Understanding your professional identity – a practical introduction

Webinar handout

by Nelson Arditto and Şirin Soyöz Yılmaz

Introduction

In this webinar, we explore how we see ourselves as teachers, what shapes our professional identity and how it changes over time. This handout summarises the key ideas and six practical activities to try on your own or with colleagues.

How do you see yourself as a teacher?

Which statement best describes you right now? Experience is not the same as expertise, and you may see yourself in more than one stage.

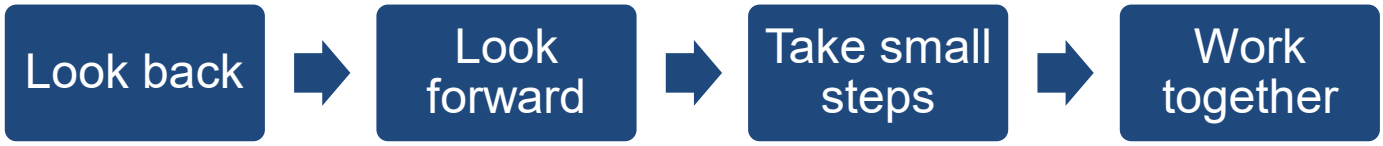
How I see myself	Description
1. **Emerging**	New to teaching; building confidence and classroom experience.
2. **Developing**	Building skills through experience, CPD and feedback.
3. **Proficient**	Confident, experienced and able to draw on a broad professional repertoire.
4. **Specialist**	Developing expertise in specific areas and contributing to the profession.
5. **Teacher of teachers/mentor**	Mentoring, training, researching or supporting other teachers.
6. **Undecided**	My professional identity varies by context or is still developing.

What is professional identity?

Five ideas from the webinar:

- Building a professional identity takes time and involves deliberate choices.
- Everyone has a different pathway, e.g. state schools, language schools, freelance work.
- It is not fixed: it changes as we take on new roles, such as mentoring or teacher training.
- Career stage is not simply about age or years of experience.
- Communities of practice strengthen our sense of belonging.
- It is shaped by our values and beliefs about teaching and learning.

Activities to help you explore your professional identity



- **Stepping stones (looking back).** Draw a timeline of the moments, people and decisions that have shaped you as a teacher. What does it say about you?
- **Letter to self (looking forward).** Imagine you are where you want to be in five years. Write to your present self: what did you achieve and what choices did you make?
- **AI career coach.** Ask an AI tool to act as your career coach, interview you and suggest a CPD action plan for your career stage. Avoid sharing personal details.
- **Vision board.** Put your goals on a board in words and pictures and keep it where you see it every day.
- **Mini-actions.** Choose one small action for the next month, e.g. joining an online community or trying something new in class.
- **Inquiry-based peer observation.** Find a colleague interested in the same area of teaching. Take turns to observe each other, then discuss what you learnt.

Resources

- Explore the TeachingEnglish professional development pathway for videos, podcasts and articles: https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/professional-development/teachers/professional-development-pathways/pathways-understanding-my
- Join the Facebook group 'British Council Courses for Teachers'. https://www.facebook.com/groups/1165496060743113

A recording of Sirin and Nelson's webinar can be found here: https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/teachers/webinars/understanding-your-professional-identity-webinars