Professional identity shifts of academic teachers in response to recent (g)local critical incidents: Preliminary research results

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic, 2020-2022, has been defined as a turning point and possibly a critical incident (Tripp 1993) for the workstyle, professional well-being, and quality of work of thousands of academics worldwide. This type of uncontrolled, unexpected, and multifaceted event: political (procedural and administrative), biological (coronavirus inflicted deaths) and cultural (normative), has never before been experienced by the contemporary generation of professionally active academic teachers. As we assume in the presented research findings, two years of a global lockdown and the implementation of regulations which have had a destabilizing effect, must have affected the dynamics of *identity shifts* experienced by this professional community. Paradoxically, however, alongside this, endless possibilities have opened up for new research concerning the hardship experienced during the adaptation undertaken to deal with global and local (g/local) socio-cultural changes in policy and work conditions in academia. One such

study, led by two co-researchers at the University of Gdańsk, shall be introduced and partially described in the following text. Selected findings shall also be demonstrated and tentative conclusions drawn.

Keywords

identity shifts, academic nexus of multi-membership, professional development, engaged teaching

Przesunięcia w tożsamości profesjonalnej nauczycieli akademickich w odpowiedzi na (g)lokalne wydarzenia krytyczne: Wstępne wyniki badań

Abstrakt

Pandemia Covid-19 w latach 2020–2022 została zdefiniowana jako punkt zwrotny i prawdopodobnie incydent krytyczny (Tripp 1993) dla kondycji psychofizycznej oraz stylu i jakości pracy tysięcy naukowców na całym świecie. Tego typu niekontrolowanego, nieoczekiwanego i wieloaspektowego zwrotu politycznego (proceduralno-administracyjnego), biologicznego (zgony spowodowane koronawirusem) i kulturowego (normatywnego) współczesne pokolenie aktywnych zawodowo nauczycieli akademickich nigdy wcześniej nie doświadczyło. Zakładamy w przedstawionych w artykule wynikach badań, że 2 lata globalnego lockdownu i wdrażania regulacji o destabilizującym wpływie na codzienność zawodową wpłynęły na dynamikę *zmian tożsamościowych* doświadczanych przez społeczność akademicką. Zarazem otworzyły się nieskończone możliwości dla nowych badań dotyczących trudności doświadczanych podczas adaptacji podjętej w celu radzenia sobie z globalnymi i lokalnymi (tj. g/lokalnymi) zmianami w warunkach pracy w środowisku akademickim. Jedno z takich badań w swoim cząstkowym wymiarze i ograniczone do jednego z polskich uniwersytetów przedstawione zostaje przez autorów poniższego tekstu.

Słowa kluczowe

zmiany tożsamości, akademickie ogniwo wieloprzynależności, rozwój zawodowy, nauczanie zaangażowane

1. Introduction of leading categories and conceptual research framework

Defining academic *identity* provides many options when it comes to scholarly approaches to this multidimensional, theoretical concept in the educational setting. Almost every research discipline in the humanities and social sciences has developed its own contextualisation for the term *identity*. Many of them refer to the sociological works of Pierre Bourdieu and his concept of "cultural capital" as a value which is built up in education. For example, Bonny Norton (2013) did this in her attempts "to integrate poststructuralist conceptions of identity and human agency by developing a construct […] called 'investment'" (Norton 2013: 2, Norton and Toohey 2011). She elaborated on the notion of motivation and literacy in the area of speaking a foreign language, understanding literacy as an overly complex social practice of exchange (of facts and ideas) aiming at gaining more agency in the educational context and, in this way enhancing one's own and the learner's cultural and social capital, but also reaching out to develop their **identity through literacy**. In the context of Academia, the research on teachers' identities and their shifts includes the analyses by Bourdieu in his famous *Homo Academicus* (Bourdieu 1984). Betcher and Trowler (2001) also investigated this notion in the context of disciplinary identities and the conditions of their possible alterations. Van Lanveld et al. (2017) conducted a qualitative meta-analysis of fifty-nine research reports devoted to the issue of academic teachers' identity shifts and development. Their synthesis showed that the quality of contacts with students as well as staff development programmes contributed to the clarification and strengthening of teachers identities (2017: 328–331). This report also presents identity shifts

as phenomena that are far from smooth processes. On the psychological level, there are five processes that play significant roles in the processes of both building the identity and changing it: "a sense of appreciation, a sense of connectedness, a sense of competence, a sense of commitment and imagining a future career trajectory" (2017: 325).

As we need, however, to limit our choice to the context of academic reality and our research aims, we refer to the *social theory of learning* and *situated learning* (cf. Wenger 1998), which also relates to the theories of identity developed by Norton (2013) and Luke (1977). "As Luke (1997) notes, while earlier psychological perspectives conceived of literacy as the acquisition of particular behaviors, cognitive strategies, and linguistic processing skills, more recent insights from ethnography, cultural studies, and feminist theory have led to increasing recognition that literacy is not only a skill to be learned, but a practice that is socially constructed and locally negotiated" (cf. Norton 2013: 2). The social theory of learning focuses more on the interactional and relational aspects of learning and teaching more than the purely cognitive, with regard to the individual aptitudes of a human being as iconically defined, for example, by Piaget. Thus, the framing of *identity* shall be viewed as a pulsating pattern "of several negotiated meanings of our experience of membership in social communities" (Wenger 1998: 145). Following Wenger's idea, we must also view it through the prism of a dynamic *learning trajectory* (which is like a constant social interplay of the social roles performed (cf. Goffman 2008) during which academic teachers experience and co-construct and re-construct their specific *nexus of multi-membership.* This metaphorical entity, also recalled by Wenger, provides an adequate conceptualization of what happens today with shifts of social and personal identity constructs of academics in their processes of *social learning.* Not only has global lockdown and the transfer to online teaching enforced the reorganization of their professional lives, but it has also effected their private territories. Social interaction face to face has been challenged by a mediated contact, which

shed new light on digital literacy levels or – even if this was not a problem – a new affective (emotional) and cognitive (rational) attitude towards a teaching/learning process and its subjects. Teaching practice has become dispersed and represented through multiple, usually individual, approaches, methods, tools, and channels of communication, which on the one hand greatly accelerated the teachers' methodological creativity, but on the other hand, opened up new grounds for their malfunctioning. It needs to be remembered that the *academic nexus of multi-membership* of academic teachers includes not only their teaching activities, but also running research projects, doing administrative tasks, and, very meaningfully to our analysis, initiating or continuing their *professional development*. Grant winning and bureaucratic accountability, being a result of neoliberal research funding mechanisms, adds even more to doubling or tripling of the above mentioned workload in different and new contexts. Faced with such a scope of identity related complexity, it is important to go into more depth about some categories which constitute the "floating character" of the contemporary *academic nexus of multi-membership***.** This is done to give a conceptual framework to the research project introduced below**.**

First, it must be noted that all these academic practices, although performed autonomically, are never isolated from social interactions and practices of others in the academic community. Hence*, situated learning* appears as a natural context for academic work. Especially, when we understand it as a "transitory concept, a bridge, between a view according to which cognitive processes […] are primary and a view according to which social practice is the primary, generative phenomenon, and learning is one of its characteristics" (Lave and Wenger 1991: 34). Wenger based his model of learning on the interaction between **practice, meaning, community** and **identity**. If we view teaching as a correlate of learning (disregarding any direction of dominance and without prioritizing), we must also see teaching as a highly meaningful, social acti-

vity which incorporates the creation of identity (of those who are subjected to teaching and those who teach).

Consequently, socially marked *situated learning*, as constitutive to teaching, needs some more identifying descriptors and representations, which we have turned into framing categories for our research results analysis. Again, to limit the discussion only to categories contributing to our research, we recall **self-reflection** (Schoen 1983). Because our empirical research, des-cribed and introduced in more detail in part 2 of this chapter, aimed, among other things, to measure such phenomena as *Teaching Satisfaction*, *Self-Perception of Didactic Success/Failure* and *Self-evaluation of own Competencies*, **self-reflection** is to our mind a pre-condition to any academic activity. It relates directly to the next subjects of analysis: *Models of Self-education and Professional Development*, covered by research but not included in the present analysis. There is no other way to assess whether teachers experience success or failure if they do not reflect upon their own practice in the exchange of feedback with students and colleagues. A teacher's own professional competencies can be subjected to constant re-evaluation and self-reflection once the teacher is ready to receive and adequately provide feedback based upon the merits of what has been achieved. Thus, *self-reflection* becomes a natural habit and *professional development* turns into a mindset.

We label the *nexus of multi-membership* with the additional category of **Engaged Teaching**. Not disregarding *Self-reflection,* we dare to assume that *Engaged Teaching* is even more sensitive to geopolitical and health related (Covid-19) critical incidents. Hence, we make it a framing category for analysing phenomena such as *Sources of professional support, Need for didactic training* and, very importantly, the way teachers view the *Role of research they do for the quality of their teaching.* This is a delicate area of academic activity which is mostly exposed to ideological clashes between neoliberal demands calling for being both a good researcher and a teacher, as well as the cognitive and affective need for consonance between internal (motivational) and external (institutional) pressure to

constantly professionalize teaching skills and research achievements. All this has been drastically challenged by the Covid-19 pandemic, which changed the form of education without changing the level of demands and thus enhanced the dissonance experienced **while shifting academic identities**.

Engaged Teaching constitutes a meaningful framing category for one major reason: the levels of engagement of academics (cognitive and emotional) with teaching may vary due to their very individual responsivity to (1) the institutional policy at the university, and (2) the group dynamics in the local *communities of practice*. The aforementioned *social theory of learning* draws on the essentiality of social interaction with all the other agents related to teaching. This interaction may be with students or other teachers (and even non-human objects), depending on the organisational policy and local culture of studying. One way or another, to operate in the fields of emotional energy (EE; Collins 2011), which affects sense-making, there needs to be constant reflection on what else is needed to be a member of a particular *community of practice* and an agent in a particular field of emotional energy (EE). To follow this approach, however, it is important to inquire whether teachers subjectively need more didactic training to self-asses as competent teachers.

Last but not least, *Engaged Teaching* appears a worthy category for another reason: the Humboldtian university model, of which Polish Higher Education (HE) seems to be highly respectful, values the relation between teaching and research highly. We share this approach and believe that for meaningful teaching the educator-researcher needs to make research in their field and share (or even better co-produce) new scientific developments with their students. In this we agree with Teresa Bauman, who wrote that being a researcher is a condition for being an academic teacher and that "nobody starts working in academia to teach students but to explore the world" (Bauman 2011: 6).

Table 1

Framing categories vs researched categories

FRAMING CATEGORIES	RESEARCHED CATEGORIES
Self-reflection	Teaching Satisfaction
	Self–perception of Didactic Success and Failure
	Self-evaluation of own Competencies
Engaged Teaching	Need for Didactic Training
	Role of Research for Engaged Teaching

2. Elements of HE policy and demographic turns in Poland as conducive to the identity shifts of academic teachers

Our research was conducted in 2022 among academic teachers at the University of Gdańsk. In order to ground our research, in some historically meaningful perspective, we decide to briefly sketch out the recent macro-social context of HE in Poland. Our longitudinal, comparative study consisted of two stages. The first part was conducted in 2009 by the late professor Teresa Bauman (Bauman 2011) and the second one, as presented here, in the year 2022. Over this period of time, more than a decade, a number of significant factors have greatly changed the land-scape of academic education, critical incidents such as Covid-19 and the 2.0 Constitution for Science Higher Education (HE) Reform being dominant. However, to understand the grounds for the shifts in academic identity we need to go back to 1989, when Poland regained freedom, implemented democratic gov-erning and accepted the free-market economy. A crucial part of the changing picture of HE was also demographic in nature.

In the last decade of the twentieth century the number of stu-dents in Poland stood at around four hundred thousand (400 000), and most of them were full-time students. The total number of students was significantly lower than in other Euro-pean societies, so one of the first ambitions of the newly elected

governments was to make higher education as accessible as possible to anyone willing to study. As a result, in 1993, the Polish government passed a bill allowing private entrepreneurs to establish educational institutions – including private colleges and universities. At that time, it was unquestioned that HE may serve as a "lever" to provide a "better-off" life. Graduation from a HE institution was considered a *sine qua non* condition if one wanted to achieve success in a market-driven, neoliberal reality. In 1998 the number of students in Poland (by the gross enrolment index for HE) had tripled. Accordingly, the number of HE institutions rapidly grew. From 2000 until the moment of the first stage of our research in 2009, the number of HE institutions grew by nearly 50 % (2003–2012 – 46 % increase), including over 450 colleges, universities, and other higher education institutions. Two-thirds of them were not state led but were either non-governmental business entities or belonged to religious associations (usually the catholic church). In 2004 there were more than two million people studying in Poland, and the gross enrolment index for HE was one of the highest in OECD countries.[1]

This phenomenal growth had, naturally, both positive and negative consequences. Egalitarian social fractions emphasized the role of HE in building a mature democracy, civic society and competitiveness on a global job market in knowledge-based EU societies (and beyond). The more elitist perspective underlined the decrease of HE quality, especially in the context of academic teaching, types of requirements and the lowering of studying conditions. The competencies of academic staff were not properly verified and holding a number of posts in several HE institutions at the same time was not rare for many academics. In addition to this, the institutional facilities were at times far from optimal: sometimes they did not even provide a small library. It cannot be disregarded, moreover, that the total number of stu-

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[1] Source: (https://thinkco.pl/liczba-studentow-w-polsce/).

dents reaching more than 2 million in 2005 was achieved thanks to the enrolment of part-time or extramural students.

Due to the above complex reasons, demographic ones included, this 2004–2005 peak started to "go down" slowly by the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century in Poland, settling at 1.2 million students in 2018/2019 (while the number of institutions was still growing). This fact seemed to have created a situation which we could call favourable for the first round of research introduced in this paper and conducted in 2009. In a noticeably brief period (5 years) one quarter of the total number of students "evaporated" and numerous HE institutions started to compete even more fiercely to attract candidates. The quality of academic teaching became a "buzz word" both in informal conversations, organizational policies as well as in formal political decisions. In 2005, an important bill on HE was passed and a market driven, job oriented, accountable, high quality HE was postulated, thus meeting the standards of the EU Higher Education Area, and correlating Polish HE even more to global solutions and aims. In other words, the first research "snapshot" was taken when it became clear that academic teaching was particularly important for the universities to survive both locally and globally, meeting global, or at least European, requirements of various stakeholders. In relation to this, the academic teaching competences of teachers became as important as their research results, and legal state regulations at international, national and local levels, focused on the necessity to master didactic excellence. At this particular turning point, research into the diverse aspects of this excellence and levels of teachers' self-reflection upon their teaching practices became the target of interest for the research undertaken by Teresa Bauman in 2009.

The 2022 research stage, as run by the co-authors of this chapter, has been marked by a student decrease to slightly less than 1.2 million people, which in comparison to 2010 means a fall of around 34 %. As a result of this, Polish universities need to pay attention to the quality of academic education more than before, but for apparently different reasons. At the same time,

teachers are faced with a growing multiplication of demands and requirements: their scientific production and high fidelity research are the main factors for their prestigious position in the field and their institutional evaluation as researchers, while they are also expected to perform high quality and engaged teaching. This multitude of roles: of a productive researcher and publisher, a beneficiary of grants, a dedicated academic teacher as well as a public distributor of scientific knowledge define the academic *nexus of multi-membership* identity in the Poland of today.

3. Research methodology and selected findings

As has been mentioned, the research as a whole consisted of two rounds, both at the University of Gdańsk. The first round was completed in 2009 and the second in early 2022. The sampling scheme was in both cases non-randomized, quota sampling. The sample comprised between 222 academic teachers in 2009 and 279 in 2022. The samples consisted of academic teachers at various levels of their academic careers and from all eleven faculties present at the researched university. The main research tool was a questionnaire with a similar number of both open and closed questions, all of which asked detailed questions, possible to be grouped during analysis according to the Framing Categories and Researched Categories shown in Table 1. The questionnaire was distributed in paper form in 2009 and in an online form in 2022. The findings were analysed using a mixture of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The closed questions were analysed statistically by their occurrence, while the open-ended questions were semantically coded and categorized by fitting the researched categories as described. Tentative conclusions have been drawn based upon deep insight into the observed numbers and frequency of qualitative answers. For this article, the findings related to five selected researched categories will be presented and discussed (Table1). The choice of the relevant questions has been arbitrarily made by the authors and was agreed upon based on their close proximity to the aim

of this chapter. This aim was to highlight the complexity of academic identity shifts in the times of critical turns experienced globally and locally in recent years.

Within the researched category of *Self-reflection* we briefly discuss the answers to the questions related to:

– Feeling of Teaching Satisfaction
– Self-perception of didactic success
– Self-evaluation of own Teaching Competencies

Within the framework of *Engaged Teaching* we discuss the answers to the questions related to:

– Need for Didactic Training
– The Meaning of Research for Engaged Teaching

The types of questions within the research categories taken into consideration, along with the quantitative analysis of answers, are given in Table 2.

Table 2
Selected quantitative research results
in the 2009 and 2022 rounds

RESEARCH CATE-GORIES	Answers in 2009/2010	Answers in 2021/2022
(1) Teaching Satisfaction Q: how often does teaching give you satisfaction?	Always **28 %** Often 56 % Sometimes 15 % Usually/rather not 1 %	**28 %** 48 % 21 % 2.5 %
(2) Self-perception of Didactic Success	Open ended	Open ended

(3) Self-evaluation of own Teaching Competencies Q1: How do you assess your own didactic knowledge?	as very good 23 % as good 61 % as good enough 13 % as not satisfactory 0.4 %	31 % 46 % 19 % 3.5 %
Q2: How do you asses yourself as an academic teacher?	excellent 2 % very good 25 % good 69 % not good enough 4 %	1 % 35 % 61 % 2 %
(4) Need for Didactic Training	(Q 2009: declarations to take didactic/pedagogical courses) 66 %	(Q 2022: should university provide didactic training?) Yes: 93 % There is no need: 7 %
(5) Role of Research for Engaged Teaching (Q: Research ….)	… does not affect teaching 13 % … helps to teach 72.5 % … impedes teaching 23 % *	14 % 55.5 % 30 %

* the more than 100 % result to this question stems from the fact that 22 persons indicated a double factor (research both helps and impedes teaching) (Bauman 2011: 131).

4. Discussion

(1) It has been preliminarily observed that the levels of **Teaching Satisfaction**, measured by the indication of the frequency adverbs, turned out to be comparable in 2009 and 2022. However, a slightly lowered frequency occurs in the answers "often" against a growth in "sometimes," which might suggest that **teaching satisfaction shows a tendency towards a slight lowering over the last decade**. This appears to be the case, especially when we consider the

growth by 1.5 % in the indications of "usually/rather not". This result is not a surprise if we consider all the above mentioned changes related to the HE state reforms in Poland, by which productivity in publications and research are more valued, as well as the pandemic crisis and the chaos connected to the growing demands put on teachers to meet the challenges of their multi-layered duties with regard to their positions.

(2) **Self-perception of didactic success** requires a qualitative analysis of answers to the open – ended questions asked in the survey. In the future we intend to make a thorough comparison of the results and for this aim to consider in detail the parameters enlisted by Teresa Bauman in 2009. Here we can only indicate that the parameters for success which appeared dominant in both research stages were (a) appreciation shown by the students during their chosen courses and (b) success of students in their further education or professional lives. Some new categories of success appeared uniquely in the research round of 2022. They seem to relate directly to the Covid-19 pandemic and accountability related requirements: (c) online teaching challenges and (d) overload with administrative tasks.

(3) **Self-evaluation of own teaching competencies** provides evidence for an unstable self-assessment performed by teachers in this year round of research. On the one hand, they seemed to assess their own competencies as higher than the respondents 13 years ago, as a growth in the descriptor "very good" is noticeable (by 8 %). On the other hand, 15 % fewer teachers have labelled their skills as "good", a few more as "not good enough" and markedly more (by 3.1 % more) believed their skills were "not satisfactory". This picture shows a divided opinion among 2022 respondents: 31 % of teachers trust their competencies and claim they are "very good", almost a half say they are "good", but still approximately one quarter are not so sure about their

teaching competencies (good enough or not satisfactory). 13 years ago many more teachers claimed they were "good" and significantly fewer seemed to be dissatisfied with themselves. **This might suggest that that the level of self-confidence in this matter has become lower over a decade**, which may again originate in situating teaching alongside the range of many other duties performed by teachers or other socio-cultural aspects such as the generation gap or differences in students' expectations.

The variance of this result grows even more if we look at the remarkable growth of teachers' self-assessment in the question about self-evaluation as a teacher. 10 % more teachers in 2022 indicated that they were "very good" teachers. Slightly less claimed to feel "good" or "not good enough." Would it be too risky to conclude that the growth in feeling "very good teachers" along with the lowering feeling of having "good" teaching skills suggests that being a good teacher does not relate – to the teachers' minds – to teaching excellence in academia? To what does it relate? Does it have anything to do with the connection of research with teaching and vice versa? And how does it reflect in the need for didactic training then and now?

(4) **Need for didactic training** appeared to have changed most evidently over the years. The analysis performed by Teresa Bauman in 2009 (2011: 84) represented a hybrid methodological approach (Jendza 2017), as she collected numbers of declarations to participate in various courses, didactic ones being among them. The overall number of declarations Bauman achieved in connection with the mastering of academic skills in terms of teaching and pedagogy was 147, which gave 66 % of the entire population tested (although, without a guarantee that this is the number of persons, as some pointed to a few types of courses, and some did not indicate anything). This number could be compared, however, to the "yes" responses to the question in 2022, as to whether the university should provide didactic training: 260 out of 279,

which suggests that 93 % of teachers consider this as important and would potentially take part. **This data allows the claim to be made that there is a remarkable change in the declarative need for didactic training if compared with the situation 13 years previously.** If we combine this result with the lowered self-trust of teachers in their own teaching skills and parallel (paradoxical?) high self-assessment as "very good teachers," we are led to a possible conclusion that **training courses are beginning to be viewed as a good (and easy?) way to professionalize**. On the other hand, this might equally well be a side effect of a neoliberal policy which calls for collecting credentials and mastering new skills to catch up with growing demands of new regulations/students' needs/labour market requirements etc.

(5) **Role of research for engaged teaching** is a researched category which appears controversial, taken as the climax of the neoliberal policy development at Polish universities. All the academics experienced an overload of administrative tasks related to grant applications, report writing, quantified and parametric ways of evaluating their teaching and publishing activities. This controversy is by no means new, as it was discussed in the academic milieu as early as the nineteen-twenties. At that time, academics agreed unquestionably that teaching rather negatively affected research activity (Bauman 2011: 130). The millennial discussions around the year 2000, changed this view in Europe towards a Humboldtian model, were teaching and researching need a balanced approach. Both research rounds in 2009 and 2022 proved that this controversy continues, but the majority of teachers in both rounds claimed that doing research helps to teach (and viewed this dependency positively). In comparison, several percent of respondents do not see any relation between their research and teaching in both samples. If we are to observe tendencies over the last decade, however, **nowadays the number of those who view this relationship as helpful has decreased by 20 % when**

compared to 2009, whereas those who believe that research impedes teaching has grown by 7 %.

This result blurs the optimistic, provisional conclusion that the advantage of the postmillennial academic situation is the direct connection of teaching and research. The complexity of the educational field over the last two decades in Poland suggests that academics often experience the phenomenon of *decoupling* in their careers. This is one of the potential metaphors for their continuous necessity to readjust and re-create their *nexus of multi-membership* in academia.

5. Conclusions

The article aimed at presenting selected results of empirical research concerning the identity shifts of academic teachers who are faced with critical incidents such as the global Covid-19 pandemic and the politically induced transformation of HE institutions in Poland. The authors have chosen only a few research categories for presentation, as the whole, elaborate longitudinal study requires a wider and longer analysis of the results. The results presented above have, however, shed some light on aspects which relate to academic teachers' job satisfaction, self-evaluation of their teaching skills and the declared need for professional development. A "good teacher" profile, as parts of the presented research show, is that of a teacher whose academic success is mostly defined by the success and appreciation of their students. It is an academic who believes her/himself to be a "very good" teacher although s/he does not feel fully competent didactically, although s/he is aware that training in this field will help her/him to professionalize. Hence, s/he declares a need to participate in diverse professional teaching courses. The academic of 2022 seems to separate research activities from teaching more than the decade earlier, which does not exclude her/his belief in the positive impact of one over the other. This *decoupling*, which appears on many levels, seems to be the outcome of institutional policy and govern-

mental regulations, which have introduced a 'set of schizophrenic rules of the game' into the university of today: ones which promote the development of didactic skills through diverse national (e.g. Masters of Didactics or Didactic Excellence of HE Institutions) and international projects, motivate to professionalize through training courses, conferences and workshops, but at the same time do not provide space, time and funding for a qualitative combination of both research and teaching. Academic teachers are pushed into living a form of institutionally chameleonic life: they must frequently shift their social identities and are increasingly self-reflective about this process. This self-reflection is a double-edged sword, as it may lead either to a spec-tacular academic career or to a decision to quit the university. Critical incidents and turns, as we experience them nowadays, appear to pose challenges for the academic community all over Poland and may result in another, serious transformation of HE institutions.

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