

# Teachers' Narratives: Insights into the Norm of Practice

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*In this study, physics teachers' storylines are explored in relation to what they perceive as their norms of physics teaching. It is anticipated that their stories may provide better understandings of how teachers form and reform their identities throughout their career. Semi-structured interviews aim to focus on the teachers' views about their daily discursive practices in school. Using three types of stories: cover, sacred and secret; the teachers storylines are grouped and located in relation to their intentions and actions which are based on the emerging themes. In addition, continuous coding is produced to strengthen the analysis of their stories. This study hopes to determine what is involved when becoming and being a physics teacher within teachers' own community of practice.*

## *Introduction*

One of the aims of this study is to explore how physics teachers position themselves and perceive their daily discursive practices in their schools. Daily discursive practices are referred to here as the choices and actions the teachers use in their teaching practices at their own local context. This local context subsumes their school as well as nearby schools that they usually take into account when considering the normal standard and acceptable practice within their community of practice. In my interviews with the teachers, they are asked to talk about their own teaching practices, choices and actions and this allow the 'stories they live by' (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) to be discussed.

Teachers stories can reveal how the teachers position themselves within the context of their environment, socially and culturally, in and around the school (Kelchtermans, 2010). This may provide better understandings about how and why teachers' identities are formed and reformed. Teachers' identities, personal and professional, can provide insight into how they see themselves, their perceptions, experiences, skills, practices and ways of acting and interacting, values, morals, beliefs, passions and commitments in their world and how they think others see them as teachers (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Flores & Day, 2006; Harré & van Langenhøve, 1999; Helms, 1998; Luehmann, 2007; Sfard & Prusak, 2005; Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011; Volkmann & Anderson, 1998). Teachers' use of words and language in the interviews carry the meaning about how they value and see their daily teaching practice in general. In this study, about physics specifically,

their stories produces their text of identity which describe by Wittgenstein as the language games (Harré, 1989).

By examining teachers' storylines at any particular moment of the interviews, their positions are jointly constructed and determine their social acts (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré & van Langenhøve, 1999). Each of the teachers' moments from their stories is valued from their personal experiences. This may indicate how they are situated within specific activities of a community of practice they are in (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Traianou, 2006; Wenger, 1998). Furthermore, an individual's understanding of a particular community is a dynamic process that results from actions to situations and negotiation with other members of a community and shows the participants' perspectives of the world implicated in their activities (Fairclough, 2003; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Traianou, 2006; Wenger, 1998).

### *Methodology and Data Analysis*

One of the approaches, in the early stage of data management in this study, was to determine teachers' storylines by considering the three types of stories: cover, sacred and secret (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). On-going and refining processes are involved to eventually provide the structure of the data. By using the ideas of these three layers of stories, the framing of my approach is done by grouping and codification of the teachers' stories that are related to people, places and things the teachers work with.

In this study, the cover stories are taken to be the public kind of stories that are freely share with others who are not necessarily from the school setting. These are usually what the school and teachers want outsiders, including parents, to know about. The sacred stories are still considered as 'public' as these are usually the practice stories of the school and of the teachers, stories of a school, school policies or curriculum documents. These stories are usually the ones that influence teachers' day-to day practices and may be seen as the norm of practice. The final type is secret stories, which are often only shared at secret places with the closest friends or partners. The secret stories are about teachers' own personal classroom interactions with students as well as the truths and the realities of daily discursive practices that are not often talked about.

By considering the three types of teachers stories, a better representation could be provided when studying and analysing the dynamics relations between the teachers' saying and doing which then leads to a better understanding of the description of their identity formation. Teachers' daily choices and actions are usually related to, and position based, the setting they are in. Their stories often include their school stories that provide a context within their practice stories. When dividing and grouping these three types of teachers' stories, the focus has been given to the teachers' commonality of language, such as phrases that recur in their narrative. This includes looking into consistency, similarities and differences within their description that subscribe to the norm of teaching practice among the physics teachers in this study. The words and language are indications of what the teachers value and believe. How the teachers are situating their stories such as with regard to students, schools, subject, teaching activities and personal experiences are noted when grouping their stories into the three types. The three types of stories are then ready for codification for emerging themes and patterns. Further analysis to narrow down and give logistic interpretation based on the types of teachers stories is then by using pronoun grammar analysis. The pronoun grammar analysis allows the stories to be analysed as to when the teachers feel confident, hesitant or committed in relation to the content of the discussion

(Redman & Fawns, 2010). Thus, the structure of conversation according to Harré & van Langenhøve (1999) which consists of positions, storylines and social force can be framed through the teachers stories by using the positioning theory (Harré & van Langenhøve, 1999). Positioning theory allows a better understanding and make sense of the dynamic and inter-relationships of the teachers' daily discursive practices.

### *Findings*

At the initial stage of analysis using the three types of stories, it is no surprise that in the few early meetings with the teachers, there were a lot of cover stories being shared. Among their cover stories, the teachers' usual phrases tend to start or end with 'you know'. This indicates a shared understanding that they expect in their own community as a physics teacher in the school specifically and physics teacher in a broader community of physics teachers. It was by using the division of the types of stories, a construction of more direct and focused questions are prepared and asked at the later interviews where gradually the sacred stories are begun to be shared with me with a few of secret stories too. For the secret stories, the common phrases such as 'I mean', 'I think' and 'I want' indicate personal kinds of stories and the teachers' own desire and decision in making their choices and actions.

### *Conclusion and Implications*

Taking into account the three types of teachers stories and used them to further construct the follow-up interview questions has evidently open up the public kind of cover stories to be discussed into sacred stories and a few to secret ones. If more time were available, more secret stories are anticipated. I am assured using this narrative approach could help to improve teachers' practice as they are able to talk about things that they do and why they do them in their own ways in a deeper secret way of stories.

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