

## *Original Paper*

# On Reconstruction of Teacher Professional Identity in Curriculum Reform for Vocational Education

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### ***Abstract***

*Vocational education curriculum is being reformed nationwide less than compulsory education. It sources from demonstrating college construction in higher vocational education, and imports design-oriented curriculum idea from German. To teachers, it is necessary to reconstruct their rights to utterance.*

### ***Keywords***

*vocational education, curriculum reform, professional identity, reconstruction*

## **1. Introduction**

Teacher identity is the question of what a teacher is, what it should be, and what it must be answered. Teachers are both social and professional individuals. The professional identity of a teacher, in simple terms, refers to how they perceive their work (mainly teaching), how they express themselves, and what they believe is the most important. The Teacher Law, which was implemented in 1994 in China, stipulates that “teachers are professionals who fulfill their educational and teaching responsibilities”, which for the first time confirmed the professional status of teachers from a legal perspective. However, in reality, it is not yet clear whether society or teachers themselves have a clear understanding of their identity.

Education, similar to other social fields, is also deeply engraved with the imprint of the era of change. Since the 1980s, with the intensification of global competition, countries have launched wave after wave of educational reforms. Herbart’s educational theory has made great contributions to educational practice. However, Herbart believes that teaching is an independent cognitive process and is parallel to the educational process, which is not conducive to the comprehensive development of students.

Students only passively accept knowledge and are also influenced by differences in teachers' cultural levels, which narrows their horizons and confines them to a limited range. Teachers themselves have also alienated themselves as individuals. According to Herbart's educational theory, once a teacher's professional knowledge and abilities are formed, they will be utilized for a lifetime without any development issues, thus shifting teacher education towards "professionalization".

The key to the success or failure of educational reform lies in teachers, and this understanding reached an unprecedented consensus in the 1980s in the United States. In the United States, two major waves of teacher education reform have emerged around teacher professionalization, greatly affecting the exploration of teacher professionalization in countries around the world. The first wave started with "The Country is in danger" and was carried out from top to bottom. Its goal is to pursue the "excellence" of education, implement teacher "functional tests", pay corresponding salaries based on students' grades, and implement a job promotion system by the education administrative department. The second wave started with "A Ready Country-Teachers of the 21st Century" and was implemented from bottom to top. Its goal is to pursue the "professionalization" of teachers and promote creative reforms within the school based on their self-discipline.

## **2. Characteristics of Vocational Education Teachers**

From the perspective of British school organizations, vocational education is non-academic education. Academic universities in the UK are institutions that have the authority to confer degrees, such as the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge, while multi-disciplinary technical universities are institutions that confer professional qualifications and do not confer degrees. The value orientation pursued by vocational education is to cultivate students' ability to engage in professional practical work for the needs of economic, political, and social development. Vocational education teachers must prioritize their professional and technical abilities and have abilities that match their work processes. Vocational education teachers should have rich practical experience and extensive social relationships, and understand the needs of enterprises. The American Education Association once detailed the eight characteristics of the education profession: high levels of mental activity; special areas of knowledge; specialized vocational training; Continuous on-the-job training; a permanent lifelong career; essential professional standards; with the goal of serving society; a sound professional organization, etc. It can be seen that the image of "teaching craftsman", a teacher inherited from ancient times, is being increasingly challenged by the professionalization of society.

Vocational education teachers must have a diploma, which is the minimum requirement for them to become teachers. In addition, vocational teachers should also have industry qualification certificates, especially professional course teachers, as the close integration of teaching and practice is an inherent requirement of vocational education. Vocational education has a relatively short learning time, and the curriculum should mainly reflect advanced production processes, production management methods, and be able to effectively solve problems that arise in production. Teachers should make great efforts to

investigate the economic structure of their region, the forefront of industry development, and be familiar with the laws of education and teaching. The “dual teacher structure” and “dual teacher type” teachers are important ways for the development of vocational education teachers. Vocational education teachers have shifted from traditional “small” subject teaching to work processing oriented courses, which means that vocational education needs to be separated from the concentration of undergraduate teaching. The teaching perspective of teachers should shift from books to reality, so that they lose their sense of familiarity and control over the familiar professional scenes, and their self-balance is disrupted. Teachers must reconstruct their identity during the reform in order to restore balance. In other words, implementing reforms requires teachers to change themselves, leave their existing homes, and constantly move towards the other world. In Bauman’s words, the reform expects teachers to complete a pilgrimage.

### **3. Changes in Professional Identity of Vocational Education Teachers in Curriculum Reform**

Based on the work process curriculum reform, the curriculum is restructured with a design oriented concept. Break down the originally systematic curriculum and integrate each seemingly independent knowledge horizontally or vertically. The inherent knowledge of teachers can no longer be smoothly connected, leading to cognitive dissonance and a sense of ‘tension’. Due to the inconsistency between the educational goals imposed on teachers from top to bottom and their personal experience, this means that their professional identity often encounters problems. Traditional good teachers are not necessarily the ones required by reform, and the requirements for good teachers are more diverse. Once the issue of a teacher’s professional identity is determined, the tension caused by cognitive imbalance can be relieved, resulting in a relaxed, joyful, and fulfilling emotional experience. This positive emotional experience has played a reinforcing role in curriculum reform. On the contrary, the uncertainty of the teacher’s identity exacerbates the problem, leading to negative emotions of confusion, distress, and disappointment. The anxiety and unease of teachers play a “punitive” role in curriculum reform, and ultimately they will adopt a non cooperative attitude.

For a long time, our teachers have been engaged in educational and teaching work under the control of technological rationality. The power to arrange textbooks, reference books, teaching content, and choose educational and teaching methods that teaching practice relies on is controlled by hidden trainers such as subject experts and course compilers. Teachers become mechanical executors of established procedures, faithfully transmitting “legal knowledge”, leading to the loss of their discourse power. We know that traditional educational values and the educational values of comprehensive courses are two different sets of educational value systems. The knowledge and value system of teachers has been formed over a long period of time, and a set of familiar textbooks and teaching methods, as well as teacher interaction, are the sources of job security for teachers. Once the work routine of teachers is broken, their identity will naturally be threatened.

Teachers who lack practical experience in enterprises or have few horizontal connections with society

face significant resistance in curriculum reform, are unable to practice new concepts in the classroom, and students do not trust them, resulting in teachers being unable to gain recognition from students, colleagues, and leaders. The professionalization standards formed by the new curriculum have impacted the professional identity represented by the original educational values. For them, the formation of educational beliefs is precisely influenced by the educational and teaching experience they experienced during their initial education and the years they first joined the teaching industry.

To fill a wooden bucket with water, each wooden board must be flush and undamaged. If there is an uneven board or a hole in the bottom of a board, the bucket cannot be filled with water. The amount of water a bucket can hold does not depend on the longest wooden board, but on the shortest wooden board. The goal of the new curriculum reform is to fill the bucket with water, and teachers other than expert teachers carry more of the ideas, confidence, and expectations of the new curriculum than experts. Therefore, teachers must go through a new journey. Therefore, developing teacher professional development plans by excellent educators or experts cannot meet the needs of most teachers. Just as Bauman likened the identity of modern society to a “Pilgrim,” he would move towards a certain goal and also see his own footsteps. The process of changing the professional identity of teachers in the curriculum reform can also be seen as a Pilgrim like process.

#### **4. Reconstruction of Professional Identity of Vocational Education Teachers in Curriculum Reform**

The subjective participation of teachers in educational practice is the fundamental driving force for teacher development. When the development of vocational education encounters external obstacles and the students they teach discover during the employment process that they have learned the same or generalized academic knowledge as those who have graduated from academic universities, they find it useless for enterprises. The sense of disappointment can spread to students on campus, leading to a crisis in the survival of vocational education. And those who perceive this trend and will lead future curriculum reform are the following types of teachers: they have rich teaching experience and exquisite teaching skills, and their majors are highly praised by their peers; They have advanced educational concepts and understand that curriculum reform is the core of vocational education development. Although the effectiveness of curriculum reform may differ from their expected results in the future, it does not affect their active participation and guide teachers towards a “good” direction. The professional identity of vocational education teachers will undergo significant changes after the curriculum reform, as they are both teachers in schools and technical innovators in factories. The teaching of teachers has undergone significant changes, not only in the classroom, but also in the workshop. The teaching environment has undergone qualitative changes and is no longer limited to be a “wall-like” environment. But in fact, some teachers play the role of consumers of ready-made knowledge in the new curriculum reform, which may not necessarily meet their needs. This change puts great psychological and intellectual pressure on teachers, and their professional identity needs to

be reestablished.

The new curriculum reform will bring about a series of new problems, and how these problems are solved determines whether the professional identity of teachers can be completely reconstructed. In the new curriculum reform of vocational education, teachers' understanding of work oriented courses is definitely inconsistent with expert explanations. Teachers will examine the new curriculum reform with their previous professional identity, and after entering the expert discourse system, they will be at a loss for the new concepts. For example, "What is A?" But most teachers are familiar with B, and for them, B is a common reference, and A is often consciously ignored. In fact, even the small differences in familiarity with A can interfere with teachers' understanding of the new curriculum. It can be said that teachers' learning involves the transfer of existing knowledge and experience in new learning and work contexts, and what truly affects teachers' professional behavior is a certain "theory" inherent in their own minds. Teachers are "wandering" outside the new curriculum reform which it is seen as a building, and to enter this door, one needs to confirm their identity. They need a key, and exploratory learning can truly learn to survive and develop, and gain the professional knowledge and ability to actively enter the building. In fact, throughout a person's life, exploration has never been interrupted; Without exploration, no one can stand firm in this world. In exploratory learning, curriculum reformers no longer focus on how to effectively convey information and make it the most accurately understood and firmly grasped by teachers, but on how to more effectively provide support and assistance to teachers to influence their independent construction of professional identity, thereby achieving their goals. The reconstruction of a teacher's professional identity is to transform them from teaching and accepting concepts to entering real natural environments that may require them. The professional identity of a teacher is not just superficial, but it is through teaching new courses that one can experience their own transformation, which is not something that anyone or any department can bestow.

## 5. Conclusion

Emphasize the construction of knowledge and skills that meet the needs of reform based on the existing experience of teachers. Learners must pay sufficient attention, value, understanding, and respect to their previous experiences in new learning contexts. Schools should fully recognize the importance of teachers' original concepts and cultural knowledge for learning before the curriculum reform, and improve the teacher assistance system: firstly, promote teachers' physical and mental development through systematic cultural immersion and learning activities; On the other hand, through a special social system such as schools, it promotes the professional development of teachers, thereby satisfying them with their professional identity. Teacher training is a powerful guarantee for promoting curriculum reform. The new curriculum reform will bring about a diversified curriculum system, especially the emergence of thematic courses, practical courses, research-oriented courses, etc., making the transformation of teacher training and training models an inevitable requirement of curriculum reform.

Faced with the discomfort of teacher professional identity in the new curriculum reform, it is necessary to break the traditional unified, closed, theoretical, and summative training models and open the training system. In this way, teachers become a type of qualification certificate education based on academic education, which can be transformed in different scopes according to the role of teachers. On this basis, teachers should not only learn to replicate their abilities, but also ensure the transformation or improvement of their abilities. Teachers are still hesitant to accept the concepts contained in the new curriculum within their limited time, rather than being obedient in action. Expert practice seminars are a great solution. The participation of practical experts, school leaders, and teachers who work in enterprises can highlight interactive awareness and emphasize problem-solving skills during the discussion process. Their advantages include a small number of people, flexible forms, and wide coverage. This helps teachers make judgments and choices, and take responsibility for their professional future. After their identity is recognized by themselves and others, they will gain a sense of power, which is called empowerment. Teachers will voluntarily seek professional development opportunities and become a new force in curriculum reform.

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