

# Fostering Inclusive Teaching Practices: The Crucial Role of Social Philosophy in Developing Professional Identity

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## *Abstract*

This article argues that social philosophy is key for teachers. It helps them create inclusive classrooms and develop a strong professional identity. By reflecting on social justice and cultural perspectives, teachers can refine their practices and make ethical decisions. This article also explores how social philosophy can prepare future teachers by examining how social factors shape their identity. Finally, it emphasizes the importance of a strong professional identity for teachers and highlights the role of social philosophy in teacher education programs.

*Keywords:* teacher, education, identity, social philosophy.

## 1. Introduction

Effective teachers do more than impart knowledge; they shape students' lives and influence society. This complex role requires a deep understanding of the principles that guide education and the development of a strong professional identity. This paper argues that social philosophy is key to achieving both.

Social philosophy provides a framework for teachers to navigate the ethical complexities of education. By emphasizing justice, equality, and cultural responsiveness, it helps teachers create inclusive classrooms. Understanding the social and historical context of education allows teachers to see the bigger picture and their role in achieving societal goals. It is also intertwined with professional identity. As teachers grapple with philosophical questions about social justice and diverse perspectives, they reflect on their own values and teaching methods. This reflection refines their professional identity and ensures their practices are inclusive. Furthermore, social philosophy equips teachers with the tools to critically examine and adapt their methods. By understanding cultural diversity, teachers can foster classrooms where every student feels valued. Furthermore, social philosophy guides teachers through ethical dilemmas. By grounding decisions in philosophical principles, teachers make informed choices that solidify their identity as ethical practitioners.

The importance of social philosophy grows as education adapts to changing societal needs. It empowers teachers to navigate new cultural, political, and economic landscapes. Moreover, it equips them to guide students in understanding the social and political dimensions of contemporary issues.

This article argues that social philosophy is a powerful tool for educators. It helps them create inclusive classrooms, develop strong professional identities, and navigate the complexities of the educational landscape.

## 2. Exploring the foundations of human interaction

Humans need each other for everything – from staying alive to growing and thriving. Social philosophy explores the fundamental rules that guide our interactions in society, trying to understand the true meaning of how we live together. As soon as a person is born, they start living in society, where constant interactions shape who they become. Society, described as a group of individuals with a shared purpose, serves as the nurturing ground for one's character. Social philosophy delves into the philosophy of human relations within this societal framework. It views society as a dynamic organization of purposeful individuals, with man at its core, and explores the principles that underlie social solidarity.

Mackenzie (1917), asserts that social philosophy seeks to explain the nature of society through the lens of social solidarity, emphasizing the importance of understanding the united forces that connect individuals. While Blackmar (1905) highlights the connection between social philosophy and the general facts of society, making overarching observations about societal nature.

Moreover, Bertrand Russell (1958), takes a broader perspective, stating that social philosophy seeks conditions conducive to directing all constructive tendencies of humanity, such as love and sympathy, within aspects like social marriage and education. The ultimate goal is to provide maximum opportunities for creating individuals capable of safeguarding the world from future catastrophes.

As an educator, I would like to take a closer look at social philosophy in the aspect of education and the aspect of professional identity formation as a socialization process of future teachers.

## 3. Perspectives on identity formation through socialization

Identity can be conceptualized as a process of socialization, wherein an individual's position within a community shape who they are perceived to be. Professional identity formation, therefore, is not merely an inherent quality but rather a process of assimilating into the professional culture. This entails learning to embody the practices deemed exemplary within the professional community.

The formation and growth of an individual's professional identity is a lengthy, continuous, and ongoing process that takes place within specific contextual environments. (Gardner & Shulman, 2005)

Another commonly acknowledged framework for understanding socialization is the Communities of Practice model, proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991).

According to this model, novices in a field progress from peripheral participation to full engagement primarily through social interaction. A community of practice comprises three essential components: mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire. Mutual engagement refers to active participation and interaction within the community, while joint enterprise involves pursuing a common purpose or goal that unites members. A shared repertoire encompasses the tools, language, and resources collaboratively utilized by members to facilitate their collective learning.

Professional identity as a concept, refers to the self-perception, beliefs, values, and sense of belonging that individuals develop about their chosen profession. It is the understanding and internalization of what it means to be a professional in a specific field or occupation. Professional identity encompasses how individuals view themselves about their professional role, the knowledge, and skills they possess, and the attitudes and behaviors associated with their

profession (Gardner & Shulman, 2005). Before we deep dive into the idea of the professional identity of a preservice teacher, it's crucial to overview the formation of professional identity as a general concept .

Establishing a precise definition of professionalism has always been a challenging task, and there has never been a standardized approach to it. As it is hard to find one precise definition, let's take a look on how several notable researchers defined professional identity and the interpretations of professionalism in a broader sense.

The term “professional” encompasses several characteristics based on various definitions provided by reputable sources. According to Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary, (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/professional10>) the word “professional” has multiple meanings, including engagement in a field of endeavor for gain or livelihood, being characteristic of a profession, following a line of conduct as though it were a profession, and engaging in a pursuit or activity professionally. These definitions align with the concept of professional identity overall described in a variety of research. Furthermore, the Cambridge Dictionary online (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/professional>) defines “professional” as relating to work that requires special training or education, possessing qualities associated with trained and skilled individuals, and having a job that commands respect due to high levels of education and training. Overall, according to these definitions being professional signifies being skilled, educated, effective, organized, and serious in manner, reflecting expertise and proficiency in a specific domain.

Erikson (1968), being a pioneer in this field, defined professional identity as an individual's sense of personal and social identity within the context of their chosen profession. It involves the integration of professional roles, values, and commitments into one’s self-concept.

Later, Ibarra (1999), describes professional identity as a dynamic and evolving sense of self that emerges through engagement in professional roles and activities. It involves the internalization of professional values, beliefs, and norms, and the alignment of personal identity with the expectations of the profession.

The latest research by Pratt and Rafaeli (2001) talks about professional identity as the meanings, feelings, and behaviors associated with being a member of a particular profession. It includes the adoption of professional roles, internalization of professional norms, and identification with the values and goals of the profession.

Gardner and Shulman (Gardner & Shulman, 2005) discussed the mutuality between professions and society, asserting that professions gain autonomy and prestige from societal recognition, and in exchange, perform services to society through their professional actions. They described six characteristics of a profession as a commitment to clients and society; the specialized body of knowledge; a specialized and unique set of skills; the ability to make judgments with integrity in environments of uncertainty; growing new bodies of knowledge through experience, community of professionals who perform oversight and monitoring of professional practice.

Finally, according to Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop (2004), professional identity development involves the internalization of professional norms, values, and beliefs, as well as the adoption of professional roles and responsibilities. It encompasses the development of a professional self-concept, including an understanding of one's professional strengths, values, and commitments.

Based on these highlights, professional identity comprises multiple dimensions, including cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects, and it develops over time through interactions with various social contexts.

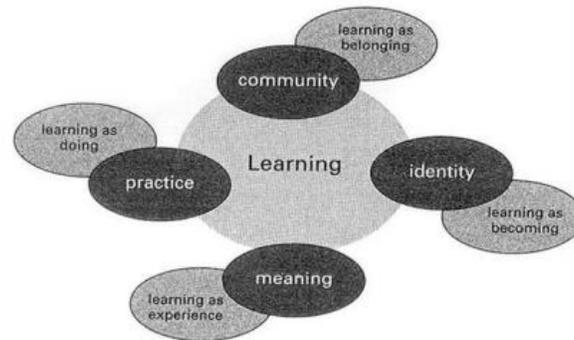


Figure 1. Wenger (1998): four factors of learning that contribute to identity formation

Furthermore, it is important to recognize that, professional identity is not static but evolves and develops over time as professionals gain more experience, knowledge, and expertise in their field. It is a dynamic process of self-reflection, growth, and aligning one's values and actions with the ideals of the profession (Burke, 2004).

These different theoretical perspectives on professional identity provide a rich and nuanced understanding of this complex construct. They highlight the importance of individual experiences, social context, and professional norms and values in shaping professional identity. They also emphasize the dynamic and evolving nature of professional identity, which is constantly being shaped by new experiences and challenges.

Overall, professional identity encompasses the individual's self-concept and understanding of themselves as professionals, including their role, values, beliefs, and commitment to their chosen field. It plays a significant role in shaping professional behavior, decision-making, and engagement in professional communities.

#### 4. Professional identity development

Professional identity development is a complex process that encompasses the formation and integration of professional norms, values, roles, and self-concept. Theoretical perspectives provide valuable frameworks for understanding the factors that shape professional identity and the dynamics involved in its development

This overview explores three main theoretical perspectives in the context of social philosophy on professional identity development: social identity theory, professional socialization theory, and communities of practice .

The first one is the social identity theory, as proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), which emphasizes the influence of social groups on individuals' self-concept and identity formation. In the context of professional identity, this theory suggests that individuals' identification with a professional group, such as teachers, contributes to the development of their professional identity. It recognizes the significance of social categorization, social comparison, and group membership in shaping professional identity .

Another theory – Professional socialization, as discussed by Beijaard et al. (2004), focuses on the process of becoming a member of a profession and the socialization experiences that influence professional identity development. This theory highlights the role of formal and informal learning experiences, interactions with colleagues and mentors, and exposure to professional practices and values. It recognizes the dynamic and ongoing nature of professional

identity development as individuals navigate through different stages and contexts of their professional journey.

Beijaard et al. (2004) state that there are two types of professional identity:

Personal professional identity is the sense of who you are as a professional based on your values, beliefs, and experiences. It is shaped by your personal history, your education, and your work experiences.

Social professional identity is the sense of who you are as a professional based on the expectations of your profession and the people in your professional community. It is shaped by the norms, values, and practices of your profession.

These two types of professional identity are not mutually exclusive. They are often interrelated. For example, your professional identity may influence the way you interact with others in your professional community, and your social professional identity may influence the way you think about your values and beliefs.

The last one is the Communities of Practice, as theorized by Wenger (1998), which emphasizes the role of social participation and collective learning in shaping professional identity. According to this perspective, individuals engage in communities of practice where they interact with others who share similar professional interests, engage in joint activities, and collectively develop a shared set of knowledge, skills, and practices. These interactions within communities of practice contribute to the construction and negotiation of professional identities.

The development of professional identity is a complex process that is influenced by a variety of factors, including personal experiences, educational experiences, and professional experiences. It is a lifelong process that continues to evolve as we gain new experiences and insights. This is why I would like to take a closer look at Wenger's (1998) concept of identity as a social construct from the perspective of the concepts of social philosophy. Wenger (1998) introduces the concept of identity as a social construct that emerges through active participation in specific communities. He defines identity-in-practice as an action-oriented approach to understanding identity and identifies five key dimensions: negotiated experiences, community membership, learning trajectory, nexus of multi-membership, and the relationship between the local and global.

Wenger (1998) proposes that the formation of identity involves layering of participation and reification, where experiences and social interpretation continually influence one another. This implies that identity is a product of both social construction and negotiation, shaped through our interactions and experiences.

Wenger (1998) highlights four factors of learning that contribute to identity formation. These factors include meaning, practice, community, and identity itself. Meaning refers to the capability of perceiving the world as meaningful, while practice involves collective engagement in action through shared perspectives and social structures. Community refers to the social configurations that define our participation and recognize our capabilities. Identity, on the other hand, signifies how learning transforms who we are.

These four factors provide a framework for understanding the social proposition of identity formation. Wenger (1998) summarizes this framework in an illustration, which outlines the interplay between meaning, practice, community, and identity.

Overall, Wenger's theory emphasizes the social nature of identity formation, highlighting the role of active participation in communities of practice and the influence of learning experiences, community membership, and the negotiation of one's identity within various contexts .

These theories share a common focus on the influence of social factors, such as group membership, socialization experiences, and collective learning, in the development of professional identity. By considering these perspectives, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complex processes through which individuals form their professional identities.

Above all, developing a strong professional identity is essential for professionals as it provides a sense of purpose, belonging, and commitment to their chosen field. It helps individuals establish their professional reputation, establish professional relationships, and navigate ethical and decision-making dilemmas. Professional identity also influences how individuals approach their work, interact with colleagues and clients, and contribute to the advancement of their profession.

##### 5. The importance of professional identity development in the context of teaching profession

Professional identity development in the teaching profession is of great importance for educators as it impacts their job satisfaction, commitment, and effectiveness in the classroom. A strong professional identity helps teachers develop a sense of purpose, belonging, and professional agency, which are crucial for navigating the challenges and demands of the profession (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

The objective of my research is to study the development of professional identity among preservice teachers in their educational journey and the influence of pedagogical instructors on this process including various factors that influence this development. Subsequently, this paper concentrates on examining the concept of identity within the realm of education, with a specific focus on teaching and teacher education. Furthermore, it highlights the significance of fostering professional identity development within the preservice teaching framework.

Considering the intricate nature of identity, existing literature suggests that multiple factors play a role in shaping teacher identities. Nevertheless, Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) indicate that there is a research shortage on how teacher education programs promote preservice and in-service teachers in developing positive and reflective professional identities and emphasize the need for teacher education programs to support preservice teachers in developing positive and reflective professional identities. They suggest that teacher education should provide opportunities for self-reflection, collaborative learning, and engagement with the broader educational discourse.

Research has also shown that teachers with a well-developed professional identity are more likely to be resilient, adaptable, and reflective practitioners. They have a clearer understanding of their roles and responsibilities, leading to improved instructional practices and student outcomes (Goddard et al., 2004). Furthermore, a strong professional identity contributes to the formation of a supportive professional community where teachers can collaborate, share best practices, and engage in continuous professional development (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

However, professional identity development is a complex and ongoing process that requires efforts from both individual teachers and the broader educational community. It involves self-reflection, self-evaluation, and a commitment to lifelong learning this is the reason teacher education programs and school practicum programs play crucial roles in fostering a positive professional identity by providing opportunities for pre-service and in-service teachers to develop their knowledge, skills, and pedagogical beliefs (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005).

In conclusion, the development of a strong professional identity is essential for teachers' personal and professional growth, as well as for the advancement of the teaching

profession. It is a dynamic process that requires ongoing support, collaboration, and reflection to ensure that educators can thrive and make a positive impact on their students' lives.

## 6. Professional identity development of preservice teachers

As mentioned earlier, I, as a preservice teacher educator, consider the development of professional identity to be of the highest importance in the field of teacher education. Professional identity development in preservice teachers refers to the process through which individuals training to become teachers, develop a sense of professional identity, which includes their beliefs, values, attitudes, and roles as educators. This phase of development is crucial as it lays the foundation for their future teaching practices and influences their overall professional growth.

Professional identity development is a dynamic and ongoing process that occurs throughout a teacher's career, with initial stages typically occurring during preservice teacher education programs and continuing as teachers engage in reflective practice and in professional learning communities (Kelchtermans, 2009).

According to OECD Education Working Papers (No. 267), the development of a professional identity is particularly important for preservice teachers, who are individuals preparing to enter the teaching profession. The main reasons for developing a professional identity for preservice teachers is important, are the following: it provides clarity, commitment, and motivation, guides their professional preparation, enhances resilience and adaptability, supports networking and collaboration, and facilitates a successful transition into professional practice. It lays the groundwork for their future as educators and contributes to their effectiveness and fulfillment in the teaching profession. This process takes place mostly during preparation programs, preservice teachers engage in various experiences, such as coursework, field placements, and interactions with mentors and peers, which contribute to their professional identity development. These experiences provide opportunities for preservice teachers to reflect on their beliefs about teaching and learning, gain practical skills, and internalize the norms and values of the teaching profession.

Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop (2004), proposed a model that outlines the different stages of professional identity development among teachers. The stages they identified are as follows:

**Exploration:** In this initial stage, individuals are considering or entering the teaching profession. They explore their own motivations, values, and expectations related to teaching. They may have limited experience and knowledge about teaching but are curious and open to learning more.

*Predisposition:* This stage involves the formation of initial beliefs and attitudes towards teaching. Individuals start to develop a sense of what it means to be a teacher and how they fit into that role. They may base their perceptions on personal experiences, observations of others, or societal expectations.

*Preparation:* During this stage, individuals engage in formal teacher education programs. They acquire pedagogical knowledge, skills, and strategies. They learn about educational theories and research, and they start to connect theory with practice through classroom observations and practice teaching. Their professional identity begins to solidify through this formal preparation.

*Induction:* The induction stage occurs when individuals enter the teaching profession as beginning teachers. They confront the realities of the classroom, gain practical experience, and face challenges and successes. They further refine their professional identity through actual teaching practice and interactions with students, colleagues, and the school community.

*Stabilization:* In this stage, teachers have gained a level of competence and experience. They feel more secure and comfortable in their professional role. They develop a sense of personal style and adapt their teaching approaches based on their own reflections and ongoing professional development. They become more self-directed and confident in their abilities.

This model emphasizes the development of professional identity is not a linear process but rather a dynamic and ongoing journey. It is important to note that these stages are not strictly linear and may overlap or occur in different sequences for different individuals. Overall, the model proposed by Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop (2004) provides a framework for understanding the developmental trajectory of professional identity among preservice teachers and can be used by teacher educators to enhance the process of identity formation in preservice teachers

Therefore, teacher education programs need to prioritize the development of professional identity in preservice teachers. This can be achieved through a variety of approaches, such as reflective practices, mentoring and coaching, and targeted professional development programs. By supporting the development of a strong professional identity in pre-service teachers, teacher education programs can help prepare them for successful and fulfilling careers in education.

Furthermore, the intricate nature of teachers' professional identity is characterized by the incorporation of their past and current experiences during the practicum, as well as their personal beliefs, which have a lasting impact on their future activities, behavior, and decision-making as educators. (Chong, Choy & Wong, 2008). Due to the complex nature of this phenomenon, recent research suggests a need for further exploration into how the identity of preservice teachers is formed and transformed throughout their teacher education journey. Researchers argue that examining this process can enhance teacher trainers' (pedagogical instructors) understanding of the challenges faced by preservice teachers and enable them to select and develop materials that align with their needs in teacher education programs (Beijaard, Meijerp & Verloop, 2004).

#### 7. Role of pedagogical guidance in professional identity development: a cross-cultural perspective in Israeli teacher education through the lens of social philosophy

As previously noted, as a preservice teacher's educator, I believe that the development of professional identity holds paramount importance in the field of teacher education. Consequently, in my current research I attempt to investigate the effect of pedagogical guidance models, incorporating feedback, encouragement to experiment, and self-monitoring skills, during internships on preservice teachers' self-efficacy and professional identity. While some studies have identified general factors associated with positive professional identity development, and have found general factors related to positive professional identity, more research is required to pinpoint specific pedagogical practices (Beijaard et al., 2004).

This study also addresses a critical issue in Israeli teacher education, where identity development is often overlooked. Neglecting identity can lead to a disconnect between personal and professional roles (Danielewicz, 2001). While most research on this topic has been conducted in Western countries, there is a need for a cross-cultural examination of pedagogical instructors' roles in professional identity development in the Israeli context .

This research advocates for the inclusion of reflective practices, feedback, and self-efficacy opportunities within teacher education programs to support identity development. This is why, understanding how pedagogical instructors influence professional identity formation and

identifying effective strategies are essential for enhancing teacher education practices (Zeichner, 2010).

In Israel, two mainstream models facilitated by pedagogical instructors are the PDS model and the academy-class model. In addition, this research aims to investigate preservice teachers' perceptions of pedagogical instructors' roles in their professional identity development and explore the long-term effects of this involvement. It addresses the gap in research on the specific impact of pedagogical instructors on identity development.

Understanding these factors will enable more effective guidance and support for preservice teachers, fostering a nurturing and empowering learning environment. The goal is to help preservice teachers become resilient, reflective, and impactful educators. Addressing the limited research on the specific impact of pedagogical guidance models, this study aims to contribute to teacher education program design and policymaking. It highlights the importance of supporting preservice teachers' professional identity development to reduce teacher attrition rates, especially in the critical early years of teaching.

Social philosophy is crucial in the context of current research, on the development of professional identity for several reasons. Firstly, as highlighted in this research, social philosophy provides a theoretical foundation for understanding the interconnectedness of individuals within the broader societal context. It emphasizes the importance of communal aspects, such as shared practices, values, and interactions, which play a significant role in shaping an individual's professional identity.

Secondly, social philosophy encourages a cross-cultural examination of pedagogical practices and their impact on professional identity development. By acknowledging the cultural nuances within teacher education, it promotes a more inclusive and diverse approach to understanding how individuals form their professional identities in various contexts.

Furthermore, social philosophy contributes to the advocacy for reflective practices, feedback mechanisms, and self-efficacy opportunities within teacher education programs. These elements align with the principles of social philosophy by emphasizing the collaborative and dynamic nature of learning within a community. In doing so, social philosophy supports the creation of learning environments that nurture the development of preservice teachers' identities.

In the Israeli context, where identity development in teacher education is often overlooked, social philosophy becomes a tool for addressing this critical issue. Neglecting identity can lead to a disconnection between personal and professional roles, emphasizing the need for a social philosophy lens to bridge this gap and facilitate a more holistic approach to teacher development.

By understanding how pedagogical instructors influence professional identity formation and identifying effective strategies, informed by social philosophy, this research aims to enhance teacher education practices. The ultimate goal is to empower preservice teachers, making them resilient, reflective, and impactful educators who contribute positively to the education system.

In conclusion, the incorporation of social philosophy in this research not only provides a theoretical framework but also emphasizes the importance of considering societal and cultural aspects in shaping professional identity. It aligns with the broader goal of fostering effective teacher education practices and reducing attrition rates by nurturing the development of preservice teachers in a socially and philosophically.

## 8. Conclusion

### *The ripple effect of social philosophy in education*

This article has explored the transformative power of social philosophy in shaping educators and the educational landscape. We have seen how social philosophy equips teachers with a framework for fostering inclusive classrooms, developing a strong professional identity, and navigating ethical dilemmas.

The impact of social philosophy extends beyond individual educators. By fostering a generation of teachers grounded in social justice and cultural responsiveness, we contribute to a more equitable and inclusive educational system. This, in turn, has the potential to ripple outwards, shaping a more just and informed citizenry.

Furthermore, the application of social philosophy in teacher education programs offers a valuable tool for nurturing preservice teachers in the Israeli context, where identity development has been an under-addressed issue. By incorporating reflective practices, self-efficacy opportunities, and a cross-cultural lens, we can bridge the gap between personal and professional roles, empowering future educators to become resilient, reflective, and impactful changemakers.

Finally, social philosophy transcends theory. It serves as a practical guide for cultivating a more inclusive and socially responsible educational approach, ultimately preparing teachers to navigate the complexities of the contemporary world and empower future generations.

### Acknowledgements

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

The author declares no competing interests.

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