

# DID YOU SAY... PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY?

How to foster its development



Observatoire  
de la **formation  
professionnelle**  
du **Québec**

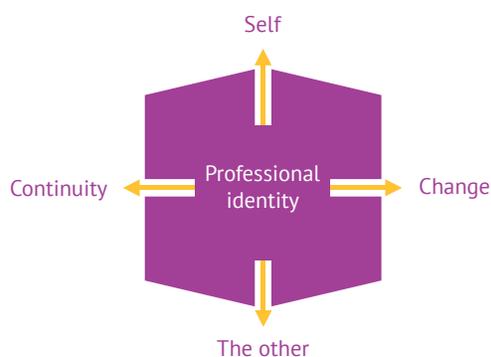
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## A DEFINITION

According to Perez-Roux (2011), professional identity is a representation of oneself as a professional which is constructed and modified according to tensions experienced between:

- the image that an individual has of himself (self, in the figure below) and the feeling that this image is acknowledged by others (the other);
- the need to affirm oneself as an individual (continuity) and the need to belong to a professional group (change).



## WHAT IS IT USED FOR?

Professional identity rarely manifests itself in a conscious manner. When it is thought of consciously, professional identity can be a tool for professional development as a teacher. Incidentally, professional identity specifically touches on two professional competencies that every teacher must develop in order to practice. The first one is to engage in a process of individual and collective professional development; the second requires ethical and responsible behaviour in the performance of his duties. In brief, one's professional identity serves to define and recognize oneself, to affirm oneself with respect to others and to orient one's behaviours and attitudes as a teaching professional.

## HOW ABOUT IF WE EXPLAINED IT IN SIMPLE TERMS...

### No end nor beginning

The construction of a teacher's professional identity has no beginning and no end. Depending on one's path in life, one's professional identity may be rooted as far back as childhood, having been inspired by one's own school experience or by a parent who had the same profession. It also evolves throughout one's career, at times more intensely, such as when transitioning from practicing a trade to teaching it or when changing schools.

### A little of everything

The representation that a teacher has of himself is based on an amalgamation of different aspects of himself, his environment, the people around him and more. Professional identity also includes not only his own knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, values and aspirations, but also the standards, rules, values and codes that govern his profession.

## TO FIND OUT MORE

Gagné, A. (2015). *Les valeurs issues des carrières initiales des enseignants en formation professionnelle : leurs rôles dans le développement d'une nouvelle identité professionnelle d'enseignant*. [mémoire de maîtrise, Université du Québec à Chicoutimi].

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Perez-Roux, T. (2011). Changer de métier pour devenir enseignant : transitions professionnelles et dynamiques identitaires. Dans A. Balleux et T. Perez-Roux (dir.), *Transitions professionnelles et recompositions identitaires dans les métiers de l'enseignement et de l'éducation*. *Recherche en éducation*, 1(11), 39-54.

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## WHAT IF I WANTED TO INTEGRATE IT INTO MY PRACTICE...

Professional identity is not part of one's practice, rather, it exists whether we want it or not, and it develops through experiences. In fact, professional identity supports and orients the teacher's practice based on what he perceives and interprets in a professional setting.

What can a teacher do to promote the development of his professional identity?

### Becoming aware of one's career path...

First, have a retrospective look at both your career path and personal journey. To do so, start by drawing your own timeline.

1. Get a paper and pen, and draw a timeline starting from when you graduated from high school, or earlier, right up until now and for the next twenty years and beyond.
2. Note the different periods of training starting with school-related ones, then work-related ones and, if applicable, those of a personal interest (ex.: volunteer work, sports, art, etc.).
3. Add in the main jobs you held and the main involvements.
4. Think about other events that had an impact on your path through life, work related or not, and write them down (ex.: trips, moves, trials or challenges).
5. Think about what you want for the future and fill in the next 5, 10 or 20 years according to your aspirations and goals.
6. For each element you wrote into your timeline, identify people who were important to you during that period and write in their names.
7. For each event and person identified, ask yourself "what did I learn, understand, or take away from that situation, period, or encounter that makes me different as a teacher?" Events and interactions have an effect on us because they were repeated often or were intense. When we are faced with a situation, a dilemma, or a challenge, we refer to our previous experiences, all the while thinking about our aspirations and ideals, which orient our actions. By taking a critical look at where we come from and where we want to go, we can better understand how our professional identity influences our practice.

### Keeping a logbook or a journal...

1. Get yourself a logbook or journal. Track Take your professional situation, based on what you learned from making the timeline. Ask yourself: how do I define myself as a teacher? How do my colleagues see me? What distinguishes me from the others? What are my strengths and challenges?
2. Specify the goal of the journal if you know it. If not, define your professional objectives and, why not, your personal ones as well. Answer the following questions: Where do I want my career to lead? What would I like to explore to improve my practice? What type of teacher would I like to be?
3. Write your goals down in detail by adding observable and measurable manifestations, timetables or resources to mobilize and get it done. It's like designing your own professional development plan.
4. Every day, week, or month, write down the situations that made you think, that held your attention, and which stood out because of their intensity. Then, analyse them by answering the following questions: What happened? How did I act or react? What could I have done differently?
5. Reread your journal every now and then on a fixed schedule to review the progress towards your goals, so that you can revise them and the steps to take next. To better understand how you are evolving, go over your definition of yourself as a teacher while asking yourself if it is consistent with your current view.

*"We do not create other people's identity in spite of themselves, yet we cannot live without others to forge our own identity." (Dubar, 2002, p. 113).*

