

Chapter 4

Teacher Professional Identity and Career Motivation: A Lifespan Perspective



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The complex nature of teachers' work calls into play personal attributes, values, expectancies, and beliefs; task-related content and pedagogical knowledge, skills and abilities; as well as social relationships and the attendant emotional demands embedded in interactions with youth, colleagues, parents, and the wider society. A strength, but also a challenge to the study of the formation and development of teacher professional identity, is its multidimensional contextualised character, reflected in the diversity of conceptual and methodological perspectives drawn on to examine identity-related processes (e.g., Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Day, Sammons, Stobart, Kingston, & Gu, 2007).

Key studied constructs have included self-efficacy, expectancies, values, goals, attitudes, beliefs, and professional commitment. These derive from major motivational theoretical frameworks that emphasise the interplay among person, task, and context: expectancy-value theory (EVT; Eccles (Parsons) et al., 1983; Eccles, 2009), achievement goal theory (AGT; Ames, 1992; Nicholls, 1989), self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000), and self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997) each of which has been adapted to the exploration of teacher motivation (EVT: see Richardson & Watt, 2006; Watt & Richardson, 2007; AGT: see Butler, 2007, 2014; SDT: see Roth, 2014; self-efficacy: see Klassen, Durksen, & Tze, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

An observation made some time ago that “teachers are workers, teaching is work, and the school is a workplace” (Connell, 1985, p. 69), has important ramifications for understanding teachers' motivations and the formation and development of their professional identities in particular work contexts. It is in specific school

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cultures and workplace environments governed by local and global social and political forces, that teachers realise their career motivations and goals and configure their professional identities.

We begin this chapter by outlining how we see identity and how it has been researched from varying disciplinary perspectives, before reflecting on the development of teachers' professional identities. Next, we propose how major motivation theories provide windows into identity development at different points during teachers' career lifespan. We then propose Selection, Optimisation, and Compensation (SOC) theory as an integrative framework within which to systematically explore how teachers regulate their personal and workplace resources and how these are implicated in shaping their professional identities across the career lifespan.

Defining Identity

"Identity" is an elusive, dynamic, and multidimensional construct that changes shape dependent on the theoretical lens through which it is observed. Researchers from philosophy (Mead, 1934), psychology (Erickson, 1989; Vignoles, Schwartz, & Luyckx, 2011), anthropology (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998), neuroscience (Quartz & Sejnowski, 2002) and sociology (Côté & Levine, 2002; Goffman, 1956) have provided insights from different disciplinary perspectives. A rich literature demonstrates that identity is not a singular construct, and specific identity domains (e.g., occupation, spirituality, ethnicity, gender) are experienced and enacted by individuals in sociocultural contexts through the lifespan. Changing physiological, biological, and psychological needs, together with larger sociopolitical forces, activate identity shifts and development.

Some motivation researchers distinguish personal and social identities. Personal identities provide an expression of individuality and relate to traits, attributes, goals, values, competencies, and self-concepts. Social identities refer to relational or interpersonal roles and group memberships (Tice & Baumeister, 2001). These commitments can be "self-chosen or ascribed" (Vignoles et al., 2011, p. 4). The twin concepts of ascribed and achieved identities help distinguish dimensions of identity that derive from social positioning versus personal attributes (Linton, 1936). Ascribed identities are those assigned by virtue of an individual's sex, race, socioeconomic status or cultural group; whereas achieved identities arise from individuals' personal agency, choice, efforts, and persistence. Both are implicated in the formation, development, and maintenance of teacher identity, because choosing teaching as a career involves individual qualities, expectancies, values, beliefs and talents, as well as accommodating required social roles, responsibilities, and expectations.

Social identities associate with norms, behaviours, and values ascribed to group identities and constitute one's identification with and self-awareness of *belonging*. Group membership is contingent on congruence between personal identities and the roles and relationships required for group memberships – what Foote called

identification (1951). These ties “help individuals define who they are both for themselves and for the people with whom they interact” (Eccles, 2009, p. 79). In this way, teacher identity includes “how teachers define themselves to themselves and to others” (Lasky, 2005, p. 901).

Teacher Professional Identity

In a review of the literature on teachers’ professional identity, Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop (2004) identified a lack of definitional clarity, and considerable diversity in how it had been researched. Studies of teacher identity have ranged from the highly particular focused on a single construct, through to studies drawing on several constructs (e.g., Canrinus, Helms-Lorenz, Beijaard, Buitink, & Hofman, 2012). Taking into account what is known about identity formation and development, we propose that *teacher identity* is dynamic and shaped by career choice motivations and goals, reflecting the degree to which a person categorises her/himself personally and occupationally as someone who enacts the roles required of a teacher, engages with the social ties of the profession, and is committed to the career into the future. Rather than conceiving of teacher identity as static, such a description highlights the roles of personal and social identities in development over time, which involve drawing on personal and workplace resources to sustain goals, satisfy needs, and balance demands, within the relational and political context of the workplace and wider systemic influences on the profession.

Aspects of teachers’ ascribed identity come with the territory of sociocultural models and roles assigned by the schema of “teacher”. D’Andrade (1992), a cultural anthropologist, identified schema as “conceptual structure[s] which makes possible the identification of objects and events” (p. 28), that can “function as goals” (p. 29). Expectations of the “teacher” schema are embedded in social and cultural practices enacted in multiple micro-level interactions, with which personal goals and motivations intersect. For instance, what “teacher” means in Indonesia is not exactly the same as in Australia or the USA. Cultural expectations of teachers in Indonesia are reflected in the word “guru”, Bahasa Indonesia for “teacher”. Inscribed in this word are the professional and wider social roles teachers are expected to play by acting as a source of guidance and wisdom, with the important role of promoting social harmony.

The exercise of choosing teaching as a career path and exerting effort to achieve that goal is central to the process of achieving motivations, confirming self-conceptions, and being recognised and ratified by members of the social group who constitute the teaching profession. Occupational identity is central to a person’s self-worth and a meaningful, healthy life (Ashforth, 2001). In contemporary society, much of our life is taken up by the work we do, which is related to our self-constructions and who we perceive ourselves to be at different points in time (Guichard, 2009). These are intimately interwoven with the pursuit of occupational goals and meaning (Cochran, 1991). Changing patterns of individualism, the

renegotiation and reconstruction of social systems, and contingency of values on context, suggest an identity that is foreclosed and rigid and not open to evolution to be problematic, especially in times of rapid social and cultural change (Luyckx, Goossens, & Soenens, 2006). As Fouad and Bynner (2008) observed, personal goals, social affinities, and socioeconomic position are inscribed in our occupational work. Teachers who lack confidence in their abilities to meet the relational and knowledge demands of the job, or are avoidant and minimalist in their efforts, are unlikely to exhibit high levels of identification and commitment to the career.

What Insights Do Theories of Teacher Motivation Offer Teacher Identity?

Theories of motivation were developed to explain processes that energise individuals to attend to, engage in, and persist with tasks to achieve goals. There is an explicit link between the self, identity, and motivation such that the self and identity forecast “what people are motivated to do, how they think, and make sense of themselves and others, the actions they take, and their feelings and ability to control or regulate themselves” (Oyserman, Elmore, & Smith, 2012, p. 70). While in everyday parlance “motivation” can be characterised as a single attribute – a person is motivated or not – teachers’ career motivations are multidimensional, complex, and responsive to contextual factors (Butler, 2007, 2014; Richardson & Watt, 2006; Roth, 2014; Watt & Richardson, 2007).

Diverse motivational theories offer insights at different points of a teacher’s career lifespan to understand how identity influences what teachers are motivated to do and vice versa. How teachers prioritise, optimise their resources, and compensate for barriers to achieve their goals, offer insights into the motivational drivers that influence shifts in occupational identity. The major motivation theories investigated so far in relation to teachers and teaching have shed light on teachers’ confidence (self-efficacy theory); why people choose the career (EVT); what teachers aim to achieve (AGT); and, what sustains or undermines their commitment (SDT). This burgeoning literature has collectively foregrounded the powerful influence of context (school, community, district, state and national policies, sociopolitical discourses) on teachers’ engagement, behaviours, and wellbeing, that impact the lives of students. We outline the key tenets of each of these theories below, and empirical findings these lenses have afforded in the study of teachers’ motivations, highlighting their relevance to teachers’ identity development.

Teacher Self-Efficacy

Based in social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1997), the literature on teacher self-efficacy has grown rapidly over more than two decades. The dominant framework is that developed by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) who measure

dimensions of efficacy for student engagement, instructional practice, and classroom management. Other motivational theories have examined conceptual cousins (such as success expectancies and perceived competence). Notwithstanding differences in measurement and conceptualisation, teachers' self-efficacy associates with their goals and aspirations (Muijs & Reynolds, 2002), responses to innovation and change (Guskey, 1988), use of effective teaching strategies (Woolfolk et al., 1990), likelihood to remain in the profession (Glickman & Tamashiro, 1982) and positive behaviours, and, as such, with teachers' identity development.

Why Teach?

There have been many studies investigating why people choose teaching as a career. Our interest in this question emerged with the publication of the Factors Influencing Teaching Choice (FIT-Choice; www.fitchoice.org) framework (Richardson & Watt, 2006; Watt & Richardson, 2007), which enabled comparisons across samples and settings (Watt, Richardson, & Smith, 2017). Grounded in Eccles' et al. EVT (1983; Eccles, 2009), it offers a multidimensional account of teachers' career choice motivations and the emergence of initial teacher identity. Collectively, the continuing FIT-Choice program has proven fruitful in measuring and understanding beginning teachers' motivations; established how they matter for later outcomes including professional engagement, behaviours, and wellbeing; for different types of beginning teachers across diverse contexts.

We have distinguished three "types" of beginning teachers according to their motivational profiles, highlighting different nascent teacher identities even at the outset of their careers (Watt & Richardson, 2008). The *highly engaged persisters* were most motivated by an inherent valuing of the career, perceiving they had the abilities to be a good teacher, desire to make a social contribution, and, were the least motivated by choosing teaching as a fallback career. *Highly engaged switchers* similarly wanted to make a social contribution, intrinsically valued the career, planned to exert high effort and energy, had leadership aspirations, but were not planning to stay long in teaching because of plans to pursue a different career. The third type, *lower engaged desisters*, exhibited a rather negative motivational profile. They did not identify with the profession and were less motivated to take on the role because of adverse practicum experiences, the demanding nature of teachers' work, lack of school structural supports for beginning teachers, and prospects of insecure employment.

By comparing changes in motivations over the first years of teaching, we found that *highly engaged persisters* who exhibited an apparently positive profile at the end of teacher education, appeared the most psychologically vulnerable to stressors during early career—experiencing reduced career satisfaction, planned persistence and self-efficacies, all of which signal less robust personal and social ties to the profession and a refashioning of their self perceptions, motivations, and identity. This appeared to be the price of continuing to hold idealistic motivations in environ-

ments where they may not be able to be attained (see Watt & Richardson, 2010). On the other hand, *highly engaged switchers* adjusted their motivations downwards to sustain levels of planned persistence, self-efficacies, and satisfaction with choice of career. The *lower engaged desisters* who did enter teaching appeared to find unexpected rewards from the career. Their motivations were adjusted upwards and satisfaction with choice, planned persistence, and self-efficacies remained stable, foregrounding motivational adjustments as an adaptive coping mechanism in response to contextual demands. Personal and social identities are responsive to different contextual factors and influence what teachers are motivated to do, the action they will take to achieve their goals, how well they will “fit” within the work culture of the school, their work satisfaction and whether the resources available to them support or undermine their commitment, persistence and identity as a teacher.

What Do Teachers Aim to Achieve?

Butler and her colleagues’ work makes important theoretical and practical contributions to understanding that teachers adopt different goals in relation to what they are trying to achieve, reflecting different types of professional identification, commitment, effort, and work satisfaction; with important ramifications for instruction and student outcomes. The recognition that school is an “achievement arena” for teachers and not only students, led Butler (2007) to develop AGT to study teachers already in their careers, in her Goal Orientation for Teaching (GOT) approach. She showed that teachers pursue *relational* goals (to create close, caring, personal interactions with students), *mastery* goals (reflecting a wish to learn more about teaching and develop skills and abilities), *ability-approach* goals (to exhibit superior teaching abilities), *ability-avoidance* goals (to avoid demonstrating poor teaching), and *work-avoidance* goals (to do as little as possible to get by).

The new class of relational goals was theorised through Butler’s insight that students’ and teachers’ motivations are uniquely intertwined, in that teachers incorporate the motivation of their students as integral to their own motivations. In a recent TALIS survey (OECD, 2014), positive teacher-student relationships and collaborative work among teachers were found to boost their work satisfaction. It has been eloquently observed that, for many teachers “relationships make their curricula vital and real; the human connection gives visible meaning and tangible purpose to their work” (Bernstein-Yamashiro & Noam, 2013, p. 56).

Relational goals are central for teachers, and predictive of their providing positive socioemotional support, cognitively stimulating instruction and adaptive coping (Butler, 2014). Mastery goals are also positive, in terms of associations with teacher support and positive responses to students seeking help. In contrast, ability-avoidance goals linked to student cheating on school work, and teachers’ suppression of student questions and help seeking (see Butler, 2014). Relational and mastery goals reflect aspects of the basic needs of autonomy, competence, and belonging as proposed by self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Teachers whose main

motivation is to avoid work will not experience a high level of competence, are less likely to seek to establish positive relationships with their students, or exhibit a strong sense of belonging to the profession or their school.

What Contexts Promote or Undermine Teachers' Motivations and Thriving?

SDT is the final major motivation theory we highlight that has been fruitfully studied in relation to teachers during their professional trajectories. SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000) proposes the satisfaction of three basic needs—for competence, autonomy, and relatedness/belonging—as conditions for human flourishing. Motivations are defined as self-determined and autonomous, versus externally controlled. When teachers experience autonomous motivation in their work they enjoy positive outcomes such as sense of personal accomplishment, engagement in autonomy-supportive teaching behaviours, promotion of students' autonomous motivation to learn, and reduced levels of burnout (Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, & Kaplan, 2007). On the other hand, controlled motivations produce negative outcomes for teachers and their students. Relatedness, the third pillar of SDT (also discussed as fundamental to teachers' goals and initial motivations in AGT and EVT) sits at odds with management models that take teachers away from their work in the classroom and opportunities for interaction with students. Teachers who feel unable to attain valued goals are likely to experience reduced autonomy and competence, and consequently experience reduced professional engagement.

School principals who believed that teachers need to experience autonomy in relation to their teaching, promote teachers' autonomous motivation (Roth, 2014). Externally directed accountability measures may lead teachers to engage in instructional practices that do not sit well with their beliefs and values, or reduce their sense of competence and autonomy, undermining their positive and autonomous motivation and leading to increased emotional exhaustion (Roth, 2014) or burnout (Fernet, Guay, Senécal, & Austin, 2012). Empirical studies point to these undesirable consequences of externally controlled accountability measures, and systems based on competition and standardised testing ostensibly designed to improve teacher quality and student achievement.

A Lifespan Perspective on Teacher Motivation and Identity Development

The motivation theories discussed are being systematically studied in relation to teachers' career choice and development (EVT, within the FIT-Choice program of research), teachers' goals (AGT, within the GOT program) and thriving (SDT and

self-efficacy theories) which forecast key outcomes including professional engagement and wellbeing, teaching behaviours, and student outcomes. These all can be considered—and we consider them—dimensions of teacher identity development. How teachers regulate and marshall their personal resources to accommodate challenges across the career lifespan and how teacher professional identity changes in response to these demands, is not a trivial question. Teachers experience higher work-related stress (Travers & Cooper, 1993) and burnout than other professionals. Work-related stress, reduced work motivation and engagement, and low job satisfaction are persistent reasons for why people leave the profession (OECD, 2005). Studies have identified the following as sources of strain and tension for teachers: work intensification, heavy workload, negative professional interactions with colleagues, inadequate salary, students with behavioural problems, assertive and demanding parents, poor school leadership and absence of autonomy (Pithers & Soden, 1998; Pyhältö, Pietarinen, & Salmela-Aro, 2011). These have potential to drain teachers' energies and wear out even those most committed. Yet, the majority of those who stay in the career find it rewarding and satisfying (Borg & Riding, 1991). How do we understand what sustains people throughout a life-time career as a teacher?

The SOC framework was developed as a model of successful ageing (Baltes & Baltes, 1990) and has been applied to successful occupational lifespan development (Abraham & Hansson, 1995; Yeung & Fung, 2009). SOC offers a framework to study motivation and identity development through the teaching career lifespan, capable of encompassing the existing motivational theories targeted to different points during the career (i.e., EVT for initial career choice; AGT during within-classroom teaching; SDT for future growth and flourishing). *Selection* involves setting and prioritising important goals or tasks: elective selection reflects personal determination of goals on which to focus resources; loss-based selection results from a threat to undermine functioning that forces a reorganisation of one's goals (e.g., a teacher might find her/himself in a school context where personally important goals of promoting social equity are not able to be realised). *Optimisation* means investment in additional resources to achieve selected goals, such as additional efforts or enhancing current skills. *Compensation* involves using alternative means to maintain a level of functioning when current means are thwarted or unavailable.

A recent study drew on the SOC framework to examine how German secondary teachers ($N = 1939$; aged 25–65 years) managed their workload to maintain wellbeing (Philipp & Kunter, 2013). Both beginning and older teachers engaged in fewer tasks (*selection*); older teachers *optimised* by saving time on demanding tasks that they invested in other valued tasks such as interacting with students; and older teachers had fewer career ambitions (a form of *compensation*). A lifespan approach is concerned with individuals' development within context, in which selection, optimisation, and compensation are key to coming to grips with demands.

A lifespan perspective on teachers' identity development foregrounds the significant learning, development, and refinement of teaching-related skills throughout the career. From this perspective development is not conceptualised as irreversible or

end-state (e.g. Day et al., 2007; Huberman, 1989). How teachers avoid depletion of their energies, mobilise resources to avoid emotional exhaustion, and remain engaged with and committed to the career, may be accounted for by the coordinated deployment of the complementary strategies of selection, optimisation, and compensation.

Teachers' professional lives are intertwined with their school and community contexts and larger policy frameworks that impinge on their practice. We might expect teachers' identity and motivations to be significantly impacted by the appointment of a new principal or supervising head teacher, assignments to teach difficult classes, or new high-stakes testing procedures. While we recognise that individual resources such as time, cognitive capacity, and social support are limited, there is considerable plasticity in intellectual functioning, personality, attitudes and interests, as well as stability over the course of development. It is not known if and how these contextual influences diminish a person's identification with and investment in the career. Contexts that create tensions, frustrations and confusion for an individual have the potential to challenge motivations, emasculate confidence, and reduce occupational commitment and career satisfaction.

Outlook and Future Directions

SOC offers a potential integrative, coherent organisational framework capable of bringing together a range of theories and constructs that have been drawn on in the examination of teacher motivation and identity development; it embraces the unfolding of developmental processes in particular contexts and helps us think beyond assumed age and stage models of teacher identity and work commitment. In many countries recently, there has been an intense focus on teacher quality, early career attrition, work intensification, and accountability measures that refashion teachers' daily working lives. Teachers' motivations are intimately connected with how they perceive themselves and the work they do. For instance, teachers whose goals are to avoid work or get through the day with little effort have less positive relationships with students and are unlikely to be highly identified with the profession. Ideally, longitudinal studies could flesh out how teachers regulate their energies in relation to demands over the career lifespan. Although such work is costly and methodologically challenging, we need to know more about how teachers sustain their motivations and professional identities, cope with work demands into mid-career and beyond, and strategically deploy personal and workplace resources to thrive and remain committed to the profession.

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