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To cite this article: Emma Arneback, Tomas Englund & Tone Dyrdal Solbrekke (2017): Achieving a professional identity through writing, Education Inquiry

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/20004508.2017.1380489>



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Published online: 29 Nov 2017.



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Achieving a professional identity through writing

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ABSTRACT

In what way might writing of different kinds contribute to the development of a professional identity? By analytically distinguishing three discourses of communication, everyday, professional and academic, applied to three preschool student teachers' conceptions of writing during their education and in their initial phase at work as preschool teachers, we attempt to understand the role of writing in their development of professional identities. What we have found is that the professional discourse which all three have achieved is something each of them creates and develops in very different forms. Their independent final projects show that all three have a mastery of academic discourse, but only in exceptional cases do they make use of that discourse in contexts other than this specific piece of work and to some extent earlier papers written as part of their teacher education. However, judging from our interviews and their responses to our questions, it seems as if they have acquired modes of expression quite close to an academic discourse, but have primarily developed and use different variants of a professional discourse. This professional discourse also seems to be an important element in their development of a professional identity.

KEYWORDS

preschool teacher education; professional identity; discourses of communication; academic writing; longitudinal study

Introduction

In what way might writing of different kinds contribute to the development of a professional identity? By distinguishing three discourses of communication, everyday, professional and academic, applied to three preschool student teachers' writing and their conceptions of writing during their education and in their initial phase at work as preschool teachers, we attempt to understand the role of writing in their development of professional identities. The aim of this article is thus to show how teacher education as an institutional force creates ways for three preschool student teachers to develop different variants of a professional discourse, a discourse that is also the main element in the development of their respective professional identities. This means that the formation of a public professional identity is understood as an interactive, discursive process in which written and spoken language is central.

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Context

In Sweden, education for those aiming to work in early childhood education and care (ECEC) has been part of the higher education system since 1977. In 1993, it was integrated into the broader system of teacher education, implying closer links between the different parts of teacher education and a mix of student teachers in the general elements of teacher education programmes (Tellgren 2008). With the reform of teacher education in 2011, there was once again a separation of the different teacher programmes (Prop 2009/10:89). However, some parts of the ECEC programme provided at Örebro University – such as common lectures and guidance on how to write academic texts – have continued to be integrated with teacher education in general. This means that ECEC students are enrolled in a university context with quite a strong academic tradition. In a recent evaluation, teacher education at Örebro University was characterised as deeply rooted theoretically in a sociocultural perspective and in pragmatism, which implies an emphasis on democracy and communication (Hansén & Wikman 2017). Many of the teacher educators have a doctoral qualification, and the education itself attracts a large number of applicants. Once student teachers have entered ECEC, which is a 3½-year programme, they progressively come into contact with the different disciplines of educational science, natural science and aesthetic studies. However, educational science is the basic and dominant discipline, with responsibility for the students' independent final projects.

Earlier studies and theoretical implications for this article

This article has been developed from three papers which form a longitudinal examination of three preschool student teachers' writing.¹ In our first paper, with inspiration from Blåsjö 2004, we analysed different genre struggles across different disciplines among preschool student teachers and student teachers from the social sciences, in the light of general academic and discipline-based rules for writing. In the second paper we concentrated on analysing a group of preschool student teachers' struggles with writing in and out of control, exploring different forms of control and lack of control over their struggles with writing. Gradually we focused our analysis on the development of three student teachers, who represented groups of students with different backgrounds, approaches and ways of dealing with academic writing. By combining a *before*, *during* and *after* perspective, we related their struggle with the texts they encountered in higher education to the questions of present and future life processes (cf. Ivanic 1998, 2004; Lillis 2001). A core research interest in all three papers, and in the present article, is to capture the student teachers' individual struggles with academic writing and what this writing means to them (Lea & Street 1998, Lillis 2001, Macken-Horarik et al. 2006). The data stems from interviews with the students, in focus groups and individually, analyses of their independent final projects and other text samples, observations of group work and examination seminars, and the students' written self-presentations during teacher education and as professional preschool teachers at work. An underlying concern is to problematise the frequent everyday conception of student teachers as lacking the competence for academic writing (Ask 2005, Bertilsson 2014, Gallavan, Bowles & Young 2007, Street & Stang 2012). The results from the first two papers show

that the preschool student teachers experience different difficulties with academic writing. We also saw how the same norms and rules of academic writing were helpful to some students but posed obstacles to others, as a result of earlier and current experiences within and outside their preschool teacher education.

On writing in preschool teacher education

The present article has mainly been developed out of the third paper and attempts a thorough analysis of the role of academic writing and other kinds of communication and writing undertaken by the three preschool student teachers within their education and in their professional practice, with special reference to the development of their professional identity. As noted, the article starts off with and makes use of some of the results of the two earlier papers to help us pursue the analysis further and incorporate the transition from education to the three student teachers' working life. We relate the three students' experiences of writing in pre-service education to their experiences of writing after five months working as preschool teachers. This approach allows us to consider and compare how they talk, reflect and write – by analysing the papers written during their education and especially their independent final projects – and how they view academic and other kinds of writing they worked with during their education and their experiences from their initial phase at work as preschool teachers. As part of our approach, we offered our three informants opportunities to reflect on how the academic writing undertaken during their education relates to their work as professional preschool teachers.

We used four research questions, to which responses were sought from the preschool student teachers:

- (1) How do they view their own development as writers?
- (2) How do they evaluate the academic writing they have experienced in teacher education and how do they use writing as professionals?
- (3) How has their writing developed in their written coursework and their final project?
- (4) How do the three preschool teachers view and reflect on writing (academic and of other kinds) in relation to the development of their professional identity?

A theoretical framework

In seeking to answer these four questions, we have been inspired by and will make use of an idea of three different discourses of communication developed first by Northedge (2003a, 2003b) and later by Macken-Horarik et al. (2006). We will apply it as a general approach, in line with our aim of understanding the concept of professional identity. The idea developed by Macken-Horarik from Northedge was to note that “everyday” and “workplace” discourses have different logics and goals from those of academia. With Northedge,

Everyday discourse, whether at the public level in the mass media, or locally at home and community, functions “tribally, keeping us in our places, carrying on our daily lives alongside each other. It works less by analytical reasoning than by constructing group loyalties, presuming common perceptions, invoking folk wisdom, naming enemies and

anathematizing alternative viewpoints. By contrast, *discourse within care workplaces* tends to function in a more constrained way, to keep institutions and systems going; enabling the delivery of services, whilst protecting against internal disruption and external threat. Meanwhile, *academic discourse* aspires to esoteric goals of theory building and research. It claims to separate a speaker's arguments from social position, personal loyalties, institutional goals and immediate crises. Ideas are said to be judged independently of speaker and context" (Northedge 2003a, 23–24, cited here from Macken-Horarik et al. 2006, who also added the italics in the quotation).

On that basis, Macken-Horarik and colleagues state that "just like health care professionals, pre-service teachers have to operate within and across different discourse domains in education" (Macken-Horarik et al. 2006, 244). Other contributions from these authors that we would mention are their emphasis on how "teachers' discourses about literacy tend to be practical rather than polemical", and their observation that academic literacy is "specialized, related to research and accessed primarily through written texts based on theoretical argument" (244).

We believe that the three different discourses distinguished by Northedge and Macken-Horarik can be concretised and applied to teacher education to allow an analysis of the identity development of our three preschool teachers. In doing so, it has to be stressed that we regard the three discourses as different discourses of communication, relying to varying degrees on verballity or writing, where the existence of different forms of writing is the crucial distinction between professional and academic discourse.

In our own account of the three discourses, we believe that *everyday discourse* can be found and exists in many different shapes and contexts, such as at home, together with peers, and in other clearly defined spaces. This discourse can thus assume different forms, but it relies on a mutual pre-understanding built on communication over a long period of time. Everyday discourse is primarily oral, often without elements of writing and text, and is communicated without any more or less evident testing or analysis of the claims made.

Professional discourse also rests primarily on mutual verbal understanding and interaction. But this discourse has its specific characteristics, namely that it is built on and related to a task-oriented, mostly writing-based formula and the central concepts related to more or less predetermined activities. Professional discourse thus includes strategic elements of written components referring to concepts, with the consequence that it is much more analytical than everyday discourse.

Finally, *academic discourse* involves a substantial element of writing, is strongly analytical with a reciprocal influence between verballity and writing, and is very different from everyday discourse. Academic discourse is constituted by certain concepts and perspectives that hold the discourse together, while at the same time leaving room for different individual interpretations, possibly leading to more highly elaborated, argumentative communication. This discourse shows certain similarities to professional discourse, although academic discourse is vertically more developed and professional discourse primarily horizontal (cf. Bernstein 1999).

In a wider perspective, our use of the concepts of professional, professionalism and professionalisation requires comment. Understanding professionalisation as a sociological concept relating to the authority and status of being professional, and

professionalism as concerned with the internal quality of being professional, provides us with a background to defining a professional identity (Englund 1996) as linked to both of these concepts. This distinction between the two forms of being professional opens the way for an analytical approach to understanding what forms an emerging professional identity.

Concerning the concept of *professional identity*, we have drawn inspiration from Coldron and Smith (1999), who state that teachers are engaged in creating themselves as teachers, with a teacher identity often before, but certainly during, their teacher education and careers as teachers. “Being a teacher is a matter of being seen as a teacher by himself or herself and by others; it is a matter of acquiring and then redefining an identity that is socially legitimated” (Coldron & Smith 1999, p. 712). They also underline that professional identity should not be interpreted as fixed, but rather as complex, multidimensional and dynamic, developing “over time as the result of interactions between the person and an environment” (p. 712 with reference to Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe 1994, p. 47). Coldron and Smith stress that identity as a teacher “is a matter of where, within the professionally pertinent array of possibilities, a particular person is located. Teachers need, however, to distinguish between the location they are given and that which they achieve” (p. 714). They go on to introduce “four wider social traditions: the *craft*, the *moral*, the *artistic*, and the *scientific*” (p. 715), which provide models for responding to issues and questions from practice. These four traditions have been used in our analysis of how our three preschool student teachers become professionals as they develop their professional identities.

Methodology

Our empirical data was collected over a 3½-year period and consists of material from interviews (INT), written responses (WR), written papers (WP) and the students’ independent final projects (IFP) (See Table 1). The data was analysed in relation to the four research questions mentioned and the communication discourses described above.

The first and second research questions, about how the students view their own development as writers and their evaluation of their experiences of academic writing during their education and as professionals, were explored by means of interviews of different kinds, focus-group and individual (INT). To answer the fourth research question, the interviews were supplemented with written responses (WR) to a questionnaire that we sent to the students after they had worked as preschool teachers for around six months. These responses were also followed up with individual face-to-face interviews (INT) with each of the three preschool teachers.

Table 1. Empirical data from Helen, Sara and Eva.

Sources	Numbers
Group interviews (participants)	3
Individual interviews (3 x 5)	15
Papers (WP, except IFP) (3 x 3)	9
Independent final projects (IFP)	3
Questionnaire/written responses (WR)	3
Follow-up interviews	3

Through our analyses of the written responses and interviews, we gained an insight into to what extent the informants have reflected on, and how they view, what they learned about academic writing in teacher education, and whether, and if so how, academic writing has been helpful in their work as professionals. In addition, we learned more about what they see as being most worthwhile and important for their initiation into a profession and a growing sense of professional identity.

In parallel with these investigations and findings, the third research question, concerning the development of their writing over the course of their education, was analysed and related to the student teachers' conceptions of writing. The papers analysed were a selection of those written by the three student teachers during their education (WP) and, in particular, their independent final project (IFP).

As researchers, we represent two "insiders" (researchers working at the Swedish university at which the teacher education is based) and one "outsider" from a Norwegian university. The questionnaires and interview guides were prepared collaboratively, but the collection of data from all the interviews and the categorisation and initial interpretation of the data were performed by one of the insiders, and the text analyses of the IFPs, WPs and WRs by the second insider, before all three undertook a collaborative and critical analysis of the data.

While we already have quite a clear picture of the different trajectories of the three informants, we also see them as representatives of many other students. Through our analysis of the material mentioned above, we hope to be able to perform more in-depth analyses of the different meanings and implications of writing for preschool teachers undergoing education and in their professional work. We are conscious of the limits of our investigation, in that one could have wished both for more students and for a longer period for the longitudinal study, concentrating more on how preschool teachers grow into their professional practice. In light of their study of 10 newly qualified teachers from 2000, Grossman and colleagues write: "The results of this study suggest the danger of making claims about what teachers do and do not learn during teacher education based only on data from their 1st year of teaching" (Grossman et al. 2000, 631). On the other hand, that study began following the 10 new teachers in their last year of teacher education and thus missed their development over the whole period of that education, which in our case is 3½ years. This is a period we have found very important to analyse, together with the teachers' first 5 months at work, because the student teachers clearly develop in those years of teacher education, as we showed in the first two papers (for a detailed account, see papers 1 and 2). Against that background, our longitudinal study will enable us to relate their experiences as student teachers to their experiences as preschool teachers and, as mentioned, their path to developing a professional identity, a concept we will return to in due course.

In the earlier papers we analysed how the three student teachers (Helen, Sara and Eva) struggled with academic writing during their studies (Arneback et al. 2014b/2016). Here we will supplement the earlier analyses and concentrate on the students' reflections on their education and their experiences at work as preschool teachers and emerging professionals, developing a professional identity. We will also, as noted, analyse a selection of the papers they wrote during their teacher education and their independent final projects.

The three preschool teachers' path to a professional discourse and a professional identity

Helen – a creative writer finding meaning

For Helen, who we characterised in the second paper (Arneback et al. 2014b/2016) as “a creative writer searching for meaning”, her future identity as a preschool teacher always provided significant and motivating guidance for her way of reading and writing during her teacher education. She decided quite early on to become a preschool teacher. To a greater extent than the other two, Sara and Eva, Helen connected her writing in teacher education to her future work as a preschool teacher (WP), and this connection is confirmed in her answers to the questionnaire and in the interviews, where she stresses how, in her view, her education has strengthened her capacity to reflect

on why I do things a certain way and what consequences this might have. I now have theories to fall back on and I feel more secure in my role as a professional (WR).

At work she has also developed her earlier ideas on how to cooperate with educators from museums and shows how she has developed and used texts as “opportunities for reflection”. Together with her colleagues at work, she now writes reflections every week, and together they also perform an evaluation each semester. By doing this, they prepare continuous documentation of various kinds, and she notes how the ability to write developed during her teacher education has made her confident about working with this documentation as part of her professional practice.

While Helen, from the point of view of a creative discourse (cf. Ivanič 2004), sometimes found the rules of academic writing within teacher education boring and limiting, they also offered opportunities and challenges. She experienced how, early in her teacher education, she acquired the ability to reflect critically and that she had an excellent feeling for language, which gave her good self-esteem (WP). At work, she returned as soon as possible to her specific interests, and as a preschool teacher she has considerable scope to develop her aesthetic interests. At the preschool where she now works, the teachers have different areas of responsibility, a division of labour that has given Helen ample opportunity to develop various areas of aesthetic activity. She has also found it very satisfying working with the youngest children, even though she had hoped to work more with the older ones.

In summary, and in relation to the three discourses (everyday, professional and academic), Helen can be seen as aware of the argumentative value of academic discourse, although for a long time she was critical of its formalism, which she found limiting. When, later on, she was able to connect her aesthetic interest with the professional discourse which her teacher education offered in collaboration with an academic discourse adjusted to her future profession, she was progressively able to explore the potential of both discourses, with the result that she developed a strong professional identity. Thus, Helen responded in an *artistic* or aesthetic way imbued with feelings, stressing meaning creation and using a personal resource of artefacts that act as landmarks to position her (cf. Coldron & Smith 1999, p. 719).

The following quotation from Helen may be seen as illustrating how she has developed her writing in a way that is adjusted to the professional discourse of a preschool teacher:

We write short reflections and put them on the walls, but most of the documentation is done through pictures that the children can reflect upon together with us. We write about each child before conversing with their parents, and this documentation is collected in each child's folder, folders that accompany them as long as they are in preschool (WR).

In this quotation we see Helen as a participant in a community of practice. She uses the word "we" and explains how, by making pictures and writing short reflections, she is using her aesthetic ability.

We consider it crucial that individuals with a special interest such as aesthetics be given some scope, both in their teacher education and at work, to develop that interest and thereby transfer the knowledge and practical activities in question to others, both in education and at work as communities of practice, and especially to the new generations in preschool. Of course, there is also a need to balance these special interests in relation to other activities.

Sara – developing professional responsibility

Sara, who we previously characterised as "becoming a writer for a second time", came to preschool teacher education in her late thirties, with a good deal of life and work experience. She lives in a small town dominated by an industrial plant, where she gained most of her work experience. She applied for and started preschool teacher education without support from her family, becoming the first to enter higher education. Sara reads fiction regularly, but found the encounter with academic writing a great challenge. "I have not studied in this way before. I left secondary school and have been working in industry since then. So I do not have this language" (INT).

For Sara the first year of teacher education is difficult and she wonders whether she will cope with the demands placed on her to understand and use academic writing. She reflects upon how it is hard to understand what kind of text she is expected to write. She "cannot express her own opinion", but at the same time she is expected to relate to what she is writing and to abide by the rules. She is afraid of getting it wrong and/or missing something (INT). At the same time, Sara's motivation has led her to tackle the work with great dedication. Her early papers are quite short, but open to new influences (WP). The supporting structures built into her university studies – the study guides, rules on writing, discussions at writing seminars and so on – help her in the process of developing her writing. In the individual interviews conducted with her it is obvious that Sara is gradually acquiring greater self-reliance in academic writing (INT).

She thus undergoes a profound and significant personal development during her teacher education, once she has overcome her fear of things academic. Concerning writing, Sara recalls the dominance of formal academic writing rules, but at the same time recognises and acknowledges the value of writing on subjects she is interested in (WP). As examples, she mentions the text written as part of her education on "how children use different strategies to engage in play with their peers", and another text she wrote on children's early language development (WR). These texts show her growing self-confidence in the use of "academic" words and perspectives (WP).

As a preschool teacher she stresses how fantastic it is to see and follow the development of the children at her preschool. She especially enjoys arousing the children's curiosity about new things and she underlines, using an academic discourse, "how it is

possible to integrate learning goals in activities and to play towards knowledge” (WR, WP). She reminds herself of how her teacher education stresses the uniqueness and potential of each child. Sara notices that the programme failed to prepare her for developmental communication, i.e. communicating without judgement. She also stresses how, at work, she writes to the parents every day so that they know what the children have been doing during the day. Related to this, she concludes “that [her] repertoire of words and ways of writing has developed dramatically” (WR). She also feels more confident writing in a more academic style, even if the writing she does at work is generally easier than the texts she wrote during her teacher education. Concerning the value of learning academic writing and its potential use at work, Sara believes that it is now easier to write texts for different recipients; in short, it is now easier to write. Or, in Sara’s own words – in response to the question: Do you find the ability to write (developed through your teacher education) important in your work as a preschool teacher, or is the writing developed within your education not something that you feel you need? – “For me it is very worthwhile and it is easier to write in different ways for different recipients. I now write without getting writer’s block” (WR).

In relation to the three discourses, Sara experienced how she nearly lost control when, starting out with her everyday discourse, she encountered the professional and academic discourses in the first year of her teacher education (cf. Arneback 2014b/2016). However, she has overcome these challenges and accommodated both the formal and later also the analytical demands. With opportunities to go deeper and write in her areas of interest, she is growing into both the academic and the professional discourse, which she brings with her into her professional practice as a preschool teacher. It can be noted that Sara, with her earlier experience from working life and industry, is the only one of the three who reflects on her own position from a societal and political perspective. For example, in relation to her independence at work, she discusses “the importance of being able, as a preschool teacher, to communicate with the head of the preschool and influence conditions there” (INT). In sum, Sara is also developing a strong professional identity, entwining all the different experiences she has gained as she builds up this position. The professional identity she is developing is characterised as a moral responsibility to create a specific atmosphere together with the children in her preschool. What we have previously analysed as a significant personal dimension to teaching, the aesthetic response of Helen, is closely connected with the *moral* dimension developed by Sara. “Both have the same well-spring of personal values, namely the unique accommodation a teacher achieves to his or her given location. Both are affirmations of values” (Coldron & Smith 1999, p. 718).

How representative is Sara, who entered preschool teacher education after almost two decades working in the main industry of her home town? In Sweden at least, individuals – mainly women – with considerable experience from industry and other manual sectors have from time to time been recruited into (preschool) teacher education. Like Sara, many of these latecomers to academia often show rapid development in their language and learning in higher education, at the same time enriching higher education with their life and work experience. Sara may even be an exceptionally clear case of such rapid development, but with respect from her teacher educators and work colleagues and suitable teacher education resources, her self-confidence seems to have grown very fast as her latent capacities have been put to use.

Eva – searching for a professional identity

The youngest of the three, Eva, who we earlier characterised as “a structured writer searching for clear frames” and who began preschool teacher education straight after school, also finds her preschool work stimulating, even though she has not yet secured a permanent position, acting instead as a substitute, which influences her experience of working (INT). She stresses “the need to make her working conditions and conditions for the children as secure as possible” (WR). She is happy with the way she has been prepared for the work by her education, but believes there could have been more concrete guidance for different occasions and events. Eva also has a specific suggestion about how different activities could have been documented within teacher education for use at work. In addition, she indicates that she wants to learn more about apps.

Looking back at the academic writing undertaken within teacher education, she recalls finding it very difficult, although she remembers autonomous writing as being very useful. She liked the formal writing tasks in her education and those with “correct answers” more than the open-ended ones (WP). Evaluating what she learned about academic writing, she underlines how she developed a more critical attitude and greater understanding of how texts are produced and used (WR, WP). She refers to concrete situations in which she analysed the preschool curriculum, noting how these analyses are “still there” and highly relevant for her work. She writes:

I think that, through my writing, I have primarily learned to be more critical and not automatically to accept new ways of working or thinking, so I tend to check what’s behind them and relate that to my own experience (WR).

Eva does not yet write very much at work, but she believes that what she has learnt about writing will be important. Interestingly, she is planning to work at a preschool in another country for several months.

In relation to the three communication discourses mentioned earlier, Eva felt relatively secure in the early part of her teacher education, but lost control when it came to open-ended tasks (WR, WP). At work as a preschool teacher, Eva is developing her writing within a professional discourse framed by clear rules and prescribed limits. However, as regards her own evaluation of whether the writing she developed during her teacher education is important for her work as a preschool teacher, she believes the writing skills she developed will be useful: “I do not think that writing skills will be the most important thing I have learned for my profession, but I think they will help” (WR). At the same time, she refers to her critical and analytical interest, an attitude that seems very valuable for the future development of her identity as a preschool teacher. In sum, Eva is progressively transforming her view of writing, relating it to the professional discourse as she develops her professional identity. With reference to the four traditions of teaching mentioned earlier, Eva’s professional identity can be characterised as a kind of growing into a *craft* tradition. There are, as Coldron and Smith underline, different interpretations of this tradition, but it might be summarised in terms of “teachers as craftspersons in so far as they plan actions aimed at achieving a pre-determined end, the success of which depends on their spontaneous responses to contextual factors and on the exercise of acquirable skills” (Coldron & Smith 1999, p. 716).

Different forms of professional discourse

The main result of this investigation, and what we have discovered through our use of the distinction between academic, professional and everyday discourses in our analysis of verbal and written texts and responses produced by Helen, Sara and Eva, is as follows. With their experiences of writing, all three have – before, during and after their teacher education – made a journey through the three communication discourses, starting primarily within everyday discourse. In Helen’s case, even before her teacher education, she had some knowledge of academic writing, supplemented by a language influenced by aesthetics. In the cases of Sara and Eva, their everyday discourses have been progressively transformed into different variants of professional discourse, at the same time as academic discourse has had some influence. This is especially true of Sara, where the academic discourse has supplemented the professional, a discourse which over time has developed a dominant position that has become even more established during her work as a professional preschool teacher.

What is noticeable is that the professional discourse which all three of them have achieved is becoming more or less dominant for all three, and is something which each of them is creating and developing in very different forms. So when talking about a professional discourse, we must stress that there are different variants of it which they are developing and using and that these variants can be explained. The development of these variants of professional discourse can chiefly be explained by the individuals’ earlier socio-economic, cultural and political backgrounds and their different ways of acting as they become professionals, especially their different ways of developing professional writing related to different tasks in which writing plays a central role. Each of them is in fact developing a professional discourse that fits in with how each will act in their work as a professional preschool teacher.

The role of academic writing

What then about academic discourse? Having analysed how different forms of professional discourse are developing a dominant position for all three informants, with fewer signs of an academic discourse, one may speculate about how strong the expectation of becoming and being a professional preschool teacher is both in teacher education and at work. Going back to the independent final projects (IFPs) from the second last semester of their teacher education, which are or should be a kind of examination of the authors’ academic discourse, we see the following. All three of these projects, undertaken by Helen, Sara and Eva, follow the more or less prescribed patterns for such work (cf. Erixon-Arreman & Erixon, forthcoming). All three include explicit references to theoretical perspectives: hermeneutics (Helen), activity theory (Sara), and theories of participation and influence (Eva). They include overviews of earlier research, a discussion of methodology, and critical notes on conducting interviews, which are the main source of empirical data for the projects. The final projects also contain quite strong analytical elements, using theoretical perspectives as well as scientific concepts referring to an academic discourse. What is especially interesting is that the projects presented by all three are open to pluralist perspectives and comparisons between different “truths”. Through their independent projects, the students all show a capacity to write within an

academic discourse and, should they wish to continue their studies, they have acquired the necessary basis for doing so.

To sum up, we may conclude that the students' independent final projects show that all three have a mastery of academic discourse, but only in exceptional cases do they make use of that discourse in contexts other than this specific piece of work and to some extent earlier papers written as part of their teacher education. However, judging from our interviews and their responses to our questions, it seems as if they have acquired modes of expression quite close to an academic discourse, but that they have primarily developed different variants of a professional discourse. This professional discourse also seems to be an important element in their development of a professional identity.

Some preliminary analytical notes on professional identity

What can we learn from the three preschool teachers' reflections on the relationship between their preschool teacher education and their first period at work (cf. Trede et al. 2012)? In general, they seem to have been motivated and quite adequately prepared for work as preschool teachers by their teacher education. However, this education could have been more flexible in relation to the different expectations of the student teachers, and, as researchers, we might perhaps have expected the three qualified preschool teachers to have made more use of their "academically" developed language. However, there are clear signs that they have developed a professional language and use words and specific concepts related to their work as preschool teachers (cf. Grossman et al. 2000).

Does this mean, then, that the three preschool teachers have developed a *professional identity*? In our analysis, we have found that our three informants have developed professional identities in which different variants of professional discourse play a central role. Although, according to many researchers, there is no generally accepted definition of professional identity, we might, in line with Goodson and Cole (1994), perceive the development of the student teachers' identity as being rooted in both the personal and the professional and consequently as "an ongoing process of integration of the 'personal' and the 'professional' sides of becoming and being a teacher" (Beijard et al. 2004, 113). They identify themselves as professionals when they describe and explain their role and the tasks they have to grapple with, especially as writers working as professional preschool teachers (cf. Beijard et al. 2000). This also means that they accept the need to change, or perhaps better, to move their lay theories in line with the impact of the external knowledge, norms and values belonging to the (preschool) teacher education landscape and actual preschool activities (cf. Sugrue 1997).

Writing is a crucial part of the formation of the student teachers' professional identities, being a process of "practical knowledge building characterized by an ongoing integration of what is individually and collectively seen as relevant" (Beijard et al. 2004, 123). For all three informants – Helen, Sara and Eva – different kinds of writing that are "new" to them gradually establish themselves in their working activities, writing which is influenced to a greater or lesser degree by their experience of academic writing (cf. Martin & Dismuke 2015). So even if writing within teacher education tends to meet

with different forms of resistance, academic writing does seem to be an important formative aspect of developing a professional identity (Kierstead & Abner 2012).

As the students progressively identify themselves as professionals using variants of a professional discourse and begin to work as preschool teachers, each making use of their professional discourse in which writing plays an important role, we can observe, as researchers, how this “making use of” helps each of them not simply to identify themselves as professionals, but also to develop a professional identity in interaction with children, colleagues and parents.

Are the elements of academic and professional writing in preschool teacher education important and, if so, why? Our answer is that they are, and we believe that writing constitutes an important part of the preschool as an educative, formative and cultivating institution. Preschool teachers as professionals have a crucial role to play in relation to the children, especially as regards basic knowledge and the development of self-confidence through use of language and the creation of safe conditions and resources. The continual use of writing of different kinds maintains and develops a linguistic deliberative sense as an important aspect of life within a preschool.

Although the preschool teachers studied here do not primarily use an academic language and academic writing (other than for certain tasks and in particular their independent final projects), we believe that the kind of development we have seen and analysed provides a relatively good foundation for the continuing development of academic language in further education, after some years working as a preschool teacher. We would also stress how important it is to develop an academic language and academic writing within professional education. But what we can observe from this study is the development of three different ways of creating professionals, and of growing into and establishing a professional identity, based on different professional discourses.

Conclusions

On the basis of this and our earlier analyses, we are able to problematise the stereotyped and frequently occurring conception of students, in particular student teachers and those without academic parents, as lacking the potential to develop analytical writing. In addition, given the very different trajectories of student teachers, we argue that there is a need to regard each individual as a unique person, rather than approaching them as a group with similar characteristics and experiences.

What conclusions, then, can be drawn from our analysis of the trajectories represented by our three student teachers? It seems as if the necessary flexibility in student teachers' encounters with preschool teacher education is absent in the general discussion. Do all student teachers necessarily have to follow the same kind of route to academic writing and professionalism? We believe that the different dispositions and potentials among student teachers could be explored and developed by drawing on multiple teaching approaches that permit greater flexibility in relational teaching-learning processes, especially when it comes to student teachers' writing and development as professionals.

Regarding the informants' experience of internalising a professional identity as preschool teachers, which is a key concern of this paper, it seems that their writing at work,

building to varying degrees on experiences of academic writing, is a crucial element in this construction of identity. By finding and making use of legitimate ways of and situations for writing in their work as professional preschool teachers (with colleagues, for planning or documentation purposes, for parents or in other settings), they are progressively creating their professional identity. We have tried to show in what ways and by what means this creation of a professional identity is achieved.

Note

1. Arneback, Englund & Solbrekke 2014a. 2. Arneback, Englund & Solbrekke, unpublished paper 2014b / published article 2016. 3. Arneback, Englund & Solbrekke 2015. All three papers have been produced within the project *The Struggle for the Text*, funded by the Swedish Research Council. Grant number 2011-4885-88850-36.

Funding

This work was supported by the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet) [Grant Number 2011 4885 88850 36].

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