

## **Teachers' voice on their being professional**

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**Abstract:** Teacher quality entails the enhancement of the schools, the society and eventually the whole nation. Realizing this, the Indonesian government has done some efforts to make sure that there are sufficient qualified teachers for students. Since 2006 Indonesian government has established educational reform of upgrading teacher quality by administering teacher certification program supported with teacher professional development. They have to examine what they think teaching and learning are, who their students are, and of course, what their subject is. Considering the key role of teacher quality, this study has its main concern on revealing the teachers' reasons of being teachers and the teachers' view on their profession values with regards to their self, student, and subject. This study involved 24 teachers at Elementary School, Junior High, and Senior High Schools. The data of this study are a narrative self-evaluation of the participants' teaching life. The findings of this study reveal two kinds of motivation driving one to be a teacher: the fundamental reasons which are altruistic and the extrinsic reasons from family members, friends, and former teachers. Further, this study finds the three characteristics of Palmer's (1997) a good teacher. Conclusion and suggestion end the study.

**Keywords:** teacher quality, reasons for being teachers, profession values

### **Introduction**

The term 'professional learning of educators' (Cartmel, Macfarlane, & Casley, 2012) implies that being a teacher is not without being a learner. Like learners who learn to get knowledge, teachers also learn. They learn to get more knowledge so that they can develop themselves to become more and more qualified.

By being more qualified, teachers can indirectly enhance the learning of their students. In fact, teacher quality is an indispensable factor influencing student achievement. Researches show that teacher's quality has a substantial impact on students achievement (Coleman et al., 1966; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Darling-Hammond (2000); and OECD (2001) and Cunningham, 2007). Teacher quality entails the enhancement of the schools, the society and eventually the whole nation.

The Indonesian government has done some efforts to face this challenge in making sure that there are sufficient qualified teachers for students. One current outstanding way to have qualified teachers is a teacher certification program. Indonesian teachers are gradually encouraged to change to be more professional. Through Teacher and Lecturer Law no 14 passed in 2005, the Indonesian government tries to increase teacher quality, other things, through teacher education and professional development. To be more professional, all teachers must meet a minimum standard of a four-year degree before being certified and that all teachers should be formally certified after the four-year degree has been gained and undergo continuing professional development (Chang et al., 2014).

To change implies the process of growing. Indicated in the insights from interactionists and psychologists - among others Mead (1934) and Erikson (1968) respectively (see Beijaard, Meijer & Verlop, 2006) –

is that the growing process is subject to the individual's interaction with his or her environment and that the process has its typical characteristics affected by biological and psychological maturation (Beijaard, Meijer & Verlop, 2006).

The growing idea from the two insights brings about the entity of teacher's professional identity which is defined as something that advances during a teacher's entire life (Beijaard, Meijer & Verlop, 2006). In teaching domain, this identity – teachers' perceptions of their own professional identity, to be more specific – is believed to be an influential factor for teacher's professional development to cope with educational change and to implement instructional innovations in their classroom (Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2000). Keeping this illuminating idea of professionalism equals challenging teachers to possess the determination to be qualified.

It is a widespread agreement that qualified teachers are vital for our nation. However, there is not widespread agreement about how we accomplish this particular aim. Fortunately enough, there are some famous teacher professional development programs implemented. Two most frequently mentioned are in-service teacher training and seminars or conferences. Several professional development programs have been conducted in Indonesia to improve teacher quality, such as Centre for Teacher Activity, Teachers Working Group, and Forum of Teacher-subject that allow teachers to share their experiences in solving the problem they face in teaching.

The effectiveness of professional development programs is always a hot issue. Analyzing 16 studies of teacher professional development programs in mathematics and science in the US, Blank and Alas (2009) found that teacher development improved student achievement. In Indonesia, a teacher development program helped teachers feel more confident and better prepared (Schleicher, 2015). A study in Indonesia (Widodo, 2004) has been performed to reveal the needs of individualized English teachers and to identify the known or less-known programs for teacher professional development. Professional development programs

have their noble intention of improving teacher quality and student learning or achievement.

High-quality teaching is the critical prerequisite for high-quality education and training. Teacher quality has many dimensions: actions, knowledge, and creativity (Blanton et al., 2006). Fenstermacher and Richardson (2005) include teacher quality into good teaching and effective teaching; while Goe (2007) argues that teacher quality consists of teacher qualifications, teacher characteristics, teacher practices, and teacher effectiveness. Professional development is intentional, ongoing, and systematic (Guskey, 2000). Díaz-Maggioli (2004) states that professional (teacher) development is a career-long process in which teachers fine-tune their teaching to meet student achievement.

Professional development for teachers is now recognized as a vital component of policies to enhance teacher profession. Further, professional teacher identities are considered critical components in teaching (Tsui, 2007; Varghese, Morgan, Johnston & Johnson, 2005). Teachers should be aware of the identities they bring with them into their classroom. Ball and Goodson (1985, p. 18) argued that teacher identities are related to "... the sense of self, [which is] of vital significance in ... understanding the actions and commitments of teachers in their work." Accordingly, teacher identities are the factors that influence teachers' attitudes and beliefs as well as their "sub-identities" (Mishler, 1999, p. 8) which guide teachers to carry out their work in the classroom.

This study identifies teacher identities. It is argued that there are reasons for becoming teachers, and teacher identities are multidimensional and constructed with profession values with regards to teachers' self, student, and subject (Palmer, 1998, 2007). This study intends to reveal (1) the teachers' reasons for being teachers, and (2) the teachers' view on their professions values with regards to their self, student, and subject

## Professionalism

Teachers are a profession with personal identity. As professional choices, “teachers are required to make and do make, in developing the knowledge, skills, and values of learners” (Adendorff et al., 2010, p. vii). Teacher profession is unique, different from other professions. Besides having the expertise and specialized knowledge and skills, teachers are required to make professional choices in all sorts of situations, i.e., preparing and give lessons, relating to parents, and participating in unions or professional associations. Not only the different jobs teachers need to do, but also hundreds of decisions, judgments and commitments they must make.

Being professional is identical to continuously learning to do a competent job. The learning can take the form of in-service courses, reflection on experience, reading, observation, or collegial discussion (Ur, 2002). Earlier literature has highlighted some more concrete learning activities for teachers like deepening content knowledge, learning new teaching methods, and critically examining new standards being proposed (Corcoran, 1995). All these learning activities fall under the general heading of professional development.

The learning has been made explicit by a professional development program or sometimes called Career Development Program (CDP). It has been designed in such a way to accomplish the goal. Harris and Young (2000 cited in Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon & Birman (2002) claim that the professional development of teachers is assumed to be the key to the success of educational reform, school development, and changes. Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, and Birman (2002) themselves found that there was an increased use of specific instructional practices after teachers joined a development program focusing on those practices.

One issue consistently discussed under the topic of professionalism is being reflective (see McKay, 2002; Richards, 1998; Richards & Nunan, 1997; Richards & Renandya, 2002). Being reflective leads one to be more professional (Boud, Keogh & Walker, 1985 in Richards, 1998; Quan, Yang & Chen, 2010). Therefore, when we do not perform reflection, we miss professionalism. This notion is strengthened by

Lyons (2010, p.8) who claims that reflective inquiry can show all valued aspects of professional education by “uncovering needed perspectives; identifying critical moral and ethical dimensions of practice; encouraging collaborative inquiries; deliberating about underlying professional purposes and possibilities.”

## Reflection Practice

Reactive practitioners are those who do the same things year and year and blame others (Norton, 2009). Unlike reactive practitioners, reflective practitioners are those who take time to learn from mistakes or failures and keep improving. Let bygone be bygone surely does not apply to reflective practitioners. Reflection is needed to make differences. “Reflective action involves standing back from the flow of experience and weighing up beliefs and taken-for-granted knowledge in the light of practice” (Adendorff et al., 2010, p. 181). A reflective teacher is not tenacious but curious. She will not easily satisfy but sees herself as a goal-oriented agent who adopts an experimental approach to improve teaching and learning.

The development of the reflection issue has been framed by John Dewey's *How We Think*, Donald Schon's *Reflective Practitioner*, and Paulo Freire's *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Reflection practice can then be examined as a way of thinking (Dewey), a way of knowing (Schon) and a way of reflecting critically (Freire) (see Lyons, 2010). In teaching field, this development of reflection is framed by Borg's (2003, 2009) teacher cognition of thinking, knowing and believing and also Woods' (1996) BAK – beliefs, assumptions, and knowledge. In the scope of the classroom, it is associated with epistemological framing which is defined as “how a participant thinks about knowledge as it relates to teaching and learning” (Russ & Luna, 2013, p. 286). This general process of making sense of the world is a part of metacognitive skills – rooted in critically questioning oneself to broaden one's understanding.

After clarifying the various terms used around the notion of reflection such as ‘reflection,’ ‘reflective learning,’ and ‘reflective writing,’ Moon (2007) defines reflection for formal education context as follows:

Reflection/reflective learning, or reflective writing in the academic context, is also likely to involve a conscious and stated purpose for the reflection, with an outcome specified regarding learning, action or clarification. It may be preceded by a description of the purpose and the subject matter of the reflection. The process and outcome of thoughtful work are most likely to be in a represented (e.g., written) form, to be seen by others and to be assessed. All of these factors can influence its nature and quality. (p. 192).

Schon (1983)'s simple definition of reflection – how professionals think about what they are doing – has been argued as having no clarity or giving no explanation of how reflection summarizes tacit understandings (Canning, 2011; Lyons, 2010). The definition of Moon (2007) above has then obviously expanded the initial simple key concept of reflection popularized by Schon (1983) with the concept of 'reflective practitioner.'

### **Teacher Identity**

The implication of this simple proposition "good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher" (Palmer, 2007, p. 10) is truly not as easy as one thought. In the service of learning, a teacher needs to connect his/her ability with the students and also to connect the students with the subject taught. Palmer continues that bad teachers detach themselves from the subject and also their students, meanwhile good teachers join three elements together: self, subject, and students. To unite the three elements, a teacher needs to keep his/her heart open especially in the unbearable moments so that the teacher himself or herself, the students, and the subject can really be entangled not only for the sake of learning but also of living.

How can identity and integrity appear? Palmer (2007) points out a simple answer: when we speak about "who we are as teachers." (p. 13). Identity covers the complicated mystery of being human such as genetic character, the culture, the good and bad performed to self and others, love, and sufferings (Palmer, 2007). Integrity refers to the totality found in identity. It requires wisdom to distinguish what fits and what

does not fit. It needs the courage to take the forces within or to reject them.

Both integrity and identity are two delicate life forces. They are "lifelong process of self-discovery" (Palmer, 2007, p. 14). The intersection of the various life forces forms one's identity. When life – not death – resulting from relating the forces is obtained, one reaches integrity.

In line with Palmer's claim, Bolivar (2014, p. 106) asserts that "...the professional is armed with a vocation, a set of universal values, a teaching discipline, and a sense of socialization and liberation for the students..." Further, he argues that a professional teacher should have knowledge, competences, actions, attitudes, and values. Even, these identities are 'prerequisites' for someone to be a teacher.

Singh and Richards (2006) opine that identity represents a core component of teacher learning; "identity seems to play a special role in teaching, as compared with other professions" (p. 155). Further, Singh and Richards recommend teacher identity for teacher education and teacher professional development. Reviewing a previous study, Bolivar (2014) stated that professional identity is affected by the socio-cultural policy, workplace or socially located influences, and personal influences.

### **Research Method**

This study investigates the teachers' perceptions of instructional activities and experiences. This qualitative investigation gains a deeper understanding of how teachers perceive their professional development experiences. Accordingly, this research investigates teachers' pedagogical and professional stories of teaching through their own words told in school settings.

This study was a narrative inquiry to provide in-depth information regarding teachers' perceptions of their pedagogical and professional experiences to improve student outcomes. Teachers' stories provide perceptions of what they value about pedagogical and professional activities, their contributions to their

schools' professional development plan, barriers they encountered, how they apply new learning, the role of a learning culture, and the impact of their professional development experiences within their professional world and classroom.

The participants of this study were selected from schools of the same education foundation in Surabaya. There were 24 teachers involved. Eight were elementary school teachers, 12 were Junior High School teachers, and four were Senior High School teachers in Surabaya. They were varied in educational backgrounds, teaching experiences and subjects taught. Some participants graduated from Education Faculty while the rest were from Non-Education Faculty. Those who graduated from the Education Faculty learned and practiced teaching strategies during their study while the others did not. They started teaching at regular schools differently; and, the subjects they also taught varied, i.e. English, Indonesian Language, Mathematics, Religion, Physical Education, Biology, Sociology, Content Subjects, Civic Education, Social Sciences, and Natural Sciences. However, they worked for the schools of the same education foundation. Therefore, they learned and applied the same vision and mission of teaching.

The data of this study were teachers' pedagogical and professional stories of teaching. They were collected from different sources: documents (Self Evaluation), and interviews. The document collected was self-evaluation developed by the participants.

The major instrument of this study was the investigators equipped with theories and experiences in teaching and education. To collect data, they used an interview protocol, audio recorder, and narrative guideline.

After obtaining the narrative writing of the participants' teaching life, the researchers conducted an in-depth- interview. Using the interview protocol, the researchers sought particular information about their teaching profession stories. In general, the researchers knew the topics to be covered and the questions to be asked, i.e., the teachers' opinions about their self, student, and subject (Palmer, 1998). However, at the same time, the researchers had to prove some aspects of the research topic in depth.

The data of the study were analyzed continuously throughout the data collection and coding process. When the researchers collected the data, they coded and reviewed the data to find voices, experiences, and issues in teachers' professional development. The researchers carefully read the documents to understand why the teachers chose to teach as their profession. Besides, the documents were also analyzed to obtain their views on the self, student, and subject.

Transcribing the data after each interview kept the transcriptions manageable and allowed the researchers to begin to review them for suggestions of emerging themes. All transcripts were kept in a folder to make it easy to access them.

The researchers also coded individual narrative self-report to enable the researchers to describe, classify, and interpret the data. The themes on reasons of being teachers and on their profession values were taken from self-evaluation document and interviews. Reasons for being teachers and views on their profession values were deduced from self-evaluation documents and interviews. Themes on reasons of being teachers and views on their profession values were coded and counted based on the occurrences found in both data sources.

## Findings

### *Teachers' reasons for being teachers*

The writers got the data to answer the first research question only from 15 out of 24 respondents' reflection. At the foundation where the respondents worked, the teachers were graded based on their competency. The respondents involved in this study varied from grade 9 to grade 11. Therefore not each respondent reflected something about their reasons of being a teacher.

The analysis of the 15 respondents' reflection reported through narrative self-evaluation indicates that three instances are showing the reasons of being a teacher. The first instance – fundamental reason – is indicated by four respondents. The second instance – outer reason – is indicated by six respondents. The third instance – both inner and outer reasons – is indicated by five respondents.

Ten respondents were either intrinsically or extrinsically motivated to be teachers. Five respondents were both intrinsically or extrinsically motivated to be teachers.

Driven by their own intention (inner drive) to be a teacher, one of the four respondents felt that being a teacher was the most satisfying and an honorable job. One admitted that he/she was called to serve children and support them to be better. One even said honestly that the reason of being a teacher was for finding experience and just trying to earn money for his/her future. The last respondent asserted, "When I realized His greatest gift upon my life then I decided to choose this wonderful profession, teacher, to become part of my life." The intrinsic motive is primarily related to one's like of the teaching profession (something enjoyable)

Driven by others (outer drive) to be a teacher, one of the six respondents was extrinsically driven since he/she was in kindergarten; her kindergarten teacher inspired him/her. One respondent admitted that his/her father was an influencing person. Another one was influenced by his/her friend. He/she simply followed his/her friend who asked him/her to join teaching in a school, the school which was involved in this study. Another respondent was similarly influenced by his/her father. Writing "Being a teacher was not my dream ... .", He/she initially never imagined himself/herself being a teacher. Another respondent was initially offered a job as a translator for a classroom observation by his/her lecturer, and when offered further to be a teacher, his/her reason was merely to fill the time before his/her graduation. His/her lecturer became the person initially making him/her a teacher. He/she more particularly stated, "Waktu itu, pertimbangan saya untuk menerima pekerjaan sebagai translator dan guru hanyalah untuk mengisi waktu luang sambil menunggu wisuda." [translation: At that time my consideration was to accept the offer to be a translator and being a teacher was just to fill the time while I was waiting for my graduation.]. Encouraged by his/her family and friend who had become teachers in the school involved in this study, the last respondent determined to be a teacher.

Five respondents were both intrinsically or extrinsically motivated to be teachers. They had their inner motivation as well as outer drive that made them decide to be teachers. One said he/she himself/herself determined to be a teacher (inner drive). At the same time he/she also said his/her grandfather influenced him/her to be one. Another respondent was triggered by a verse in the Bible which reminded one not to be a teacher. At the same time, his/her father was influential, and the Dutch priests who came to teach in Indonesia was also influential. They became the model for him/her. One said that being a teacher was his/her passion. At the same time he/she was also driven by two great teachers he/she knew. The last two respondents revealed that they were intrinsically called in life to be a teacher. They declared "... saya merasa terpanggil untuk menjadi bagian dalam rencanaNya"; "... setelah melalui berbagai pergumulan akhirnya saya menyerasakan diri untuk menjawab panggilan Tuhan untuk menjadi seorang guru." [translation: ... I felt I was called to be part of HIS plan; ...after numerous struggles I finally surrender to respond to God's call to be a teacher]. At the same time, one of them admitted that someone else – friendly, full of authority, caring and solution-giving – had influenced her. The other one admitted that his/her family and church friends were the ones influencing him/her to be a teacher.

This study reveals that intrinsic reasons of being a teacher include a spiritual call (a divine call) and intention to serve others (being of service). The second instance is in line with the findings of Alexander, Chant, Cox (1994).

Meanwhile, the primary outer drive for one to be a teacher includes family members, friends, former teachers who have become a good model, and the second outer drive comes from friends who ask one to follow them to be a teacher. This primary motivation similarly indicates that it is the "influence of students' former teachers" (Alexander, Chant, Cox, 1994, p.40) that was one of the major motives for choosing to teach as a career. Lortie (1986 in Alexander, Chant, Cox, 1994) agrees that "teachers have played a significant role in recruiting new members for the profession" (p.40).

As previously presented, one of the intrinsic motivation was related to the call to serve children and support them to be better. This might indicate another instance of motivation, i.e. the altruistic motive which is exemplified by Bakar, Mohamed, Suhid and Hamzah (2014:156) as follows: "The altruistically motivated teachers view teaching as a profession that enables them to contribute to the society such as by being a part of young peoples' growth and development."

Implied from the primary outer drive is that it is necessary for settled teachers to be a role model to influence teachers-to-be to be real teachers. It is even necessary for settled teachers to be good teachers so that more and more people are attracted to be teachers – a profession that should not be underestimated nowadays.

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When writing the paper please remember to use either British, or US, spelling but not a mix of the two, i.e., if you choose British spelling it would be colour, not color; behaviour (behavioural) not behavior; [school] programme, not program; [he] practises not practices; centre, not center; organization not organisation; analyse not analyze.

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