Perceptions of Teacher Identity

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Abstract

This research note explores how a novice lecturer continues to develop her teacher identity by using the "onion model" or "a model of levels of change" which has been introduced and used for teacher education by Korthagen (2004), especially in terms of developing teacher identity. The model has six layers: the environment, behaviour, competencies, beliefs, identity and mission or deepest inspiration to understand and explore people's behaviors from within. The author created three types of reflection sheets through which one can self-reflect as a teacher for each layer to help face issues and challenges in the classroom by exploring teacher beliefs and identity behind behaviour. In addition to gaining awareness of professional identity and beliefs, the benefit of exploring teacher identity through such reflection sheets was also seen in developing competencies in lesson planning. The examples of such lessons are introduced in the Results section. This research note aims to help teachers gain awareness of their professional identity and beliefs in order to become better teachers.

INTRODUCTION

This study note started with a simple but fundamental question – "How can I be a better teacher?" by the author - a novice lecturer who has been teaching communication in English at university levels for three years and has recently started teaching at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies (NUFS) as a full-time lecturer. The main courses that the author was assigned to teach at NUFS are called "CORE English[1]" which are designed for first and second year English majors. Though the author enjoyed teaching the courses to motivated learners and with inspirational colleagues, there were also struggles and challenges as a teacher, especially in terms of creating interesting lessons to introduce various topics. As the author started asking herself the simple question mentioned above, and started seeking a theoretical model as a hint to assist her teacher development, the author encountered the so-called "the onion model"[2] which visualizes six levels-from the core to the outer-to understand and explore people's behaviors from within. This model was adopted by Korthagen (2004) and has been used in teacher education and professional development, especially in terms of developing teacher identity. Through such perception of teacher identity, this study note aims to help teachers gain awareness of their professional identity and beliefs in order to become better teachers by sharing the journey of how the author is discovering her teacher identity and beliefs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

### Teacher Identity and Development

Bullough (1997) defined teacher identity as "what beginning teachers believe about teaching and learning and self-as-a-teacher-is of vital concern to teacher education; it is the basis for meaning making and decision making… Teacher education must begin, then, by exploring the teaching self" (p.21). Focusing on the teacher as a person in teacher education has its historical roots in Humanistic Based Teacher Education (HBTE)[3] which started around 1970. One of its main

representatives is Carl R. Rogers who claimed that one of the key traits found in successful teachers is "genuineness" or "the ability to be a human being with strength and weakness, to be authentic with your students" (Rogers, Lyon, & Tausch, 2014, p. 51). Even though HBTE did not succeed in collecting major support back then, many researchers today see teachers' personalities-such as "enthusiasm, flexibility, or love of children" (Korthagen, 2004, p.79) as a part of competencies. The central questions of HBTE such as "Who am I as a teacher?" "What kind of teacher do I want to be?" or "How do I see my role as a teacher" are essential to develop a professional identity today as Korthagen claimed (p.81). Why then it is essential to develop a teacher's professional identity?

Hamachek (1999) indicated that "the more that teachers know about themselves- the private curriculum within- the more their personal decisions are apt to be about how to pave the way for better teaching" (p.209). In other words, the more teachers explore about themselves, the better outcomes can be drawn from within, as a shape of transformation or development of their behavior and competencies. The next question is how a teacher can explore his/her professional identity. Korthagen (2004) introduced a model called "a model of levels of change" or "the onion" to answer the question.

A Model of Levels of Change

The model which is shown in Figure 1 is called "a Model of Levels of Change" or simply "the Onion Model" (Korthagen, 2004). According to Korthagen, this model has been used for teacher education both for novice and experienced teachers to help them develop effective professional identities. The model has six levels: the environment, behavior, competencies, beliefs, identity and mission (See **Table 1**). As explained in **Table 1**, the two outer levels- "the environment" and "behaviour"- are visible to others. The third level, "competencies" can be both visible and invisible. The last three levels towards the core- "beliefs", "identity", and "mission" (The author made an alternative name
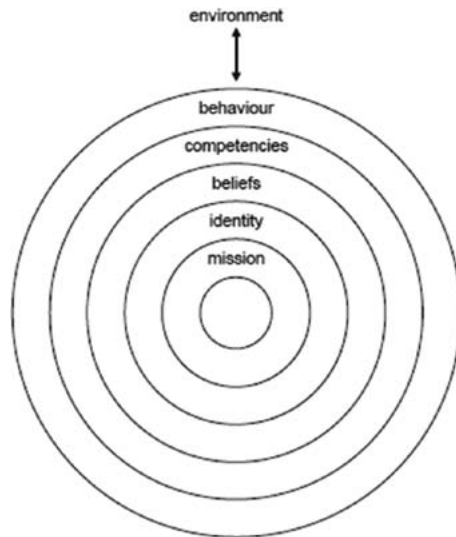
Data Source: Korthagen (2004, p.80)

Figure 1. The onion: a model of levels of change.

Table 1. Six levels of the "onion model"

Levels of the "onion model"	Meaning/Example
1. Environment	the class, the students, the school, problems in the classroom
2. Behaviour	actual behaviour of the teacher towards problems/students
3. Competencies	skills/knowledge of the teacher (e.g. competency to show empathic understanding)
4. Beliefs	the teacher's beliefs that determine their competencies (e.g. a belief that caring learners' feelings is important)
5. Identity	what kind of teacher does one wants to be/ what kind of role does the teacher want to take in the class
6. Mission/ "Deepest Inspiration"	what inspires you most as human being/ meaning of one's own existence

Note: This table was created by the author based on Korthagen (2004)

for the last level "mission" instead of the word "deepest inspiration" in order to avoid religious images towards the term) are invisible to others; what's more, the teacher him/herself may not be aware of them. Each level can be influenced. For instance, a teacher who believes that teaching is the transmission of knowledge and a teacher who believes that teaching is letting learners explore the contents of a topic are likely to develop different competencies and behavior. Their identities or roles as teachers may likewise, be very different. Another example is if a teacher believes caring about learners' feelings is important, naturally, he/she will develop the competence to show empathic understanding. While, if a teacher does not have such a belief, showing empathy does not even seem to be a 'competence' to him/her. The point is whether a teacher is aware of such beliefs behind behaviour or competences.

For a clearer understanding, the author created **Table 2** which shows a simple question that a teacher can ask to oneself for each level.

In this study note, the onion model explained above is used as a core concept.

Reflective Teaching

In addition to the onion model which was explained in the previous paragraph, reflection is used as a key approach to explore the author's professional identity

Table 2. Six questions to develop professional identity

Levels of the "onion model"	Questions
1. Environment	What do I have to deal with it?
2. Behaviour	What do I do?
3. Competencies	What can I do?
4. Beliefs	Why do I do that? What belief led me to do that?
5. Identity	Who am I (as a teacher)? What role do I want to take in the class?
6. Mission/ "Deepest Inspiration"	What is my deepest inspiration as a teacher/person? What is my ultimate goal of teaching/ life?

Note: This table was created by the author based on Korthagen (2004)

and beliefs. As Bartlett (1990) pointed out, reflection involves two meanings-"relationship between an individual's thought and action" and "the relationship between an individual teacher and his or her membership in a larger collective called society" (pp.204–205). Kemmis (1986) also defined the meaning of reflection as "an action oriented, historically-embedded, social and political frame, to locate oneself in the history of the situation, to participate in a social activity, and to take sides on issues" and "through reflection and the action which it informs, we may transform the social relations which characterize our work and our working situation" (p.5). Therefore, self-observation or self-reflection including using reflection sheets, diaries, and learning logs have been used by many researchers. Richards and Nunan (1990) indicated that a critically reflective teacher can go beyond "how to" questions to "what" and "why" questions through which the teacher gain more power to teach (p.201). Through combining the onion model and reflection, this research note explores the author's professional identity and beliefs and how they affect her development as a teacher.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this study, two research questions were explored:

RQ1. What kind of identity and beliefs does the author have as a teacher?

RQ2. How do the author's identity and beliefs affect teacher development?

These research questions explore emic perspectives of the author about identity and beliefs and how they were connected to the development of her behavior and competencies as a teacher. Data were collected through self-reflection sheets answered by the author. Details of the reflection sheet will be described in the following section. Through exploring these research questions above, this study aims to explore answers to a big question – "How can I be a better teacher?" or teacher development.

METHOD

Participants

In order to answer RQ1 and RQ2, the author plays a role as a self-observer who observes and explores her teacher identity and beliefs based on the onion model. Self-reflection is an effective tool especially when it comes to explore issues within a person such as identity and beliefs as Richards and Nunan (1990) claimed "experience alone is insufficient for professional growth, and that experience coupled with reflection is a much more powerful impetus for development" (p.201). Reflection sheets were created and analyzed by the author.

Instrument

Reflection sheets.

Three types of reflection sheets were created based on the onion model. (See APPENDIX 1-3). The first reflection sheet, "30 Questions to Help Developing Professional Identity" consists of 30 questions- eight questions about "beliefs", eight questions about "competencies", four questions about "identity", two questions about "mission", three questions about both "competencies" and "beliefs", three questions about both "identity" and "mission/deepest inspiration", one question about both "identity" and "competencies", and the last question. The last question-'Is there anything you've realized about yourself after answering these questions?' is the most significant question.

The second reflection sheet, "Reflection Form- My behavior in the classroom" consists of seven questions and is designed to reflect a teacher's reaction to certain issues or incidents in the classroom. The first four questions allow a teacher to reflect on what happened, who were involved, how he/she felt, and what was the teacher's reaction to it. After answering the four questions, the teacher reflects if there was a gap between his/her actual behavior and ideal behavior in such situation by answering the fifth question. Further, the teacher will reflect what is keeping him/herself from taking ideal action by answering

the sixth question- "What is keeping me from taking ideal action?" Finally, the teacher is encouraged to explore his/her own beliefs, identity, or competencies and how they affect his/her own behavior in the classroom in order to take better action.

The third reflection sheet, "Reflection Form - My struggles as a teacher" consists of eight questions to reflect and analyze struggles that the teacher is going through at the moment. Through this reflection, the teacher is encouraged to reflect and realize which level of the onion model is related to the struggle.

All reflection sheets were created and mainly answered during summer after the first term; however, in terms of reflection sheet "30 Questions to Help Developing Professional Identity", it took half a year to complete reflecting and answering all the questions.

RESULTS
Teacher's Beliefs and Identity

There are mainly two things that the author found out about her teacher beliefs and identity through answering "30 Questions to Help Developing Professional Identity". First of all, it was confirmed that positive role models that the author had when she herself was a student affected her beliefs and identity as a teacher. The author has a total of eight positive role models from teachers at elementary school to professors at university and graduate school. (**Table 3**).

As shown in **Table 3**, there were seven keywords regarding the author's teacher beliefs that were adopted or learned from positive role models. The first three keywords-"Active learning", "Teaching through songs", and "Scaffolding" are related to the author's teaching style or approach. The fourth keyword- "Caring for students" connects directly to the author's belief that caring learners' feelings is important. The fifth keyword "Learner identity" connects to the author's identity. The following is a question and response to one question on the first reflection sheet:

Table 3. Keywords of the author's teacher beliefs adapted from role models

Keywords	Role Models	Examples
1 Active learning	K (ES)	-Taking the whole class for a walk to 'find Spring' for science class
2 Teaching through songs	K (ES) and M (JHS), M (*)	-Teaching English through songs
3 Scaffolding	R (Gr), M (*)	-Encouraging peer scaffolding inside and outside of the class -Giving precise assistance to each student
4 Caring for students	M and N (JHS), S and P (Col), A (Uni) , R(Gr)	-Always showing empathy -Listening to Ss' feelings and taking action when needed for a solution -Act of kindness such as offering a piece of cake to each student on Christmas though the teacher cannot eat any due to medical reasons
5 Learner identity	R (Gr),	-Enjoys learning new things from books, research, and people -Showing attitude to learn from Ss
6 Stimulate learning	S (Col)	-Always stimulates Ss' to explore global issues -Explore the connection between global issues and one's own behaviour/decisions
7 Purpose of learning and teaching	A and S (Uni)	-Questioning the purpose of education in depth

(ES): Elementary school, (JHS): Junior high school, (HS): High school
(Col): College , (Uni): University, (Gr):Graduate school , (*): Others
Underlined : Attitude or behaviour that the author adapted after becoming a teacher

Question 7- "Do you like learning?"

"I generally enjoy learning new things in any way- through books, lectures, experience, and from people. I love this job because learners and I can learn from each other."

The Sixth keyword "Stimulate learning" shows the author's role identity as a teacher. It was confirmed that the author sees herself not so much as a 'teacher' but more as a 'facilitator' by her answers to the questions. The following are the questions and responses to two of the questions on the first reflection sheet:

Question 9- "Do you like teaching?"

"Generally speaking, I never felt I like 'teaching' even though I love this job. Actually, I don't really feel that I'm 'teaching' in the

class. To me, "communicating with learners" best describes how I feel during the class."

Question 10- "What role do you want to take in the class?"

"My role in the class is to stimulate leaners' interests in topics. After that, I would just observe, praise, encourage, and assist."

The Seventh keywords "Purpose of learning and teaching" represents how the author has continued to ask the deeper meaning of learning and teaching. It is interesting to note that one of her role models, a professor teaching Teacher Education, kept asking "Why do you want to teach English?" At the end of the semester, he introduced his version of the answer, saying "*My purpose of teaching English is to raise a person who can appreciate both similarities and differences among different cultures. Thus, he/she can contribute to bun bullying and further, fulfilling world peace*." The author is continuing to seek her version of the answer.

In addition, Question #27 "What is your deepest inspiration as a person?" helped the author to percept the core level of the onion model. The answer was "*To share the joy of living and the goodness of life*". Then when the author asked herself the deepest inspiration as a teacher, the answer was the same – "*I want to share the joy of living and the goodness of life with learners through teaching.*" This answer was developed from the author's personal experiences which she learned through life; however, the author was also inspired by the President of NUFS, Dr. Kameyama who wrote the message below to the students on the school homepage:

"I would like to ask all NUFS students: What is our purpose in learning? My answer is that we learn in order to survive. Then what is the purpose of living? My answer would be that we live in order to confirm the joy therein. Only when we understand the joy, our lives have real value."

(NUFS homepage "President's Message" https://www-e.nufs.ac.jp/about/message/)

As the President Kameyama appealed to the students, the author also believes that the purpose of education is to encourage and support learners to learn to live, and learn the joy and goodness therein. That was also the most significant thing that the author has learned as a student and also as a person.

How Teacher Beliefs and Identity Affect Teacher Development

The most significant findings about the effect of a teacher's beliefs and identity on teacher development through this study note was found through Reflection using "My struggles as a teacher". The author selected a struggle of planning free lessons to introduce certain topics from textbooks especially for the second year students who are given deeper topics such as 'Personality', 'Happiness', 'Education' and so on. Fortunately, the author could receive good suggestions, ideas and materials for lessons from a colleague which worked well in the class. However, when she tries to think of such lessons on her own, she could not be satisfied with them. As she reflected, she noticed some beliefs about herself as a teacher that she unconsciously had- "*I can't think of creative lessons like other people because I don't have enough experiences and competence*". Then, the author started to question such beliefs as she wrote at the end of the reflection sheet: "*Is it really true that I am lack of experience and competence? Is it true that I'm not good at planning creative classes? I don't think it's true. Maybe, this negative impression about myself was affecting my struggle*."

Furthermore, exploring teacher identity and deepest inspiration through the 30 questions explained in the previous paragraphs gave the author a hint to go over her struggle. Since the author found that her "mission/deepest inspiration" is to share "the joy of living" and "goodness of life" with learners, she started to find a connection between such inspiration and topics and learners. For instance, if the topic was "Technology", the author started to ask one question before she started to plan a lesson- "What is the connection between technology and happiness?" In such a way, the author was able to deepen the topic and started to enjoy

planning free lessons with more confidence. In addition, the author started to discuss more about the topics informally with her colleagues during daily lunch time where various ideas and opinions were exchanged. As a result, the author and her colleagues often combined the ideas and created lessons collaboratively, as well as reflecting on the results afterwards. The details of such lessons and the process of collaboration with colleagues are explained in **Table 4** below.

As described in **Table 4** above, the author started to do more creative lessons using songs and pictures as well as adopting a new teaching strategy called D.I.E. (Describe, Interpret, and Evaluate) which she learned from her colleague. The

Table 4. Examples of lesson plans that the author collaboratively created

Topics	Intro-topic activity	Collaboration Process with Colleagues and Acknowledgements
Technology	1. The teacher selects 5~6 pictures/illustrations related to either the positive or negative side of the topic. 2. Put Ss into small groups. Each group receives a different picture. 3. In a group, Discuss, Interpret, and Evaluate (D.I.E.) the picture. Then, collect more information about the issues the picture represents. 4. Change the groups and each member describes the picture they saw in the previous group, then, gives information they researched. Then, the group has a discussion on both the positive and negative sides of technology. 5. Finally, each student fills in a class reflection log.	-The author learned the basic concept and skills of D.I.E. from her colleague, Jessica Zoni Upton who continually inspired her by introducing interesting images, short movies, and news related to the topics. -The author borrowed the idea and the format of a reflection log from her colleague Eric Hirata. This log helped the author not only find what Ss learned but also built good relationships as the author always writes comments back to the Ss.
Education	1. Ss answer a learning preference survey 2. Put Ss into pairs (if Ss prefer, it can be done individuually as well). Each pair was assigned one learning style out of three (through books/ people / technology). Then, do mini-research on 'the purpose of education'. 3. After research, Ss are put into small groups. In a group, each student reports what was learned and how it was learned 4. Finally, discuss the strengths and drawbacks of each learning style.	- The author and her colleague, Zoni Upton collaboratively planned the entire lesson.

Marriage and Relationships	1. The teacher selects three song lyrics about several types of relationships (e.g. romance, family, friends). 2. Put Ss into 6 groups of 4 people. Each group receives one of the three song lyrics. In a group, read and discuss the relationships in the lyrics. 3. Mix the groups which received the same lyrics. Share and compare each group's version of interpretation of the lyrics. 4. Finally, enjoy listening to the songs and do a whole class discussion.	- The author shared the idea of using songs to introduce the topic. - Zoni Upton contributed to create discussion questions which can be used for any song lyrics a teacher would like to use. - The author, Zoni Upton, and Wan Jung (Amy) Lin contributed to searching for various types of song lyrics related to the topic.
Environment	1. The teacher selects six different pictures related to environmental issues. 2. Put Ss into a small group. Each group receives a different picture. 3. In a group, Discuss, Interpret, and Evaluate (D.I.E.) the picture. Then, collect more information about the issues the picture represents. 4. Change the groups and each member describes the picture they saw in the previous group, then, gives information they researched. 5. Have a whole class discussion about the issues each group discussed. Then, the teacher introduces a poem "Kurikindi, the golden hummingbird" which explains how the small act of one person can solve a big problem. 6. Ss are assigned to think of one simple act that they can do every day to solve certain environmental issues as a project.	- The author adopted the idea of using the poem "Kurikindi, the golden hummingbird" for the project from the former professor at Nanzan Junior College, Ms. Tomoko Sekiguchi who is one of the author's role models and has taught the author that every global issue is connected to our daily behavior, thus, everyone can contribute to solving the problems by doing simple actions. - The author borrowed some of the pictures from Jessica's collection of D.I.E. for environmental issues. -The author was also inspired by Lin who has enthusiasm about environmental issues and has introduced her daily efforts or actions to make a change.

Notes: Ss=Students

author noticed that as the negative beliefs about herself as a teacher due to her struggle of planning lessons diminished and she recovered her confidence by exploring her teacher identity deeply, her competences as a teacher in terms of creating lessons and also working collaboratively with others have improved.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this study note, the author's teacher beliefs and identity and how they affect teacher identity were explored through reflection based on Korthagen (2004)'s onion model consisting six levels- "environment", "behaviour", "competences", "beliefs", "identity", and "mission/deepest inspiration". As was shown in the Results section, the author could explore teacher beliefs and identity. Additionally, through reflection, the author could be aware of unconscious beliefs which were affecting her competence negatively especially in lesson planning and could renew such beliefs through confirming her original beliefs, identity, and the deepest inspiration as a teacher. Such transformation within was helpful for the author to improve the quality of the lessons as well as contributing to collaboration with colleagues.

However, this research note is solely limited to the author's case. For further investigation, researching other participants using the same reflection sheets are needed to measure the effectiveness. Furthermore, learners perspectives are also needed to avoid this kind of research being a 'monologue' from only one teacher's perspective. Thus, the author has already collected data from learners and is investigating what qualities learners believe make a 'good teacher'. Through such studies, a wider picture of teacher identity and development which benefits learners can be developed. Finally, the author would like to end this research note with a quotation of Hamachek (1999) which expresses the significance of exploring teacher self in teaching- "*Consciously, we teach what we know; unconsciously, we teach who we are*." (p.209).

NOTES

1   Core English course for the first year students cover topics such as 'University Life', 'Marriage and Relationships', 'Environment' and so on. While, Core English course for the second year students explore topics such as 'Personality', 'Happiness', 'Technology' and so on. Lecturers give classes through using the same text and program but the first lesson to introduce each topic is up to each instructor which was challenging to the author for the first term.

2   According to Korthagen (2004), this model was often introduced as 'the Bateson model' even though Gregory Bateson (1904–1980) never explained such model in the publications (p.79). Therefore, the author followed Korthagen's example and described this model as "the onion model" or "a model of levels of change".

3   According to Korthagen (2004), HBTE originally started in humanistic psychology movement which was mainly led by Rogers and Maslow around 1970's and then adopted to areas of education. The central attention of HBTE is 'person of the teacher' and as Maslow described, its purpose of education is 'self-actualization' (p.79).

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APPENDIX 1: 30 Questions to Help Developing Professional Identity

1. Who was your favorite teacher(s)? Why did you like him/her?
2. What kind of classes do you still remember? Why?
3. What kind of teachers you didn't like? Why?
4. What was one thing that you learned from someone that you will never forget?
5. What brought you to be a teacher?
6. If you were not a teacher, what would you be?
7. Do you enjoy learning?
8. Did you learn something from someone lately? When? What? How?
9. Do you like teaching?
10. What role do you want to take in a class? Why?
11. Who is your "best" student? Why do you think that person is the best?
12. Who is your "worst" type of student? Why do you think that type is the worst?
13. When is your happiest moment with your students?
14. What is one thing you hate to do/say as a teacher? Why?
15. What do you enjoy most as a teacher?
16. Please describe a "good teacher" in your words.
17. What are your strengths?
18. What are your weakness?
19. What is most challenging for you as a teacher?
20. What was your greatest achievement as a teacher?
21. What was your greatest mistake as a teacher?
22. Have you ever lost your confidence as a teacher? What did you do to get it back?
23. What kind of knowledge you have are useful when you teach?
24. What kind of experience you have are useful when you teach?
25. Is there any skill/knowledge/competence you want to develop to be a better teacher?
26. List three things that are essential to your life.
27. What is your deepest inspiration as a person?
28. What kind of person you would like to be in 5 years?
29. What do you think your students may remember about you/your class in 10 years?
30. Is there anything you've realized about yourself after answering this questionnaire?

APPENDIX 2: Reflection Form for Teachers - My behavior in the classroom

1. What happened?

   _____
   _____
   _____

2. Who were involved? _____
   _____
   _____

3. How did I feel about it? ☐ Mad ☐ Sad ☐ Frustrated ☐ Upset ☐ Scared
   ☐ Confused ☐ Lonely ☐ Guilty ☐ Other _____

4. What was my reaction? _____
   _____
   _____

5. Ideally, how would I like to react? _____
   _____
   _____

6. (If my answers for 4 and 5 were different,)What are keeping me from taking ideal action?
   ☐ lack of competence (What kind? _____)
   ☐ lack of preparation time (Notes _____)
   ☐ lack of communication (with whom? _____)
   ☐ group dynamics in the classroom (Is there anything I can do? _____
   _____)
   ☐ relationships with students (Notes _____)
   ☐ Others _____
   _____

   ☐ I'm not sure. I want to talk with others and ask opinions.

7. Is there anything I've realized about myself or the situation after the reflection?

APPENDIX 3: Reflection Form for Teachers - My struggles as a teacher

1. What am I struggling with?

    _____
    _____
    _____

2. Who are involved? _____
    _____

3. How do I feel about it? ☐ Mad ☐ Sad ☐ Frustrated ☐ Upset ☐ Scared
    ☐ Confused ☐ Lonely ☐ Guilty ☐ Other _____

4. What have I done about it? Was it effective? _____
    _____
    _____

5. Who have I talked about it? Was it helpful? _____
    _____

6. Which area(s) do I think is related to my struggle?
    ☐ environment (workplace/classroom/texts and materials/others _____)
    ☐ behavior (of myself/ students/others _____)
    ☐ competencies (what kind? _____)
    ☐ beliefs about (teaching/ teacher's role / myself / others _____)
    ☐ identity as a (teacher/ person/ others _____)
    ☐ mission or goal as a (teacher/ person/ others _____)

7. How do I think my answer for Question 6 is related to my struggle?

    _____
    _____

8. Is there anything I've realized about myself or the situation after the reflection?

    _____