

Beyond Fiction: Using Character Profiling in Screenwriting as a Tool to Explore Higher Education Teachers' Identity

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ABSTRACT

The character profile is the first document that one prepares when one wants to write a screenplay for a film. This is based on the principle that it is characters that drive the story and not vice versa. A strongly developed character can shape an impactful story. In teaching, this parallels a teacher in his or her teaching environment. It is the teacher (and the teacher's identity) that drives the way in which students learn and how they are supported in their learning. The teacher's identity governs the way the teacher thinks, behaves in the teaching and learning environment and how the teacher perceives / treats the students. This paper describes how teachers can explore and reflect on their identity, using the character profiling tool. It reports on a small group of HE teachers' attempt to reflect on themselves and write their own character profiles during a two-day professional development programme. The perceived value of the character profile in relation to understanding teacher identity and the challenges they faced in adopting the character profile as a reflective tool will also be discussed.

Keywords: continuous professional development, higher education, teacher identity, reflective teaching

INTRODUCTION

Screenwriting is the discipline of writing screenplays, that is, film scripts. Screenplays contain not just dialogues, but also the time, location and description of a scene, characters and their age, as well as action descriptions. They become the blueprint for the film director, actors and the whole production team on how the film should be executed. In essence, and most importantly, the screenplay delivers story, that is, the narrative of the film. Before a screenplay can be written, the writer needs to firstly create and develop its characters, especially the protagonist. A writer might have an idea for a story, but he cannot chart the storyline if his characters are not well-developed. This is done through a document called the *character profile*. Although only a small component in the whole writing process, it is, nevertheless, a very important document. This is because in a mainstream story, it is characters that drive the plot, not vice versa (Thomson-Jones, 2008).

Character Profile in Screenwriting

Screenwriting scholars agree that there are many different approaches to writing a character profile (Mehring, 1990). A character profile is drawn from answering all the questions that help describe a character from infancy to the first pages of a screenplay (Mehring, 1990). In relation to that, Parker (1999, p. 89) explains that the character profile is used as means to come to terms with who the character is and what makes them who they are; they are created by answering the questions based on their outer and inner presence, and context. Field (2005), who calls it as "character biography", summarises character profiling as an exercise that reveals the interior life of the character, the emotional forces working on them since birth. Regardless of the slightly differing definitions and approaches to character profiling, the role of the character profile is the same: to provide an adequate description of the characters so that they will become believable on screen, in the make-believe world of cinema. In addition, the aim is always to create an exciting, multifaceted and three-dimensional character, rather than a flat, boring and a single-dimensional one.

Evidence on the Screen

In film, a well-crafted character profile will result in a strongly developed character. A strong character is recognised, most importantly, from having a clear goal on what he wants in the story. A strong character will also move heaven and earth to achieve his goal, despite all the overwhelming obstacles that come his way. This is noticeable, for instance, in the character of John Keating (Robbin Williams) in the film *Dead Poets Society* (Haft, Witt & Thomas, 1989), which won the Best Original Screenplay at the 62nd Academy Awards.

Keating wants to inspire his students at the elite all-boys preparatory school, Welton Academy. He wants them to be extraordinary and seek for what they truly believe in and achieve it - to seize the day or *carpe diem*. That

becomes his goal. Why he wants it is because he believes that every person has the potential of realising their dreams and that they should make their lives meaningful. Why he is pursuing this goal now (in the film) is because he has just been transferred to that school as their new English teacher. His unorthodox ways of teaching poetry cause a conflict with the institution which has its own conservative and tradition-based high standards. It is Keating's relentless pursuit of his goal, despite oppositions from some teachers and students, which creates the essence of drama in that story – the conflict between the character's goal and his stakes. Keating exemplifies a strongly developed character, from a well-crafted profile, who remains consistent in his pursuit from the beginning until the end of the story.

In another box-office hit and critically acclaimed film series, the same pattern of character development is apparent. The character Frodo Baggins (Elijah Wood) in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (Jackson et. al, 2003, 2002, 2001), which won the Best Adapted Screenplay in the 76th Academy Awards with its third and final instalment *The Return of the King* (Jackson, Osborne & Walsh, 2003), also had a strong protagonist with a clear goal. All that Baggins wants is for the one ring to be destroyed so that his beloved village The Shire will be safe from all evil and tyranny. That becomes his goal. He wants it now (in the film) because he has been made the official ring bearer by the wizard Gandalf. Baggins' naivety, lack of knowledge and experience, and his small size makes him an unlikely person to undertake the journey to destroy the ring at Mount Doom and face his antagonist, Lord Sauron along the way. Baggins' continued persistence makes him successful in the end. Again, the conflict between a protagonist's goal and his high stakes becomes the perfect ingredient for drama, for what is story without drama.

Parallelism between Character Profiling in Screenwriting and Teacher Development in HE Teaching

An important aspect of teaching development in HE is teachers' ability to reflect on their teaching and make positive changes to their practise. Early work on reflective teaching can be traced to Dewey (1973), Schon (1983) and later Brookfield (2002, 2007). Schon argues for the importance of teachers to "reflect in action", that is, while they are teaching and then "reflect on action", i.e. a reflection after the teaching session. Brookfield's framework for reflective teaching appears to embrace Schon's idea but puts forward reflective action in a different way. Brookfield (2002) identifies the importance of using critical incidents in teaching as a trajectory for teacher reflection. However, in analysing critical incidents or issues in teaching and learning, an effective/complete reflection cannot rely only on one or two perspectives. Brookfield (2002) proposes 4 lenses that teachers should use to reflect on their teaching. These lenses are (1) the teachers' own experience as a learner and as a teacher; (2) the students' perspective; (3) colleague's perspectives; and (4) theory / literature.

Reflective teaching is a continuous process that goes beyond making isolated improvements to teaching practices. It centres on teachers examining their own sets of assumptions which influence their teaching practice (Samaras, 2002, as cited by Izadinia, 2014). It helps teachers to consistently clarify the assumptions that they may have about how students learn and how best to support students in their learning process (Brookfield, 2002). This, in turn, will help teachers to improve on their teaching decisions and action. If Brookfield's four lenses were to be adopted for the reflection process, the key figure in the reflection process is still the teachers themselves. They decide what elements uncovered from the four lenses that they will consider important and what elements are less important. Their perception of themselves as teachers influences the decision they make, even in the reflective process. This is one of the reasons why teachers need to have a clear understanding of their teacher identities because it is their teacher identities that govern their thinking, decision-making and their teaching and learning approaches. As such, teachers' understanding of their own teacher identity helps them make sense of themselves (Coldron & Smith, 1999). Without that understanding, reflection may be fragmented and inaccurate.

What is teacher identity?

Findings from research on teacher identity point to challenges in defining the concept and the nature of its influences to teachers' learning and work (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009, cited in Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). Mayer (1999) defines teacher identity as a fundamental belief that teachers have about being a teacher and about teaching itself. This includes how they see themselves and how they feel about being a teacher and about teaching. Teacher identity is a composite of a number of sub-identities based on the teachers' knowledge of the subject matter, their knowledge of teaching and their skills in teaching (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004). Teacher identity, which forms through social interaction, can be multiple in nature and can discontinue or change over time (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011, p. 308).

There is a similarity in the way that new teachers and more experienced teachers develop their teacher identity (Archer, 2008). It takes intellectual effort, criticality and professionalism to develop that identity (Archer, 2008). It is also associated with values and morality as the development of teacher identity reflects commitment and

responsibilities, and what can positively or negatively impact the teachers and the stakeholders in their teaching environment (Fitzmaurice, 2013). The evolution of teacher identity often involves internal conflicts and emotional struggles as teachers go through the process of constructing, accepting and maintaining their teacher identities (MacLure, 1993). These internal conflicts are frequently centred on the teachers themselves, i.e. the teacher they perceive themselves to be and the extent to which their situational contexts empower them to do so (Dubar, 1997, cited in Lopes et. al., 2014).

Teachers are often the first ones significantly affected by the institution's processes and values (Winter, 2009) and who face the practical implications of the contextual change (Mcnaughton & Billot, 2016). In the case institution where the action research was undertaken, there was a changing nature of the institution as it aimed for higher research outputs, increase in student number and programmes offered, stronger social impact and market presence, and higher QS and SETARA ranking (a Malaysian rating instrument for higher education institutions focused on quality teaching and learning). These increased demands added to the already heavy teaching responsibilities that academics had. The changing nature of the higher institution thus contributed to the changing nature of the teacher identity. It pointed to the necessity for the teachers to be negotiate between their past, present and future identities (Mcnaughton, & Billot, 2016, p. 656) through a holistic exploration (Hall, 2013). Teachers within the institution – although this was not necessarily unique to them – needed to deconstruct and reconstruct their teacher identities in order to find out how they fitted with the institution and how the institution fitted them (Fitzmaurice, 2013).

There was a need to provide a professional development platform that enabled teachers to reconnect with their existing teacher identity. Chee, Mehotra and Ong (2015, p. 425), in citing Walkington (2005) argue that it is insufficient for institutions to offer professional development programmes for teachers which only focus on content knowledge and the skills for teaching content knowledge. There should also be opportunities for teachers to reflect and develop their “professional ways of being” (Chee, Mehotra & Ong, 2015, p.426). A review of literature reveals that various strategies have been adopted to engage teachers to explore their teacher identities. These include journal-keeping (Joseph & Headig, 2010), teacher-narrative studies (Craig, 2013), teacher-annotated self-portraits (Woods, Barksdale, Triplett, & Potts, 2014) and teaching metaphors (Erickson & Pinnergar, 2016). Other known strategies that have been applied over a longer period include mentoring (Walkington, 2005). To the authors' knowledge, character profiling has not been used as a tool for teachers to explore their teacher identities.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In undertaking this action research, the authors sought to answer the following questions:

- (i) What is the nature of teacher identities that can emerge from the character profiling exercise?
- (ii) How do teachers perceive the value of character profiling as a tool to explore their teacher identities?
- (iii) What improvements should be made in adopting character profiling as a tool to explore teacher identities?

THE ADOPTION OF CHARACTER PROFILING AS A TOOL IN EXPLORING HE TEACHERS' IDENTITY

The authors co-facilitated a two-day workshop on reflective teaching, focused on exploring the participants' teacher identity, using character profiling as a tool. The workshop was open to all teaching staff in the institution. Participation was voluntary in nature but the number was kept at 15. Of the 15 participants, 3 were teaching in the field of arts and humanities, 9 in language studies, 1 in law and 1 in social science. Another participant was an internal facilitator for professional development programmes for HE teachers.

Workshop Structure

The workshop adopted the Goldsmiths' method of character profiling. It was based on the method of character profiling applied in the highly successful and industry accredited MA in Scriptwriting programme at Goldsmiths, University of London (where the first author undertook his postgraduate studies). The Goldsmiths' method was chosen as the reflection tool as it focused only on the most essential elements that build towards a strongly developed character. Through the programme advertisement and at the beginning of the workshop, participants were informed that the reflective teaching workshop would adopt this approach. At the beginning of the workshop, participants were informed that the outcome of the two-day workshop was the production of each participant's character profile as a teacher, using screenwriting's character profile format, as adopted by the film-making industry. Ultimately, by the end of the workshop, each participant should have produced his/her own character profile in the form of a one-page document, typed in a single-spaced, Courier type font, size 12. As an introduction to the workshop as well as a modelling/scaffolding activity, Act 1 from *Dead Poet's Society* (Haft,

Witt & Thomas, 1989) was screened. Participants were asked to analyse the *want*, *need* and *stakes* of John Keating, the main character. This activity was later used to illustrate that the foundation of a character profile was built upon these three important criteria.

Participants then engaged in exploring their own teacher identity using the character profile format. They were asked to answer specific questions that were categorised into: (1) want; (2) need; (3) stakes; (4) strengths and weaknesses; (5) likes and dislikes; and (6) important biographic factors. Questions for each category, except the last, were quite similar. For example, for “want”, participants had to apply the following questions to themselves: “What does the character (the teacher) want?”, “Why does he/she want it?”, “Why does he/she want it now?” After answering the questions for each category, they were asked to support their answers for that category with a brief description of an event in the past. Each question had to be answered truthfully in order for the teacher identity that emerged to be what it was at that point. At the completion of each category or paragraph, participants were asked to post their paragraph to Padlet, a free online virtual “bulletin” board. A discussion was then held for constructive feedback so that the paragraph could be improved further. The activities for the two days followed this cycle, with a complete character profile produced at the end of the workshop.

Participant Consent, Data Collection and Analysis

Participants were informed of the authors’ intention to conduct an action research based on the workshop and the data collection methods. They were informed of their rights not to be included in the research data collection and assured that personal information would not be revealed if they chose to participate. Participants were also informed that they could choose to maintain anonymity by using a pseudonym when uploading what they had written onto Padlet. All 15 workshop participants gave their consent to participate in the action research. There was an attrition rate of 26.7% on the 2nd day of the workshop attributed to a medical procedure, marking of final exam scripts, conflicting work commitment and an unexplained absence. Data was derived from the researchers’ observation notes, the 9 character profiles and 11 formal workshop evaluation and feedback form completed by participants. A thematic analysis that focused on what was spoken and written by the participants (Riessman, 2008) was applied to the data to draw out emerging themes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Teacher identities that emerged from character profiles

Each character profile was labelled from A to I. Each profile was analysed and emerging themes from the profiles were categorised into the following: “goals and wants”, “influencing factors” and “teacher conflicts”. The table below summarises the teacher identities that emerged from the profiles. Further discussion follows.

Table 1: Teachers’ goals and wants, influencing factors and conflicts

	Goals and Wants	Influencing Factors	Teacher Conflicts
A	To inspire students so that they are aware that education is more than passing exams and getting good grades, and, they can function well and contribute to society	Past experience - as a student and as a beginner teacher – focus on grades caused underdeveloped soft skills which affected job applications	Exam oriented culture <i>vs</i> inspiring students
B	For students to break out of comfort zones, be flexible, adaptable and resilient	Past experience – Unable to adapt to new colleagues, new company and its culture, knowledge of a friend who remained jobless 3 years after graduation due to lack of exposure and inadaptability	Exam oriented culture and restricted contact hours <i>vs</i> achieving <i>goals and wants</i>
C	To share with and educate others, and to have a meaningful impact on students	Past and current experience – there were friends in class who were forced to take subjects by their parents and saw the same situation with his students.	Having students who were trapped in the subject/programme of study <i>vs</i> having a meaningful impact
D	To challenge students to become autonomous and self-directed learners who are responsive and engaged in learning	Past experience as a student suppressed by institution and teachers and as a beginning teacher who was “a stickler for rules”	The need to complete the syllabus and adhere to “conventional practices” <i>vs</i> <i>goals and wants</i>
E	For students to balance the pursuit of academic goals with non-academic development	Past experience as a student too focused on studies which caused underdeveloped interpersonal skills upon graduation	Completing the syllabus and preparing students for exam <i>vs</i> carrying out activities that could help students develop themselves
F	To facilitate independent learners in their learning, not spoon-feed students what they needed to know	Current experience as someone who approaches life’ situations with the ability to think and view issues from multiple perspectives	Students’ over-dependency, the need to complete the syllabus and prepare students for examinations <i>vs</i> hands-on learning
G	For students to understand that learning is a lifelong process and that marks are not the ultimate goal; they should be able to use what they learned and contribute to “life”.	Personality as a person who tended to “overthink” things and place too much importance on others’ opinion of her teaching strategies	Students’ exam-orientation, the need to the syllabus within a time frame and prepare students for exams <i>vs</i> developing deep learners
	To provide opportunities for students to grow and get inspired so that they are	Current experience – time constraint in	Completing fixed syllabus, preparing students for exam,

	Goals and Wants	Influencing Factors	Teacher Conflicts
H	adaptable to life's stages and challenges and make positive contributions to the world	preparing good teaching that helped students develop mastery	needing to fail "students who needed to be failed" vs <i>goals and wants</i>
I	For students to be bold, confident, speak their minds and not be afraid of the surroundings; and for them to be adaptable to different environments and survive challenges at later stage in life	Past experience as a quiet and reserved student who witnessed a close friend being unable to get a job despite having excelled in examinations Current experience: inexperience caused frequent self-doubt when making teaching choices	Covering the syllabus vs. learning activities that actively engaged the students

1.1 "Goals and Wants"

Eight character profiles (Teacher A, B, D, E, F, G, H and I) identified the teachers' "goals and wants" to be focused on their students and the students' achievements, not on themselves or their career development. In addition, all eight teachers perceived student achievement to be focused on character development, becoming independent individuals who were able to adapt to life after graduation and overcome the challenges that they would meet along the way. "Flexibility", "adaptability", "contribute to society" were each mentioned by 3 profiles; developing "autonomy", "independence" and "interpersonal skills" were mentioned in 3 profiles as well. Only two mentioned examinations as being important but also emphasised that education was more than achieving good grades in examinations. One mentioned that students needed to achieve a mastery of skills:

I want my students to be able to break out of their comfort zones and learn to adapt. They need to be able to adapt because they will be experiencing different phases in life which may present new challenges. (Teacher B)

I want to let my students understand that learning is a life-long process. Although marks are important, they are not the ultimate goal of learning... what's more important is how they can use what they have learnt and contribute.... (Teacher G)

Getting good grades is not everything... being able to function in society is crucial – to pay debts [to society]. (Teacher A).

As the teachers' "goals and wants" were focused on holistic student development, the roles that these teachers perceived for themselves also emerged from the character profiles. These teachers felt that they needed to "inspire" their students and "challenge them to take learning beyond the classroom". To do this, it was important that they assumed the role of "facilitator" of their students' learning and ensured that students were responsive, continuously engaged and wanted to do more. As one teacher stated:

I like it when students are responsive, excitedly asking if the tasks they have chosen are relevant and meet the lesson objectives. My sense of satisfaction is further heightened when they continue to be engaged with the lessons and want to do more. But doubt creeps in when some do not respond as positively... and I question my strategies. I dislike feeling like a failure. (Teacher D)

A slight difference was found in the profile of Teacher C. Teacher C's "goal and wants" were focused on the teacher but it was still linked to students. Teacher C wanted to share his knowledge and educate others and have a meaningful impact on his students.

Based on the 9 character profiles that were submitted, it could be deduced that the teachers' "goals and wants" were defined in two ways. For one, they were defined through their students' achievement. For another, they were defined through their perceived roles and responsibilities in facilitating that achievement; that is, in enabling students to become well-developed individuals who later graduate with a mastery of skills, independence, ability to adapt to change, ability to overcome challenges and be able to contribute to society.

1.2 "Influencing Factors"

From the character profiles, factors which influenced the shaping of the teachers' identities were "past experience", "current experience" and "personality". Three teachers singled out past experience as factors which influenced who they were (Teacher A, B and E) while two others singled out their current experience (Teacher F and H). Two more teachers identified the combination of past and current experience (Teacher C) and past and current lack of experience (Teacher I) as their influencing factors. One participant identified his/her personality as the influencing factor (Teacher G).

“Past experience” that was identified by teachers as the factor influencing or co-influencing their teacher identities could be divided into the following: experience as a student, experience in trying to gain employment and experience as a beginner teacher. Three teachers mentioned that they did not want students to be like they were as students or to graduate with shortcomings similar to their own:

I was once a university student who focused too much on marks and did not participate in any co-curricular activities which could have helped me build essential skills. (Teacher E)

I was once a student like them, quiet, reserved... so I don't want them to be like me... I want my students to be bold, confident, speak their mind and not be afraid of their surroundings. (Teacher I)

When I was working in my previous company, I could not work well with my colleagues, failed to adapt to the new competitive company culture and eventually had a nervous breakdown. I don't want my students to experience the same thing. (Teacher B)

One teacher mentioned that her previous learning experience as a student influenced her to want to be a different teacher. Teacher D felt that she was “suppressed” because of a rule-governed university and being taught by “control freak educators”. It was this learning experience that caused her to want to encourage her students to be “autonomous” learners who could determine their own direction in learning. Interestingly enough, despite wanting to be a different teacher, she admitted to being “a rigid stickler to rules” at the beginning of her teaching career but that she had learned to be “a more flexible educator” over the years.

“Current experience” that was cited as an influencing factor was described as either the work experience of teaching in the current higher learning institution (Teacher H) or the perceived lack of teaching experience prior to joining the current institution, and hence, feeling handicapped by that lack of experience (Teacher I). Teacher H stated that being in an institution with its rules and regulations on completing the syllabus and preparing students for examinations, he felt he was spending more time on marking and grading papers, instead of analysing available data to learn how to get his students to master the skills they needed to master. He wanted his students to be adaptable to different phases of life and the changes and challenges that came with it because it was a situation that he faced in his current institution. As Teacher H stated, “I am overwhelmed by the number of hats that I must wear – teacher, parent and social worker.” Teacher I, on the other hand, felt that despite what she wanted her students to achieve (quoted in an earlier paragraph), she lacked confidence and often doubted her own capabilities to the point that she would “occasionally” come up with excuses instead of doing what she knew needed to be done.

“Personality” was cited as an influencing factor in shaping and reshaping the identity of Teacher G. For Teacher G, her tendency to “overthink” things, even “the smallest matter”, combined with caring “a bit too much” about what others thought of her, caused her to be affected when she was deemed not to have done as well as expected in her teaching. As such, despite having a clear conviction of what she wanted her students to achieve and what she needed to do to help the students, she became emotionally affected when she received contradictory feedback.

It could be deduced that the interaction between the teachers’ past experiences as students and as teachers, their current experience and the teachers’ own personality, shaped how they viewed their own “goals and wants” as teachers and the roles that they needed to undertake in order to achieve these “goals and wants”.

1.3 “Teacher Conflict”

Eight of the 9 teachers identified exam-oriented culture, the need to complete the syllabus and teach the topics within a specific time-frame as sources of conflict which prevented or reduced their ability to do what they felt needed doing. All of them felt that doing what they should do in order to achieve their “goals and wants” could mean that they were seen as “non-conformist”, “deviant” and moving out of “conventional practices”. These might not be well-received by the students, parents and their institution. They were concerned that this might ultimately result in students and parents complaining about their teaching and subsequently put their job at risk.

The 8 teachers whose profiles were referred to above felt that pursuing the fulfilment of their “goals and wants” put themselves and their careers at risk. There were several outcomes which the teachers anticipated in pursuing

their “goals and wants”: inability to complete the syllabus and receiving complaints from students and parents (Teacher B, E, F, G, H, I), a damage to reputation (Teacher B, E, F, H and I), being blamed for students’ poor performance and receiving poor student evaluation of teaching (Teacher D), risking the job (Teacher A, B, E, F, G and H) and losing interest in teaching (Teacher G).

One teacher identified an existing conflict which differed from what was identified by other teachers. Teacher C identified a shared feeling of “helplessness” with his students caused by being forced to take the subject or programme by their parents. As Teacher C stated, “I know most of my students are being dictate[d] by their parents...on their future prospect without [the parents] knowing if their children are interested or have the passion [for it].” Teacher C felt that this was a significant conflict because his students struggled in the subject, causing “negativity” and “hatred” toward the subject “and probably their parents” for putting them through that experience. For himself, Teacher C worried about not making an impact on his students but his concern was more for his students:

I listen to my students’ plight and sadness as they share their passion and interest [which] has been denied by their parents... At night while I sit on my bed reading my book,... [I] try... to figure out how I could help students in their time of need and desperation... If I were to meet their parents and explain to them about their children’s plight... parents’ decision has been made.

With the exception of Teacher C (whose concerns were different), there appeared to be a fundamental belief among the teachers that they were limited in their ability to help students develop into well-balanced individuals who were independent, adaptable, resilient and capable of contributing to society – because they had to complete teaching the syllabus within a specific time frame. There are several possible implications that need to be explored further: (i) that teaching the syllabus is at the expense of students’ holistic development, rather than both being mutually inclusive; (ii) that teachers need to cover the prescribed syllabus during the face-to-face teaching time; and, (iii) that learning is teacher-led.

2. Perceived value of character profiling as a tool

Based on the evaluation form and feedback completed by participants, 63.4% (7) found character profiling to be useful and would recommend the workshop to other teachers while 18.2% (2) did not find it useful. No answer was recorded for another 18.2% (2). Those who found that character profiling technique was useful in exploring who they were as teachers reported that they were satisfied with the character profile that they had produced and that the profile was a reflection of who they perceived themselves to be at that point. A total of 36.4% participants found the use of the tool interesting because it provided them with a new perspective or a new way of reflecting on themselves, 36.4% found that it helped them to reflect on their values as teachers and to synthesis their purpose, while 18.2% stated that the tool taught them to be specific, with the cycle of writing, thinking and writing useful for their reflection. Below are some responses:

“I’ve learnt that I need to look deeper within myself to understand who I am.”
“...have a better understanding of myself as a lecturer. I have learned that how you see yourself/experiences can influence your teaching style.”
“... reflect upon teaching / persona as a teacher.... Reflect on daily lessons / achievements so far... reflect on how lessons progress throughout the semester.”
“A valuable framework for analysis” which provides “clarification a round career direction.”

From the 18.2% of participants who found the tool to be less useful, one reason was cited by one participant. The reason cited was an incompatibility between the tool or how the tool was applied with the teachers’ own identity. As stated by one teacher:

Maybe it’s just me, but I am someone who is boring, drama-free, forgive everyone before going to sleep, let go easily so I really couldn’t dig deep into myself and relate to all of this. Plus, I can’t write that well yet. Ha ha.

This participant’s response could be linked to the requirement that each of them identified a critical, most impactful event for each element of the character profile. A further analysis on this can be found in the next section.

3. Perceived challenges in using character profile as a tool in a workshop for reflective teaching

In reflecting their experience in adopting the character profile technique, most participants reported that it was challenging at varying degrees, although they also found it interesting. At the first stage of the character profiling, participants appeared to struggle with answering questions on their *wants* – what they wanted as a teacher, why and why at that particular point in their career. Providing a brief description of a past event to support their answer appeared to be difficult as well. The challenge identified at this stage was the lack of time to address the deep, self-exploratory nature of the question, which one participant considered as “philosophical”. Given that there was a time allocation for each element of the character profile, the time limit could have inhibited their thinking and reflection process.

Two other reasons were provided by participants to explain their apparent challenges. One reason was that they viewed application of the tool to themselves required not just writing skills but specifically, “creative writing skills” which they were either not good at or needed help in developing. The perception that character profiling was still a creative writing exercise – despite being focused on the participants, their own needs and wants, their past and current experiences – was unexpected but not surprising, given that the tool was borrowed from the creative writing field and the examples that were used to explain each step of the application process were also examples from films and film scripts. As one participant stated, the application of the tool could have been better achieved in the workshop if it had been “directed more to teaching rather than a dramatic fictional character.”

The third reason was the perceived inflexibility in the adoption of a screenwriting method to teachers’ exploration of themselves. One participant stated that there needed to be “more flexibility” in “moving from strict screenwriting to the present subject matter.” This view was linked to the requirement that for each element of the character profile, participants had to identify a critical incident in the past that became the turning point for the teacher. This perception was shared by a number of participants, with three participants being resistant to this step:

“But we don’t make decisions or change just based on one incident.”

“You cannot pick one. One is not enough to decide, even if it is very good or very bad.”

“This is not who I am. If I pick one incident that was bad, does that mean I am blaming whoever... the students? The...whoever...”

Identifying one critical incident seemed to contradict with their belief that responsible teachers should not ethically make decisions based on one incident.

The use of critical incidents in reflections on teachers and teaching is not new. For example, it can be found in Brookfields’ four lenses of reflective teaching and his use of critical incident to explore learners’ assumptions (2002). It can also be found in a study by Clavert, Bjorkland and Nevgi (2014) where participants were asked to draw their lifeline and identify critical incidents, what they describe as “meaningful events, experiences or achievements” within that lifeline. Other studies have explored the use of teacher narratives, and deriving from the narratives, a frame for tracing teacher development and professional way of “being” (Yam, Mehotra & Jing, 2015, p.426).

So why did the use of critical incident in this particular setting seemed less acceptable by the academics? There were two possible answers. Firstly, critical incident as a source of reflection and learning for teachers should not be limited to one incident. Rather, teachers should be engaging in continuous reflection based on analysis of critical incidents that occur throughout their teaching career. Secondly, critical incidents, as they have been used in reflective teaching, do not have to be a dramatic event. Instead, the incidents are deemed critical due to their significance to the students, the teacher or the teaching. For example, they could be related to a teaching strategy that worked really well or a minor conflict that led to an impactful learning for the teacher which could influence how he/she would approach a particular topic area in future. As such, how teachers would normally expect to choose critical incidents for reflective purposes contradicted with how they were asked to choose their critical incident during the workshop. Participants were asked to choose only one critical incident which had the most dramatic effect – because there is a limit to screen time and because on screen, it is the drama that captures the audience’s attention. When analysed from this perspective, some of the participants’ resistance to having to choose one dramatic critical incident could be well-understood.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Screenwriting's character profiling appears to be useful as a framework to explore the identity of a selected group of teachers teaching in a higher learning institution. Several things are evident from the analysis of the teacher identities which emerged: (1) These teachers had very specific goals and wants as teachers but that their goals and wants were viewed from the perspective of their students' holistic development, their ability to be part of and contribute to the society. (2) The teacher identities uncovered through the use of the tool concurred with research findings that they are influenced by the teachers' past and present experience and teaching context. Personality was also found to be an influencing factor in the shaping of teacher identities. (3) There appeared to be a dissonance between the teachers' perceived identity and the extent to which teachers' choices in teaching and supporting students' learning could be correlated with their identities. Teachers appeared to view themselves as being unable to or limited in their capacity to achieve their goals and wants due to perceived contextual constraints imposed by their institution and situation.

If teachers chose to focus on completing the syllabus within a specific time-frame, believing at the same time that doing so was at the expense of the necessary student development, it was likely that there were misalignments between how students needed to be supported and the teachers' adopted teaching strategies. This points to further professional development needs. Future professional development activities for these group of teachers should include a further exploration on the teachers' own perceptions about effective teaching and their conceptions of learning for students in a higher learning institution. It is worth exploring to find out if the teachers' current view of teaching is related to their levels of thinking about teaching (Biggs, 1999). According to Biggs (1999, p.2), teacher competence appears to follow three levels of focus which are *what the student is* (Level 1), *what the teacher does* (Level 2) and *what the student does* (Level 3). Available information seemed to indicate that at least some of these teachers may be operating at Level 1 or Level 2 where the emphasis is on what the student is and what the student does. This meant that teaching is based on a deficit model which either attributes student achievement or lack thereof to their differences or to the teacher input which is seen as requisite to learning.

Further professional development activities also need to include teacher reflection on their conception of teaching and learning and how to move towards level 3, where the focus is on what the student needs to do in order to learn and therefore what kinds of teaching and learning activities would support their learning process. At level 3, the teachers' role changes to be more of a facilitator. Some of the teachers involved in this study already seemed to recognise the need for adopting the facilitator role at some stage. It is most likely that they would benefit from engaging in activities that enable them to explore how to be effective at facilitating students' learning.

Finally, whether at subject, department or faculty level, it may be beneficial for academic staff to engage in interaction or development activities where they can explore and come to an understanding of the value of the syllabus, the variety of ways in which students can be guided to learn the syllabus and if indeed there was an over-prescription of syllabus, the mechanism needed to rectify this.

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