

# TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES AND DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION

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**Abstract:** This article explores the relationship between development education (DE) and the notion of teachers' identity. The Teaching Council's *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers* (2016a) is seen as a significant step forward in clarifying the essential role of teachers. In interrogating the four underpinning ethical values associated with teaching in the *Code* - respect, care, integrity and trust - we find strong resonances with the traditions and ambitions of DE. We contend that a commitment to the advancement of human rights and to global justice perspectives generally follows organically from embracing the *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers*. Furthermore, we believe our conclusions have implications for Irish Aid, The Teaching Council, teachers, student-teachers, initial and ongoing teacher educators as well as DE practitioners.

**Key words:** Teacher Identity; Code of Professional Conduct; Global Citizenship; Development Education; Teaching Council; Irish Aid.

## **Introduction: shifting visions of teacher identity**

Teacher identity is a complex topic (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009: 175). How we understand it has implications for student teachers' learning and for the professional development of practicing teachers. Furthermore, 'identity is dynamic rather than stable, a constantly evolving phenomenon' (ibid: 177). This is particularly relevant in a rapidly changing world (Quirke-Bolt & Jeffers, 2018). For example, constructivist pedagogies which encourage social collaboration and enable educators to utilise the different capacities, knowledge and expertise of students in tackling problems and developing an enquiry process (Dewey, 1944) is enjoying a resurgence in popularity. In the Irish context, a re-imagined Junior Cycle (ages 12-15 years) curriculum gives a fresh prominence to, *inter alia*, themes of community cohesion, social justice, global sustainability and personal well-being (NCCA, 2011; DES, 2012; DES, 2015).

These themes have a heightened relevance in today's world and carry significant implications for how teachers see themselves and their roles. Understandably, a perception of 'initiative overload' (McHugh, 2018) indicates how curricular change can challenge many embedded views of teachers' identities and practices. We write as teacher-educators with a particular interest in how the values and perspectives of development education might enrich teachers' professional identities. We also believe that an enhanced sense of identity can inspire teachers to work collaboratively as active agents with their students by enquiring into and taking action on practical problems facing our world (Hackman, 2005; Boylan and Woolsey, 2015). This article suggests that The Teaching Council's *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers* offers a new articulation of teacher identity and deserves wider consideration. In particular, we consider the implications of the specific ethical values of respect, care, integrity and trust in a wider global context.

### **Irish Aid Strategy**

The Irish Aid Development Education Strategy 2017 - 2023 is driven by an overarching vision of 'a sustainable and just world where people are empowered to overcome poverty and hunger and fully realise their rights and potential' (Irish Aid, 2016: 2). This official policy document from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade notes in relation to supporting teachers and student teachers that: 'We will pursue opportunities with the Teaching Council to increase coherence between development education and relevant criteria and guidelines for teachers' learning' (Irish Aid, 2016: 30). One possible route to achieving this worthy and challenging aspiration of 'greater coherence' is via the Teaching Council's *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers* (2016a).

### **Development education 'champions'**

Gleeson et al (2007: 60) noted that many of those who integrate development education in Irish second-level schools are individual teacher enthusiasts driven by their own values rather than officially adopted policies or curricular programmes. Similarly, Bryan and Bracken (2011: 188) noted: '... the responsibility for the incorporation of Development Education into the formal curriculum falls squarely upon the shoulders of individual teachers'. Thus, teachers who find opportunities to teach social justice generally and development

education in particular in the schools where they work might be described as ‘champions’. This centrality of ‘champions’ offers some pointers to how greater teacher ownership of education for global citizenship might grow. The studies cited above frequently refer to the underlying assumptions, values and beliefs of the champion teachers. Typically, these teachers are described as those with the passion, commitment and expertise to teach development education (see also McKeown et al: 2002). Such teachers typically see themselves as global citizens, committed to social justice, equality and a fairer distribution of the world’s resources, who value and respect diversity and inclusion, and who have a strong sense of human solidarity. They are also characterised as people of empathy, with a belief that teachers can make a difference in the lives of the people they teach and beyond (see also Vare and Scott: 2007). Frequently, these champions also express concern for the environment and invariably have a commitment to the ideals enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UNEP, 2013; UN, 2015).

Are such orientations exceptional among teachers? Is it reasonable to think that valuing human rights, solidarity, sustainability and global interconnectedness are desirable traits in all teachers, that such commitment might even translate into indicators of what ‘good teaching should look like’? In exploring these questions, the Teaching Council’s *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers* (2016a) offers a valuable point of reference. Its foreword states, *inter alia*, that:

“The Council works on the premise that advocacy and regulation are interdependent. This Code of Professional Conduct sets out the standards that teachers should adhere to at all stages of their career. It also describes a vision of what good teaching should look like. In this dual purpose, it epitomises the dual mandate of the professional standards body for the teaching profession” (ibid: 2).

### **Code of Professional Conduct**

Coolahan (2016: 280) describes the Teaching Council’s *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers* as a ‘bedrock document’ for the profession. Under the heading ‘Standards of Teaching, Knowledge, Skill, Competence and Conduct’,

the *Code* states that ‘The role of the teacher is to educate’ and then sets out four ethical values that ‘underpin the standards of teaching, knowledge, skill, competence and conduct as set out in this Code’. These values are Respect, Care, Integrity and Trust (Teaching Council, 2016a: 8).

The *Code* then expands briefly on these values, relating them to classrooms and schools. But can the application of these values be confined within the walls of the school? We believe that adopting such values implies perspectives well beyond the school gates, especially if we take seriously the value of ‘integrity’. An intellectual and ethical integrity suggests a particular relevance for development education and, indeed, social justice teaching and learning. Further exploration reveals the four named values as akin to the tips of icebergs; great bodies of power and possibility lie beneath these surfaces.

### ***Respect***

Regarding ‘respect’, the *Code* states: ‘Teachers uphold human dignity and promote equality and emotional and cognitive development. In their professional practice, teachers demonstrate respect for spiritual and cultural values, diversity, social justice, freedom, democracy and the environment’ (ibid, 2016a: 6). These references resonate strongly with the language and underlying thrust of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights (UNDHR) (UN, 1948). It is worth recalling that, in relation to education, Article 26b of the UNDHR states:

“Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace”.

Thus, embracing ‘respect’ in the *Code* implies at least a sympathy with and, arguably, a commitment to, the values of the UNDHR with curricular consequences.

## *Care*

Moving on to the *Code's* expansion of the term 'Care' we find: 'Teachers' practice is motivated by the best interests of the pupils/students entrusted to their care. Teachers show this through positive influence, professional judgement and empathy in practice' (2016a: 6). The key phrase here relates directly to article 3 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) which asserts that 'In all actions concerning children ... the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration'. This ground-breaking treaty, which Ireland ratified in 1992, has been a major influence in legislative and policy directions over the past two decades. The UNCRC also offers 'a relevant and practical lens through which our thinking about schooling might be re-evaluated and re-energised (Jeffers, 2014: 1). The Convention's articulation of rights of survival, protection, development and participation can extend teachers' understanding of their professional role. Indeed, in our opinion, it is disappointing that the Teaching Council's *Code* does not make more explicit references to the UNCRC or suggest that teachers familiarise themselves with it and its implications for their working lives, including curricular implications and responsibilities.

## *Integrity*

Consistent behaviour, especially in terms of adhering to values such as respect and care, and living their implications, are central to a teacher's integrity. As the *Code* states: 'Honesty, reliability and moral action are embodied in integrity. Teachers exercise integrity through their professional commitments, responsibilities and actions' (2016a: 6). This resonates with the premise on which Parker (1998) built his book *The Courage to Teach*: 'good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher' (Parker, 1998: 10). Thus, a commitment to promote 'understanding, tolerance and friendship' among people – human solidarity – seems core to being a teacher of integrity.

## *Trust*

As well as respect, care and integrity, a fourth value underpinning teaching is trust. 'Teachers' relationships with pupils/students, colleagues, parents, school management and the public are based on trust. Trust embodies fairness, openness and honesty', according to the *Code* (2016a: 6). This commitment to fairness,

openness and honesty thus becomes a responsibility of all teachers and is critical for public trust in the profession. Individual failures to meet professional standards have negative implications for the teaching collective. Revelations about the misdeeds of a minority across a diverse range of professions, including residential care, the Catholic priesthood, the Gardai, journalists and international aid have, in recent years, impacted on the public's trust of many of those working in these professions. Increasingly, the public will expect teachers to demonstrate these four ethical values in their practice.

## Discussion

Reflective practice (Schön, 1983) offers an energising approach to teachers' continuing professional development (CPD). Hislop (2015:3) notes 'Significant changes have been introduced into our teacher education programmes to ensure a greater emphasis on the continuum of learning from ITE to induction to CPD and on reflective practice'. Reflective practice is also a rich theme running through the Teaching Council's (2016b) *Cosán, Framework for Teachers' Learning*. This welcome attention to reflective practice in teaching should never be reduced to an inward-looking, narcissistic exercise. Brookfield's *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher* (1995) begins:

“We teach to change the world. The hope that undergirds our efforts to help students learn is that doing this will help them act toward each other, and towards their environment, with compassion, understanding and fairness” (Brookfield, 1995: 1).

For us, reflecting on the richness of the Teaching Council's *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers*, especially the underpinning values of respect, care, integrity and trust, suggests that teaching for global citizenship, for including 'development education' as a cross curricular perspective (Quirke-Bolt and Jeffers, 2018) and for integrating education for sustainable development (ESD) are imperatives that could impact on every teacher. Currently there are glimpses of global citizenship perspectives in the primary school curriculum, the Junior Cycle programme, Transition Year and the Leaving Certificate programmes. However, curriculum application is never an exclusively top-down phenomenon; individual teachers play crucial roles in shaping what happens in their own classrooms

(Priestley, Robinson and Biesta, 2011). The possibility exists for every teacher to become a global citizenship education ‘champion’.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN, 2015) offer one framework for teachers to ‘change the world’. In his portrayal of 21<sup>st</sup> century schools, Schleicher, states:

“These goals (SDGs) are a shared vision of humanity that provide the missing piece of the globalisation puzzle, the glue that can counter the centrifugal forces in the age of accelerations. The extent to which these goals will be realised will depend in no small part on what happens in today’s classrooms” (Schleicher, 2018: 227).

While easily dismissed as overly idealistic, the SDGs enable teachers to integrate key concepts such as poverty, inequality, climate justice and peace into their day-to-day practice. The SDGs 2030 target date adds an immediate relevance, even urgency, to classroom work for all age groups and can help link classroom learning with issues and actions beyond school walls. It can also bring focus to curriculum reform. The vision of the Ubuntu Network, a group committed to promoting development education in initial teacher education, captures some of the links between curriculum development and global citizenship:

“Through Development Education, the Ubuntu Network contributes to building a world based on respect for human dignity and rights and is informed by values of justice, equality, inclusion, sustainability and social responsibility” (Ubuntu Network, 2016: 9).

The Ubuntu Network’s mission is to support teacher educators to embed into their work a living understanding of and commitment to education for global citizenship, sustainable development and social justice. As a result, graduate post-primary teachers entering the workforce can integrate into their teaching, and into the schools where they work, perspectives that encourage active engagement to build a more just and sustainable world’ (ibid: 9).

## **Conclusion**

In an increasingly globalised world, the concept of the teacher as a global citizen makes sense as a core component of one's professional identity and an essential feature of continuing professional development. Adoption of the Teaching Council's *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers* should lead to consideration of the implications of the specific ethical values of respect, care, integrity and trust in a wider global context. Specifically, central to the emerging identity of 21<sup>st</sup> century teachers should be a more explicit commitment to human rights frameworks. The UNDHR, the UNCRC and the SDGs are prime examples of frameworks that offer rich possibilities. Irish Aid and the Teaching Council have much to talk about. Indeed, we believe that this issue needs discussion beyond Irish Aid and the Teaching Council. Professional conversations involving teachers, teacher educators, teaching unions, and developments educators and focused on deepening collective understandings of the *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers* could enhance the two key and linked concepts of teacher identity and education for global justice.

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