentioned specifically using body language to communicate with children who cannot speak the native language or cannot speak.

Body language is a way to communicate with children. Not knowing the language made it difficult for me to communicate with Norwegian children, and I had to use more body language. But it is a way to understand and communicate with children, and I will use it in future work and communication with children who cannot speak my language or cannot speak. (InC_21I)

Discussion

Our findings confirmed the findings of some other researchers (e.g., Olsen, 2016; Sach, 2005; Slagstad, 2008) that the development of teacher identity is a process where the identity is formed through negotiation between experiences and the professional identity is also created and developed together with

others through a joint education (e.g., Heggen 2008; Slagstad, 2008; Suarez & McGrath, 2022). In this study, we have found that the different experiences of both international and Norwegian student teachers have facilitated their professional identity development mostly similarly and differently in some way as well.

Corroborating other authors (e.g., Clement & Outlaw, 2002; Faulconer, 2003), we also found that gaining knowledge about the host country's ECE coupled with field trips and internships are especially beneficial for international student teachers to establish a relationship between book knowledge and practice. Besides, gaining new perspectives different from their home countries has inspired student teachers regarding how to act for future teaching in their home countries. The two-week internship was frequently mentioned in the pedagogical creeds as an enlightening experience for gaining new perspectives and inspiring more reflections. Although all the international students had experienced their early childhood education in their home country and had been studying for years in their educational programs, the days in the internship changed their thinking about education and learning in one way or another. Different from other field experiences, student teachers in this course also have experienced as native Norwegians how outdoor play and activities are and how they can be organized for children. This has especially impressed and changed their views and ideas on how to make future activity plans when it comes to making plans for outdoor play and activities for children. Additionally, findings also indicated that theoretical learning coupled with field trips also changed the perspectives of local Norwegian student teachers' perspectives on outdoor activities and being in nature especially those who do not really like most native Norwegians who enjoy going outdoors and being in nature.

The finding of this article echoes other findings that teacher educators play an important role model for student teachers in their identity development (e.g., Larson, 1977; Suarez & McGrath, 2022). "What student teachers learn during their initial training is as much influenced by who is responsible for teaching them as it is by the content of the curriculum" (Larson, 1977, p. 36). Some of them also described how the way that the teachers of the AOE behaved was eye-opening for them. During the different trips and lectures in the classroom, the students could feel that the teachers had confidence in them, which inspired them to reflect on how they should treat their future students. Moreover, the field experiences have also impacted their views of children. This is more obvious among international student teachers than Norwegian ones since children are seen as competent subjects in Norway and is reflected in the Framework plan.

Furthermore, the findings of this article show that writing a pedagogic creed is a valuable and important self-dialogical and reflective tool in the development of the ethical and conscious identity needed for the teacher's role today. As the student teachers have indicated, the writing process allows them to conduct self-dialogues and reflect critically so they can make meaning of and negotiate the different experiences to

maintain the continuity of their teacher identity and handle the profound changes in their baffling and intercultural encounters. Self-dialogues and reflection require the interrogation of subjective perceptions, attitudes, values, and feelings that are important for teachers. Writing pedagogical creed also provides the student teachers with an opportunity to connect experiences with future work concretely through deep reflection. "The teacher as a reflective practitioner is crucial in dealing with the ever-changing multicultural and multilingual environment" (Broeder & Stokmans, 2012, p. 1).

Final remarks and implications

The findings of this study have confirmed previous research on the international program that study abroad has an impact on participants' identity development and it is especially beneficial for them to gain intercultural competence in the multicultural classroom and fieldwork in another culture. This article has further found out that different course elements of teacher education facilitated student teachers' identity development differently. In addition, findings have indicated that international program that enrolls both local and international students impacts them similarly and also differently. Since the findings are from a small-scale case study of 29 participants, it has limitations. Nonetheless, we believe that this research can be an inspiration for universities in Norway and beyond in terms of offering international courses for student teachers and university students, in general, to help them develop their professional identity.

This study confirmed the importance of preservice teacher education in student teachers' professional identity development. It highlighted the importance of international experiences. For policymakers, it is important to support future students to take their studies in one or more foreign countries. For teacher education institutions, it is important to carefully design field experiences as we can see that student teachers gain more concrete experiences and insights in the field. Students' authentic lived experiences coupled with self-dialogical and critical reflections play a transformative role in student teachers' change and the development of their identity. One challenge mentioned by international student teachers is language. Because they do not understand Norwegian, they do not have good interaction with children in the kindergarten. At the same time, this made them develop empathy towards children of other languages in their future work. This is why teacher education institutions need to consider how to arrange fieldwork for students who do not speak the host country's language. Besides, what literature should be included in a course is of great importance. Student teachers in their writing of the pedagogical creed have used course literature in justifying the professional judgement they have made.

Furthermore, teacher educators and mentors in the internship matter. Good teacher educators and mentors can serve as good role models for student teachers. We also recommend that student teachers write their pedagogic creeds. We find that the pedagogic creed is a useful self-dialogical and reflective tool for student teachers, which aids in their personal and professional development into their future roles as

preschool teachers. In addition, we found this to be a formative method for the development of both preschool teachers and teachers. It has always been promoted that all teachers should be reflective. However, there are few tools for them to use for reflection. Pedagogic creed is one, which provides teachers with opportunities for metacommunication with themselves in terms of their professional identity formation and development. Conducting self-dialogues and reflections especially critical ones, on experiences, are indispensable for student teachers and teacher identity development and continuity, as well as their general development as teachers. In our analysis of the participants' pedagogical creeds, we found that they have little reflection on the tension, frustrations, contradictions, and/or anything negative about their experiences or the course. This might be due to the analysed pedagogical creeds being assignments, which makes students less critical. Thus, there is a need to balance the requirements so that student teachers can have some guidance but at the same time reflect freely on their role as a teacher.

For future research, we think it is important to collect pedagogical creeds or student narratives both at the beginning and the end of the study period. Moreover, follow-up data collection in the form of narratives or open-ended surveys after this international study will be beneficial to see if the multicultural experiences have some long-lasting impact and in what ways.

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