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PHILOSOPHY OF THE PROFESSION IN THE STRUCTURE OF SCHOOLTEACHER PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY IN LATVIAN AND RUSSIAN SAMPLES

Jelena Jermolajeva
The University College of Economics and Culture, Latvia

Tatiana Bogdanova
Smolensk State University, Russian Federation

Svetlana Silchenkova
Smolensk State University, Russian Federation

Abstract. *The article presents the results of the international study of the professional identity (PI) of schoolteachers of Russia and Latvia. The six component model of the content of the PI is used in the study. According to this model, the questionnaire "School Teacher Professional Identity" was created and international survey organized in 2017, in which 433 schoolteachers from Latvia and the Smolensk region of Russia participated. The aim of this article is to analyze the data of two national samples for the first component of the schoolteacher PI: Philosophy of the Profession. The data in both samples show very high support for the basic values and beliefs of the profession. The answers of the teachers of the two countries are well agreed, however certain differences in the data of Latvian and Russian teachers are observed. Some problems of the schoolteacher PI are identified that require attention of teachers, school administrators and education officials.*
Keywords: *Latvian and Russian schoolteachers, philosophy of profession, professional identity (PI), structural model of the contents of PI.*

Introduction

Teacher professional identity (TPI) is now accepted as a key determinant of the effectiveness of schoolteacher's work, motivation and commitment, psychological well-being, and persistence in the profession (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard et al., 2004; Carrillo et al., 2015; Goodson, 2014; Voinea & Palasan, 2014). Research on the TPI is necessary for better understanding the problems faced by modern schoolteacher, which in turn contributes to the improvement of quality and management of learning/teaching process. An important part of the research on TPI is a study of its contents, using

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different approaches (Hsieh, 2015; Li, 2016; Medveckis, 2016; Mikelsone et al., 2014).

The article is devoted to one of the components of TPI contents: philosophy of the teacher profession, which is the ideological and ethical foundation of the profession and concerns professional ethics, goals, beliefs and values (Woo, 2013). According to Remley & Herlihy (2014), it is imperative for a professional to adhere to the certain set of philosophical assumptions in order to achieve a strong professional identity.

This study is a part of Latvian-Russian research project "Professional identity of educators", ongoing since 2013 and having been implemented by a group of scholars from Riga (Latvia) and Smolensk (Russia) including the authors of this paper. The essence and structure of the contents of pedagogue PI are in the center of the project. The research is based on the assumption that TPI is a psychological phenomenon consisting of several key components, which are influenced not so much by national characteristics, national cultural traditions, state educational standards, personal characteristics of teachers, and the specifics of the subject taught, as by the more general traits: the level of civilizedness of society, its social priorities and direction of social development. The structural model of contents of higher school pedagogue PI was created based on the existing literature on the topic (Bukor, 2015; Emerson, 2010; Healey & Hays, 2011; Woo, 2013). The model includes six major structural components: Philosophy of the Profession, Professional Knowledge, Professional Roles, Professional Attitude to Work, Cooperation with Colleagues, and Professional Engagement Behaviors (Шпона & Сенченков, 2016; Jermolajeva & Bogdanova, 2017). The relevance of the proposed model was confirmed by the data of the international survey "University Teacher Professional Identity" carried out in 2015. This questionnaire was developed on the base of the Professional Identity Scale in Counseling by H.R. Woo for the profession of counselor (Woo 2013) radically modified for testing university pedagogues (the authors were A. Shpona, M. Vidnere, J. Jermolajeva; see: Шпона & Сенченков, 2016).

At the current stage of the project, the same model has been used to study the schoolteacher PI. Based on the experience received in the study of the university teacher PI the questionnaire "Schoolteacher Professional Identity" was created (the authors A. Shpona, M. Vidnere, J. Jermolajeva, T. Bogdanova, S. Silchenkova) and international survey organized in April-May 2017, in which 433 schoolteachers from Latvia and the Smolensk region of Russia took part.

The aim of the article is to analyze and compare the data of Latvian and Russian samples of schoolteachers for the PI first component "Philosophy of the Profession".

The questionnaire contains 6 blocks according to the number of the components of the model; each block consists of 10 statements. The

schoolteachers were asked to evaluate each of the statements by the appropriate rating from the strong disagreement (1 point) to the complete agreement (6 points). The reliability of the questionnaire was tested by the method of Cronbach's alpha; the obtained indicator 0.96 suffices to recognize it as reliable. For each component of PI and for each item mean rates, dispersion, standard deviation, statistical mode, and coefficient of variation (CV) were calculated for the two national samples and for urban and rural teachers separately (CV up to 33 % is considered to be reliable and accurate to draw conclusions – Spirina & Bashina, 2012). Statistically significant differences were checked using the Fisher criterion, and correlation coefficients were defined by means of *Statistica* software.

The data obtained in the survey show very high support for the basic values and beliefs of the profession in both samples of schoolteachers. The answers of teachers of the two countries are well agreed, however certain differences in the data of Latvia and Russia were observed. Some problems of the PI of teachers are identified that require attention of school administrators, education officials and teachers themselves.

Results

The study involved 433 urban and rural schoolteachers in Latvia and the Smolensk region (Russia), from over 20 schools in each national group. Both samples are representative for the corresponding general population. In Latvia, 231 teachers participated in the survey; the sampling error is 6.4 %. In Russia (202 participants) the sampling error is 6.8 %. In both cases the error is allowable (Ядов, 2012). The characteristics of Latvian and Russian samples are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 **Characteristics of Latvian (LV) and Russian (RU) samples**

Indicator / **Group**	**Quantity of teachers**		**Age (mean)**		**Work experience, years (mean)**		**Education (%)**			
							Higher		**Specialized secondary**	
	LV	**RU**	**LV**	**RU**	**LV**	**RU**	**LV**	**RU**	**LV**	**RU**
Urban schools	179	96	48.3	46.7	22.8	22.8	99.4	97.9	0.6	2.1
Rural schools	52	106	47.9	46.8	22.2	26.5	100	90.6	0	9.4
All	231	202	48.2	47.0	22.7	24.6	99.6	94.0	0.4	5.9

For the block "Philosophy of the Profession", the respondents evaluated the following statements:

1. The most important thing in my work is to contribute to holistic physical, mental and social development of student's personality.
2. The professional work of schoolteacher is an important factor in the development of society.
3. The work of schoolteacher is determined not only by the social demand on educational services, but by professional ideals and values as well.
4. In the pedagogical process, it is important to contribute to student's personal achievements and development of her/his competences.
5. Effective teaching process is based on equitable cooperation between teacher and students.
6. The teacher profession has a significant impact on my own personality.
7. The teacher profession is based on eternal values; frequent upgrades are harmful to it.
8. It is important for schoolteacher to know modern theories of development and education of students.
9. The schoolteacher profession gives opportunities for self-realization.
10. The teaching work makes especially high ethical demands to professional.

The obtained data are presented in the Tables 2–4. The Table 2 shows the statistical indicators of Latvian and Russian samples for each of 10 statements. The other two tables show the same statistical indicators for urban and rural schoolteachers in the Smolensk region (Table 3) and Latvia (Table 4).

Table 2 **Data of the Latvian (LV) and Russian (RU) samples**

Item	Mode		Mean value		Dispersion		Standard deviation		Coefficient of variation (CV, %)	
	LV	RU	LV	RU	LV	RU	LV	RU	LV	RU
1	6	6	5.47	5.52	0.73	0.53	0.85	0.73	15.60	13.80
2	6	6	5.37	5.50	0.57	0.48	0.75	0.69	14.03	12.59
3	6	6	5.40	5.39	0.57	0.86	0.75	0.92	13.93	17.17
4	6	6	5.69	5.61	0.45	0.40	0.67	0.63	11.77	11.26
5	6	6	5.62	5.34	0.47	0.65	0.68	0.81	12.16	15.14
6	5	6	5.00	5.21	0.87	0.69	0.93	0.83	18.64	15.89
7	5	5	3.82	4.53	2.24	1.76	1.5	1.33	39.25	29.28
8	6	6	5.38	5.43	0.63	0.66	0.79	0.82	14.77	15.01
9	5	5	4.94	4.84	0.88	1.24	0.94	1.11	18.95	23.04
10	6	6	5.49	5.54	0.47	0.52	0.69	0.72	12.54	12.98
Component as a whole	6	6	5.22	5.29	1.05	0.88	1.03	0.94	19.67	17.76

According to the Fisher criterion, there is no significant difference in mode between samples for this component of PI (the empirical value of the Fisher criterion F_{emp} = 0.52, which is much less than the critical value 1.64 for the significance level of 0.05). As in the previous survey on PI of university teachers (Jermolajeva et al., 2017), the rates in this block are the most unanimous (CVs are the lowest) and highest (the average mode is 6) of all the components of PI. Therefore even small fluctuations of mean rates and modes are important in the research.

The statements concerning the obligation of a teacher to society and students received the maximal and unanimous agreement; however, the agreement on the influence of the profession on personality of a teacher was not fully complete: the statements "The teacher profession has a significant impact on my own personality" (6) and "Schoolteacher profession gives opportunities for self-realization" (9) received less support (Table 2). Both rural and urban Latvian subgroups were especially critical about the connection between professional work and personal characteristics (Table 4, item 6: modes 5 and 5, mean values 4.99 and 5.00, respectively). The opinion of urban teachers of the Smolensk region was about the same (Table 3: mode 5, mean value 5.26), but most of Russian rural teachers feel the strongest influence of the teaching profession on their personality (mode 6). If a teacher lives in a rural area, where everyone knows everything about neighbors and most part of population is her/his students or graduates (average work experience is 25.5 years, average age 46.82), she/he can never forget about her/his profession and the professional requirements set by society. The personality of rural teacher in Russia is still inseparable from her/his professional image, which is a powerful incentive for personal development (mode 6 in item 9). On the contrary, the urban teachers of the Smolensk region and the teachers of Latvia do not limit the possibilities of their self-realization exclusively to the professional field (mode 5); beside them, they see other opportunities and incentives for the personal growth.

The certain difference of opinions is observed in items 1 and 2. The statements "The most important thing in my work is to contribute to holistic physical, mental and social development of student's personality" (1) and "The professional work of schoolteacher is an important factor in the development of society" (2) caused a restrained reaction of urban teachers of the Smolensk region (Table 3) and rural teachers of Latvia (Table 4): the mode in these subgroups is 5. This means that in the Russian sample the urban teachers feel little doubt about the importance of their professional work in the development of society, whereas in Latvia rural teachers do not have complete confidence in the mission of the profession and results of their efforts.

The most controversial reaction was to the statement "The teacher profession is based on eternal values; frequent upgrades are harmful to it" (7). The hypothesis

of the research group that the permanent modernization that has been going in the last decades destabilizes the work of teachers, takes much of their time and energy, and diverts them from the essence of the professional work, was confirmed only partially. In both samples the statement was agreed in general (Table 2: mode 5), but without unconditional support with the mode 6 as it was in many other items. At the same time, the opinions of the urban teachers and their rural colleagues on this item strongly disagreed. In the subgroup of Latvian rural teachers, the mode of answers to this item is 2, i. e. "I do not agree" (the unique case for the whole questionnaire!). It should be noted, however, that great dispersion (2.73) and CV (52.77 %) of responses takes this indicator beyond the confidence zone (Table 4). This means that the answers to this question differed greatly, from full agreement to complete disagreement. However in general the data show that rural teachers in Latvia feel lack of change in the school system and need to accelerate the pace of reforms. The answers of Russian rural teachers (though not as explicitly as the answers of their Latvian colleagues from rural areas) also testify to certain expectation of changes (this item was the only one of the ten statements that obtained mode 5 in this subgroup; all other items obtained mode 6). Thus the reforms that are actively implemented in urban schools are slowed down on the "outskirts" of educational systems of both states; rural teachers signal about the stagnation of reforms in their schools.

Table 3 **Data of urban (U) and rural (R) subgroups (*Russian sample*)**

Item	Mode		Mean value		Dispersion		Standard deviation		Coefficient of variation (CV, %)	
	U	R	U	R	U	R	U	R	U	R
1	5	6	5.28	5.64	0.52	0.50	0.72	0.71	13.66	12.52
2	5	6	5.36	5.53	0.45	0.52	0.67	0.72	12.45	13.02
3	6	6	5.24	5.40	0.71	1.00	0.84	1.00	16.11	18.56
4	6	6	5.43	5.67	0.42	0.39	0.65	0.61	12.00	10.81
5	6	6	5.29	5.42	0.70	0.49	0.84	0.70	15.83	12.96
6	5	6	5.26	5.17	0.44	0.81	0.66	0.90	12.62	17.40
7	5	5	4.62	4.73	1.36	1.63	1.17	1.28	25.26	27.01
8	6	6	5.21	5.57	0.80	0.40	0.89	0.63	17.16	11.37
9	5	6	4.93	4.79	1.08	1.42	1.04	1.19	21.10	24.87
10	6	6	5.45	5.58	0.43	0.46	0.65	0.68	12.00	12.11
Component as a whole	5	6	5.21	5.35	0.74	0.86	0.86	0.93	16.50	17.34

The comparison of modes in urban and rural schools revealed statistically significant difference only in the Smolensk sample. The Fisher criterion was used since the mode for the block "Philosophy of the profession" has only two values

in this sample: 5 and 6. The empirical value of the Fisher criterion F_{emp} = 2.07, whereas the critical value F_{crit} = 1.64; that is, the reliability of the differences in the compared data is 95 %. This means that the answers of teachers from Russian rural schools strongly differ from those of their urban colleagues.

The most essential difference is higher evaluation by the rural teachers of their importance and role in the development of student's personality and the creation of a base for her/his achievements (Table 3, items 1, 4). As many years ago, the Russian rural teacher takes full responsibility for the students' achievements in education and hence their opportunities in career: rural children and their families do not have a wide choice of training courses, they cannot afford highly paid private tutors, the system of distance learning cannot compete with a simple schoolteacher as well. The above mentioned lack of innovations and reforms felt by rural teachers is connected with their much higher evaluation of the knowledge of modern theories of development and education (item 8), compared with their urban colleagues. In this item the maximum difference is achieved between the mean rates in the two subgroups: 0.36. At the same time, the maximum difference in the CV is observed here: the urban teachers are not so unanimous in the assessment of theoretical knowledge; their opinions on this issue differed essentially stronger than the opinions of rural teachers (17, 16 % versus 11.37 %). It should be noted however that the variability of answers (CV) in the subgroup of Russian rural teachers in general is higher than that of their urban compatriots (Table 3: items 3, 6, 7, 9), which is probably connected with the difference in living standards and working conditions in rural areas.

Table 4 **Data of urban (U) and rural (R) subgroups (*Latvian sample*)**

Item	Mode		Mean value		Dispersion		Standard deviation		Coefficient of variation (CV, %)	
	U	**R**	**U**	**R**	**U**	**R**	**U**	**R**	**U**	**R**
1	6	6	5.46	5.51	0.79	0.52	0.89	0.72	16.29	13.14
2	6	5	5.41	5.25	0.58	0.53	0.76	0.73	14.01	13.94
3	6	6	5.38	5.45	0.59	0.48	0.77	0.70	14.28	12.75
4	6	6	5.65	5.79	0.51	0.21	0.72	0.45	12.69	7.84
5	6	6	5.60	5.70	0.51	0.33	0.71	0.57	12.71	10.08
6	5	5	4.99	5.00	0.93	0.65	0.97	0.81	19.35	16.17
7	5	2	4.02	3.13	1.94	2.73	1.39	1.65	34.67	52.77
8	6	6	5.38	5.38	0.62	0.66	0.79	0.81	14.70	15.14
9	5	5	4.90	5.08	0.92	0.72	0.96	0.85	19.55	16.78
10	6	6	5.51	5.40	0.45	0.55	0.67	0.74	12.17	13.76
Component as a whole	5	6	5.23	5.17	1.00	1.24	1.00	1.12	19.09	21.58

According to the Fisher criterion, there are no significant differences between subgroups of urban and rural teachers in the Latvian sample (Table 4). The only exception is the question on the modernization of educational system (however the data on this item are beyond the reliability zone). This means that in Latvia there is no such gap between urban and rural teachers as observed in Russia.

The statistically significant interdependences within the component are different in two samples. By the number of correlations, the key item for the Smolensk region teachers is the item 10 (Table 5).

Table 5 **Correlations within the block (*Russian sample*)**

Statement	Correlating statements	Pearson coefficient
The teaching work makes especially high ethical demands to professional	The professional work of schoolteacher is an important factor in the development of society	0.47
	The work of schoolteacher is determined not only by the social demand on educational services, but by professional ideals and values as well	**0.52**
	In the pedagogical process, it is important to contribute to student's personal achievements and development of her/his competences	0.44
	It is important for a schoolteacher to know modern theories of development and education of students	0.47
It is important for a schoolteacher to know modern theories of development and education of students	In the pedagogical process, it is important to contribute to student's personal achievements and development of her/his competences	**0.50**
	Effective teaching process is based on equitable cooperation between teacher and students	0.46

For the Russian sample, teacher is in the center of the concept of the philosophy of the profession. The teacher profession imposes high ethical requirements closely related to high importance of teacher for the development of the student's personality and thus for the development of society as a whole. Teacher should permanently improve her/his pedagogical skills. Taking into account the social demand, teacher, however, does not follow it blindly because of her/his unshakable humanistic values: equitable cooperation with students in the learning process and priority of the student's personality.

Table 6 **Correlations within the block (*Latvian sample*)**

Statement	Correlating statements	Pearson coefficient
In the pedagogical process, it is important to contribute to student's personal achievements and development of her/his competences	Effective teaching process is based on equitable cooperation between teacher and students	**0.56**
	The most important thing in my work is to contribute to holistic physical, mental and social development of student's personality	0.46

According to the data of the Latvian schoolteachers, their concept of the philosophy of the profession focuses on the student (Table 6). The main priorities are similar to those in the other sample: harmonious development of the student's personality and equitable cooperation in the learning process.

Table 7 **Intercomponent correlations in two samples**

Samples	Professional Knowledge	Professional Roles	Professional Attitude to Work	Cooperation with Colleagues	Professional Engagement Behaviors
LV	0.19	**0.46**	**0.44**	0.25	0.22
RU	0.37	**0.62**	**0.56**	0.38	0.40

The statistically significant interdependences of the component with the other PI components appeared similar but not identical in the samples (Table 7). The closest connections are with the Professional Roles that the schoolteacher performs (teacher, mentor, organizer, etc.) and Professional Attitude toward work. In the Russian sample this connections are moderately strong (the Pearson coefficient is in the range from 0.5 to 0.7) whereas in the Latvian one they are statistically significant (over 0.3 and up 0.5). This means that the analyzed component of PI essentially influences performance and behaviors of teachers.

Conclusions

The Philosophy of the Profession is the most unanimous and approved component of the PI of schoolteachers. There are no statistically significant differences between the Latvian and Smolensk samples, however certain peculiarities in the data of Latvia and Russia are observed.

The statements of the questionnaire about the obligation of teacher to society and students received the maximal and unanimous agreement. However, the agreement on the influence of the profession on teacher personality was not fully

complete. The rural teachers of the Smolensk region feel the strongest influence of the teaching profession on their personality, whereas the urban Russian teachers and the teachers of Latvia do not limit the possibilities of their self-realization exclusively to the professional field, but see other opportunities and incentives for the personal growth as well.

In the Russian sample, the urban teachers feel little doubt about the importance of their professional work for the development of society, whereas in Latvia, the rural teachers lose confidence in the mission of the profession and results of their efforts. In both countries, rural teachers signal the slowdown of educational reforms in their schools. Education officials should pay attention to this signal.

Statistically significant differences between the data of urban and rural teachers were found in the Russian sample. Russian rural teachers evaluate importance and role of teacher in the development and achievements of student higher than their urban colleagues, which is connected with unequal educational opportunities in the urban and rural areas. They attach more significance to new theoretical knowledge; that may indicate to shortcomings of the system of in-service teacher professional development. The variability of answers in the subgroup of Russian rural teachers in general is higher than that of their urban compatriots, which is probably connected with the difference in living standards and working conditions in rural areas.

For the Russian sample, teacher and high moral and ethical requirements imposed on her/him are in the center of the concept of the Philosophy of the Profession, whereas in the center of the Latvian concept is student, harmonious development of her/his personality, and equitable cooperation in the learning process.

There are statistically significant correlations of the Philosophy of the Profession with other PI components; the correlations in the Russian sample are stronger than in Latvian one. In both samples, the closest connections are with the Professional Roles and Professional Attitude toward work, i.e. the analyzed component of PI essentially influences performance and behaviors of teacher.

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