

# **Understanding identity construction of an in-service pre-k teacher using discursive psychology**

**Faishal Zakaria**

Department of English Education, Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh,  
Indonesia

[faishalzakaria.ftk@ar-raniry.ac.id](mailto:faishalzakaria.ftk@ar-raniry.ac.id)

Manuscript received July 1, 2022, revised April 5, 2023, accepted April 8, 2023, and published online May 7, 2023.

## **Recommended APA Citation**

Zakaria, F. (2023). Understanding identity construction of an in-service pre-k teacher using discursive psychology. *Englisia: Journal of Language, Education, and Humanities*, 10(2), 56-70. <https://doi.org/10.22373/ej.v10i2.13998>

## **ABSTRACT**

Experts have asserted that teacher identity is an integral part of classroom practices; studying teacher identity construction would allow us to understand the teachers' learning process and teaching practices. It is then argued that identity is fluid and is never a stand-alone aspect. Further, many studies of the discursive construction of teacher identities have suggested teacher identity construction is highly contextual. However, little research has focused on how pre-K teachers serving low-income students and families construct their professional identities discursively. Grounded within the perspectives of Discursive Psychology, this study is interested in how a US government-sponsored pre-K program teacher discursively constructs her identities. The findings further suggest the fluidity of identity and particularly posit that the teacher has constructed and claimed her collective and co-constructed identities, as well as discursively formed her identities as a person who values social capital, who is practical, who serves the needy students and families, who has power or resources, and who is a lifelong learner. The findings further implicate the need to consider teachers' identities to understand their learning, growth, and classroom practices.

**Keywords:** *Pre-K teacher; Discursive identity construction; Discursive psychology*

## **1. Introduction**

Many have asserted that teacher identity is one of the most crucial aspects of classroom practices (Alsup, 2006; Tsui, 2007; Yuan & Lee, 2015; Zacharias, 2010). Also, the teacher's ethos takes a central stage in every classroom. Thus, when teachers are

aware of the identities they bring into the classroom, they will be aware of their contributions to the teaching-learning process in the classroom (Zacharias, 2010). It has further been argued that teacher identity is not a stand-alone professional aspect but is rather a combination of personal aspects of self and professional ones (Alsup, 2006). Further, understanding how teachers claim, construct, or negotiate their identities is paramount to understanding how they learn and develop professionally (Trent, 2017; Yazan, 2018). It is interesting to learn how teachers negotiate their “personal ideologies and perceived professional expectations” (Alsup, 2006, p. xiv) as they construct their identities and make sense of what it means to do/become teachers in their particular teaching contexts.

In this sense, many studies have addressed the issues of teacher identity formations. For example, Bathmaker and Avis (2013) discuss the findings of their longitudinal study of novice teachers involved in the English further education (English FE) program. Their construction of identities is particularly discussed. It is also discursively constructed through language and talk (Tan, 2020). In general, the findings indicate that teacher identity construction is highly contextual. Thus, teacher identities should be viewed as not static but fluid depending on the context (Pennington & Richards, 2016). Other existing research (e.g., Devos, 2010; Li, 2020; Trent and Lim, 2010; Trent, 2010) study also suggests similar insight on teacher identity development; how teachers make sense of their professional identity is very much shaped by the social conditions of their teaching contexts.

Here, as Alsup (2006) has argued that teachers would usually negotiate their personal beliefs and professional expectations as they teach or during teacher learning (Yazan, 2017), it would be very interesting to explore how these teachers construct their professional identities and make sense of doing/becoming teachers in their teaching contexts. Indeed, many studies have focused on the discursive construction of teachers’ identities (e.g., Li, 2020; Tan, 2020). However, little research has delved into how government-sponsored pre-K program teachers construct their professional identities through language and talks.

Therefore, I am particularly interested in exploring and understanding how a teacher of the pre-K Head Start Program, which is sponsored by the US federal government, navigates her personal beliefs and professional identities as she serves children from economically-challenged families. Studying the discursive construction of the Head Start program teachers’ identities will enable us to better understand the underlying meanings of their “talks-in-interaction” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) and how they construct their personal/professional identities through the discourse. This present study seeks to answer the following question: How does a government-sponsored pre-K program teacher navigate her personal beliefs and discursively construct her professional identities?

## **2. Literature review**

### *2. 1. Teacher identity constructions*

There is, of course, no single-agreed-upon definition of the notion of identity. It can be understood from different perspectives. From a post-structuralist perspective, for instance, identity can be understood as “the way a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (Norton, 2013, p. 4). Using such a perspective, one can further view identity as something that is enacted and reenacted through various “discursive practices and social interactions” (Davey, 2013, p. 31) within a particular setting. As has been said, we can see that teacher identity is never a fixed and stand-alone entity. As Yuan and Lee (2015) further argue, teacher identity could be “understood as a fluid, multifaceted and contextual construct, which involves teachers constantly making sense of themselves in their professional practice in relation to the outside world” (p.470).

It is understandable that teachers discursively construct and negotiate specific professional identities as professionals. Professional identity can also be problematized, and the term is open to a wide range of interpretations (Servage, 2009). Therefore, Davey (2013) draws on the perspectives of psychological, sociocultural, and post-structural theories of identity and social identity. He contends that professional identity is “the valued professional self” (p. 6), and he proposes that we take this viewpoint when examining the professional identity of teachers as “a distinctive professional group.” Davey argues that we must try to go “beyond stories” teachers tell to understand their professional identity better. Therefore, he argues that professional identity can:

- a. be thought of as both personal and social in origin and expression; it is personally and individually perceived and claimed but individually and culturally negotiated.
- b. be thought of as multifaceted and fragmented, as well as evolving and shifting in nature; one’s professional identity is always in a process of becoming.
- c. involve emotional states and value commitments; it comprises how one sees oneself and what values in oneself as a professional.
- d. necessarily involve some sense of group membership or non-membership, and identification with a collective; one’s sense of self as a member of a purposeful occupational community is a significant and necessary component of one’s professional identity (pp. 31-32).

There have been many studies on the construction of teacher identities. For instance, within the context of English language teacher education, Elsheikh (2016) studies how four Sudanese EFL preservice teachers discursively construct their professional identities. Interestingly, the findings reveal that only two of these four preservice teachers aspire to be English teachers. Socio political and economic discourses very much influence the preservice teachers’ views of their identities in their context. Elsheikh argues that “the participants’ discursive constructions and experiences of teaching impacted how they view themselves as future teachers or professionals”(p. 48). In other words, these preservice teachers built and claimed their identities based on different discourses around them.

Also, Trent and Lim (2010) explore the experiences of two groups of secondary

English teachers who got involved in school-university partnerships in the context of Hong Kong. By drawing on several theories of identity construction, such as Varghese et al. (2005) identity-in-discourse – teacher identity discursively established through the discourse and identity-in-practice – teacher identity as demonstrated through their practices, Wenger’s (1998) negotiation of meanings, and Fairclough’s (2003) model of identity formation, this case study showcases how the teachers’ identity construction was shaped by their participation in the school-university partnerships. The participants indicate that their participation in the partnership is very much related to their identity construction. Therefore, as Alsup (2006) has argued, teachers would usually negotiate their personal beliefs and professional expectations. Thus, it is very interesting to explore how these teachers construct their professional identities and make sense of doing/becoming teachers in their teaching contexts.

Similar findings are also echoed in research from the context of Indonesia; for example, a recent study by Intansari Meilani et al. (2022) shows cases of three female mid-career English teacher educators’ autoethnographic inquiry of their professional identities. The findings suggest that these female teacher educators’ identity constructions are influenced by various historical, sociocultural, and institutional factors. This is much like the existing literature that has suggested that identity construction is indeed contextual, contested, and negotiated (Yazan, 2017). It is within the sense of such identity construction fluidity that the present study commenced.

## 2.2. *Discursive psychology*

People mostly construct certain discourses through language use, either spoken, written, or other non-verbal cues (Tan, 2020). Therefore, a discourse analysis approach can appropriately be used to analyze how identity is discursively constructed. This paper focuses on the discursive construction of teacher identity in a US government-sponsored pre-K education program. Discursive Psychology (DP) can be beneficial because it is both a theory and a method. As its name suggests, DP is a type of discourse analysis that centers around psychological aspects in talks or texts (McMullen, 2021). Despite its name, Wiggins (2016) says that DP is not trying to understand what is in somebody’s mind when they say an utterance (e.g., I don’t like the food) because the assumptions we make about such an utterance can be limitless. DP, however, simply focuses on what action the utterance is performing (i.e., saying no).

Here, DP will help a researcher study “talk-in-interaction” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987), which can be simply understood as real-time social interactions within real-world contexts (Higginbotham & Engelke, 2013). In other words, DP allows us to understand talks and texts and our activities when interacting with others (Wiggins, 2016).

Furthermore, Potter (2012) asserts three Discursive Psychology (DP) strands. The “first strand” focuses on identifying interpretive repertoires, or conceptually organized clusters of terms, phrases, grammatical features, and idioms used to construct social behaviors, often perpetuating existing structures of power and inequality. The “second

strand” focuses on what speakers and writers do with language. A speaker’s praise, belittling, demand, or condone could indicate this strand. Finally, the “third strand” pays close attention to the sequential conversational structures typical of conversational analysis, which focuses on micro features of interactions, such as grammatical forms, pauses, intonation, and idioms.

The present study adopts an “Interactionist Perspective,” explained by Jorgensen and Phillips (2002) as the second strand of DP that “concentrates on the analysis of action orientation of text and talk in social interaction” (p.105). With this particular perspective, an analysis is focused “on what speakers are doing with language – on the social actions that are being performed” (McMullen, 2021, p. 5). This perspective is drawn from Conversation Analysis (CA), which enables analysts to concentrate on how social organization (i.e., identity) is enacted through language and interactions.

### **3. Method**

#### *3.1. Population and sample*

Ten teachers were teaching at the pre-K center where this research was conducted. These ten teachers were considered the population of this study. Initially, I purposely invited two teachers as samples for this study. These two teachers once served as my child’s teachers. Thus, I know them personally. I know their communication styles, so I could understand them easily. As I explain below, my analysis only focuses on the data from one of the sample teachers, Ms. Anna. I refer to Ms. Anna simply as MA and use my initial (FZ) in the interview transcripts; our initials appear in the quotes presented in this paper.

#### *3.2. Positionality*

I must admit that I brought my personal biases to this project. One clear possibility of such biases was that I was educated as a teacher educator. Thus, I might have brought my personal positions and stances to the issues that my participant and I discussed during the interviews, or I might have based my interpretation of data on my personal and academic viewpoints. For instance, I might have played a significant role in co-constructing the discourse during the interviews. Therefore, I would also like to address this co-construction issue in my analysis.

#### *3.3. Research context*

I used the data I collected for one of my class projects for this paper. I initially used the data to analyze whether teachers’ beliefs and practices are in line with the goals or objectives of the programs or institutions they work for. At the time, I chose to observe a local federally-funded pre-K classroom (best known as the Head Start classroom) and interview its two teachers. Because I wanted to reorient or re-purpose this existing data to fit my current focus, I only emphasized my attention on one of the teachers. Thus, my analysis is only based on my interviews with Ms. Anna.

Ms. Anna serves as a Lead Teacher of a Head Start classroom. This Head Start classroom is situated on the east side of a mid-sized college town in a US Midwest state. Altogether, there are four pre-K Head Start classrooms at this location. The classroom where the research took place was team-taught by Ms. Anna and Ms. Sharon (not real names). During my research, 13 students were enrolled in this classroom.

I chose this particular classroom because my oldest daughter was once enrolled in Ms. Anna and Ms. Sharon's class. I usually talked with both of them when I dropped and picked up my daughter or when we had parent-teacher conferences. Such interactions have enabled me to know both teachers quite well, and I became aware of some of their teaching beliefs and practices. In addition, I could also learn more about this particular classroom and other Head Start programs in general through other general and curriculum-related documents sent out to me regularly as a parent. Through various Head Start socialization programs, I came to know some key figures of the local Head Start program. Knowing these figures has made it easy for me to gain permission to interview Ms. Anna and Ms. Sharon and observe their classroom.

I contacted Ms. Anna's supervisor, Ms. Regina (a pseudonym), to ask for permission and to inquire about what I needed to do to be able to observe Ms. Anna's classroom and interview her and her assistant teacher. Because I have known Ms. Regina during Head Start socialization programs, I found it easy to explain my research plans. I was permitted to observe the classroom and interview the teachers but must sign a confidentiality form before starting any research activity. Generally speaking, my familiarity with the Head Start program and its key individuals allows me easy access/entry to the site.

#### *3.4. Research participant*

Previously, I invited both Ms. Anna and her assistant to participate in my study. As has been said, I only focus my attention on Ms. Anna here; thus I solely based my analysis on my interviews with Ms. Anna. Ms. Anna was born in one of the US Midwest states and she has extensive experience teaching children aged five or less and under. Ms. Anna started her career teaching children after she graduated from college decades ago. She had taught for the Head Start program for almost five years by the time I interviewed her. Prior to coming to Head Start, Ms. Anna had taught in many different daycares before, but Ms. Anna had to adjust here and there and had to upgrade her ability when she first worked at her current Pre-K class. She had to do more paperwork and learned other computer skills not required in her previous work.

#### *3. 5. Research site*

As said above, the research site was a classroom of a US government-sponsored Pre-K Education (Head Start) Program located in a mid-sized college town in a US Midwestern state. The classroom lead teacher, Ms. Anna, serves as the main research participant thus, the analysis will specifically refer to my interviews with her.

### *3.6. Data sources*

My data was sourced from several observation notes and three interviews in my previous project. But, I especially paid attention to my interviews with Ms. Anna in this project. Because I conducted two interviews with Ms. Anna, I initially planned to use both of these interviews as my data sources. However, for this project, I only focused on my first interview with Ms. Anna because it has quite a lot of data, and it would not be feasible to study and analyze all data for this paper. The interview lasted about 40 minutes. I conducted this interview in the school playground as Ms. Anna watched her students playing. I did not ask for a specific interview time because Ms. Anna preferred that the interview be done while the children were playing outside.

### *3.7. Data analysis*

Because I initially did a verbatim transcription, I had to revisit my transcription and apply light Jeffersonian transcription symbols to enable me to analyze the verbal cues as well. These Jeffersonian transcription symbols include, for example, “↑” to indicate a rising intonation, (( )) to show words or phrases added by the researcher, or “(0.2)” to tell seconds pass by before an interlocutor continues their sentence. I only use a few of these symbols here because this is not a pure conversational analysis study. I then coded my interview transcripts. It is important to note that I had to omit some data because Ms. Anna talked about things that were not directly related to the topics of my questions. [Omitted] would indicate such data omission.

As has been said above, I provided Jeffersonian symbols only to parts of the interview data that I see as relevant to my focus. To help me with transcription, I used Express Scribe software where I could set hotkeys (e.g., I assigned the F4 key for pause and F9 key for replay, etc.) so I could continue typing without having to close my Microsoft Word file. Because the transcription process can also offer some initial interpretation of the data, I omitted the data that I did not need (e.g., I omitted data unrelated to the topics discussed). Another benefit of this transcription process is that I can develop some kinds of initial data analysis.

When I first coded my data, I tried to apply descriptive, in-vivo, and a priori coding (see Saldana, 2015) just to see how many themes I could come up with. Here, I simply printed my transcribed data and provided my codes on the margins of the papers or between the lines because I did not use qualitative analysis software packages such as N-Vivo. This coding strategy resulted in numerous codes. When I revisited my codes, I came up with some major themes that accurately represented the data. I will later discuss these themes here. For the sake of trustworthiness, I analyze my initial codes recursively. This allows me to move from a broad understanding of large datasets to categories/themes.

## 4. Findings

This study primarily focuses on how Ms. Anna navigates her personal beliefs and discursively constructs her professional identities. These identity claims were present in numerous initial codes, which were interpreted into major themes of different kinds of identities Ms. Anna was constructing and co-constructing, either through her personal language use or her interaction with me as the interviewer. Below are the major themes:

### 4.1. A collective identity

Several times during the interview, Ms. Anna hinted that she was claiming a collective identity as a Head Start teacher serving low-SES (socioeconomic status) students and their families from around her Head Start site.

146 MA: I feel like it, and I think they come here because they are very smart (.) intellectual. The parents who come here from other countries and they want their children to be (.)

148 FZ: Uh uh

149 MA: This program is available because of the funding, I feel like they want their children to uhm it's great that we can help people who come over, they're coming here and learn from from (0.2) their university and here we are helping their children by giving free childcare so they can study to become better individuals and they don't have to worry about childcare for their children every day before they go to ↑kindergarten.

In the interview excerpt above, Ms. Anna discussed her fondness for working with international students and their parents. She seemed to express her pride in being able to serve and help these international parents. She was giving herself credit because the parents could go to study at the university and better themselves while their children were being educated in Ms. Anna's class for free. Interestingly, Ms. Anna did not claim that as her personal accomplishment but as collective attainment. The pronoun "we" in line 151 indicates that Ms. Anna presents herself and her colleagues under the big umbrella of the Head Start Program.

Such a claim can also have a different meaning. As a part of a collective entity (e.g., Head Start Program, which assists those in need), Ms. Anna can also seem to express her power and resourcefulness. Here, such power and resourcefulness can be understood as Ms. Anna's ability to provide assistance (i.e., daycare) to those parents who need it the most. In this sense, imbalanced power relations are also visible, one acts as a provider, and the others act as receivers of assistance. Such a discourse is being constructed in Ms. Anna's talk (line 151-153 of the above excerpt). The fact that she said, "we are helping their children by giving free childcare so they can study to become better individuals and they don't have to worry about childcare for their children every day" indicates the kind of important role that Ms. Anna and her colleagues are playing in helping these

international parents' efforts to be better individuals. Such a claim makes a lot of sense because daycare is not inexpensive, and these international students coming to the United States on tight budgets might not be able to afford quality daycare for their pre-K children without help. Thus, Ms. Anna and the Head Start Program have come to the rescue.

#### *4.2. An identity of a teacher who values social capital*

Although Ms. Anna claims to have done a great favor for these international parents, she also acknowledges their other social capital. She posits that these international parents come to the United States to pursue their graduate education; this makes them different from some local Head Start parents who did not even have GED (general educational development) diplomas or high school equivalent diplomas. In line 146, Ms. Anna explained why she likes multiculturalism and working with international students/parents. Her assumed impressions of these international people are clearly positive. When she says, "I think they come here because they are very smart (.) intellectuals," she seems to mean that international parents managed to come to the United States and got admissions to prestigious graduate programs at a large well-known research university in the Midwest because they are smart and intelligent. Indeed, not many people can attain such kind of academic achievements. In this sense, Ms. Anna values the parents' social capital, i.e., big 'D' Discourse (Gee, 2015). These parents might not possess great financial capital but they have other valuable social and cultural capital (e.g. having graduate education, possessing research skills, and being the cultural agents of their countries, etc.). In a different interview, Ms. Anna claims that she loves working at her current site because of the demographic she's serving. The fact that her Head Start site is only a few miles away from a big Midwestern university makes many international parents working on their graduate degrees send their children to this particular Head Start location. Different Head Start locations do not have such a diverse student population.

#### *4.3. A co-constructed identity*

Apparently, Ms. Anna does not entirely construct her identities on her own. There were times when Ms. Anna co-construct her identities with her interlocutors. In the context of our interview conversations, I serve as one of her interlocutors. In the following interview excerpt, I seemingly have influenced Ms. Anna's discursive construction of her identity as a pre-K teacher.

117 FZ: What were some of the ↑reasons for you to choose this kind of job?

118 MA: Uhm, it offers health ↑insurance.

119 FZ: ↑Oh, Ok!

120 MA: it has ↑paid days off.

121 FZ: Uh uh

122 MA: It uhm (0.2) it took early childhood ↑degree. A lot of daycares said that you had to have an early childhood degree to be a ↑lead teacher. You must have a degree to be a lead teacher here. In other places or daycares, you do ↑not. So, I obviously got paid more.

125 FZ: Other than the (.) uhm ↑benefits and financial ↑reasons, do you have any other ↓reasons?

126 MA: I ↑thought I would do something different. I knew I knew what this program was about (.) helping lower-income children and families.

128 FA: Ok, Ok

129 MA: So, OK I:: give it a ↑try. I've always worked with more ↑elite groups. I worked at a place where a lot of ((a Midwestern university)) families were. They ↑paid a lot of money and at this place you know so uhm I got to know different kinds of families, especially my main thing I really like the last two years with the ↑multiculturalism

133 FA: ↑Nice!

When asked why she chose her current profession, Ms. Anna's first answer was very practical, listing the benefits she received for taking up the job. In this regard, she presented herself as a pragmatic and practical teacher who still values job security. This is strongly evidenced in line 118-124 where she mentioned all the benefits she received for teaching for the Head Start program.

I, as the interviewer, seemingly did not expect that she would mention "health insurance" as her first answer. In line 119, there was a rise in intonation (i.e. ↑Oh, Ok!), indicating my surprise. Ms. Anna explained her credentials (e.g., early childhood education degree) to indicate her credibility as a teacher and her being paid more for such credibility. I immediately asked if she had any other reasons other than financial reasons. Ms. Anna did respond by mentioning her ability to do something different and assist low-SES students and their families (line 127-128). She would not probably say that if I did not ask the follow-up question. Here, I have played a part in "helping" Ms. Anna co-construct her identity as a Head Start teacher who served low-SES students.

#### *4.4. An identity of a teacher who is both practical and caring*

Also, I seemed to encourage Ms. Anna to continue talking about other-than-financial-reasons. In line 129, I said, "Ok, Ok" to encourage Ms. Anna to say more. I said this because I was expecting Ms. Anna to say more about her efforts to help low-SES students and their parents. Ms. Anna compared the students she served in a different daycare where their "elite" parents had to pay a lot of money with her current Head Start class attended by students from different low-SES backgrounds. Here, Ms. Anna was discursively trying to assert her identity as a teacher who does a "noble" deed, as she was serving low-SES families. As she mentioned in line 132 of the interview excerpt above, Ms. Anna claims to have valued multiculturalism in her class. I, as the interviewer, found

her elaboration interesting, so I continued encouraging her by saying “nice” (in line 133) and the word “nice” to indicate that I approved of what Ms. Anna said and I was interested to hear more. The excerpt below shows that Ms. Anna has had positive experiences interacting with people from different countries (e.g., learning more about different cultures, climates, or food). From all of these examples, we could see that Ms. Anna and I were co-constructing a particular kind of identity for Ms. Anna; an identity of a teacher who is both practical and caring.

134 MA: And I ↑love meeting people from other ↑countries and they share their cultures with ↓me; whether it’s ↑climate, ↑food uhm raising their children and I really like getting to know people from other countries. And I feel like their children are more ↑well-behaved Hum(h)our

#### *4.5. An identity of a lifelong learning teacher*

Although Ms. Anna has obviously constructed her identities as the one who serves or the one who has power and resources, she also constructed her identities as the one who is eager to learn more. Also, this is interesting because, during the early stages of the interview, Ms. Anna clearly showcased and emphasized her credentials and experiences as a professional pre-K teacher.

167 MA: ((a Midwestern university)) helps us like the parents. We’re getting ((a Midwestern university)) volunteers we had one this morning, I had one yesterday morning. So, they’re going to school to be teachers or psychologists and we’re using them as service-learning students over here. So, they’re helping ↑me by being extra hands in class and I learn from ↑them because ↑obviously they’re going to ↑school and it’s been 20 years since I’ve been to ↑school. So, I’m still learning from ↑them as ↑well.

From line 167 – 172 of the above excerpt, Ms. Anna explained how she benefits from some university students coming to her class to learn. The fact that she mentioned, “they’re going to ↑school and it’s been 20 years since I’ve been to ↑school. So, I’m still learning from ↑them as well” explains her humbled position as a long-time practitioner but is still willing to learn from younger people who are still attending today’s university classes. Also, to emphasize her point, Ms. Anna raised her intonation on some of the words she used. For example, she raised her intonation when saying the word “school” to indicate temporal differences. She attended school a long time ago thus, she can learn from the students who might learn new things that Ms. Anna did not get to learn before. Therefore, we can also consider her a lifelong learner.

## **5. Discussion**

The data analysis revealed some interesting themes regarding Ms. Anna’s discursive identity construction. Ms. Anna’s construction of a collective identity could fit in Bathmakers and Avis’ (2013) discussion of occupational and personal professionalism.

Occupational professionalism is defined as the discourse formed within an occupational entity where “collegial authority” exists. For instance, when Ms. Anna used the pronoun “we” instead of “I” when arguing that the Head Start program has provided great service to low-SES students and their families. Here, she seemingly acknowledged some “collegial authority” because she did not want to claim all the credits for herself. In fact, the services provided to the low-SES and families would not be possible without her peer and institutional support. Therefore, collegial authority is certainly exercised to achieve institutional goals.

Ms. Anna also constructed some personal professionalism as well. For instance, when she was talking about assisting low-SES parents (i.e. providing free daycare to their children) and her fondness for multicultural and diverse classroom populations. She indicated her personal commitment to helping these families so that they could better develop. Obviously, Ms. Anna also enjoyed the presence of international students in her class because that was also some kind of personal development for her. Although Ms. Anna admitted that financial issues were some of the most important reasons for her accepting the job, she later showcased her commitment to the job. She seemed to invest in this kind of classroom environment personally. She claimed, for example, that she loved knowing people from different cultures, trying new food, and learning about new cultures.

Such construction of occupational and personal professionalism is an example of the combination of personal and professional aspects of self (Alsup, 2006). Thus, Ms. Anna here confirms that teacher identity is not a stand-alone professional aspect. Things always mix up together, so the construction of identities is always complex. In the case of Ms. Anna, the fact that I, as the interviewer, might have played an important part in co-constructing her identities suggests the fluidity of the notion of identity construction itself (Ruohotie-Lyhty et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021). This discussion can then be referred back to Davey’s (2013) point that professional identity is always a process of becoming.

Even though I did not intentionally adopt Fairclough’s (2001) ideas to analyze power relations in this project. I noticed Ms. Anna asserted her power, especially when she claimed to have assisted the students and their parents. In any kind of people-to-people relationship, the power relation is usually present. Trent and Lim (2010), who adopt Fairclough’s framework of power relations, discuss the dynamics of power relationships among participants of school-university partnerships where the power relations among participants are not balanced.

The data also suggests that Ms. Anna is constructing her identity as a lifelong learner when she talks about her willingness to learn from the university students doing the service-learning teaching in her classroom. Perhaps, Ms. Anna is fully aware that being a lifelong learner is crucial in her line of work. Ms. Anna’s optimistic view of lifelong learning aligns with the existing literature suggesting that professionals who excel and perform well are those involved in lifelong learning activities (e.g., Cirocki &

Farrell, 2019; Richardson et al., 2018, Zakaria, 2021). In this sense, teachers and educators could catch up with their ever-changing needs and cope with all kinds of challenging teaching in today's world.

This research indeed specifically focuses on the construction of pre-K teachers' identity construction. However, its findings could seemingly be interpreted as having contributed to the existing literature on other teacher education contexts, such as English language teacher education. It has provided additional insights that understanding teacher identity formation is paramount because it would allow us to understand teachers' learning and classroom performance (Li, 2020; Yazan, 2017).

## **6. Conclusion**

The data reveals the fluidity of teacher identity constructions. As grounded in the data, one can draw a conclusion that identity is not a stand-alone professional aspect because there are always things that mix up together, so the construction of identities is always complex. When studying teachers' identities, for example, discourse analysts should also pay attention to the spatial and temporal contexts so we can better understand how their identities shape their classroom practices. As in the case of Ms. Anna her teaching context has shaped how she constructed her teaching identity. For example, she positions herself as a teacher who is fond of multiculturalism. And this is related to the fact that her student population is quite diverse. The findings also showcase the importance of the contributions of the researchers, as interlocutors, in constructing participants' identity(ies) in this type of discourse analysis. In this sense, this study has also allowed me to practice recognizing my roles during the research process. Finally, the findings have also hinted at teacher identity's centrality in their learning and classroom practices. As suggested by Li (2020), paying attention to teacher identity construction is paramount because helping teachers become aware of their identity would eventually help them develop professionally.

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