



# A Study on the Transformation of Pre-service Teachers' Primary Professional Emotion Based on Transformative Learning Theory

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**Abstract:** Transformative learning theory concerns itself with the organic integrity of learners, and holds that man is a complete unity of biological, social and spiritual attributes. Man's rationality, his sensibility and his spiritual perceptions underlie each other and interact with each other, so for a man's overall sound development, not only the development of his rationality but also the development of his sensibility and spiritual perceptions should be highlighted. At present, the professional training of pre-service teachers is restricted by instrumental rationality, ignoring the development of man's sensibility and spiritual perceptions, which leads to the cultivating of rational instrumental people who lack professional emotions. Positive and stable professional emotions are the lasting motivation for teachers' professional development. To break from the shackles of teacher education dominated by instrumental rationality, the paper studies to develop re-service teachers' reasons, sensibility and spiritual perceptions, to build their stable professional emotions based on Transformative learning theory. By literature review and reflections based on supervisions of students' field practice, this study finds that developing pre-service teachers' rationality will promote their primary professional emotion from superficial to deep; developing pre-service teachers' sensibility will promote it from volatile to stable; developing pre-service teachers' spiritual perceptions will promote it from external to internal.

**Keywords:** Transformative Learning, Professional Emotion, Pre-service Teachers

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## 1. Introduction

In response to the great changes in education, The OECD project [1] seeks to develop a framework to better understand the competencies (i.e. knowledge, skills, attitudes, and metacognition) that will prepare students for a more volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world in 2030, advocating that education at school should aim to foster holistic student learning and well-being. Such an education requires a well-balanced teachers' competencies, and the key role is played by teachers' emotional competence [2, 3]. There's no denying that emotions constitute a key dimension in teachers' professional work and lives (Schutz and Zembylas 2009) [4]. Without emotions that unexpectedly arise from classroom interactions and situations, the truth is that very little teaching and learning would take place [5]. Teachers' professional emotions inspire their teaching and drive their sustainable

professional development. Researches have noted that it is the teachers' emotions rather than their cognition indicate their teaching competencies. It is true that emotions in the learning-to-teach experience are often ignored or downplayed by teacher educators, as Golombek and Doran [6] clearly remind us. As Chen [7] reminds us, one of the greatest challenges that teachers face is to understand their own emotions, the role of emotions in teaching and the classroom, and how to manage such emotions competently, thus posing a real challenge for teacher education. In short, emotional education should be a real priority for teacher education in view of its tremendous educational impact [8].

National education needs ideal, enthusiastic and professional young teachers who devote themselves to education, so it is imperative to cultivate professional emotions of pre-service Teachers. Pre-service teachers choose to be teachers based on their primary professional emotion, that is, based on their

personal life experiences with teachers they love and recognize. Their original professional emotion is a good foundation for their professional emotional development. To transform their primary professional emotion into positive and stable professional emotions, Transformative learning theory comes into its own.

## **2. Pre-service Teachers' Primary Professional Emotions and Their Professional Emotional Development**

### ***2.1. Pre-service Teachers' Primary Professional Emotion***

Teachers' professional emotion is their attitudes towards the occupation and their perceptions of it, which derive from their experiences with the occupation and their overall feelings and satisfactions obtained from the occupation. Man is the combination of flesh and blood and emotion. Emotion is the essential force of human life and the source of human creativity. A man without emotion is like a machine without power, a cold shell, lack of vitality and creativity. [9] People with strong professional feelings harbor a sense of need of their professions and deep understanding of it, so they love their professions whole-heartedly. Therefore, professional emotion is of great significance to humans' professional development. Professional emotion generally include professional love, professional identities and professional achievements. Professional love is a kind of natural choice based on the general understanding of the professions; the perceptions of professional identity is based on the acceptance and affirmation of professional value from the rational cognition of a certain profession. Career achievement is a personal achievement experience obtained from professional practice. In this paper, we refer to pre-service teachers' attitudes towards the profession and their experiences of it, their infinite love of the occupation and their constant pursuit of professional development as professional emotions, which are the enduring motivation for pre-service teachers.

When pre-service teachers choose to be teachers, their choices originate from their initial professional perceptions or their individual growth experiences. The three following situations are responsible for their decisions of becoming teachers. Their personal growth experiences are deeply influenced by their teachers, so they recognize the professional value of teachers; as the people they are in close contact with are engaged in teaching, they are impressed with the teachers' sense of achievements and happiness; because of the high social acceptance and recognition of teachers, they love the profession. Therefore, we define the initial love, acceptance, recognition, attitude or experience owned by pre-service teachers in helping them choose to be teachers as primary professional emotions.

The primary professional perceptions may derive from the individual's perceptual knowledge or from the others' description, and the professional experiences may derive from the experiences of students' perspectives or the others' fragmented perspectives. Pre-service teachers' primary

professional emotions are positive in that they help them to make professional choices. In other words, pre-service teachers' primary professional emotions are a good foundation for their following professional development, and therefore it benefits to promote their transformation from primary to stable and professional.

### ***2.2. From Primary Professional Emotion to Stable Professional Emotion***

The primary professional emotions of pre-service teachers are superficial, which is reflected in the fact that when they make professional choices at first, what they have in mind is that teaching as a profession enjoys high social acceptance and recognition, which can bring a sense of achievement and happiness, according to their personal growth experiences and others' vicarious experiences. Therefore, we should guide pre-service teachers to understand the specialization of being teachers', to experience the unique charm of education and to embrace the uniqueness of being teachers. Being teachers is less a profession to earn a living than a career that should be pursued all their lives, which fulfills their individual value as well as makes them useful members to society. Only in this way can we deepen pre-service teachers' professional emotion.

The primary professional emotions of pre-service teachers are changeable and do not constitute the self-regulation system, principally because they original from the external perceptions and experience input and lack the internal re-cognition and re-experience. When pre-service teachers encounter difficulties or obstacles in the course of their professional study, their original professional emotions may be weakened or dispelled. If they evolve into a self-regulation system at the core, despite the pressure, pre-service teachers can still maintain the original emotions. In other words, pre-service teachers' original professional emotions without transforming cannot benefit their long-term professional study and development, so they need to be well utilized and transformed. So, how can we transform the original professional emotions of pre-service teachers into the deep and stable professional emotions in them?

## **3. The Transformation of Primary Occupational Emotions Based on Transformative Learning Theory**

### ***3.1. Overview of Transformative Learning Theory***

American adult education expert Machiro (Jack Mezirow) first put forward the idea of transformative learning in 1978. McIroe believes that "transformative learning can trigger deeper and more lasting personal changes than other types of learning. Learning experiences that have an important impact on them and shape them may also affect learners' subsequent experiences when these experiences transfer." [10]

Following Jack Mezirow, some other adult education educators put forward their own ideas on Transformative

learning, and there evolve great differences in the development of Transformative learning theory. In terms of transformative contents, some scholars are concerned about the conscious level and some about the subconscious level; in terms of transformation orientation, there are personal transformation and social transformation; in terms of transformation conditions, there also remain differences too... However, with the deepening of the research of Transformative learning, the differences are gradually weakened and comes the internal integration of Transformative learning theory, and its core propositions have been widely recognized. [11] The core propositions are summarized as follows:

- (1). It emphasizes that adults become autonomous thinkers, which is the condition and goal of adult transformative learning.
- (2). It promotes the awakening of adult consciousness through transformative learning.
- (3). It highlights the integrity of learners. Learners are the unity of social, biological and spiritual attributes.

### **3.2. The Transformative Mechanism of Primary Occupational Emotions**

All along, Transformative learning has been applied to the field of adult education, and few have introduced it into general education. The current era of change calls for teachers to become transformative intellectuals [12], so it is imperative to introduce Transformative learning theory into pre-service teacher education. As a learner of subjectivity, professionalism and practicality, pre-service teachers should be encouraged to promote their professional development through subjective consciousness combined with their educational experiences. The four-year professional study of pre-service teachers is the key period for their subsequent professional development, thus it is vital to instill lifelong learning into pre-service teachers, making them autonomous and organic and complete people. Therefore, from the perspective of transforming learning theory, this paper discusses the problems related to pre-service teacher education, the key to which is endowing pre-service teacher with the integrity of their identity.

Transforming learning theory focuses on the integrity of learners and believes that human beings are the unity of social, biological and spiritual attributes. Teachers should be humans first, as well as complete people. We should not ignore their biological and spiritual attributes while stressing their social attributes. However, following the tendency of instrumentalism, the current teacher education is preoccupied with the rational development of pre-service teachers, ignoring the support of their sensibility and spiritual perceptions for their overall sound development. Sensibilities and spiritual perceptions are the part and parcel of humans' emotion.

Pre-service teachers primary professional emotions are the basis of their sensibility. Pre-service teachers' professional theoretical study is the basis of their rational development as reason is based on concept and logic. Developing pre-service teachers' sensibilities, developing their reason and developing

their spiritual perceptions complement each other.

#### **3.2.1. Primary Professional Emotions of Pre-service Teachers Catalyzes Their Autonomous Learning**

The famous educator Spencer said, "when a child is happy, it is easier for him to learn anything. On the contrary, in a state of depression and mental tension, his confidence will weaken, and even a great educator is unable to help him learn." In essence, not just children, this is true of adults who find learning much easier when they are happy and relaxed. Based on their individual life experiences, pre-service teachers own the initial love for the teaching profession, which prompts them to choose teacher education in the first place. They love their major, happy to learn more about it. Their primary professional emotions has laid a foundation for their professional development.

With regard to study, pre-service teachers maintain the positive attitude. Under the guidance of teachers, if they can have a clear-cut overall goal as well as step-to-step goals, if the vision of professional development based on their original professional emotions is guided and satisfied, autonomous learning occurs accordingly. Systemic professional theoretical learning develops their perceptions and concepts towards the profession, thereby promoting their rational development. Educational practice is the key to the development of their understanding and spiritual perceptions of education. In response to the real educational situations, they will apply their educational theories they have learned to practice. The positive visions of becoming qualified teachers or excellent teachers will catalyze them to actively participate in practice and become reflective practitioners. When they encounter conflicts between educational ideals and practice, their primary professional emotion will drive them to reconcile them. In the process of continuous practice, they can construe their educational practices under the guidance of teachers so that their comprehension and spiritual perceptions are to be developed.

#### **3.2.2. Rational Development of Pre-service Teachers Deepens Their Primary Professional Emotion**

Based on the initial professional perceptions or individual growth experience, pre-service teachers naturally choose the teacher education major, full of curiosity and infinite yearning for the teaching profession. With their professional dreams within their bosoms, they happily begin their teacher education. The systematic professional study expands their understanding of the teaching profession, helping them get the whole picture of the value of teaching profession to the society as well as the teachers themselves, rendering their understanding of the teachers' making more forward-looking and the understanding of education's social value more profound. They grasp the deep level of education, aware of the unique charm of the teaching profession, and in turn they are more curious, full of more yearning, looking forward to becoming teachers. Meanwhile, teacher educators mentor pre-service teachers to explore, to construct their individual knowledge, skills and ideological system and to feel the professional charm of being teachers. Rich cognition and experiences obtained from rational thinking act as catalyst, transforming their initial shallow professional love and

identity into profound professional emotions.

The pre-service teachers' professional identity directly affects their attitude towards the teaching profession. [13] Therefore, we can say that deepening their professional perceptions is one of the key factors in transforming their primary professional emotion. The deepening of their professional perceptions is contingent on their study of professional theory. The study facilitates their rational understanding of the occupation and professional identity. In this manner, their primary professional emotions realize their deep development.

### **3.2.3. Development of Spiritual Perceptions Stabilizes Pre-service Teachers' Primary Professional Emotion**

Before pre-service teachers begin the teaching practice, they are quite apprehensive about it. The question of "Can I do well" is their major concern, naturally they will shrink from difficulties, worried about their performances. Here, their original professional emotion drives them to challenge the difficulties and cope with them. The huge gap between educational theory and practice will certainly impact their teaching practice. However, their professional emotion will promote their active participation in teaching practice and find ways to overcome the difficulties encountered in practice. During the period, if teacher educators can encourage them and support them in time, pre-service teachers can gain the sense of achievement of "I can do well" in the concrete education and teaching situations.

It is true that some successful experiences alone are obviously not enough. If pre-service teachers can formulate the universal practice laws and educational theories based on their successful teaching practice under the guidance of teachers, it would be much better. The construction of their own educational ideas will render them more confident in their future educational practices, consolidating their sense of achievement in educational practice and their sense of professional efficacy. Moreover, the development of spiritual perceptions enables pre-service teachers to adapt to the complex and changeable educational situations. They will embrace the challenges and fun brought to them by educational practices, love the teaching profession more, and maintain stable professional emotions.

## **4. Strategies of Transforming Pre-service Teachers' Primary Professional Emotion into Stable One**

### **4.1. Mentoring Pre-service Teachers in a Sound Educational Atmosphere to Maintain Their Love for the Profession**

Pre-service teachers' primary professional emotion favors their subsequent professional development, but if it is not transformed opportunely, it will eventually disappear. After the pre-service teachers enroll, proper mentoring on their professional planning and development will initiate the transformation of their original professional emotion, rendering them independent learners, as a consequence, their rational and savvy development can be ensured.

German educational anthropologist O. F. Bolnov points out that the success of education depends on the external educational

climate and certain internal emotional attitudes that the educatee and the educator adopt. It is generally referred to as the "educational atmosphere" and is understood as the sum-up of emotion, emotional state and affections or disgusts towards education. [14] The educational atmosphere influences the pre-service teachers imperceptibly. When it is harmonious and warm, they will generate a sense of security, a pleasant state of mind, and positive feelings for education. Colleges and universities should focus on creating a sound educational atmosphere so that pre-service teachers can experience and appreciate the unique charm of education, aware of the teacher educators' love for the profession and their love for them. All of these have great impacts on them, strengthening their initial choices and keeping them devoted to the professional learning and practice.

### **4.2. Establishing Pre-service Teachers' Self-regulation Systems to Deepen Their Professional Identity**

Pre-service teachers' own recognition of the teaching profession is the most persistent source of their sound emotions towards it, preparing them for it and inspiring their professional development [15]. With their own teacher educators being the role models, coupled with a harmonious educational atmosphere, their professional identity is generated on the emotional level; meanwhile, by virtue of their learning of the theoretical knowledge and in-depth learning, their professional identity is enhanced on the rational level. However, the educational situation is volatile. To enhance pre-service teachers' professional identity as a pillar of their professional emotion, we must cultivate their awakened consciousness and critical thinking ability. When a conflicts between their previous experiences and educational situation at hand arise, their awakened consciousness will prompt them to reassess their original mode of thinking and values and adapt the latter to the new situation. Moreover, critical thinking helps pre-service teachers find the crux of the problem. Thus, their original professional identity is deepened by their critical reflection.

### **4.3. Designing the Practice Courses to Enhance Pre-service Teachers' Professional Efficacy**

Teaching practice is the path for pre-service teachers to obtain direct educational experience, and therefore its planning is related to their direct experience acquisition. The teaching practice phrase in teacher education suffers the problems of short duration, teacher guidance being mere formality, cooperative school not being "cooperative", etc. Therefore, optimizing the teaching practice curriculum ensures pre-service teachers' gaining positive educational experiences by the teaching practice. To do this, two points should be emphasized: one is to extend the duration of teaching practice courses; the other point is to refine the content of the courses, marking students' progress during the whole course of teaching practice. First of all, the practice curriculum should be introduced when pre-service teachers are in their sophomore year and run through to senior year, helping them obtain long-term practical experiences and comprehend the differences between educational theories and practice. Secondly, the content of the practice curriculum should be refined, marking

students' progress and the ability they have acquired during the teaching practice. Furthermore, the practice curriculum planning should reflect on practice, guiding pre-service teachers to the exploration of the general educational practice law behind real-life teaching practices, developing their educational comprehension and enhancing their sense of efficacy as teachers.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper focuses on the transformation of pre-service teachers' primary professional emotion based on Transformative learning theory. Transformative learning theory concerns itself with the organic integrity of learners, and holds that man is a complete unity of biological, social and spiritual attributes. Developing man's rationality, developing his sensibility, developing spiritual perceptions complement each other, ensuring a man's overall sound development. To break from the shackles of teacher education dominated by instrumental rationality, the paper proposes to develop pre-service teachers' reasons, sensibility and spiritual perceptions, to build their stable professional emotions based on Transformative learning theory. The transformation of pre-service teachers' primary professional emotions into their stable professional emotion involves deepening their primary professional emotion by developing their rationality, stabilizing it by developing their sensibility and internalizing it by developing their spiritual perceptions. Cultivating pre-service teachers' stable professional emotion ensures their future professional development, making them whole people and whole teachers.

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