

The Nexus Between Teacher Professional Identity And Some Socio-Demographic And Psychological Variables

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Abstract

As multidimensional concept, primarily relational rather than substantial, professional identity can be investigated in nexus with socio-demographic and psychological variables. On a sample of N= 284 active teachers in Serbia and in Montenegro, the author examined the prominence of various aspects of teachers professional identity (teaching practice, school and profession, student development, personal development, role anticipation, and commitment to roles), as well as their interrelationship with some psychological variables (self-esteem, self-assessment of their own success, satisfaction with family, and professional satisfaction) and sociodemographic variables (sex, place of residence, years of service, and financial status). The obtained results show that personal development is the most pronounced aspect of teachers' professional identity and that role anticipation is the least pronounced one. Significant correlation has been found between different aspects of professional identity and individual psychological correlates. The results show that there is a possibility of predicting professional identity (the majority of measured aspects) based on a set of psychological predictors. The best predictor in all aspects of professional identity is professional satisfaction. Regarding the nexus with certain sociodemographic characteristics, an interesting finding is that years of service negatively correlated with most of the examined aspects of teachers' professional identity.

The results imply the need for further research of this phenomenon, with the inclusion of a number of psychological and social factors that are directly or indirectly related to the professional identity of teachers.

Keywords: Professional identity, socio-demographic variables, psychological variables, nexus

Background

It is no surprise that the issue of the professional identity of teachers received new attention. Teacher's role is changing from one who conveys knowledge to the one who guides the students *in loco parantis* (Van Manen, 1999). From teachers are expected to adopt a different perception of their roles, develop answers to the question: *Who am I as a teacher?* After decades of hereditary burdens of pedeutology prescriptive training and education of teachers, we become witnesses of advanced interests in the problem and the issue of awareness of how teachers think and reflect on their *self* while organizing personal and professional transformation and identification. Beijaard defines identity as "response to the question who I am; the totality of the different meanings that people ascribe to themselves (tied for yourself) or meaning assigned to the other (identities for others and for themselves)"(Beijaard, 1995, p.34). This definition is associated with the one given of Gecas: "Identity provides the structure and content for the self-concept and self-tied to social systems"(Gecas, 1985, p.739).

Both authors emphasize the importance of self-concept for identity. Nias (1989) concludes that the concept of themselves is crucial for the proper and adequate understanding of how teachers work. In recent literature, there is consensus and agreement on the basic ideas of self-concept. Self-concept is recognized and understood as "sum of organized information, based on observable facts about ourselves, which includes aspects such as traits, character, values, social roles, interests, physical characteristics and personal history " (Bergner & Holmes, 2000, p.112).

Identity is defined in different ways in the literature and in various fields of science. In some research studies identity is associated with consciousness and a picture of themselves teachers (Knowles, 1992; Nias, 1989). In other research, professional identity emphasis on the roles of teachers (Goodson & Cole, 1994; Volkman & Anderson, 1998), or concepts such as reflection and self-assessment, as a significant factor in the formation of the professional identity of teachers (Cooper & Olson, 1996; Kerby, 1991). Teacher professional identity is not only related to the impact of conceptualization and expectations of other people, including a widely accepted image in society about what teachers should do and should know, but also to what teachers themselves consider important for their professional work and life, based on theory and practice, as well as their own professional origin (Tickle, 2000).

In the most of the research, researchers consider a professional identity as a continuous process of the integration of personal and professional roles, relatively stable characteristics, beliefs, values, motives and experiences which teachers describe their professional career and work roles (Ibarra, 1991).

Professional identity is not a stable entity, it can not be interpreted as a fixed or unique content (Coldron & Smith, 1999). It is a complex and dynamic "equilibrium" in which the notion of self as a professional balanced with diversity of roles that teachers feel that they should "play" (Volkman & Anderson, 1998). Reynolds (1996) points out that what surrounds personality, what others expected and what it is allowed to influence it, it determines the identity of the teacher. She notes that the position of teachers "landscape" can be very demanding, but also very restrictive.

In defining the professional identity, the concept of "the self" is often combined with other (concepts), and it is generally presented as a real connection. In other words, it is impossible to discuss about self without self-reflection and reflectivity. Through self-reflection teacher connect their experience with their own knowledge and feelings, and is able to integrate what is socially relevant, in the image of *self as a teacher* (Korthagen, 2001, Nias, 1989). The process of formation of the professional identity of teachers is a process that involves the inclusion of a large number of sources of knowledge, such as knowledge of teaching, relationships in communication, as well as specific knowledge in the field of science that deals with the teacher (subject knowledge) (Antonek, 1997). Implicit theories and previous experience as a student teacher should also form part of the corpus of sources.

Many researchers point out the context for the formation of professional identity (Goodson & Cole, 1994; Connely & Clandinin, 1999). It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that the professional identity of teachers depends on the perceptions and understanding of the wider professional community. The aim of the research conducted Sugrue (1997) was to make a review of the most prominent influences (formative, personal and social) on the professional identity of teachers-trainees - the deconstruction of their implicit theories. Its main conclusions are: teacher-trainees are able to define the issues that are related to their professional identity; implicit theories of teachers depend on the personality of the teacher but also from the social context; professional identity of teachers is the most intuitive expression of their personalities (tacit knowledge) and depends on personal theory about teaching and learning. Coldrone & Smith (1999) representing the position in the debate about professional identity that highlights the tension between the role of the organization and structure (which is socially specified). Professional identity can not be fixed nor unitary; he is not a stable entity that people "have" – it is the way by someone invents itself in relation to other people and contexts. Dillabough (1999) deals with the question of the significance of gender in defining the professional identity of teachers (links gender and professional identity and implications). It starts from the premise that there is a history, and even in a sense a tradition, of male dominance in

the political thoughts on education issues. This question is, considered to be the author, central to understanding and explanation of the formation of the professional identity of teachers. The experience of beginning teachers is influenced by what the teacher lived as a student, and this experience strongly influences the formation of their professional identity.

Method

The main objectives in this research were:

1. Assess level of certain aspects of the professional identity of teachers;

2. Determine what is the nature of the relationship between certain sociodemographic (sex, place of residence, work experience, financial status), psychological correlates (self-esteem, self-assessment of their own success, the family satisfaction, and job-satisfaction) and various aspects of the professional identity of teachers.

There were investigated the possibility to predict various aspects of the professional identity on the basis of the socio-demographic variables.

The sample consisted of 284 teachers (subject teachers) from primary schools in Serbia and Montenegro, the average age of 40.69 years ($SD = 8.27$). There were 151 females respondents and 133 males respondents, and respondents had the highest percentage of the average financial situation (59%). Most of the respondents are employed for an indefinite time work (69.5%) and has over ten years of work experience (62.5%).

In the study we treated professional identity as a dependent variable, and the independent variables accounted for the different sociodemographic (gender, age, place of residence, work experience, financial status, and employment status) and psychological correlates of professional identity (self-esteem, family satisfaction, job satisfaction and self-assessment of their own success).

1. *Professional identity* is perceived and defined as a multidimensional construct. Professional identity of teachers is defined as a unsubordinative relation of the teacher professional practice (what the teacher does) and professional roles and attitudes (what the teacher did to themselves and others) (Enyedy et al., 2005). It represents a commitment to image and performances of teachers and teaching that have general and personal meaning and sense (VanHuizen et al., 2005), as well as the combination of the actual and allocated identity (how others see us and how we see ourselves) (Dubar, 2000). Given that in this study professional identities were measured using two instruments, there will be analyzed all the aspects mentioned instruments measures.

A) *Professional identity* is operationally defined by the score on a scale from the professional identity of teachers - Teacher Professional

Identity Scale (Cheung, 2008). This is one of the few scales in recent literature and research (psychometric) practices that are designed for the empirical study of professional identity of teachers. The scale was translated and adapted to the Serbian population (Živković, 2012), in a sample of primary school teachers in the Republic of Serbia. After determining the psychometric characteristics of the final scale included 18 items, each having good psychometric properties (Cronbach's alpha 0.87). The respondents give answers on a five-point Likert scale. On 18 items of the scale, by factor analysis (method of principal components with varimax rotation), we get a four-factors interpretable structure which explains 70.57% of the variance. This result fully coincides with the results obtained by Cheung (2008). Reliability of the scale is high (Cronbach's alpha 0.87). Four subscales that represent factors also satisfy the criteria of reliability (Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.83 (first factor) to 0.66 (fourth factor)). The identified factors are named: *teaching practice*, *schools and professions*, *student development* and *personal development*.

Teaching practice is a subjective experience and evaluation of efficiency in translating the general educational goals of everyday activities in the classroom and school. Refers to the ability to support students to achieve their needs and motivating students to learn.

School and professions represent self-perception of the teaching profession, which is being developed and implemented in collaborative behavior and cooperation with colleagues (respect for differences and diversity in dealing with colleagues, students, and parents).

Student development is an affection and concern for the welfare of students, faith and confidence in the students that they can learn. Teachers evaluate the development of students by analyzing the students' achievements and learning outcomes achieved.

Personal development is a commitment and dedication to the profession and the professional community, continuous professional training and professional development as well as the achievement of setting personal and professional goals.

B) *Professional identity of teachers* has been perceived over measuring of teachers roles-through Teacher Role Identity Scale (Jackson, 1981), a scale to measure the identity of the role of the teacher. Scale form two subscales, commitment roles and anticipation roles. The scale has 14 items, respondents give answers on a five-point Likert-type scale. Reliability of the scale in our sample expressed Cronbach alpha coefficient was $\alpha = 0.69$. To explore the central identity of the author has developed the scale of assessment of the various identities that are retrospective and prospective achievements in the given and accepted roles.

Anticipation roles. First subscale ($\alpha = .71$) measures the perception of the role of teachers in individual and professional future. Represents construction: identification, biographical identity for themselves, which is characterized by earlier social, educational and professional trajectory and individual perception of the future.

Role commitment. The second subscale ($\alpha = .60$) measures the perception of commitment to the role of teachers. It represents accepted and assigned professional identification, commitment as professional roles assigned identifications.

2.Socio-demographic variables that we considered were operationalized through the response of respondents to the Questionnaire on socio-demographic data, constructed for the purpose of this research. Gender (male / female), length of service (years of service), financial status (very poor, poor, average, very good and excellent) and working status (full time / part time)

3.Psychological correlates we took into consideration were: self-esteem, family satisfaction, job satisfaction and self-assessment of their own success

Self-esteem is defined as part of the evaluative self-image, which is expressed in both positive and negative feelings towards self and indicates the degree to which a person believes himself to be significant and valuable. Self-esteem is operationalized as the total score on the scale of global self-esteem. Rosenberg self-esteem scale that we use to measure global self-esteem, which in the original version was created in 1965 (Rosenberg, 1965) and has since been modified several times and translated into almost all languages of the world, represents the most commonly used scale in the study of self-esteem. Respondents were asked to assess to what extent indicated claims (items) relate to them (1- totally incorrect, 7- completely true). The total score is calculated as the sum of all items on the assessment, a possible range of scores is from 10 to 77. Reliability in our sample expressed Cronbach's alpha coefficient was $\alpha = 0.78$.

Satisfaction with family represents a subjective assessment of individuals with which to measure the quality of family relationships or family adaptation (Pitman, according to Mitic, 1997). Operationally defined by a score on a scale of family adaptation. Scale of family adaptation (Antonovsky, 1988) measures the overall satisfaction with the outcome of the operation and its overcoming stress is viewed through adaptive family (Pitman, according to Mitic, 1997). The magnitude scale consists of 11 items and measures the satisfaction of the family (the satisfaction of the family and family relations towards the center). Respondents give an answer to the seven-point Likert scale (1 not at all satisfied, 7- I'm totally satisfied). The

possible range of results: 11 – 77. Reliability of this scale in our sample expressed Cronbach's alpha coefficient was $\alpha = 0.83$.

Self-assessment of personal success represents the subjective experience of their own success in life in general. Operationally was determined by respondents' answers to the questionnaire on sociodemographic data concerning a self-assessment of their own success in life (very unsuccessful, unsuccessful, average, successful, very successful).

Satisfaction of a profession is a subjective experience of the quality of connections with other teachers and the profession in general (belonging to the profession and professional community), as well as the status of the profession. (Živković, 2012). This variable is operationally defined through the score on a scale of functions of the identity of teachers - Teachers Identity Functions Scale (Blake, 2000). The scale was used in the study of functions and identities of teachers is satisfactory psychometric characteristics. Skala has 9 items, the respondents give answers on a five-point Likert scale (1-I fully agree, 5 general disagree). Reliability of the scale in our sample expressed Cronbach's alpha coefficient was $\alpha = 0.71$. Živković (2012), just like Blake (Blake, 2000), obtained factor structure of the instrument and proposes the name 'satisfaction with the profession' 'as the most appropriate for this factor.

Findings

Expression of various aspects of professional identity of teachers

Here are the results of description statistics related to various aspects of the professional identity of teachers. These data are set out in Table 1.

Table1. The degree of the expressiveness of the various aspects of professional identity

	N	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD
Teaching practice	284	3	5	4,28	,40
School and profession	284	3	5	4,33	,47
Student development	284	2	5	4,22	,56
Personal development	284	2	5	4,35	,51
Role anticipation	284	1	5	3,34	,56
Role commitment	284	1	5	3,48	,51

As we see, the most prominent aspect of professional identity concerning *personal development* ($M = 4.35$), immediately followed by one aspect of which is attached to the *school and the profession* ($AS = 4.33$). At least it is expressed *anticipation roles* ($M = 3.34$).

Teacher professional identity and some psychological and sociodemographic variables nexus.

Assessed the connection between different aspects of the professional identity of teachers and individual psychological correlates (self-esteem, job satisfaction and satisfaction with family and self-assessment of their own success). For this purpose, we used Pearson correlation coefficient, and the results were shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Connection between professional identity and psychological correlates.

VARIABLES	TP	SP	SD	PD	AR	CR
Self-esteem	-,152*	-,069	-,157**	-,087	-,102	-,096
Job-satisfaction	,386**	,459**	,476**	,421**	-,082	,354**
Family-satisfaction	,077	,180**	,098	,109	-,020	-,022
Self-assessment /personal succses	,149**	,025	,059	,101	-,125*	-,222**

Legend: TP-teaching practice, SP-school and profession, SD-student development, PD-personal development, AR-anticipation role, CR-comitment role; * Correlation significative at level 0.05; ** Correlation significative at level 0.01.

There are also discussed nexus beetwen professional identity of teachers (various aspects) and certain sociodemographic variables (age, financial status, and work experience). These results are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Nexus between professional identity and demographic characteristics (Pearson correlation coefficient)

Variables	TP	SP	SD	PD	AR	CR
Age	-,096	-,122*	-,070	-,068	,166*	,044
Material status	-,145*	-,202**	-,194**	-,118*	-,102	-,070
Years of service	-,228**	-,215**	-,236**	-,255**	,199**	,113

Legend: TP-teaching practice, SP-school and profession, SD-student development, PD-personal development, AR-anticipation role, CR-comitment role; * Correlation significative at level 0.05; ** Correlation significative at level 0.01.

We examine the differences in expression of certain aspects of the professional identity and their employment status (part time / full time indefinite period). A significant difference was found only in regard to the aspect of identity commitment roles ($t = 3.077$, $df = 279$, $p < 0.05$). Teachers who have the full-time status have pronounced this aspect of the professional identity, then teachers with part-time job status. In all other aspects of the professional identities were not found significant differences between teachers an employee for an full-time period and part-time term. There were found no significant differences between male and female respondents. The only aspect of the professional identity of teachers which was found differences in expression between male and female respondents is on schools and professions aspect ($t = 2.486$, $df = 277$, $p < 0.05$). This aspect of the

professional identity of teachers is more pronounced in females. In research, attention was paid to the question of the difference in various aspects of professional identity due to the fact that if teachers are going to work as a teacher right after graduating or later (even a year later). The results showed that there were significant differences only in the case of the aspect of personal development ($t = -2,121$, $df = 280$, $p < 0.05$). It has been shown that teachers who went to work immediately after graduation are less pronounced this aspect of the professional identity (personal development) of teachers who started to deal with the teaching profession later.

The ability to predict a professional identity on the basis of psychological variables (self-esteem, job satisfaction, family satisfaction and self-assessment of their own success).

The study is the possibility of predicting the value of individual aspects of the professional identity of teachers on the basis of a set of psychological variables (self-esteem, family satisfaction, job satisfaction, self-assessment of their own success). For it is a technique utilized multiple regression analysis, enter method. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. The possibility of predicting different various aspects of professional identity on the set of psychological variables.

	R	R^2	F	df1,df2	Sig
Teaching practice	0,438	0,192	16,315	4; 275	0,001
School and profession	0,486	0,236	21,218	4; 275	0,001
Student development	0,490	0,240	21,729	4; 275	0,001
Personal development	0,431	0,186	15,718	4; 275	0,001
Role anticipation	0,1630	0,025	1,880	4; 275	>0,001
Role commitment	0,400	0,160	13,118	4; 275	0,001

Legend: R – multiple correlation coefficient; R^2 – multiple determination coefficient; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

As shown in the table, there is a possibility of predicting the most part of the value of the examined aspects of the professional identity based on a set of predictor variables. Only in the case of the aspect of the *role of anticipation* were proved that this aspect of the professional identity can not be predicted on the basis of the proposed set of psychological variables. The highest degree of explained variance is in the case of the aspect of the development of students (24% explained variance).

The values of standardized regression coefficients show that regard the psychological correlates (and this applies to all aspects of professional identity), job satisfaction is the best predictor (standardized β value for said predictor can range from 0,336 in the case of the aspect of commitment roles, to 0,455 in the case of aspect of student development, whereby the significance t-test is always < 0.001).

Discussion and conclusion

Professional identity is only sporadically and inadequately treated as a research variables, while not determined nor his epistemological structure and theoretical nature. In this regard, it was necessary for our research that illuminates the problem from all sides, but taking into account that the operationalization of professional identity and socio-demographic and psychological variables examination nexus. The theoretical and scientific analysis shows that professional identity is justified to study as an interactive phenomenon, because only in interdependent behavior toward personal identification can be achieved. Modern teacher positions, roles, and functions exercised, contextual complexity that characterizes the environment in which realized its gestation, there are all circumstances and tasks that can not be achieved without the development of professional identity. Professional identity is multidimensional concept, which covered different theoretical perspectives on this phenomenon, as well as empirical verification. In this study there are taken into consideration the following aspects of the professional identity of teachers: teaching practice, school and profession, personal development, student development, an anticipation of the roles and commitment of roles. Results of empirical research showed that the most pronounced aspect of the professional identity is teachers' personal development, and, at least, expressed anticipation roles. This finding, apparently contradictory, suggesting that teachers differently assess commitment to the profession and the professional community, professional development and achievement of set personal and professional goals, on the one hand, and completeness of identification as biographical identity for themselves, which is characterized by earlier social, educational and professional trajectory and the individual's perception of the future. All this suggests the difference between identities for themselves and for other identities. When it comes to relationships between different aspects of the professional identity of teachers and certain socio-demographic characteristics, the results were correspondent with previous research findings (Dillabough, 1999, Decors & Vogt, 1997, Cheung, 2008, Živković, 2012). The length of service (years of service) is negatively correlated with most of the measured aspects of professional identity (teaching practice, schools and professions, student development and personal development), with the anticipation of a positive role. It turned out that the years of service decreases expression of professional identity. All that, contrary to expectations, suggesting that the years of service and experience, perception of teachers about the important dimensions and aspects of professional identity change. They probably estimated as less important for the identity form teacher and his professional identity. It is possible that teachers with years of service estimated that some other dimensions of identity are

important for the assessment of professional identity, probably one that we in this work was not measured. When it comes to gender, the data indicate that the professional identity of teachers (in most aspects measured) is not significantly different at male and female. A significantly more prominent aspect of the school and the profession of the teacher female is the somewhat expected result because this aspect of professional identity permeates through co-relation with other colleagues in the profession and cooperation, and adherence is usually more pronounced in the female population. This data is consistent with the findings Živkovic (2012).

There are confirmed a statistically significant correlation between different aspects of professional identity and individual psychological variables (self-esteem, satisfaction profession, family satisfaction and self-assessment of their own success). Of all the examined psychological correlates (all aspects other than the anticipation of the role), teachers professional identity is strongest associated with job-satisfaction. Moreover, there were confirmed the possibility of predicting the teachers professional identity (all aspects except the anticipation role) on the basis of a set of predictor variables, with the best single predictor of job-satisfaction. Although the degree of explained variance is not particularly high (16% in the case of commitment to the roles of up to 24% in the case of the aspect of student development), the ability to predict various aspects of professional identity of teachers on the basis of a set of tested psychological correlates shows us the importance of paying attention to the research variables, and all in order to strengthen the identity and the creation of healthy teachers. Improving working conditions with occasional monitoring expression of individual psychological correlates, could have a positive influence on strengthening the different aspects of teachers professional identity.

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