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ORIGINAL PAPER

# "The fish becomes aware of the water in which it swims": revealing the power of culture in shaping teaching identity

Yuli Rahmawati[1] · Peter Charles Taylor[2]

**Abstract** "The fish becomes aware of the water in which it swims" is a metaphor that represents Yuli's revelatory journey about the hidden power of culture in her personal identity and professional teaching practice. While engaging in a critical auto/ethnographic inquiry into her lived experience as a science teacher in Indonesian and Australian schools, she came to understand the powerful role of culture in shaping her teaching identity. Yuli realised that she is a product of cultural hybridity resulting from interactions of very different cultures—Javanese, Bimanese, Indonesian and Australian. Traditionally, Javanese and Indonesian cultures do not permit direct criticism of others. This influenced strongly the way she had learned to interact with students and caused her to be very sensitive to others. During this inquiry she learned the value of engaging students in open discourse and overt caring, and came to realise that teachers bringing their own cultures to the classroom can be both a source of power and a problem. In this journey, Yuli came to understand the hegemonic power of culture in her teaching identity, and envisioned how to empower herself as a good teacher educator of pre-service science teachers.

**Keywords** Teaching identity · Cultural identity · Religion · Auto/ethnography · Transformative research

**Abstrak** "Ketika ikan tidak menyadari air sebagai tempat ia berenang" adalah metafora yang mewakili peranan identitas budaya sebagai kekuatan yang tersembunyi dalam

✉ Yuli Rahmawati
  yrahmawati@unj.ac.id

  Peter Charles Taylor
  p.taylor@murdoch.edu.au

[1] Department of Chemistry Education, Universitas Negeri Jakarta, Jl. Rawamangun Muka, Jakarta 13220, Indonesia

[2] School of Education, Murdoch University, 90 South St, Murdoch, WA 6150, Australia

⌂ Springer

identitas personal dan professional saya sebagai seorang pendidik. Arts-based critical auto/ethnographic inquiry membantu saya dalam memahami pengalaman saya di sekolah-sekolah di Indonesia dan Australia. Saya menyadari kekuatan peranan budaya dalam identitas saya sebagai pendidik. Saya juga menyadari bahwa saya merupakan identitas hibrid dari berbagai budaya berbeda - Jawa, Bima, Indonesia dan Australia. Dalam sudut pandang tradisional Jawa dan Indonesia, saya tidak dapat mengkritik langsung orang lain. Hal ini sangat mempengaruhi cara saya berinteraksi dengan murid-murid dan menyebabkan saya menjadi sangat sensitif terhadap orang lain. Ketika berinteraksi dengan budaya Australia, saya belajar nilai dari siswa dalam hal keterbukaan. Saya juga menyadari bahwa guru memiliki budaya sendiri yang dapat menjadi potensi sumber kekuatan sekaligus sumber masalah. Saya semakin memahami kekuatan budaya dalam identitas saya sebagai seorang pendidik yang mendorong saya untuk menjadi pendidik calon guru sains yang baik.

**Kata kunci** Identitas pendidik · Identitas budaya · Agama · Auto/ etnografi · Penelitian transformatif

Yuli Rahmawati is a chemistry teacher educator in an Indonesian university, and in recent years completed graduate degrees in Australia. She started the journey of becoming a chemistry teacher in a vocational school before she accepted a position of teacher educator in the chemistry department in a pedagogical university in Jakarta. During doctoral research she co-taught with several science teachers in Australian secondary schools with the aim of investigating how students can engage in meaningful learning via co-generative dialogue (Rahmawati, Koul and Fisher 2015). With her mentor, Peter Taylor, she conducted a critical auto/ethnographic inquiry to identify the hidden power of culture shaping her identity as a person and teacher.

In a recent article in *Reflective Practice*, we explained how adopting the role of researcher as transformative learner enabled Yuli to develop a powerful transformative philosophy of science teacher education which now shapes her professional practice as a teacher educator, researcher and community leader (Rahmawati and Taylor 2015). Here, we illustrate Yuli's engagement as a researcher with transformative ways of knowing, in particular cultural self knowing, relational knowing and critical knowing (Taylor, Nhalevilo and Rahmawati 2015), that enabled her to identify key moments of her lived experience as she crossed cultural borders from her local community in Indonesia to postgraduate study in Australia and back again to her role as a teacher educator in an Indonesia university. The narrative vignettes that illustrate these key moments were subjected to scholarly critical reflection (Brookfield 2000), leading to reconceptualisation of her teaching identity. This inquiry contributes to the growing body of research on teaching identity (Olsen 2008; Rodgers and Scott 2008) and research as transformative learning (Taylor, Taylor and Luitel 2012). In accordance with a critical-interpretivist epistemology, the credibility of this inquiry is evidenced by the researcher's ongoing critical subjectivity. Other researchers wishing to learn from this inquiry and/or engage in similar inquiries into their own experience of culture shock will be helped by the thick descriptions and critical scholarly reflections of Yuli's inquiry (Guba and Lincoln 1994; Lui 2013).

Critical auto/ethnographic inquiries employing transformative learning methods of critical reflexivity (e.g., Huang 2015) and phenomenological reflection (e.g., Bradshaw 1998) are exploring and seeking to resolve conflicts and contradictions in researchers' cultural identities. This is becoming an increasingly important issue in an era of

globalisation as young researchers no longer suppress but, instead, give serious scholarly contemplation to the disorienting dilemmas they experience as they cross cultural borders, especially when travelling from East to West. Studies such as these hold the potential to help resist the Academy's traditional practice of colonising young academics from non-Western cultures who are likely to become future intellectual leaders of their nations and, instead, contribute to the Council of Europe's (2016) call for intercultural dialogue that fosters culturally diverse democratic societies.

## I am Javanese and Bimanese and …?

I was born in Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia, a nation with over 700 living languages. My mother and father have very different cultural backgrounds. My father grew up in Central Java while my mother is from Bima (near Lombok). Currently they are living in Jakarta where I was born and raised (Fig. 1). When I was a child, I never thought it was a big issue that I didn't understand my parents' natal language and culture. I felt that it was simply because we were from different generations. But when I learnt the value of culture during my doctoral research (Rahmawati 2013), I came to realise how valuable my culture and language really are, especially when I found that various cultures within Indonesia are becoming extinct, and that only a small number of the younger generation understand their family culture. I discovered that many can't speak their mothers' languages, can't perform traditional dances, and don't know their traditional musical instruments.

While conducting my research I came to understand the influence of two different cultures on my own cultural identity. My father is Javanese and, according to Totok Sartiso (2006, p. 448), "Javanese culture here is a complex of ideas, values, norms, regulations, and others; or a complex of patterned behaviour activity of people in a society". I
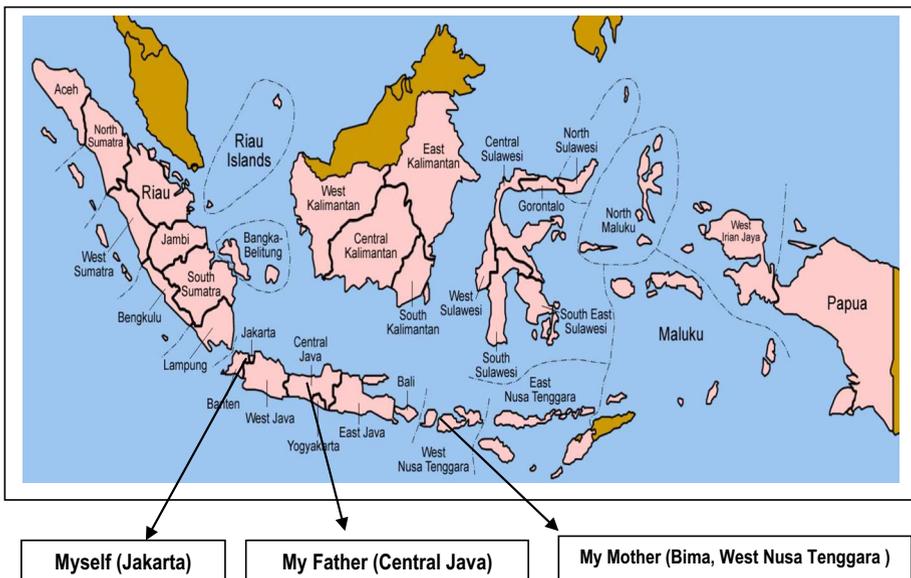


**Fig. 1** Places of birth of Yuli and her parents in Indonesia

experienced these complex norms that shaped my cultural identity. For example, traditionally Javanese women are followers of men, so women are expected to obey what men say, especially in marriage. And it is not regarded as socially acceptable for Javanese women to be married at an older age (i.e., more than 25 years old). These two values influenced my thinking and acting as an adult woman. However, due to my advanced education and family support I was able to avoid what Katelin Corbett (2015) describes as a 'conflict of belonging' by negotiating my group identity as a Javanese woman.

Totok Sarsito (2006) also pointed out that most of the traditional societal teachings consist of philosophical values giving a moral basis for Javanese people's lives, particularly in responding to phenomena such as: how to position themselves in relating and communicating with God as the Creator; with other people; with other different creatures; as well as with their environment. The value of the family is the centre of life for Javanese (Subandi 2011). So, even though family members may live separately they tend to maintain close emotional ties with their family, thereby ensuring regular contact and visits.

Although I have explored these two different cultures, I remain confused about how, from a cultural perspective, I should answer questions about who I am. According to Esther Usborne and Donald Taylor (2010), *bicultural* individuals can experience distress when challenged to integrate different cultural identities, although clarifying their identity might help them to better understand themselves and establish their self-esteem or psychological wellbeing. According to LaToya Strong (2015), individuals can have more than one identity, because they have more than one social circle. Nann Sussman (2000) points out that "culture might be part of the self, but cultural identity is not explicitly recognised. Like a fish in water, culture surrounds an individual, albeit its impact is seldom a salient feature of an individual's self-concept; individuals rarely recognise the imprint of their own culture and its ubiquitous nature" (p. 362).

During this study, I came to understand the influence of my parents' differing cultures on my cultural identity. I realised that clarifying one's cultural identity is a subjective and individual experience (Usborne and Taylor 2010). It is difficult for me to say that I am Bimanese because I don't have a good understanding of this culture, especially because I can't speak the language. But, also I can't say that I am Javanese. Although I have a greater understanding of that language, I don't have a deep understanding of the culture. I also can't say that I am Betawi. Although I was born in Jakarta, I don't interact much with local Betawi culture, which is almost extinct. So, I ask myself—who am I?

## I am in the space of Australia

Understanding Others, Understanding Myself

It is 2012 and I am a doctoral student in an Australian university. Today will be my last day celebrating 'Harmony Day' in Australia. After 5 years living in a differently coloured culture I have learnt different ways of life. This morning my husband, my daughter, and I are celebrating Harmony Day, a really busy day. Since yesterday I have been thinking about the clothes that my daughter can wear and the food that represents our culture.

In Australia with a multicultural life I enjoy the differences. I have learned to understand different values, beliefs and practices. I remember that the first time I ate Biriyani rice I felt strange. How can the rice be cooked in yoghurt or milk with different spices, because I only know fried rice. When I ate fish and chips I felt strange

because we used to cook fish with so many ingredients, not only salt and pepper. Now Biriyani rice and fish and chips are my favourite foods which I will miss when I return to my home country. Not only the food, I have also learned different practices of other cultures. I felt it to be impolite to address our teachers without using "Sir" or "Mam", saying instead Peter, Rekha, Bill or David, only using their first names. In embracing difference, I have learned to adjust, to understand, and to appreciate others, and I really enjoy it, something I had never realised before I came to Australia.

I also have come to realise that a multicultural life stimulates me to think about my culture. What are the values, beliefs and traditional practices that represent my culture? I have become more aware that I don't have a deep understanding of my culture. Both of my parents come from different ethnic backgrounds, so I am confused about representing my own culture. I can't speak my mother's and father's languages, I can't perform traditional dances, or remember most the traditional practices of my parents. I can only speak Bahasa, our national language, that's all. In my way of thinking about multiculturalism, I realise that it is not simply about understanding others and the ways they are, it is also about understanding my own culture which I realise I have started to lose. (Rahmawati 2013, p. 170)

People can have both negative and positive experiences when they interact with other cultures that have distinctly different values, beliefs and practices. One of the negative experiences is called 'culture shock'. I experienced culture shock when I arrived in Australia, even though the Australian Government Program that provided the scholarship for my studies conducted a cultural preparation for living in Australia. According to Theo Van Leeuwen (2008), "the term 'culture shock' was coined in 1960 by the cultural anthropologist Kalervo Oberg to describe a totality of symptoms that *may* result from exposure to another culture …[and] the core features of culture shock are confusion, uncertainty, depression, anguish and interpersonal discomfort" (p. 153). Jennifer Noesjirwan and Colin Freestone (1979) pointed out similar characteristic feelings of confusion, alienation, hostility and anxiety. Nan Sussman (2000) explained that "culture shock is an intense, negative affective response, both psychological and physiological, experienced by new expatriates when faced with unfamiliar symbols, roles, relationships, social cognitions, and behavior" (p. 355). Culture shock played out in my experience of crossing cultural borders in Australia.

According to Sussman (2000), "cultural adaptation refers to the outcome in which individuals modify their cognitions, behaviours, and interpretations of behaviours to match the new cultural environment better" (p. 360). Sussman described the situation of self-construal, emotion and motivation in individuals, and argued that it might be that cultural identity emerges during cultural transition, which is labelled as subtractive, additive, affirmative or intercultural. I experienced these processes within my own cultural transition. The process of cultural transition is ongoing. Even though I had been living in Australia for almost six years I continued to experience culture shock. In writing the above story, which illustrates a cross-cultural experience during my doctoral research, I was stimulated to reflect critically and to explore the issue of cultural difference.

## Am I a hybrid?

After my critical reflections on the influence of different cultures on my identity, I am thinking now of my hybridity; can I say that I am a product of cultural hybridity or is it just a normal process of cross-cultural mixing? According to Andreas Ackermann (2012), "the

word 'hybrid' was developed from biological and botanical origins: in Latin it meant the offspring of a tame sow and a wild boar, and hence, as the Oxford English Dictionary puts it, 'of human parents of different races, half-breed'" (p. 6). Ian Clothier (2005) pointed out several important aspects of hybridity: heterogeneity (diversity in constitution), multiplicity (mixtures of elements) and unique authenticity. From this perspective, I could say that I am the product of a mixture of cultures. According to Mehmet Aydeniz and Lynn Hodge (2011), connecting different pieces can help someone to develop a cohesive picture of one's identity. Thus I reflected on my hybridity as a process of exploring the pieces of my cultural identity.

However, Ackermann (2012) argued that the concept was renewed during the 1980 s in the era of post-colonial studies, under the scholarship of Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha. These prominent scholars were concerned with cultural hybridity in the sense that there is no culture that has been left untouched by the global circulation of people, artefacts, signs and information. Teresa Davis (2010) argued that these post-colonial scholars conceived of cultural hybridity not simply as a matter of multiple cultural origins, but as cultural newness comprising new meanings and new identities. For Ackermann (2012), post-colonial theory relies heavily on the ideas of the Russian linguist and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, who distinguished between intentional and organic hybridity. Intentional hybridity describes two points of view that are not mixed, but set against each other dialectically, whereas in organic hybridity the mixture merges and is fused into a new language, worldview or object. In the 20th Century the concept of cultural hybridity moved into various disciplines, particularly sociology, anthropology and history. Homi K. Bhabha's (1983) work on cultural hybridity views hybrid identities as challenging essentialist assumptions in a discourse of difference. Ackermann (2012) pointed out that Homi K. Bhabha took up Bakhtin's concept of intentional hybridity, shifting it as a means of subverting the colonial situation. In this vein, Mahalingam and Leu (2005) argued that, "hybridity has been proposed to negate dominant, unitary modes of thinking about social differences" (p. 841). "Homi K. Bhabha states explicitly that hybridity 'is not a third term that resolves the tension between two cultures but rather is one that holds the tension of the opposition and explores the spaces in-between fixed identities through their continuous reiterations" (Simone 2008, p. 605).

From this perspective, I have come to realise that I inhabit a third space that results from tensions between the different cultures influencing my sense of cultural identity. When I consider the different cultures within myself, I experience a dialectical tension amongst them. The values, beliefs and practices of these differing cultures can be both empowering and disempowering. However, as Islam is the main guideline of my life I choose not to 'merge' cultures that are disallowed by Islamic values, beliefs and practices. Islam is not only a religion; Islam is a way of life which shapes my lifeworld practices. Islamic teaching says that Islam should be integrated into all aspects of my life, including economic, social, and political aspects, not only by observing the rituals of "affirming the unity of God and Muhammad's prophecy, congregational prayer, fasting during the month of Ramadan, pilgrimage to Mecca, and paying poor dues" (Rahmawati 2013, p. 190). Thus any cultural practices that recognise more than one God will be not accepted for integration into the lifeworld of a devout moslem.

## Cultural identity in my teaching identity

Can We Drink It?

It is May 2010 and I am involved in co-teaching in an Australian secondary school. I sit in the back of the Year 10 classroom. Since the very first time I came to this class I always learn something new. I realise that this academic extension class presents an outstanding picture of a science classroom with such an enthusiastic teacher and highly motivated students. The teacher, Tony, is really well organised and always tries to find different ways to engage his students. Today, he is explaining acids and bases. He starts by exploring students' understanding and experiences of the topic. Then he gives explanations to clarify his students' understanding as the nature of the concepts change. He provides examples of acids and bases in everyday life. Then he distributes worksheets to help students' understanding of the concepts of acids and bases. The students work on the sheet for 10 minutes. Tony is good at managing time; he is very punctual and there is no wasting time during his teaching. After ten minutes he begins exploring students' ideas about the worksheet and he gives opportunities for students to explore their ideas. I am really surprised because almost all students put their hands up to explain their ideas. The class is noisy, not because of their behaviour but because of their curiosity to learn. The students continue to put their hands up after the teacher chooses one of them to explain his ideas. The discussion runs really well; there is no room for students not to pay attention. Students become more interested when Tony demonstrates acid and base characteristics. He doesn't start by giving the chemical formula as I and most other chemistry teachers in my country do. He shows them the chemical reaction between magnesium and hydrochloric acid that produces the products of magnesium chloride and hydrogen gas. He puts the petri dish on the overhead projector to help the students who sit at the back to see the chemical changes because it is quite a large class – about 32 students. The students look interested and pay attention. He starts to explain acid-base reactions and gives a simple example:

$$NaOH + HCl \rightarrow NaCl + H_2O$$

$$Base + acid \rightarrow salt + water$$
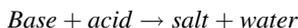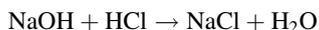
After he writes the formula on the whiteboard, just as he is poised to explain one of the students has already put his hand up.

Mark: If the product is water, can we drink it?

Tony: That's a good question Mark. It is correct that $H_2O$ (water) is the product of this reaction, which is the same formula as the water that we drink. However, in this chemical reaction we can't ensure that the product of this reaction is only salt and water without any excess of HCl or NaOH, which is dangerous for our health. What do you think?

Mark: Yes, that makes sense

I am quite surprised at Mark's question but I reason that it must be common in Australian schools for students to keep asking questions. As a chemistry teacher I always waited for my students to ask this very question every time I taught acid-base reactions. But it never happened during my teaching experience or when observing

other classrooms in my country. Most of the students in Indonesia are silent while the teacher explains and they stay silent during the lessons until the teacher asks a question. I am still sitting in the back of the classroom continuing to write my notes while my thinking is floating and wondering (Rahmawati 2013, pp. 176–177)

This vignette portrays a science teacher in an Australia school, Tony, a young teacher with a passion for providing the best learning experiences for his students. I observed him as being being very energetic in front of his students with a passion for engaging them in learning, further evidenced by his statement during an interview:

I aim to do the best I can with them and give them the opportunity to benefit from activities I provide. Ideally being able to think critically and abstractly, as well as respecting others in group situations is a priority. I believe the students should always do their best and never give up, or if they feel they don't understand something – they are empowered to find out. (Rahmawati 2013, p. 177)

Kate Fitzpatrick (2012) argued that it is important to be thoughtful about how our [teachers'] own backgrounds might affect our expectations of students and our interactions with them. Teachers bring their culture, which is shaped by their history and personal experiences, to the classroom. Each teacher has their own history and personal experiences; therefore, each teacher has their own cultural identity which influences their teaching identity.

In the Australian government secondary schools in which I conducted my research teachers gave more opportunities for students to express their ideas, compared to Indonesian science teachers, and created meaningful learning experiences by enabling students to explore scientific issues in their local communities. They also appeared to be more friendly in their relationships with students.

Almost 30 years ago, a study by Indonesian educators revealed strong similarities between US and Australian schools: student-centred teaching approaches, well-organised schools, well-trained teachers, well-equipped facilities, more freedom for schools and teachers to implement curricula, and more freedom for students to express their opinions (Eulie 1987). The author explained that Indonesian teachers are traditionally 'highly respected' in society in accordance with the cultural proverb: 'Guru harus digugu dan ditiru' ['The teacher must be obeyed and imitated in all aspects of life']. Indonesian classrooms of today are becoming less strict in terms of teachers' expectations of student obedience, but there remains a legacy of traditional cultural expectations.

I do not intend to dichotomise the cultures of Indonesia and Australia because I realise that there are many elements that shape teaching identities, including autobiographical backgrounds and teaching experience. However, in my study I also co-taught with two science teachers of Asian background and, although they taught in Australian schools within a similar education system to Tony's school, I observed marked differences between these teachers and Tony. Even though there are many factors that cannot be isolated, every time I co-taught with these teachers I felt that I was back home teaching in Indonesia because we were more focussed on asking students to finish their homework and prepare for the standardised tests. I could see my own Indonesian teaching identity reflected in these two teachers whose classroom practices focused mostly on content knowledge and students' achievement.

When I was in their classrooms I realised that I manifested similar cultural values, beliefs and practices, especially a major focus on students' achievement and behaviour. It is educationally sound to consider these two aspects, but when teachers focus only on them

and ignore students' engagement and empowerment that is very restrictive. As a chemistry teacher in Indonesian schools I recall spending almost the entire class being angry because of students' misbehaviour. Every time my students misbehaved, spontaneously I would think to myself that they should respect me as their teacher. It is a common belief in Indonesia that teachers play the role of parents in school. Historically we believe that students should obey teachers although, as I stated before, the value of respect for teachers is currently decreasing. We believe also that teaching is a profession that educates people about how to be good citizens. Therefore, if teachers do bad things there will be great public concern since we expect teachers only to do good things. In some ways, it is good that teachers are so highly regarded, but if their sense of authority becomes overly exaggerated this can lead to student disengagement and disrespect.

Both of my parents are teachers. My mother and my father have different cultural backgrounds. As a Javanese my father placed more value on the relationship with his students compared with my mother's approach. As a Bimanese my mother placed more value on her role in transferring knowledge. If my father discovered his students were doing something negative he would try to develop a relationship with them, whereas my mother would directly tell the students to behave properly. In Bimanese culture it is common that if you don't like something you should say it directly to the person. However, in Javanese culture it is not polite to reprimand people directly. If a Javanese person feels the need to do so they are expected to use polite and indirect language. According to Walter Williams (1991), most Indonesians, particularly Javanese, will rarely communicate negative judgements or evaluations openly or candidly. They make such judgments but will not express them, as many Westerners are used to doing. As the biggest ethnic group in my country Javanese strongly influence Indonesian culture. Other historic factors influencing contemporary Indonesian cultural practices are Dutch colonialism and our ancient kingdoms, where it was not permitted for people to disobey the rules or to speak with their own voice.

In understanding the influence of my parents' cultures and my co-teachers' cultures, I have come to realise the power of cultural identity in shaping my own teaching identity. In Indonesia I was a teacher who found it difficult to say something directly to my students if they misbehaved; instead, I would find a way to tell them politely. I also have come to realise that sometimes I think so much about what my students or my colleagues might think about my actions that I keep silent. These two examples exemplify the influence of Javanese and Indonesian cultural practices.

## My current teaching identity

For me now, teaching is holistic; it involves not only technical and cognitive aspects, but also personal, social, cultural and emotional factors. In exploring my teaching identity in this research, I came to understand how these aspects co-exist in myself as a teacher. This has empowered me in my current role as a university teacher to engage my student teachers in reflective thinking about their own lived experiences, both as students and as developing teachers, so that they come to a better understanding of their own nascent teaching identities. I am supported in my approach by Brad Olsen (2008, p. 5) who has written that the construct of teacher identity is an important pedagogical focus:

> Teacher identity is a useful research frame because it treats teachers as whole persons
> in and across social contexts who continually reconstruct their views of themselves

in relation to others, workplace characteristics, professional purposes, and cultures of teaching. It is also a pedagogical tool that can be used by teacher educators and professional development specialists to make visible various holistic, situated framings of teacher development in practice

Contemporary research on teaching identity has become an important focus for revealing diverse teachers' beliefs, attitudes, life histories and personal narratives, all of which share similar basic assumptions about identity: (1) identity is influenced by context; (2) identity is formed through relationships; (3) identity is changing; and (4) identity involves meaning making (Rodgers and Scott, cited in Hamman et al. 2010). Thus, teaching identity is important to an understanding of essential aspects of teachers' professional lives, including their career decisions, motivation, job satisfaction, emotions and commitment.

Good teachers share the trait of a strong sense of personal identity that infuses their work (Palmer 2007) which, in turn, is shaped by their experiences in the classroom (Shapiro 2010). It is important to understand that one's teaching identity is not fixed; it can be revised and transformed through ongoing experiences and historical circumstances (Erickson 1986). In reflecting critically on my own journey, from a beginning teacher to a teacher educator, I have realised how my teaching identity has changed over time, and I now appreciate that my current teaching identity is likely to continue to change into the future in response to my maturing cultural values, some of which have remained stable throughout my life.

During my initial teacher education, I already had an idea of what a teacher should look like but when I had to deal with real classroom practices I was shocked. As a beginning teacher I had the experience of floating expectations between my ideal theoretical teaching practice and the reality of the school context. My cultural values, beliefs and practices helped me to deal with those unexpected and conflicting realities. For example, when I faced the reality of misbehaving students, the value of the teacher as a role model in my culture encouraged me to stay motivated and strive to engage my students and shape them as holistic individuals, lifelong learners, and good citizens.

One's teaching identity is far from being a private cultural matter; it influences personal and collective values and, in turn, is influenced by professional practices and politics, as explained by Peter Hoffman-Kipp (2008 p. 135):

> I define teacher identity as the intersection of personal, pedagogical, and political participation and reflection within a larger socio-political context. I see teacher identity as a mix of values, beliefs, attitudes, approaches to interaction, and language that has been developed in personal realms (life history, family, community of origin) combined with understandings, pedagogical commitments and approaches, and routines of professional practice developed in teacher education programs and on the job.

In this regard, I have come to realise how the power of my cultural values and beliefs shapes not only my personal identity but also my teaching identity. Equally, I have come to realise how professional requirements and political aspects also shape my teaching identity. Although I place great value on teaching for student empowerment, when I have to deal with conflicting national and school politics I recognise the need to renegotiate this treasured value that lies at the heart of my teaching identity. In this situation, dialectical thinking becomes a powerful means for me to reconcile divergent and competing views within my professional practice (Basseches 2005). For example, ongoing dialectical

tension between the metaphors of objectivism and constructivism in science teaching, as described by John Willison and Peter C. Taylor (2006), encourages me to think about how this tension influences my pedagogical practice.

## Closing note

The research journey of working together with teachers from different cultural backgrounds and experiences was insightful and empowering. In reflecting critically on these experiences I have realised that I am unique and that I have my own cultural identity. This helps me realise the educational value of giving more opportunities to my student teachers to express their voice in the classroom. Although teaching identity is not the only powerful factor that shapes teachers' professional practices, it has engaged me in the journey of opening my eyes and looking at my heart in understanding the power of cultural identity in my teaching practice. Previously the power of culture was unspoken and unseen in my teaching practice. But now, like the fish becoming aware of the water in which it swims, I know that my cultural identity is not fixed, and neither is my teaching identity.

Engaging in a critical auto/ethnographic research study has been evocative for me in terms of revealing and transforming my own identity, at both personal and social levels. I have come to realise that I can't separate myself into these two perspectives, especially in the context of my various roles. I am still on a learning journey of reconstructing my cultural identity, and the concept of cultural hybridity has helped me to understand this ongoing process. At this stage, I think that cultural hybridity is a natural process of human interaction amongst multicultural lives thrown together in an era of rapid globalisation. Importantly, I have realised also that as a beginning journey to understanding myself, especially the role of my cultural identity in constituting my teaching identity, the journey will not end; instead, it will be a continuous process of a life-long journey. I expect that continuing to explore my cultural identity will help me to continuously transform my teaching identity throughout my life's journey. As a teacher educator I now feel much more capable of preparing new teachers with the skills to prepare the next generation of future citizens for a rapidly changing world where cultural border crossers need to construct complex multi-cultural identities.

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**Yuli Rahmawati** is a chemistry teacher educator at Universitas Negeri Jakarta, Indonesia. As a University educator, she engages in transformative learning and research practices. Her interests are teaching and cultural identity, environmental education, green chemistry, transformative education, social emotional learning, and STEAM education. Her passion is engaging her student-teachers in transformative research approaches in different research areas. She has written chemistry textbooks for high schools, journal publications and conducted several research projects in chemistry education. Reflecting on her pedagogical experiences, she has a passion for developing transformative science education in Indonesia.

**Peter Charles Taylor** is the director of the Transformative Education Research Group (TERG) and Professor of STEAM Education at Murdoch University, Perth, Australia. As a university teacher he strives to engage professional educators in transformative learning. To this end he has designed an integral model of postgraduate research that enables students to draw research epistemologies and methods from multiple paradigms, especially interpretivism, criticalism, and postmodernism. Armed with these powerful tools, postgraduate researchers explore their cultural histories and identities, excavate deep-seated cultural values and beliefs, engage in utopic thinking to reconceptualize the role of education in a globalizing world