Teachers' Professional Identity - A Comparative Study into how NLP and non-NLP Trained Teachers in Slovenia Talk about their Professional Identity and their Work

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The study investigates how teachers trained in Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) and non-NLP trained teachers in a primary school in Slovenia talk about their professional identity and their work. NLP is a behavioural model and a set of explicit techniques, developed by Bandler and Grinder (1976) by studying patterns created in interaction between brain, language and body. This study has defined NLP as an approach to developing professional practice through modelling.

The background to the study was the researcher's personal experience of being a teacher in the midst of the conflicts in ex-Yugoslavia in the 1990s and the main aim has been to explore the teachers' subjective experiences and representations of their professional identity and their work with a hope of developing the professional practice. The study examined comparatively two groups of teachers (14 Slovenian primary school teachers) looking for similarities and differences in the way they talk about their professional identity and their work.

The epistemological position of the study is interpretivism combined with several overarching frameworks including 'constructive' critical theory and a 'constructive' action research approach. Semi-structured interviews, non-participant structured observations, reflective diaries and video-stimulated interviews were used for data collection and the data was coded both deductively and inductively.

The study showed significant differences and some similarities between the two groups of teachers and their way of talking about professional identity and their work. The NLP trained teachers tended to see themselves as nurturers/carers and awakeners, underpinning their professional identity with values such as fun, curiosity and enjoyment. The non-NLP trained teachers emphasized the importance of being an instructor, underpinning it with values such as responsibility, equality and fairness. Evidence suggests that NLP trained teachers talk about themselves as more self-sustained and in more positive terms than non NLP trained teachers. They also appear more prepared to maintain their professional identity irrespective of personal, social or political changes/critical events. There was also evidence of similarities in the two groups' perception of the teacher identity as being multifaceted and teaching being a calling. The study can have interesting implications for the design of NLP-based continuing professional development (CPD) courses as well as University-led teacher-education programmes, where less focus on skills and knowledge and more focus on beliefs, values and identity might be more effective.