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The Five Faces of an Assessor: Conceptualizing the Enactment of Teacher Assessment Identity in Vocational Education and Training

Julie Klovholt Leonardsen , Britt Karin Støen Utvær , and Henning Fjørtoft 

Department of Teacher Education, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Norway

ABSTRACT

Teacher assessment practice is affected by a complex set of cognitive and affective traits, as well as institutional contexts. There is a dearth of research on sociocultural influences on teachers' assessment identity. This study presents a model illustrating how vocational education and training (VET) teachers enact their assessment identity across contexts. We draw on interview data from 18 VET teachers. Using metaphors found in the data set allowed us to capture key aspects of the data material and to situate this study in the existing literature on teachers' assessment identity. Based on the findings, we conceptualize five "faces" of VET teachers' assessment identity: 1) the quality controller, 2) the educator, 3) the fosterer, 4) the motivator, and 5) the negotiator. We then show how VET teachers enact these faces within and across contexts as a way of negotiating tensions and avoiding conflicts. Finally, we discuss the implications of this model.

Introduction

Teacher identities shift over time depending on the external context and internal factors (Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons, 2006; Fejes & Köpsén, 2014; Mockler, 2011). However, there is a dearth of research on the sociocultural influences on teachers' positions as assessors and their professional identities. There is a need to establish models focusing on how concepts, knowledge, and dispositions influence and are influenced by the different situations in which they are embedded (Pastore & Andrade, 2019).

This is particularly important for less-researched educational contexts, such as vocational education and training (VET). VET teachers hold conceptualizations of learning and assessment rooted in the teachers' vocational backgrounds (Billett, 2010; Finlay et al., 2007; Sennett, 2008) and may experience tensions between the phenomenological realities of the school and workplace settings (Kemmis & Green, 2013) as they move between communities of practice and negotiate the interests of different stakeholders (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Tuomi-Gröhn & Engeström, 2003).

This qualitative study presents a conceptualization of how VET teachers enact their assessment identity. The study draws on group interviews with 18 VET teachers. First, we review existing research on teacher assessment literacy and identity and situate the study in the VET context. Then, we outline the role of metaphor theory in the present study and describe how the qualitative data were used to conceptualize teacher assessment identity in a model that illustrates how teachers enact five different "faces" of their assessment identity. Finally, we discuss the implications of this model.

CONTACT Julie Klovholt Leonardsen  Julie.Leonardsen@ntnu.no  Department of Teacher Education, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Gunnerus gate 1, Trondheim, 7012, Norway

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Theoretical framework

Assessment identity

Teachers' understanding of educational assessment is often referred to as assessment literacy (Messick, 1992; Popham, 2009; Stiggins, 1991, 1995). Originally, the construct denoted teachers' knowledge of and ability to use measurement terms and practices but now acknowledges that teacher assessment practice is affected by a complex set of cognitive and affective traits, as well as sociocultural and institutional contexts (Coombs, DeLuca, LaPointe-McEwan, & Chalas, 2018; DeLuca, 2012; DeLuca, Coombs, MacGregor, & Rasooli, 2019; Shepard, 2000). This move has led to the development of the concept of *teacher assessment identity*, which has been variously framed within historic notions of teacher professionalism, assessment, and participation within new policy contexts and conceptualized as a complex set of teachers' beliefs, feelings, knowledge, roles, and sense of self-efficacy (Adie, 2013; Looney, Cumming, van Der Kleij, & Harris, 2018).

The initial development of teachers' assessment identities is a multi-faceted and multi-purpose social process, entailing tensions and contradictions as well as shifts in perspective on the role of assessment (Cowie, Cooper, & Ussher, 2014). Teachers further develop their assessment identities as members of communities of practice, for example, by talking about standards, examining assessment artifacts, and participating in moderation activities (Wyatt-Smith, Klenowski, & Gunn, 2010). Teacher assessment identities are characterized by a situated understanding of assessment criteria, the use of evaluative language, and the ability to reify particular student narratives (e.g., "top student" or "poor writer"; Pryor & Crossouard, 2008). Current understandings of teacher assessment identity therefore acknowledge that the position of teacher as assessor is emotionally charged and contextually dependent (DeLuca et al., 2019; Looney et al., 2018; Willis, Adie, & Klenowski, 2013; Xu & Brown, 2016), and includes aspects such as the teacher's background, experience, and professional learning, as well as the classroom context and student interactions and behaviors (DeLuca & Braund, 2019).

For example, teacher assessment identities may be shaped by affective aspects of teaching. Teachers may feel unprepared for or lack confidence in their assessment practice (DeLuca et al., 2019; DeLuca & Klinger, 2010; Volante & Fazio, 2007) and may struggle to enact new assessment ideas, such as assessment for learning, which might be related to the teachers' self-efficacy beliefs (Dixon, 2011). Furthermore, teachers' perceptions of themselves as assessors can vary (e.g., being a hard or easy assessor) and may require teachers to enact aspects of multiple identities (Adie, 2013). DeLuca and Braund (2019) argued that learning how to assess is a continuous process that requires teachers to integrate foundational assessment ideas with the development of their role as assessors through context-based, socio-reflective learning. Looney et al. (2018) concluded that the development of a teacher assessment identity is "neither simple nor linear; rather it is responsive to events and circumstances" (p. 446) and that conceptualizations should include contextual phenomena, such as teachers' values and beliefs, community expectations, pedagogical directions, and curriculum and policy influences (Looney et al., 2018).

Several authors have attempted to explain how the assessment identity is related to other concepts, such as assessment literacy, teacher beliefs, and the role of teachers in assessment systems. Scarino (2013, p. 310) emphasized how teachers are positioned in a "dual role of both teacher and assessor or judge." Xu and Brown (2016) placed teachers' identity (re) construction at the top of a pyramid conceptualizing teacher assessment literacy in practice. However, although the authors considered teachers' awareness of and actions to construct their identity as assessors an important part of contextual considerations of assessment literacy in general, Xu and Brown also noted that the interrelation between such mediating factors remains unknown. Conversely, Looney et al. (2018) considered "identity to" be an overarching concept and "role" a subcategory, along with teacher feelings, beliefs, confidence, and knowledge. In conclusion, concepts such as "role" or "identity" are theoretically complex and are used in varying ways to capture the situated nature of and dynamics in teachers' assessment work.

Vocational teachers' assessment identity

We now turn to VET teachers as a context for examining the enactment of teacher assessment identity. VET teachers are often described as having particular embodied and affective identities stemming from their vocational background (Colley, James, Diment, & Tedder, 2003, p. 448). Transitioning from vocational worker to VET teacher requires individuals to be competent in two fields of practice (Fejes & Köpsén, 2014) and can be a challenging experience (Esmond & Wood, 2017; Page, 2013; Robson, Bailey, & Larkin, 2004) leading to a sense of loss (Sarastuen, 2020a). For example, Sarastuen (2020b) noted how VET teacher students use the metaphor “leaving the tool belt behind to pick up a pen” to describe experiences of identity loss. Similarly, Mårtensson, Andersson, and Nyström (2019) referred to VET teachers metaphorically as recruiters, matchmakers, and firefighters to describe the many aspects of their position as teachers. Therefore, identity formation in VET is closely associated with crossing boundaries between different communities of practice (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Tuomi-Gröhn & Engeström, 2003; Wenger, 2015) and the need to negotiate a dual or hybrid identity for VET teachers (Andersson & Köpsén, 2015; Farnsworth & Higham, 2012; Fejes & Köpsén, 2014; Kemmis & Green, 2013).

Significant aspects of VET teachers' skills, knowledge, and experience are enacted in classroom practice but cannot be fully expressed verbally. This is often referred to as *tacit knowledge*, conceptualized variously as the things we know how to do but do not know how to explain (Ryle, 1963) or as a dimension of knowledge that can be seen only in action because of its elusive character (Polanyi, 1966). Tacit knowledge is considered an important dimension of teachers' assessment practice, for example, for evaluating student work or providing feedback (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2014; O'donovan, Price, & Rust, 2004; Sadler, 1987; Stake, 2004). Looney et al. (2018) similarly underlined teachers' experiences with assessment, identities as professionals, beliefs about assessment, dispositions toward enacting assessment, and perceptions of their identity as assessors as significant in shaping their practice. Direct investigations into how such factors influence teacher assessment literacy are generally lacking, and it is unclear how assessment literacy “is developed and enacted in day-to-day classroom practice” (Xu & Brown, 2016, p. 154).

Purpose of the present study

As shown, teacher assessor identity is conceptualized in various ways. We situate our understanding of teacher assessment identity within a contextually sensitive approach focusing on the relations among 1) teachers' assessment knowledge and skills and their enactment of such practices, 2) beliefs and emotions related to assessment, 3) contextual aspects of assessment, and 4) the broader dimension of teachers' professional roles in negotiating curriculum and assessment demands, socioemotional relationships with students, and other institutional demands. Given the lack of a uniform conceptual apparatus, we choose to frame our discussion of teacher assessment identity using metaphors instead of more abstract concepts. Metaphors provide structure and meaning to human experience and understanding (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003) and have long been used in educational research to complement other types of conceptualizations (e.g., models of the relations between variables in a system or scientific theories) and to emphasize a key characteristic of a phenomenon (Dickmeyer, 1989). Metaphors constitute a way of constructing events in practitioners' professional worlds (Munby & Russell, 1990). For example, in examining two main metaphors of learning (acquisition and participation), Sfard (1998) noted that living with a plurality of metaphors is inherently contradictory but also necessary to generate differing perspectives. Therefore, we continue a line of inquiry that sees metaphors in teaching as archetypes or blueprints for professional knowledge and thinking (Martínez, Sauleda, & Huber, 2001). Similarly, students use different metaphors to describe their perceptions of assessment (Stralberg, 2006). Following Xu and Brown (2016), we focus on the daily enactment of assessment in everyday settings.

In the following sections, we draw on sociocultural theory (Wenger, 1998) to conceptualize five “faces” of VET teacher assessment identity. We employ “faces” as metaphors for specific dimensions of VET teacher assessment identity. We found the “face” metaphor in the data and further developed it inductively by the authors. We explore how VET teachers draw on experiences from multiple communities of practice (e.g., school, work, and teacher education) to enact these dimensions. The research question guiding our inquiry is: *How do vocational education and training (VET) teachers enact their assessment identity?*

Research design and methods

Background and context

VET is part of the upper secondary school system in Norway. Vocational education is considered equal to general academic studies, and more than 50% of Norwegian youths choose vocational education after finishing lower secondary school (Ministry of Education and Research, 2018; Statistics Norway, 2019). VET usually involves two years of education, two years of workplace training, and a final trade or journeyman’s exam (NOU 2018, p. 15; 2018). The first year of education introduces students to several vocations within a field. The second year focuses on one or a few vocations. The workplace training is in a vocational specialization. VET consists of vocational and general academic subjects, including Norwegian, English, mathematics, science, social science, and physical education. Students must pass vocational and academic subjects to qualify for apprenticeships and trade exams. Vocational students can also choose to undertake an additional year of supplementary education to qualify for entry into higher education.

Norwegian VET is based on a holistic approach to learning and places considerable trust in teachers’ professional judgment in assessment contexts. The personal, social, and professional development of adolescents in school and workplace training is considered paramount for participation in society (Billett, 2011, 2014). In Norway, VET teachers are required to have vocational qualifications (e.g., a trade or journeyman’s certificate) and formal teacher education (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015). Policymakers are invested in the development of schools and teacher assessment literacy to improve students’ learning outcomes. However, many vocational teachers lack formal teacher education and, by extension, formal training in assessment literacy (Ekren, Holgersen, & Steffensen, 2018).

During their education, VET students visit and work in local businesses to obtain authentic training. Students may choose to gain experience in vocations for which the school does not provide training. During workplace training, students are trained and assessed by instructors at local businesses. However, VET teachers are still responsible for students’ final grades on diplomas. Contextual problems, such as large student groups or a lack of equipment, suitable locations, or teacher competence, make practical learning and assessment of vocational competence difficult (Aspøy, Skinnarland, & Tønder, 2017; NOU 2018, p. 15, 2018). Consequently, opportunities for more authentic forms of assessment of vocational skills and knowledge can be lacking. For example, VET teachers may resort to assigning written tasks to students (e.g., reports, tests, and texts) to collect data for summative assessment. Moreover, although the education authorities value formative assessment as part of the learning processes, responsibilities related to summative procedures, such as grading and documenting achievement, tend to occupy a large amount of teachers’ attention.

Participants

This study was conducted in the context of a professional development (PD) project aiming to strengthen upper secondary teacher assessment literacy. The PD activities were not heavily scripted and were primarily oriented toward identifying and solving local problems of practice. The mode employed in the PD was dialogic and partnership oriented. Although the teachers were introduced to

a simplified version of the Xu and Brown (2016) assessment literacy framework, which mentions “assessor identity (re)construction” as one of many dimensions of teacher assessment literacy, teacher assessment identity was not given specific emphasis in the project, and teachers were free to select any assessment-related topic as part of their inquiries. Furthermore, metaphors were not mentioned in the program materials.

Eighteen VET teachers from two upper secondary schools participated in the study. The participants were between 29 and 63 years old, and most were between 45 and 50 years old. Two-thirds of the participants were male. The participants were informed of the study’s purpose via e-mail, consented to being audio-recorded, and could withdraw at any time.

The participants were selected based on six criteria: 1) possessed a vocational trade or journeyman’s certificate, 2) started or completed vocational teacher education or practical pedagogical education for vocational subjects, 3) employed at least 80% in a VET teacher position at an upper secondary school, 4) had a minimum of two years’ experience as a vocational teacher, 5) had experience teaching vocational specialization subjects, and 6) had experience assessing students’ vocational competence (both formative and summative assessment or grading). The criteria were created to ensure that the participants had a vocational certification and teacher education. The teachers included in the study represented three vocational programs: building and construction (BC); agriculture, fishing, and forestry (AFF); and restaurant and food processing (RF). All 18 participants taught and assessed VET students in the broad first-year programs and the subject-specific second-year programs. The teachers were responsible for supporting students’ learning, performing summative grading, and assessing students’ conduct and orderliness.

Researcher positionality and ethics

The first author of this study conducted the data collection. She has vocational education and work experience in the restaurant and food industry. The first author was also educated as a teacher and has a master’s degree in Norwegian language and literature. Because of her combination of VET and academic education and her work experience in the vocational sector and upper secondary schools, she is familiar with assessment traditions in both contexts. She is also familiar with vocational workers’ and teachers’ ways of thinking when assessing students’ learning and understands that the assessment of vocational competence is a complex matter.

At the time of the study, the first author was acquainted with the schools at which the participants worked. She was particularly familiar with School 1 (see Table 1), as it was her former workplace. Thus, half of the participants had worked alongside the first author for five years before the project period. She was also acquainted with the school culture of School 2, as she was part of a research team supporting the school in the project that was the context of this study. The first author’s vocational background and intimate knowledge of the school cultures made it easy to gain the VET teachers’ trust, and they allowed her to observe their projects and assessment practices and participate in discussions regarding the complexity of assessment. She was an insider and was deeply

Table 1. Description of the schools.

	Description of the schools	Size	Location	Vocational programs
School 1	Upper secondary school with three vocational programs, supplementary courses for higher education, and vocational competence courses for adults	Approximately 350 students and 70 employees (45 of whom are teachers)	Central Norway, rural	Building and construction Agriculture, fishing, and forestry Technology and industrial production
School 2	Upper secondary school with two general studies programs, three vocational programs, and supplementary courses for higher education	Approximately 1,000 students and 180 employees (100 of whom are teachers)	Central Norway, in a city center (city with approximately 200,000 inhabitants)	Health and care Electronics and computer science Restaurant and food processing

involved in the research process. The second and third authors were outsiders and did not know the participants or the context but were experienced researchers in assessment, VET, and professional development.

Data collection

Data were collected through six focus group interviews consisting of three teachers, lasting approximately 35–40 minutes. The interviews took place about six months into the development project. The teachers in each group were colleagues who worked in the same vocational programs but had different vocations (e.g., chef, butcher, or meat cutter). We chose to use small focus groups, as the teachers worked in these groups in the professional development project that was the context of this study. Focus groups are used for many purposes but typically serve to explore the culturally constructed horizons for understanding and acting in which actors figure out who they are in relation to others through habituated practices (Kamberelis, Dimitriadis, & Welker, 2018). Kamberelis et al. (2018) suggested that researchers exploit preexisting networks because they encourage collegiality and solidarity building. Although there was no guarantee that all participants would share their experiences (Kitzinger, 1995), the interviewer's personal relationship with the interviewees made it likely that all the teachers would contribute to the interviews.

The interviews focused on how VET teachers define and enact their assessment identity as they cross the boundary between school and workplace traditions in their assessment practices. The interviews were not directly linked to the development project that constituted the study context. The participants were asked questions such as “How do you define yourself as assessors?,” “How does your previous vocational experience affect your conceptions, beliefs, and feelings about assessment?,” and “What aspects of yourself do you enact when you assess different dimensions of students' vocational competence, for example, vocational expertise, social skills, or key competencies?” The interviews provided narrative descriptions of how teachers enact their vocational worker and teacher identities when assessing students' vocational competence. The teachers also provided more general descriptions of the problems they encountered in their assessment practices. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The participants were anonymized, and quotations were translated into English by the authors.

Data analysis

Analyzing focus group data is a complex process that combines mapping, sensemaking, and imagination (Rabiee, 2004). We used a collaborative approach to analyzing qualitative data to ensure that multiple perspectives were applied in the analysis and construction of new ideas (Cornish, Gillespie, & Zittoun, 2014). All authors read and reread the transcripts to familiarize themselves with the data set. The first author then performed the initial coding and discussed her interpretation with the other authors. The authors coded and recoded the material through several iterations and held joint workshops to discuss the emerging interpretations.

In doing so, we noticed how participants used numerous metaphors such as faces, masks, and roles when describing how they negotiated their dual belongings and enacting different aspects of their assessment practice:

Assessment in vocational education has many purposes, and I think the particular purpose affects what role I enter, what face or mask I put on. (BC1)

I negotiate between roles when assessing, and all of them seem to point in different directions depending on the purpose or who is involved. (AFF3)

Our many obligations and the responsibility we carry toward our students, our vocations, our colleagues, the school, society . . . You name it . . . It makes us negotiate different challenges, play different roles. (RF5)

We found no instance of participants disagreeing with the metaphors suggested in the data set, suggesting that these metaphors captured shared experiences among the teachers.

In discovering that the teachers used numerous ways to represent the enactment of their assessment identities, we decided to draw on the participants' own utterances on which to base the next stage of analysis. *In vivo* codes are often used to capture the meanings inherent in people's experiences by using participants' terms and concepts verbatim (Stringer, 2014, p. 140). The use of *in vivo* codes can happen as an a priori decision (e.g., drawing on established theoretical concepts) and as part of developing an emergent theoretical framework (e.g., when attempting to construct new theoretical concepts); this is especially important when studying complex and ambiguous phenomena such as identity (Saldaña, 2015, pp. 71–72). As the purpose of the study was to gain greater theoretical insight into the enactment of assessment identity in VET contexts, we decided to treat these examples of metaphors as *in vivo* categories (i.e., as part of an emerging framework) and to draw on metaphor theory to further develop our theoretical perspective.

Using metaphors as *in vivo* categories allowed us to capture key aspects of the data material and to situate our study in the existing literature on VET teachers' identities and roles. Drawing on the metaphors appearing in the data set, we conceptualized five categories representing different aspects of VET teachers' assessment identity.

- (1) The quality controller: "I think of myself as a quality controller when assessing students' work in the kitchen." (RF5)
- (2) The educator: "Trying to meet policy demands makes me put on an educator identity when assessing students." (BC1)
- (3) The fosterer: "I feel like a parent, calling students in the morning to make sure they go to work." (BC2)
- (4) The motivator: "I'm a supporter, a motivator, a cheerleader – I want my students to succeed." (AFF4)
- (5) The negotiator: "Assessing in both school and workplace contexts makes me a negotiator. I must safeguard different stakeholder interests." (AFF3)

All of the groups used varieties of the metaphors above to describe both assessor roles and assessment identity.

We then used the metaphors present in the interview transcripts to organize the data into five categories, each representing a particular dimension, or "face," of the vocational teacher assessment identity (see Table 2). Subsequently, we identified the responsibilities, guiding frameworks, knowledge domains, traditions for learning and assessment, perceptions of assessment, and sociocultural and institutional contexts related to each face. We then used the faces as categories to conceptualize the properties of these dimensions of VET teacher assessment identity. In this way, the findings emphasize how negotiations about assessment identity manifested in different ways. We chose the face as an overarching metaphor because it signifies the enactment of a certain aspect of the teachers' assessment

Table 2. Coded responses and *in vivo* categories.

Nouns and phrases describing assessment identity and enactment of assessment identity	Frequency in data material	<i>In vivo</i> categories
quality controller, manager; responsible for controlling, checking, investigating, evaluating, and assessing the quality of students' work	44	Quality controller
educator, teacher, administrator, office worker; bound by policy, curricula, competence aims, and assessment criteria	54	Educator
motivator, supporter, coach, fan club, cheerleader, trainer; encourage, motivate, support, help, guide, push, give a kick in the behind	68	Motivator
fosterer, parent, caregiver, guardian, mentor, counselor, supervisor; teach common decency, support upbringing, take care of	71	Fosterer
negotiator, diplomat, broker, peacemaker; negotiate, building bridges, two-faced, be pulled in different directions, deal with conflicting perspectives	52	Negotiator

identities in a certain context. Furthermore, it signifies directionality and relationality in that teachers have shifting responsibilities depending on the context they are facing. For example, while the quality controller face is responsible for securing the validity and reliability of assessment practices and therefore turns toward the professional responsibilities of individual teachers in the school system, the fosterer face is turned toward students and the socioemotional and relational responsibilities teachers have toward adolescents. We considered other *in vivo* codes as possible alternatives (e.g., masks or roles) but felt that the face metaphor best captured the connotations in the participants' statements.

Member checking refers to a range of activities with differing purposes in qualitative research (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). Following Candela (2019), we used member checking to ensure the participants' voices were accurately represented and to provide a reflective space for participants. The participants were invited to read the first draft of the transcripts and analysis to ensure their statements were accurately represented. The teachers discussed the draft with the first author and were asked whether they recognized their statements and whether they identified with the five faces. Some teachers commented that it was possible to identify sub-identities within the faces and that different faces could be applied in different ways across contexts (e.g., school or workplaces). One of the teachers argued that they "enact different identities in different situations all the time" (BC1). However, when we explained the inherent complexity of each face, the teachers understood and did not disagree with our choice of conceptualization.

Qualitative researchers seek rigor and transparency in several ways, for example, through applying inter-coder reliability checks or by publishing long textual extracts allowing the reader to check the plausibility of the interpretations (Cornish et al., 2014). We chose the latter approach, as it was better suited to represent the nature of the analytical process we used. The member-checking process and the use of extensive quotations from the data set reduced the risk of personal or collective idiosyncrasies and allowed for trustworthiness in the conceptualization of the VET teacher assessment identity as five faces. Furthermore, the use of *in vivo* categories and member checking may ensure that the results would be represented in a language familiar to and useful for practitioners (Cornish et al., 2014).

Results

We now present the five faces of the teacher as assessor: 1) the quality controller, 2) the educator, 3) the fosterer, 4) the motivator, and 5) the negotiator (see Table 3). First, we focus on how these faces represent certain assessment responsibilities, knowledge domains, and sociocultural contexts. Then, we discuss the challenges associated with each face. Quotations are marked with the participants' vocational background to provide context and are numbered to ensure transparency.

Table 3. Five faces of VET teacher assessment identity.

The quality controller	The educator	The fosterer	The motivator	The negotiator
The quality controller maintains the connection to vocational communities of practice by possessing a reservoir of tacit vocational knowledge, ensuring authentic vocational training, and certifying that students uphold standards of vocational competence.	The educator maintains the connection to the curriculum and other educational policies governing education and is responsible for adapting teaching and learning to prescribed learning objectives and students' needs.	The fosterer provides care to students so that they are prepared for adulthood and can support themselves in education, work, and society.	The motivator supports students who encounter adversity in school, work, or society, provides strategies for learning and human development, and encourages students to overcome obstacles.	The negotiator represents the need to cross boundaries between different communities of practice and negotiate between different situated standards, objectives, and understandings.

The quality controller

The quality controller maintains the connection to vocational communities of practice by possessing a reservoir of tacit vocational knowledge, ensuring authentic vocational training, and certifying that students uphold standards of vocational competence. This face is concerned with the certification of new vocational workers and how to teach students the overall vocational competence (i.e., disciplinary knowledge, practical skills, and key competencies) vocational sectors seek. In sociocultural theory, identification with a community is conceptualized as belonging to a certain category, as well as active participation in community activities (Wenger, 1998, p. 191). The quality controller is proud of and has a strong connection to his vocational background, including the norms and values it represents. “I am a carpenter,” one teacher (BC1) said, explaining that he identified more with other carpenters than with other teachers because carpenters share the same knowledge domain and sociocultural traditions. When enacting the quality controller identity, vocational teachers mainly safeguard vocational sectors’ interests in VET by teaching students what they think are the required skills for work life.

The quality controller must negotiate the school and workplace contexts in order to assess students’ vocational competence. “To ensure that the students learn the skills they need [to be] a chef, they practice in the school kitchen and in local restaurants,” one teacher said (RF5). Another teacher in the same focus group explained:

We assess the students when they are training in school, but during apprenticeships, students are assessed by a chef at the restaurant. We have to trust the chef’s assessment of students, as we only do short visits to the workplace and [do] not follow the student for the whole apprenticeship period. (RF5)

One teacher in another focus group pointed out that they trusted their fellow vocational practitioners’ assessment of students as they observed them over time but emphasized that

Assessment documentation from the workplace or from the students themselves often focuses on whether students, for example, show up for work at the right time, rather than the quality of their work or the progress in their learning, but it is probably as hard for them as it is for us to make written descriptions of vocational competence. (BC1)

According to the participants, “the students’ actual vocational competence gets lost in translation” (AFF3) when the quality controller tries to translate the tacit, practical, and experiential workplace knowledge students learn in vocational training facilities, schools, or workplaces into grades based on curricula standards. Unlike the role of “judge” observed in other studies of teacher assessment identity (Scarino, 2013), the quality controller in VET maintains a forward-looking perspective on learning for future participation in work rather than a gatekeeping function. The reason may be that the final certification of VET students’ qualifications (the trade or journeyman’s exam) is the responsibility of an external committee and not the VET teacher in question.

The educator

The educator face represents the teachers’ attempt to navigate the conflicting demands of curriculum standards, workplace practices, and day-to-day assessment in the classroom. This face is anchored in teacher education, teacher practice, institutional contexts, and policy demands. The educator focuses on how to make vocational teaching and assessment practices fit into a school context founded on an academic approach to learning. VET teachers bring this perspective to workplace learning. Teachers use this face in particular when grading students’ academic performance in subjects and on their orderliness and conduct.

Policy demands require that students’ progression be described in grades based on curriculum standards. The educator encounters difficulties when trying to fit vocational assessment practices into curriculum standards, which might be unfit for assessing and documenting vocational competence. One teacher said:

I find it challenging to justify [to] students how assessment for learning ends up as grades. Grades leave out the tacit dimension of vocational competence and tell students that some parts of their competence are not as valuable as the rest. (BC2)

The teachers blamed themselves for not mastering the educator identity:

We make assessment criteria and goals for students' learning outcomes, but we lack the tools, language, and assessment literacy to document learning and assessment in the way educational authorities expect. I also think we lack the guts to try out new things and challenge policy demands, but it is difficult without support from businesses and schools. (RF6)

Thus, the educator represents the teachers' attempt to wrestle with multiple demands (e.g., curriculum and assessment policies, tacit knowledge in the workplaces, or balancing of formative and summative assessment) as well as their own professional values (e.g., autonomy in assessment decision making).

The fosterer

The fosterer provides care to students so that they are prepared for adulthood and can support themselves in education, work, and society. This face is anchored in the need for shared norms and values in a democratic society. The fosterer is concerned with teaching students acceptable behavior and corresponding values, such as punctuality, preparedness, respect, and appropriate behavior and language in different communities of practice. Fosterers also teach students healthy life routines, such as how to maintain personal hygiene, get adequate sleep, exercise, and eat proper meals. The fosterer considers socialization in work, society, and adulthood to be the main purpose of education and assessment.

The fosterer practices assessment for learning by giving feedback regarding students' key competencies during vocational training. The fosterer's feedback prepares students for adulthood and employment, but the teachers were concerned that many students were not equipped to succeed at work due to psychological or social challenges:

It is challenging getting the school, workplaces, and particularly policymakers to understand that some students need to learn how to cope with life before they can learn to manage a job. Some just need a wake-up call; others need serious help to deal with life. (AFF2)

However, enacting this face may lead to some teachers feeling more like parents than teachers:

Many students do not know how to behave at work or in school. I feel like a parent when talking about personal hygiene, physical and mental health, what to wear, nutrition, use of language, attitude, and so on to 16- to 19-year-old students, but some of them come from homes with low or no education, and no traditions for talking about learning, education, and behavior. (RF5)

Thus, the fosterer is the most personal of the five faces, as it is involved in students' personal lives and well-being. Enacting the fosterer role in teachers' assessment identities is likely to require empathy and imagination as well as the ability to form trusting relationships with adolescents. The role is also likely to be emotionally charged for students and teachers in some contexts, in that more conventional assessment responsibilities (e.g., administering tests or grading) are performed by the same teacher who is responsible for developing shared norms and values in the school context.

The motivator

The motivator supports students who encounter adversity in school, at work, or in society, provides strategies for learning and human development, and encourages them to overcome obstacles. This face is anchored in VET teachers' interest in certifying workers in their vocational sectors, educating democratic citizens for a welfare society, and supporting young people in school and into adulthood. When enacting the motivator identity, VET teachers safeguard the interests and needs of students, schools, and vocational sectors. This enactment is heavily value-laden for teachers, as they take pride in helping students through school and into apprenticeships.

The motivator looks for motivating aspects of assessment to support student learning. Motivating aspects can include the use of authentic learning contexts, authentic tasks, fair and valid assessment methods, support, and feedback. The motivator practices assessment for learning to motivate students but is also concerned about destroying students' motivation by turning assessment for learning into summative grades. "Many students are motivated by our feedback on their subject-specific skills, but they know that positive feedback does not show in the diploma, only grades do," one teacher explained (RF5). The motivator is concerned that assessment in the school and workplace reduces students' motivation to learn because curriculum standards and grades cannot describe the human or tacit dimensions of vocational competence.

The motivator is aware of the complex impact of assessment on student motivation. "We push students into participating in learning activities to grow [their self-confidence] . . . Then, we kill their motivation by giving them written tests or [making] them write about their competence to collect evidence on their learning," one teacher said (BC2). "Many students have poor reading and writing skills, and to ask them to write a paper on how to operate a specific tool or machine is like asking an elephant to climb a tree," another teacher stated (AFF3). A third teacher explained why VET teachers often use assessment methods they find invalid:

We lack the time, tools, machines, competence, and space to create authentic learning activities at school and end up with practical training for only a few students. The rest have to observe. Instead of assessing everyone when trying skills out in practice, we assess a written test later on or make them write a report. The students that master writing get the highest scores, but such an assessment does not tell us if students can apply this knowledge in work contexts. It is not fair, and it does not feel relevant for students or teachers—and both lose their motivation. (BC3)

The teachers found it challenging to maintain their own motivation when enacting the motivator face. They were emotionally involved in students' lives and protected, defended, and encouraged students whom they felt have potential for success but were sometimes required to make decisions that did not necessarily motivate students.

The negotiator

The negotiator represents the need to navigate different communities of practice and negotiate between different situated standards and sets of sociocultural norms. The negotiator balances the interests of the other faces and decides which perspective or practice VET teachers should follow when assessing students in particular settings or contexts. These decisions are affected by stakeholder interests and institutional and sociocultural contexts. According to the participants, "it is impossible to make everyone happy" (AFF3), as there are different expectations for VET students' vocational competence and VET teachers' assessment of it. VET teachers take on the negotiator identity to bridge the gap between school and workplace assessments.

VET teachers are vulnerable when enacting the negotiator identity. Stakeholders' conflicting expectations for teacher assessment literacy make it difficult for VET teachers to decide how to assess students' vocational competence. A teacher explained:

Many businesses teach students narrow, subject-specific skills needed in that particular business and give them top marks when they perform well. We must assess according to curriculum standards and cannot give students top grades because they are really good at peeling potatoes. (RF6)

This remark shows how different stakeholder interests push VET teachers to put on the negotiator face and cross the boundaries between the other faces to reach agreement regarding what decisions and actions to take when assessing students. This is described in sociocultural theory as negotiating the ownership of meaning between locations; the meaning of certain actions or objects is inherently contestable and must be negotiated across contexts (Wenger, 1998, p. 200). For instance, in the case above, we can see a VET teacher enacting the educator identity, as this face finds that a particular skill

is too narrow to meet curriculum standards and be graded. The educator knows that students gain other competencies when they learn narrow skills but struggle to include social skills, for example, in an assessment.

The five faces of an assessor: A conceptualization

To conceptualize how the five faces of VET teachers' assessment identity are enacted, we depict our conceptualization in a dynamic model (Figure 1). The model aims to capture the dynamics of enacting different faces and teachers' movement across boundaries between communities of practice at school, work, and society in general. In Figure 1, the VET teacher assessment identity is placed at the center, surrounded by a middle circle denoting the five faces. The outer circle represents the three main contexts in which VET teachers operate. To illustrate how boundary-crossing occurs, the outer and middle circles can be rotated so that the five faces appear in all contexts. The arrows, therefore, indicate how contexts and faces shift in relation to each other and emphasize the dynamic nature of VET teacher assessment identity. The dotted lines in the middle and outer sections denote the shifting and unclear nature of boundaries between the faces and the communities of practice.

The five faces offer a metaphorical way of understanding teachers' professional knowledge, thinking, and enactment of assessment. The blueprint nature of metaphorical conceptualizations of teachers' professional worlds (Martínez et al., 2001; Munby & Russell, 1990) implies that our conceptualization of the faces and their dynamic relation to different contexts and communities is intended as generative rather than reductive. Teachers must navigate different sets of norms and values across contexts, reflecting the multiple and contradictory facets and purposes of assessment (Cowie et al., 2014). Metaphors offer a way of encapsulating such inherent tensions so that they can be reinterpreted in situated ways.

Therefore, the conceptualization is not an abstract scientific model but a way of visualizing the contradictory nature of enacting assessment in VET contexts. We expect teachers in other contexts to enact other faces depending on the communities and demands they must navigate. For example, teachers at other levels in the education system (e.g., early childhood education, primary education, or

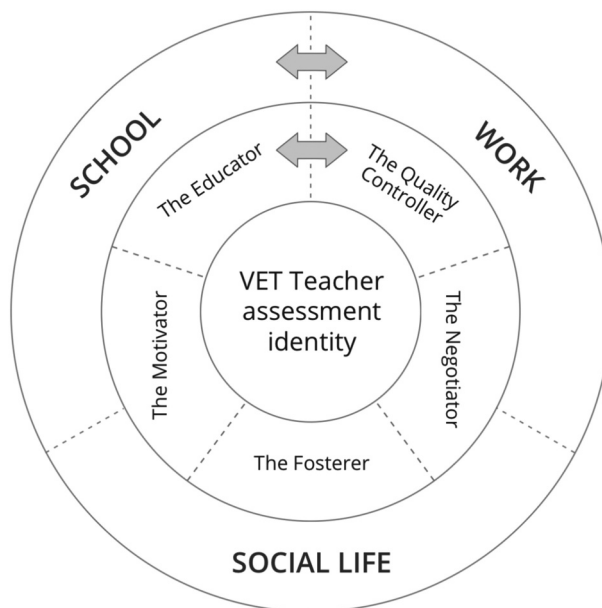


Figure 1. Vocational education and training (VET) teacher assessment identity.

higher education) or in different sociocultural contexts must navigate other contextual demands and therefore are likely to enact other faces as part of their assessment practice. This variability emphasizes the need to understand teachers' assessment work as a continuous process in which complex ideas must be enacted, refined, or reconstructed through contextually situated reflection (DeLuca & Braund, 2019; Xu & Brown, 2016).

Discussion

The quest for greater consistency in education may lead to assessment reforms privileging standardization and technical, rationalist approaches, undermining the centrality and complexity of teacher judgment and tacit knowledge (Wyatt-Smith et al., 2010). Given that teacher assessment identity is constructed from a range of factors (Coombs et al., 2018; DeLuca, 2012; DeLuca et al., 2019; Xu & Brown, 2016), the social, dynamic, and layered nature of teacher assessment work requires a shared language to initiate critical conversations about teachers' beliefs and understandings (Willis et al., 2013). Research on teacher assessment work must be broadly conceptualized and should include various dimensions, such as teacher confidence, personal disposition, and emotional engagement with assessment, as well as their ability to reinvent themselves and create narratives and metaphors to respond to changes that reframe or change their position as teachers (Looney et al., 2018). Therefore, recent conceptualizations of teachers' assessment knowledge emphasize teachers' need to adapt to the situations in which they are embedded and the need to "help them to scrutinize their professional identity as assessors within classroom and/or school system contexts" (Pastore & Andrade, 2019, p. 134).

By emphasizing the dynamics of teachers' assessment identities, the model we present conceptualizes how teachers enact different aspects of their assessment identities across contexts and the inherent tensions in enacting multiple faces in different contexts. Looney et al. (2018) emphasized that teachers' beliefs and feelings about assessment would inform how teachers engage in assessment work with students, and that our conceptualizations of teachers' assessment practice should focus not simply on what they do but also on who they are. The conceptualization of the faces provided in this study emphasizes how the dynamics of teachers' assessment identities are related to emotional labor. For example, enacting the fosterer face requires teachers to empathize with students' life experiences beyond school contexts, and the motivator must negotiate students' and teachers' own motivational states. The inability to perform the role as the educator may lead to self-blame and feelings of professional inadequacy.

Therefore, we suggest that the model could be useful for identifying contradictions and tensions in teachers' assessment identities. Cowie et al. (2014) argued that teachers' assessment capability is shaped by consistency and contradictions, and that there is a need to open a space for critical analysis and deeper understanding, where teachers' personal beliefs about and preconceptions of assessment can be confirmed or disrupted. We believe that this model can serve such a purpose. In focusing on the enactment of five distinct faces, our conceptualization in the VET teacher assessment identity model underlines the dynamics between communities of practice. We would encourage educators to use the model as part of context-based, socio-reflective professional learning (DeLuca & Braund, 2019) and as a conceptualization to be tested and further refined or modified in other educational contexts.

The dual nature of VET requires teachers to negotiate powerful institutionalized discourses in which certain aspects of their identities are acknowledged or ignored. Sociocultural theory emphasizes how the process of identification requires belonging to a certain category as well as active participation in community activities (Wenger, 1998). For VET teachers, this involves crossing boundaries between communities of practice and negotiating meaning across contexts. VET teachers' enactment of the five faces presented here is employed as a way of negotiating tensions and avoiding potential conflicts. Such conflicts may arise when expectations in assessment policies are not aligned with tacit standards in vocational communities, or when VET teachers must navigate tensions between analytic and holistic assessment practices. The enactment of assessment identity in VET contexts therefore echoes

Pryor and Crossouard's (2008) description of assessment practice as a process of performing and contesting identities through discourse, where certain ways of speaking, acting, and believing are recognized and privileged in different sociocultural settings. Testing this conceptualization across contexts would provide insights into the particular challenges VET teachers face when navigating the many purposes and practices of assessment across institutional contexts.

Limitations

The metaphorical conceptualization offered here uses qualitative data to derive theoretically inspired reasoning (Silverman, 2014, p. 438) about teacher assessment identity. However, the use of metaphors in theoretical conceptualizations can be challenging, in that parts of a conceptual structure can be understood metaphorically, while other parts can be understood in a literal sense (Lakoff & Turner, 1989). The "major limitation of metaphors is in their inherent simplification" (Dickmeyer, 1989, p. 152). As Sfard (1998) noted, the social, normative, or ethical aspects of metaphors are not inscribed in the metaphors themselves but instead are a matter of interpretation. In our conceptualization, we draw on metaphorical and nonmetaphorical phrases to reason theoretically about teachers' assessment identities. Therefore, the conceptualization may resonate differently with the ways in which teachers' assessment identities are imagined or enacted in other sociocultural contexts. Following Sfard, we see this potential discrepancy in interpretation as a confirmation of the potential of metaphors rather than as a limitation in itself. Nevertheless, we are aware that metaphors cannot substitute for more thoroughly developed theoretical models about teachers' assessment work.

Furthermore, the data were collected in one national context. Given the variance in VET education internationally, our conceptualization may not be generalizable to other contexts. However, although attempts at analytic generalization based on the empirical data are limited by the sample, they can lead to greater insight into the "how" and "why" of the phenomenon in question (Yin, 2018, p. 38). For example, although the use of *in vivo* codes helps to avoid conceptualizing through the researchers' interpretive lenses (Stringer, 2014, p. 140), this practice might also delimit the researchers' ability to connect local phenomena to broader theoretical concepts in the literature.

Implications

The conceptualization offered here could support researchers in understanding teachers' enactment of key ideas in contemporary assessment discourse. Awareness of the five faces could lead to a deeper understanding of how practitioners' assessment identities are formed and enacted in practice. Our conceptualization could also help policymakers understand teachers' many assessment responsibilities. We suggest using the model again to study teacher assessment identity in the Norwegian context, as well as in other school systems, to ensure its relevance across boundaries. We further suggest that teacher assessment identity be considered in relation to broader theories of teachers' professional identities. This is important due to the close relation between instruction and assessment, in particular considering the increasing attention to formative assessment as part of instructional practice.

Sharing metaphors of education in collaborative groups can be a productive professional development activity (Martínez et al., 2001). The role of the faces in our model could act as tools for mediating how teachers enact their assessment identities in different ways across contexts and how this relates to their broader professional responsibilities.

Given that students use metaphors to describe their perceptions of assessment (Stralberg, 2006), further research could explore how such metaphors impact students' learning, school experiences, and assessment behavior. For example, it is possible to imagine a conceptualization of students' "faces" when participating in assessment activities such as peer feedback or self-assessment, or in virtual settings such as online education or in multimedia.

For VET specifically, the model developed in this study provides a shared language for the dual nature of VET. This could empower VET teachers to make more confident choices when deciding which assessment practice to use, support teacher judgment, or improve interaction with students as they navigate communities of practice.

Disclosure statement

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ORCID

Julie Klovholt Leonardsen  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9586-9347>

Britt Karin Støen Utvær  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0275-2727>

Henning Fjørtoft  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1732-1818>

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