

A Narrative Analysis on the Identifying of English Education Majors

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Abstract

Identifying is a dynamic process, involving inner factors such as feeling, cognition and outer factor like influences from others or outer pressure. Through reading 100 compositions from juniors majored in English education in Nanchang Normal College, I find out their identifying with the major varying in different degrees: self-conscious identifying, passive identifying, partial identifying and complete replacement. In addition, a further reading makes known the four factors: feeling, cognition, practice, and belief. All of them contribute to construct or deconstruct the identifying one way or another.

Key words: Narrative Analysis; Identifying; English Education Majors.

Narration is a kind of in-born performance or capability of human [1]. It lies not just in the fiction of literature. In everyday living, people have a strong inclination to tell the stories which happens to them. In the eyes of researchers, narration is a kind of process reorganizing experiences, reviewing the past and expecting the future. As a branch of qualitative research, four orientations are proposed: [2] inward, outward, backward, and forward. “Inward” means the tendency toward the inner conditions such as feelings, aesthetic responses and moral inclinations; “outward” refers to the outer conditions, i.e. context; “backward” and “forward” means the past, now and future in terms of temporality. The four orientations illuminate the narrative analysis on the identification of English education students. First, I design a natural interview context by assignment of composition titled “the career I pursue” to collect my material. Second, I closely read the compositions sent by 100 students to probe into their inner feelings and thinking about the identifying process from application-filling till future. From the first reading, I find out four different levels of identifying: self-conscious identifying, passive, or forced identifying, partial identifying and complete replacement to fulfill my trial coding (categorization). Second reading is to choose four typical cases and have a more detailed analysis. The finding or the second coding is four factors: feeling, cognition, practice, and belief. They all play a role in constructing or deconstructing in identifying with English education major. Following are the narrative analysis in detail.

(a) A Case of Self-Conscious Identifying

One girl student narrates in her composition:

“When I was filling the application form, my parents suggested that I apply for teachers’ college because it be better for a girl to serve a teacher. In fact, I like English from junior school till now. As a student in senior school, I was inclined to enter teachers college to be a teacher. Additionally, my grandpa, my uncle and my aunt are all teachers, which may influence me one way or another. Therefore, I choose English education as my major of Nanchang Normal College. I like this major very much...” While the student is narrating, she mixes her fondness for English with the knowledge about the major from her parents and relatives, which spur on her to choose the identity of students of English Education. When talking about how to fulfill such an identity, she continues to narrate. Usually, I prefer quiet place and like reading in my spare time. From the first college year, I have been to the library frequently, for I think, have much spare time, and I can go to the reading room for magazines as well as to the self-study room for study on my own.

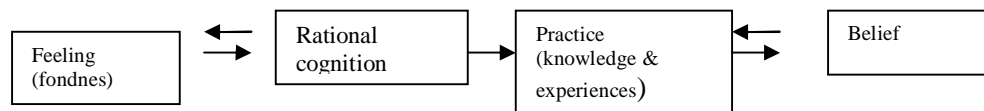
I prefer the learning atmosphere of the self-study room. In the dorm, I feel there are so many distractions that I can't concentrate on reading sometimes and play with mobile phone. Even as a fresher, I wanted to enhance my Degree, so I signed up for self-taught exam, having classes every weekend. Though I feel tired sometimes, I feel accomplished and fulfilled". Through finding learning space and opportunities, she manages to accumulate her knowledge and enhance her Degree. It shows her endeavors toward the identity stipulated by the teachers college. In turn, such a practicing identity pushes the student making preparations for the identity of state-stipulated teacher.

"I learnt from the teacher about the access exam for teachers' positions set by the state. I am going to buy some books on it for earlier preparations."

This belief leads the student to practice actions, interacting with practice identity. In addition, such a highly conscious identification is gradually realized in the process of narrating: from personal fondness for English to understanding about the teachers' profession, to the real practicing and belief in future career of teaching. In the end, she also expects to experience her social identity in reality.

"On summer vacations, I also go for part time jobs to contact with outside world and learn how to get along with other better..."

Till now, we can use a drawing to describe the four factors in the identifying process during the student's narrating:



Feeling and cognition play a lasting role in constructing the identity as a future teacher because they are always there to guide the student toward the realizing the identity as a teacher and they can become the belief in fulfilling the identity.

(b) A Case of Passive Identifying

"When filling in the application form, neither my parents nor I know anything about the specialty. However, I was inclined to be a doctor from the beginning. So I turned to my head teacher for some advices. My first choice is a medical college and second is Shangrao Teachers' College. I had never thought about this school. When I would have submitted my applications, my head teacher asked me to fill the advanced enrollment I had the slightest idea of. To be worse, he didn't even remind me that if I filled in it, I would be enrolled in advance. In fact, I had never planned to read in a teachers college, let alone our school" At first, this student doesn't identify herself with the teaching profession. However, after struggling in her mind, she recovers her rational cognition:

"No matter how much injustice there is in my fate, after all, I have been studying for so many years and it is not easy for me as well as for my parents. Against my will, I went to my school. As first, everything looks bad for me and goes against whatever I do. But with time passing by, I gradually get used to the school living. Every day, together with my classmates, I have fun and have classes. Everything looks up. What's more, I come to realize that teaching is not so bad a profession. So slowly, I begin to accept everything, even become satisfied with this major."

Rational cognition makes her accept her identity, and she begins her identity practice: "Now I seize well every chance in school to learn. Firstly, I try to lay a solid foundation of knowledge. However, the foremost is to pass the exams of undergraduate courses, and then I can do the things that follow. I believe that everything will get better, for I will continuously improve myself"

She also has her belief in her future professional identity: "First, obtain the undergraduate, and then pass the exam for enrolling teachers. With a steady job in hand, think how to climb up the career ladder..., besides being a teacher, I also want to enter my names into the exam for village magistrates in my hometown." All her narratives show that passive identification is a kind of rational cognition rather than feeling identification.

(c) A Case of Partial Identifying

"As early as graduation from junior school, I applied for the teaching major. And I passed the access exam for major in children teaching at that time.

I like this major very much mainly out of the fondness for singing, drawing, handicraft, and children. “This student originally has a liking for the major in children teaching. So she didn’t identify with English education as her major. But her rational cognition sways her from her original choice: “When filling the applications, I chose English education as my first priority and children teaching as my second alternative, thinking that it would be back to the original point after a round of 3 years studying in senior school if I applied for children teaching. Afterward, I regretted my first choice rather children teaching.”

But the “reasonable cognition” doesn’t bring any real identification change because of her different interest. “Nonetheless, after going to college, I gradually came to realize that I had lost a lot interest in English. Every day, I felt restless and fidgety in English classes, feeling that only in teaching method course can I learn teaching ability that can be used in work because of hand-in-hand teaching practices” But the “reasonable cognition” doesn’t bring any real identification change because of her different interest. “Nonetheless, after going to college, I gradually came to realize that I had lost a lot interest in English. Every day, I felt restless and fidgety in English classes, feeling that only in teaching method course can I learn teaching ability that can be used in work because of hand-in-hand teaching practices”

She has the idea of changing practicing identity as an English education student, for she only identifies with teaching instead of English teaching: “Later, when I studied English education, I really regretted that I hadn’t applied for children teaching, feeling that children teaching is a major equipped with more knowledge and gets more popular and welcome in future jobs while English majors are too many to be competitive. Now, I have an opportunity to teach in a kindergarten.” This case fully reveals that what really matters in partial identification is personal feelings or interests to be specific.

(d) A Case of Complete Replacement

“My dream is to be a traveler, listening to different stories, experiencing different livings. Though it cannot be a profession, it is really, what I am always pursuing. To realize this dream, I will study hard. I intend to travel supported by my working along the way. Though I can’t go far this way, I can better appreciate the charm of each place I travel. Why do I harbor such a dream? A restless heart makes me go seeing this world. I was born in south, so I will go northward, till I arrive in Tibet where I find great interest in Buddhism.” This student has never thought about being a teaching of English from the start. Through chatting with her by QQ, I learn that she only wants to learn some foreign culture through English.

Therefore, what she thinks and practices has nothing to do with the identity as English teaching major from the perspectives of feelings, cognition, practice, and belief. Instead, she replaces the identity with a prospective free traveler. Among all the surveyed students, such cases like this are far and few between. Usually, the students have their own future plan in a specific way. In conclusion, all the four cases show that the identifying with English education major manifests itself in a hierarchical way, ranging from fully self-conscious identification to complete replacement, varying in different degrees of identifying intensity. What’s more, feelings, cognitions, practices and beliefs all interact with each other in constructing or deconstructing the identity of English teaching major in different phases of identification (choose majors, practice majors, expect future professions)

References

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