

## Chapter 5

# Mentoring for Professional Identity Construction in EFL Pre–Service Teacher Education: A Case Study From Turkey

**Ayşe Kızıldağ**  
Aksaray University, Turkey

### ABSTRACT

*Teacher identity, neither stable nor predetermined, plays a key role in decision-making on pedagogical practices. Research demonstrates that identity formation is enacted via various interactions of mentors, students, colleagues, and significant others. Practicum is, thus, an important space for exploring pre-service teacher identities through mentoring to encourage them for critical reflections over their dispositions of the professional identities. This study explores how a mentoring program at a Turkish university contributes to a group of EFL student teachers' identity formation. Three semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven male and five female participants; the research found out three significant spaces facilitating the identification and transformation of their initial professional identities. Namely, practice, peer collaboration and mentoring discussions enhanced the awareness, analytical and reflective skills through open, challenging but supportive mentoring.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Teacher learning is usually considered as a complex process through which one is expected to take a number of initiatives to build professional identities (Kelly, 2006). In the relevant literature, a great number of research studies towards pre-service teacher identity have been conducted (Beijaard et al., 2004; Maclean & White, 2007; Webb, 2005). Teacher identity is defined as “the intersection of personal, pedagogical, and political participation and reflection within a larger sociopolitical context” (Hoffman-Kipp, 2008, p. 153). Although it not stable or predetermined, it “plays a key role in decisions teachers make about their teaching practices, the content they teach, the kind of relationships they maintain with their students” (Izadinia, 2013, p. 695). Research based on student teachers’ identity formation demonstrates that it is enacted and transformed via a series of interaction with the field and its agents such as supervisors and mentors (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1987; Standal et al., 2014; Zeichner, 2010). Field placement is, therefore, found to be the most significant component of a teacher education program (Farrell, 2008; Munby et al., 2001). Eisner (2002) also summarizes the benefits of field experience as participants learning from each other and guided by their experience through reflective thinking. Classroom observations, actual teaching and interacting with others in the field schools stimulate and improve student teachers’ pedagogical knowledge and reflective skills.

One of the main components of this process is mentoring. Lindgren (2005) describes it as an active process when human nature is collaboratively learned and promoted. Particularly, the way pre-service teachers communicate with their mentors affect the quality of field experience and guide professional identity (Timoštšuk, & Ugaste, 2010). In this sense, practicum is a significant space for teacher learning (Farrell, 2008) where student teachers can observe various classrooms, practice-teach, interact with others, and develop their teaching skills as well as construe professional identities. Mentoring throughout the practicum is a widely recognized established practice and focuses on pre-service language teachers’ professional experiences and reflections over them (Izadinia, 2015) as they may often feel a lack of confidence and uncertainty. Effective mentoring via encouragement and support can influence identity development and transformation through building a working communication circle between university supervisors, school mentors and pre-service teachers. Familiarization with the school reality and combining them to the theoretical knowledge coming from the teacher education program, and to the prior learning that they bring from their apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975), pre-service language teachers are contributed to engage in constant critical and reflective thinking on professional issues. Student teachers often end up in positioning across a variety of topics, which, in return, they form some certain

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