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Teacher identity and professionalism: The construction of teacher identities as a systemic construct

The study of teacher identity was greatly developed during the 1990s and, in a way, replaced other studies on teacher professionalism. Highlighting the interactions, emotions, cognitions – in short, the subjectivities – in their everyday expression, those studies contributed, with some limitations, to make the role of specific communities of professionals in valuing and improving professional action visible. However, after almost two decades, it became clear that the study of the construction of teacher identity could not be based solely on the description of the interactions, but in fact also required a macrosociological analysis. Based mainly on theoretical contributions including the “construction of professional Identities for real social change”, as developed by Claude Dubar, and the ideal-typical model of professionalism described by Eliot Freidson, this paper aims to present the construction of teacher identity as a subjective dimension of the process of teacher professionalization, viewing it as a systemic construct, involving the various levels of analysis of the social – individual, small group, organisational and societal. To this end, we present, chronologically, the results of research carried out by the author and other researchers during the 1990s and the early twenty-first century, in order to shed some light on the dynamics inherent to each of the levels of analysis and the interactions which are established between them. We end with a discussion of the advantages of this approach – which unites identity and professionalism – for teacher training and for political decisions related to the teaching profession.

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