

## *Professional Identity Development of Multi-role Teachers in Technical High Schools*

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### **Abstract**

The professional identity is the core of professional practice, and the formation, maintenance and change of professional identity are a lifelong learning process. For teachers with multiple identities in a technical high school, the construction of professional identity in multiple roles is an important issue that needs to be clarified in the professional development selection process, whether it is to prioritize the general teaching role, optimize administrative capabilities, or develop coaching skills. This article finds that for teachers with multiple mixed roles, the concept of professional identity is sometimes vague and overlapped. Based on phenomenology, this article uses the body as a research tool to clarify the perception of professional identity in seven perceptual propositions under the state of vagueness and adjustment of professional identity. After repeated reviews of texts, self-extraction and reflection, this article preliminarily classifies the concept of professional identity and development for teachers with multiple identities in four dimensions: 1. Professional identity should start from within, 2. The lack of identity makes it difficult for teachers to develop professionally, 3. Teachers with multiple professions need guidance in the process of identity recognition, and 4. Emphasizing the career development and professional growth of teachers with multiple role identities. Through the clarification of these four dimensions, this article provides a reference for teachers with multiple identities to adapt and adjust themselves internally and externally in the process of changes and entanglements.

Keywords: Professional Identity, Social Identity, Phenomenology

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## **Introduction**

The new era and modern educational landscape have given rise to a new ecology of educational personnel. In alignment with the context of social changes and career expectations of education professionals, teachers' professional identity has evolved under new policies promoting interdisciplinary competency development.

In technical high schools, there are two primary sources of professional teachers. The first comprises those who obtain qualified teacher certificates through national examinations and are subsequently selected through teacher recruitment processes to serve as formal teachers. The second consists of teachers who receive national-level professional skill certifications through national skill assessments (or competitions). Objectively, the latter group serves both as teachers and professional technicians, creating a subjective identity formation where professional technical personnel engage in student guidance and classroom management within schools. While this may not necessarily lead to conflicts in duty execution, teachers with dual professional backgrounds may develop "multiple" (or hybrid) complex identities. For teachers with such dual professional backgrounds, the process of developing and exploring self-identity and professional identity, without adequate guidance or equivalent understanding, often results in contradictory and ambiguous feelings toward their professional or technical professional identity. When a teacher's professional identity exists in such an ambiguous state, struggling to confirm their sense of identity, it inevitably affects their attitude and willingness toward professional advancement and development in their teaching career.

Furthermore, many professional subject teachers must not only fulfill their duty of transmitting professional knowledge but also implement student guidance and classroom management as educational work, while engaging in school administrative affairs. Additionally, due to their professional technical certification and background, they often bear the mission of coaching students for relevant competitions according to the school's development blueprint, thereby assuming another role with a professional image.

Under such multi-tasking conditions, for teachers in technical high schools, determining their professional development path—whether to prioritize general teaching identity, optimize administrative capabilities, or develop as a professional technical "coach"—becomes a significant issue in constructing professional identity amid multiple roles. However, as teachers committed to lifelong learning, their professional identity development process must face the dynamics and entanglements within external social identity structures while simultaneously enduring the impact, conflicts, and adaptation processes from internal professional recognition. Therefore, how teachers find their professional identity amid multiple overlapping roles remains a topic worthy of investigation.

## **Literature Review**

The implications of teacher professionalism have been explored for years in both regulatory and academic research domains. The topic of teacher professional identity has also been extensively studied. In Wei, Song, and Zhang's (2013) research, they posit that the subject of "teacher occupational identity" is the individual teacher, while the objects of "teacher occupational identity" include both the "teaching profession" and the "professional role" internalized by individual teachers. They identify four dimensions of teacher professional identity: occupational values, role values, occupational belonging, and occupational behavior.

Their research indicates that both the individual teacher's understanding of their role's meaning and their personal awareness of the collective consciousness of the teaching profession as external constraints of occupational responsibility demonstrate that teacher professional identity encompasses not only teachers' self-identity consciousness of their occupation but also the scope of professional identity as constrained, defined, and regulated by external factors.

Xing and colleagues (2019) studied teacher professional identity through multiple perspectives, including professional identity stage theory, external expectation factors, and internal expectation factors. Their research suggests that teacher professional identity involves complex interactions between many internal and external factors and is a dynamic process that changes over time.

### **1. External Professional Identity of Teachers**

Wang Yuwen (2017) points out that postmodern teacher professional identity involves creating a personal style, where teachers must be sensitive to external self-regulatory discourse while seeking their self-defined professional teacher image. This indicates that teachers' professional identity forms through continuous interaction, negotiation, and communication with external social contexts, pursuing and shaping a self-identified professional pattern. Xing Zhibin and colleagues (2021), in their study of guidance teachers with professional psychological counseling certificates, found that school guidance teachers receive more workplace recognition than counseling psychologists primarily due to practical factors, including salary structure, working conditions, and social evaluation. This context influences dual-professional individuals' choice of school guidance teaching as a career. Yan Guoliang (2003) suggests that teacher professionalism in school duties is recognized through completing action research, teaching portfolios, self-compiled materials, certification workshops, IT integration in teaching, teaching demonstrations, and professional development evaluations set by educational administrative agencies. In summary, during teacher professional identity formation, many key factors affecting teachers' professional self-identity come from external social expectations, views, norms, and evaluations.

### **2. Teachers' Self Professional Identity**

Teachers' professional self-identity closely connects with their personal perceptions and expressions. According to B. Bernstein, teacher professional identity reflects external circumstances (translated by Wang Ruixian, 2005), maintaining this identity shows the function of externally-driven projective discursive organization/practice, meaning professional identity links teachers' feelings with the external environment, expressed through discourse. Guo Yingjie (2008), studying junior high school guidance teachers' professional role identity, found their challenges mainly stem from struggles between "self-awareness" and "others' expectations," doubts about "professional definition," and tension between "ideals" and "performance." Thus, teachers' internal and external adjustments or compromises during professional development are necessary perceptual integration processes in self-identity stages.

Past emphasis on teacher professional description and normative meaning has shifted to professional self-identity in teachers' professional life development. Teachers are no longer viewed as a collective but as unique individuals with life experiences, educational concepts, and value systems. Scholars now emphasize teachers' "voices" and lives, highlighting how

personal values, life experiences, and knowledge systems influence both the journey toward professional identity and its continuous shaping. Teachers' varying educational backgrounds and personal experiences lead to different levels of professional identity awareness in their teaching careers (Zhou, 2004).

Identity is a transformation process. When teachers consider their identity, self-awareness of experiences, occupation, and life values influences their perspectives, strategies, and actions. Teachers' self-identity forms the basis for giving meaning and making decisions in their profession (Korthagen, 2001). Teachers must identify with themselves to move toward professionalism, and identifying with their profession enables opportunities for deep cultivation and development.

### **3. Professional Identity in Multiple Roles**

Teachers' mission includes teaching their subject, transmitting knowledge, and guiding students. Recent educational policy changes have increased the number of teachers with dual or multiple professional identities. For dual-professional teachers, single-profession teaching regulations can create identity conflicts and impacts. External factors further influence teachers' professional identity choices, conflicts, adjustments, or avoidance issues, emerging during professional development promotion.

Domestic research on multiple professional identities in schools is limited. Only Guo Yingjie's (2008) study on "Junior High School Guidance Teachers' Professional Role Identity Challenges and Responses" and Zheng Chunqi's (2016) research on "Professional Identity Experiences of High School Guidance Teachers with Counseling Psychologist Certificates" address professional identity states and challenges for guidance teachers with professional psychological counseling qualifications at different school levels. The researcher believes different school types and professional work experiences create different perceptions through personal experiences and social expectations. When teachers possess multiple professional identities in educational settings, their professional identity impacts become more complex.

Teachers with multiple identities in educational settings live in external and internal conflicting circumstances as cross-domain hybrid roles. While appearing simply as school teachers, they carry multiple identity backgrounds, constantly choosing, struggling, and compromising in daily work life. In pursuing teacher professional identity, their persistent perceptions and insights merit further exploration.

### **Research Methods**

This research topic emerged from the researcher's personal experiences of confusion, challenges, and insights regarding professional identity. According to Zhou Shuqing's (2003) research, the shaping of teacher professional identity can be facilitated through narrative processes, helping individuals understand the relationship between self and society, providing a means for critical reflection and reconstruction. Phenomenologist Husserl believed that intentional activities have a constitutive effect on objects, as objects do not exist independently but are constructed through self-consciousness via intentional activities. Therefore, the existence of objects is intentionality itself, representing the conscious relationship between subject and object (Li, 2007).

Consequently, this study will utilize the researcher's perceptual narrative process within a phenomenological framework to examine the bodily perceptual intentions of teacher professional identity amid multiple roles. It will explore the state, needs, and challenges of professional identity for teachers with multiple roles. Additionally, two technical high school teachers who also possess professional skills and administrative duties (detailed information about the researcher and interviewees is presented in Table 1) were invited to participate. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect textual data and perform perceptual comparisons. This approach aims to clarify the author's intersecting and mixed consciousness states under multiple identities, as well as the internal professional identity recognition, external development challenges, contexts, and opportunities faced by teachers with multiple roles.

Table 1: Basic Information of Research Participants

CATEGORY	RESEARCHER	INTERVIEWEE 1	INTERVIEWEE 2
CURRENT POSITION	Taipei Municipal Public Technical High School	Taipei Municipal Public Technical High School	Taipei Municipal Public Technical High School
PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATIONS	1. Construction Supervisory Teacher Certificate 2. National Table Tennis Teacher Certificate	1. Information, Electronics, Control, Life Skills & Resources Technology Teacher Certificate 2. Computer Assembly and Maintenance Level C Technician	1. Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Teacher Certificate 2. Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Maintenance Level C Technician
TEACHING EXPERIENCE (YEARS)	17	15	4
PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE (YEARS)	3	1	5
COACHING SPECIALTY	Competition Table Tennis	Information Network Technology, Competition Operation	Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Equipment
COACHING EXPERIENCE (YEARS)	5	12	1
ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE	Director, Secretary, Section Chief	System Administrator, Director, Secretary, Section Chief	Director
ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE (YEARS)	15	6	3
CURRENT SCHOOL ROLE	Teacher, Athletic Training Teacher (Coach), Administrative Position	Teacher, Athletic Training Teacher (Coach), Administrative Position	Teacher, Athletic Training Teacher (Coach), Administrative Position

## **Research Findings and Discussion**

Teaching is a profession characterized by close human connections. A teacher's professional identity state continuously manifests dynamically—whether positively, neutrally, or negatively—through the interweaving of external factors and personal experiences. This internal-external adjustment process progresses from external to internal and back to external, encompassing cognition, behavior, and expression.

Based on the researcher's awareness of professional identity ambiguity, which emerges from the conscious relationship between self and situation, this consciousness is not simply caused by a sense of self-loss or unclear professional identity perception. Therefore, through reflection, detachment, and textual review, using a phenomenological perspective on the essence of ambiguous identity brought by multiple roles, the researcher proposes seven perceptual propositions to clarify the perceptual consciousness under ambiguous and adjustment states.

### **1. Sense of Life**

Life occurs only once, with no chance for repetition. While we are powerless against time's passage and cannot change the present in our teaching career, we can anticipate the professional future. Sometimes, knowing too much about the future isn't beneficial, as the waiting mindset can consume one's passion for present matters.

Compared to the enjoyment of practical courses, the repetitive teaching mode of theoretical courses can feel monotonous. Such formalized life creates a sense of emptiness, while relatively challenging administrative roles provide a feeling of fulfillment and growth. (Interviewee 1)

In a limited lifetime, regular teachers performing the same tasks for 30 years, without competition or self-growth, might be interpreted as specialized dedication. However, this unchanging pattern creates dissatisfaction with life, feeling that limited youth will be consumed in "waiting" like a candle in the wind.

### **2. Physical Sense**

A healthy body is essential for a good life, particularly for professional teachers who lead by example. Previous professional technical work modes made acute bodily awareness a natural ability, considering many subtle physical perceptions as "natural." In the workplace, appropriate environmental transitions sometimes provide distance, allowing space to perceive our primary professional state. However, unexpectedly, prolonged separation can gradually diminish the body's original energy and superior functions.

As a professional technician, prolonged equipment contact and practical operation led to more acute physical responses. As a general teacher in school, while professional technical judgment skills may gradually decline over time, teaching experience increases and can become living teaching material, showing students that skills require practice for improvement. Though not meeting industry professional standards might slightly shake professional identity, basic teaching doesn't affect teaching confidence. (Interviewee 2)

### **3. Sense of Space**

Pressure fosters growth and propels forward movement. While excessive pressure requires release to find personal living space, insufficient pressure makes personal space feel too empty and life hollow, lacking the driving force for professional development.

Despite facing multifaceted pressure and challenges in multiple roles, this state, though stressful with stronger life tension, can stimulate more motivation under pressure. Compared to regular teachers' more uniform lifestyle, multiple roles enable more personal growth. (Interviewee 1)

### **4. Sense of Existence**

Teaching's vocation is to achieve success for every student. Regardless of how illustrious one's pre-teaching experiences were, with the role transition, the feeling of being noticed and expected gradually diminishes. When external applause disappears and self-achievement becomes insufficient to support self-identity, one begins to question their existential purpose.

The source of personal existence stems from whether one's confidence in professional abilities is sufficient. The stronger my professional capabilities, the more I'll be needed by students or the school, and the stronger my sense of existence becomes. Having dual professional identities as both technician and teacher enables me to excel in both theoretical and practical courses, making me less replaceable and more distinctly present. (Interviewee 2)

### **5. Sense of Time**

Time in the objective material environment is measured by clocks, seconds, and physical changes. However, when time exists within subjective consciousness, it becomes emotion, awareness, perception—a sum of multiple sensations. During the busy state of multiple roles, a day's objective time isn't merely displayed in numbers, but in the accumulation of various tasks and events. Teachers exist in a blurred temporal experience, while full-time teachers' lives, with fewer uncertain administrative duties, have clear time markers and planning for each class. Time passes gradually between classes, increasing the sense of subjective time passing, yet leaving little trace in life. Time's passage isn't frightening; what's frightening is losing oneself in passing time.

### **6. Sense of Interaction**

Administrative work involves frequent but superficial interactions with stronger defensive mechanisms. As a training teacher or full-time teacher, being the core duty of teaching, interactions with students and parents are closer. Through these interactions, one can better understand students' backgrounds and conditions, becoming more helpful in guiding and assisting students. However, interactions among colleagues lack external environmental factors to promote closer relationships. (Interviewee 2)

## 7. Sense of Center

Single-role teaching duties are clear with simple responsibilities, making it easy to distribute work and life focus. However, under intersecting multiple roles, more detailed planning is needed for time management, task prioritization, and energy investment control. Overly complex duties create an "heavy" sense of life center, while simple duties of full-time teachers may create a "weightless" feeling of having no burdens. Finding balance between "light" and "heavy" in life's center becomes crucial for healthy and passionate professional development.

Regarding these seven propositions of professional identity's ambiguous perception, through detachment from events themselves and external perspective examination, reflection, self-detachment, and interviewee text comparison confirm that the sense of professional identity ambiguity indeed influences multiple-role teachers' professional identity state through these seven propositions' different aspects within external environmental frameworks and internal self-perception intersections. These seven propositions interact without absolute or single directionality (such as center sense affecting existence sense, or time sense affecting space sense), but rather interconnect and influence each other reciprocally. For instance, sense of center links with sense of existence, which in turn intersects with sense of center, thus creating the researcher's initial perception of ambiguous, confused, and disordered professional identity.

## Conclusion

After self-detachment, reflection, and review of interviewees' texts, this research preliminarily categorizes the concepts of professional identity and development for teachers with multiple roles as follows:

### 1. Professional Identity Should Develop From Inside Out

Throughout the process of identity formation, teachers continuously respond to a single question through countless events in their teaching life: "Am I a professional teacher?" While self-questioning, one's consciousness becomes involved in pursuing the teacher identity. For teachers with dual roles as both teacher and coach, besides asking "Am I a professional teacher?", they must also ask "Am I a professional coach?" Through this self-seeking process of constant stimulation and tension, they gradually clarify that while having a single identity (teacher), they possess dual professional characteristics (teaching/training). Through pursuing professional self-identity, they realize that professional development must first involve continuous introspection, analyzing role tasks, understanding self-capabilities, and familiarizing with environmental expectations to identify with their profession. Only then can their perceived sense of life, physical sense, and sense of space have clearer directionality.

### 2. Professional Development is Difficult Without Identity Recognition

Li Xinrong (2022) believes that teacher identity formation should enable self-agency and aim for self-realization, though the implementation process isn't always smoothly progressive. Based on both interviewees' experiences, the inadequate development of professional skills in their early career affected their self-realization process, creating ambiguity in professional identity. This hindered development in both general teaching and athlete training capabilities, demonstrating that professional development is unlikely without sufficient self-professional identity. In such ambiguous states, external support through policies or peer support might have helped



clarify confused perceptions of existence, time, and center through interaction and exchange.

**3. Teachers With Dual Professions Need Guidance in Identity Formation Process**

Teacher professional identity is a dynamic, continuous reflective process. In teachers' career cycles, their development level results from the combined effects of personal characteristics, school environment, support systems, and solid training processes (Steffy, 2001). Therefore, for teachers with technician (coach) and teacher dual professional identities, like our interviewees, besides clarifying professional identity through reflection, school development, peer support, external professional training, or guidance from experienced individuals can serve as lifelines for teachers caught in professional identity ambiguity, reducing perceptual emptiness and uncertainty from lack of interaction, helping them find their uniqueness and subsequently develop deep roots.

**4. Emphasizing Career Development and Professional Growth for Teachers With Multiple Roles**

Single-identity teacher roles experience perceptual voids and imbalances in life sense, time sense, and center sense, leading to ambiguous and disordered professional identity states. However, teachers with multiple role careers can develop broader and more diverse thinking dimensions in understanding educational professionalism, professional skill inheritance mission, and policy implementation. This enriches their growth energy in life sense, center sense, or existence sense along professional development paths. From a school management perspective, considering teachers' perceptions of time and space in experiencing professional identity, when planning and arranging duties, maintaining balance in teachers' "multiple roles" clarifies satisfaction with different role self-identities and achieves teachers' agency in developing multiple roles. This creates opportunities for teachers to experience diverse roles, contributing to the deepening and development of their professional careers.

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