

Developing Professional Identity: From methods to messages

Context

Previous research:

- substantive (essential) vs contingent stable /unstable
- lack of longitudinal 'real time' data
- varying degrees of attention given to macro/meso/micro structures, personal biographies & emotional factors.

A study of teachers' professional identity (VITAE):

- longitudinal data collected from 300 teachers over four years.

Dimensions of identity

- Professional dimension (e.g. long term policy and social trends)
- Situated dimension (e.g. specific school, department or classroom issues)
- Personal dimension (e.g. marriage, bereavement)

Scenarios

- Dimensions in relative balance
 - One dominant dimension
 - Two dominant dimensions
 - Three dominant dimensions
- Based on the degree of dominance that each dimension has in a practitioner's life at a given time (Day et al, 2007)



Scenario 1: relative stability

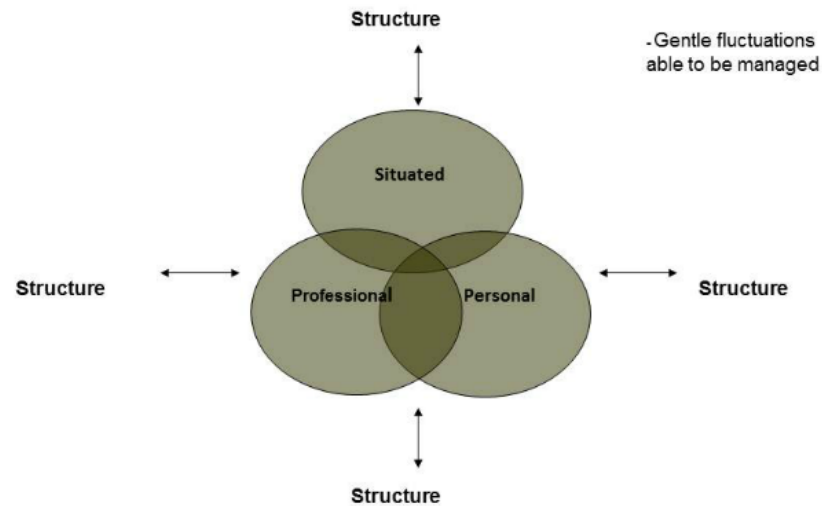
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Scenario 1: relative stability

Situated dimension of identity

- Changing the situated identity leads to an instability in teachers' sense of professional identity.
- Re-evaluation of teaching and learning strategies = challenge and re-evaluation of professional selves.
- In spite of challenges, changes to situated dimension can have a positive impact e.g. increased levels of motivation, morale and job satisfaction.
(Howard, 2013)

Professional dimension of identity

- Policy-driven teacher education programmes = high levels of accountability and little opportunity for consideration of trainee professional identity.
- Impact on sense of agency and power.
- Often rallying against cultural norms and values of placement community.
(McKerr, forthcoming)

Personal dimension of identity

- Personal identity can be influenced by changes to the education environment.
- Dialogic relationship with others affects ways of thinking and being.
- Personal dilemmas are influenced by cultural and economic capital.
- Intra-emotional challenges experienced include anxiety, and loss.
- The development of specific personal qualities is vital. (Messenger, 2012)

Messages: for practitioners

- Maintaining a positive sense of identity is closely related to practitioners' sense of well-being and agency.
- Practitioner identities are neither intrinsically positively or negatively stable, nor intrinsically fragmented, but will display characteristics of stability and/or fragmentation at different times during a career.

Messages: for schools

• Variations in teachers' identities occur in response to their capacities to manage the fluctuations in various scenarios which exercise the positive influences on their effectiveness.

• School leaders need to establish structures and cultures which support teachers to sustain their sense of agency, well-being and effectiveness in different stages of their career.

Messages: for policy

• Changes in identity will, in turn, have a direct impact upon commitment, resilience and the retention of practitioners.

• Teacher education policy needs to consider placing professional identity at its centre.

Messages: for schools

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