

## **TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS: TEACHERS AS AGENTS OF INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION**

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### **ABSTRACT**

International learning experiences focuses on the ways in which teachers professional identity is being shaped and influenced in educational settings and seems to shift to an all-persuasive motive in a globalised educational sector. This article presents the theoretical and conceptual framework of an understanding of intercultural learning and sensitivity. Professional factors such as work intensification, lack of training and resources, ideologies, values were found to affect teachers' identity and intercultural relations. Teachers are the ones who adopt, reinterpret and develop the curriculum. They are the way and degree to which teachers understand, adjust and perceive and to develop interculturalism. The first part will outline professional identity and its meaning for intercultural education. The second part describes approaches of diversity activities with-in institution and some assumptions about intercultural encounters.

**KEYWORDS:** Professional identity, intercultural education, intercultural competence, teachers

### **INTRODUCTION**

Educational policy developers hold the perception that by redeveloping and restructuring the education system, prevailing teaching practices will change fundamentally.(Ball, Maguiore, Braun and Hoskins,2011).Consequently, they tend to dismiss the fact that policy enactment highly depends upon the degree of ownership teachers feel with respect to the policy, as well as on the different meanings these people attach to it based upon their existing ideologies, knowledge and experiences(Alfrey, o'connor, and jeanes,2017; Ball, Maguire and Braun,2012).For the successful enactment of intercultural agendas, policy and research should acknowledge

that teachers professional identities, diversified approaches influence not only their practices but also, the ways in which they interpret educational policies, construct images of the surrounding context and based on these images, how they conceptualise and interpret externally imposed policy agendas.

This article aims to reflect that educational institutions are undergoing major changes due to mass influx of immigrants which in turn has numerous political, economic and social impacts. Understanding teachers' professional identity is important as this notion affects both teachers' readiness and willingness to deal with and enact educational policies and implement them in their own teaching practices. The way and degree to which comprehend, amend and perceive educational policies, challenge and reconstruct their existing identities.

### **Conceptualising Professional Identity**

Conceptualising teachers' professional identity is important as it is interrelated with the ways in which teachers react to externally imposed policy agendas (Day, Flores, & Viana, 2007; Hong & Vargas, 2016). Consequently, the implementation of educational agendas is highly dependent upon the extent to which these initiatives challenge teachers existing professional identity (Hall & McGinity, 2015; Tang, 2011). Professional identity consists of the individual's alignment of roles, responsibilities, values, and ethical standards to be consistent with practices accepted by their specific profession. Identity is being used as a constantly evolving, dynamic phenomenon which is neither fixed, static nor de-contextualised following Gee's (2005) perspective that identity is not 'once and for all' but rather 'settled provisionally and continuously, in practice, as part and parcel of shared histories and ongoing activities' (p.25).

It is currently agreed upon the fact that teachers' perspectives about their role and the nature of teaching and learning influence their students, work behaviour, sense of well-being and work effectiveness. In an attempt to reconcile the variety of perspectives on teachers' professional identity, Beijaard et al. argue that "what these various meanings [of identity] have in common is the idea that identity is not a fixed attribute of a person, but a relational phenomenon". This skims that professional identity is a continuous process of interpretation and reinterpretation prompted by professional experiences and

contextual factors. When Beauchamp and Thomas overviewed the issues related to the understanding of teacher identity they stressed the problem of defining this concept, the place of the self, the role of agency, emotion, narrative, discourse, reflection with identity, the influence of contextual factors.

The teaching profession is generally associated to certain fundamental roles , which are accepted by most teacher training systems, such as: organization of the learning activities, psycho educational advising, class management, proper communication with the pupils, parents and work peers, life-long learning programmes, active participation in perfecting the educational process and school innovations, offering educational services to the community etc. These factors promote interculturalism in classrooms. Teachers' professional identity transforms over time under the influence of several dynamics, given that schools reflect what occurs in society. In a similar vein, Sachs (2001) teachers' professional identity is negotiated by their experiences in and out of the working environment. Specifically, during their careers, teachers formularise an interpretative schema which is continuously shaped and re-shaped throughout the reciprocity with the social and cultural conditions of their working setting (van Den Berg, 2002).

Becoming aware of one's professional identity and all the facets it entails, and most importantly, knowing the distances and differences between those facets is one of the fundamental conditions of success and evolution in the teaching profession. Teachers are a true blend of social representations: the professional identity of the teacher and all of its facets is always confronted to the perceived image that the pupils have on the teacher. This is why training and developing the teachers' professional identity, as well as raising awareness on it, is extremely important in order to be able to optimize and exercise control in a positive and formative manner.

According to the author, a prototype of the professional teacher would be: 'a role-model, a technician, a practitioner, the reflexive practitioner ,a social actor, a person who is aware of his/her own identity, meaning ' a person who is interested and aware of his/her own personal development' (PăOăean, 2009, p.60).Another important aspect is that teacher's teaching context, experience, and biography are categories of factors that

may influence their perceptions of their professional identity. Indeed in different culture, the relationship between teachers and students pass through a new change who affects the teachers' professional identity. We can say that teachers' professional identity is being affected by the educational policy, educational institutions vision on intercultural education and the implications on their practices with respect to interculturalism.

### **INTERCULTURALISM EDUCATION**

A simple definition of culture is the way of life of a society. However, culture is a concept with many intricacies, such as belief systems, knowledge, art, the rules people live by, habits, and abilities derived from communities. Lifestyle is influenced by cultural belief systems, behavioural patterns, values, and attitudes, although classical definitions understand culture as “an acquired and transmitted pattern of shared meaning, feeling, and behaviour that constitutes a distinctive human group”.

Culture is defined as “those customary beliefs and values that ethnic, religious, and social groups transmit fairly unchanged from generation to generation”. Societies comprising diverse cultures involve multiple cultural perceptions that merge and diverge because of cultural differences, and these are influenced by factors such as race, age, education, gender, ethnic attributes, and history. Intercultural education promotes the understanding of different people and cultures. It includes teachings that accept and respect the normality of diversity in all areas of life. It makes every effort to sensitize the learner to the notion that we have naturally developed in different ways. Intercultural learning is an area of research, study and application of knowledge about different cultures, their differences and similarities. Interculturalism seems to emphasise empathy, interaction and cultural exchange.

Intercultural education promotes intercultural communication and promotes the feelings of internationalism:

- Promotion of world citizenship
- Promotion of independent and critical thinking
- Eradication of racial, religious, cultural and national prejudices.

- Promotion of world peace.
- Developing the students' faith.

Intercultural education promotes a learning situation in which both the scholars and the teachers accept different races, cultures and religions. Acceptance of differences and acknowledgement of diversity are crucial factors of such classroom. It is based on the principle and concept which emphasize regional, linguistic, and cultural union. It has been accepted as a respond to the management of nation state by including the cultural diversity within the political community. Any educational institute that values diversity offers multiple opportunities for interpersonal cross-cultural communication incorporates a diversity of opinions and ideas and explicitly acknowledges the contributions at learning settings.

The various notions of internationalisation of higher education serve different (national) policies. Giving students an intercultural dimension in education is one of many goals that guides present internationalisation strategies. As Callan (1999) states “How are we to depict the central notion of “internationalisation” itself: as policy, as process, as a self-evident educational value, as a social change with the emergence of new occupational alignments and accompanying interest, articulation and rhetoric, or as some combination or accommodation among these? It is a fact that, in world, resources, programmes, institutions and organisations are mobilized around the concept on internationalization.” (p. 44). As a decisive factor of change, internationalisation describes activities that aim to bring about changes of structure and processes of educational systems (Knight & De Wit, 1995).

The terms international education and intercultural education refer mainly to the product or the output that can be expected from internationalised educational institutions. Rather than a national educational programme, international educational programmes intend to enable students to tolerate diversity and to embrace alteration and differences without feeling a major threat to their own shared cultural identity (Pearce, 1998). In other words, international education seeks to introduce some kind of intercultural learning as a key element in the academic world. Marginson (2000) suggests drawing a distinction between globalisation and internationalisation: The term

“internationalisation” describes the growth of relations between nations and between national cultures. Rather, the term “globalisation” is reserved here for the growing role of world systems. These world systems are situated outside and beyond the nation state, even while bearing the marks of dominant national cultures (p. 4). This argument can be extended with a third dimension as students also have to deal with the regional/local level of growing diversity due to domestic multiculturalism. The impetus of internationalisation, market-driven forces of globalisation and to some extent the process of integration highlight the intercultural dimension in present higher education. At the same time, the developments merge into a blurry picture that mixes up strategic and educational goals as well as means and outcomes of education. The call for a critical perspective on international education (Callan, 2000) seems to come at the right time, as internationalisation cannot be taken as an unquestioned added value for its own sake.

### **Strategies used by Teachers for Teaching Culturally Diverse Students**

There are many school factors that affect the success of culturally diverse students the school's atmosphere and overall attitudes toward diversity, involvement of the community, and culturally responsive curriculum, to name a few. Certain behaviours and instructional strategies enable teachers to build a stronger teaching/learning relationship with their culturally diverse students. Many of these behaviours and strategies exemplify standard practices of good teaching, and others are specific to working with students from diverse cultures. A number of these behaviours and strategies are listed below.

#### **TEACHER BEHAVIOUR**

- Appreciate and accommodate the similarities and differences among the students' cultures. Effective teachers of culturally diverse students acknowledge both individual and cultural differences enthusiastically and identify these differences in a positive manner. This positive identification creates a basis for the development of effective communication and instructional strategies. Social skills such as respect and cross-cultural understanding can be modelled, taught, prompted, and reinforced by the teacher.

- Build relationships with students of other cultures.
- Focus on the ways students learn and observe students to identify their task orientations. This is a positive way to honour their need for preparation, rituals, or customs.
- Teach students to match their behaviours to the setting. We all behave differently in different settings. Involving families and the community can help students learn to adjust their behaviour in each of the settings in which they interact.
- Prepare to teach the culturally diverse students you may have in your classroom using these guidelines and strategies for teaching your lessons to meet the needs of these students. Includes strategies such as considering students' cultures and language skills when developing learning objectives and instructional activities, monitoring academic progress, and more to help your culturally diverse students be successful.

### **Instructional Strategies**

- Use a variety of instructional strategies and learning activities. Consider students' cultures and language skills when developing learning objectives and instructional activities. Facilitate comparable learning opportunities for students with differing characteristics. For example, consider opportunities for students who differ in appearance, race, sex, disability, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, or ability.
- Incorporate objectives for affective and personal development to accept people of other cultures.
- Communicate expectations.
- Facilitate independence in thinking and action. There are many ways to facilitate students' independence to accept students of different cultures.
- Provide frequent feedback. Feedback at multiple levels is preferred.

### **From International Encounter to Intercultural Competence**

Given that contacts and personal experience of cultural differences are more likely at an internationalised university, how much does this stimulate intercultural development?

Research on the so-called “contact hypothesis” (Allport, 1954; Amir, 1969) has shown that intercultural encounters do not automatically increase the intercultural competence of students. They can even reinforce stereotypes and prejudices if the experiences of critical incidents in intercultural contexts are not evaluated on cognitive, affective, and behavioural levels. Thus, contact is not enough if the social experience of otherness is not transformed into a personally relevant learning experience (Paige, 1993). To conclude: Intercultural learning needs reflection of individual and collective social experiences with people from other cultures rather than the mere contact as such (Brewer, 1996; Gaertner, Dovidio, & Bachman, 1996). The outcome of intercultural learning is intercultural competence, a longterm change of a person’s knowledge (cognition), attitudes (emotions), and skills (behaviour) to enable positive and effective interaction with members of other cultures both abroad and at home (Bennett, 1993; Dignes & Baldwin, 1996). It results from the experience of differences that causes cognitive irritation, emotional imbalance, and a disruption of one’s own cultural worldview.

The “developmental model of intercultural sensitivity” (Bennett 1993) is one concept to illustrate this. According to Bennett, “The developmental model posits a continuum of increasing sophistication in dealing with cultural difference, moving from ethnocentrism through stages of greater recognition and acceptance of difference, here termed as ethno relativism” (1993, p. 22). The developmental model describes how cultural difference is comprehended and identifies the strategies that impede such comprehension. The model should be seen as a phenomenological one in the sense that it explains a learner’s subjective experience of cultural difference, not just the objective behaviour. Keeping in mind that the other culture is a system that is organised as equally complex as our own culture, we cannot stick to a static vision of our own or the other culture. Instead “culture is action” (Bennett, 2001, p. 8) and we constantly re-create our worlds by collective action, or as Agar (1994) pointed out, “Culture is not what some group has; it’s what happens to you when you encounter differences” (p. 22).



### **Being Sensitive For Asymmetry**

Intercultural encounters become more complex because they take place in specific institutional contexts. The institution requires a more or less well-defined set of communication rules and strategies. People who are familiar with the institutional context are also familiar with the rules that steer the communication. The institutional context usually increases the complexity of intercultural communication and creates a multidimensional asymmetry (Günthner & Luckmann, 1995). One side of the interacting parties can build up interaction more easily due to having the chance to use the mother tongue and due to the knowledge of institutional terminology and setting. The other party is less familiar with the cultural environment in general and the institutional routines in particular. A common problem to all institutions is that they do not allow differences in interaction because all unknown and unexpected differences are disturbing elements to the institutional procedures. Diversity that cannot be assimilated to the frame of reference is perceived as disturbing to the institutional routines

Asymmetric power structures usually are not expressed frankly, but we can find them in the subtle practice of educational institutions; for example, when it comes to refer to retention: Failure is clearly assigned to the (foreign) student as “student dropout rate” and success is attributed to the institution as “institutional graduation rate” (D. G. Smith, 1991, p. 131). Schröder (2001) argues that in an international academic setting the (host) lecturer usually has an advantage over the international student because he or she grew up in the host country and is better acquainted with the local values, symbols, rituals, and perceptions. This situation gives the lecturer an “obligation to identify and make explicit the local culture that prevails at the institution” (Schröder, 2001, p. 50).

It is the individual teacher who has to deal with the effects of institutional structures and balance it with the needs of an internationalised and globalised education. Internationalisation, globalisation, and cultural diversity “take us into territories uncharted, where we make our own new rules, and this in itself imposes a certain kind of strain in an often deeply conservative profession” (Marginson, 2000, p. 26).

### **Curriculum Change and Teaching**

The influence of diversity practitioners on curriculum matters is limited because this belongs to the traditional claims of the faculties and academic departments. Still, more and more colleges and universities across the world are transforming their curricula because college leaders increasingly recognize that knowledge about domestic and international diversity is essential for today's students.

### **CONCLUSION**

The experience with a rapidly growing number of international programmes throughout the world and the research on diversity policies in the India and other countries show the necessity for serious consideration of the personal, social, and professional challenges that accompany international education. Without neglecting the efforts that an international student has to make to adjust to a new culture, we have to bear in mind that also the members of the host culture need preparation for a diverse world, especially when many of them cannot enjoy the first hand experience of cultural difference abroad. The reduction of parochialism and asymmetries on the institutional level is another major challenge for the institutions in higher education. Internationalisation on one hand and domestic diversity on the other will become vital elements for the policy of educational institutions. At the same time, universities can contribute with their rich experience of organizing international education within balanced supranational structures and networks that respect quite different notions and traditions of academic education. The implementation of the strategies and explicit diversity policies needs support from the top levels of the university and policy. But in the end, it is the teacher, the program coordinator, and the student who have to put theory and strategy into daily intercultural practice and offers an opportunity to join further discussion and exchange of ideas on an intercultural level.

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