HOW "THE TEACHER" IS PRESENTED IN LITERATURE, HISTORY, RELIGION, AND THE ARTS
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Cross-Cultural Analyses of a Stereotype

Raymond McCluskey
and
Stephen J. McKinney

With a Foreword by
Donald Christie

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Chapter 1.
To render visible:
the scholarship of teacher image, icon and identity
in social contexts

Gail E. Burnaford
Florida Atlantic University
USA

Introduction

This text represents work from the international community of scholars who have demonstrated an interest in the notion of ‘teacher’ in and across societies. The fascination with who teachers are, how our various societies view them, and how they view themselves, now has a global audience across disciplines that contribute to the ongoing scholarship concerning teacher image, icon, and identity. This field has established theoretical and practical relationships with other fields of study, including identity theory, teacher knowledge, teacher beliefs and related practice, media studies, arts, humanities, and global education.

In 1958, researcher Lloyd Manwiller constructed an inventory with which he surveyed 550 teachers and school board members. He wrote:

As a public servant, a teacher’s personal life is always subject to public inquiry, study, and discussion. The constant surveillance of teachers’ lives
accords to them, as is sometimes described, a kind of ‘goldfish bowl’ status (Manwiller 1958, p.315).

Teachers in the twenty-first century continue to be examined, analyzed and criticized. As public servants, teachers have been expected to do far more than teach. In Hobson’s interview project (2001, p.53), retired teachers told their personal stories of expectations for service that extended far beyond the school day: “You had to fix the fire in the morning. You had to do your own janitor work. You had to go out and pump water and bring it in”. We have moved beyond most of the items on Manwiller’s inventory, i.e., the expectation that public school teachers also teach Sunday School, and most teachers in Western schools do not have to tend the fire or do janitor work. But teachers are still expected to serve multiple roles in their schools and with their students, as hall monitors, disciplinarians, data analysts and, of course, surrogate parents.

At present, our expectations for teacher behaviours are far less scripted outside the classroom, but are much more severely scripted and controlled inside the classroom. Fifty years ago in most Western societies, teachers often had autonomy to teach what and how they deemed appropriate; now, teachers often report less and less autonomy and more common standards and standardizing of their practices. This shift – from individualized community norms for teachers’ social behaviours as public ‘servants’ to highly regularized expectations for common practices – represents a significant influence on the image of teachers and their professional identities.

This chapter will address three perspectives on teachers – image, icon and identity – proposing etymological perspectives for each. Particular attention will be paid to research addressing these areas of scholarship in global and cultural contexts, both as they pertain to specific settings and with respect to the apparent persistence of trends that seem universal.

The chapter will conclude with a discussion of three research trends that seem promising for future scholarship. The intention is to render the teaching
profession more visible through multiple lenses, media, and research perspectives, and to enrich the conversation about the powerful roles teachers play in our world.

Image as noun

Early 13c., ‘artificial representation that looks like a person or thing’, from O.Fr. image, earlier imagene (11c.), from L. imaginem (nom. imago) ‘copy, statue, picture, idea, appearance’, from stem of imitari ‘to copy, imitate’ (see imitate). Meaning ‘reflection in a mirror’ is early 14c. (Online Etymology Dictionary 2010)

The word ‘image’ conjures up different concepts depending on the discipline under discussion. In psychological settings, image may refer to the façade that one presents to the world, by definition, false and frail. In filmmaking or photography, an image is a visual representation produced on a surface. It is literally a picture and not reality itself. For a sculptor, an image is also a representation, as in an effigy on a tombstone. The word ‘image’ is often used to mean a standard or prototype that many if not most people hold. We might have an image, for example, of ‘a good mother’ or ‘the ideal child’. No one seriously considers the possibility that this image exists per se in the real world. These perspectives on ‘image’ all have one thing in common. They inherently suggest that images are not real; they stand for something else.

In the field of rhetoric, the term ‘image’ is particularly relevant for our discussion here. Images, for linguists, creative writers, and poets, are figures of speech, most familiarly, metaphors. The term ‘metaphor’ derives from a Greek word meaning ‘transfer’. The Greek etymology is from meta, implying ‘a change’ and therein meaning ‘to bear, or carry’ (Yero 2001-2002). A metaphor is an image that “implies a way of thinking and a way of seeing that pervades how we understand our world generally” (Morgan 1986, p.12). The metaphor helps to highlight certain features of reality while forcing others into the background. Metaphors are used to clarify abstract ideas by tangible, visual, and sensual images.
The use of metaphors has been one approach to enable researchers to understand teachers’ beliefs, attitudes, perceptions and assumptions more clearly. The metaphors that teachers ascribe to themselves reveal much about how they see themselves, their work, and perhaps the profession in general (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Tubin 2005; Yero 2001-2002). In a study by Merseth, Sommer and Dickstein (2008), teacher candidates commonly used military metaphors to describe their response to teaching in an urban school. They wrote about aspiring to ‘be the sword’, ‘fighting’, ‘battling’, and ‘developing an arsenal’ (Merseth et al. 2008, p.95) all as part of what they viewed as necessary to teaching in this environment. References to teachers ‘in the trenches’ and acting as ‘drill sergeants’ merit deconstruction to determine whether and how such language influences how teachers work. Metaphors can be powerful ways of looking at practice. Do teachers actually act their way into the metaphors that they claim for themselves? Do they perpetuate metaphors for their work intentionally?

There may be clear connections between metaphors and teachers’ views of their roles. Martinez, Sauleda and Huber (2001) analyzed the metaphorical conceptions of learning of 50 experienced and 38 inexperienced Spanish teachers. Their findings showed that 57% of the experienced teachers and 22% of the prospective teachers viewed learning as transmission of knowledge from the teacher as a source of knowledge to the empty container of the student; 38% and 56% (respectively) held a constructive metaphor of the teacher as a facilitator and the student as a constructor. The remaining 5% and 22% respectively had a socio-historical perspective, viewing the teacher and the student as collaborating to achieve beneficial results for all. “By disclosing the metaphorical base of thinking about teaching and learning we hope to assist teachers in bridging the gap between their implicit and explicit knowledge”, the researchers note (Martinez et al. 2001, p.973).

There are constructions of the teacher that have been surprisingly consistent over time, inherited from traditional expectations of teachers as public
servants (Keroes 1999). The most clearly defined image of teachers, particularly though not exclusively at the elementary level, is that of mother (Trousdale 1994). In children’s literature as well as young adult literature (Burnaford 2001), the image of teachers as tyrannical witches persists. Consider the popularity of the Harry Potter series (e.g. Rowling 1997, 1999) in which Harry’s teachers, Professors Albus Dumbledore, Severus Snape, and Minerva McGonagall, are reminiscent of their predecessors, Mr. Creakle in David Copperfield (2007a), Wackford Squeers in The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby (2007b), and the aptly named Mr. McCchoakumchild in Hard Times (1995), in novels by Charles Dickens.

Another familiar image that appears most notably in film is the larger-than-life teacher as hero (Ayers 2001; Dalton 2004). Western societies applaud and recognize teachers who are courageous, dedicated and unconventional, while also paradoxically increasing constraints and discouraging individual innovation and initiative in the name of accountability.

Do the images of mother, witch, and hero persist because of the expectations societies continue to hold of teachers who assume roles both as parents and as disciplinarians? How do such societal images of teachers influence expectations related to teaching?

Icon

1572, ‘image, figure, representation’, from L.L. icon, from Gk. eikon ‘likeness, image, portrait’, related to eikenai ‘be like, look like’. Eastern Church sense is attested from 1833. Computing sense first recorded 1982 (Online Etymology Dictionary 2010).

The etymology for this term, ‘icon’, appears strangely similar to that for the word, ‘image’. The word ‘icon’ is relevant for us here because it has moved beyond the 1572 original definition, “image, figure, or representation” and has become appropriated in two arenas: Eastern Orthodox Christianity and computer technology.
In Eastern Orthodox Christianity, the term ‘icon’ has been used since the early nineteenth centuries to refer to pictures, wall murals, or paintings of figures that tell a story or represent something or someone of great significance. In this tradition, the icon becomes a standard, a portrait of an event or person that persons carry in their minds and transmit from one generation to another. David Morgan (1998, p.43) explains: “When devout viewers see what they imagine to be the actual appearance of the divinity that cares for them, the image becomes an icon. The icon is experienced by believers as presenting some aspect of the real thing, shorn of convention... the icon is the engine of visual piety”.

It is this notion of the icon as an ‘engine’ which is relevant to the present discussion of teachers. Most religions of the world rely on the notion of teacher as central to the role of guru, rabbi, spiritual leader (the term ‘guru’ means ‘teacher’ in Hindi; the term ‘rabbi’ means “doctor of religious law or master” in Hebrew). While we could find no studies examining teachers explicitly as icons, heroes in films such as *Stand and Deliver* (1988), *Dead Poets’ Society* (1990), *The Man Without a Face* (1993), and *To Sir With Love* (1967) are icons. The mother-teacher is also an icon well represented in Western culture.

It is no accident that the term ‘icon’ has also more recently been appropriated into the world of computers. The term ‘icon’ refers to the symbol on the screen that makes computer navigation easier. The icon is a pictogram that can represent a file, folder, or application on that computer. Users can invent icons, move them, subsume them in other icons or discard them in the trashcan icon. For contemporary students, teachers, and researchers, computer icons represent expendable, movable, removable and deceptively simple pictures of who teachers are and what they do. Using the term ‘icon’ within its cultural context in modern Western societies is important to the dialogue and suggests a way of understanding representations of teachers that are consistent with both its symbolic and pictographic computer uses in the contemporary lexicon.
Teacher identity: Moving from fixed to performative in social and cultural contexts

1570, from M.Fr. identité (14c.), from L.L. (5c.) identitatem ‘sameness’, from ident-, comb. form of L. idem (neut.) ‘the same’ abstracted from identidem ‘over and over’ (Online Etymology Dictionary 2010).

The Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop literature review on teachers’ professional identity affirms the dearth of research that effectively integrates context with personal identity formation (2004). Beijaard et al. claim that teachers’ professional identity has emerged as a separate research area in the last decade (p. 107). They maintain, however, that different researchers have defined this notion of professional identity among teachers very differently and that many of the studies emphasize teachers’ roles as a specific function of identity. In the 22 studies that Beijaard et al. reviewed, they found that most of the researchers viewed professional identity as both personal and professional (p. 113), and that the emphasis in most studies was on personal construction of identity with an “underestimation of the contextual side that plays a part in professional identity formation” (p. 113).

Contrary to its etymology, the phenomenon of identity does not appear to be the “same over and over”, but is rather a journey with a starting point and place. Watson (2006) explains that an earlier notion of identity referred to a fixed sense of the self. More recently, psychologists have described identity as something that is fluid and evolves as individuals engage in new experiences access new resources. This process can be seen in ‘narratives of practice’ (p. 509).

The research of Ben-Peretz, Mendelson, and Kron (2003) suggests that teachers’ views of themselves are directly related to social and economic contexts of the schools in which they teach. In their study, half of the participant teachers taught in high-achieving classes and half taught in low achieving classes. Seven drawings of occupations were individually presented to each of the participants: shopkeeper, judge, animal keeper in a zoo, entertainer, an orchestra conductor,
puppeteer, and animal trainer. The teaching context had a significant impact on which drawings they chose to represent themselves and their work, overriding even background characteristics such as a teacher’s educational level, gender, or seniority.

Koooy and de Freitas (2007) explored the notion of capturing teacher beliefs through their narrative studies of teachers in diaspora, or displacement. Koooy and de Freitas were interested primarily in the concept of identity as it related to teachers who physically migrate from one cultural setting to another and thereby address their own personal histories as learners and teachers, as well as the norms of the institutions they now face. This is a global phenomenon, given the greater ease of relocation and the increasing role of organizations such as the United Nations, UNICEF, and UNESCO to move teachers toward places where training is possible and then into areas of high need to teach. In the United States, specific school districts and university teacher education programs are also recruiting teachers from European, Asian, South and Central American countries to teach. What becomes of teacher identity during such diasporas? Do teachers who work in environments outside of their own personal schooling experience rethink their personal and professional identities? The Koooy and de Freitas analysis of narratives by three displaced teachers who were displaced affirms the role of language as well as other cultural parameters in the development of identity among displaced teachers.

Stigler and Hiebert (1999) analyzed the international case videos from the Third International Math and Science Study (TIMSS) and confirmed that much of what one can observe in the taped classrooms is at least partially culturally constructed. As the outcomes of research into the interdependence of culture and education become more widely recognized, it is clear that no single approach to teaching and learning can suit all people (Hewitt 2000, p.112). Hewitt’s study and description of his own teaching among the Aborigines in Australia suggest that culture is perhaps the most central consideration for analyzing teaching.
Teachers are increasingly aware of the benefits of learning about the worldview of the pupils they teach and researchers are calling for more such experiences in order to further inform teachers in diverse classrooms (Walker 2004). While this is not a new concept, it has not always been an explicit criterion for assessing teacher effectiveness. The teacher is no longer the one who merely teaches, but who is also taught in dialogue with the students, who themselves become teachers (Freire 1970, p.53).

One study at Harvard Graduate School of Education asked teacher education students to examine their own identities as prospective teachers as they participated in a 12-week experience in an urban school (Merseth et al. 2008). The identities they reported were heavily influenced by “the personal identities they (brought) to the learning to teach process” (Merseth et al. 2008, p.90). New teachers are particularly tentative about their identities (Thomas and Beauchamp 2007). The notion of teacher identity deepens and expands with respect to the multiple roles that teachers see themselves performing in their complex professional lives.

Galindo’s analysis of three Chicana teachers contributes the notion of ‘bridging identities’ as an essential element of acknowledging the role of personal context as a function of identity (Galindo 1996). These findings are consistent with Mishler’s view that there is not one simplistic identity, but rather many sub-identities that may sometimes conflict or align with each other within individual teachers. He describes these multiple identities within a professional teacher as “a chorus of voices, not just the tenor or the soprano soloist [sic]” (Galindo 1996, p.8).

A Norwegian study found similar results in a narrative investigation of five teachers (Soreide 2006). The researcher found that participating teachers identified multiple identities in their work, with particular attention to four identity constructions: “the caring and kind teacher”; “the creative and innovative teacher”; “the professional teacher”; and “the typical teacher” (p.527). Once
again, teachers reported the need to assume multiple roles, leading to multiple identities, if they are to be successful.

It seems that this line of research is particularly promising for deepening our understanding of the value of teachers taking an active role in defining their identities. This approach to understanding teachers and teaching is an interesting juxtaposition to research that seeks to mine the resources of cultural icons in media, such as film and television. Teachers are often negatively portrayed in the public media and teachers report feeling consistently undermined as the climate of accountability and teacher merit based on test scores gains momentum. Further study would be useful to deconstruct the intersection and divergence of context and what appear to be more universal contributors to a theory of teacher identity.

**Teacher image, icon and identity research: continuing the dialogue**

There are promising research programs within and across disciplines related to teacher image, icon, and identity. There appear to be three areas of particular potential and influence for future scholars’ consideration.

First, we need more research regarding the impact of social and cultural contexts on the images of teachers, particularly as they relate to the perspectives teachers have of themselves. With increasing attention to the gender, racial, and ethnic identities of students in schools, there is also the acknowledgment of the need for teachers to view themselves as members of a global society. Beyerbach (2005) analyzed films released from 1939 to 1998 with respect to teacher and student representation in terms of race, class, and gender. She integrates this database into an education course entitled *Culturally Responsive Teaching*. Beyerbach’s presence in the literature reflects an increasing awareness of the need to examine media and its images of teaching through a critical lens as part of teacher professional development.

A second area for productive scholarship lies in the analysis of how and when teachers’ beliefs, knowledge, and practices intersect. Guskey’s work
analyses the chronology of teacher professional development, changes in teachers’ beliefs and implementation of practices (2009). The teacher’s mind, including her/his perceptions, beliefs, and values, has been a constant source of interest for researchers (Munby et al. 2001; Tubin 2005) as well as for constructing and reframing teachers’ professional knowledge (Munby 1986; Munby and Russell 1990, 1994). Some researchers, however, have suggested that teacher beliefs do not necessarily have an impact on their behaviours (Olafson and Schraw 2006). The researchers found that practicing teachers frequently endorsed more than one epistemological worldview. Further, their results indicated that there was not a close alignment between teachers’ worldviews and their teaching practices. These investigations across academic domains remain essential to a deeper understanding of the profession. The research on the relationship between teachers’ beliefs, the construction of their identities, and images of teachers in society could provide valuable contributions to this literature.

Finally, the field can benefit from intentional focus on cultural, artistic and media resources and artefacts with respect to their impact on public opinion and policy. Warburton and Saunders’ work on the depiction of teachers in cartoons illustrates an approach to research regarding how such artefacts contribute to public discourse (1996). Lasky’s sociocultural analysis of teacher identity and the constraints on teacher agency in this age of accountability reform suggests that what people believe as well as how they think and act “is shaped by cultural, historical, and social structures that are reflected in mediational tools such as literature, art, media…” (Lasky 2005, p.900). Actively drawing upon the arts and humanities as part of the praxis in education can illuminate how societies view teaching.

**The future now**

Each decade brings new images and transformed roles for teachers. Technology integration, it appears, is now a ‘stable part’ of the educational system
(Adcock 2008, p.41). In 2001, we acknowledged this obvious trend and proposed that teachers now needed to see themselves as ‘navigators’ in new terrain, working alongside their students rather than as seer in the front of the class (Burnaford and Hobson 2001). Today, we have a new term for this image of teacher: ‘avatar’. Avatar comes from the Sanskrit, avatara, or ‘descent of a Hindu deity’, from ava- ‘down’ + base of tarati ‘(he) crosses over’ (Online Etymology Dictionary 2010). The teacher avatar crosses over and back in virtual reality, responding to images of students and re-imaging him or her accordingly. Jeremy Bailenson of Stanford University explains:

The prevailing wisdom in teaching, as in just about every form of social interaction, is that face-to-face contact is the gold standard, trumping all forms of mediated interactions. But more important, a teacher’s avatar has powers that just don’t exist in physical space (Bailenson 2008, p.27).

Such flexibility enables Bailenson to assert, “My virtual representation of me, commonly known as an avatar, can outperform me as a teacher any day” (p. 27). The teacher as avatar in virtual reality reminds us of how culture, innovation and society continue to inform our understanding of what it means to be a teacher.

**From noun to verb...image to ‘imaging’**

Imaging: (n.) ME copy, likeness (cf. imitate) (v.) ME: to form a mental picture < OF imagier, deriv. of image (Online Etymology Dictionary 2010).

In this chapter, we have examined the phenomena of teacher images, icons and professional identities as nouns. If we recast the notion of ‘image’ as a verb, we add new insights. In medicine, when one undergoes Magnetic Resonance Imaging, or MRI, the physician can see bones, tissues, and muscles beneath the skin. The process of ‘imaging’ renders the inner body parts visible. An investigation of the meaning and interpretation of images, icons and professional identities of teachers in and across cultures can help us to understand teaching and teachers more fully. Such an examination of teachers in the arts and humanities is a process that indeed renders teachers’ work and lives more visible.