Professional Practice Report – Definitions of A Profession: Special Needs Educator

Victor Tan

University of Stirling, United Kingdom

Abstract

The traditional view of a profession has always been an area of debate within the social sciences. The Weberian views it as either an inclusion or exclusion criterion of occupations and employment to the Foucauldian view of it as the development of expertise within the understanding of a discipline. In the current social context, the definitions are vaguer than distinct with the everchanging social environment. Issue 40 of the Teachers Matter Report by OECD conceptualized the teachers' role in a complex 28 domains over four key zones the individual, the classroom, the school and the community. The parallel profession of a Special-needs Educator though subjected within the same field of education, has not gained equal attention despite the challenges the profession faces in its more complex provisos. The project seeks to determine the professional understanding of a SnE and the varied implied association of professional identity, and their effects at organizational and professional (occupational) levels. The research adopted a qualitative approach using an adapted version of Collie and Mansfield's proposed model (2022) with the infusion of another paradigm of Social Identity Theory. 10 participants were gathered at different levels of professional involvement to conduct interviews that were analysed using Thematic Analysis proposed by Clark, Braun and Hayfield (2015).

Presenting themes of (1) Big Environment, (2) Professional Identity, (3) Expectations (Formal Professional roles), (4) Additional Roles (Hidden Professional Roles) and, (5) Burnout were observed from the data. Key finding notes that dissonance within the profession was resultant of the low clarity of professional responsibilities rather than factors identified from earlier studies (heavy workload, emotional burnout, lack of resources etc). 'Parents' and 'Organization' were noted to be direct contributors to the low clarity of role. 'Ambiguity' was noted to represent the hidden curriculum of the profession rather than any distinct findings. The research notes the maturity of the profession in a developmental context and provides recommendations for different profiles-levels to reflect inwards in bids to protect the profession.

Keywords: Profession, Special-education, Special-needs Educator, role ambiguity, professional maturity, hidden roles