Exploratory study of the professional identity of higher education teachers in Ukraine

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Introduction

As part of the transformation in economic and political domains over the last 20 years in Ukraine, the education system has also been under reform (Koshmanova 2006; Shaw, Chapman, and Rumyantseva 2011). Ukraine entered the Bologna Process[1] in 2005 (European Commission 2012), making it relevant to focus on the professional identity of higher education (HE) teachers in the post-Soviet context as the country strives to comply with European Higher Education Area (EHEA) guidelines. Education reform[2] have been necessary for compliance with the Bologna Process and one key element is how teachers see themselves and

1 »By May 2005, the Bologna Process was extended to 45 signatory countries with the inclusion of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine« (European Commission 2012, 77). The meeting was held in Bergen, Norway. The Bologna Process required a radical change in education in Ukraine, in particular changes in the design of the curriculum, the academic calendar, and student grading procedures, as well as greater emphasis on faculty research (Shaw, Chapman and Rumyantseva 2011).

2 In the context of a highly centralized system of education and financial problems caused by the global economic crisis, there was a need to provide systematic instructional redesign or real support for staff to implement the changes prescribed by the Bologna Process. However, this was not provided and caused Bologna Process implementation results that seem patchy to external observers (Shaw, Chapman and Rumyantseva 2011).

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construct or reconstruct their professional identity in the process (Shaw, Chapman, and Rumyantseva 2011).

Despite criticism, within academic circles, of the current HE system and the prevalence of a teacher-centered approach to teaching (Koshmanova 2006; Koshmanova and Hapon 2007; Koshmanova, Hapon, and Carter 2007; Koshmanova and Ravchyna 2008; Kvit 2011; Silova 2009), little attention has been paid to the aspect of professional identity. However it is important to raise the issue of professional identity among university teachers as, according to Shaw, Chapman, and Rumyantseva (2011), »university faculty are the gatekeepers of higher education reform. Their attitudes and response are crucial in determining the odds of successful reform and the modernisation of higher education« (73–74).

Professional identity is an area that has not been much researched in HE (Clarke, Hyde, and Drennan 2013), and Ukraine is not an exception. Some aspects were partly addressed by Koshmanova and Ravchyna (2008) in their research on teaching stereotypes among Ukrainian HE teachers, however their exploration of professional identity is limited to the self-image and self-esteem of practicing university teachers and concentrates mainly on the preparation of prospective teachers. Other studies focus on the impact of educational reforms (Kvit 2011; Koshmanova 2006; Shaw, Chapman, and Rumyantseva 2011), the roots and manifestations of corruption in institutions of higher education (Osipian 2009; Round and Rodgers 2009), and teacher education (Koshmanova, Hapon, and Carter 2007; Koshmanova and Hapon 2007; Koshmanova and Ravchyna 2008; Koshmanova 2006). There is a need to look at teachers' professional identity from a psychological perspective and explore the stories HE teachers create about their professional identity, including how these stories have evolved through their learning and teaching experiences and the relationship between teachers' professional stories and their working environment. This study also discusses the notion of identity as the basic component of teachers' professional identity. I refer to social identity theory, Kelchtermans' (1993) model of professional identity, and Connelly and Clandinin's (1999) approach to

teachers' professional stories, using their findings as the basis for the research at hand.

Conceptual framework

There is no established definition of the concept of identity. Accordingly, »professional identity« is defined differently by various researchers. Teachers' professional identity has been researched more thoroughly only within recent years (Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop 2004). Definitions are comprised of a number of conceptions, among them teachers': self-identification (Gao 2012), role (Ajayi 2011), self-image (Cohen 2008; Thomas and Beauchamp 2011), self-reflection (Warin et al. 2006) and vision for the future (Anspal, Eisenschmidt, and Löfström 2012).

A number of terms are used in the literature to refer to novice teachers and experienced teachers as well as to the cognitive constructs created on the basis of these experiences: ideology, personal theories, principles, perspectives, beliefs, and practical knowledge (Kagan 1992). Clandinin and Connelly (1987, 1999) believe that, mostly, these terms define the same concept and constitute the professional identity of teachers. Moreover, despite the debate about the definition and differentiation of the terms *teachers' beliefs* and *teachers' knowledge*, and the degree of insight into teaching offered by each of the terms (see Calderhead and Robson 1991; Goodman 1988; Holm and Kajander 2012; Nespor 1987), for the purpose of this research, the term *teachers' stories* is used as a key term. This term is synonymous with *narratives* and *personal practical knowledge* as used by Connelly and Clandinin (1999) and encompasses both *beliefs* and *knowledge* about teaching.

Clandinin, Connelly, and colleagues (Clandinin, Connelly, and Craig 1995; Connelly and Clandinin 1988, 1999) were pioneers in the use of language, particularly the narrative approach, to explore the *professional knowledge landscape*. They attempted to frame the understanding of teaching as a profession (Elbaz-Luwisch 2007). Clandinin and Connelly (1988, 1999) emphasized the role of time, space, and interaction in the shaping of a professional identity through the discourses created at work. The stories created by teachers are largely influenced by their context or

working environment within a particular time span and by their interactions with students, colleagues, and administrators. In other words, these stories are formed by a teaching context while they also influence teaching styles and approaches.

Not only the teaching context, but also teachers' beliefs and values play a major role in the teaching process (Clark 1988; Pajares 1992), as they can explain decisions made by teachers and their behavior in the teaching context (Bandura 1986). Moreover, awareness of these beliefs is crucial for the enhancement of teaching practice and re-shaping teaching tasks (Clark 1988; Pajares 1992). These beliefs are rooted in students' consciousness before they even start their university or college lives (Florio-Ruane and Lensmire 1990; Wilson 1990). They are constructed through observation during early school years (Pajares 1992)—a finding that was also corroborated in the current study—and may or may not be re-shaped later during the teaching career (Kagan 1992). The possibility of change depends largely on academic communities, which see themselves as part of a distinct sector of society and provide the community with the language to (re-)shape professional identity (Henkel 2005). Professional identity is not static (Henkel 2000), but rather a dynamic process of re-interpretation of experiences (Clarke, Hyde, and Drennan 2013). Thus, academic identities are »influenced by individual values and beliefs, as well as by institutional culture and positioning« (Billot 2010, 713).

According to social identity theory, which has its origin in the works of Tajfel and later Turner (Hogg and Turner 1985; Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, and Flament 1971; Tajfel 1959, 1969, 1982; J. C. Turner, Brown, and Tajfel 1979), there are two classes of identity: *social identity,* which defines the self in terms of group membership(s) and »the value and emotional significance attached to that membership« (Tajfel 2010, 2), and *personal identity,* which refers to idiosyncratic personal relationship and traits (John C. Turner and Oakes 1989).

In this research, I use Kogan's (2000) perspective on the professional identity of academics, which he defines as being both »individual and social« (210). Kogan (2000) further developed Henkel's (2000) concept of

academic identity as a distinctive individual with his or her conceptual framework, unique history, and identification with the community, adding the idea of an individual embedded within a particular community with its own language, practices, beliefs, and values. Such a perspective is similar to Kelchtermans' (1993) approach to professional identity. Kelchtermans (1993) distinguishes between the *professional self*, the perception teachers have about themselves, and *subjective educational theory*, teachers' belief systems and knowledge about their profession. In my research, I integrate both concepts into my approach to the study of professional identity. Perception of oneself as a teacher does not always coincide with the general social views of the teaching profession that lay the basis for teachers' belief systems; thus individual and social identities are explored.

In addition, drawing on what Connelly and Clandinin (1999) call *personal practical knowledge* or *teachers' professional knowledge landscape,* constituting a »narrative education concept« (1), in this research I explore the stories that HE teachers create about their professional life. In Connelly and Clandinin's understanding, personal practical knowledge is »in the teacher's past experience, in the teacher's present mind and body, and in the future plans and actions. Personal practical knowledge is found in the teacher's practice. It is, for any teacher, a particular way of reconstructing the past and the intentions of the future to deal with the exigencies of a present situation« (Connelly and Clandinin 1988, 25). Moreover, there is a clear distinction between *in-classroom* and *out-of-classroom* sites. The former is a safe environment where teachers practice with their students. The latter refers to institutional prescriptions and instructions that exist outside the classroom as well as to discussions that teachers have once they leave the classroom (Connelly and Clandinin, 1999). This distinction was marked in the interviews conducted with teachers for this study.

Kelchtermans (1993) emphasizes that teachers not only define their present experiences, but also analyze the past and try to envisage the future. This idea is similar to the notion of personal practical knowledge introduced by Connelly and Clandinin (1999). Kelchtermans' (1993) model of

teachers' professional identity consists of five features. The first is *self-image*. This includes the way people describe themselves as teachers as well as descriptions others provide about them. Second is *self-esteem,* or people's evaluation of themselves as teachers. Teachers often associate self-esteem with positive relations with their students and with student feedback. Self-esteem is also achieved through finding a balance between self-image and the intrinsic professional norms applied by teachers. Kelchtermans understands the third feature, *job motivation*, as the reasons that motivate teachers to choose and remain at a certain workplace. The fourth feature is *task perception*. This is the definition teachers ascribe to their job. Task perception is largely built upon work in the classroom and student feedback, as well as cooperation with colleagues. Finally, *future perspective* defines the prospects that teachers see for themselves, their expectations and plans for future development. I used this model to analyze the findings of my study and to gain insight into teachers' stories within the educational context described below.

Identity challenges faced by higher education teachers in Ukraine

Ukraine is (and other CIS nations are) characterized by corruption that has driven down the quality of education after the collapse of Soviet Union (Osipian 2009; Round and Rodgers 2009; Isaxanli 2005; Temple and Petrov 2006). Further characteristics of the Ukrainian educational system are poor funding (Isaxanli 2005; Temple and Petrov 2006; Silova 2009), feminization of the teaching profession, the low popularity of the profession among students, and high staff turnover (Koshmanova and Ravchyna 2008; Kvit 2011; Silova 2009; Koshmanova, Hapon, and Carter 2007; Koshmanova and Hapon 2007; Koshmanova 2006), as well as a decrease in the status of the teaching profession (Silova 2009; Round and Rodgers 2009).

Early attempts to reform the education system in Ukraine in 1993 had two major goals (Koshmanova 2006). The first objective was to build a new national identity. The second goal was to make the education system inherited from Soviet times more democratic. This reform was followed by the Bologna Process in 2005. The European approach was taken as a

model for improving the education system. However, according to some researchers (Koshmanova 2006; Shaw, Chapman, and Rumyantseva 2011), although reforms were introduced and, formally, teachers followed a student-centered approach, a majority of teachers reverted to teacher-centered or »authoritarian« approaches, a method that in their eyes ensured better learning outcomes (Koshmanova 2006). Such an approach is rather conservative, with an absence of interaction and dialogue, and an emphasis on the right answer. The teacher is in control of the learning process and transmits knowledge to the students. The role of the student remains rather passive—to absorb and memorize the information provided.

The Ukrainian higher education system is still highly centralized and there is little academic freedom within universities. Teachers have few opportunities to participate in decision-making processes or to introduce changes into the curriculum (Filiatreau 2011; Kvit 2011; Shaw, Chapman, and Rumyantseva 2011). Teacher morale is also undermined by a number of other factors. Education was highly esteemed in Soviet times, and this view is still present in society. For this reason, teaching was an admirable and very prestigious profession (Round and Rodgers 2009; Silova 2009). During the post-Soviet transition era, political change and economic instability caused a drastic decrease in salaries (Silova 2009). Teachers no longer earned enough to cover their basic needs (Slantcheva 2003, 443) and most teachers sought additional jobs (Round and Rodgers 2009) or stopped teaching (Silova 2009). In addition, low financial rewards caused a feminization of the teaching profession and lowered the profession's status (Silova 2009).

Education policy has been influenced not only by financial, but also by labor market factors. In Ukraine, a higher education degree is necessary to receive employment (Round and Rodgers 2009). Therefore a large number of secondary school graduates apply to universities irrespective of their wish to continue education. As a result, it became common practice in most universities to pay an informal »fee« or receive additional tutoring in order to enter university or to pass university exams (Round and Rodgers 2009). Such methods of augmenting low salaries are met

with understanding in society. Thus corruption, which was popular during Soviet time as a major method of receiving basic goods and services, became legitimized and is perceived as the social norm in higher education institutions (Round and Rodgers 2009).

Furthermore, following the requirements of the Bologna Process, the teaching-oriented culture of universities has now shifted to research. This puts additional pressure on teachers, considering the immense teaching workload and the financial austerity measures (Shaw, Chapman, and Rumyantseva 2011). Teachers are caught in a conflict between external structural changes and an internal course that continues to be practiced within institutions of higher education despite supposed conformity to external expectations (Shaw, Chapman, and Rumyantseva 2011).

Changes introduced by the Bologna Process in practice remain exterior and formal, »the rhetoric of change« is developing faster than reality (Shaw, Chapman, and Rumyantseva 2011, 87). Koshmanova and colleagues (Koshmanova 2006, 2011; Koshmanova and Hapon 2007; Koshmanova and Ravchyna 2008) have stressed that the rather conservative approach to education, with an absence of interaction and dialogue, does not provide students with good professional preparation and makes extrinsic motivation prevalent among students (Ryan and Deci 2000). Thus one aim that should be pursued in Ukraine is »getting rid of authoritarianism« (Koshmanova and Ravchyna 2008). Understanding teachers' professional identity may be a crucial step towards necessary changes.

Methodology

The study at hand was conducted in one of the leading universities in western Ukraine. The institution was selected because it is accredited as a national university and is ranked one of the top universities in foreign language teaching and translation studies.

Participants were selected using a purposive sample; nine female teachers from the same department were interviewed in the period between May

14 and May 22, 2013. All participants started their university teaching careers after Ukraine's independence and received their education before the Bologna Process. The sample had a good balance of those who taught at the university before and after the launch of the Bologna Process, all respondents were employed at the same university department between 2 and 10 years. Participants were chosen so as to have representatives from the same area who share similar teaching methodologies. Also, participants were expected to have at least two years of teaching experience at the university so that they could retrospectively trace their perception of themselves as teachers. All the respondents teach English as a second language, which provides a very specific professional identity. However, due to an immense departmental workload, all also teach a number of other courses with larger numbers of students than in regular language classes. Moreover, some of the participants have their own lecture courses, providing them with a broader understanding of the teaching process and contributing to their academic identity. On average, each participant taught 14 classes per week and each class lasts 80 minutes. The number of classes did not influence salary. The respondents involved in the study have the same academic rank despite varying work experience.

Because sampling, in particular purposive sampling, is conducted using nonprobability design and because of the limited number of participants, representation and generalizability are restricted (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias 2008). The main goal of this qualitative exploratory research was to gain insight into how social experience is established and how it acquires meaning (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). It is believed that narrative inquiry into and thematic analysis of teachers' professional identity (or stories) can reveal aspects that are not elicited in any other way (Connelly and Clandinin 1999; Kelchtermans 1993). Therefore semi-structured interviews were used to elicit responses and examine the stories university teachers create about their professional identities. My research interest was in how these stories have evolved during the course of the teachers' learning and teaching experiences and in the relationship between teachers' professional stories and their working environment.

Each interview lasted approximately one hour. All interviews were conducted in English as all of the participants have been proficient in the language for at least the last 15 years and use it regularly in teaching and translation.

Interview transcripts were analyzed using a data-driven or inductive method of thematic analysis to explore semantic themes on the explicit level and latent themes on the interpretative level (Braun and Clarke 2006).

Findings

The data suggest that the stories teachers create about their practice vary from teacher to teacher, revealing that even within the same department and under the same working conditions, attitudes, values, and approaches to teaching may be different. The analysis revealed seven main themes: 1) subject-centered approach, 2) student-centered approach, 3) the concept of teachers as specialists, 4) early ideas about teaching, 5) development of the teacher's image during their career, 6) cooperation with colleagues, and 7) the relationship between institutional rules and the teacher's professional identity.

What stories do university teachers create about their current professional identity?

All of the participants raised common issues or problems during the interviews. However, their perceptions of and attitudes towards the issues were quite different. Analysis of convergent and divergent features of participants' stories revealed three initial themes that correspond with teaching approaches (subject-centered approach, student-centered approach, and the teacher as a specialist). Each of these three themes/ approaches includes similar values, beliefs, attitudes, and visions and was further explored following Kelchtermans' (1993) model of teachers' professional identity. A comparative analysis of the three approaches is provided in Figure 1.

Kelchtermans' model (1993)	**Teachers' descriptions of their professional identity**		
	Subject-centered approach (K.M. and Z.O)	**Student-centered approach** (B.R., A.S., and C.W.)	**Teacher-as-specialist approach** (M.C., P.S., C.V., and T.F.)
Self-image	A practitioner in the field	Directs students through their learning path	Organizer of the teaching process
	Researcher	Motivates students	Motivates students
	Competent in the subject	A guide	An advisor
	Open to cooperation	A conductor	A mentor
	No longer an authority in the classroom	A leader	A leader
	Approachable	A monitor	A teacher has to treat each student equally and with respect
	An assistant in the learning process, ready to help	A director	
	Sees students as part of the equation and involves them in the teaching process	Light at the end of the tunnel	
	Moderator and facilitator of	Provides knowledge	

	teaching process		
	Compassionate	Teaching is an inborn quality	
	Self-development	Demanding	
Self-esteem	Feeling of satisfaction when your students approach you after some time to thank you and/or ask for advice	Students' achievements are essential	Students' results are an indicator of good work*
	Feeling of enjoyment when students approach after classes to ask questions	Students' positive feedback is important	
	Feeling enjoyment when you can share your experience with students	Students' progress is an indicator of good work	
		Students' appreciation and feedback are vital for work	
		Treat student success as their own	
Task perception	Share experience	Find specific approach to each group of students	Achieve the goals set for the course
	Help students to reach their full potential	Use diverse approaches	Achieve the objectives of the course
	Teach students to be selective about infor-	Adapt teaching to students' needs	Create motivating, friendly, and favorable environment

	mation		
		Create friendly environment	Teach where to look for information
		Adjust teaching methods to make students interested	Make students interested in the subject
		Give students the initiative in the learning process	Teach students to work as a team
			Teach how to learn efficiently
			Create space for discussion during class
Job motives	Cooperation with students	Love of teaching	Love teaching and work with students
	Stability of the job	Teaching is a state job	Teaching is a prestigious job
	Prestigious profession	Absence of a better offer	Trying out the profession
	Love of the research process	Influence of parents and husband	
	Convenient schedule		
	This job allows the combination of work and passion: it gives space for research and opportunity to share it in teaching		
Future perspective	To share passion for translation	To have better working conditions	To be less in control during classes
	To give students more practical knowledge	University should provide better facilities	To introduce more purpose-oriented classes
	To continue research	More up-to-date equipment and software would make	To better organize and structure classes

	teaching more efficient	
University should provide better facilities		To start a tailored course on teaching English to students in different fields and prepare textbooks for them
To give lectures on the topic of interest		

**Student feedback was not mentioned by any of the participants throughout the interview.*

Fig. 1: A subject-centered approach, student-centered approach and teacher-as-specialist approach according to Kelchtermans' model

Despite the belief that the teacher-centered approach to teaching prevails in Ukrainian HE (Koshmanova 2006; Koshmanova and Ravchyna 2008), the data revealed that other approaches are becoming more popular. Although the boundaries between the approaches are not rigid, two out of nine participants clearly exhibited attitudes and made emphases that gave reason to categorize them as teachers who value ***subject-centered*** teaching.

One of the main characteristics of the subject-centered approach is academics' love of what they teach (Rowland 2008; Palmer 2010). The student and the teacher are brought together around particular disciplinary interests (Morrison-Saunders and Hobson 2013) and share their intellectual interest by engaging in a conversation in which the learner is an »inquirer« (Ashworth 2004) who interacts with a subject. The teacher is there to support students by guiding them through difficulties and by motivating them (Morrison-Saunders and Hobson 2013).

For interviewees K.M. and Z.O., there are no spatial borders between in-classroom and out-of-classroom times. They make their passion and their interests the center of their teaching and of in-classroom life. Throughout the whole interview, this aspect was very pronounced and was reflected in all their answers.

Both teachers emphasized that sharing their research interests and their experiences as practicing translators is one of their main aims. Their most commonly stated aim was to teach students how to learn and how to make use of the information that is available from a variety of sources. As K.M. put it:

> *Right now there is so much information around and it's accessible at a tip of your finger. […] The teachers' role now is maybe, helping students to make sense of this information and to show them how to use it.*

Her image of herself as a facilitator is strongly reflected in her practice. Her main aim is not to pass on knowledge, as is the stereotypical view of teachers in Ukraine (Koshmanova and Ravchyna 2008), but to provide tools so that students can work individually. Z.O. has a similar perception of her role as a teacher. Apart from enabling her students to be more independent in their studies, she mentioned that for her »*teaching is to help students to open their potential.*«

Kelchtermans (1993) highlights that each teacher has their own personal program and measures to evaluate students' performance. Teaching is believed to be an emotional profession (Hargreaves 1998) that is heavily reliant on student feedback and on the opinions of colleagues (Warin et. al. 2006). For Z.O., her students' feedback is an indicator that helps her to evaluate her work and that inspires her to continue.

Apart from sharing their passion for the subject with students, other reasons for staying in the profession given by both teachers were the convenience of the academic year schedule and the working atmosphere, which is not as stressful as working »*for example, in business.*« Moreover, both view a teaching position as prestigious, despite the decrease in the status of the profession. This may be explained by their preference for stability, which they believe their current job provides.

Nevertheless, their working environment (Anspal, Eisenschmidt, and Löfström 2012) and stereotypes about the role of teachers (Koshmanova and Ravchyna 2008) both had an observable influence on their self-description as teachers. Z.O. mentioned that as she is young and not very tall she found it »*very surprising that students almost always listened to me*

quietly and never questioned my, so to say, authority in the teaching room.« Despite the fact that she emphasizes the importance of cooperation, the concept of the teacher as an imposing figure is rooted in her imagination. A similar descriptive statement was made by K.M. At the beginning of her career—and even now—she viewed entering the classroom as an intrusion into her students' pre-formed group. It should be mentioned that students in Ukraine study in the same groups during their undergraduate studies, and by graduation form a tightly-knit group. They do not necessarily become friends, but they spend a lot of time together and know each other quite well. Thus her feeling may be explained by her wish to be accepted by the group in order to be able to openly share her knowledge and passion.

Three other participants (B.R., A.S. and C.W.) focused mainly on students and teaching approaches during the interview. These teachers use a *student-centered approach* to teaching and concentrate on the needs and interests of the learner (Brown 2008). The main goal of such an approach is to create a favorable, supportive environment and make learning engaging in order to deepen students' knowledge (Morrison-Saunders and Hobson 2013).

Dynamics within a class largely depends on the students, and teachers very often find ways to help their particular group that vary greatly from textbook examples (Clandinin and Connelly 1996). All participants stressed that each group of students they teach is different, as are the students within the group. That is why they see their main goal as exploring ways of teaching that are efficient and suitable for a particular group. For these teachers, teaching means creating a productive learning environment in which students can fulfil their potential. They agreed that experience and self-improvement are helpful for dealing with issues that arise.

The image that the three teachers within this group have about themselves is noticeably different from the previous group. All of the participants in this group view the teacher as a leader, a guide or a director of the learning process. The teacher's role is more dominant and central in comparison with the previous group, although they also see their efforts

as directed at students. This group views the teacher not only as a leader, but also as a person who provides knowledge and shows practical ways of applying the information given to students. They believe that their experience outside the university as interpreters, translators, and tutors gives them more perspective and a better idea of which aspects might be important for their students after graduation. Student feedback, which was central for the previous group of teachers, is also important for this student-centered group of teachers, but is not a main feature of their stories.

A striking characteristic was found in this group of teachers. C.W. described a teacher not just as a knowledgeable person, but also as

> *somebody that students admire and look up to. […] [the] appearance of a teacher plays an important part. Teacher is a person that students look at with wide-opened eyes and really want to copy and admire.*

For her, appearance is as important as knowledge and experience. This may be explained by the belief in society that teachers are enthusiasts who have a low income (Round and Rodgers 2009; Silova 2009). Appearance may serve as an indicator of higher status and of a respected profession. Teachers in this group admit that they feel undervalued. As A.S. put it:

> *Well, I can't see that I occupy some special place in society. But, generally, teachers as category should have a certain role because, without teachers, independently, to get some education, it's next to impossible.*

All of the teachers with a student-centered approach believe that teachers play a crucial role in the learning process.

Motives to stay in the profession varied within this group. Most of the teachers said that they enjoy teaching. Another strong motive is their perception of the job as stable and secure. Such perceptions coincide with the previous group. However, while teachers from the previous group did not consider that a priority, for this group it is one of the main reasons to stay in the profession. B.R. said that she is a postgraduate student working on her dissertation and finds it difficult to leave the

position due to her parents' pressure. It was quite surprising that she did not mention her research work throughout the whole interview. Despite the low salary, all three participants agreed that the convenient schedule and summer holidays are another reason to stay.

Some teachers set clear spatial borders between their in-classroom and out-of-classroom environments (Connelly and Clandinin 1999). They live according to stories created by the institution and sustain these narratives as a community, supporting one another in their common beliefs and values. The third group of teachers (T.F., P.S., D.V., and M.C.) was characterized by their vision of teaching as, primarily, a job. Unlike the teachers of the student-centered approach, who adjust their approach to students' needs, teachers from this group adjust their own stories to the instructions and stories that are created by the university. In other words, they are living a *specialist teachers' story* (Connelly and Clandinin 1999). Their approach is based more on methodologies and techniques.

For all participants within this group, a teacher is an organizer of the teaching process and a mentor, although the amount of control that teachers are willing to take during class varies among the teachers in the group. However they take more control than the teachers with subject-centered and student-centered approaches. As D.V., in her self-description of herself as a teacher, said: »*I'm more confident with knowing that I'm the boss. […] I'm leading them, I'm organizing them.*« For her, the teacher is a key figure in the learning process. She is a person who is »*self-organized, disciplined, and punctual,*« who takes the responsibility for the teaching/learning process and creates a working environment.

M.C. has a similar view, but she also thinks that this role should change so that the teacher is more of a mediator. Nevertheless, it can be seen that for M.C., the teacher still has a leadership position in the classroom, despite her belief that teachers should take less control and be mediators. Discrepancies in her descriptions of teachers became even more marked later during the conversation when she said,

> *Well, probably I would agree with the traditional view of a teacher in our society that it is not only a person who teaches the material and keeps to the syllabus and generally to the curriculum of the university but that is a person who also, teaches […] about the society and how to behave in society.*

This vision of a teacher as an advisor and a role model was mentioned by the other two teachers as well.

These teachers' self-descriptions are closely related to ideas expressed by Sukhomlinskiĭ (1981), who says that a teacher has to combine upbringing and instruction. A teacher is viewed as a person whose objective is not only to share knowledge, but also to promote morality. Nevertheless, it was interesting to observe that for the subject-centered group of teachers, the focus has shifted. For example, K.M. believes that students are »*conscious people*« and her task is not to teach them how to behave, but to discuss »*more important issues*« which are related to the subject. So her understanding of a teacher as a »role model« is quite different and is more related to the subject than to issues of upbringing.

Task perception was interwoven with self-evaluation. One of the main criteria for all the teachers from this group was to achieve the objectives they set at the beginning of the class. When the goals were achieved, it was an indicator that a class had been a success. Student feedback, mentioned by the first and the second groups, was not touched upon by this group during the interview. Nevertheless, all teachers from the third group mentioned that one of the main reasons for them to stay in the profession is that they enjoy teaching. Thus, on the one hand, teachers express a wish to create a positive context, whilst, on the other hand, they want to control the whole process and feel the need to manage it from beginning to end.

The three thematic approaches delineated above are the result of the participants' own learning experiences, their collaboration with colleagues, and their working conditions, as described in detail below.

How have these stories evolved through the teachers' learning and teaching experiences?

Teachers enter their careers with internalized ideas about good and bad teaching that they gain during their school years (Kagan 1992; Pajares 1992). It was interesting to observe that when I asked participants to share their very first memories about the teaching profession—theme four: *early ideas about teaching*—stories about their future profession were rather diverse, and for most participants not closely related to teaching.

However most participants mentioned that they did sometimes model themselves on their first teachers. For some, the first experience with teaching was not positive. For example, C.W. stated »*I didn't really like my first teacher.*« Despite this, she still enjoyed imagining herself as a teacher: »*Just somehow naturally I really liked teaching. I did play with toys, I placed everybody in a class.*« Other participants' early stories were diverse. A.S. said »*when I was a child, I was dreaming of becoming a musician.*« B.R. and D.V. also mentioned that they did not want to become teachers.

Nevertheless, for varying reasons, all of the participants have been in the profession for the last two to ten years. Most participants said that, as high achievers, they were offered a position at the university and due to the lack of other options they accepted the offer. All participants agreed that their school and, partly, university learning experience influence their teaching style.

The fifth theme—*development of the image of teachers during their career*—covers several aspects of image development: sources of the teachers' ideas about good teaching, reflections on the early stages of their careers, and how their approach to teaching changed over the time.

All of the participants said that their first teaching experience was very different from what they expected and made them realize that their education did not sufficiently prepare them for teaching practice. This may be explained partly by the lack of connection between the theory taught during classes on pedagogics and the practical application of this information (Aitken and Mildon 1991). Lacking support as regards their developmental needs, teachers felt they were in a »sink or swim« posi-

tion. That is the major reason why they were forced to follow the models of teaching they experienced as pupils or students rather than reflect on their theoretical background and their own practical experience. K.M. mentioned that she had to »*blindly*« continue with her teaching, asking for advice from her colleagues and relying largely on her experience during her own time as a student, and the approaches to teaching and learning she met with at the time. This story was similar for other participants, who however said that their colleagues eagerly shared their experience. Teachers often mentioned that they have had to change or adopt the image they had before their career because the real conditions of work made them question their earlier narratives.

Most participants acknowledged that their beliefs and approaches remained largely the same despite what they were taught in the context of the Bologna Process and that they relied heavily on observation of their school and university teachers in order to create their own image of what good teaching is. K.M., Z.O., and C.W. mentioned that their experience of studying abroad made a great impact on their understanding of teaching and their practice in general. They said that they try to apply some of the methods experienced abroad in their work. The influence of such different positive contexts (Anspal, Eisenschmidt, and Löfström 2012) made them reflect on their teaching practice and re-shape their approaches to teaching.

One of the reasons teachers hold to their previous belief systems can be explained through the concept of »schemata.« Every new experience and new knowledge acquired undergoes a kind of filtering process and is viewed through the prism of a pre-established system of beliefs (Pajares, 1992). In order to modify the existing belief system, novices undergo a number of personal changes within a community.

What is the relation between teachers' professional stories and their working environment?

It was noticed that participants often referred to »authorities,« for example, colleagues and leaders in the field (Kelchtermans 1993). Teachers balance their self-descriptions (ibid.) by having discussions with

colleagues and comparing their own teaching approaches to that of others. This observation constitutes theme six: *cooperation with colleagues*. The information received from an authoritative figure is later made congruent with pre-existing practice and is interwoven into a teacher's personal story. This idea was stressed by Hollingsworth (1989), who mentioned the importance of cooperation between novice teachers and their senior colleagues, as it helps to modify the beliefs a young teacher holds at the beginning of her career. Novice teachers may feel cognitive dissonance because their own self-image and beliefs do not coincide with those of more experienced and practiced colleagues.

Participants with a subject-centered approach or story (K.M. and Z.O.) mentioned that they consider cooperation with colleagues to be »*perfunctory*« and »*mostly limited to discussion of some paper work*« (K.M.). Moreover, as Z.O. said, every teacher has a personal style and »*cooperation is not very much invited there.*« These two teachers created stories about the environment at the department that differed from the other participants as regards sharing information and the usefulness of cooperation. They stressed that collaboration with colleagues does not have much influence on their teaching style. Z.O. and K.M. create their in-classroom stories, but prefer not to share them in their out-of-classroom space, as they potentially may not be understood (Connelly and Clandinin 1999). However, teachers who relied largely on the methods used by their colleagues and who followed institutional rules found the discussions useful. Teachers with a student-centered approach were more optimistic about their working environment and their relations with colleagues. Teachers from that group believed that such conversations are useful. The third group of teachers, with a specialist teacher's story, considered such cooperation to be an essential part of their teaching process. They stressed the importance of being able to discuss different in-classroom stories, to »*share materials and experience*« (M.C.).

All of the participants mentioned that they »*faced the reality*« (K.M.) of teaching. In addition to difficulties regarding the lack of knowledge, preparation, and self-confidence mentioned above, it was striking to hear Z.O. say that »*students are not that problematic as many colleagues try to paint*

them and as I used to think as a beginner.« This example shows how some of the novice teachers re-shape their perception of teachers and the teaching process through reflection, and construct an identity that is contrary to their colleagues' stories. However, most of the participants were open to the stories they heard at their workplace, and adapted to them.

Apart from the influence of the people teachers work with, the institution's story has a strong effect on teachers' identity. As Connelly and Clandinin (1999) mention, their working environment often makes teachers stressed, hardened, and resistant to change. This leads to theme seven: *relationship between institutional rules and the teacher's professional identity*.

Any institutional change can make teachers feel that their professional identity is being violated or threatened. It can make them resist the change and feel insecure (Connelly and Clandinin 1999). However the Bologna Process brought a lot of institutional changes and participants did not express feelings of frustration or insecurity. Six participants mentioned that the major change they see is an increase of administrative paperwork. For example, K.M. described the new system by saying »*the road to hell is paved with good intentions.*« She further explained that »*in fact, we're still working according to this, you know, Soviet notions of what education should be.*« A.S.'s perception of alterations to education is similar, »*I would say that maybe the whole idea was ok. But generally our reality is different and it should have been tailored more, somehow, to our reality.*« Three teachers (C.W., P.S., and Z.O.) mentioned that they find certain aspects of the new system helpful. For example, C.W. and T.F. said that they like the system of grades; »*I like to give students grades according to the new system of grading. That's the only effect of Bologna process that we got*« (C.W.). However, D.V. mentioned that new grading is »*really confusing for students and teachers.*« P.S., in contrast, considers the new reform to be beneficial for students as it requires them to have more tests, and serves as a good preparation and review for exams.

Despite their diverse attitudes towards and perceptions of the Bologna Process, all participants said that it does not influence their approach to teaching and does not prevent them from following their previous practice. For them, the major change was the increased amount of

paperwork and the change of the grading system. However this made them feel insecure about the education system as a whole rather than about the Bologna Process. All participants expressed concern and distress about the fact that they have no voice in creating curriculum, although they admitted that very often they take a risk and introduce their own topics rather than following the written rules. They also feel powerless and unimportant when it comes to administrative issues, as their voice is not taken into account. Another theme expressed by all teachers from all three groups was low salary and lack of space and resources. These aspects noticeably affected the morale of the teachers.

Discussion

Koshmanova and colleagues (Koshmanova and Hapon 2007; Koshmanova and Ravchyna 2008; Koshmanova 2006), in their study of university teachers and in particular of Ukrainian stereotypes about teaching and issues of national identity, stress that the teaching approach in Ukraine is rather teacher-centered or authoritarian. They mention that, despite this general tendency, attempts are still made to make classes more interactive. Nevertheless this issue was not explored in their studies as such attempts are occasional and not systematic.

The findings of my research suggest that there has been a shift, at least within the department studied, in teachers' perception of the relations between teachers and students, as well as a desire to improve the teaching environment. It was observed that even the third group of teachers, categorized as perpetuating the idea of teachers as specialists, were aware of the control they take in the classroom.

The stories created by teachers vary greatly, from feeling that the profession is their vocation and an emphasis on the nobility of the job to the perception of work as a set of duties, obligations, and tasks. Such views of the teaching profession are not unique to Ukrainian university teachers and were also observed and described by Connelly and Clandinin (1999). The stories teachers live by influence their approach to teaching, their cooperation with colleagues, their motivation, and their efficacy.

Three types of stories were identified: subject-centered, student-centered, and centered around professional specialization.

The data suggests that for the subject-centered group of teachers, the spatial borders of teaching (Connelly and Clandinin 1999) are erased. These teachers concentrate on the subject matter and build relations with their students as equal participants in the education process. They facilitate learning rather than control it. However, the influence of the teacher-centered model was still observed in their responses. For both Z.O. and K.M., relations between teachers and students are in a kind of opposition, with students are on one side and teachers on the other, albeit not as strongly as for the other two groups. However, with more experience, the two teachers with a subject-centered approach managed to create space for interaction with students.

The second group of teachers—characterized as taking a student-centered approach—views the role of the teacher as dominant and central in terms of organizing the learning process and selecting the information to be provided and discussed. However, all participants who took a student-centered approach highlighted the importance of their experience as practicing translators and interpreters and its influence on their approach to teaching. Moreover, they emphasized the need to upgrade equipment and facilities for students' training and specified the changes necessary so that students might acquire skills more relevant in the current market. This may serve as an indicator that the nature of their profession made these teachers more practice-oriented. Teachers in this group, as practicing translators and interpreters, clearly see which practical skills students need. All of them admitted that they risk not adhering to the curriculum and go against institutional rules in order to provide students with more relevant information and situations that they may face in their future careers.

The third group of participants, categorized as teachers who see themselves as specialists, perceive their job as a set of goals to be achieved. They are more controlling in their relations with students. Three out of four participants from this group mentioned that they do their best to treat all students equally and with respect. They emphasized the im-

portance of motivating students and creating a productive environment, however the distance or border between teachers and students is quite strong. Also, the analysis of the interviews showed that teachers from this group believe that one of their tasks is to determine students' »moral qualities« (Sukhomlinskiĭ 1981, 1).

No direct influence of age or number of years in the profession could be observed on participants' teaching approach or the stories they created. However, it was noticeable that international experience, namely studying abroad, influenced teachers' reflection on their practice and their teaching style. In addition, most participants mentioned that they lacked workshops or trainings on teaching methods, which may serve as an indicator of their openness to self-development and change.

A larger study involving more participants and implementing the same methodology may be able to explore whether the stories created by teachers vary in various departments within the same university. Moreover, inclusion of universities from different parts of Ukraine could explore the issue of the influence of the perception of national identity on teachers' self-image and, consequently, teaching approaches. Finally, equal participation of male and female university teachers would be of benefit for a more representative sample.

Conclusions

The topic of teachers' professional identity in Ukraine has not been given the attention it deserves and remains under-researched. This study represents a first attempt to gain insight into teachers' professional lives from a psychological perspective. The study revealed that teachers follow their schoolteachers' and, to a lesser extent, university teachers' approaches to teaching, as well as asking colleagues for advice. As some participants mentioned, their university courses on pedagogy did not sufficiently prepare them for entering the teaching profession. These may be the reasons for the teacher-centered or authoritarian approach still being practiced, as observed by Koshmanova (2006). As teachers do not have alternative experiences, they adhere to the approaches they experienced themselves. However, all participants acknowledged that

they have additional jobs, and for some their university career is not their main job. Non-teaching experience allows them to earn additional income and to get a better understanding and vision of the teaching materials that should be provided as well as the approach to use to share this information.

All participants admitted that the major noticeable change in their work brought by the Bologna Process was additional administrative paperwork and the change in the grading system. However, they agreed that it did not influence their approach to teaching. Moreover, despite the emphasis of Bologna requirements on research work, most of the participants said that this did not have much effect on them. Due to their immense teaching workload and the need to take on additional work outside the university, they have no time to work on their research.

It may be concluded that despite a general tendency that is a legacy of Soviet times, there has been a shift in teaching approaches within the department under study. The research demonstrated that within the department there are at least three different approaches to teaching: subject-centered, student-centered, and centered around specialization. As the boundary between the approaches is not rigid, more favorable working conditions and increased motivation, as well as professional training for teachers, could be a trigger for changes in teaching approaches to create more space for students to develop and explore their potential, gain better professional expertise, and develop critical thinking skills.

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