

IDENTIFICATION OF PROFESSIONS: PSYCHOLOGICAL PECULIARITIES OF ACQUIRING A PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY OF TEACHERS

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Abstract

The article offers an integrated review of literature on the phenomenon of professional identity. Empirically, professional identity has been studied in the experimental group consisting of 214 Daugavpils University students majoring in teacher training programs, using M.Kuhn methodology and the unfinished statement technique. The data obtained from processing first-year students' responses demonstrate a high level of identifying with the social role "student". The second-year students begin expressing ambivalent and neutral attitudes to their profession. The situation is quite favorable for building up a professional identity. The Third-year students become more satisfied with their professional behavior during their studies. The Fourth-year student crisis has been identified and the reasons for its appearance discussed.

Key words: *identity of personality, professional identity crisis, professional training, teacher training students.*

Introduction

The contemporary social-economical activity has acquired its global character. Therefore, personal, professional and social development is understood as integrated processes. The today's job market demands competitive personalities, who are ready to solve economical and social problems. Competitiveness is determined by professional identity, by the ability to build and manage professional activity, and to be able to change and develop it.

The concept "general identity of personality" is a generic one for the concept "professional identity". Professional identity, though, has characteristics that distinguish it from the general identity of personality. The term "identification" refers to the developmental aspect of finding likeness with a previously formed image while the concept "identity" indicates the result, the ultimate effect. The article does not focus on the similarity and difference between real Ego and ideal/imagined Ego. Dynamic Ego is being studied.

That is why the terms "identification" and "identity" are used in the same context. General personal identity can be subdivided into personal and social identities. The end result of personal identification (self-awareness) is constituting oneself as a personality and experience of ones own Ego. According to E.Erikson (1968, 1980) personal identity is a merge of social roles of an indi-

vidual, a psychological correspondence to the model personalities that are accepted in the culture to which the personality belongs.

Cognitive school of psychology treats personal identity as self-categorization of ones own personal qualities (Waterman, 1992). Representatives of neo-behaviorism claim that personal identity is a mechanism of personal development, a way to develop new forms of behavior and new roles (Marcia, 1966). The analysis of various views on essential characteristics of identity makes it possible to assert the following:

- Identification is understood as finding likeness between oneself and somebody else, as matching oneself against somebody else.
- Depending on how wide and deep or accurate and complete likeness or match would be, identification can be described as multi-level or multi-dimensional.
- The process of finding likeness or establishing match involves identifying emotional experience.

The functions of personal identity include integration of a person into society, personality development, and regulation of person's behavior. Social identification is understood as the process of becoming aware of oneself as a member of a social group, and establishing likeness or match with other members of this social group. The different ways of describing the essence of identification are listed below.

- Identification is an instrument of socialization whereby a personality attempts to feel and think like others; to assume the roles, and to share the values of another meaningful personality (Sears, 1957).
- Identification is a mechanism that makes mutual understanding within a group possible; it determines cross-personal differentiation and integration, as well as differentiation and integration across groups (Waterman, 1992).
- Identification is a way of structuring one's ideas about and views of oneself in the system of relations with society: a way of finding likeness with and differences from other group members (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).
- Identification is an instrument of conscious mimicking or copying others (Hiebsch & Matthias, 1991).

The contemporary research on professional identity is focusing on the adjustment of a person to the requirements of his/her profession and building up profession-related qualities (Pipere, 2003, 2007). Convergence of a ones private life and his/her career which leads to such situations where typical features that professionals have acquired make them obvious in all areas of his/her live, is called identification of a personality with their profession. This means that a person acts as professional in other spheres of his/her live. In other words, it is a case of unanimity of professional life and personal self-identification.

We suggest two levels of professional identification, personal identification which determines professional self-positioning of a personality as an agent of professional activity; and societal identification which allows one to develop one's societal and professional standing by means of identifying oneself with other society members representing imagined or real-life professional groups. Functions of professional identification for personality include (1) building up "professional Ego", (2) enhancing professional development and professional socialization, and (3) regulating professional behavior. Therefore, we attempt to examine the degree of a person's identification with a professional role, i.e. to find out the extent to which a person identifies her/himself with the agent of a professional activity.

Identification presupposes two options, namely, identifying and de-identifying oneself with the agent of activity. As a result, a person's professional identity shows itself in a set of subjective and objective indicators. Professional success is usually viewed as an objective indicator of the

acquired professional identity. Subjective indicators of professional identity are listed below:

- degree to which one identifies with a professional role or a professional model;
- acceptance of professional norms and values;
- emotional attitude to profession;
- degree of professional self-realization and awareness of this fact;
- appearance of demand-motivational sphere;
- amount of responsibility which a person is prepared to accept in her/his professional activity.

Motivational component

The motifs uncover the degree, to which certain profession is desirable or unwanted for an individual. The formation of motivation reflects the evaluation of profession's societal significance, its moral value, and respect, which certain profession has in the society or certain societal group. (Aharpour & Brown, 2002). The salary level, conditions of professional and vocational way of life also influence the motifs. Motifs reflect the satisfaction that individuals experience as a result of their professional activity. (Deaux, Reid, Mizrahi, & Cotting, 1999).

Professional qualification

Almost every profession requires professional training. Skills and knowledge, which are acquired during the studies in educational establishments, and beyond them, influence the attitude towards professions and feeling of oneself fitting or belonging to a profession. Professional qualification and readiness to profession do not always match. Professional training usually does not prognosticate all situations that may happen during the future working activity, which is not the effect of incompleteness of study program development, but the effect of particular professional activity specifics. Clearly, it is not possible to present the complete program of actions, for example, for traffic accident, when training a driver. (Pipere, 2007).

The same stands for teacher education, where there is no possibility to present the program of actions that a future teacher may follow in case of behavioral deviations of children in class. It is, however, possible to prepare general models of problem solving, leaving the choice of using one of them in concrete situations to the teachers themselves. Preparedness and acquisition of profession are important but not sufficient conditions for professional identity.

Individually-typological peculiarities

The formation of motifs, acquisition of professional qualification, feeling one-self belonging to a profession are tightly connected to typological peculiarities. Among typological characteristics, which separate individuals from one another, it is important to pay close attention to stable features, which have natural grounds. Life conditions influence the way individual character and his/her habits are being formed and transformed, however, the dynamic peculiarities (temperament) remain most conservative, and determine the tempo, rhythm and speed of reactions in human activities (Keirse, 1998).

Methodology of Research

For further analysis of the professional identity phenomenon, it seems important to determine the current stage of the development of a person's professional identity. Which factors influence the dynamics of professional identification? How does professional identification, in its turn, influence the effectiveness of one's professional activity? In the present research, only those indicators of

professional identity, which seem to be more operational, have been studied. The research scheme has been accordingly designed.

The current research seeks to describe the dynamics of professional identification. It has been assumed that the parameters established above are the criteria of the change of professional identity. Out of the listed above indicators of professional identity, only those, which seem more operational and important, have been selected. They determine the research process.

Research sample, instrument

Daugavpils University students were used in order to study the level of professional identity. The selection consisted of 214 students of teacher training programs of all four years of study, 93% females and 7% males. The “horizontal sampling” method of research and a standard battery of psychological techniques were used. Diagnostic samples were made at each of the four years of study, and the results obtained were correspondingly analyzed in four main groups.

The methodology of this empirical study included M.Kuhn’s and T.McPartland (Twenty Statements Test, [TST], 1954). The question “What am I?” is logically connected with what a person identifies her/himself with, i.e. social status, role, and related set of qualities. Kuhn and McPartland (1954) believe that the set of answers to this question reflects the model of “Self-conception”. We assume that the level of people’s awareness of their professional standing as well as of their professional identity can be defined by the rank, status and the role position, which is made up by the listed range of answers. In order to register results, the key notions, reflecting the status-role positions of the responding students, were established (“teacher”, “future teacher”, “student”). Results are expressed in marks, which depend on the rank of the status-role position mentioned by the respondents in the set of answers. In positions from 1 to 5, the answers are assigned 2 marks; in positions from 6 to 10 – 1.5 marks; and from 11 to 20 - 1 mark.

The technique Unfinished Statements [US] was employed to establish the following indicators of professional identity:

- awareness of the object of identification;
- place of profession in one’s life;
- impact of profession on other strands of life;
- emotional acceptance of profession;
- mobility in professional development.

Respondents were requested to complete eleven unfinished open-ended statements, such as “In my profession, I would like to be like ...”, “In my life, profession means ...”, “My attitude to pedagogy: ...” etc. While processing the answers, only those related to profession were counted. Positive, negative and ambivalent answers were accepted.

With the help of these methods one can distinguish the tendency of a subject towards his/her identity.

Results of Research

All the obtained data is summarized in groups, which are pled in certain categories or groups: “student”, “teacher”, and “future teacher” according to method TST and “Number of profession-related answers in unfinished statement”, “Positive attitude to profession”, “Ambivalent attitude to profession”, “Number of students without an object for identification” according to technique US.

Research results are displayed in the table Nr.1, the analysis of which will be presented below.

Table 1. Dynamics of professional identity.

Status-role positions	Year of study			
	1	2	3	4
'Student' (Amount of marks)	1,3	1,35	1,38	1,7
'Teacher' (Amount of marks)	0,5	0,6	0,39	0,7
'Future teacher'(Amount of marks)	0,5	0,6	1,1	0,55
Number of profession-related answers in unfinished statement (%)	83	72	88	64
Positive attitude to profession (%)	80	68	85	73
Ambivalent attitude to profession (%)	0	38	15	22
Number of students without an object for identification (%)	35	48	54	49

Peculiarities of the 1st-year students' professional identity

According to the results of the TST, the data obtained from processing first-year students' responses demonstrate a high level of identifying with the social role "student" (1,3), while the status-role positions "teacher" (0,5) and "future teacher" (0,5) were ignored. This result can be explained by the general situation in the first year of studies. Having been selected from other candidates, the first year students have achieved their much desired aims and have an opportunity to constitute themselves as belonging to the social group "student". They are young people, actively communicating and sharing their successes with friends and relatives. This is why identifying one-self with the social role "student" is stable at this stage of studying, and it is well grounded.

The data also show evidence of professional identification. Completing the unfinished statement "For me, pedagogy is ..." 83% of first-year students give professionally-related endings, such as "my profession", "my main activity in life", etc. This allows claiming that there is a tight relation between these two methodologies, which on the whole is in favor of the tendency towards professional identity being built up as the constituent "Me – dynamic" of a student.

It is also worth mentioning the endings of the statement "My attitude to pedagogy is ..." These were divided in three groups: "positive attitude", "ambivalent attitude", and "other". 80% of the first-year students express an undoubtedly positive attitude to pedagogy; none demonstrates ambivalent (contradictory) attitude.

Emotional internalization of professional environment testifies to the fact that foundation for normal development of professional identity and constructive dealing with possible crisis in future, are being formed. Objects for professional identification for the first-year students are successful professionals who are influential in their sphere of activity and characterized by a certain set of qualities, such as their cleverness, openness in relation to people, sensitivity, attentiveness, expertise, and being a powerful character.

Nevertheless (35%) of the first-year students admit absence of any object of identification. Such statements like "In professional sphere, I would prefer to be like ..."; "An authoritative personality in pedagogy from my point of view is ..." were completed in the following way: "nobody", "don't know", and "no ideal professional". This contradictory situation whereby professional identity has scored a high mark while a concrete object of professional identity is absent means that first-year students make sense of their profession using idealistic constructs and societal stereotypes. This might be viewed as the basis for future dramatic change in students' professional self-constructing.

The students did not display ambivalence of choice (0%). Students have no clear conception about the peculiarities of the teacher profession. Therefore, there is a need to introduce the position of career consultant in school.

After having received more objective information about peculiarities of professional activity, professional role, and professional demands students' self-awareness might suffer a crisis. On the one hand, students highly evaluate their professional abilities, on the other they have just started their professional training and are not yet at grip with the specificity of their chosen profession and its demands. Hence their self-evaluation as would-be professionals is inadequate. It is highly possible that when the contradiction becomes obvious for students they will find themselves in the state of the professional identity crisis.

Peculiarities of the 2nd-year students' professional identity

According to Kuhn's and McPartland's (1954) methodology the role of the student (1,35) has been stabilized, without any significant changes, marks assigned to the categories "teacher" (0,6) and "future teacher" (0,6) have practically not been changed. However, the picture of attitude to profession has changed.

The US shows that the second-year students gives professionally-related endings (72%), although the number of students with positive attitude to profession remains high (68%), second-year students begin expressing ambivalent (38%) and non-identification to their profession (48%). At the same time they seem to better understand the essence of a professional's job, they have a chance to see examples of professional activity and behavior. Second-year students have an opportunity to compare themselves to and identify with real professionals. By interpreting research results, we have ascertained factors, which influence and determine the development of crisis in the two first years of crisis. These are listed below:

- General and professional overestimation as a result of successful entry selection procedure and becoming students.
- Insufficient or lack of adaptation skills in the study process context.
- Understanding that they happen to be in the beginning of professional training and that there is still a chance for another option in choosing a profession.

Peculiarities of the 3rd-year students' professional identity

In the third year of studies there appears a tendency towards overcoming the crisis. The situation is quite favorable for building up a professional identity. Third-year students become more satisfied with their professional behavior ("future teacher" – 1,1) during their studies, but real identification with the teacher role has decreased (0,39). It is possible to assume that students are now better informed about profession and more adapted to the professional demands, which can serve the basis for further development of their professional identity, which has been being built. Also the indicators "student" (1,38) and "future teacher" (1,1) become closer.

The US shows positive emotional attitude to pedagogy (85%) as a strand in professional life is ascertained. Unfinished statement "For me, pedagogy is ..." 88% of third-year students give professionally-related endings. In comparison with the second course, the number of ambivalent answers has decreased (15%). But the small percent of student answers (54%) did not have professional identification.

The following factors seem to have influenced the stabilization in forming a professional identity:

- Students are well informed about their profession.
- They demonstrate a high degree of adaptively to studying.
- Students are aware of the pending completion of their professional training, which seems to lead to internalization of profession. It is late to question one's choice of profession. Students are now trying to find justification of their choice.
- Students positively evaluate their own professional abilities as well as their resources (expertise, skills).

- Students have made sense of their social status as that of a professional group member.
- There is still time for choosing a work place, and the responsibility for making any decision related to future profession, is not yet pressing.

The results according to method TST relate to the answers “student”, “future teacher” and according to technique US “Number of profession-related answers in unfinished statement” and “Positive attitude to profession” are related. The data confirms that the subject identifies himself/herself with teacher profession.

Peculiarities of the 4th-year students' professional identity

Towards the end of studies the subject identifies himself/herself more as a student (1, 7), than a professional and future professional. It is necessary to admit that in previous study years student has not identified himself/herself so much in the role of the student. The obtained data show a dramatic decrease in professional identity indicators. In accordance with TST method, marks for the positions “teacher” (0, 7) and “future teacher” (0, 55) are lower.

The US shows of fourth-year students give relatively less professionally-related endings (64%). The results of this technique show the number of students who do not identify with any “object” also grows (49%). The number of respondents with positive attitude to profession (73%) diminishes, while the number of those giving ambivalent answers increases (22%). Professional identification is undoubtedly taking place. It is apparently being determined by the pending graduation. On the other hand, the data reflect the existing crisis in the choice of profession. It is expressed in respondents' dissatisfaction with professional education and in switching from studying to professional activity. Respondents demonstrate awareness of the conflict between what they have acquired in the course of their professional education, and those requirements that everyday real-life practice in their chosen profession puts forward.

The results according to the method TST, relates to the answers “teacher”, “future teacher” and according to technique US “Number of profession-related answers in unfinished statement” are mutually related. In other words, one can identify unstable position of the subject in the role of the teacher in case of the crises of professional identification.

Conclusions

1. The process of building up professional identity becomes more obvious with the raising degree of professional education and expertise.
2. During the studying, development of professional identity reaches its peak in the third year. In the first and fourth years, professional identity is not manifested.
3. These stages in the professional identity crisis are called first-year and fourth-year crises. The latter has its own definitions and peculiarities.
4. The choice of the object of identifying fluctuates in the course of professional studies. The first-year students tend to identify themselves with an ideal professional model, which is formed on the basis of societal stereotypes. Senior students, in their turn, identify with real-life specialists.
5. The research has brought about the conclusion that Kuhn's and McPartland's methodology “Who am I?” does not allow to describe the process of professional identity development in an exhausting way. This methodology registers the trajectory of identity development, i.e. it indicates the direction in which a person's searches for his/her identity.

The professional identity may be viewed according to two criteria: the successful acquisition of profession and the level of satisfaction with ones own working activities. These criteria are both relational, and often also subjective. However, by employing these very criteria we will continue the study of professional identity. Even though professional identity is being formed in the process

of professional activity, it is necessary to study natural preconditions, i.e. typological aspect of personality, which will allow prognostication of belonging to profession in every concrete case. Both theory and practice point to the fact that there are no people that may acquire any profession.

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