

# The Life – Course Formation of Teachers’ Profession. How Emotions Affect VET Teachers’ Social Identity

La formación a lo largo de la vida de la profesión docente.  
Cómo afectan las emociones en la identidad social del profesorado  
de Formación Profesional

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## Abstract

One of the less developed issues in the sociology of education concerns how the social formation of emotions affects teachers’ collective identities. In this article we outline the ingredients of a conceptual scheme explaining the emotional dynamics which form teachers’ social identities through a life-course perspective. In particular, we show how educational and job experiences related to teachers’ social trajectories create emotional dynamics in their identities which undermine the sense of belongingness to their profession. Our methodology was based on biographical – narrative interviews treated through a Critical Realism prism in order to bring to the fore the causal process through which a specific outcome is formed. By researching the extreme case of VET teachers in Greece who were put into redundancy for two years in the memorandum years, we explore why the threat of job loss, instead of mobilizing collective action, feeds feelings of self-blame and of shame which annul teachers’ social ties.

## Keywords

VET teachers, social identity, emotions, life course, critical realism.

## Resumen

Uno de los temas menos desarrollados en la sociología de la educación se refiere a cómo la formación social de las emociones afecta a las identidades colectivas de los docentes. En este artículo esbozamos los ingredientes de un esquema conceptual que explica las dinámicas emocionales que forman las identidades sociales de los docentes a través de una perspectiva del curso de vida. En particular, mostramos cómo las experiencias educativas y laborales relacionadas con las trayectorias sociales de los docentes crean dinámicas emocionales en sus identidades que socavan el sentido de pertenencia a su profesión. Nuestra metodología se basó en entrevistas biográficas y narrativas tratadas a través de un prisma de realismo crítico con el fin de resaltar el proceso causal a través del cual se forma un resultado específico. Investigando el caso extremo de los profesores de FP en Grecia que fueron despedidos durante dos años en los años del memorándum, exploramos por qué la amenaza de pérdida de empleo, en lugar de movilizar la acción colectiva, alimenta sentimientos de culpa y de vergüenza que anulan a los vínculos sociales de los docentes.

## Palabras clave

Profesorado de FP, identidad social, emociones, curso de la vida, realismo crítico.

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## 1. Theoretical aims and scope of the article

The aim of the article is to study the formation of VET teachers' social identity and to show how it affects their response to critical life events. It is a difficult task to carry out for the reason that most of the research taken in the field of sociology of education and of educational sciences aspires to construct concepts that interpret teachers' relation to their professional activity, but not teachers as an occupation (Lopes, 2009; Evetts, 2014). For example, the concept of professional identity which is mostly used in the literature aims at professionalizing the teaching activity and at delimiting a body of expert knowledge possessed only from those who are members of a distinct profession characterized by peculiar rules of function (Cohen 2008; Orgoványi-Gajdos, 2016). In contrast, our approach is inspired by a symbolic interactionist point of view which sees teachers as an occupational group of which the members are bearers of various careers (Freidson, 1994). The difference lies at the fact that in implementing such constructs as self-efficacy, job satisfaction and effectiveness, researchers set up criteria for distinguishing professional and non professional teaching profiles. In contrast, we see VET teachers' identity as a social process formed through the life cycle of their social group (Goodson and Hargreaves, 1996). In that sense, we do not approach teacher identity through the developmental «becoming» which frames the discourse of professionals but through the life-course processual point of view which examines VET teachers as a group the members of which carry out an occupational activity. In the next sections, in analyzing the case of VET teachers who faced a life-threatening event, we will describe how their social identities are formed not only by dint of their membership belonging but through group's life-course social becoming as well.

## 2. Literature review

Traditionally, research stemming from the field of sociology of education is focused either on how teachers unconsciously stereotype and categorize pupils or on the structural constraints imposed on teachers by capitalist market forces. As other researchers have underlined, this line of research neglects to examine social identity issues in so far as it emphasizes how teachers respond to external pressures (Ball and Goodson, 1985: 24-26). What is missed through this emphasis is both how biographical temporalities intermingle with group's process and how teachers' career is affected by the professionalizing dynamics of the social group of teachers.

More recent approaches examine how teachers' professional identity is influenced by beliefs prior to the occupational entry. Biographical experiences and personality characteristics are seen as factors influencing the passage from being a student to being a teacher (Lambirth, 2010). It is not a deterministic transition due to its naturalistic and unconscious character. Similar to this approach is the research emphasis on how teachers' self-conception changes through the teaching career and the classroom experiences. Within this line of thought, there are attempts exploring how external or structural dimensions of teachers' profession interact with the identity construction of its members, such as the researches of Walshaw (2004) and Beijaard *et al.*, (2004) who underline the significance of the institutional processes on teachers' identity formation. In that sense, the formation of teacher identity does not follow pre-determined developmental stages, but it is constructed individually through social interaction (Richardson & Watt 2005). As scholars working in this research field have argued (Swennen *et al.*, 2008), the theoretical background that is used in this research tradition is fragmented. The research which is carried out is so disparate that ranges from teacher effectiveness to teacher self-evaluation.

Additionally, within this line of research there are no clear theoretical arguments highlighting the details of the forces which form teachers' social identity. What is left unexamined is a theoretical or conceptual explanation on the ways through which the occupational belonging affects teachers' self-understandings. While the abovementioned research literature collects abundant information on how cognitive or affective determinants frame teachers' identity formation, it does not provide us with a sociological account of it. Such an account would bring to the fore the psycho-social mechanisms which explain the sense of belonging in the social group of teachers. We believe that our research makes a contribution to this literature gap.

### 3. The research purpose and questions

The purpose of our article is to explore the role of teachers' social identity on how they respond to life-threatening events. As a case study we took VET teachers in Greece who were put into redundancy during the financial crisis of 2012-13. It was an attempt of Greek government to make cuts in its public sector so as to become entrusted by troika (Spyridakis, 2018). What we try through our research is to highlight how teachers' occupational trajectories affect the degree of belongingness they share in face of critical life events like the threat of job loss. Having said that, we focus both on the narrative grounding of teachers' identity and on the peculiar socio-structural dimensions which make up teachers as a social group. This dual focus on both the narrative and on the institutional side of teachers' identity is tied up with emphasizing the life-course dimension of their narrative identity as well as the group's social history. There are two main premises which we took into account in order to explore this dual emphasis: first, that teachers' previous career and life experience shape their view of teaching and the way he or she is practicing it. Second, that teachers' lives outside school and their latent identities have an important impact on their work as teachers and on how they define their «central life interest». The above line of reasoning frames our two research questions: 1) How was VET teacher's identities influenced by their previous life-course experiences? 2) What is the role of emotions in the collective response of teachers against the redundancy?

### 4. Emotions and collective mobilization. The social experience of becoming a VET teacher in Greece

We think that these questions will shed light on why the threat of job loss did not lead into collective mobilization in the case of Greek VET teachers. Externalist Rational Choice theorists' rejection of psychological explanations can not give us a clue as to why the same external stimuli (redundancy regime) leads to a non expectable outcome (self-blame and withdrawal and not collective action). On the contrary, without subscribing to Olsonian models of rational choice, we believe that internal reasons provide us with valuable insights as to how identities shape (non intended) social outcomes (Aguar and de Francisco, 2009). What we are going to illuminate is how both teachers' life-course work trajectories and the public perception of their profession form emotional dynamics which divert them from acting as a group. There are two ways through which one can become a VET teacher in Greece, first through national exams and, second through the waiting lists which the central government sets up by taking into account such criteria as the years of previous teaching experience and the social or marital situation (for example, suffering from chronic illness).

The specialties that the Greek VET system offers to pupils presuppose that the would-be VET teachers may have either a) university diploma, b) University Technical School diploma or c) secondary school

diploma. In other words, despite the fact that one can work as a VET teacher, there are plenty of educational and social trajectories through which one can attain the status of teacher. Some of the specialties offered by the Greek VET system and which were put into redundancy are: pharmacist, doctors, dentists, nurses, hairdressers, aestheticians, dental technicians, textile technicians, social workers, decorators, silversmith makers, electrical welding technicians, builders, graphic designers, refrigerants, tailors and physiotherapists. However disparate their route to the teaching profession is, all of them share, first, the membership identity of being VET teachers and, second, the threat of job loss.

Greek government, responding to troika's pressure to make cuts in the public sector considering it responsible of Greece's financial crisis, decided to abolish from the VET system the abovementioned specialties treating them as not so important for the contemporary vocational education. As a consequence, two thousand VET teachers in 2012 faced the threat of job loss regardless of their age or of their professional experience. In practice this meant that VET teachers would be paid for two years according to the 2/3 of the salary they received. After this period, suspended VET teachers either would be fired, they would be transferred to a relevant post in the public sector (for example, nurse teachers would be transferred to hospitals) or they would retire. What needs to be underlined is that the teachers of the abolished specialties had no idea about what was going to happen since the Greek government had shown no signs of its intentions. It is obvious that losing one's job at middle age is a disrupting experience of which the effects vary from the social to the more personal levels. This is why we view the suspension as a turning point.

What has to be stressed is that the public perception of teachers is under attack in the sense that they are portrayed as lazy and as having failed to transmit discipline, values and knowledge to the pupils (Ball and Goodson, 1985: 5). During the memorandum years, this kind of social stereotyping has been intensified through the way mass media construct discourses which provide quantitative «data» showing, for example, that Greek teachers work less than their European colleagues. In addition, VET teachers in Greece, beyond this teacher-bashing process, are seen as having lower status because they are teaching practical «*technes*» or skills and technical specialties, in contradistinction to the General secondary-school teachers who teach theoretical subjects. As a consequence, VET teachers' professional self-respect is at stake because they are socially represented by the Greek media through a double negation in the sense that they are negated the status of both the respectable teacher and of the respectable public servant.

## 5. The life-course formation of social identities

The concept of identity we use is focused on both how agents make sense of their experiences throughout their life course and on how structural circumstances affect biographical self-understandings. Emergence and structure are the two core elements which frame agents' biographical identities. Emergence means that identities are not conceived of as closed cognitive systems but as open and biographically shaped ways of providing reasons for taking decisions. Structure means that identities are not voluntaristic artefacts but that they are situated within institutional arrangements in which peculiar patterns of orientation are crystallized in social roles (Alheit, 2003). The most prominent element of the biographical conception of identity is that every agent sets up a specific biographical code through which life experiences are accounted for according to a peculiar temporal order. As Alheit puts it: «the articulation of experiences through this biographical code does not look like a chain of which the cribs are causally connected but like a story indicative of a case which can be reconstructed narratively» (Alheit, 2003: 11). Instead of asking «where

do I belong» or «who am I», the biographical conception of identity asks «how what I was shapes what I am now and what I wish (or afraid of) to become in the future.»

The biographical conception of identity is enriched from the life-course perspective which, in addressing the sequencing of transitions, highlights the role of time, the embedding of individuals' lives in contexts and the interdependency between different spheres of the life course such as family and work. Within the life-course perspective careers are socially constructed and individually experienced over time. However, there are important ways in which individual careers can be tied to wider political and economic events. In some cases particular historical 'moments' or periods assume special significance in the construction of or experience of a career (Kohli, 2007).

Finally the concept of social identity refers to the duality of the fact that one never knows who he/she is but only through others' eyes. According to Dubar (2000: 115-121), social identities entail both how agents are seen through the lens of the official classifications (*identité pour autrui*, for example State's classifications between technical specialties and theoretical subjects) and to what extent agents accept them or reject them altogether (*identité pour soi*). The concept of social identity captures the dual and heterogeneous process of both how institutions see the members of the groups to whom they apply specific labels (VET teachers/General school teachers) and whether the groups' members interiorize or reject these labels. As Dubar (2000: 102) puts it: «What we consider as public is but a ghost and what we see as deeply personal results in being what we share most with other people. In that sense, lived experience is not a psychological experience but a *par excellence* social experience which can be studied scientifically.»

## 6. Methodology

As far as our sample scheme is concerned, we chose to research what is called an «extreme case.» In the relevant literature extreme cases are chosen when the research aim is to develop new theoretical propositions regarding a specific substantive area of interest and not to confirm/disconfirm theories. The methodological value of this case derives from its extremity (along some dimension of interest), not from its theoretical status or its status in the literature on a subject (Gerring, 2007: 101). In our research, given that it is the rareness of the case that makes it valuable, VET teachers who faced the threat job loss as a critical life event is an extreme case because the unusual situation of being in redundancy is more informative regarding the deeper socio-emotional determinants of their social identity than when they practice their profession in routine situations. Thus, in order to find informants we approached VET teachers who were in the list with the names the Greek government put into redundancy. As a first step and given that two of the authors are teachers in General high schools, we selected informants by acquaintance and through a kind of snowball sampling we asked our initial informants to introduce us to other VET teachers who were in redundancy too. As a result we collected thirty two (32) biographical-narrative interviews in which the gender distribution was unequal because most of the VET teachers were women (24 women, 8 men), due to the fact that it was the government's decision to put into redundancy «women's VET specialties.» Finally, the informants' age ranged between 42 and 55 years old. The specialties from which we collected the interviews are nurse, dental technician, aesthetician, dentist and doctors.

Regarding the reasons why we used biographical – narrative style of interviewing, we think it is more appropriate when one wants to study self-processes related with peculiar life situations such as life disruptions and with how members of social groups develop strategies to cope with them. However, in our research we did not limit the value of biographical interviewing only for tapping lived experiences

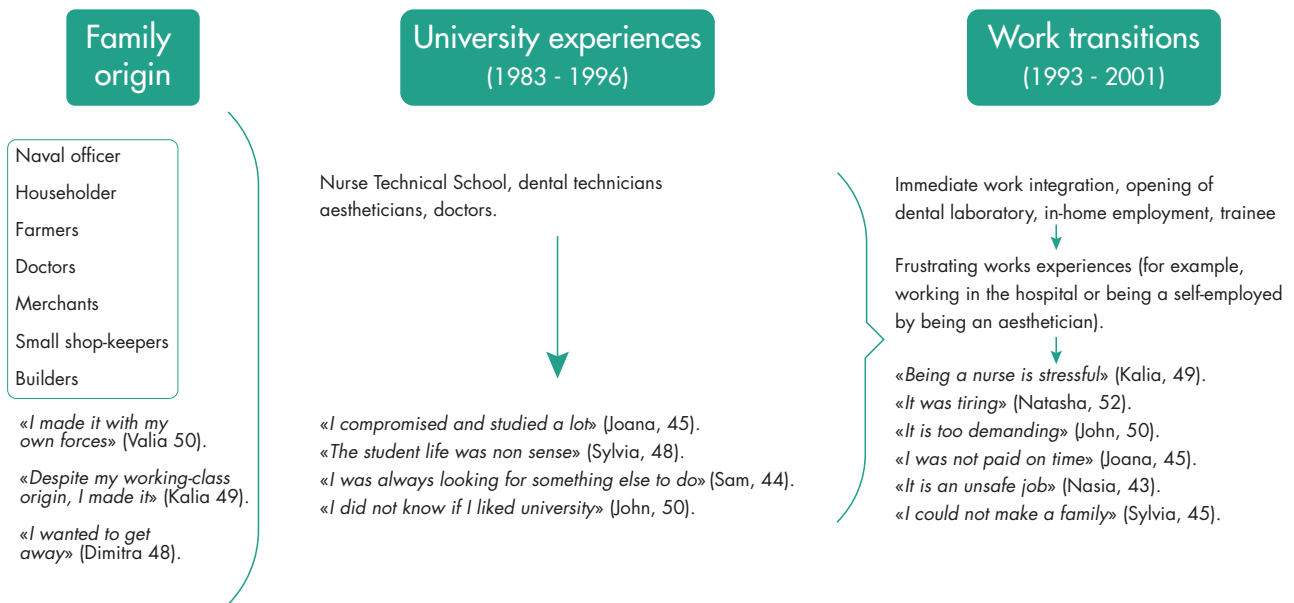
but mostly for tracing causal processes, which make things, happen. In particular, through biographical interviews we can both highlight first-person perspectives and explore the generative mechanisms, which form them. As Wengraf and Chamberlayne (2013: 63) put it: «to avoid being seduced by interviewees' storytelling, for a critical realist understanding it is crucial that the researcher separately gathers together as much hard biographical and contextual data as they can in order to understand the 'situated subjectivity' of the story teller.»

Despite the fact that the biographical method tends to be identified with a constructivist epistemology, we adopted the Critical Realist (CR) social ontology for framing biographical interviews. What distinguishes CR from the constructivism-oriented epistemology is, *mutatis mutandis*, that the roots of interviewee's meaning formation are not inscribed in the interview context but in the external social reality, which is stratified in the Empirical, Actual and the Real layers. The Empirical layer concerns lived experiences, the Actual entails events and the Real entails generative mechanisms. This means that causality is found not only in the informants reasons for acting but also in the emergent reality of which the peculiar features are not reduced to the individual actor him/herself (Fletcher, 2017).

As far as interview data analysis is concerned, we followed Demazier and Dubar's (1997) analyses in discerning the interview text in Sequences, Actants and Narratives. The analysis focuses on how the horizontal axis of Sequence is articulated with the vertical axis of evaluations and narrations. This articulation is expressed in pairs of conjunctions and disjunctions in which interviewees' meanings are formed. In other words, informants' deeper meanings are to be found in the «code of Discourse» which is constructed through relations of difference. According to Demazier and Dubar, what are analyzed is not the psychology of individuals but the embedding of their narratives in particular social situations. This is the reason why Demazier and Dubar' style of analysis is compatible with a CR social ontology. Informants talk about themselves and their life course through normative judgments within which past experiences, present situations and future potentialities are emplotted.

In closing this first part of the article we want to clarify how we have organized the presentation of our findings. While it is used that researchers present their findings in a thematic manner, we chose to structure the next sections as following: we will provide three schemes each of which taps a specific research finding related to VET teachers as a social group. In particular, the first scheme identifies the major transitions they have been through and the main narrative patterns through which they make sense of them. The second shows VET teachers' main responses to the threat of job loss and in what ways it impacted on them. The third scheme depicts the socio-emotional dynamic that affects their social identity. Then, for each scheme we analyze the details of a life narrative, which functions as an illustrative case, which exemplifies these relevant findings.

**Graphic 1. Teachers' Group-Specific Life Course Process**



### Teachers' Group – specific life course process

Graphic 1 depicts the main turning points, which make up teachers' life course as a social group and taps the social trajectories of its members before they enter VET system. We have focused on family origin, university experiences and work trajectories and for each life phase we present the dominant narrative patterns through which teachers make sense of it. Raised in working-class families in the beginning of 80s', the informants' life plans had not as their goal to become secondary school teachers, but, as their narrative patterns show, their decision to follow university studies was tied up with financial establishment. What one should keep from these patterns concerns the sense of personal achievement the informants experienced due to the fact that university entrance symbolized class mobility, which was not so usual in their family culture. However, this sense of achievement coexisted with feelings of insecurity stemming from the fact that the more they remained outside the job market after university graduation, the more stress they felt because their family could not support them financially. Regarding the third turning point, we see that their transition to work is full of sentiments of frustration, despite the fact that all of them had not any serious trouble finding a job consistent with their university diplomas. The sources of frustration had to do either with the job demands (short-term contracts, frequent job transfers) or with peculiar characteristics, which make informants feel unsafe (for example characteristics related to the local labour market of dental technicians whose income is dependent upon dentists' orders). The case of John exemplifies the narrative patterns of the informants and the biographical logic, which framed their decision to become VET teachers. Although John's case looks atypical regarding his social class origin, the typicality of his case lies at the transformation from being undecided regarding the work plans to becoming a committed VET teacher.

### The case of John

John was 50 years old when the interview took place. His mother was household keeper and his father was naval officer. He is the only informant who presents himself as coming from a wealthy family providing as a reason that he attended private primary and secondary school. Regarding his post-

secondary life plans, even though he aspired to become a doctor, he confesses that it was his mother's dream and that he wanted to follow his father's path and to become a naval officer. However, a health problem with his eyes prevented him from realizing this goal, an event which experienced it as a frustration. In face of it, he moved to Athens reacting to his parents who wanted him to become a sailor. During his stay in Athens, it was two accidental acquaintances with two friends that changed his life and made him to get involved to the teacher profession. The first one was with a friend.

*«Who when I asked him about his job he told me that he was a dental technician, I asked him "what is this?" and he said "I construct and fix teeth", then I asked him "do you get enough money?", he replied "yes" and then I enrolled to a Technical University School for dental technicians. When I completed my studies, I started working, but I did not like it because I had to work for a lot of hours.»*

No matter how lucky he was regarding the way he found his first job, John remained unsatisfied as far as the job conditions are concerned. A second acquaintance was more crucial than the first one since it opened him the door to the teaching profession:

*«When I started working as self-employed I made a lot of connections with dentists who were ordering me dental stuff but I was not satisfied, so I was looking for something else, I didn't know what exactly, just something else, then I met an old friend who told me "I am a teacher in technical school, I am a dental technician and I teach pupils the art of our profession, didn't you know that we are entitled to become VET teachers? It is a permanent job, not a short-term contract". That was it, the next year I applied to the Ministry of Education and I started my career as a VET teacher, it was 1997.»*

It is obvious that John presents his life in a coherent and linear manner and with full of favorable outcomes. His frequent use of direct speech functions as a discursive means for making his description believable and for emplotting the fact that he remained undecided until his mid 30's. However, in the flow of the interview John presents himself as a very committed teacher who loves to read a lot and who is related with his job in terms of the Weberian «calling.» In the next passage we see how he tries to reconcile these two different self-conceptions within his life narrative:

*«I didn't like my School, I didn't like reading, what I always liked is to be a teacher, it is something I always knew but I did not want to become a teacher because I had to enter the university, I did not want to read but while I was growing up I like it, now I read a lot and every day.»*

John's case exemplifies three events: first, the indecisiveness which permeates the process of becoming a VET teacher, second, the frustrating job experiences teachers had before they enter the teacher profession and which are connected with being self-employed and, third, a change in the self-conception of how teachers are related to their social role: from being indifferent to being devoted teachers. A question emerges regarding the role these three events played as to how teachers responded to the Greek government's decision to put them into redundancy. In the next figure we illustrate the effects, the responses and the main narrative patterns of how nurses, aestheticians, doctors and dentists have dealt with the regime of redundancy.



## Graphic 2. Responses and Effects of Job Loss

### The Experience of Job Loss, the Responses and the Narrative Patterns of the Informants

	Nurse	Aestheticians	Doctors – dentists
<b>Effects</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Psychological problems</li> <li>Feelings of shame</li> <li>Depression</li> <li>Annulment of plans related to motherhood</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Permanent sense of fear</li> <li>«Coldness»</li> <li>Psychological problems</li> <li>Feelings of shame</li> <li>Depression</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Difficulties related to the return to the private sector</li> <li>A few were not affected</li> <li>Interiorization of devaluation</li> </ul>
<b>Responses</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collective mobilization</li> <li>Struggle</li> <li>Union help</li> <li>Legal actions</li> <li>Finding a job in Technical School</li> <li>Transfer to hospitals or to kindergarten</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mobilization</li> <li>Struggle</li> <li>Union help</li> <li>Legal actions</li> <li>Finding a job in Technical School</li> <li>Transfer to hospitals or to kindergarten</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implementing plans aimed at returning to self-employment</li> <li>Engagement with family (for example, devoting time to children)</li> </ul>
<b>Main narrative patterns</b>	<p>«We were like hostages» (Natasha, 52), «Inaction» (Kalia, 49), «It was like a death announcement» (Dimitra, 48), «We were treated like puppets» (Valia, 50).</p>	<p>«Depreciation» (Sylvia, 48), «Neither employee nor unemployed» (Nasia, 43), «The State did not appreciate our job» (Joana, 45).</p>	<p>«It was a kind of awakening», (John, 50), «I do not panic, I do not lose my temper» (Sam, 44).</p>

### Ascending job trajectories as means of dealing with turning points

Through Joana's case we analyse the structuring of teachers' response to job loss. In particular, we focus on how the social/family ties influence the choices teachers made in overcoming the threat of job loss and on the role the social value of their university diploma played in taking decisions.

#### The case of Joana

Joana at the time of the interview was 48 years old and the biographical sequencing of her life history runs as follows:

- Born at 1965 and raised in a working-class family
- She has one twin brother, one elder brother and one elder sister
- At 1983 she enters the Nurse Technical School and at the same time she started working as an assistant accountant
- At 1987 she was appointed as a nurse in a public hospital and at the same time she studied for one year in a School which provides pedagogical training and services its members for the teaching career
- At 1988 she gets married and after three years (1991) she gives birth to a boy
- At 1993 she started working as VET teacher in technical school

The dominant genre, which pervades Joana's self-presentation narrative, is something like «whatever I achieved, I did it by myself and by relying on my own powers.» Social class and gender order are the two structural constraints which she emplots as the main obstacles she managed to overcome so as to reach her goals. For instance, in her introductory extempore narrative she values her willingness for achievement in the following manner:

*«From a very young age I was trying to gain knowledge because it was the only way for me to live in my own powers, my family was poor and I was studying and working at the same time, I was raised in a large family with two brothers and one sister, I was never helped by anyone, I tried by myself to enter the university and I made it.»*

Although she married at 23, she realized that her husband's traditional beliefs about the role of women were not in accord with her ambitions to develop as a nurse as much as a teacher. As a result she decided to divorce him and to continue her life with her new husband whom she met the next year in the Pedagogical school he attended too. The reason why she decided to stop working as a nurse in the hospital and to become a VET teacher by taking advantage of her position in teachers' waiting list, was that she could not put her life in a program, she could not realize plans:

*«I was working in the hospital for many hours, I could not see my new husband and in addition the work shifts were unpredictable so that I could not schedule my life, I could not schedule anything. For that reason I decided to leave the hospital and to start working as a permanent VET teacher because I was profited from my position in the teachers' waiting list.»*

The self-image of an ambitious and an achievement-oriented personality is the argumentative ground upon which the narrating of her decision-making is built. Despite the fact that she was appointed a permanent job as a teacher, she believed that «superior knowledge would be needed if one wants to become a teacher.» For that reason, after some years she started attending a postgraduate programme (at 2006), which was followed by a PhD research (at 2008). Through this educational development Joana managed to make sense of her most crucial turning-point experience (before redundancy comes up):

*«When did you first realize that you like being a teacher?  
In the beginning I did not like to be a teacher, I liked my job in the hospital, but the truth is that one has to be committed to his/her job in order to be a good teacher, so I told to myself that I had to combine my nurse studies with profound knowledge in educational issues, that's why I started doctorate research.»*

*«What have you learnt all these years from being a teacher?  
The job of teacher is a disappointing experience, I have learnt two things, first the value of working in groups and second the importance of critical thinking, however through my PhD studies I realized that teachers have not critical thinking and do not like team work, teachers do their job in a routine way.»*

In other words, what Joana shares with her colleagues is not a body of scientific knowledge but just a membership position given by the state classifications. On the contrary, the scientific knowledge she obtained enables her to give meaning to the transition from being a nurse to being a VET teacher. It is a research finding that we hold because it is by dint of this biographically shaped emotional distance through which teachers dealt with redundancy. See how Joana puts it:

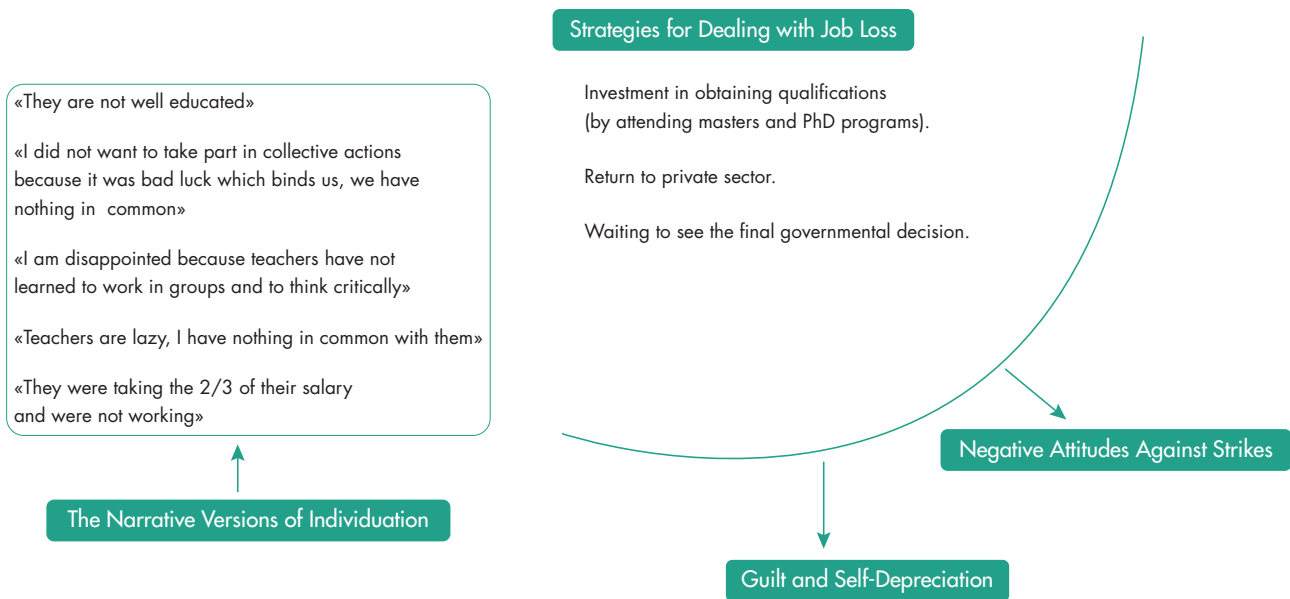
*«Do you want to tell me about the redundancy experience?  
It was like a shock for me, it was unexpected, the government said that there is no point in teaching nurse in VET schools because there is no professional future in this work, it is a lie, they decide to abolish us because it is a women's specialty which is easily handled, it was Friday night on 19th of June, it is a betrayal since all my life I was trying to educate myself, I can not accept that the only way to be in the public sector is to have three or four children [teachers who had over three kids were exempted from the regime of redundancy], I felt that my job as teacher and all my efforts to educate myself were unappreciated, it is not by accident that a serious health problem afflicted me for several years, a friend of mine told that it was the stress which affected me, the good thing from this experience was that I was forced to complete my PhD research which enabled me to work as a short-term contract teacher in Technical Nurse School.»*

*«What was the reaction of your friends and colleagues?»*

*It was something like “ohh the poor girl, we are very sorry about what happened to you”, it was a sense I received from how they were seeing me, my friends were very sad because they knew how much I struggled in order to become what I am now, the State should profit by such qualified teachers like me and not to fire us, I felt like a garbage, it would be a huge depreciation for me if I would accept to be transferred to the hospital and work as a nurse, I did not went through all this career in order to return to the hospital.»*

It is obvious that Joana's investment to educate herself has serious social and psychological ramifications. Social, because the fact that she managed to complete her PhD during the period of redundancy provided her with the means to combat unemployment and to get a prestigious job through which she could protect her self-esteem. Psychological, in the sense that she was trying to overcome the feeling of being seen by the State as useless, it was this feeling of contempt which caused serious psychosomatic symptoms in her body. We think that one should keep in mind how these emotional dynamics influence the sense of belongingness teachers construct while they face life disrupting experiences. In the next section we explain how these dynamics annul teachers' collective mobilization and action.

### Graphic 3. The Vicious Circle of Guilt and Self-Blame



### The vicious circle of guilt and self-blame

In this final section we will explore how and why the experience of redundancy has created a feeling of resentment in teachers' self-conceptions which is directed not against the State, but towards their colleagues. We will show why a social threat, instead of strengthening the emotional bonds of teachers' group, sets in motion emotional dynamics of which the peculiarities are shaped by this group and makes them reluctant against collective action. Sam's story exemplifies this process.

#### Sam's story

The biographical history of Sam is the following:

- Born in 1974

- 1996 graduates from the Dental Technician Technical School
- He works as self-employed in his own laboratory for 9 years
- At 2005 he succeeds in national exams and starts working as a teacher

The pattern of indecision recurs and permeates Sam's life trajectory. Although his dream was to become a doctor, he studied something of which the prospects were unknown to him. When asked to comment on the fact that he passed to the Technical School and not to Medicine, he replied: «it's ok, I do not know, I'll give a try.» He decided to open his own laboratory in order to get money but it was the limited financial prospects of this kind of job, which made him to start thinking of working as a VET teacher. However, even though he succeeded in the national exams and became a teacher, he retained the laboratory for complementing his income. Finally, it is striking the confused account he gives in order to make sense of his decision to study in a postgraduate programme, during the redundancy period.

*«What was it that made you to get a MSc?*

*I wanted it...no I didn't want it so much because friends and relatives believed that I did it in order not to get fired [Greek government said that those who hold masters are not losing their jobs after the redundancy period is over], I accept that this is true to some extent but it is not absolutely true, I did it for reasons of self-improvement, in order to become a better teacher, I am not sure but no matter what ... I did it.»*

Sam in most of his talk preferred the description as a way to account for his life events and the two actors who were evidently absent from it were his wife and his parents. He referred to them only once, his wife was brought to the fore by accident when he thoroughly described his timetable so as to underline how pressed his time is and his parents were referred to when asked to comment how his job goals were formed. He started narrating when he talked about the redundancy experience. From being an external observer of life transitions Sam transformed to a passionate informant who expresses his indignation about the stigma involved in losing his job.

*«It was a shocking experience, the impression I got was that I was being devalued, when one enters the teacher's profession he/she is stamped, anyone looks at him/her as a specific person and he/she is identified with his/her job, this is something which does not happen with the other employees, teachers become one with this stamp, the State stolen violently and wrongfully this identity from us and that's why I felt devalued, I was annulled as a personality.»*

The way Sam tried to cope with the indignation and the devaluation he felt was to start working intensively to his laboratory. In that sense, Sam sincerely says that the impact redundancy had upon him was not financial but psychological.

*«I had strong feelings of anxiety because I was put in a situation in between, I was not unemployed since I was taking the 2/3 of my salary and I was not employed since I was not working as teacher, I was always waiting, I didn't know whether I would fire or be transferred, the consequence of all this situation was psychological.»*

The important thing is that VET teachers had to deal not only with the government's political decisions but mostly with colleagues' reactions. Redundancy, besides being felt as a personal insult, was seen as a disease, which had to be cured by doing everything one could so as to get rid of this malady.

The vocabulary Sam uses describes eloquently how he experienced the reactions of his colleagues when they learnt about Greek governments' decisions.

*«My colleagues behaved as if they had been afflicted by some disease and they tried to take it out of their body in order to recover, this is how I felt when I told them what had happened. I am sure that if you hear in the news that an employee has been put into redundancy, you will think that he did something bad in whatever sense, this is how VET teachers put in redundancy had felt.»*

Sam's narrative exemplifies that the feeling of shame undermines the emotional ties of teachers' group. Putting teachers into redundancy has the effect that what unites them (the fact that they belong to the same social category) is considered responsible for governments' decision. In other words, sameness is contrasted to the feeling of belongingness in the sense that no matter how same the teachers are due to the fact that they do the same job, they feel ashamed of how society sees the reasons government gives for putting them into redundancy. See how this feeling is intensified when Sam narrates in more depth his colleagues' reactions.

*«What connects us is something that is not good, something that happened to us and is bad or evil, it is quite unreasonable for me that I came close to my colleagues because something bad happened to us, I was bored talking about the lawyers who are the most capable for defending us, so I didn't like taking part in these gatherings, I felt that there was nothing I could share with them, I didn't want to be with them, it was too unbearable to me that I was forced to connect with them, I was forced because it was this bad luck that unites us, I can not accept it.»*

*«Beyond this bad luck, what unites you is that you are all VET teachers  
Yes, ok, we are (long pause), look, I support the view that the public sector in Greece does not function well and I do not disagree with the dismissals the government imposed, I would say that eventually some of us deserve to be fired because some us are worthless as teachers, the problem was that the government treated us a whole by not implementing criteria for discerning the worthwhile from the worthless teachers or the good from the bad teachers, we were treated as if we are all same but we are not.»*

The reasons Sam gives so as to account for his colleagues' reactions are typical of why VET teachers' collective mobilization failed. The role of the emotion in the social structuring of teachers' social identity prevails in this failure. In particular, we see that no matter how indignant they are against governments' decision to put them into redundancy for two years, VET teachers blame their colleagues' anti-professional behavior for what happened to them. In that way, however, they can not put a blame on their selves too due to their membership belonging. As a consequence, they end up in feeling resentment against their colleagues and in depriving them from acting as a group.

## 7. Results. When commonalities create differences

In this section we will try to illuminate in more detail how informants' life-course multiple trajectories result in a mixture of emotional dynamic creating in them a kind of social identity which blocks collective action. By using as a research example the extreme case of VET teachers in Greece who faced a disruptive event, we bring to the fore the role of emotion in the structuring of teachers' social identity. First of all, it seems that informants' identity depends upon the social trajectories through which they enter the teacher profession. What is common in the social pathways before their entrance into teachers' pro-

profession, is not an educational life plan but disappointing and frustrating job experiences. Given that the Technical School diploma they obtained was not the end of an educational project but a means of social survival or of upward mobility, it follows that the insecurity they faced in their jobs as self-employed in the private sector intensified their indecision. VET teachers were extremely undecided regarding what to do with their job and this is the reason why most of them learned about the possibility to get a job in VET system by chance. This means that they went through a transformation process of identifying with the role of the teacher. In that sense, although they were identified with the ideal of being a teacher, they seldom developed social ties with their colleagues. Although it sounds unbelievable, see how Kostas replied when asked whether he participated in whatever form of collective action:

*«I never participated in such actions because most of the participants (VET teachers) were women, 9 out of 10 were women who were crying, I felt I was in a funeral, I could not be a part of such a situation.» (Kostas, doctor, 50).*

In a similar vein, this is how Joana (nurse, 50) commented on where the value of the teaching profession lies:

*«From my teaching experience in VET schools I learned how to tell lies in my colleagues in order to get elected in the union-trade elections (she laughs ironically), I think that our profession has been depreciated by such practices, so I do not want to have contacts with such persons.»*

Finally, Theoni (doctor, 50) feels too estranged when she talks about her emotional attachments with her colleagues:

*«My colleagues' views on various issues are old-fashioned, after financial crisis lashed out at Greece teachers reacted in a pessimistic way, they were trying just to survive and they were saying that they will not do their job as they should because of the wage cuts, I am not this kind of person, I could not live in a workplace in which such views dominate, I wanted to get out of this circle, I felt I did not belong to these circles.»*

These narrations made us think that our informants were proud of attaining the goal of upward mobility and not of being a member of a social group. What the biographical interviews revealed was the pride that they felt about being ascending on their own powers. However, the sense of achievement which is common in their narratives, functions as a sign of distancing with each other: «We are different due to the fact (or despite the fact that) we are proud of having achieved something on our own powers.»

The coexistence of pride and distancing in VET teachers' social identity is what lies beneath their failure to act collectively when they faced the threat of job loss. It would be superficial and naïve in attributing to fear the reasons of this failure. On the contrary, what our research highlighted concerns the intermingling of social and emotional responses. In particular, it is not by accident that the two most prominent responses of dealing with redundancy were teachers' investment in educational qualifications and the aid they took from family networks. The emotional, economic or social resources they used for overcoming the threat of job loss had not to do with the involvement in collective mobilization in order to combat government's decision. On the contrary, in having interiorized the label of the «lazy public servant» who is responsible for the regime of redundancy, VET teachers got the sense that they carry a stigma, which they should get rid of, despite the criticisms they expressed, as Joana did. The paradox lies

at the fact that the result was not the creation of community comprised of «guilty teachers» who acts like a group but, instead, that VET teachers tried to maintain the sense of belongingness by distancing themselves from each other. In our view this is something that their previous pathways had formed and not a behavioral reaction to an external stimuli (government's measures). What united them (the regime of redundancy) ended up in compartmentalizing them in so far as in their colleagues' face they would see a shameful image of themselves. In our view, the feeling of shame undermined their emotional and social ties only to the extent that it traumatized the class pride through which VET teachers constructed their biographical identities. Since they were proud of being upwardly mobile by dint of being VET teachers, they sensed that what they had achieved had been afflicted by their colleagues' behavior. In that way, what they had in common made them want to distance themselves from whatever reminded them of what they thought they should be ashamed of.

## 8. Discussion

One of the main theoretical points of our research is that teachers' professionalism does not seem to enhance the sense of belongingness in the social group of teachers and their emotional ties. Without denying that the autonomy teachers have upon the curriculum augments the levels of job satisfaction or that effective leadership influences the levels of commitment to the role of teacher, we highlighted that the emotional stances and evaluations teachers maintain with regards to the life-course experiences affects both how they make sense of their colleagues and group solidarity (Day, *et al.*, 2003; Cabaniss, 2014). What binds teachers as a social group should not be exhausted only to how experts they are on moral, pedagogic or scientific matters. Even though scientific expertise is a necessary component of teachers' self-understanding, it is not sufficient for making them feel that they are members of a social group (Sikes, 1985). Under circumstances which are stressful or life-threatening, membership identities based on professionalism criteria (performance, efficiency, management) can easily fall apart, leaving group members as weak and vulnerable as ever.

Throughout our research we underlined that the common threat of job loss did not foster teachers' feelings of we-ness but it fuelled feelings of resentment. This happened not because they were motivated by egoistic drives but because the sense of being proud of their upward mobility has been traumatized by the way the Greek government stigmatized them through redundancy. This finding is consistent with Cabaniss's (2014: 648) point that «one way people can preserve claims to a moral identity is by avoiding interactions that would cause them to see their actions as inconsistent with that identity.» This means that the spoiling of teachers' moral and emotional identity has insulted their class aspirations of not returning to a working-class situation. In that way, teachers, instead of critiquing the class nature of teachers' lived experiences, are trying to protect themselves from feelings of shame by blaming each other. We do not think that this is a generalizable statement in quantitative terms but that it taps a generative mechanism, which explains how the members of a social group act in life-threatening situations. In other words, it is more close to the concept of «contingent generalizability» and not to the from-sample-to-population generalization (Bengtsson and Hertting, 2014). Even though Lambrirth (2010) hopefully believes that teachers' awareness coupled with future events and actions that may impact profoundly upon them and others around them may be the most powerful lever for a fundamental change in society, we think that teachers' subjectivities are forged through their class life-course pathways by means of which they tend to resist or accept State's definitions of what it means to be a teacher. However motivating moral shocks are

in promoting collective action, we think that unexpected and disruptive life events are mediated by how teachers make sense of how what they were affects what they are now. The shame of spoiled collective identities or the pride of refurbished ones or the joy of imagining a new and better society and participating in a movement toward that end are not automatic responses but they are culturally and historically contested and variable.

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