

# A Cross Cultural Analysis of Motivational Factors That Influence Teacher Identity

**Maria Cardelle-Elawar<sup>1</sup>, Leslie Irwin<sup>1</sup>,  
María Luisa Sanz de Acedo Lizarraga<sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup>College of Teacher Education and Leadership,  
Arizona State University, Glendale (USA)

<sup>2</sup>Department of Psychology and Pedagogy,  
Public University of Navarra, Pamplona (Spain)

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**USA / Spain**

[mcardelle@asu.edu](mailto:mcardelle@asu.edu)

*Maria Cardelle-Elawar*. 4701 West Thunderbird Road, College of Teacher Education and Leadership-Graduate Studies. Glendale, AZ 85306, USA. E-mail: [mcardelle@asu.edu](mailto:mcardelle@asu.edu)

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## Abstract

This qualitative study describes the outcomes of teachers from three different countries (Ghana, Spain, and USA) enrolled in a graduate educational psychology class taught by the authors. A theory-into-practice teaching approach was used to encourage in-service teachers to conduct a research process guided by the instructors. Participants engaged in a metacognitive, self-regulated, narrative-inquiry process that allowed them to situate themselves within educational, historical, and political contexts. The participants followed an interview protocol in pairs where they asked each other a series of questions related to their experience in becoming teachers and what keeps them teaching. Meaningful descriptive narratives summarizing the interview results were analyzed for generative themes. Implications for teaching and research with references to metacognitive self-regulatory practices are discussed.

**Keywords:** *Cross cultural analysis, Motivation, Teacher Identity*

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*The rewards of teaching come from teachers' innate belief that every day they have the opportunity to enrich the lives of their students by igniting the human spirit, dignifying the human experience, and inspiring human excellence.*

*John Blaydes*

## Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to help teachers and teacher educators better understand the core elements of the teacher-self by stimulating their metacognitive processes on their motivation to choose teaching as well as their motivation to stay in the profession. Today teachers must meet the conflicting challenges of being responsive to an increasingly diverse population of students. At the same time, they must meet the expectations for successful implementation of school reforms dictated by the state, such as the “high-stakes testing.” This is the process of attaching consequences to student standardized test performance (Berliner, 2004; Sloan, 2004). We believe this study is timely to answer the questions so often asked by our graduate students: “How does one keep motivated in dealing with the complexity of classroom change? How does one build public and student confidence with these constraints?” The answers to these questions may be embedded in the work of several researchers who studied the motivational factors that guide teachers to learn about themselves and direct them to re-examine the goals that are shaping their identity as teachers.

### *How Is Teacher Identity Defined?*

The study of teacher identity is relatively new to educational research, with most of the qualitative investigations occurring within the past decade. The motivation to explore the “teacher-self” emerged from the need to gain understanding of the extent to which teachers are committed to reconstruct their existing identities as they face the challenges of changes in school reform. Teaching commitment appears to be an important research variable of graduates’ entrance into the teaching profession. It is defined from a cognitive-emotional perspective as a teacher education graduates’ degree of psychological attachment to the teaching profession (Coladarci, 1992; Rots, et al, 2007).

The review of the literature shows that learning about teacher “identity” is to learn about the factors that are influencing teachers’ sense of purpose, self-efficacy, motivation, commitment, job satisfaction, and effectiveness in the classroom. These factors are predictors on their motivation and commitment to change (Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons, 2006; Day, 2002; Drake, Spillane, & Huffered-Ackels, 2001; Nevin & Cardelle-Elawar, 2003; van Veen, Slegers, & van de Ven, 2005). This line of research is multifaceted. These facets are embedded and explored from several theoretical frameworks and interpreted within changing

contexts (Graue, 2005). All of these theoretical perspectives (social-cultural or cognitive-affective) contributed to developing construction of teacher identity, which reflects the processes and ways teachers enter the profession with cultural scripts, self-efficacy beliefs, emotions, and personal histories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1997; Chong, 2007; Lindsey, 2004). These authors recognized the value of the use of a narrative-biography as a methodological approach for data collection. This framework evolves from an inquiry process that is based on the assumption that teachers are storytellers who come to know themselves in relation to others through shared stories. Teacher histories reflect their goals for teaching, their concerns, and their perspectives on the contexts in which they developed their ideas for teaching. Thus, it is through these teachers' histories that we understand the core of their identity (Agee, 2000; Loughran & Berry, 2005; Sloan, 2006; Tatusco, 2005; Twiselton, 2004).

Teacher identity formation, based on the review of the literature, is still poorly defined. The studies focused primarily on the professional aspect. Researchers examined teachers' perceptions of the subject matter, pedagogy, and didactical expertise (Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2000). The results of these investigations vary in their definitions. Teacher identity is characterized by the way teachers think about themselves, the images they have of "self" (Andrew, 1997; Ottensen, 2007). It also reflects a subtle dimension of the complex and life-long process of self-discovery, a process for teachers to know themselves, their students, and the subject matter they teach. It becomes the ability of the teacher to connect with all these elements so that they are all intertwined into one another (Palmer, 1998). Other studies placed the developing of the professional-self during the transition from teacher training to beginning teaching. It is described as the provoking of the *praxis shock* between the beliefs and ideas about teaching and the school context in which they must operate. This formation of the professional-self depends on which extent the teacher's subjective educational theory meets the challenges of accommodation and conformity within the school-micro-political perspective (Findlay, 2006; Smagorinsky, 2004). It becomes the way teachers define themselves to themselves and others (Lasky, 2005). It serves as the psychological device that allows teachers to incorporate their unique selves to respond to the professional and personal demands and desires within their knowledge base and skills to teach mainly in schools with great diversity of students (Friesen, Finney, & Krentz, 1999).

*Theoretical framework for the current study*

We contextualized our study in the literature of motivational factors that influence teacher identity. Although several studies have examined teachers' motivation with regard to their work, it is missing a systematic understanding of the motivational factors that influence teachers not only to choose teaching as a profession but also to stay in teaching. We believe those examining teachers' motivational perceptions as they build their stories within the social and multicultural contexts in which they live will contribute to the advancement of the understanding of teacher identity.

*Motivation to teach* is a complex construct: it is easier to define it than to understand it. Motivation is not observed directly but rather inferred from the teachers' behavioral indexes such as verbalizations, task choices, and goal-directed activities. The literature has recognized that teacher motivation is critical to effective teaching. Goal theory and research suggest several ways how teachers can foster a productive learning orientation. For example, teachers can foster a productive learning orientation by giving students' progress feedback showing how their skills have improved (Eliot and Dweck, 2005). It is an essential factor in the construction of knowledge and the process of conceptual change, so one could expect that motivation strategies would be integral components of constructivist-informed teaching (Morgan, et al, 2007; Palmer, 2005). It is related to what energizes, directs, and sustains teachers' behavior as they move toward accomplishing their goals of student achievement (Ahl, 2006; Gage & Berliner, 1998; Berliner & Biddle, 1997; Malikow, 2007; Woolfolk, 2005). In a study conducted by Cardelle-Elawar & Sanz de Acedo Lizarraga (2000), the role of the teacher as a motivator was recognized as the one most needing improvement. It also was perceived as the highest significant predictor to persevere in the teaching profession. Teachers believed that it is motivation that influences a teacher to persist in the profession or to give up after the first, second, or fifth year. Teacher motivation is an explanatory concept that helps us understand why teachers behave as they do. It also explains why teachers with similar abilities or preparation perform differently in the classroom and make decisions during the three phases of teaching: planning, instructing, and evaluating (Maehr & Mayer, 1997; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002).

Specifically, the main purpose of the current study is to explore teachers' motivation as a combination of three interrelated concepts that are at the core of "self" of teacher identity:

metacognition, self-regulation, and self-efficacy. There is a strong research base indicating that, as teachers become more aware of their ability to teach, their self-efficacy increases. As a result, their self-competence improves by developing a metacognitive-self-regulatory approach through an inquiry process of reflective thinking on why, what, and how to teach. (Cardelle-Elawar & Sanz de Acedo, 2002; Cardelle-Elawar, 1995). These authors designed instruction to engage teachers using metacognitive-self-regulatory strategies during setting goals, selecting developmentally appropriate strategies during instruction, and assessing students' outcomes through reliable and valid sources of information. The research findings suggested the value of this approach in transforming our university teaching; in particular, in helping pre-and in-service teachers to become more thoughtful in the roles of reflective thinkers and motivators during the processes of making decisions in setting goals and in selecting strategies that predict student achievement.

Following is a description of these three interrelated concepts of motivation to teach:

1.1. *Metacognition* refers to teachers' conscious awareness of their thought processes. Although research investigating metacognition in the classroom is still fairly new, it has been viewed as an essential component of the process of teaching for learning. Metacognition is considered that part of cognition that is in charge of controlling a large number of cognitive functions, such as perception and attention (Bruning, Schraw, Norby & Ronning, 2004). Thus, it includes two related dimensions: knowledge and regulation of cognition. The literature describes three kinds of knowledge: (a) *Declarative* knowledge about the "self." Who am I as a teacher? What is my task? Which resources do I have? (b) *Procedural* knowledge about how to perform the task. How appropriate are these strategies to influence students' success? and (c) *Conditional* knowledge to ensure the completion of the task; when and why do I apply the strategies? In which context or with which students would the strategies be more relevant? (Cardelle-Elawar & Sanz de Acedo, Lizzaraga, 2006; Schunk, 2001; Woolfolk, 2005).

1.2. *Self-regulation*. Zimmerman & Kisantas (2005) define self-regulation as the process we use to activate and sustain our thoughts, behaviors, and emotions to reach our goals. It guides teachers to get control over the problems they experience before, during, and after instruction (Bandura, 2005; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2001). Self-regulated teachers are able to transform their mental ability and teaching knowledge into teaching skills in the classroom with their students. It involves clarity of purpose and the use of goal-directed actions in teach-

ers' own performance (Boekaerts, Pintrich, & Schunk, 2008; Zeidner, 2000). This self-regulatory process is mediated by a combination of the teacher's personal beliefs such as self-efficacy and the epistemological world views of the individuals who choose this profession, and also by their volition to act according to these beliefs (Cardelle-Elawar & Nevin, 2003; Corno, 2001, 1993; Nevin & Cardelle-Elawar, Beckett, Thousand, & Diaz Greenber, 2002; Milner, 2003; Cardelle-Elawar, 1996; Elliot & Dweck, 2005; Rivero, Cabanach, and Arias, 2001).

1.3. *Self-efficacy* is defined by Bandura (1997, 2001) as the evaluative judgments we make of our capability to think when we are organizing, executing, and carrying out specific courses of action that are required to produce given attainments. Bandura suggests that predictions about possible outcomes of behavior are critical sources of motivation. These predictions are affected by our sense of capability to master challenges and achieve goals. Thus, self-efficacy is a central element to the development of the "self." It refers to teachers' beliefs about their own values, competencies, and accomplishments (Rots, Aelterman, Vierick, & Vermeulen, 2007). The sources of teachers' self-efficacy come from the way they master their direct experience, their level of anxiety in facing or interpreting their tasks, their imitations of other teacher models, and the social persuasion or specific feedback from significant others. The effect of this feedback that may lead to effort will depend on the credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise of the persuader. Researchers have shown that teacher efficacy appears to be one of the few personal characteristics of teachers that is correlated with student achievement. It has been linked to a variety of teaching behaviors such as how teachers can reach even difficult students to help them learn. Self-efficacy theory predicts that teachers with a high sense of efficacy work harder and persist longer even when students are difficult to teach, in part because these teachers believe in themselves and in their students (Bandura, 2005; Gencer & Cakiroglu, 2007; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk, & Hoy, 2001). This is a significant research finding to understand how teacher self-efficacy has the potential to increase from real success with students. Any experience that helps teachers succeed in the day-to-day tasks of teaching will give them a foundation for developing a sense of efficacy in their careers. Teacher learning from models appears to be another source of self-efficacy. An example is when teachers are observing models and mentally incorporate the learning into a new behavior pattern. Bandura's social-cognitive theory considers that the input for change comes from the individual acting upon the environment. For example, through feedback on their behavior, teachers gradually form standards for judging their own actions and become more

selective in choosing models that exemplify those standards. This process contributes to the developing of the sense of self-efficacy, the confidence that teachers have what it takes to be successful in dealing with change. This view is in contrast with the behavioral approach that suggests that it is the environment that acts on the individual.

### *Research Aims*

The purpose of the study was to use dialogic retrospection as a tool to elicit in-service teachers' voices to guide them to reflect about themselves and their motivation in becoming teachers. We believe the dialogic retrospection interview process will help teachers address their own identity. Investigating the core of their own motivations to become teachers may create an awareness of the self that will assist them in understanding their own students and how their past influences the teaching and the learning process.

Two questions guided the inquiry process:

1. How did participants construct their views of themselves to become teachers and continue in the profession?
2. How did participants' constructed views reflect their motivation to overcome the challenges of the educational, social-political context where they operate?

### **Method and Research Design**

The research design follows a qualitative analysis tradition in that data collection and analysis procedures employed a narrative inquiry process. Several teacher identity studies in the field have used a similar process (Johnson, 2005). We used a dialogic retrospection-interview process as a self-reflective inquiry undertaking by participants to elicit their voices as used in the study by Nevin & Cardelle-Elawar (2003). The methodology of this study is grounded in metacognitive self-regulated theory and self-efficacy including:

1. A dialogic retrospection interview process to elicit participant's voice;
2. Guided reflections to cue questions to elicit metacognitive knowledge of their beliefs and self-regulatory processes. For example, monitoring progress in naming and overcoming difficulties or barriers to becoming teachers; and
3. Constructing written narratives that represent a phenomenological interpretation of the interviews.



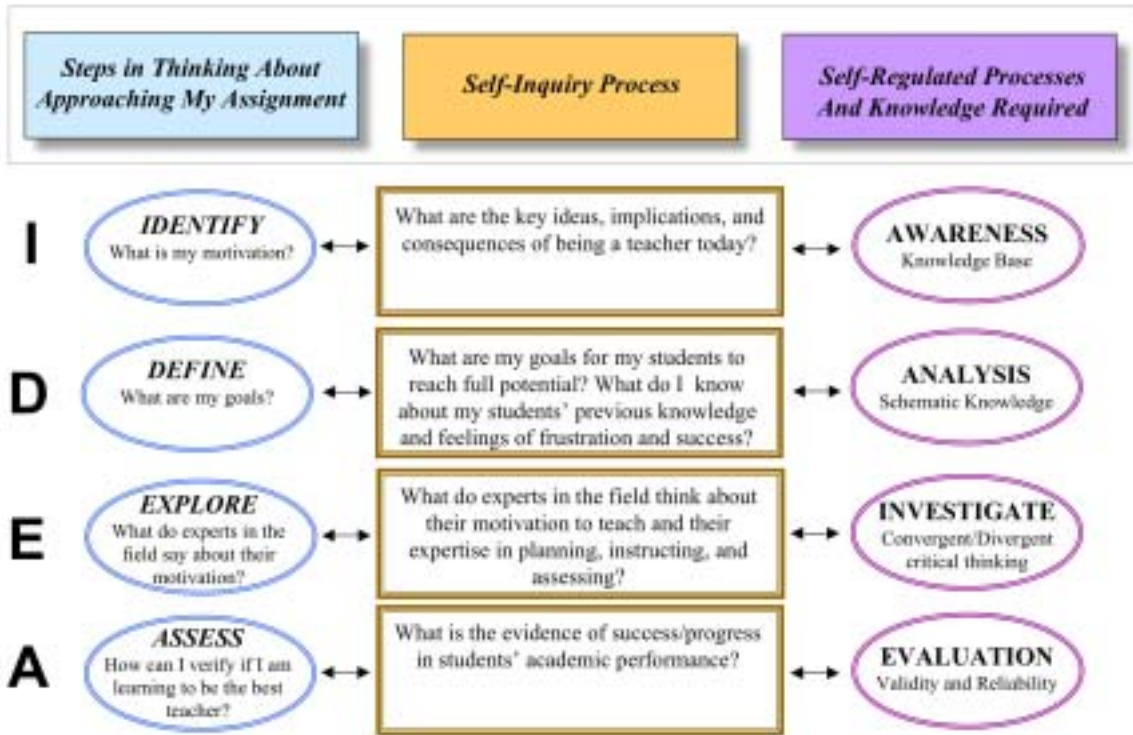
### *Participants*

Participants consisted of 487 volunteer in-service teachers from three different cultures: Africa, Europe, and the USA. Of this number, 231 (67% male and 33% female) were from Ghana, 54 (24% male and 76% female) from Spain, and 202 (30% male and 70% female) from the USA. This was a convenient sample since all participants were teachers enrolled in educational psychology classes taught by each of the authors in their respective countries.

### *Context and course content*

The educational psychology course in which participants of this study were enrolled was a required class for all education majors. The major goal of the course was to contribute to the shaping of a professional identity as teachers who must face the challenges of teaching pupils with diverse needs such as socio-economic status, gender, race, ethnicity, linguistic competence, and cognitive and developmental stages. The three professors designed instruction modeling research methods often used by educational psychologists when they are translating various motivational theories of learning and motivation (e.g., humanistic, cognitive, and social learning theories) into classroom practice. The course used a self-metacognitive-regulatory approach such as the IDEA model to facilitate teachers' self-reflection on their strengths and limitations on teaching. This model is illustrated in Table 1. In addition, the dialogic retrospection process described previously was also used. The written narratives were an ungraded assignment. However, to ensure accuracy of the interview process, participants validated their interview results during class discussions. The three professors independently read and analyzed the narratives. Using a dialogic process, the three professors agreed on the coding to be used to identify themes.

**Table 1. What Motivates Me to Be A Teacher At This Point in Time?**



*Data Collection and Analysis Procedures*

The participants were guided through the interview process in a step-by-step manner as shown in Table 2. The rule of confidentiality was invoked to ensure that participants would be more likely to share sensitive information. Each interview team was comprised of a listener who scribed the partner's responses to the interview questions. Each partner then independently wrote a one-page summary, all of which were exchanged and edited for accuracy. The instructors for theme analysis then collected written narratives.

**Table 2. Process to Elicit Your Teacher Voice: Guided Interviews with a Partner.**

Confidentiality rules: Be conscientious about maintaining the trust of your interview partner.  
 Partner A interviews, listens, and scribes B's answers.  
 Partner B interviews, listens, and scribes A's answers.  
 Each partner independently writes one page summarizing what has been scribed and comes to the next class prepared to read it to the other.  
 Changes are then made to ensure accuracy of information.  
 Each partner then chooses a pseudonym (or decides to use given name).  
 Remember the code of ethics for a researcher: DO NOT share your partner's story with anyone. It belongs to your partner. S/he decides what part(s) of the interview to include in the one-page paragraph summary.

The semi-structured interview process relied on cues or prompts to elicit the participants' voices. The authors guided participants on how to question each other using the dialogical perspective model as described in Table 3. Questions reflected key findings from the extensive literature on sources of motivation to become teachers.

**Table 3. Interview Questions.**

1. How old were you when you first knew you wanted to be a teacher? What was happening in the world, your town, your neighborhood, and your family at the time?
2. Do any teachers stand out in your memory? Why? What makes them memorable?
3. Who were your favorite teachers and why? Do you have any of their attributes? Please explain.
4. What barriers have you had to overcome to become a teacher?
5. What keeps you motivated to achieve your goal in keeping on teaching?

Questions included age at which participants first knew they wanted to be teachers, heroes or heroines, events that occurred at that time, memorable teachers, the extent to which participants had attributes similar to their memorable teachers, barriers to becoming a teacher, and identification of what motivates participants to achieve the goal of becoming a teacher. The questions were posed as examples rather than as a script, thus there was a degree of self-selection for the specific other's unique life experiences as they compared their responses with their partner's responses.

The interview guide served three purposes: first, it was an advance organizer intended to focus participants' attention during the interview. Second, the guide served as a strategy to check participants' understanding of their own and the partner. Third, it helped participants to self-regulate their own awareness processes.

The authors used an iterative, recursive, and constant-comparison process to analyze the data. The major source of data is the individual biography of each participant; a secondary source is professors' debriefing of participants' reactions in conducting the interview. The verbatim written responses to the interviews were collated and analyzed for generative themes across all participants for each of the two research questions. The resulting themes were cor-

related with findings from the literature and the extent to which the themes helped to address the two research questions.

## Results

From the constant-comparative analysis of the narratives, five themes emerged as shown in Table 4. The themes are displayed in relation to the research questions that were posed for this study. Randomly selected verbatim quotes from the narratives are reproduced in order to show the rich descriptive texts. Also included are quotations that disconfirmed the theme. The apparently conflicting views are thus a result to be expected when engaging in a dialectical process wherein two different views of the same event can be experienced.

From the answers to Question 1, three themes emerged that seemed to be related to the first research question, how did participants construct their views of themselves as teachers? These themes are explained by representative verbatim quotations from the narratives of randomly selected participants from each country.

**Table 4: Themes Emerging from the Narratives in Relation to the**

Research Questions	Themes	
1. How did the participants’ teachers construct their views of themselves to become teachers?	Theme 1a	<i>Participants clearly articulated the influence of former teachers as a source of their motivation to become teachers.</i>
	Theme 1b	<i>Commitment to pupils was frequently named as a source of motivation to become teachers.</i>
	Theme 1c	<i>Participants who were teaching reported deeper understanding (metacognition) of their motivation to become teachers.</i>
2. How did their constructed views reflect the historical, social-cultural, and educational contexts?	Theme 2a	<i>Social-cultural-political contexts were emphasized when Ghana participants first “knew” they wanted to be teachers.</i>
	Theme 2b	<i>Personal context were emphasized when The Spain and USA Participants first “new” they want to be teachers.</i>

*Theme 1a: Participants clearly articulated the influence of former teachers as a source of their motivation to become teachers.*

The following examples represent 92 percent of the excerpts from narratives that confirm this theme and include:

Ansha, a teacher from Ghana. He is the oldest of six children who decided to become a teacher when he was 21. He explained that all the people in his neighborhood were mainly farmers and that about half of the people had not entered in to school and were living in poverty. “My parents were both illiterate and poor. One day, one teacher took me to the church, where I got some financial help, and at age 12 I began school; it was hard and my parents would rather prefer I help on the farm. The first experience was negative. I was a slow learner and the teacher punished me by ordering me to be on my knees, and other times he hit me with a ruler. But my life changed when I met my sixth grade teacher who also was a leader in the church and the community, and he used to tell us ‘the only way to get out from poverty is education.’ Those words made such a difference in my life that I still use them in my class. He was my best role model to imitate. He was punctual, hardworking, God fearing, sympathetic, and generous in helping us. Like him, I keep encouraging students not to give up when they fail in class or want to drop out.” Ansha also recognized that, in addition to helping students get out from poverty, his motivation to keep on teaching is “to have a salary and a respectful status in [his] neighborhood.”

Claudia, an elementary teacher from Spain, was 19 when she thought of becoming a teacher. “I needed to get a degree and teaching was attractive for the same thing that continues motivating me in teaching, that is, my love for children. I was the oldest of four, and I always took care of my siblings. I know I am making a positive difference in the lives of the children. I know that and this is what gives me fulfillment to teach.” She remembers her eighth grade teacher influenced her decision. “I want to follow his teaching style. I enjoy the friendly camaraderie and competition he established in class to involve all of us in active learning.” The major difficulties she encountered during her last two years were to delay her marriage, “But I decided to get my [teaching] degree first.”

Liz, who is a science teacher in the USA, thought to become a teacher at age eight “when I loved to play school. It was this early experience that struck my interest in teaching.” She recognized within herself a feeling of enthusiasm and passion for kids. “I believe I wanted to be like my sixth grade teacher. She was a lady who still is full of enthusiasm about teaching. She really believed [in the] child’s capacity to learn. She believed in my ability to achieve; I always felt like I was the teacher’s pet. That made a huge difference in my life. I had another teacher who was the opposite; he said I was not college material to be a teacher. I had two teachers who were at opposing ends of the spectrum in regards to their beliefs in my mind: one teacher that has a firm belief that I can be a teacher, and the other that I should quit school because I do not have the ability to teach. Today my motivation is strong [in] believing that all kids can learn at different paces, and I make sure to find the way to help them to succeed. I learned from both teachers; the negative one taught me to never treat students the way he treated me.”

*Two of the few excerpts from narratives that disconfirm this theme include:*

Bob, a teacher from Ghana, thought he would be a teacher when he was 20 years old. “I needed a job to support my family because my father died, and I needed to help my mother take care of my siblings. We were so poor. There was a water shortage in my neighborhood and we had to travel very far to fetch water. I do not remember any teacher that helped me. There is, however, a teacher who stands out in my memory when I teach because I do not want to be like her: she was very lazy. She was always in her seat until she went home. She did not actually like the job. I do not have any of her attributes.

George, a teacher from the USA, wanted to become a lawyer in his 20s. “I was engaged. but later I called off the wedding. I finished my pre-law degree, and I got a job working in a restaurant and quickly I moved up, making a good living. Unfortunately becoming a lawyer slipped away after 10 years with long hours and few days off. I started dreaming of being a teacher to have fewer hours at work and longer vacation time. There are no memorable teachers who really stood out.” The largest barrier he still didn’t overcome was sacrificing an already established career in which he made a good living to take a cut in pay when starting his new career as a teacher. “Adjusting to no bonus checks and trying to live within the new salary is still challenging.”

*Theme 1b: Commitment to students was frequently named as a source of motivation to become a teacher.*

The following examples represent 89% percent of the excerpts from narratives that confirm this theme and include:

Dako from Ghana wrote, “I am humble when I face my students. I take time to know them, and often I visit their parents to learn about their family learning environment. This [learning] helps me to know how much I have to help when students fail to achieve.”

Mary from Spain wrote, “I am very dedicated to my students. I meet individually with those who fail tests. When the failing is due to lack of previous knowledge, I provide them with individual instruction or create groups for studying. Students know they can count on me.”

Melody from the USA wrote, “As a seventh grade reading and language teacher, I care not only for the ‘popular’ kids in class because they were like me. As I am gaining confidence in my teaching, my primary focus is in helping those quiet kids who did not fit and they are left out and not socialized. I make sure every week that nobody is left out in my class and they experience interest in reading by changing assignments.”

*Theme 1c: Participants who were teaching reported deeper understanding (metacognition) of their motivation to become teachers.*

The following examples represent 93% percent of the excerpts from narratives that confirm this theme and include:

Tsikata from Ghana wrote that what keeps him motivated is “when students respond to my reinforcement and feedback by improving their performance, and I see them also motivated to keep on learning.”

Tere from Spain emphasized that, “I am convinced that my motivation as a teacher is reflected in my students’ motivation. For example, when I involve students in active learning, independent of their ability level, students are learning. And I feel that my confidence and motivation to teach are increasing.”

Tom from the USA wrote, “At this point in time, what motivates me is that because of who I am my students are motivated to achieve, and they realize they have a voice in my class.”

## **Research Question 2**

How did participants’ constructed views reflect historical, social-cultural, and educational, and personal contexts? One theme emerged that seemed to be related to the second research question.

*Theme #2a. The emphasis on historical, social-cultural, and educational contexts were emphasized by Ghana group.*

To illustrate, representative verbatim quotes from participants are described below to allow the voices of teachers to be heard. Excerpts from narratives that confirm this theme include:

Rubatu. From the beginning, “I was self-conscious about the need to be a teacher. In those days, 12 years ago, there was an exodus of teachers to neighboring countries for greener pastures. Classrooms became empty and teaching was left at the mercy of untrained personnel with few professional teachers, mostly heads. This period coincided with a long drought, which brought a severe famine, and life became unbearable for everybody in the country. In addition, teenage pregnancy was at its highest peak. Very few people in my town had access to education. The elders had adverse mind about girl child education, so only men were allowed to be educated.” Within this discouraged environment, she managed to become a teacher. First, helping in schools without training, “then I went to get my certification. It was not smooth sailing. My parents were not engaged in any gainful employment apart from subsistence farming. When I was in schooling, I had to engage in farming to subsidize what I would get from my parents. I never could get a sponsorship to go to school without work.”



Akuvi wrote, “I overcame many difficulties to become a teacher. My parents are illiterate; they do not value education for girls because they believe that, at the end of schooling, the girls end up in the kitchen. So my father refused to pay my fees. My former teachers helped me to get a job to pay my school fees.”

Kyei emphasized political events: “When I decided to become a teacher, there was political instability and unrest in the country. There was nobody to figure out and lead the community. The social life was an absolute mess. I got some help from the church to pursue my career as a teacher.”

*From Spain and the USA personal contexts were more emphasized.*

Andrea from Spain was planning a career in medicine because she liked biology, but after the first year, she changed her mind to become a high school teacher in biology. “Medicine will take too long, and I want to get a job before I get married and have kids. Also, teaching has three months’ vacation a year.”

John from Spain: “I needed to get a college degree. It was my family’s expectation. I always was successful in mathematics, and I felt I had the opportunity to get a degree in something that I would like to teach. Teaching is well paid and has long vacation time.”

*From the USA there were more variations within the personal contexts.*

Ramsey from the USA decided to become a teacher to help people with disabilities in some capacity. “In my family, I had a sister who was born with Down Syndrome and passed away very young. Then my parents adopted my brother who was blind. When I enjoyed volunteering in community service projects helping the disabled, I developed a great empathy and understanding of people with disabilities. Teaching was a way of continuing to work with people with disabilities.”

Monique from the USA wrote, “When I was 34, after my kids where in school, I decided to go to college to become a teacher; however, after my first semester, I thought

a degree in business would be more attractive. I wanted to work in international business.” She found out later that this was not the right path for her because “business classes were not interesting.” During that time she was going through an emotional divorce. Finally, she went back to college and became a teacher. “I feel that being a teacher makes me a better mother, and I can help non-performing kids who come from broken homes.”

Peter, from USA, He was 33, when he was working as an insurance-claims adjuster and we were doing a mentor reading program with a low SES middle school in Long Beach, California. I went one day every two weeks and love it...I knew them that I'd rather be with the kids than in business. The students inspired me I wanted to be in a career that mattered.

## **Discussion**

What is important about this cross-cultural analysis approach to study motivation to become teachers? Teachers from three different cultures used a dialogic retrospection process to identify and define their motivations to be teachers. The results of this mutual questioning process were that participants acquired a metacognitive self-regulatory approach that involved them in a dynamic identity process formation emphasizing motivational character. Motivation connected teachers' thoughts, judgments, and beliefs as a “glue” identity that provided meaning to their experiences. It opened up an opportunity for self-discovering and self-transformation as participants learned about themselves and their peers. This self-evaluation of teachers' beliefs and ability to identify cues in the teaching environment are recognized as essential in the literature to help teachers become self-regulated learners in their classroom activities and in their adjustment to change (Boerkaerts & Cascallar, 2006; Cascallar, Boerkaerts, & Costigan, 2006).

Furthermore, the outcomes of this study not only confirm the earlier findings of Nevin and Cardelle-Elawar (2003) but also cross-validate the common characteristics that become the core of the teaching profession independent of the cultural origin. There were no apparent differences between narratives from males and females with respect to commitment to students as a source of motivation. Similarly, participants independent of the culture became aware of what motivates them to become teachers by knowing who they were, are, and can

become. Through reflective thinking teachers free themselves to reflect on their motivation within personal, educational, and socio-political contexts. As Zembylas (2003) suggested, developing teacher awareness of their own way of knowing can illuminate the process of becoming teachers by encouraging them to move away from being normalized. Instead they should be empowered to be actively involved in reflecting on different ways of knowing. "Teaching may become a main source of teachers' self-esteem and fulfillment as well as of their vulnerability" (p. 230).

The three groups of teachers constructed their views of how they decided to become teachers in similar ways. They could describe the age at which they decided to become teachers. They were able to articulate people and events that influenced their decisions. They were able to reflect on their own life experiences and to communicate them to other people. Participants from the three cultures referred to mean-spirited teachers, but those in Ghana added explicit descriptions of corporal punishment. The Ghana participants also expressed that the punishment discouraged them to go back to school. In contrast, USA and Spain schools are governed by rules and regulations that limit teachers' and administrators' use of corporal or unreasonable punishments. All participants had something positive to say of their previous teachers and about their styles and commitment to prepare them as teachers. USA participants wrote about the work-worlds that they had experienced and the influence these work experiences had on their decisions to become teachers, whereas Ghana and Spain participants had started their education degrees upon completion of secondary school. Some Spanish participants spoke of unfulfilled desires for other careers due to family pressures. Ghana participants spoke of their motivation in choosing a teaching career as a fulfillment to help society and for economical survival. USA students appeared to have more personal control of career choice and many seemed to choose teaching after experiencing other careers.

The cross-cultural comparison illustrated differences in motivations to teach from personal, historical, political, and economic points of view. The Ghana group emphasized that teaching was primarily one way to achieve social and economic status. The group from Spain explained their motivation was to get a college degree and work that provided longer vacation time than other jobs. The USA group showed more variety of reasons. For some it became a second or alternative career; others indicated they decided on becoming teachers after their children grew up. This decision contrasted with the Spain group in that they wanted to get the

degree before getting married. Love for children made a positive difference in their lives and became a common thread across the three cultures.

There appeared to be a difference in the barriers to becoming a teacher among the Ghana, Spain, and USA participants. The majority of Ghana participants, because of their financial hardship, received some kind of financial support from previous teachers or from the church. The majority were first-generation college students. Spain participants did not mention financial problems, with the exception of three cases who needed to move because there was no university in their city. USA participants mentioned divorce, family, children, and financial difficulties as barriers. Many took part-time jobs, grants from the government, or received scholarships. Thirty-three percent considered themselves to be first-generation college graduates.

It is also worth mentioning among the similarities of participants from the three cultures in regard to their goals, not only in becoming teachers, but also on their motivation to continue teaching. Participants emphasized that their passion for teaching was to make a positive difference in the lives of their students. The group from Ghana emphasized also the desire to improve the community through education. Stephen from the USA wrote, "Teaching is never a routine. The reward of seeing kids learn outweighs the difficulties of poor payment." Luis from Spain wrote, "I always enter class thinking I am going to help everyone."

Although the results of this study may be limited to three convenient samples, there were some indications from the literature that the results observed for these participants are significant to deepen our understanding of "knowing in practice," the role that motivation played in shaping teacher identity. For example, Kelly's (2006) analysis of teacher identity from a socio-cultural perspective showed that teachers' identities are negotiable among various factors and influences; most notably how teachers construct their self-knowledge, how they see their role as teachers, and how they self-regulate external factors during the process of teaching. "Facets of such constructions include how teachers interpret their role, the meanings and understandings which they bring to their role, their beliefs and intentions, and so on" (p. 513). Nichols, Glass, and Berliner (2005) argue about the negative effects of the high-stakes testing on teachers' motivation to adjust to changes because of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policy. These authors asserted that motivation based on extrinsic rewards alone cannot overcome the range of background experiences and individual differences in learning

students bring to the classroom. McDonough (2006) and Lunenberg, et al (2007) found that a systematic reflective approach is required for teachers' professional development to enhance their effectiveness as role models in their instructional practices. In addition, Kwame, et al (2006) suggested that these teachers' self-reflections within a dialogue and active engagement are essential for professional development in countries where teachers were poorly trained.

The majority of participants showed that they possessed intentional goal orientation, the belief they can teach by the way they oriented themselves to become teachers and the barriers that they have had to overcome to succeed in their chosen career and to keep on teaching. Research findings suggested that goal orientation is a strong predictor of teacher's engagement and successful performance in the classroom (Bembeanutty, 2007; Boekaert & Cascallar, 2006; Boekaerts, Koning, & Vedder, 2006).

The data from the teachers' dialogic retrospection also reflects the characteristics shared by models of self-regulation as discussed by Pintrich (2004):

(a) *active, constructive assumption*: participants were active in the learning process as they constructed their own meanings, goals, and strategies from the information available to them (external environment) as well as from their cognitive-mind (internal environment);

(b) *potential for control*: this perspective assumes that participants were able to monitor, control, and regulate barriers they encounter during the process of becoming teachers;

(c) *goal, criterion, or standard assumption*: participants were goal oriented; they set goals and strove for their completion by monitoring their progress and adjusting their goals in different contexts. For example, Dzidy from Ghana said, "I encourage students' effort in their learning as I always put extra effort in helping those who give up easily. Becky from Spain indicated that "I stop and think about why my teaching method does not appear to be relevant and fun for those students who lack previous learning experiences, and [I] change it by accommodating to [their] learning needs." Thomas wrote, "My commitment is expressed by my effort and flexibility to rehearse, paraphrase, and try something different, or by breaking down the task into small steps."

### *Implications for Research and Teacher Educators*

Many implications can be gleaned from this cross-cultural analysis on teacher identity from a motivational perspective.

First, teacher identity has been shown to be a developmental phenomenon. This means that it changes over the teacher's lifetime and that it is a process that involves continuous development of interrelated motivational constructs such as metacognition, self-regulation, and self-efficacy.

Second, teacher identities can be seen as an ecological development that emerges as the teacher interacts with the environment (e.g., social, educational, cultural, political) and as the environment affects to reshape the teacher identity. Thus, teacher identity is not a fixed trait, but instead is fluid (i.e., it is situational and changes according to the contexts where the teachers are operating).

Third, the comparison of the outcomes of the theme analysis indicated the important role of teacher educators to elicit the voices of in-service teachers. Eliciting teachers' voices is a form of social construction of their knowledge and reflection upon their motivation to teach. Metacognitive reflective thinking and self-regulation are essential skills to develop teachers' perceptions of their competence.

Fourth, to create deep understanding of knowledge, it is necessary for teachers to reflect on their own experiences and on their motivation to adjust frequently to school demands. Thus, this was a useful task for teachers to become metacognitive thinkers. They learned the importance of listening to one another's thoughts, and it assisted them in solidifying their self-efficacy on their commitment to be effective teachers. Comments from participants illustrated that this dialogic retrospection has assisted them in becoming more committed, reflective teachers.

Fifth, this methodological dialogic retrospection approach appears to be an effective activity or assignment to be used by teacher educators. The biographical reflections have the advantage to broaden teachers' context of the meaning of their motivation to choose or persevere in the teaching profession. For example, when professors or teachers use instructional

processes that elicit voices of their students, they can take action on the voices. A foundation is established for teachers to see how knowledge is constructed within the individual, and both professors and students learn of how uniquely each teacher filters information and interprets the results. By engaging in an interactive action process, the teachers in this study learned to monitor and personalize their own interactions. Moreover, the dialogical process of this study exemplifies an interpretive introspective method that shows teachers what it might mean to learn from their experiences as well as how to learn about themselves by learning from others. By inference, these teachers might become better prepared to interact with their students from different cultural backgrounds and within different stages of development.

Finally, drawing on the results of this cross-culture study, teacher identities are powerful means through which to understand the role that motivation played in choosing teaching and their accountability to staying in the profession.

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