

Exploring the Conflicts and Tensions Between Teachers' Personal and Professional Identities

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Abstract

This research paper examines how the personal and professional identities of teachers intersect with one another and explores the resulting impact on the language classroom and learners. Teachers have the ability to shape their students' worldview and foster personal development. The personal beliefs, objectives, and life experiences of some educators can sometimes be at odds with those of the educational system. Finding a balanced medium between their true selves and the personas they present in their professional lives is essential. Personal and professional identities can be impacted when one struggles with problems relating to authenticity, autonomy, emotional labour, maintaining a healthy work-life balance, and value conflicts. This paper delves into the intricate intersections of teachers' personal and professional identities, aiming to provide insights into potential conflicts that may arise. By fostering a deeper understanding of these conflicts, teachers can be better equipped to manage and address them effectively. Consequently, addressing these concerns has the potential to enhance teachers' overall well-being and effectiveness, ultimately leading to improved academic progress among their students.

Keywords: Conflicts, personal identity, professional identity, challenges, authenticity

Introduction

Research in education extensively explores the conflicts and tensions between educators' personal and professional identities. Teachers are significant mentors, role models, and influential figures in their students'

lives. However, the complexity of their profession often leads to clashes between their beliefs, values, and experiences and the expectations set by the educational system (Law et al., 2017). Balancing personal and professional lives can create stress, negatively impacting a teacher's mental health, job satisfaction, and effectiveness in the classroom. Understanding and addressing these challenges is crucial in creating an environment where educators can thrive emotionally and professionally. Exploring teachers' personal and professional identities can shed light on their struggles to integrate their job with their individuality.

Personal identity encompasses an individual's unique traits, experiences, beliefs, and values that shape their sense of self outside their professional role. On the other hand, professional identity is specific to a person's role and identity within their professional domain, encompassing their beliefs, teaching philosophy, instructional practices, and commitment as educators. Recognizing the distinction between personal and professional identity is essential in understanding how conflicts and congruence between these aspects impact various facets of a teacher's role, such as teaching strategies, classroom management, and assessment methods. By comprehending these influences, teachers can strive to strike a balance and foster a supportive and effective teaching environment for themselves and their students.

This paper delves into the conflicts and tensions experienced by teachers, touching on value conflicts, autonomy struggles, emotional labour, work-life balance, and identity-authenticity conflicts (Pretorius & Padmanabhanunni, 2022; Law et al., 2017). The exploration of these complexities and the intersection of language aspects of teacher identity could unveil techniques and interventions that promote a harmonious integration of teachers' personal and professional identities. Ultimately, this holistic approach benefits not only teachers but also the students they teach.

Beliefs and Values

The term "values" is used to describe deeply held beliefs that people consider significant and that influence their behaviour and decision-making (Pillen, Den Brok, & Beijaard, 2013). Contrarily, beliefs are the ideas and viewpoints that a person often holds to be true because of their own life experiences, the cultural influences they have encountered, or their philosophical perspectives. Teachers' values and beliefs have a

huge impact on the strategies they use in their classrooms. Teaching strategies, classroom management techniques, and assessment methods used by teachers are significantly influenced by their values. The importance of creativity, inclusion, and critical thinking are a few of these values. Conflicts and tensions are likely to arise when an individual's beliefs and the requirements of standardized curricular frameworks or administrative directives differ.

Teachers are frequently expected to follow the policies and guidelines of the educational institutions where they work. These could be in the form of a specific curriculum, standardized tests, or guidelines for acceptable behaviour. Pillen, Beijaard and Den Brok (2013) discovered that conflicts may arise when teachers' own values and views collide with institutional obligations. A rigorous curriculum that does not consider the demands and interests of the students may feel restrictive to a teacher who values student-centered learning. The discussion of religious, political, and social themes in the classroom can often be uncomfortable for teachers. Pillen, Beijaard and Den Brok (2013) suggest that instructors may encounter struggles when their values diverge from those of their students or society. Balancing acceptance of various viewpoints while maintaining professionalism becomes challenging during such sensitive discussions. Teachers' beliefs and worldviews significantly impact their teaching environments. Pillen, Beijaard and Den Brok (2013) note that some instructors prioritize creating a caring and supportive atmosphere, emphasizing empathy and emotional bonding with their students. However, conflicts may arise when high-stakes testing prioritizes academic performance over student well-being. This can lead to a struggle for instructors to align their personal holistic development objectives with the demands of their profession. Moreover, teachers' principles and beliefs play a crucial role in shaping their careers. According to Pillen, Beijaard and Den Brok (2013), lifelong learners and educators seek professional development opportunities that align with their values and views. However, if external factors or institutions force them to compromise their core values, conflicts and tensions may arise.

In general, the values and beliefs that teachers uphold have a significant impact on the conflicts and tensions that develop between their personal and professional identities. Understanding the impact that values and beliefs have on teaching practices, misalignments with institutional standards, tackling contentious themes, creating a positive learning

environment, and continuing one's own professional development are crucial for cultivating a supportive and empowering educational environment. If educational institutions recognize and respect the diverse values and beliefs held by teachers, and if they construct such spaces with the intention of doing so, they may create spaces that allow for authentic teaching practices and foster teachers' personal and professional development.

Autonomy and Compliance

The teachers who guide their students have a significant impact on their development and futures. Tateo (2012) asserts, however, that the tension between autonomy and conformity in the educational system may give rise to conflicts and tensions within teachers' personal and professional identities. Investigating how the balance between autonomy and compliance affects these conflicts and tensions, which in turn affect teaching practices, job satisfaction, and teachers' overall professional experiences, is of utmost importance. Striking a balance between their unique teaching styles and the need to follow the curriculum may be challenging for instructors. Even if they have innovative and successful teaching techniques, they may be forced to adopt conventional methods due to external pressures (Tateo, 2012). These tensions force instructors to frequently tread a fine line between upholding their professional ethics and meeting the requirements set forth by the educational system. This could cause a variety of issues and conflicts. The degree to which teachers are required to adhere to the standards established by the organizations in which they work is strongly correlated with the amount of autonomy given to them. Tateo (2012) demonstrates that teachers who report having a higher level of autonomy report being more satisfied and engaged at work compared to those who feel that they have limited autonomy. As a result, the conflicts that arise between personal freedom and compliance may have a big impact on educators' overall professional identities as well as their ability to deliver high-quality instruction.

Educational institutions should work to create a supportive and empowered environment for instructors because autonomy and compliance are two aspects of teaching that are very important. This might entail providing opportunities for professional growth, fostering open discourse and cooperation, and allowing flexibility in the application of instructional practices (Tateo, 2012). By striking a well-calibrated

balance between autonomy and compliance, and by recognizing and respecting the subject expertise of teachers while fostering their continuous professional development, we can effectively address conflicts and tensions that may arise. This, in turn, has the potential to significantly enhance the quality of instruction and positively impact student outcomes. Through a thoughtful and comprehensive approach, a harmonious and productive educational environment that maximizes the potential of both teachers and learners could be created.

The intricate conflicts and tensions that arise from the intersection of teachers' personal and professional identities are heavily shaped by the need to strike a delicate balance between autonomy and compliance. It might be challenging to meet institutional requirements while also accommodating a teacher's demand for autonomy in their teaching methods. Finding a middle ground that allows for respect for the expertise and values of educators while also upholding accountability and consistency is crucial when working to create a supportive and empowering educational environment (Tateo, 2012). If educational institutions recognize and manage the conflicts that arise between autonomy and conformity in the classroom, they can improve teachers' job satisfaction, foster their professional development, and ultimately provide students with a high-quality education.

Emotional Barriers or Boundaries

Teachers have a significant impact on how their students develop as people and frequently form close relationships and emotional attachments with their students. Upholding emotional boundaries may cause conflict and stress between instructors' personal and professional selves (Pretorius & Padmanabhanunni, 2022). Investigating how emotional boundaries impact conflicts and tensions that educators experience is crucial because these issues have an impact on their sense of wellbeing, their interactions with other professionals, and their general performance in the classroom.

To comprehend the impact that emotional boundaries have on the conflicts and tensions that arise between teachers' personal and professional identities, it is essential to define emotional limits. The term "emotional boundaries" is used to describe the limits that people set for themselves in order to protect their emotional well-being and maintain

a sense of professionalism (Pretorius & Padmanabhanunni, 2022). It is necessary to manage one's emotional involvement in one's relationships while also giving them the necessary amounts of empathy and support. Teachers inevitably form emotional bonds with the students they teach as they provide guidance, encouragement, and care for them. These connections nurture trust and create an atmosphere conducive to learning. However, Pretorius and Padmanabhanunni (2022) assert that when teachers permit themselves to become emotionally involved in or affected by the struggles that their students face, conflicts can occur. Teachers must strike a balance between their personal and professional emotions in order to maintain both their mental health and effective classroom management.

The fact that teachers bring their personal experiences and emotions into the classroom may have an impact on how they interact with their students. Conflicts may arise when teachers' personal experiences or emotional triggers interfere with their ability to provide objective support for their students or when the teachers' own emotional baggage interferes with their capacity to make wise professional decisions (He et al., 2022). To maintain one's emotional boundaries and prevent potential conflicts, it is imperative to recognize these triggers and learn how to deal with them. It is customary to ask teachers to show understanding of the emotions and challenges felt by their students. However, conflicts may arise when teachers struggle to strike a balance between objectivity and empathy (He et al., 2022). In order to make decisions that are fair and unprejudiced toward any one student or group of students, instructors must maintain some degree of objectivity. Building relationships with children and recognizing their needs requires empathy. Finding this balance might lead to conflicts between one's own emotional responses and one's obligations in the workplace.

Teachers frequently engage in emotional work, which entails managing their own emotions while also attending to the emotional needs of the students. It may be physically and mentally taxing to perform this emotional work, which can lead to emotional exhaustion and burnout (He et al., 2022). Conflicts and tensions arise when teachers are unable to set boundaries that protect their emotional health, which lowers their level of job satisfaction and reduces their ability to teach effectively. To effectively teach while acknowledging the necessity of setting emotional boundaries, teachers must prioritize their own care and

develop strategies for striking a healthy balance between their personal and professional emotions. This could involve engaging in emotional well-being-enhancing activities like asking for help from co-workers or mentors, and engaging in self-reflection exercises (He et al., 2022). Using effective self-care techniques, which can also support teachers in maintaining a positive professional identity, can help them increase their ability to manage emotional conflicts and maintain a strong professional identity.

The emotional separation that instructors create between their personal and professional selves generally has a significant impact on how conflicts and tensions develop between the two. Finding a way to strike a balance between maintaining their professional objectivity and developing emotional connections with their students is crucial for a teacher's well-being and success in the classroom (Pretorius & Padmanabhanunni, 2022). If educational institutions recognize the importance of emotional boundaries, they can provide resources and support systems that promote teachers' emotional health. This will eventually strengthen teachers' professional identities and create a setting that encourages students to learn well.

Balancing Time and Work

Because they have a significant impact on how their students' lives are shaped, teachers invest a lot of time and effort into what they do. But there may be tensions and conflicts between a teacher's personal and professional identities due to the demands of the job (Fox & Bird, 2015). In terms of time management and achieving a work-life balance, this is particularly true. It is crucial to look into how time management and work-life balance issues affect the conflicts and tensions that educators experience because these factors have an impact on their general well-being, interpersonal relationships, and level of overall satisfaction with their personal and professional lives. Apart from their extracurricular responsibilities, teachers encounter substantial time limitations and pressures stemming from tasks such as grading, ongoing professional development, and various other professional duties. According to Fox and Bird (2015), these demands may interfere with personal time, resulting in conflicts between teachers' personal lives and their obligations as educators. To maintain one's sense of personal identity outside of the school environment, it is imperative to find a happy medium between

these various competing interests. The demanding nature of the teaching profession may put pressure on personal relationships, which may lead to conflicts and tensions between teachers' personal and professional identities. According to Fox and Bird (2015), not having enough time to socialize, take care of oneself, and fulfill family obligations can result in strained relationships with partners, family members, and friends. Lack of participation in interpersonal interactions can result in feelings of guilt and loneliness as well as a diminished sense of one's identity outside of one's role as a teacher. Because of the tremendous quantity of work, they have to perform and the limited amount of time they have available to them, teachers could endure emotional stress. According to Fox and Bird (2015), the burden of trying to care for the needs of children while still maintaining high standards may lead to feelings of stress, anxiety, and burnout among educators. When teachers find it challenging to achieve a good balance between their personal needs and the requirements of their work, it may put their mental and emotional health in jeopardy, which can lead to conflicts in the classroom.

The maintenance of a good work-life balance requires the establishment of limits as well as the development of tactics for time management. According to Law et al. (2017), tensions and conflicts arise when teachers find it difficult to distinguish between their personal and professional lives and, as a consequence, struggle to set clear boundaries between the two. This imbalance has a negative impact on the teachers' general well-being. Effective time management techniques can help teachers make time for their own interests, self-care, and meaningful relationships outside of the classroom. Educational institutions may significantly lessen the challenges and conflicts brought on by time constraints and a lack of work-life balance. According to Law et al. (2017), policies that support teachers such as flexible scheduling, a lighter workload, and access to resources for professional development—may have a significant impact on their ability to achieve a healthy work-life balance. Institutions that prioritize the well-being of their faculty members show that they are cognizant of the challenges they face on a daily basis, which in turn increases their overall satisfaction and productivity.

Teachers need to prioritize self-care and reflection in order to deal with the conflicts and tensions that arise in relation to time and work-life balance. Exercise, hobbies, and relaxation techniques, which promote both physical and mental well-being, may help instructors regain

their equilibrium and revitalize themselves (Law et al., 2017). Regular review of one's personal and professional goals can help one spot areas of imbalance and decide what proactive measures should be taken to improve those areas.

In general, one of the most crucial factors in determining whether or not there will be conflicts or tensions between teachers' personal and professional identities is their capacity for time management. These abilities, along with the ability to strike a healthy work-life balance, are two of the most significant factors. Law et al. (2017) contend that achieving a healthy equilibrium between the demands of a teaching career, personal commitments, and individual well-being is a formidable task that requires efficient time management, well-established boundaries, and institutional support. Educational institutions may increase teacher well-being by respecting time and work-life balance.

Authenticity and Identity

The personal and professional identities of teachers play a significant role in shaping the teaching strategies they employ in the classroom; these identities also impact the lives of their students. This influence may be seen as substantial, positive, or negative. According to McNaughton and Billot (2016), it is essential for educators to strike a careful balance between their personal identities and the professional duties that come with their positions. It is possible that this may lead to professional disillusionment. Therefore, it is important to investigate how conflicts and tensions among teachers are influenced by questions of identity and authenticity, which in turn influence teachers' sense of self, the instructional methods they use, and their overall level of work satisfaction.

The concept of "identity" encompasses the unique amalgamation of an individual's traits, experiences, beliefs, and values that shape their being. According to McNaughton and Billot (2016), authenticity refers to aligning a person's genuine self with their actions and expressions shown to the outside world. In simpler terms, authenticity is about being true to oneself. Both identity and authenticity play crucial roles in developing teaching strategies and interactions between teachers and students.

Teachers' identities may diverge from the established norms and criteria

within the educational system. This can lead to conflicts in the classroom when their personal beliefs, cultural background, or life experiences clash with standardized curricula, disciplinary policies, or professional standards. McNaughton and Billet (2016) argue that balancing personal and professional identities can result in inauthenticity and inner turmoil for teachers. Teachers bring their cultural identities with them into the classroom, which has an impact on how they instruct and interact with students from different backgrounds. Friction may arise when cultural identities, values, or viewpoints that instructors bring to the classroom conflict with the standards of the dominant culture or the curriculum. It can be challenging to strike a balance between upholding cultural authenticity and meeting professional obligations. Authenticity and effective instructional strategies and methods are inseparably linked. Teachers who are sincere in their interactions, communications, and teaching methods frequently gain the respect and confidence of their students. Conflicts and tensions are more likely to arise in the classroom when teachers feel pressured to follow prescribed instructional methods or evaluation criteria that do not fit with how they actually want to teach. Achieving authenticity in the classroom, necessitates finding a balance between one's personal beliefs and obligations (McNaughton & Billot, 2016).

Teachers often face societal pressures and expectations that influence both their ability to express their true selves and how they are perceived by others. These pressures can lead to conflicts in the classroom when a teacher's identity clashes with societal norms or when they feel compelled to conform to certain expectations (McNaughton & Billot, 2016). Resolving these conflicts and embracing the authentic identities of students can be challenging for teachers. Therefore, creating a supportive environment that values authenticity is crucial for their mental well-being and overall job satisfaction. Educational institutions can play a role in supporting teachers by promoting self-reflection, encouraging open dialogue, and offering professional development opportunities that consider diverse pedagogical approaches in classrooms (McNaughton & Billot, 2016). Fostering an environment that respects and embraces the true identities of educators can help reduce friction and conflict between their personal and professional roles.

In summary, teachers' personal and professional identities significantly impact the conflicts and tensions they encounter. Authenticity in

teaching requires educators to reconcile their personal beliefs, cultural backgrounds, and societal expectations (McNaughton & Billot, 2016). Cultivating a culture that encourages authenticity and allows teachers to embrace their individual personalities can enhance job satisfaction, teaching effectiveness, and student learning, benefiting both educators and students alike.

Conclusion

The intersection of personal and professional identities presents teachers with the complexity of their profession. Balancing personal commitments, principles, ideas, and experiences can be challenging, leading to conflicts that impact teachers' well-being, job satisfaction, and classroom performance. Engaging in self-reflection is vital for teachers to navigate these issues effectively.

Understanding how their personal identities influence their professional responsibilities allows teachers to identify conflicts and make informed moral judgments. Building self-confidence and sincerity can keep teachers motivated and committed to their roles. Open communication enables teachers to express their beliefs freely, while professional development opportunities that recognize instructors' strengths and encourage diverse teaching approaches create a supportive and inclusive atmosphere.

Collaborative settings, where teachers can share their successes and challenges, facilitate growth, self-reflection, and continuous learning. By acknowledging and addressing conflicts between personal and professional identities, educational institutions can help teachers embrace their authenticity while fulfilling their professional duties. This integration of personal and professional identities empowers teachers to create inclusive learning environments that promote both academic and personal growth, ultimately enhancing education and the well-being of students. Valuing and nurturing teachers' individual identities becomes instrumental in cultivating a positive and enriching educational experience for all.

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