

Social Studies Teacher Identity and Motivation when Facilitating Discussions: A Case Study

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INTRODUCTION

- Social studies teachers are encouraged to employ discussions to deepen student learning for a democratic society^{1,2,3}.
- Yet, discussions are mostly absent from social studies classrooms⁴.
- Research suggests that novice social studies teachers struggle with facilitating discussions^{5,6,7}.
- However, very little research has focused on social studies teachers' lived experiences in facilitating discussions.
- The current case study used the Dynamic Systems Model of Role Identity⁸ (DSMRI) to investigate one social studies preservice teacher's (PST's) identity, motivation, and actions while facilitating a discussion.

METHODS

- The case included a PST in his senior year from a Mid-Atlantic university.
- Data included: (a) PST's lesson plan, (b) 10-minute video recording of a discussion session, and (c) the PST's 1,227-word reflection on his decision-making during the discussion.
- DSMRI Manual⁹ guided the analysis of the data, which included coding for content (e.g., ontological beliefs) structure (e.g., alignment), and processes (e.g., self-reflection). Inductive analysis identified patterns and themes, reflected in an analytical summary of the case.

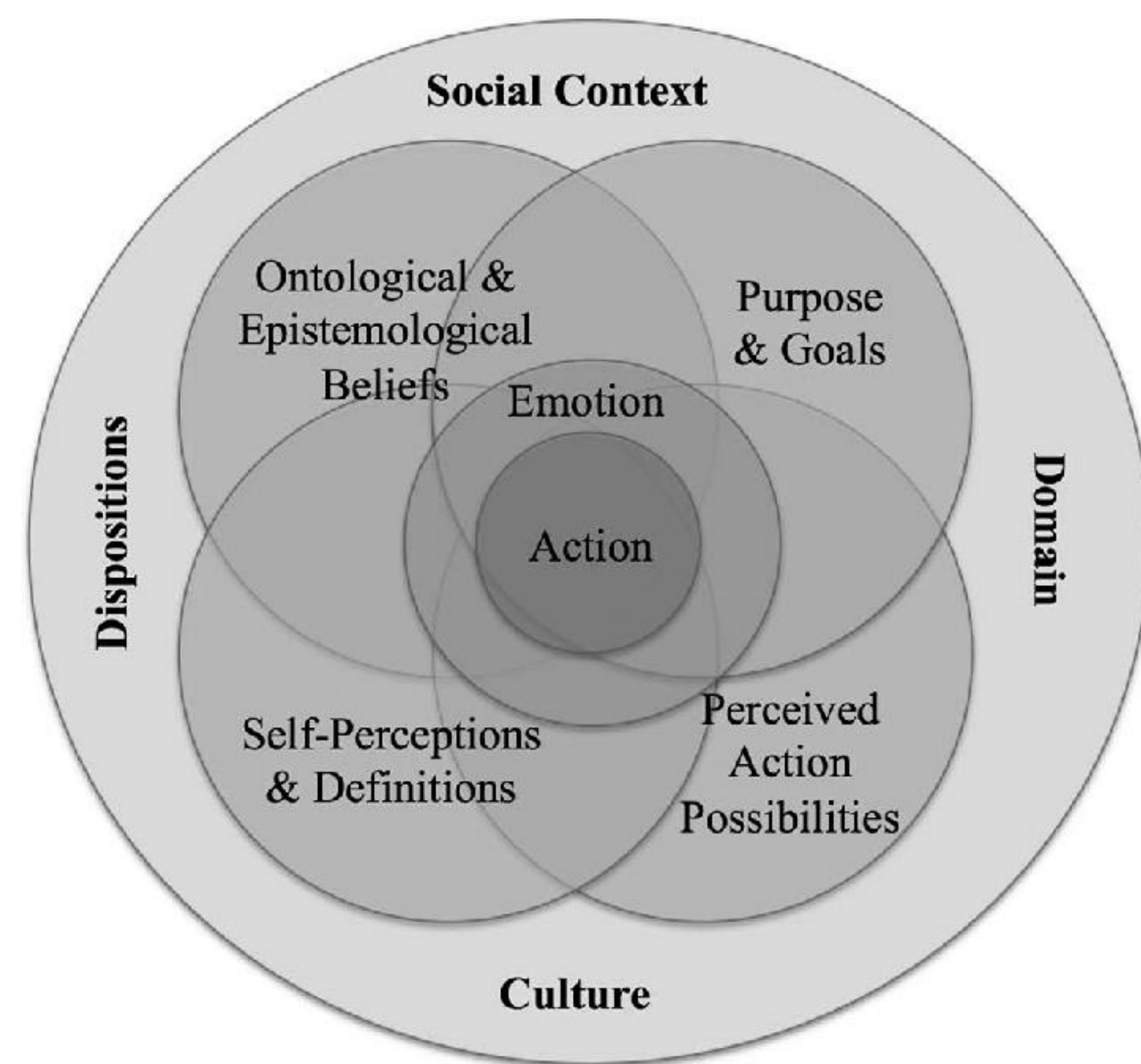


Figure 1. Schematic representation of the Dynamic Systems Model of Role Identity⁸

*At 2:22, after another student has cited the same piece of evidence as the first student to support the claim that Marcus Garvey was positive, I urge someone to come forward with a point to argue otherwise. When watching it over, it seems unfair for me to move so quickly from this point of evidence to something else. Both students had seen a connection to an idea to an excerpt in the text, but had they sufficiently understood how the two were connected? I think I missed an opportunity here to really orient students to the text, instead of just loosely pushing them in the direction of the text. My thinking with this decision was that I wanted to get students to grapple with the controversy the lies in the documents. I was rushed to get a back-and-forth dialogue going between students, and maybe not concerned enough with the relevance to the content of the discussion.

- OB1: student identified evidence aligned with AP1: Asks for counterevidence
- Self-Reflection on SP1: unfair [judgmental] on AP2: Moving away from student in OB1
- OB2: Students make connections; EB1: Were student's connections to content clear?
- Self-Reflection; Misalignment between G1: Orient students to text and AP3: loose promotion of text
- Self-Reflection; G2: Wants exploration of controversy
- Disharmony between G3: back-and-forth dialogue and G4: relevance to the content to the discussion; Self-Reflection on SP2: not concerned enough [judgmental]

Figure 2. Excerpt from DSMRI coded PST reflective decision memo. Note. AP=Action Possibilities, EB=Epistemological Beliefs, G=Goals, OB=Ontological Belief, SP=Self-Perceptions.

The novice teacher's identity, motivation, and instructional decisions reflected negotiating situated subjective tensions between disciplinary and social goals.



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RESULTS

The findings suggested that the PST prioritized academically peripheral student interactions during the discussion over his original goal of orienting students to the historical text and disciplinary argumentation. The tension between planned versus emergent goals resulted with actions that favored students' personal sense making, positive emotions, and social interaction over their engagement with planned learning objectives. The PST acknowledged this tension and noted disharmony between competing beliefs and goals in his affective appraisal of the discussion. But he indicated his priorities between these goals and actions by evaluating the discussion as "successful" despite the superficiality of the consequent academic learning in the session.

DISCUSSION

Current practices in PST training of discussions teach discrete discussion facilitation skills (e.g.,¹⁰) but neglect to consider tensions within PSTs' personal and professional identities. The current case study provides a first step towards developing a theory and recommendations that considers the interplay among PSTs' situated appraisals, multiple goals, various self-perceptions, emotions, and actions that frame their decision-making when facilitating discussions. Such a theory could guide teacher educators in promoting PSTs' professional identity exploration and formation to support their confidence, competence, and skills in aligning the different academic, social, and emotional goals involved in effective discussion facilitation.

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