

PROFESSIONAL SOCIALIZATION OF NOVICE TEACHERS: BETWEEN THE CULTURE OF ACADEMIA AND THE WORKPLACE CULTURE

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***Abstract.** This paper discusses the outcomes of the first stage of conducted qualitative research on professional socialization of novice teachers. The presented analysis refers to the transition period from the role of a student to that of an employee and uncovers the less well-known empirically side of the coin in teacher training with regards to professional socialization of novice teachers – the perspective of constructing one’s professional path at the intersection of two cultures: the culture of academia and the workplace culture.*

***Keywords:** professional socialization of novice teachers, transition period, transition, workplace culture.*

Introduction

For many years the period of formal academic education was considered the most important step in the formation of a teacher’s professional identity. In recent decades researchers in the field of education have been gradually shifting their attention towards other stages in this type of professional career, including the transition period from academic education to the labour market (Piróg, 2016; Czubak-Koch et al., 2017) and the process of learning the profession in specific workplace cultures (Sabar, 2004; Schartz-Openheimer & Dvir, 2014; Strom, 2015).

Transition from academic education to professional world poses a great challenge for any young individual; however, in the teaching profession, as Päivi Tynjälä i Hannu. L. T. Heikkinen (2011) highlight, such a transition is particularly difficult. A novice teacher must embrace a full range of duties and responsibilities concerning his work from the very first school day, just as his more experienced colleagues do. This generates a number of problems that may impede the new teacher’s effective conduct. Such problems include, for example, a high stress level, a sense of lack of agency and competences, difficulties in establishing positive relationships with students, their parents, other teachers and external institutional partners. Thus, the understanding of the transition process and its various determinants, the limiting of its negative

outcomes and the creation of a support system at the beginning of novice teachers' careers become very important fields for exploration to researchers in education.

This paper presents the results of the first stage of research concerning the professional socialization of novice teachers conducted with the participation of state-owned school teachers. Due to the limited scope of this paper, the analysis will focus on the transition period only. Other categories/processes that emerged from empirical data have been already explored (Kędzierska, 2015) or will become the subject of further publications.

Conceptual framework

Transition is a significant process for any individual and refers to any phase of life in which some important change in the status of said person (or group) occurs, caused by biological factors, e.g., age, or social factors, e.g., change in the social role and consequently in the status within the social structure. Transition from the world of education to the world of labour is one specific type of transition in human life.

Until the 1980s the process of professional transition was almost exclusively discussed in the context of graduates of vocational and secondary schools since university graduates entered the labour market rather smoothly. Along with easier accessibility to university education in many European countries, including Poland, finding a job became more difficult for people holding higher education diplomas. In the 1990s the transition period embraced the first six months following the formal completion of education, whereas successful transition was perceived as a correlate of three equally important features: economic conditions, individual factors and obtained academic capital. Since the beginning of the 21st century, as indicated by Danuta Piróg (2013), a tendency towards creating transition models can be noted, especially with the employment of the premises of human capital theories and placing stress on the importance of both the level and quality of obtained education.

Concepts of lifelong learning and learning a profession in the workplace, i.e., theoretical frameworks in this paper, have become significant for an in-depth understanding of transition as a process. Analyzing educational determinants of the transition process, Kathryn Ecclestone argues that "transition is not the same as 'movement' or 'transfer', although it involves both. Instead, transition depicts change and shifts in identity and agency as people progress through the education system (...) effective transitions require a better understanding of how people progress cognitively, emotionally and socially between different subjects at different stages of their learning, and how they navigate the complex demands of different contexts" (2009, 12). Such

concepts also emphasize institutional dimensions and determinants of transition. Researchers agree that when constructing their professional careers people work out individual transition paths/patterns, yet their course is conditioned by institutional paths and normative patterns. As K. Ecclestone stresses, such a course “presents transitions both as the product of social institutions and the outcomes produced by social expectations” (2009, 14).

Methodology and data collection

According to the assumed theoretical perspective, in order to examine the transition process as biographical experience one needs to analyze transformations relating to a particular individual changes with respect to agency and the influence of specific institutional contexts and learning environments in which this process occurs. Such multidimensional analysis of individual experiences and processes, conducted in various organizational cultures, necessitated the choice of constructivist methodology of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2009) as the basic research strategy.

At the pre-conception stage two research questions were formulated that determined the scope of research:

1. What transition patterns emerge from experiences of novice teachers?
2. What are the dynamics and determinants of the process of professional identity re (definition) of novice teachers that occurs at the intersection of the culture of academia and the workplace culture?

Empirical material consisted of 15 narrative interviews conducted with state-owned school teachers, employed in a full-time or part-time mode, for a period not exceeding 3 years. The research group was comprised of 12 females and 3 males, aged 23-27 years.

The first five interviewees with whom I conducted thematic biographical interviews were invited to participate in the study based on the snowball sampling. The analysis of empirical material collected during each interview formed the basis for the identification of analytical categories that made me modify the manner and logic of sampling selection. After having compared particular cases, I selected further participants with the use of the critical case sampling method. For example, because the first five teachers evaluated their starting career capital as low, at the next stage of data collection in the field I searched for participants who declared high levels of their competences at the beginning of their professional careers. In qualitative research the selection of key cases allows the researcher to conduct gradual and permanent comparisons and leads to the saturation of the categories, notions and processes identified on the basis of the collected data.

Interviews, after having obtained the subjects' consent, were recorded and then transcribed, creating a rich corpus of data. Data analysis was conducted consistent with the methodological procedures of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2009). The process of data analysis was undertaken according to two phases: a vertical analysis in which each of the respondents' interviews was analysed separately. A second phase was then carried out through a comparative or horizontal analysis. In this phase constant comparative analysis was used to look for common patterns as well as differences.

Studies and afterwards

Transition from the education system to the labour market, as is evidenced in the narratives of the interviewed young teachers, is difficult to plan for and may prove extremely frustrating. The expansion of higher education in Poland within the last two decades resulted in the situation where the entering into the teaching profession became one of the most difficult tasks for graduates during their early adulthood. Increasingly and frequently this process consists in several more or less successful attempts to enter the profession or finding employment, creating a patchwork career pattern (Kędzierska, 2012). This process is illustrated by the following statement of the study participant:

I defended my diploma and submitted some job offers. In August I was invited to a job interview and was employed. I was quite surprised that it went so quickly because I had heard a lot how people can't get anything for several years and here almost at once (3) but only for one year and only part-time. (T/M:1)¹.

Novice teachers' employment difficulties result not only from the lack of job offers, as the study participants' statements prove, but also the fact that every year individuals with similar academic capital appear in an educational labour market that is already saturated with specialists. Consequently, employers more often modify recruitment criteria, and so when assessing a potential employee different types of career capital are taken into account. However, in the light of dynamic changes in the labour market it is particularly difficult, especially in that period preceding the commencement of professional employment, to anticipate which type of career capital should dominate at the stage of education to increase chances for one's success.

The analysis of the transition period described during the interviews allowed for the identification of three transition paths evident in the studied group of novice teachers.

¹The symbols accompanying the excerpts from interviews are identification codes used in the study, e.g., T – teacher, M-male, F-female, 1 – interview number.

Table 1 **Typology of studied teachers’ transition paths – comparative analysis**

Path type	Interviewee (interview number)	Categorization key
successful transition	T/M:1; T/F:4; T/F:6; T/F:9; T/F:11; T/F:13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - finding employment within 6 months after graduation - full-time employment - possibility to complete professional internship - stable employment prospect - - employment consistent with formal qualifications
sensitive transition	T/F:10; T/F:15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - finding employment in the period longer than 6 months after completing MA level studies - PhD studies combined with employment in the education sector - employment contract for a limited period of time - employment without the possibility to complete professional internship - uncertain prospect of prolonging the employment
uncertain transition	T/F:2; T/F:3; T/M:5; T/M:7; T/F:8; T/F:12; T/F:14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - finding employment in the period longer than 6 months after completing BA/MA level studies - employment contract for a limited period of time; part-time employment and/or based on patchwork contracts - employment at the position inconsistent with formal qualifications - employment without the possibility to complete professional internship - uncertain prospect of prolonging the employment

The first path, represented by 6 participants, is the so-called successful transition, that is finding full-time employment in a state-owned educational institution, with a possibility to complete internship, in a period not exceeding half a year after graduation.

The second path, represented by 2 novice teachers, is the so-called sensitive transition. It is characterized by extending higher level education at the post-graduate studies and simultaneous employment (in various forms) often in non-educational institutions.

The third path, documented in the narratives of 7 novice teachers, is uncertain transition characterized by a long period of seeking employment consistent with one’s formal qualifications or the risk of finding an unsatisfactory or unstable job.

The described transition patterns illustrate the phenomenon of the so-called delayed transition (Piróg, 2016) increasingly evident in the teaching profession.

This type of transition has serious personal and professional consequences. The impossibility of finding a job and gaining complete economic independence following the graduation from a higher education institution contribute to delaying other transitions (starting a family, having children, buying a flat, etc.) typical of the early adulthood period, as illustrated by this comment:

I managed to find lodgings cheaper than a student dormitory! I am single do not have large needs so it's possible to make a living on this part-time job. No luxuries, but I manage (T/M:1)

Delayed transitions also result in decisions to prolong the education period (new fields of studies/specializations, post-graduate studies) and have a number of psychological consequences, for example increased passivity and fear to confront the realities of the labour market, decreased assessment of one's professional competences, a sense of grievance and injustice, etc. These difficulties are well-documented in the following excerpt from the participant's narrative:

I wrote and sent a lot of these CVs and what nothing, no response, only this waiting I finally found this job completely by accident (T/F:9)

Part-time employment, combined full-time employment (working in a few schools to obtain full-time number of teaching hours), employment at a position unrelated to possessed qualifications, employment contracts for limited periods of time (a year, a term, several months) prevent a successful transition process. In the recorded statements of the novice teachers I identified problems with becoming involved in the job, absence of identification with the reference group, difficulties with adaptation in disparate/contradictory organizational culture patterns, impossibility to plan one's professional career path, and a sense of losing one's competences, as is evident in this fragment of the interview:

This is already my third school. Counting these two years when I worked in telecommunication right after studies it is five years and I'm only just doing internship in this school but I will not work here after the internship anyway because I am a substitution teacher here (T/F:12)

For young teachers transition from the world of education to the world of the workplace becomes, as in other professions, more and more complex and uncertain. Because the situation in the educational labour market progressively worsens, alternative solutions are sought for – solutions that make education studies graduates drift away from employment in their learned profession. Such a situation not only complicates the quality of novices' professional socialization, but results in, which needs to be stressed, economic losses (costs of teacher education) and social losses (the so-called ghost station – unemployment among young well-educated people).

Threshold effect: Professional socialization of novices in the workplace culture

The transition process does not only embrace the period of seeking employment and a one-time act of its commencement, but also the long and extended in time process of gaining personal and professional independence. For teachers who begin their careers this is the time when the frameworks of professional identities are shaped. This process occurs as a result of the “clash” of two worlds: the world of a particular individual, his or her values, aims, professional concepts and expectations and the world of the school organizational culture.

The first year of work was described by the studied novices as *difficult to grasp* (T/F:2). The narratives of the events of the consecutive days, weeks and months depict the process of professional socialization as one dominated by a need to find points of reference/anchors that would allow novice teachers to “localize” their place in a new situation and transform their temporary identities imposed on them by the professional group. The aim of anchoring in a new culture is to reach a relative, psychosocial stability in the “fluid”, complex and unfamiliar reality surrounding the novice. Anchors employed by novice teachers allow them to localize, as Aleksandra Grzymała-Kazłowska states, “their ‘place in the world’, to formulate their sense of existence and provide the basis for psychological and social functioning” (2013, 3), necessary for further functioning and intensification of the process of learning a profession in the workplace.

When conducting focused coding of collected data and creating the hierarchy of initial categories (determined on the basis of coding) that documented the entry process of novice teachers’ into the professional group as well as analysing relationships within the professional group (Charmaz, 2009) in relation to a sense of agency of the interviewees, I identified the following three types of anchoring.

Among the studied teachers three different types of anchoring were possible to identify: anchoring through imitation, anchoring in family obligations and professional position and anchoring through a high self-assessment of the starting capital at the beginning of a career (Kędzierska, 2015).

Anchoring through imitation occurs through a simple adaptation to the culture of the professional group. The support point for the newcomer is then “the wisdom of a teacher staffroom”. The novice finds his place in the teacher group by imitating the behaviours, situational definitions, principles and norms preferred by the members of the professional group that are identified in the

course of many everyday interactions. This is illustrated by the following comment:

I at the beginning watched what others were doing and tried to do as they did. When I had a problem I asked the supervisor of my internship and she explained to me precisely what should be done (T/F:2)

The second type of anchoring is associated with the phenomenon that can be perceived as anchoring in family obligations and professional position. For novices from teachers' families, professional socialization and the process of entering into the teaching profession began largely during primary socialization, whereas entering into the teacher role was accompanied with opportunities to relate to professional experiences of the socializing environment. The following excerpt from the interview illustrates this point:

I became a teacher because my mother was a teacher and here really I can't make anything up, she persuaded me and I learnt from her more than during my studies (T/F:6)

The third type of anchoring is related to (self)evaluation of the starting capital at the beginning of one's career. The support point for a novice teacher is one's conviction of one's high personal professional competencies and the desire to fulfil the already formed image of oneself in a professional role, as can be seen in the following fragment:

The first experiences at work were really difficult, because I experienced most of all the lack of interest and kindness on the part of older teachers but with my enthusiasm for work and all the ideas that were born in my head although it was difficult I knew that I would cope (T/M:11).

As the analysis of teachers' threshold experiences indicates, the transition process occurred in dissimilar organizational cultures. Based on the excerpts devoted to organizational cultures of institutions in which the study participants were/are employed, it is actually difficult to determine transparent typologies. However, referring to the classification of organizational cultures formulated by Ch. Handy (1985), it can be concluded that the participants' professional socialization during the threshold period occurred in cultures dominated by role culture and power culture, though the intensity of features characteristic for particular types of culture was different in various schools.

In cultures characterized by a lack of cooperation, a temporary identity is imposed on the novice who enters the workplace. Narratives of the newly employed teachers demonstrate a certain pattern: the more the members of a given organization present competitive attitudes towards each other, and their activities are not focused on cooperation, the more often the novice is labelled as the Other.

The Other is a person who does not belong to a particular group, circle of people and their affairs; it is someone who comes from the culturally alien and

unfamiliar Otherness; someone who has not been yet clearly determined by us. Otherness is perceived negatively and the Other should be kept at a distance or ignored. One of the participants describes this experience as follows:

I did not mind what was happening there (staffroom; mine addition – H.K.) I entered so much as it was needed, to leave my things, school register and went on, for a long time I didn't know the names and now I still don't know all of them (T/F/3)

Transformation of the Other's identity, as is indicated by the experiences of the participants, usually occurs through imitation and following approved institutional normative patterns.

Migrant identity pattern is a particularly interesting pattern that emerges from the experiences of teachers whose careers are of a patchwork nature. Because of the impossibility to be employed in a full-time mode in one institution, teachers who combine employment in a few schools or work part-time find it difficult to determine their points of reference so that they could transform their identities imposed by the group. A pejorative overtone of the term "migrant" that appears in the interviews indicates that migration in the teaching profession, although more frequent presently, is not perceived as "normal" and looking for a "domesticated school" and "attachment" to such a school remain standard attitudes.

In cultures in which cooperation exists (even in a limited form) or when a newcomer quickly finds a reference group during the threshold period, he is treated as a novice/disciple who, when beginning his work, learns the organizational and functioning principles and actively participates in the fulfilment of the aims sought for by the organization, while receiving support from other group members. This is depicted in the following fragment:

I was lucky because together with me in the same year some other teachers got employed for one year and we quickly got to know each other and also after school because this group liked cycling and this brought us closer to each other and I didn't feel that I had nobody to talk to, to ask (T/M:1)

Professional socialization patterns at the threshold of one's career that emerged from the analysis indicate an extremely important dimension in becoming a teacher, i.e., learning a profession in the workplace. In other words, the course of novice teachers' professional socialization does not depend only on their academic preparation, but also on the type of organizational culture in which it will occur.

Conclusions

Exploration concerning the process of professional socialization of novice teachers in the transition period generates more questions than answers and,

understandably, does not allow me to formulate definitive conclusions thus far and theoretical generalizations with respect to the identified categories. I believe, however, that the obtained results facilitate some observations and suggestions.

Transition between the world of academia and the world of the teaching workplace generates the same problems that affect graduates in nearly all fields of studies. Transition difficulties indicated by Piróg (2016) such as: disturbed balance between demand and supply on the job market, temporality, patchwork professional careers, delayed transitions merit the close attention of both politicians and economists; yet, with respect to the teaching profession in-depth investigations are additionally necessary on the part of researchers in the field of education. Transitions, as many researchers highlight (Ecclestone, 2009; Czubak-Koch et al., 2017), are transformations on the level of one's professional identity and relate to a particular individual's sense of agency that occur as the result of various institutional contexts and learning environments.

Transition patterns documented in this study – successful, sensitive and uncertain – do not exhaust the 'catalogue' of possible career paths of novice teachers. They do, however, uncover risk areas inscribed into individual experiences of unsuccessful or uncertain transitions and unveil institutional mechanisms of the transition between the culture of academia and the workplace culture.

The analysis of novice teachers' anchoring strategies at the workplace in various organizational cultures proves that the legitimization of novices' peripheral participation in communal practices can be perceived not only as a process of learning in the community (Wenger, 1998), but also as an expression of power relationships. Organization cultures may block the process of learning a profession and novices' sense of agency; they may not be open to all non-members of a particular community and thus impede the process of successful transition. Hence support for students/graduates in the transition period between the culture of academia and the workplace culture should become a priority for higher education institutions teaching current and future generations of teachers.

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