

Research Article

Exploring Teacher Identity and Psychological Dynamics through Freudian Analysis: A Case Study of The Teacher's Diary (2014)

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Abstract: This study examines the psychological dynamics of teachers as portrayed in the Thai film “The Teacher’s Diary” (2014) using Freud’s psychoanalytic theory of id, ego, and superego, alongside defense mechanisms. The research employs qualitative content analysis, focusing on key scenes that reveal the emotional, moral, and reflective behaviors of the main characters, Song and Ann. Results indicate that both teachers manage internal conflicts and external challenges through rationalization, sublimation, intellectualization, and moral commitment, demonstrating resilience, reflective practice, and ethical awareness. The discussion connects these findings with contemporary theories of effective teaching, emphasizing emotional intelligence, moral purpose, and reflective practice as core competencies for teacher development. The study highlights how cinematic narratives can provide valuable insights into teacher identity, professional growth, and the integration of personal and professional competencies in education.

Keywords: Defense Mechanisms; Emotional Intelligence; Id Ego Superego; Moral Purpose; Psychoanalytic Theory.

1. Introduction

The role of teachers extends beyond the delivery of academic content, encompassing emotional, moral, and reflective capacities that shape effective teaching practices. In the context of teacher education, understanding the psychological dynamics that underpin teacher behavior is essential for preparing educators capable of navigating complex classroom environments. Films such as “The Teacher’s Diary” (Tharatorn, 2014) provide a rich narrative medium for exploring these dynamics, illustrating how personal emotion, ethical commitment, and reflective practice interact in the professional development of teachers. This study aims to bridge cinematic analysis with educational theory to examine the core competencies necessary for effective teaching.

Previous research has explored teacher effectiveness from multiple perspectives, including emotional intelligence, reflective practice, and moral development. Studies by Goleman (Goleman, 2020; Rafaila, 2015; Zarezadeh, 2013) emphasized the importance of emotional regulation in sustaining teacher motivation and classroom engagement, while Schön (Chen et al., 2019; Fatwassani et al., 2019; Nguyễn et al., 2020; Procter, 2020; Schön, 1983; Suintiah, 2021) highlighted the role of reflective thinking in professional growth. Noddings (Noddings, 2005) and Sockett (Sockett, 1993) further emphasized the ethical and moral dimensions of teaching, arguing that a teacher’s care and integrity directly impact student learning and well-being. However, most empirical studies rely on surveys, interviews, or classroom observation, with limited attention to narrative or symbolic representations in media as a source of insight into teacher psychology.

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Despite the wealth of theoretical and empirical literature, a research gap exists in linking psychoanalytic perspectives with teacher behavior as portrayed in film (Ahn & Leggo, 2019; Schwarz-Franco, 2016). While Freud's theory of id, ego, and superego has been applied to literary and cinematic characters (Ghufron & Jayatri, 2022; Heri Isnaini et al., 2023; Jasmal, 2022; Lee, 2018; Novika et al., 2014), few studies analyze educational settings or teacher identity through this lens. Similarly, the integration of defense mechanisms, reflective practice, and moral purpose in a single analytical framework remains underexplored. Investigating such portrayals can illuminate unconscious motivations, emotional coping strategies, and ethical decision-making that are otherwise difficult to observe in real-world classroom contexts.

This study offers novelty by combining Freudian psychoanalytic theory with contemporary educational theories to analyze teacher characters in "The Teacher's Diary" (Tharatorn, 2014). By examining both Song and Ann's emotional regulation, reflective thinking, and moral commitment, the research provides insights into the multidimensional nature of teacher effectiveness. The study also demonstrates how films can serve as a pedagogical tool for understanding teacher psychology and developing competencies that are essential in real educational settings.

The purpose of this research is to explore how the main characters in "The Teacher's Diary" (Tharatorn, 2014) manage internal conflict, moral decision-making, and professional responsibility through the lens of Freud's id, ego, and superego, as well as defense mechanisms. Additionally, the study aims to connect these findings with contemporary theories of effective teaching, including emotional intelligence, reflective practice, and moral purpose, thereby contributing to both teacher education research and the understanding of teacher identity development.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative content analysis approach to examine the psychological dynamics of teachers as portrayed in the Thai film "The Teacher's Diary" (Tharatorn, 2014). The qualitative method allows for an in-depth exploration of character behavior, dialogue, and narrative development, which are essential for understanding the interplay between emotional, cognitive, and moral dimensions of teaching. The research focused on the main characters, Song and Ann, as they navigate challenges in a remote floating school, emphasizing how their experiences reflect theoretical concepts from Freud's psychoanalytic framework, particularly the structures of id, ego, and superego, as well as defense mechanisms.

Data collection involved repeated viewing of the film to identify relevant scenes, interactions, and diary entries that reveal the characters' psychological states. Key moments were systematically documented, including expressions of loneliness, problem-solving strategies, moral decision-making, and coping behaviors. These scenes were then categorized according to Freud's personality theory and analyzed to determine how each character manages internal conflict and external pressures. Additional attention was given to the characters' emotional and moral development, which was cross-referenced with established educational theories, such as emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2020), reflective practice (Schön, 1983), and teacher moral purpose (Noddings, 2005).

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic and interpretative approach, which allowed the researchers to link observed behaviors to theoretical constructs. Scenes were coded and organized into tables highlighting id, ego, superego, and defense mechanisms for each character. Patterns of psychological adaptation, moral decision-making, and reflective thinking were interpreted to explain how these elements contribute to effective teaching practices. Triangulation of findings was achieved by comparing the characters' actions with multiple theoretical frameworks, ensuring rigor and credibility in the analysis. This method provides a comprehensive understanding of how personal and professional competencies interact in the portrayal of ideal teacher behavior.

3. Results

The Freudian theory of personality — consisting of the id, ego, and superego — offers a useful lens for understanding the emotional and psychological development of the main characters in the Thai film *The Teacher's Diary* (Tharatorn, 2014). By examining how Song and Ann respond to isolation, responsibility, and personal hardship while working at a remote floating school, their behaviors can be interpreted as reflections of inner conflicts between instinctive desires, rational decision-making, and moral conscience. The following table

analyzes key moments in the film that illustrate how each character's actions align with Freud's structural model of personality.

Table 1. the Freudian personality structure (Id – Ego – Superego) analysis for the Thai movie “The Teacher’s Diary” (2014).

Personality Aspect (Freud)	Analysis	Scene in the Movie
Id	Song (the male teacher) feels lonely and frustrated when assigned to teach at a remote floating school without any company or entertainment. His instinctive emotional need for affection and human connection becomes strong.	When Song talks to himself in the empty classroom and writes in the diary to express his loneliness.
Ego	He tries to adapt to the difficult situation by focusing on teaching responsibly, repairing school facilities, and bonding with his students to stay motivated.	When Song repairs the small wooden bridge and plays with the children to keep the school lively.
Superego	His moral values and sense of duty as a teacher make him stay committed despite the hardship. Reading Ann’s diary inspires him to be a dedicated teacher like her.	When Song reads Ann’s diary and silently promises himself to become as devoted a teacher as she was.
Id	Ann (the female teacher) feels disappointed and heartbroken after her failed relationship and being sent to the remote floating school. Her emotional impulse is to give up and return to the city.	When Ann cries in her room after receiving the transfer letter placing her in the floating school.
Ego	She gradually adapts to her new environment, builds warm relationships with her students, and finds new meaning in life through teaching.	When Ann smiles as she watches her students enthusiastically learn to read on the floating platform.
Superego	Her moral conscience and sense of responsibility as a teacher motivate her to stay. She believes that being a teacher is a calling, not a burden, and writes her reflections in her diary for others to learn from.	In the final scene, Ann writes her last note in the diary: “Being a teacher is not about where you are, but about your heart.”

In “The Teacher’s Diary” (Tharatorn, 2014), both main characters — Song and Ann — demonstrate Freud’s three-part structure of personality through their emotional and moral journeys as teachers in a remote floating school. Song’s id appears in his loneliness and frustration when first isolated from society, expressing his natural desire for companionship and recognition. However, his ego helps him adapt to his surroundings; he channels his emotions into teaching, maintaining balance between personal discomfort and professional duty. Ultimately, his superego guides him to remain dedicated to his students, as he is inspired by Ann’s diary to find purpose and meaning in his role as an educator, reflecting moral integrity and a strong sense of vocation.

Similarly, Ann’s id emerges when she feels rejected and disheartened after a failed relationship and her reassignment to the isolated school, showing her instinctive wish to escape hardship. Her ego, however, enables her to cope with this loneliness by focusing on her students and her role as a teacher, turning adversity into growth. Her superego is evident in her moral strength and devotion — she chooses to persevere because she believes teaching is a noble mission that transcends personal struggles. Through both Song and Ann, the film illustrates how emotional impulses, rational control, and moral conscience interact to form resilience and self-discovery within the teaching profession.

Table 2. the defense mechanisms (based on Freud's psychoanalytic theory) used by the main characters Song and Ann in the Thai film "The Teacher's Diary" (2014).

Character	Defense Mechanism	Explanation / Analysis	Scene in the Movie
Song	Rationalization	Song justifies his isolation by convincing himself that teaching in a remote area is a valuable sacrifice for his students, masking his real feelings of loneliness.	When Song talks to himself that "it's not so bad here" while clearly feeling sad and longing for connection.
Song	Sublimation	He channels his emotional frustration into productive actions — fixing the school facilities and dedicating himself to his students.	When Song repairs the floating bridge and smiles while teaching children enthusiastically.
Song	Projection	Song projects his own longing for connection onto Ann, whom he has never met but idealizes through her diary.	When he reads Ann's diary and begins to imagine her as the perfect companion.
Ann	Denial	Ann initially denies her unhappiness about being assigned to the floating school, pretending to be fine to hide her inner sadness.	When Ann smiles to others despite feeling devastated about her new placement.
Ann	Intellectualization	She distances herself from emotional pain by writing in her diary, analyzing her experiences logically instead of emotionally.	When Ann writes reflective entries about her teaching life rather than her personal heartbreak.
Ann	Sublimation	Ann transforms her heartbreak into devotion for her students and her role as a teacher.	When she passionately teaches and finds joy watching her students learn.

In "The Teacher's Diary" (Tharatorn, 2014), both Song and Ann use various defense mechanisms to cope with emotional pain and isolation. Song relies on rationalization to convince himself that his loneliness is a noble sacrifice for his students, masking his deep emotional struggle. He also uses sublimation, channeling his frustration and longing into constructive work — repairing the school, teaching diligently, and caring for his students. Additionally, Song's projection is evident when he idealizes Ann, a woman he only knows through her diary, projecting his desire for emotional connection and understanding onto her image. These defense mechanisms help him manage loneliness while maintaining his professional identity and sense of purpose.

Similarly, Ann employs denial to suppress her initial disappointment and sadness about her reassignment to the remote school, pretending to accept it with strength. She then turns to intellectualization by writing her feelings and reflections in her diary — analyzing her situation logically instead of emotionally, which gives her a sense of control. Through sublimation, Ann transforms her heartbreak into dedication, finding fulfillment in her students and rediscovering her calling as a teacher. Together, both characters show that defense mechanisms, though unconscious, can lead to personal growth and self-discovery when directed toward meaningful actions and moral purpose.

4. Discussion

The psychological portrayal of Song and Ann in "The Teacher's Diary" (Tharatorn, 2014) illustrates how personal emotion, self-regulation, and moral commitment shape the identity of a good teacher. Through Freud's structural theory, both characters demonstrate that effective teaching extends beyond cognitive competence; it involves the ability to balance

instinctive emotion (id), rational reflection (ego), and moral values (superego). This aligns with the principles of emotional intelligence theory (Goleman, 2020), emphasizing that self-awareness and emotional control are essential elements of effective teaching. Song's sublimation and rationalization reflect emotional maturity, allowing him to transform isolation into creativity and empathy in the classroom. Similarly, Ann's use of intellectualization and sublimation demonstrates reflective practice, which supports Schön's (Schön, 1983) view of the teacher as a reflective practitioner who learns continuously through self-examination.

Furthermore, both teachers embody the moral dimension of teaching described by Sockett (Sockett, 1993) and Noddings (Noddings, 2005), who argue that good teaching requires moral purpose and caring relationships. Ann's persistence and Song's commitment to their students reflect a moral calling that transcends personal struggles—an inner “superego” that guides their actions according to professional integrity and compassion. Their psychological resilience highlights that emotional and moral competencies are inseparable from pedagogical expertise. The film thus offers a symbolic narrative illustrating how good teachers act as moral agents, not merely as transmitters of academic knowledge.

From a pedagogical perspective, the characters' experiences suggest that teacher education should address not only content mastery but also emotional resilience, moral awareness, and reflective thinking. Teacher preparation programs can integrate self-reflective activities, narrative writing, and socio-emotional learning frameworks to help future teachers develop coping mechanisms similar to Song's sublimation or Ann's intellectualization. By learning to manage emotional conflicts constructively, teachers can sustain motivation and compassion even in challenging environments. This approach aligns with Day and Gu's (Day & Gu, 2010) argument that sustaining teachers' passion requires balancing personal emotion with moral purpose in practice.

Finally, integrating Freudian perspectives with modern educational theories reveals a multidimensional understanding of teacher identity. While Freud's defense mechanisms explain the subconscious strategies teachers use to manage emotional stress, contemporary frameworks such as humanistic education (Rogers, 1969) and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) expand this view by emphasizing agency, reflection, and growth. Therefore, the film's narrative can be interpreted as a metaphor for teacher development: from unconscious emotional defense toward conscious self-realization and ethical teaching. This discussion reinforces that becoming a good teacher involves continuous integration of emotion, intellect, and morality—an enduring process of personal and professional transformation.

5. Conclusions

This study demonstrates that the psychological dynamics of teachers, as portrayed in “The Teacher's Diary”, are crucial in shaping effective teaching practices. Song and Ann illustrate how balancing emotional impulses, rational reflection, and moral conscience—through mechanisms such as sublimation, rationalization, and intellectualization—supports resilience, professional integrity, and student-centered teaching. The findings highlight that a good teacher is not only knowledgeable but also emotionally intelligent, morally committed, and reflective in practice. Integrating Freudian psychoanalytic insights with modern educational theories suggests that teacher development programs should emphasize emotional regulation, reflective practice, and ethical awareness to prepare educators capable of navigating complex classroom challenges. Ultimately, the film serves as a symbolic reminder that effective teaching is a continuous process of personal growth, ethical commitment, and emotional engagement.

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