



***Perception of Oneself as a Teacher from the Perspective
of Individuals Retraining for the New Profession***
***Postrzeżenie siebie w roli nauczyciela w perspektywie osób
przekwalifikowujących się do zawodu***

ABSTRACT

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE: The purpose of this article is to identify and describe the self-perceptions of those retraining and preparing for the teaching profession.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS: The research problem was formulated as follows: how do postgraduate students who are retraining to become teachers perceive themselves as future teachers? Data were obtained from postgraduate students who wrote essays on *Why did I choose to study teacher training and what kind of teacher would I like to be?* The method of qualitative text analysis was used to analyze the essays, which were treated as secondary data.

THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION: The first part of the article focuses on the importance of positive self-image and self-concept in motivation for development, as they strengthen self-esteem, and translate it into attitudes and inner containment. In the empirical section, based on Leary's concept, three main categories were identified.

RESEARCH RESULTS: The analysis shows that the respondents' project of themselves in the professional role of a teacher is declarative only. The categories and qualities that the respondents mentioned refer both to their negative (by contrast) and positive school experiences. Positive self-perception through the characteristics described, experiences of working in other professions and passions all motivate positive work on oneself and are a condition for becoming a teacher.

CONCLUSION, INNOVATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS: In the final conclusions, a proposal was made for a new way of recruiting and temporary qualification for the teaching profession. Attention was paid to strengthening intrinsic motivation to work on one's development as a prerequisite for preparing for work and becoming a teacher.

→ **KEYWORDS:** **TEACHER, PROFESSIONAL ROLE, SELF-PERCEPTION, RETRAINING, MOTIVATION FOR SELF-DEVELOPMENT**

STRESZCZENIE

CEL NAUKOWY: Celem artykułu jest określenie i opisanie sposobu postrzegania siebie przez osoby będące w toku przekwalifikowywania się i przygotowywania do wykonywania zawodu nauczyciela.

PROBLEM I METODY BADAWCZE: W realizowanym projekcie sformułowano problem badawczy: Jak postrzegają siebie w zawodzie nauczyciela słuchacze studiów podyplomowych będących w toku przekwalifikowywania się do jego wykonywania? Dane pozyskano od słuchaczy studiów podyplomowych, którzy napisali eseje nt. *Dlaczego wybrałem studia z zakresu kształcenia do zawodu nauczyciela i jakim nauczycielem chciałbym być?* Do analizy esejów, które potraktowano jako dane zastane, wykorzystano metodę jakościowej analizy tekstu.

PROCES WYWODU: W pierwszej części artykułu skoncentrowano się na znaczeniu pozytywnego wyobrażenia i myślenia o sobie w motywacji do rozwoju. To bowiem wzmacnia poczucie własnej wartości, przekłada na postawy i wewnętrzsterowność. W części empirycznej, bazując na przyjętej koncepcji Leary'ego, wyodrębniono trzy główne kategorie.

WYNIKI ANALIZY NAUKOWEJ: Z przeprowadzonych analiz wynika, że projekt siebie w roli zawodowej nauczyciela badanych lokuje się w sferze deklaratywnej. Wskazane kategorie i opisujące je cechy są utrwaleniem znaczących, jak i opozycją do negatywnych doświadczeń zapamiętanych z perspektywy ucznia. Pozytywne postrzeganie siebie przez pryzmat opisywanych cech, doświadczenia pracy w innych zawodach oraz pasje motywują do pozytywnej pracy nad sobą i są warunkiem stawania się nauczycielem.

WNIOSKI, INNOWACJE, REKOMENDACJE: We wnioskach końcowych przedstawiono propozycję nowego sposobu rekrutowania i kwalifikowania czasowego do zawodu nauczyciela. Zwrócono uwagę na wzmacnianie motywacji wewnętrznej do pracy nad własnym rozwojem jako warunek konieczny do przygotowania do pracy i stawania się nauczycielem.

→ **SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** NAUCZYCIEL, ROLA ZAWODOWA, POSTRZEGANIE SIEBIE, PRZEKVALIFIKOWANIE, MOTYWACJA DO SAMOROZWOJU

Introduction

The school of today needs a teacher who is open to change, able to creatively adapt to it, who is emotionally stable, as well as friendly, empathetic, and guided by specific values (Parzęcki, 2000, pp. 79–92). In times of change, teachers receive many guidelines based on the ethics of the profession and social expectations of their role. The tasks that are expected from the teacher, based on different expectations and duties, continue to expand and are so diverse – in response to the changing educational reality and world – that their number is virtually unlimited. It can be said that these expectations stem from the social understanding of the teaching profession, in which to be means

[...] to be a master, as well as to strive for pedagogical mastery; it is a development that combines professionalism and the vocation which is indispensable for the transmission of values, and role models, enabling the education of the mind, body and spirit of the students so that they do not get caught up in the universalism of global activities (Kabat, 2016, p. 168).

To implement these tasks, the teacher must have certain predispositions and to follow guidelines that will help him/her strive to “be a master.” Smołalski argues that in this pursuit the teacher should become and be the creator of his/her own pedagogical talent; know his/her own weaknesses and flaws; create his/her own configuration of values; make the student his/her partner; make sure not to start acting odd an early age; try to be an effective educator; and regularly improve himself/herself as a carrier of values (Smołalski, 2009, pp. 58–78). Keeping in the spirit of this thinking, R. Kwaśnica’s (2010) description of the teacher as one who not is but still “becomes” is most appropriate here.

From the above list of expectations of teachers, their qualities, guidelines for their work, there emerges an image of the ideal teacher. The purpose of this article is to identify and describe the self-perception of those who are in the process of retraining and preparing for the teaching profession, and who already have an alternative professional education and are working in careers different from the one for which they are training.

Self-perception as a motivating factor in the teaching profession

The starting point in thinking about the importance of how prospective teachers perceive themselves in the role of the ideal teacher is the psychological concept assuming that the self-image of each person consists of a number of images of the self, some of which may be connected with one’s current roles, and others with a future role “that is, with who we would like to become, or who we should become, or even who we are afraid to become” (Ostafińska-Molik, 2014, p. 80).

Perception can be defined as “a process of active interpretation of sensory data using contextual cues, attitudes and prior knowledge” (Nęcka et al., 2006, p. 278). From a psychological point of view, it is not just the sum of impressions, nor is it a simple reproduction of the features of the physical world (Ostafińska-Molik, 2014, p. 62). Particularly significant for the theoretical analysis in this article is C. Rogers’ view of self-perception. According to him, self-perception can be understood as “an organized, conceptually coherent whole, consisting of perceptions of one’s qualities and perceptions of one’s attitude toward other people and various aspects of life, including the qualities attributed to them” (Mądrzycki, 2002, p. 207). Two perspectives of self-definition proposed by B. Galas and T. Lewowicki (1991) are a significant development of this take on perception. The first view, which stresses the cognitive nature of the mechanisms of the self, holds that knowledge of the self consists of concepts and beliefs that form an organized system of information, that is, a system of beliefs about the self. The second view, which emphasizes both the cognitive and evaluative nature of the self, posits that an individual can perceive him/

herself, his/her own behavior, form ideas about himself/herself, and also evaluate himself/herself (positively or negatively). Self-evaluation and self-description are of utmost importance in defining oneself. The former is the basis of a person's knowledge about him/herself, and is subject to constant ordering and organizing into a specific arrangement of ideas, and value judgments on physical and psychological features and social relations (Ostafińska-Molik, 2014, p. 69). Self-perceptions, on the other hand, are judgments that describe oneself. Positive self-perceptions create a positive attitude toward oneself and help strengthen self-esteem. This, in turn, translates into attitudes, as such a person is less likely to succumb to the expectations of others, and is more likely to persuade others to see them as they see themselves (Jussim & Fleming, 1999, p. 147). Specifying what categories are involved in self-evaluation and self-description underlying a certain self-perception is important to the assumptions made in this article. They refer to the body, mental characteristics (personality, intelligence, and talents), social reactions, role playing (here the role of a teacher), opinions (attitudes, beliefs, and value system), past experiences, and material things (Ostafińska-Molik, 2014, p. 76).

Since it has been assumed that self-image is important for roles and the way we function in them in the future, it has been recognized that this perception may be related to the motivation for choosing the teaching profession, especially when those training to become teachers are people with other university degrees, who work in occupations different from teaching, and yet after several or even several decades of working in their first profession, they make the decision to retrain. This decision may result from the pursuit of personal fulfillment and happiness from working in their dream profession. This is coupled with an intrinsic motivation to choose a career, as well as an orientation towards a goal and a drive to achieve that goal. W. Dróżka (1996, 2004, 2008) notes that the motives for choosing the occupation of a teacher include autonomous decisions, defined as one's own, which include dreams of working as a teacher; being recognized as having potential by teachers and being encouraged to choose training in this profession; following the role models of parents-teachers and upholding family traditions, or the desire to emulate the one's teachers or literary authorities. R. Kwiecińska adds intrinsic motivations to this list: motives based on interests, beliefs, perceptions, aspirations and awareness of one's professional role, i.e.: interest in one's work, interest in one's field of study, interest in psychological and pedagogical knowledge, a sense that the profession is creative, a sense that the profession is socially useful, the possibility of continuous education, gaining self-education skills, and expanding one's interests (Kwiecińska, 2000, p. 91). In my view, a choice influenced by intrinsic motivation, further reinforced by a positive perception of oneself in the professional role in the future, are relevant to work as a teacher. First of all, the mindset at the beginning of one's career is based on motivation and commitment, work in a dream job becomes a source of satisfaction, is built on positive perceptions of educational actors and positive relationship building (cf. Dróżka & Madalińska-Michalak, 2016). Favorable thinking about oneself in a professional role based on the desire to fulfill oneself as a teacher, guarantees better quality work, promotes teachers' development, and thus inspires the development of students, and other teachers. Taking the above line

of thinking, I conducted a study among prospective teachers who are retraining and preparing for this job, despite their previous training for another occupation.

Methodological assumptions of the study

The study used qualitative content analysis of essays on *Why did I choose to study teaching education and what kind of teacher do I want to be?* (cf. Denzin & Lincoln, 2009; Kubinowski, 2011). According to E. Babbie (2004, p. 341), this method requires no interaction with the respondent (non-reactive research), thus the researcher has no influence on the respondent's behavior. I adopted an analytical strategy that made it possible to focus on the uniqueness of individual perspectives. Using the strategy, I was able to interpret the categories that emerged, the individual perspectives against the overall experience provided in the essay, and compare them in order to universalize them within the categories that emerged. This method was used for those training for the teaching profession in studies by K. Jagielska (2021), by J. Łukasik (2021a, 2021b), among others.

The study included 21 postgraduate students studying to become teachers. The surveys, anonymous written statements, were conducted from October to November 2020. At the time when they wrote their essays, the respondents already had a trained profession and were working in that profession, but they wanted to retrain and start working in schools. The respondents were 35–51 years old, of whom there were 17 women and 4 men, and they resided in all types of towns and cities (from rural areas to urban agglomerations with more than 500,000 inhabitants). The selection of the group was purposeful, warranted by the questions and scope of the study, namely the diagnosis of how people with experience in a job different from that of a teacher imagine themselves in their new job. The selection took into account the time that lapsed between their educational experiences from elementary and secondary school, work of several or several decades in another profession, and involvement in the upbringing of their children. Learning about the self-perceptions of the respondents will fill a gap in this area of research.

The interpretation of the research material collected in the course of the study focused on the problem: *How do students of teacher training postgraduate programs perceive themselves as future teachers?*

In order to navigate the structure and to precisely identify categories and subcategories present in the narratives, I carried out a formal analysis of the content by creating notes and assigning codes to subcategories, which fell under general categories. In further elaboration and interpretation, I performed a comparative analysis for the features distinguished based on M. Leary's concept in order to develop an index of additional subcategories (cf. Kubinowski, 2011). This procedure made it possible to organize the research material and search for subcategories in the category maps that were based on Leary's theory (re-education, emergence of features and making inferences). The qualitative research approach makes it possible to apply the findings only to the respondents, therefore no social trends were identified.

Self-perception according to the findings of the study

The dominant categories in the self-images as future teachers emerged on the basis of the Leary's theory (2000). Three categories were distinguished: (1) psychological characteristics (personality, intelligence, and abilities), (2) playing the role of a teacher, (3) opinions (value system) (a detailed summary is presented in Table 1).

Table 1. Self-images of those training to become teachers as future teachers

Psychological characteristics	Playing the role of a teacher	Opinions (value system)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ability to talk to students, • good communication skills, • being able to listen to students and respond to their needs, • understanding students' problems, • curiosity, • open mind, • creativity, • continuous training, • inspiring a passion for learning and exploring, • being lenient, • being consistent, • courage and determination, • being passionate, • patience, • becoming mature enough to embrace different experiences, • independence and taking on challenges, • self-development, • being an interesting person, • being spontaneous and sincere in dealing with students, • not treating oneself too seriously, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • treating students equally, • never saying bad things about students, • genuinely promoting students' development and helping others, • bringing out positive qualities in students, • motivating students to learn, • giving one's time to students (stay after lessons), • focusing on the students' needs and strengths, • putting a lot of effort to doing one's job in the best possible way, • knowing the needs of students and adapting one's work to their requirements and skills, • recognizing students' talents and helping them develop them, • introducing children to a world full of fantastic adventures, • motivating students to take action and continuously improving their knowledge, • setting appropriate requirements for students to study on their own and earn good grades, • making children and adolescents aware that by developing their social-emotional skills, they can improve their academic performance, quality of life and interpersonal relationships, • individual approach to the student, • creative and innovative approach to education, • thorough knowledge of the subject you are teaching and the ability to transmit it, • commitment to creating interesting lessons, • being well prepared, • keeping up to date with new proven teaching methods, motivating students to take on new challenges, • unconventional teaching methods, • work as a mission, • combining different areas of knowledge in lessons, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • justice, • respect for students, • responsibility for one's actions, • not singling out anyone, equal treatment of students, • exceeding oneself, wanting more in life, seeking another person and finding them, • professional fulfillment, • goal orientation, • not giving up and not backing out of one's plans, • balancing professional and family life, • striving for continuous development and doing extraordinary things, • caring for the development of others, • caring for the welfare of children, • love of teaching and students,

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • setting boundaries for parents, • motivating parents to work with their children, • consistency at work, • being understanding, • ability to admit one's mistakes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teaching a boring subject in an interesting way, • teaching difficult content in a simple way, enlivening lessons with anecdotes so that students remember better, • moving away from traditional textbooks, • courage, setting challenges, • searching for new solutions, • looking at the world, life, and surroundings while taking into account the whole context, • deep analysis of experience, • doing the job with passion, • creating a friendly atmosphere. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • introducing students to a different world, showing them that to conquer the world they don't need grades but to be a master at something that is important to them, something they are a master at and that they develop in their strengths, • treating students as individuals, • respecting the autonomy and individual needs of students, • working with passion.
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Own source.

The surveyed prospective teachers, who were retraining to become teachers under postgraduate programs, focused on qualities, values and activities that reflect the project/image of themselves in their new professional role. They relied heavily on the opposites of their own educational experiences and on being a parent who works together with teachers of their children. Their ideal self-image as a teacher was built on the appreciation of the positive aspects of teachers' actions and qualities, and the desire to avoid the destructive negative actions that cause a strain in the relationship with students. Most often, the respondents described themselves from the perspective of (2) playing the role of a teacher. They focused predominantly on student-centered activities (on building relationships, discovering students' potential, inspiring them to develop, and giving constructive feedback) and on professional preparation for work (diverse, innovative teaching methods, combining their own passions with students' motivation to learn, commitment to preparing for lessons and teaching in an unconventional way). In addition, the respondents stressed the educational contexts that are significant for work in the teaching profession, such as recognizing students' needs and motivation, their social conditions for development, having the courage to challenge themselves in their work with students, and seeking new solutions to make education a passion for students, as well as their work as teachers. The perception of themselves in the future role of a teacher is both a result of positive experiences and the desire to overcome the destructive experiences from their school years (not to repeat negative patterns). When taking into account (1) psychological characteristics (including personality, intelligence, and abilities), we can distinguish several significant aspects of working as a teacher. Namely, the respondents focused on personal qualities and the ability/skill to build relationships through good communication

and listening skills (this area was mentioned most often by the respondents). The emphasis on communication competencies reveals respondents' high awareness of how to work with students at school and how to build relationships with students (education is a relationship). Understanding the importance of these competencies, as well as possessing them will perhaps contribute to positive effects of the respondents' teaching and educational work. The mere fact that they started building their self-image from relationships and communication brings hope for a better quality of their future work with students and increases the likelihood of their viewing education as an adventure in which they will participate as partners focused on their own development and on transcending themselves. It can be noted that a partnership, subjective approach to the student, treating him or her as a person capable of making decisions, responsible for his or her own development, reduces the distance between the teacher and the student, and opens them up to a genuine relationship in the spirit of mutual understanding, respect and kindness. The psychological characteristics listed also reveal a picture of prospective teachers as committed to their work, aware of its importance for their own and their students' personal growth, and aware that success in their work and relationship with students will mostly depend on them, their qualities, knowledge, and skills. It can be said that the qualities the respondents mentioned are also indicative of their inner containment (independence in action, courage in introducing innovations into teaching-learning, creativity, out-of-the-box and non-standard approach to working with students). In terms of (3) opinions, understood as the preferred, exhibited value system, it can be noted that the student, so the person with whom they will work, is the highest value for future teachers. They also perceive work as a teacher as a value, for if it were not so, they would not have taken the trouble of retraining (from economic, legal, medical and other professions). With regard to the values themselves, it can be seen that all the fundamental values are significant to them, while justice was the most frequently mentioned. It can be concluded that because of their own negative experiences from school, which were marked by a sense of injustice, they decided that they would not allow the student with whom they work to experience similar situations and experiences in their professional career.

Conclusions

The portrayed self-image of aspiring teachers with experience in other jobs, or their project of oneself in the professional role of a teacher is only declarative. However, the areas that the respondents indicated as key fields of teaching, which are the continuation of meaningful, positive experiences as well as opposites of negative experiences (attitudes, actions, and relationships, etc.) that they remember from the viewpoint of a student, or a parent of a student, offer hope for their different attitudes towards work and actors. Positive self-perception through the qualities that they described further helps to sustain the ideal image in practice and real experiences in the school. I think that the professional experiences from other careers and jobs are significant in this regard, as

are the respondents' passions and interests, about which they wrote very often. Different professional experiences and the desire to become a teacher, based on commitment, focus on personal growth, and combining passions with work will enable the trainees to become ideal teachers, consistent with their own self-concept as a person and a teacher in terms of their qualities, values, and actions as well as evaluation of themselves in these areas. In addition, this will allow them to see themselves as consistent, authentic, intrinsically motivated and committed to what they do (Błądowska, 2010, p. 310), and thus build and strengthen relationships with others (Jagiełło, 2013, pp. 61–61). A positive perception of oneself in the role of a teacher can be a factor that strengthens one's sense of worth, a constructive attitude towards the role and tasks of a teacher and subjects of relationships. Self-perception along with the inner need (and motivation) to work in the teaching profession can be important for better quality and more effective work.

Summary

It can be argued that those who consciously choose the teaching profession, while already being fully qualified to work in other, much better-paid careers (e.g., as a journalist, economist, lawyer, nurse, etc.), will be more creative in their approach to teaching and combine their experiences and passions from their previous jobs in their work on student development. Perhaps teachers who are qualified for another profession will achieve personal success, get a sense of satisfaction, and will be more effective in any of the professions they pursue. Therefore, it may be worth considering changes in hiring or temporary eligibility for the teaching profession that are typical of, for example, Portugal, Spain or Israel (see Michalak-Dawdziuk, 2022). This could contribute to minimizing instances of random career choices and to increasing teachers' efficiency.

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