

<http://dx.doi.org/10.16926/pe.2023.16.07>

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How to cite [jak cytować]: Dobińska, G., Kosiorek, M. (2023). The professionalisation of teachers' professional activities towards equalising educational opportunities for students. *Podstawy Edukacji. Equal opportunities for all or fair chances to all in education*, 16, 93–108.

The professionalisation of teachers' professional activities towards equalising educational opportunities for students

Abstract

The subject of the undertaken analyses was the strategies used by teachers as part of bringing them closer to pedagogical expertise. The research aims to show the ways of defining professionalisation by the respondents. As a result, we were looking for the answers to how teachers perceive professionalism and what actions they take to achieve pedagogical expertise. The empirical material comprises 19 interviews with teachers implementing the International Baccalaureate Programme. The theoretical framework for us was symbolic interactionism. We used the procedures of grounded theory methodology. As a result, we reconstructed the strategies they use to approach pedagogical expertise. We managed to characterise the three main dimensions of striving for professionalism by international schoolteachers, i.e., achieving professionalism through relationships, staying up to date, and achieving formal gratifications.

Keywords: professionalisation, international baccalaureate program, teacher, self-improvement.

Introduction

Due to the dynamic changes in the Polish education systems and the constantly increasing expectations towards teachers, reflection on the issue of pro-

professionalisation is the subject of numerous analyses by representatives of social sciences both in Poland and around the world. Previous research on this topic has focused primarily on attempts to categorise teachers' professionalism as a professional value, ideology, and discourse (e.g., Evetts, 2011; Gewirtz, Mahony, Hextall, Cribb, 2009; Hargreaves, 2000; Śliwerski, 2009; Michalak, 2010; Gołębniak and Zamorska, 2014; Szempruch, 2019; Madalińska-Michalak, 2021; Whitty, 2000).

The transformation of Polish education in recent decades and various unexpected events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or the war in Ukraine, have given rise to new challenges, not only in education. These complex and unexpected situations have shown that professionalisation needs particular reflection from a broader socio-cultural perspective. Furthermore, it is essential to review the current role of the teachers and the process of their improvement and qualifications and to consider the category of autonomy and reflection in this profession. Numerous studies address professionalisation; however, we have observed that there are not enough projects implemented at international schools, which, due to their curricular objectives, require a different approach to the teaching and learning process.

Referring to the title category, in this paper's theoretical part, we draw attention to characteristics of the teaching work in the context of professionalisation, which is understood as a complex process of enhancing knowledge and skills rooted in high ethical requirements. We also define professionalism, which we equate with the quality and standards of the teachers' duties.

Educational mastery¹

An analysis of the reference literature indicates that, due to ambiguity, it is difficult to provide an exhaustive definition of "professionalism". It is due to the dynamics and constantly changing social, political, and cultural conditions. It should be noted that professionalism and professionalisation in Poland gained importance after the systemic transformation in 1989, when, under the wave of changes, people noticed the increasing independence and responsibility for actions. Danuta Urbaniak-Zajęc (2018, pp. 27–34) analysed selected theories of professionalism and divided them into "normative" positions defining qualities that should be fulfilled by jobs aspiring to be perceived as professions, and "non-normative" ones that describe conditions for professional activity.

The first approach described defines a specific range of features that should be met by a given professional group aspiring to become professionals. Researchers presenting the first position propose sets of attributes (features) that

¹ In vivo code, an excerpt from collected empirical material.

enable distinguishing professions from non-professions (Merten, 2000; Pfadenhauer, 2003; Parsons, 2009). Talcott Parsons (2009) and his professional role model played a pioneering role in this regard. According to this approach, a professional is characterised by the need to achieve specific competencies, universalism in the undertaken actions as opposed to particularism, expertise in a strictly defined field, lack of emotional involvement in relationships with the recipient in order to maintain neutrality and objectivity, as well as focusing on the collective and the protection of established norms and social order. It is fascinating because it turns out that the actions taken by the expert (professional) are structural and institutional, not motivational. However, the limitations and shortcomings of these normatively based positions have long been pointed out. They result, for example, from the fact that they were created in conditions similar to the present day. Their static and ahistorical nature detachment from ongoing social changes is emphasised, and attention is drawn to their primary assumption that the profession is identical to the final stage of development, achieving the highest level of professional maturity. Their practical significance also turns out to be questionable and ineffective, consisting of taking actions by representatives of a given professional group to increase their social status and prestige. A profession perceived as a set of features describes a profession that has “reached” maturity, a detailed catalogue of attributes that its representatives should have. When adopting this approach, it is possible to assign a set of indicators to a specific profession and verify the extent to which they are met (Urbaniak-Zajęc, 2016, 2018).

Professionalism is approached entirely differently by the non-normative theories of Ulrich Oevermann and Fritz Schütze, which focus mainly on the conditions of professional action.

The former defines the minimum condition that must be met for an action to be considered professional, which is the protection of the autonomy of life practice. Therefore, a professional can only be a substitute interpreter of the conditions in which the crisis occurred and the conditions of possible change, not a decision-maker determining what should be done (Urbaniak-Zajęc, 2018, p. 35).

Therefore, a feature of professional activity is the abandonment of power resulting, to some extent, from the role performed and the specificity of the knowledge used (Overmann, 1996). F. Schütze’s (1996) approach, grounded in the interactional perspective, assumes openness in relationships. Their interpretation accompanies the process of exchanging meanings. The author focuses on the complexity of operating conditions and the inconsistency of expectations and established rules, leading to professional dilemmas that are solved situationally. As a result, no proven and effective action patterns could be copied and implied as the so-called good practices. F. Schütze (1996) distinguishes two essential conditions for professional action, i.e., granting a specific professional

group legitimacy, giving the right to take action to solve some social issues and the reference of representatives of the profession to a specific area of the symbolic world of meaning, which determines the internal specificity of professional actions. Interactionists reflect on dilemmas, complex and, at the same time, controversial professional situations that do not have ready-made solutions that guarantee professional success. They show that they accompany educators in their everyday practice and also have structural determinants, i.e., they cannot be removed as a result of the decisions of specific people. They must be “dealt with” by undertaking “here and now” strategies. These constantly recurring problems are not an expression of employees’ incompetence or helplessness but of inconsistency with the rules they must consider when planning their professional activities (Urbaniak-Zajęc, 2016, 2018). We deliberately and consciously presented the analysis carried out by Urbaniak-Zajęc (2018), which reliably showed the ambiguity of the concepts of “profession” and “professionalism”.

A similar interpretation is provided in documents of the *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development* (OECD, 2019), where professionalism is identified with expertness, competence, and excellence in performing a specific activity and oriented towards the quality of the teaching work. According to Boyt, Lusch and Naylor (2001), professionalism is a multidimensional structure consisting of attitudes and behaviour towards one’s work and relating to achieving high standards.

Concerning the teaching profession, professionalism is usually operationalised as the knowledge necessary for teaching, autonomy is understood as the ability to decide independently on teaching tasks, and the ability to cooperate to facilitate the exchange of information and support, enabling high-quality education. This term is most often described, analysed, interpreted, and designed using three variables: professional knowledge, professional activity, and ethical-moral qualifications (Szempruch, 2019, p. 29). This process is identified with high cognitive and ethical standards resulting from extended education and professional development. Joanna Madalińska-Michalak (2021, pp. 257–258) indicates that it is an element which confirms the quality of work and is directly related to teachers’ commitment to their duties, but also to their compliance with the standards of work and the requirements of professional ethics. Therefore, professionalism in the teaching profession refers to being a professional and *behaving professionally*. Thus, in preparing for the profession, providing sound knowledge and skills to support personal development and emotional and social competencies is also essential. Furthermore, it should be stressed that “teachers’ professionalisation is not a state but a process that advances through the profession and is, on the one hand, a matter for the individual teacher and occurs in the school community system, which also impacts, on the other” (Śliwerski, 2009, pp. 36–37).

Publication of the *Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel* (UNESCO, 1997) was critical for defining the guidelines for professionalising the teaching profession. This document outlines international standards and recommendations on teacher professionalism, including preparation for the profession, vocational development, recruitment and employment process, promotion, work conditions and quality, disciplinary procedures, professional autonomy, work supervision and assessment, rights and responsibilities, teacher involvement in education-related decision-making, and social privileges. In addition to the guidelines prescribed in this recommendation, it is worth stressing aspects related to professional autonomy. Joanna Michalak confirms this and writes that when teacher professionalism is considered,

teachers' autonomy, reflected through their ability to have a real influence on the direction of activities and processes occurring in their working environment, is increasingly identified as a distinguishing feature. Teachers can show their professionalism by establishing and developing good relationships with students, parents, fellow colleagues, local community, and with all those outside the professional framework of this profession (Michalak, 2010, p. 115).

Teachers' autonomy, therefore, manifests itself through their critical attitude towards knowledge and the possibility of co-selecting teaching content. It also involves the informed and independent choice of teaching strategies and the engaged, creative, and reflective delivery of the teaching and learning process. Continuous self-reflection promotes self-efficacy and allows teachers to maximise their personal capacity.

According to Forsyth and Danisiewicz (1985), it is one of the main elements characterising the professionalism of teachers, who should have autonomy in making decisions and be free from any external pressures. Moreover, constant reflection on one's actions helps to improve their effectiveness and allows for the optimal use of the teacher's personal potential.

Laurence Stenhouse observes that "a broad definition of teacher professionalism involves an ability of autonomous self-development through a regular analysis of one's work, the work of other teachers, and testing new solutions in the classroom" (1977; after Tędziągolska and Kasprzak, 2014, p. 334). This approach describes a teacher as open to changes, constantly revises his or her knowledge, improves skills, collaborates with others, is active and seeks new solutions.

In this paper, we focus on a group of teachers working in schools preparing students for the International Baccalaureate exam [from now on IB DP]. These schools require a different organisation and approach to the teaching and learning process. It directly results from the IB DP curriculum and the international student profile. From the teacher's perspective, the IB DP curriculum consists of three elements: teaching content (the analytical part), the way it is delivered (the practical part) and assessment methods (the concluding part). The system

assumes a balance between content, teaching methodology and assessment process. Consequently, successful implementation and delivery of the curriculum at international schools largely depend on teachers' knowledge, skills, and self-awareness.

Theoretical and methodological aspects of research

A qualitative research strategy focused on the interpretive paradigm set the trail for our analyses. At the heart of the interpretive approach are mutual interactions (social interactions), essential for interpreting, experiencing, and shaping one's professional identity. In the presented paradigm, social reality is not hermetic and absolute but is created by social actors and reflectively recreated (Wilson, 1971; Hałas, 2006; Wyka, 1993). Our theoretical framework was symbolic interactionism. Here, a person appears as an active entity capable of creating meanings and processing information sent to him, learning, and analysing accumulated experiences, and as a result, he can react and take specific actions (Blumer, 2009; Hałas, 2006).

The presented analyses are part of broader research projects focused on reconstructing the functions of education programs in Poland.² We used grounded theory methodology to analyse how international schoolteachers define professionalism (Strauss and Corbin, 1997; Glaser and Strauss, 2009). The above choice was dictated by the desire to capture the respondents' perspective. Applying the assumptions of the grounded theory methodology enabled the discovery of specific patterns and mechanisms that give meaning to an individual's actions, as well as the social relations in which he or she is involved (Konecki, 2000).

Theory building is a process, so it is not a verification of previously built hypotheses based on later collected data. Collecting data, building hypotheses, and verifying them are not separated in time, as in traditional research, but are procedures intertwined many times during the long process of generating theory (Konecki, 2000, p. 27).

Coding is a crucial element of the theory generation process; we decided to use focused category coding that considers causal and intervening conditions, interactions, strategies, tactics, context, and the consequences of actions. As a result, we talked to 14 women and 5 men employed in private and public institutions implementing the International Baccalaureate program. The respondents teach various school subjects, with varied work experience in the IB DP program (the shortest professional experience was 6 months, the most extended 10 years).

² "Comparative research on the functions of international education programs in Poland", National Science Center, Sonata Bis, project no.: 2020/38/E/HS6/0004; "Between assumptions and reality. Educational functions of the Polish curriculum - pilot studies", IDUB UŁ, project no.: 4/GNZPA/22;

Meetings with the respondents took place primarily in the school building, in a small room designated by the interviewees, where the narrators felt safe and comfortable. The initial question we asked teachers was: How did you start working at an international school? It is worth emphasising that all narrators have experience teaching in schools implementing the Polish core curriculum, which is why they willingly referred to their experience and compared two different systems during the interviews.

The subject of our analyses was the strategies teachers use to bring them closer to pedagogical expertise. As a result, we were looking for answers to the questions: what actions do teachers take to achieve pedagogical expertise?

Results

In our research, teachers paid a lot of attention to professionalisation and activities that bring them closer to achieving pedagogical expertise. It is worth emphasising that at the conceptualisation stage of this research project, we did not intend to focus on the issue of professionalisation. The respondents raised this subject during the interviews, and using extensive descriptions, they revealed the importance they gave to professionalism in teaching. They also presented ways of achieving it or getting closer to it. On the one hand, the pursuit of professionalism is required by law (through formal ministerial requirements), which prescribes the framework for the organisation of international schools and criteria for teacher promotion. On the other hand, this formal requirement may become a self-imposed goal expressed through development, exploration, autonomy, and self-improvement.

The collected empirical material has shown diversity in how our narrators define professionalism. They expressed professionalism through their own creative vision board, which they visualised during the interviews. Respondents departed from “textbook” definitions and “statutory” items required for promotion and defined professionalisation using their own personalised meaning. With this in mind, we reconstructed how the IB programme school teachers define professionalism and their methods to achieve pedagogical mastery. Consequently, we identified three main dimensions of the drive towards professionalisation. Interestingly, when the respondents were eliciting themes dedicated to professionalism, they began telling their stories from graduation, completing their studies, and obtaining a master’s degree, which they perceived as a symbol confirming their qualifications. Using vivid descriptions, they compared this moment to the beginning of their journey to professionalism.

“Well, yes, that’s when I completed my studies, and you can say that was when I started to develop in this area” (N1).

They probably chose this approach as they needed to place certain events on a timeline to reconstruct their career path chronologically. Furthermore, we observed that even when teachers gained their first pedagogical work experience before graduation, they did not discuss it in the professionalisation context. They put themselves as a student/trainee/intern “learning” a profession and testing themselves in the professional environment. After completing their studies and securing employment, they felt responsible for their professional development.

“I felt that it became serious then and that I was responsible for these kids, and it was up to me what they would know” (N2).

The more professional experience they gained, and the longer their service was, the respondents redefined the concept of professionalism. It was mainly due to the fact that they were becoming more rooted in the community of international school teachers, learnt specifics of pedagogical work, and faced professional difficulties and challenges. The time provided a frame for the respondents’ narratives and was an extremely interesting category. In addition to the chronology of the events, which respondents emphasised during the interviews, time marked the stages of their professional maturity and the process of becoming a teacher. The longer service reflected on one’s professional role and the need to update and redefine the concept of professionalism.

“I’ve become humble over time; when I graduated from the university, I thought I knew everything” (N3).

Most respondents had the experience of teaching at schools implementing Polish core curriculum. Those who decided to work at international schools were motivated by the need for change, the search for professional challenges, and the sense of bitterness resulting from the Polish systemic solutions in education. Regardless of the conditions for curriculum change, they were fully aware and confident in their decision.

“I received such an offer and thought, why not? It was a good moment. I was tired and overburdened by the Polish school, so I decided to try something new” (N4).

In my case, it was like another stage of my development [...] when I received an offer to work with IB programme. I perceived it as entering a higher level, like trying to do something new; the contact with a foreign language, using and remembering it, and the experience itself were other valuable elements for me. Well, it was a completely new challenge (N5).

Analysing the collected empirical material, we have identified three specific strategies teachers reach for as part of the process of becoming a professional have developed.

Striving for professionalism through relationships

This strategy is pursued by teachers who perceive the interpersonal dimension as the vital career development driver. Using Goffman's (1961) metaphor of the theatre of life, it can be argued that the focal point that brings respondents closer to pedagogical expertise is what happens offstage, behind the scenes. Teachers' actions are oriented towards their interaction partners, i.e., students, parents, and other teachers. They aim to create and sustain a supportive school environment. Professionalism appears as a range of activities oriented towards other people. The narrator's statement below perfectly illustrates the essence of the described strategy.

I think that building a partnership largely depends on the maturity of our students, although appropriate relationship must be maintained in my opinion, we should rather act as mentors or guides for our students, not persons who are trying to impose something on them; you can initiate a healthy and partner-based relationship, where at the same time you will have expectations for students, provided that they are mature enough to build such relationship with us (N6).

The respondent admits that the choice of this strategy is highly demanding. It is a balancing act between the role of a guardian mentor and the role of a controller knowledge enforcer. Notably, the teacher emphasises that the condition for establishing partnership relations is the student's maturity. Therefore, the involvement is preceded by the selection of students and the selection of those with good prospects, worth investing the teacher's energy and time. From the statements of respondents using this strategy, it can be concluded that an expression (indicator) of professionalism accurately assesses the potential of the student with whom you plan to establish a relationship.

The effectiveness of activities undertaken by a teacher is not assessed through the prism of personal successes (e.g., acquiring additional qualifications) or students' successes (e.g., number of promoted scholarship holders, Olympians, high average student results). Instead, it is determined by the quality of relationships with other actors in this social world.

It is worth stressing that teachers who perceive skills in starting, sustaining, and teaching healthy (N6) interpersonal relationships as synonymous with professionalism are at risk of incurring an emotional cost of their engagement. By creating a safe space for learning and growing students, the respondents become beneficiaries and guards of stories entrusted by their students, who look to the teachers for trust, support, and solutions.

A similar situation occurs in the event of an incorrect assessment of the student's potential and involvement in a relationship with a person who is immature and not ready for trust and mentoring relationships (N6). The consequence of becoming involved in such relationships is exposing oneself to excessive

shortening of distance, exploitation, straining kindness and trust, and crossing boundaries. We are talking about such behaviours as, for example, offering to call each other by name, meeting in free time outside of school or making less educational demands. The teacher discusses the hardship and the emotions associated with establishing and maintaining student relationships, emphasising that it is highly responsible and requires courage.

I know I am responsible for these students, and my weaknesses may affect their future. Thus, I do not dwell on whether I can handle the stress. Well, I know that I cannot fail. At least, this is my approach to teaching. I cannot afford to be weak and... Of course, this is what we assume, and on the other hand, we are only human, and one can become sick or experience another problem, but in general, I think that there is simply no other way, and I cannot afford to be weak. At least this is how it should be (N7).

Involving and investing one's knowledge and competencies in building relationships promotes the transparency of school environment and effectiveness of activities in prevention, education, and teaching. Interestingly, striving for professionalism through relationships also strives for openness to diversity. It involves dealing with prejudices and weaknesses and learning and raising awareness of young people's needs. The actions taken by the teachers aim to equip students with the skills to live independently and responsibly as adults.

IB school teaches true respect for differences and true tolerance, you can see and hear this when you talk with young people, and in presentations, they deliver, also when we watch controversial movies or read articles, consequently you can see that they have more true respect for other people and become more open; Because they have an example, that is what I pay much attention to [...]. These relationships and understanding are my priority [...] (N8).

The international curriculum's premise fosters relationship building. The tangible evidence of partnership and interpersonal skills education is represented by termly group projects, which students manage themselves. At the same time, the teacher takes on the role of a tutor and coordinator of the activities undertaken, teaching CAS subjects (creativity, activity and service)³ and school spaces designated exclusively for students called *IBroom*, *IBzone* (these are usually rooms equipped with soft pouffes, sofas, a kettle and a microwave, and students can use them at any time).

Interestingly, teachers pursuing the strategy focused on pursuing professionalism through relationships are oriented towards collaboration with other teachers and community-oriented activities to increase the chances of achieving teaching expertise.

³ CAS (creativity, active, service) is a subject under which students deliver community projects outside school, and it incorporates creativity, activity and voluntary work.

Striving for professionalism through *being up-to-date*⁴

This strategy is used by teachers who identify professionalism with keeping up to date not only with the subject knowledge they teach but also with scientific developments, contemporary socio-economic changes, and views and values of today's young people. Under this strategy, we can distinguish three tactics used by the respondents. The first tactic is oriented towards formal self-development pathways in the scientific discipline taught and teaching methods. It involves training, courses, and postgraduate studies. Teacher participation in webinars, listening to podcasts, watching instructional videos on the YouTube platform, and participating in discussions via online forums are examples of the second tactic oriented towards informal self-development pathways. They undertake actions to update their knowledge, enrich lessons with the latest research findings and make the teaching methods more attractive (experiments, visual materials) to meet young audiences' needs and expectations. We called the third and most unusual tactic the image tactic. Teachers who reach for this tactic spend much time creating their teacher image, attributing to it a unique importance in the quality and effectiveness of teaching.

It is worth mentioning that the IB programme, in a way, forces teachers to *be up to date* as it leaves them much freedom in choosing the content and methods of its presentation. On the one hand, this freedom is a great advantage; on the other, it demands that teachers continuously explore and improve their teaching.

One of the narrators reports on the extent of her involvement in designing the lessons. She emphasises that the International Baccalaureate program gives teachers trust and creates conditions for autonomy and creativity. Notably, the respondent believes that thanks to this, she does not fall into a routine and rigid framework of repetition of the lessons. They are more willing to reach for the achievements of other fields and look for unusual, modern innovations and teaching methods.

This programme naturally assumes trust in the teacher, and we create it ourselves. There are certain thematic boundaries [...] precisely by selecting these thematic blocks. There are, of course, certain blocks that I have to cover. However, I have many choices in the specific topics I address in my lessons, and I can teach the language through the culture and reality of the country [...] I teach the language not focusing on the language itself but on such topics and real situations; we always refer to the culture. Thus, it provides a completely different perspective on language teaching and creativity. There is an opportunity to be very creative, which is missing in the Polish system, in my opinion. [...] I explore and decide myself [...] (N9).

Moreover, the program is regularly evaluated every six years, and consequently, the content and learning outcomes, the so-called curriculum, are

⁴ *In vivo* code

changing. Teachers must adapt to the recommendations and find ways to fulfil the latest requirements.

We do not get into a rut because there is always something new. Maybe the programme itself does not change that much, but for instance other [...] other skills are emphasised. The programme does not change drastically, but nuances are introduced, innovations and different skills are emphasised, for instance, very interesting (N10).

Working on one's image, which should convince students and encourage them to participate in the classes, is an original example of *being up to date*. The respondents who used this tactic greatly valued their appearance, the vocabulary they used at work and their behaviour.

By using youth slang and following trends and technological innovations, teachers appear more accessible and open. It turns out that the contemporary dynamics of change and the amount of stimuli reaching people mean that knowledge and skills alone are insufficient to arouse students' interest. Teachers feel it is necessary to change the repertoire of methods that arouse interest, so they use image tactics that visually attract attention and blur the teacher stereotype. In this case, they used the image to draw attention to themselves, raise interest in the subject they teach, and establish relationships with students.

"The image is a flagship of the teacher who represents the subject he or she teaches [...] it is obvious that the young will reach a better understanding with another young, with someone who is up to date, speaks the same language and is open" (N11).

Striving for professionalism by *being up to date* requires teachers to be reflexive and take comprehensive actions to update their knowledge, skills, competencies, and image. The time teachers invest in their self-improvement, which significantly goes beyond the working time framework and disrupts the work-life balance, is a consequence of this strategy.

For me, it was a huge challenge, but also such a great incentive that I had to improve my knowledge in other subjects too; we need to ask students to identify sources of this knowledge. Thus, we need to refresh our knowledge of politics, religion and, in fact, ethics. Well, I feel quite special in this context [...]. However, in general, we realise that every single subject should integrate knowledge from other subjects, and this is also very unique [...] it is hard to balance this with other responsibilities (N1).

Professionalism is the skill of *being up to date*, expressed through auto presentation acquisition and improvement of knowledge in the respective discipline. It enables teachers to "juggle" information to achieve their objectives and anticipate what might happen during the class and which questions students might ask.

The professionals know the answer to the question, but if they do not, they know where to find it; they say, come on, let's look for the answer together, I don't know, let's check

together. It's a kind of flexibility towards the students, being able to anticipate what will happen, isn't it? (N12).

The respondents pursuing this strategy do not care about the formal display of their successes or the number of certificates and diplomas they have obtained. Focused on the here and now, they treat acquiring knowledge and skills more as a means to an end rather than achieving it.

Striving for professionalism by achieving formal gratification

The last strategy includes three main components, i.e., success measured in terms of student achievement, documented proof of knowledge and competencies, and length of service. Professionalism is expressed through promotion, offered when a teacher fulfils specific criteria.

In contrast to the above strategies, teachers who strive for professionalism by achieving formal gratification are oriented towards gaining promotion, awards, and letters of commendation, which are granted provided they have received certificates and documents confirming their participation in training courses and conferences. Teachers choose a formal educational pathway (training, postgraduate studies), which shows their pursuit of professionalism and ennoblement. Our respondents have designed their career paths with attention to detail and had complete control over this process. They measure professionalism through their achievements. Consequently, teachers who follow this strategy expect students to be passive and treat them as recipients of the knowledge taught or as "indicators" of the teaching outcomes. They are focused on themselves and their professional development. In contrast to the team-based activities of respondents pursuing the strategy based on striving for professionalism through relationships, there is an apparent tendency to act individually in this case.

Conclusions

The systematically growing popularity of international schools in Poland proves the changes initiated in the 1990s by the political transformation. At that time, attention was drawn to the need to equalise educational opportunities for students. This process was to take place mainly through improving the quality of education. One of the implemented changes was the possibility of establishing new types of schools, including international ones. Today, they play a significant role in educational inclusion, which in UNESCO's documents is based on such values as implementing equal rights, access to goods, including symbolic goods, inclusion and broadly understood participation (UNESCO, 2020).

In the IB classes, which prepare students for the international final exams, education has a practical dimension from the beginning and gives a chance to assimilate the curriculum content. The key role is played by teachers who are experts in the field of knowledge, but above all, they are people who are required to be reflective and have interpersonal skills. These resources allow us to diagnose students' predispositions and then support them in choosing the most appropriate educational path. Implementing program assumptions and equalising educational opportunities for students takes place, among others, through the strategies teachers use in their pursuit of professionalism.

The analyses presented are part of a broader research project. We realise that we have not exhausted the subject; however, we hope to contribute to the discussion on teacher professionalism, its importance, its definition, and the strategies for achieving teacher mastery. We have analysed the collected empirical material and studied how the respondents define professionalism, and, as a result, we were able to characterise three main dimensions of the striving for professionalism by international school teachers. Each dimension unveiled the specific reasons for actions taken by the narrators to bring them closer to achieving professionalism, defined as a process with no definite end. Respondents found their ways of interpreting its course.

Interestingly, we observed that the narrators, in their definitions of professionalism, did not refer to the concepts captured in the literature; on the contrary, they were keen to create their definitions and visualise them through *vision boards*. Moreover, the analyses enabled us to capture the specific determinants of the strategies implemented, which varied in many respects. An example is the focus on achieving pedagogical mastery through team, or individual work centred on individual success. Due to the diversity of these strategies, none of them is predominant. The strategies described may overlap and be implemented simultaneously or alternately. All strategies implemented by teachers contribute to equalising educational opportunities for Polish students on a global scale. The IB DP program leads to the education of conscious and engaged citizens sensitive to injustice and inequality.

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Profesjonalizacja działań zawodowych pedagogów w kierunku wyrównywania szans edukacyjnych uczniów

Streszczenie

Przedmiotem podjętych analiz uczyniliśmy strategie stosowane przez nauczycieli w ramach przybliżania ich do pedagogicznego eksperctwa. W rezultacie poszukiwałyśmy odpowiedzi na pytania – jak nauczyciele postrzegają profesjonalizm, a także – jakie działania podejmują w celu osiągnięcia pedagogicznego eksperctwa. Na materiał empiryczny składa się 19 wywiadów swobodnych z nauczycielami realizującymi program matury międzynarodowej. Ramę teoretyczną stanowił dla nas symboliczny interakcjonizm. Posłużyłyśmy się procedurami metodologii teorii ugruntowanej. W rezultacie zrekonstruowałyśmy strategie, po które sięgają w celu przybliżenia się do pedagogicznego eksperctwa. Udało nam się dokonać charakterystyki trzech głównych wymiarów dążenia do profesjonalizmu przez nauczycieli szkół międzynarodowych, tj. osiąganie profesjonalizmu poprzez relacje; bycie na bieżąco; osiąganie formalnych gratyfikacji.

Słowa kluczowe: profesjonalizacja; program matury międzynarodowej; nauczyciel; samodoskonalenie.