

Teacher As ‘Shape-Shifter’: Role of Teachers in Resolving Identity Crisis

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ABSTRACT

Previous researches provide knowledge about the importance of teachers in identity formation but there is a lack of discussion on how they are important to remove identity crisis. This research has incorporated the collaboration of all the important previous researches to understand how a teacher is connected with his/her students' identity formation. This research provides Erikson's point of view on the teacher-student relationship on identity development, and the prominent role played by the teachers to remove identity crisis and connect the dots within.

Keywords: *Identity Formation, Identity Crisis, The Role of Teachers, Connecting the Dots Within, Education, Development*

Identities are fluid processes involving interpretation and reinterpretation of experience (Sutherland, Howard, & Markauskaite, 2010), i.e. identity is about what someone is becoming rather than what one is. Identity, according to Grotevant (1998), is the unique collection of psychological attributes which is recognized by others and by which one defines oneself. Identity is relatively stable feeling of self-uniqueness. But among youth, this stable feeling of self-uniqueness may be found disturbed. Identity crisis is the most common thing among youth. Although it can happen to anyone, at any point in one's life, at any stage of human development as identity development is a life-long process, but most commonly it appears at the stage of adolescence or in the stage of emerging adulthood. According to Erikson, this generally happens at the age of adolescence. In this stage, an individual internalizes identification and re-examines them to form his or her own identity.

Erikson's theory on removing identity crisis and developing identity formation

Erik Erikson, a developmental psychologist, used the term "identity crisis" to describe one of the most crucial problems that humans face: the construction of identity. An identity crisis, according to Erikson, is a period of intense self-analysis and study of various perspectives on oneself. "Function of the identity search is to discover the standards for adulthood and to select from those standards what is truly important" (Erikson 1968). According to him, the stage of adolescence is a stage of identity development and identity

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crisis. He was interested in understanding how social interactions and relationships affect development and growth. According to Erikson, the youth and the adult have a reciprocal relationship. Within the setting of school, this reciprocal relationship between adolescents and adults is particularly essential (Sadowski, 2003).

Role of teachers in students' life

A teacher was seen as someone who could answer any query and was also the guardian of all resources and information (Sukriti, 2019). Teachers were in charge of providing information a decade ago. But that was all before the internet was invented and put to wider use. Information is now readily available. With just a few keystrokes, we can access an ocean of data. Now, the question is what would be the job of the teacher if they were no longer the source of information?

Many academicians have discovered that teachers have a crucial influence on students' life development, or that they can act as a "shapeshifter," based on their findings. The world needs someone who can positively affect the future generation. Someone must push or encourage students, or create an environment in which they want to study and grow. That is the new teacher's role. The teacher is endowed with the responsibility to bring out the best in his/her students and motivate them to reach greatness. Students are recognized as the nation's and humanity's future, and a teacher as a trustworthy guide for their development. In addition to mentoring students in academics and extracurricular activities, teachers are responsible for influencing a child's future and making him or her better human being. Significant adults' (teachers') influence on students' personal development has been highlighted in research studies, as has been the value of significant people's verbal utterances addressed at youngsters. In the relationship between negative and positive statements made by teachers and children's self-talk, positive words (praise) were found to be more effective than verbal criticism (Burnett, 1996a; Burnett, 1999). A teacher instills information, good values, tradition, rational objective perspective on current issues, and solutions oriented approach in his or her students. An excellent teacher is beneficial for identity formation of students because the former can act as a shape-shifter for them (Sukriti, 2019).

Teachers' role as 'Shape Shifter'

By using Transformative Pedagogical Approach

Identity formation is a major task that has to be done by parents or teachers. In many studies, teachers (like parents) are viewed as identity agents who may help students achieve their identity goals by influencing their surroundings and experiences (Schachter and Ventura, 2008). Teachers can be purposeful co-constructors of teenagers' identities when they use a transformative pedagogical approach that includes encouraging collaborative learning and empowering students to think creatively and critically (Levy et. al., 2010). Teachers must adjust their focus in the classroom from lecturing to assessing to fulfill their new roles. A teacher in a student-centered pedagogy maintains the focus on learning, supervises the process, meters the challenge, and provides appropriate feedback to each student and the entire group (Gordon et al. 2001). Teachers who use this pedagogy method are capable to assist teenagers in developing healthy identities (Marinda & Jennifer, 2010), as they are implementing a philosophy in the classroom that involves a clear investment in their students' developing identities.

By providing Social and Emotional Resources

According to many developmental psychologists, an individual's identity formation begins in childhood and early adolescence, but during adolescence, three significant developmental factors and changes can influence the re-examination of various identifications: puberty, cognitive development, and societal demands (Kroger, 2007). School is a vital part of an adolescent's social environment or societal demands, and it has a lot of potential for identity building (Schachter & Rich, 2011). Social resources available in the classroom can influence adolescents' identity exploration (Tabak & Baumgartner, 2004; Thomas, 2007; Hall & Brassard, 2008). Children who believe that teachers are warm and supportive developed a more positive sense of their control over outcomes, said Skinner et.al. (1998). A teacher's positive assessment of one's ability has a variety of positive consequences. But negative one can leave unintended consequences of stifling academic drive distancing the teenagers from adults who could provide accurate information about future potential. If teachers can spark the interest of teenagers, identity building and self-actualization will follow (Swanepoel, 1990).

Teachers are valuable in addressing a child's abilities and interests. They are capable of providing adequate counseling to pupils and assisting them in achieving their goals. Teachers can be motivators and nurturers for their students. They can help students achieve academic success, be more involved in school, and be more motivated to learn, as well as prepare them for a great future profession and future difficulties (Anderman 2002; Wentzel 2002). It is tough for parents these days to devote time on their children. As a result, they are reliant on educators. Noga Cohen (2016) investigated the argument that, because instructors are present at critical developmental phases for students, there is reason to believe that, over time, students will link their experiences with the "significant teacher" to the processes of identification, exploration, and commitment. The findings show that noteworthy teachers can help adolescents develop their identities and grow their identity capital. The importance of teacher participation in various identity processes is linked to the processes' contribution to the development of "identity capital." Teachers have a significant impact on teenage identity formation as well as their eventual development. They can help adolescents form their identities by promoting positive affective identification (Carol, 1996). One of the most significant duties for a teacher is to act as a "sanctioner" of adolescents' talents (Erikson 1968). For a teacher, approving adolescents' talents requires more than just praising their efforts (Ames and Archer, 1988).

Whatever a teacher does, he or she will be a role model for his or her students (Woolfolk, 1995). Teachers may become the most influential people in an adolescent's life (Papalia & Olds, 1993). A teacher's motivational beliefs and values can guide a student's learning process (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). At the same time as it is being edited and refined, the adolescent's self is solidified. This means that parents, teachers, and other professionals who care enough to make a difference can play an important role in assisting teenagers in developing healthy and self-actualizing relationships (Adams, 1980). Teachers' relationships with restrained adolescents have a favorable influence on adolescents' identity formation if the restrained adolescents attribute positive significance to these relationships (Carol, 1996).

By providing Vocational Guidance and Goal Clarity

The choice of vocational orientation is a major cognitive option that adolescents face (Ackermann, 1993) and it is this choice that will have the greatest impact on identity development because it will affect the entire course of the adolescent's life (Conger, 1991). Furthermore, teachers, far more than they understand, use their power to influence career

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choices and, as a result, shape teenage identity formation. Several studies have shown that professors have an impact on students' career intentions and decisions. Women working in male-dominated sectors, for example, frequently say that a particular teacher had a significant influence on their career decision (Lockheed, 1985). Students all across the world confront numerous obstacles while deciding on a career path. A teacher must stand by their students and assist them in overcoming these obstacles. The major responsibility here is to empathize with the students. Show pupils that you care about them, pay extra attention to them, be their greatest friends, and have the confidence to establish the best relationship with them and get the most out of them (Sukriti, 2019).

By providing Self-knowledge or Cognitive Strengths

Whether adolescents are conscious of it or not, their teachers provide them with a significant portion of their self-knowledge [identity]. Teachers are a strong source of feedback to adolescents about who they are, regardless of the standard in which they find themselves. The teacher-student relationship can be very important in this. The instructional message, according to Vygotsky (1978), proceeds from teacher-student dialogue to inner speech, where it organizes the student's cognition and becomes an internal mental function. He says a skillful teacher could shape a student's cognition through purposeful interaction. Because of prolonged meta-cognition, most adolescents have identified their cognitive strengths and shortcomings by the end of their second year of high school, with the help of their teachers (Prinsloo, Vorster & Sibaya 1996). If they succeed, they will be able to attribute meaning to their cognitive being, which will have a positive impact on their identity construction. Otherwise, if the cognitive relevance is unclear, identity confusion may occur (Carol, 1996). The second most important thing is 'feedback' that is given by the teacher to students. Adolescents learn whether they are capable or incapable, adequate or inadequate, and get a reliable picture of their strengths and limitations with the help of feedback, which helps them build their identity (Hamachek 1992; Skynner & Cleese 1994). To be beneficial to identity formation, educators' relationships with teens must be built on authority, mutual knowledge, and trust (Wright, 1982). Adolescents will invest their devotion in important ideological norms if teachers actively exemplify them.

By developing Self-Esteem

Simply put, self-esteem is described as "belief and self-confidence in one's competence and value" (Cambridge Advanced Dictionary, 2004). Having self-confidence and seeing oneself as capable of dealing effectively with life's obstacles is what it means to feel capable. Teachers have a vital role in instilling a feeling of dignity and self-worth in students (Robert Brooks, 2009). Many children now-a-days do not receive enough positive, caring environment from adults, either at home or school (Elkind, 1990). Teachers understand that when students feel good about themselves, they perform better in class. A teacher must have a positive perspective to help students develop self-esteem. Students must be actively invited and involved in the educational process. If the ideas of this mindset are accepted, educators will find it easier to use attribution theory as a guidepost for boosting self-esteem and hope. In terms of their attitude towards their students, female teachers have been found to be more effective than male teachers in developing self-esteem (Ghazi et. al, 2016). Another study found that teachers' self-evaluation has a favorable effect on pupils' self-esteem (EL-Daw and Hammoud, 2014). Praise, encouragement, and appropriate constructive criticism by the teacher can all help to boost self-esteem (Comer, 1987).

Suggestions

We believe that future research should focus on teachers' deliberate efforts through special education to act as identity agents. Positive developments in teenage identity can establish when considering the setting in which teachers influence adolescent's identity.

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Conflict of Interest

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