

## **Professional identity in allied health students: How it affects authentic assessment**

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Throughout the development of an individual, their identity – how they see themselves – is shaped and marked by biological processes and sociocultural influences (Bennet, 2010). An important part of identity formation is the development of a professional identity, which is the conscious awareness an individual has of themselves as a worker (Marcia, 1966). The establishment of a strong professional identity has been linked to life satisfaction, psychological well-being and success in one's chosen career (Meeus *et al.*, 1997). Thus, fostering professional identity is of great importance in university students who are about to enter the workforce. Professional socialisation is a way in which professional identity is developed in students; this is done by acquiring knowledge and developing skills associated with becoming a member of one's chosen profession, and adopting their culture, norms and values (Cornelissen & Van Wyk, 2007). An effective way of achieving this is through authentic assessment, where the individual experiences workplace conditions or tasks that mimic career practices (Kohnen, 2013). This study aimed to develop methodology to evaluate authenticity in the product of an authentic assessment task, to evaluate the extent to which occupational therapy students identify with their profession, and to evaluate the impact of professional identity on the product of an authentic assessment task. Participants were second year occupational therapy students (n=59) in the course 'Human Function in Health and Disease II'. Students completed a factsheet assignment on a disease or condition; this was assessed for authenticity using a novel rubric. Participants also completed a meta-learning task, responses were analysed to gauge students' professional identity. Degrees of authenticity and professional identity were correlated to determine if a relationship existed between them. The results demonstrate that authenticity in the product of an authentic assessment task can be measured, and that professional identity development of second year occupational therapy students is extremely varied. However, no relationship between authenticity and professional identity was apparent in these students. These findings can be used to promote the importance of professional identity in university students and how it could be identified in their academic work. In doing so, intervention strategies could be designed and implemented appropriately within a curriculum for students at risk of graduating with poor professional identity. In addition, curricula could be reformed for the effective socialisation of every student, and in doing so enable their successful transition to the workforce.

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