A Critical Review of "our work": Re-Thinking Teachers' Professional Identity: Issues and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on issues of the professional identity of teachers' in the teaching profession. It provides insights into various challenges imposed on teachers' professional identity in the age of globalization and marketisation. A range of concepts and ideas will be examined through the works of the British Sociologist Basil Bernstein in structuring of knowledge related to occupational identity formation. The first part of paper highlights the dominant issues that possess a threat to the 'notion of teacher identity' that teachers' had in the 'golden age' of teacher control. The second part focuses on the challenges to Bernstein's identities arising from 'regionalization' of knowledge and 'genericism', educational reforms and Levi-Strauss's bricolage. Thirdly, I suggest ways of re-constructing teacher identity in its current discussions through democratic professionalism, employing teacher activist identity and the use of teacher narratives in teaching. Lastly, the author recommends that teachers' professional identity could be re-built through conservative 'identity policy' by re-designing of work environments, organisational structures and ways of thinking about and carrying out teaching.

Keywords: professionalism; professional identity; teacher identity; standards; restructuring; formation; discourse; re-design; narratives; bricolage

INTRODUCTION

Increasing globalization and the emergence of the knowledge economy are calling into question traditional perspectives on the 'transformational' capacity of teacher education systems and the concepts of teaching as a profession and the role of teachers' in the system (Gopinathan et al, 2008). Innovations in information and communication technologies provide significant opportunities and challenges, leading to educational reforms in most part of the world. In response to these challenges there is a need for stronger competencies for children through high-quality schooling geared by high quality teaching. According to Hooley (2007) teacher quality is critical in preparing students in the 'new era' of social and economic changes.

The current changes pose a threat to teacher "autonomy, to the validity of any ethical view of their calling, to their relatively privileged status and economic position, and to the legitimacy of their claims to expertise based on exclusive possession of specialised knowledge" (Becks & Young, 2005: 183). Beck and Young (2005) explain the outcome of these challenges as the restructuring of the professional practices, having relative consequences on professionals with regards to their relationship to knowledge, to clients and to the organisational structures within which they work. Hence the 'new knowledge age' system requires teachers to re-build their personal and professional knowledge base and to search for 'new' professional teacher identity that meets the demands of the 21st century. This paper focuses on the dominant issues of debate to the professional identity of teachers', through the cited works of Bernstein in structuring of knowledge related to occupational identity formation. Bernstein (2000) suggests identity of professionals' as centred in a kind of humane relationship to knowledge and the relationship is centred in 'inwardness' and 'inner dedication' and it is this relationship which is threatened by the tides of globalization, and can be only appropriated through 're-contextualizing' professional/knowledge relationship.

Of fundamental importance there is the new concept of knowledge and its relationship to those who create and use it...knowledge, after nearly a thousand years is divorced formed inwardness and literally dehumanised...what is at stake is the concept of education itself (Bernstein,2000:p 86).

This paper also looks at the challenges to Bernstein's theory of identity arising from 'regionalization' of knowledge and 'gerericism', other challenges as educational reforms and Levi Strauss bricolage – teachers' work as bricolage (Hatton, 1988). Teachers' have normally failed to confront the 'issues' and 'challenges' of teaching in

reference to their own professional identities, failing to develop a strong relationship with their personal/professional knowledge in fulfilling their educative role is a problematic.

Therefore this paper attempts to suggest ways to re-construct teacher identity through democratic professionalism and activist teacher identity model (Sachs, 2001) and the use of teacher 'narratives' in teaching. Teacher narrative emerges from professional practice and reflection which develops in relation to the knowledge of others (Hooley, 2007). This paper highly recommends that teachers' identity could be re-built through 'conservative identity policy' by re-designing of teachers' work environment, organisational structures and ways of thinking about and carrying out teaching. (Bolivar & Domingo, 2006)

Professionalism Shift

Furlong et al (2001) defines of the 'notion of professionalism' as:

The three concepts of knowledge, autonomy and responsibility central to a traditional notion of professionalism are often seen as interrelated. It is because professionals face complex and unpredictable situations that they need a specialized body of knowledge, if they are to apply that knowledge, it is argued that they need the autonomy to make their own judgement. Given that they have autonomy it is essential that they need act responsibility-collectively they need to develop appropriate professional values. (p.150)

Professionalism is seen as a shifting phenomenon and sociologists suggest that a profession is whatever people think it is at any particular time (Hanlon, 1998). Sachs (2001) argues that professionalism operate as an occupational strategy, defining entry and negotiating the power and rewards due to expertise and as an organisational strategy shaping the patterns of power, place and relationships around which organisations are coordinated. The issue of professionalism has created much debate in recent decades, on the changing nature of professional control. It is quite evident that in the advanced industrial nation the position of professionals and the nature of their practice are changing. In the past professions had enjoyed high level of autonomy and power to secure their positions and knowledge in the society, as literacy and education becomes widespread questions are raised on the practices of professionals and on the autonomous nature of professions in general.

Teaching profession has been identified as one of the profession's that fails to adopt essential elements of new professionalism. According to Freidson (1994) "professionalism is being reborn in a hierarchical form in which everyday practitioners become subject to the control of professional elites who continue to exercise the considerable technical, administrative and cultural authority that professions' had in the past" (p.9). Professionalism is exposed to threats Freidson (1994) when policies are used based primarily on manipulating economic incentives in an ideological climate that claims professional work to be no different from any other kind of economic activity. These policies create conditions for individual competition hence weakens the social network of individuals to create competence and professional standards. This risks destroying the 'social capital' of professionals, since the work done is mainly for the public and not for the individual good. Coleman (1988, p.107) "reputation cannot arise in an open structure and collective sanction that would ensure trustworthiness cannot be applied". It forms a kind of 'bureaucratic device of control that binds and organises the behaviour of workers through exercise of hierarchical authority through systematic institution of formal rules and standards (Freidson, 1994).

It is worth agreeing with Freidson (1994) in arguing that "if professionalism is to flourish it is essential that practice be infused with a spirit of openness, infused by the conviction that one's decision must be routinely open to inspection and evaluation" (p. 196). Therefore the character of professional work should suggest two basic elements of professionalism "commitment to practicing a body of knowledge and skills of special values and to maintaining a fiduciary relationship with clients" (Freidson, 1994, p.200). Freidson's argument is quite important for the purpose of this paper, because to obtain these two basic elements of professionalism a relatively demanding period of training is required for learning how to perform 'esoteric' and complex work well.

Freidson (1994) argues against Haug's (1973, 1975, 1977) 'Deprofessionalization' and 'Proletarianization' theses, saying that the monopoly over a specific body of knowledge and skills that professions had enjoyed in the past are diminishing due to effective 'consumer model' of formal education and excess over a body of professional knowledge makes the work of professionals questionable by the consumer. Hence each professional act like a Marxist proletariat selling its labour for wages and stripped out of all control and autonomy over the substance and process of his work. Freidson (1994) provides alternative explanations for Haug's theses using the notion of 'knowledge gap'. He suggests that consumers' can access the specialized and technical information of today and yesterday and become informed and critical consumers. But it becomes highly questionable whether they can effectively play such a role when dealing with today's professionals, whose knowledge and technical competences have continued to expand. Therefore he claims that professions still have monopoly over important segments of formal knowledge that can never be lost, since new knowledge continuously replaces the lost and thus maintains the 'knowledge gap'.

Teachers' Professional Identity

Sachs (2001) describes "professional identity as a set of attributes that are imposed upon the teaching profession either by outsiders or members of the teaching fraternity itself" (p. 153). These attributes are shared and posses values that differentiate them from other groups, acting as 'conservative' in its intent. Identity is viewed as the primary driving force of the network era (Castells, 2000).

I use Mockler & Sachs (2006) in explaining Castells (2000)

The coexistence of a number of different identities for the individual, organised around a 'primary identity' which frames all other identities or roles subscribed to by the individual, so that while the individual may play a number of roles concurrently and internalize each of those roles to the point where each represents an aspect of their identity, their 'primary identity' which is more sustained across time and space than others, provide a frame of reference for each. (Mockler&Sachs, 2006:2)

The current changes in the teaching profession through uncertainty and continuous educational restructuring of teacher identity draws significant attention towards Basil Bernstein's (2000) 'retrospective' and 'prospective' identities. 'Retrospective identity is formed out of 'narrative' of the past that provides exampliers and criteria for the present and the future, while 'prospective' identity is informed by social movements, they engage with economic and political activity to 'provide for the development of new potentials'. Hence Wenger (1998) describes the process of identity construction as the "reconciliation of 'multimembership' where the individuals come to an understanding of him/herself through reconciling various roles and identities to the self and each other" (p. 148).

Sachs (2001) points out that redefining teachers' professional identity will require collective action by teachers' that is industrial, political and professional. "The industrial component comes through the activities of teacher unions and deals with conditions of work, remuneration and social recognition, while at the same time contributing to professional development activities" (p. 154). Teacher identity is dynamic in nature as a result it is open and possesses power. Sachs (2001) uses Wenger (1998) in identifying five dimensions of identity when considering professional identity.

1. Identity as negotiated experiences. 2. Identity as community membership. 3. Identity as learning trajectory. 4. Identity as nexus of multimembership and 5. Identity as a relation between local and global (p.154).

One can use the above characteristics of identity to reconceptualise the notion of professional identity.

CHALLENGES TO TEACHER IDENTITY

Generally speaking, a concept map is a 2-dimensional visual representation of a group of propositions or ideas The second part of the paper turns to look at the challenges imposed on the occupational identity formation of teachers' in an era of increasing marketization and mangerialization.

Bernstein Identity Concept

Therefore it becomes important to look at Bernstein's analysis on structuring of knowledge for the formation of occupational identity. In writing about the ideas of the British Sociologist Basil Bernstein on the current political and social pressures on the changes of professionalism, Beck and Young (2005, p.184) highlights that:

Bernstein with his penetrating sociological imagination perceived more clearly than most that what was pivotal to these changes was a restructuring not merely of the external conditions of academic and professional practice but even more fundamentally of the core element of academic and professional identity.

According to Beck and Young (2005) Bernstein had located the driving force of professional identity as centred on the relationship that practitioners have with knowledge, he calls this a relationship characterised as 'inwardness' and 'inner dedication'. Hooley (2007) points out that "Bernstein's analysis suggest that professionals operate within a context that includes not only the external conditions of change, but the internal basis of change and that an awareness of the interrelationship between the two at any particular time determines the nature of professional consciousness, commitment and vigour" (p.51).

Therefore we argue that a failure to establishing a strong interrelationship between 'inwardness' and 'inner dedication' opens profound threats towards teacher identity crisis. Beck and Young (2005) identify 'Regionalization of knowledge and Genericism the 'pedagogic modes' of Bernstein as obstacles for Bernstein's identity formation. *Regionalization of Knowledge* had been a dominant principle for restructuring of higher educational curricula assuming a qualitatively new significance in recent decades (Beck&Young, 2005).

Bernstein (2000) outlines that regions are constructed by recontextualizing 'singulars' into larger units which

operates in the intellectual field of disciplines as well as in the field of external practice. Hence 'regionalisation' grew intensively in universities expanding knowledge structures through innovations in technology.

Bernstein (2000) identifies 'regionalization' as a "discursive procedure which threatens pedagogic culture dominated by singulars and raises issues of legitimacy for such culture" (p. 52). Hence Bernstein further explains that change in the reproduction of knowledge structure from 'course base' to 'modular' form facilitates regionalisation. We agree with Beck and Young's position that regionalisation weakens both the autonomous 'discursive base' and the 'political base' of singulars, enforcing changes in the organizational structures of institutions towards central administrative control.

Increasing regionalization necessarily as a weakening of the strength of the classification of discourse and their entailed narcissistic identities and so a change of orientation of identity towards greater external dependency a change from introjected and projected identities (Bernstein, 2000, p.52).

According to Bernstein (2000) when 'regionalization' of knowledge began to creep into universities in the 1980s' a new kind of knowledge structure emerged with it known as '*Genericism*'. This Generic mode is defined as a performance mode by Bernstein. These are necessary features skills and competencies that are acquired for a task or work. According to Beck and Young (2005) 'genericism' or generic modes are identified across all fields of practices, which is mostly associated with 'lifelong learning'. The regionalization of new forms of knowledge structure and generic skills necessary for a particular field or teaching subject makes it vital to re-build a strong connection between the 'inwardness' and the 'inner dedication' of teachers'. The re-contextualization of professional/knowledge relationship must take place so that new forms of skills and knowledge are learnt that meets the standard demands of new emerging teaching profession.

Under these circumstances it is considered that a vital new ability must be developed 'trainability', a ability to profit from continuous pedagogic re-formations and so cope with the new requirements of 'work' and 'life'. These pedagogic reformations will be based on the acquisition of generic modes which it is hoped will realise a flexible transferable potential rather than specific performances. (Bernstein, 2000, p.59)

Educational Reforms

Reforms have an impact upon teachers' identities and because these are both cognitive and emotional, create reactions which are both rational and non-rational. Thus, the way and extent to which reforms are received, adopted, adapted and sustained or not sustained will be influenced by the extent to which they challenge existing identities (Day, 2002, p. 683).

Educational and social problems have been 'individualized' resulting in reforms directly affecting the professional identity of teachers'. Bolivar and Domingo (2006) explain that 'life politics' of teachers must be reconciled with educational policy and that changes cannot be imposed without considering the emotions and professional lives of teachers as the resistance, if created may condemn these changes to failure. Educational reforms involve restructuring of teachers' working conditions and in some countries due to social changes; reforms are also as result of students joining secondary schools with different educational demands. Bolivar and Domingo (2006) view these factors destabilizing teachers' professional practice that entails a difficult reconstruction of their identity. The new emerging circumstances of secondary school students challenge traditional models of professionalism and demand for more 'complex' and 'extended' professionalism. The education reforms are a result of what Bernstein calls, the emergence of 'generic modes' in education leading to pedagogic reforms of 'singulars' which demand effective 'trainability' by teachers.

Teachers' are socialized into their professional culture and hold on to the practices, skills and knowledge that they had capitalized through years of transmission of disciplinary knowledge. When these teachers' are faced with current classroom situations with new demands of students on them, teachers' fail to have a positive impact on students with their available knowledge, training techniques and experiences. They begin to feel de-moralized, stressful, threatened and captured in the professional identity crisis. Some teachers may try resistance methods through "strategic redefinitions of professional practice or they develop defence mechanisms to compensate for an increasing lack of control over their situation" (Bolivar&Domingo, 2006, p.344). It makes teachers to readapt their routines to new contexts. All these issues raise significant questions to teachers' personal and imposed identities.

The secondary teachers' job has been changed in such a way that the functions of public instruction that characterised secondary school teachers has been modified and broadened to an educational function similar to the one primary school teachers have been carrying out. Unlike other teaching collectives, there is no correspondence between their academic preparation and the conditions of access to the teaching profession and the job they really have to do nowadays. (Bolivar&Domingo, 2006: 346)

Bolivar and Domingo suggested that teachers' present and future identity has to be internalized therefore a

reconstruction becomes necessary, that balances the 'objective' and 'subjective' identity. When this double identification is questioned there is an identity crisis due to the lack of consistency between the two identities. Teachers' past identity needs to be challenged to accommodate, internalize and reconstruct their future identity.

Teachers' Work as Bricolage

I find it useful to explain the concept of bricolage in this paper since it raises significant attention on the nature of teachers work and provide alternatives to address the problem. The concept of bricolage is developed by Levi-Strauss and explained through Hatton (1988) in her writings. Hatton explains bricolage on the Levi-Strauss definition of "Technical Plane" associated with material accumulation and bricolage on the Plane of Speculation dealing with general ideas or theory.

According to Hatton (1988) teachers' work is a bricolage because it has the characteristics of both: Technical Plane and Plane of Speculation. The following features are identified by Hatton that represents teachers' work as bricolage:

(1) <u>Conservatism</u> – teachers work is highly conservative because by necessity teachers stay within existing constraints, through adopting survival strategies to accommodate rather than transcend constraints.

(2) <u>Limited Creativity</u> – teachers' work involves limited circumstances for creativity due to institutional constraints.

(3) <u>Repertoire Enlargement</u> – the repertoire of means on which teachers draw is enlarged in a non-principled way, where theory deployed does not generate the practices in question. Teachers culture is held constant and left unquestioned- bricolage.

(4) <u>Teachers' use of theory</u> – if teachers are bricolage on the intellectual level, they will behave like the prior scientist than the contemporary scientist.

(5) <u>Devious Means</u> – the use of devious means are exemplified in the introductions of lessons, because the connection between the means employed and the desired ends are not obvious.

(6) <u>Ad hocism</u> – bricolage on a technical plane, where teachers work may be understand as attempts to get results by developing new structures in a non-principled way. (p. 342-343)

Hatton (1988) provides further explanations to the features of bricolage by identifying the following issues:

(a) <u>Anticipatory socialisation</u> – what teachers learn about teaching is intuitive and imitative than explicit and analytical. This forms an invisible barrier to the use of abstract theory.

(b) <u>Pre-service experience</u> – the practicum experiences of student teachers' focuses mainly on the techniques of teaching rather than towards specific educational purpose, hence those strategies are adopted which is modelled by supervising teachers.

(c) <u>Failure of teacher education</u> – failure to manifest both omission and legitimation. By failing to question pedagogical problems and uncritical attention to prior knowledge of student teachers.

(d) <u>Failure of educational theory</u> – underdeveloped state of theories in teaching fails to recognise ethnical and practical questions about a disadvantage group in teacher education course.

(e) <u>Nature of work</u> – teachers work is conservative in nature, hence unable to implement their teaching freely. (p. 343-347)

Hatton had identified significant examples and features of teachers' work that turns to be bricolage and provides sound theoretical explanations on the basis and nature of teacher education and practices of teachers' in education. Hatton's work signifies that there is an urgent need to change and restructure components of teacher training programmes to achieve standards and scientific enquiry in teaching.

RECONSTRUCTING TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

The third part of the paper focuses on the ways in which professional identity of teachers' could be reconstructed.

Democratic Professionalism: Activist Teacher Identity

One of the major discourses circulating around the issues of teacher professionalism is democratic professionalism. *Democratic professionalism* has been identified as useful in the discussion of this paper because it considers views of all stakeholders in decision making through collaborative and cooperative action. It seeks to develop broader understanding within the community, especially between students, parents, teachers and others on

how education system operates. This also builds a collective effort to secure the status and autonomy in the profession by acting responsibly.

Sachs (2001) explains that this approach is identified as a strategy for industry development, skills development and work organisation. The strategies used provide teachers' relevant skills to improve their practices. Sachs's democratic professionalism is an 'inclusive' form of professionalism that provides a platform for groups to understand the limitations of each other's work. Therefore democratic discourse leads to the development of an Activist professional identity in teachers.

The proletarianization of profession can be appropriated through Activist teacher identity model.

That provides opportunities for open flow of ideas, creates individual and collective capacity of people to solve problems, use of critical reflection and analysis to evaluate problems, looks at the collective welfare of people by promoting democratic way of life. (Sachs, 2001, p. 157)

An Activist teacher identity reduces exploitation, inequality and oppression amongst and between all the stakeholders of the school and rather develops principles of equality and social justice. This model of identity minimizes the illegitimate domination of a group of people in the profession. An activist teacher identity is portrayed through teacher trade unions, which bargain on issues collectively for a common interest. To achieve an activist identity one must focus on the strategies of identity achievement which are described as 'acknowledging the importance of professional self-narratives' and 'development of practice' that involves engagement and imagination providing structures and affective conditions for identity. We will use 'self-narratives' as most influential for our discussion in the paper.

Self-Narratives

Self-narratives explained by Sachs (2001) are "culturally provided stories about selves and their passage through lives that provide resources drawn upon by individuals in their interactions with one another and with themselves" (p. 157). Gergen (1988) views narratives as effective social constructions that undergoes continuous alterations through interaction processes and thereby constructs relationships to sustain and enhance various actions. These are also 'symbolic' systems that are used for 'justification', 'criticism' and 'social solidification'.

Teachers' construct their self-narratives through experiences and relate to their 'social, political and professional agenda'. The development of self-narratives originates from teachers' own schooling experiences, "embedded and reinforced in the course of their professional life in schools" (Sachs, 2001, p.158). Sachs points out that self-narrative provide a collective professional identity and provocation for renewing teacher professionalism. In order to test the relevance and validity of these 'narratives' as a basis for 'reconstruction of identities it needs to be made public. The ideas and judgement portrayed in stories should be 'debated' and 'contested' by other 'actors' so that it becomes a 'lively professional development'. These also enables teachers' to engage in effective dialogues amongst each other about the educational processes, schooling, discipline knowledge, use of pedagogy and debating ways of building effective policies and practices in education. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) "outline an approach towards narrative that involves a movement between three sets of questions: transition from field experience to field texts, from field texts to research texts and finally from research texts to the research account" (p.413). according to Hooley (2007) teacher narratives provide directions towards learning projects and when integrated into teacher education programs based on systematic narrative inquiry can lead to 'discursive' and 'authentic' learning, through a mixture of disciplinary, curriculum studies and classroom experiences. Hooley also outlines the importance of right construction of knowledge blending both logical/scientific thinking and narrative thinking so that the personal interpretation provides valid and unconflicting results.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Lastly, the issues and challenges to teachers' professional identity points out towards some possible speculations on teacher identity.

The explanation so far provided in this paper on the issues and challenges imposed to teachers' professional identity points out that an urgent attention is needed for restructuring the official knowledge base of the modernized teaching profession, through a conservative 'identity policy'. Gopinathan et al (2008) points out that there is an urgent need to recognise teachers' work as complex and demanding therefore improvement in teacher quality requires a re-conceptualization of initial teacher education that recognises the intellectual dimension such as autonomy, control and responsibility, reflexivity, heteronomy and continuous learning as critical attributes that define teachers' work in the 21st century.

These changes will bring professional standards for teachers' developing 'lifelong learning' through recontextualizing knowledge structures and imposing demands and standards to review the roles and responsibilities

of teachers'. Gopinathan et al (2008) also revealed the need for innovation in teacher preparation programmes to broaden the entry requirements for teacher education in universities so that a range of students enter the profession. It is also important to note that teacher preparation programmes should maintain a continual innovation to respond to the changing nature of the profession. I explained using Bolivar and Domingo (2006) that reconstruction of identity, involves the emergence of new roles and relationship amongst teachers, re-designing the work setting, the organizational structures and the ways of thinking about and of performing teaching.

Therefore a new design for teacher education becomes essential as one which should facilitate strong partnership between key stakeholders- university, schools and the community. Gopinathan et al (2008) argues that principles and strategies must ensure productive and successful partnership in teacher education and government should play a key role in facilitating this partnership.

FINAL COMMENTS

This paper attempts to explain some of the dominant issues that revolve around the teaching profession today. The main focus of this paper was to explain the severity of the issue of teacher professionalism and teachers' work in the 'knowledge age'. The main problematic of this paper has been examined through the cited works of Bernstein, by identifying the issues of concern and therefore providing some possible explanations to remedy the problem. This paper has used the cited work of a number of writers, who have explained the key concepts of the paper well for our discussion.

Further this paper suggests a real need for appropriating teachers' professional identity through re-designing of teachers' work. I have intended to explain how regionalization of knowledge, genericism and educational reforms pose challenges to teachers' traditional identity, by providing vivid explanation through the concept of bricolage by Hatton (1988). The paper draws significant emphasis on universities that provide teacher education to build on the scientific enquiry in teachers' work rather than 'rote' learning. This paper suggests democratic professionalism through activist teacher identity model and the use of self-narratives as important in the reconstruction of teachers' professional identity.

I find it necessary to point out through Gopinathan (2008) that teacher education needs re-conceptualization that requires intellectual dimensions of teaching that is critical in nature and involves scientific inquiry. I also find it important to highlight through the discussion of this paper, if teachers' professional identity is to be reconstructed it needs the combined efforts of all stakeholders of the school. A through effective 'partnership' that involves a mutual understanding between all stakeholders' to enhance productive teaching and learning in schools, thereby professionalising the teacher profession in the new era.

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