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The Nature of the Conflicts that Trouble Teachers During the Process of Shaping their Professional Identity

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Abstract

The changing reality of teachers in the modern world is infused with conflicts that require significant management during the process of shaping professional identity. The aim of the current study is to examine the nature of the prevalent conflicts that trouble teachers in their professional identity. The research methodology was qualitative. Fifteen teachers who participated in the study were asked to describe junctions of deliberations, conflicts, or issues that concern them. Our results reinforce and indicate that it is imperative to understand that teachers face a myriad of intra- and inter-personal conflicts, whose complexity is heavily affected by the environment. The present study is innovative since it examines the "function" of the conflict as an essential catalyst for the process of shaping professional identity during an age in which the education system is changing.

Keywords: intrapersonal conflicts, interpersonal conflicts, professional identity, teachers

1. Introduction

In the face of the current reforms and changes in the education system, teachers may find themselves coping with conflicts and experiences of professional identity crisis, which may have unwanted consequences and negatively affect their commitment to teaching, motivation, professional pride and the sense of internal cohesion (Day, Elliot & Kington, 2005; Kozminsky, 2011). The identity conflicts are derived from the human-context interaction (Berzonsky, 2008; Bosma & Kunnen, 2001). The need for forming a distinct and subjective approach to the professional identity of teachers, which eliminates non-compliance between the concrete, frequent and significant content that flood the teachers in the changing contemporary reality in the midst of the new reforms which are underway in Israel, lead us to focus on the conflict as the main issue of the current research.

2. Theoretical background

Erikson defined identity as a structure with various components which are dynamically inclusive and change gradually during growth. The integrative organization of the numerous identity elements, the partial and the contradictory, in one coherent structure adapted to the social reality, which is termed configuration, provides the recognition that beyond the personality changes that occur at different times and in different situations - the identity does not change (Erikson, 1968).

2.1 The conflict as an essential catalyst for identity development

One approach to the study of identity, which is the foundation for the current study, considers the conflict as an essential catalyst that drives the process of shaping an identity (Kunnen, 2006). According to social psychologists, the conflict outlines a situation of discrepancy or a collision between or among identity components. Thus, in a situation of discrepancy, the individual experiences psychological discomfort when exposed to major identity conflicts since he feels that his needs and basic values are threatened. As a result, he is motivated to consider other alternatives for his identity, and to choose between identity alternatives or integrate them into a subjective solution. This process does not occur in a vacuum, in fact, the young person reacts to terms, codes, cultural and social feedback from the environment in which he is found (Cote & Bynner, 2008). Frequent and significant conflicts are a major force in identity development, since it undermines the individual's world and serve as a catalyst for action and change (Bosma & Kunnen, 2001; Schachter, 2002). In order for the processes of exploration and commitment, which are derived from the confrontation with the conflicts, to be significant in the process of identity formation, they should be attributed to ideology (Steinberger, 2008).

Two focal points of discrepancy, which threaten the identity configuration and motivate the individual to enter into an identity-shaping process can be identified (Schachter, 2004): a. Interpersonal discrepancy between the individual and the social demands of the environment, which is reflected in the gap between the self-perception and the way he is perceived by the environment

b. Intrapersonal discrepancy between and within various sub-identities that make up the identity. Solutions for conflicts are subjective and are expressed in reducing the centrality of the conflict. The solution satisfies the individual and reduces or eliminates the discrepancy, whether it is an objectively correct solution or not (Steinberger, 2008). The level and complexity of the solution have cognitive and behavioral consequences that reflect the commitment to the solutions obtained. Current researchers claim that the key processes of cognitive and behavioral commitment and exploration occurs simultaneously (Berzonsky, 1992; Crocetti, Rubini & Meeus, 2008). A successful resolution of the intra- and inter-personal conflicts reduce the discrepancy, leads to mutual compatibility and reorganization of the identities, and is more than the mere sum of its parts. However, although it is clear that the two focal points are acting together and affect one other, only a small number of studies treated the integration between these

two focal points since it is difficult to examine the complex interaction between them empirically (Cote, 2006).

2.2 The professional identity of teachers, a conflicts-rich sub-identity

Nowadays, teachers operate in a field infused with conflicts. They face complex moral, social and emotional confrontations, while they are subjected to reforms by the education systems (Kozminsky & Kloir, 2010), sustained public criticism and pressure from their superiors at the school, the Ministry of Education, parents and students. The professional identity of teachers is a central sub-identity. However, only in the last two decades it has evolved into an independent research area which still suffers from much ambiguity. For example, the definition of teachers' professional identity, mapping the components of its sub-identities and the way it is formed are still a matter of controversy (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004). However, a consensus is forming around the professional identity of teachers as a sub-identity of the "I" identity who answers the questions "Who am I as a professional?" (Kozminsky, 2008) and "what do I want to be?" (Conway, 2001). It is taking shape during dynamic and complex inter- and intra-personal processes (Rodgers & Scott, 2008) which start during the training period and often even earlier (Kimberly, 2001).

The current study is based on two main principles that are valid in the content area of professional sub-identity of teachers – the principle of the conflict as an essential catalyst to the process of identity formation and the principle of integrating between the factors within the individual and the environment in the identity formation process (Day et al., 2005). During the early career, when these conflicts arise in difficult moments they may have negative consequences, such as leaving the profession, but may also have positive consequences, such as professional development or motivation to change (Galman, 2009).

Research points to two main components that are in constant tension between each other: the intrapersonal component, which refers to the way that the teacher sees herself as a professional, such as attitude towards the profession and perception of her professional skills, and the interpersonal component, which refers to the way that the environment - students, parents, teachers and society as a whole - perceive the teacher (Fisherman & Weiss, 2011; Rodgers & Scott, 2008; Fisherman & Weiss, 2008). Beijaard and colleagues (2004) who reviewed twenty-two studies about teachers' professional identity, argue that although the formation of professional identity is a dynamic process which involves a complex balance between the intra- and the inter-personal components, most of the studies reviewed focused on the intra-personal aspect of the process and neglected the contextual aspect of the environment's impact on shaping the professional identity. Recently, research in the field began to focus also on the influence of the general interpersonal context, i.e. the cultural-sociological context in the process of shaping professional identity (Reeves, 2009).

2.3 What trouble teachers within their professional identity?

Upon reviewing the literature about conflicts of teachers (Dosnik&TzabarBen-Joshua, 2000; Tisch, 2005; Meltzer, 1999; Fisherman, 2008; Tzabar Ben-Joshua,Dosnik&Bialik, 2007; Kozminsky&Kloir, 2010), the identity conflicts that teachers encounter during their work can be sorted into several axes:

a. Type of conflict: two types of conflicts trouble teachers in their work: conflicts in the Intra-personal level which describes a discrepancy between the internal components derived from their work and do not depend on external factors. However, conflicts in the interpersonal level which describe discrepancies derived from the interaction between the components within the teacher and the feedback they receive from external figures with whom they come into contact, such as teacher- student, teacher-colleague, teacher-headmaster and so forth. The intrapersonal conflict is considered to be the most difficult to manage, due to the inability to manage complex attitudes and considerations when relating to the other (Caniel, 2001). It is the ability of a person to take opposing opinions, simultaneously, and integrate them into another position.

b. The content domain in which the conflicts occur: Conflicts were identified in four key content domains: a. The personal domain, which refers to the privacy issue and includes conflicts between the professional and other sub-identities. Meltzer (1999) argues that the personal-family conflict is one of the main causes of burnout at work. Burnout is often the result of non-management or mismanagement of the conflict and it is therefore important to manage the conflict in its early stages and in this way to prevent its escalation. b. The social-cultural domain which refers to issues related to the culture of the teaching profession, to the class ecology, the school culture and the broader social culture which includes concepts, norms and common values of all characters involved (the school headmaster, colleague, students and the community); c. The pedagogical-didactic domain which refers to issues that concern ways of teaching, curriculum planning, teaching strategies and teaching methods; d. The philosophical-ethical domain, stems from the humanistic- democratic value system, and refers to principle moral issues.

c. The expression of the conflict resolution: The possible subjective resolutions are divided into two types: A conscious resolution that would be reflected in a cognitive decision with no transitive behavioral act (e.g., investing the class time in strong or weak students) or a solution that requires transitive behavioral act (e.g., punishing a student). For example, there is a cognitive resolution of the conflict of evaluating a student who has difficulties such as the choice in school policy regarding the evaluations of weak students. The amount of the planned energy to be invested in the conflict resolution range on the continuum from intent for ideological commitment only without a behavioral act, to intent for active commitment which is expressed as invested effort, time and/or money in the obtained resolution (Steinberger, 2008).

The crossing between the components of the three axes reveals 16 (2X4X2) possible conflict patterns in the professional identity of a teacher. For example, the home-career conflict which refers to the conflict - should I seek professional promotion with the possible detriment to family members - will be tagged as a conflict on the intra-personal plane, which is found within the

personal content domain and will be expressed cognitively (principal decision about priorities). However, the conflict of whether to report a fellow-teacher who does not behave properly, or to hold back, is an interpersonal conflict (the teacher versus the colleague), which is within the ethical-philosophical content domain that is expressed as a behavior (report or lack of).

The literature review suggests that conflicts are comprised of three intertwined content domains which form the essence of the conflicts during the process of shaping professional identity. This study aims to examine the nature of the common conflicts which trouble teachers in their professional identity.

3. Methodology

The methodology used in this research was qualitative-ethnographic.

3.1 Participants

The study included 15 teachers who teach in public schools at the elementary and the high school education levels. No personal information about the teachers can be disclosed since most teachers refused to be exposed and to answer any demographic answers (such as seniority in teaching and level of education).

3.2 Research tool

In this study we used semi-structured in-depth interviews. An in-depth interview is a methodological qualitative tool that combines flexibility and openness based on structured questions. The interview and the narrative are the most common measurement tools in the studies of identity (Fisherman & Weiss, 2008; Hammack, 2008; Pearce & Morrison, 2011; Schachter, 2004). During the interview, the interviewees were asked to describe their work and their interaction with different characters with whom they meet in their daily educational practice (students, parents, colleagues, headmaster and so forth). They were asked to focus on the description of deliberation junctions, conflicts or issues that troubled them in their work in the past and today. The interviewer asked them to expand on the description of their feelings and thoughts regarding various issues they encountered and the way they dealt with them.

3.3 The research procedure

The study was conducted in the year 2013 during which the researchers identified volunteers for the study. Data analysis was based on the "field anchored theory" approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The findings were analyzed after the interviews had been coded. The process of constructing the categories and phrasing them included three main stages: 1. Open coding: repeated themes that can be characterized. 2. Axial coding: remapping the results along the axis of each category; 3. Selective coding: condensation of the categories and finding additional anchors to their existence. The goal was to reach the "core categories" and through them to explain the meaning of the most frequent and significant conflicts which occur in the process of shaping the professional identity of the teacher.

4. Results

To examine the nature of common conflicts which trouble teachers in their professional identity, the data collected were analyzed using qualitative analysis. The analysis unit selected was the syntactic analysis unit - an idea, a word or a sentence in reference to the integration of the axes, i.e., the integration of the type of conflict, the content domain of the conflict and mode of expression in resolving the conflict. Based on this content analysis the categories were constructed. The two main categories distinguished between intra- and inter-personal conflicts. In each of these primary categories, the categories of the four content domains were characterized: 1. Conflicts in the personal life of the teacher versus the professional environment; 2. The social-cultural domain of the school; 3. The pedagogical-didactic domain from the student to the school level; 4. The philosophical-ethical domain which stems from humanistic-democracy values. In each category of the content domain the two forms of expressing the resolution to the conflict were presented; the cognitive and the behavioral. Following are the categories:

1. Intrapersonal conflicts, in the personal domain with a cognitively expressed resolution

These conflicts are related to the junction between the teacher's role as a family man and his professional role in the school. On the background of this "junction", the teachers reported that the work did not end at school, but rather continued at home at the expense of family time which raises the dilemma of how much should be invested in working at home, as one of the teachers described: "In this educational work, often I work not only during the hours I spend in school. You have to continue at home. This way the work comes at the expense of the home. The problem is what is the correct dose?" A total of two conflicts were tallied in this category.

2. Interpersonal conflicts, in the personal domain with a behaviorally expressed resolution

Teachers believe that the workload in school requires that they will also work at home, and this ultimately affects the behavior of teachers toward their family. One of the teachers described it in this way:

"If you belong to the profession, the work load that you bring home is very large; it is work that is never done (...). On a long day I reach a point when I do not have patience for my own children anymore." From this a broader question arises which demonstrates the teacher's conflict, i.e. - whether to invest in professional promotion while facing the possible price of the impact on the family (spouse and children). After all, teachers participate in various training seminars for professional growth that will promote them at work. Usually, these courses are given after work hours, time when they should be at home with their family who needs them. Is it worth it? A total of two conflicts were tallied in this category.

3. Intrapersonal conflicts, in the social-cultural domain with a cognitively expressed resolution

Only one conflict was found in this category. This conflict was about the dilemma whether to express the teacher's personal political views:

"Am I allowed to express my political opinion in class, or this is an ethical issue in which I am taking advantage of my authority as a teacher?"

4. Intrapersonal conflicts, in the social-cultural domain with a behaviorally expressed resolution In this type of conflict teachers report three types of conflicts, each different from the other. The first conflict arises from the involvement of the teachers in the social scenarios of the students that occur during the course of the school day, such as:

"Should I spend time in resolving social problems that are relevant to the whole class at the expense of teaching time?". "Should I insist on handling a problematic student who has discipline issues, or should I give up in order not to provoke the class and preserve the "calmness"?"

The second conflict concerns the intervention of the teacher in a scenario that may have occurred at home. The third conflict concerns the intervention of the teacher in situations of network related risks such as: "(...) Facebook problems and the harsh and serious expressions of students one against the other, and the offense taken, whose consequences run beyond the correspondence on the computer at home, but mainly in the classroom during school hours when they meet each other face to face ... I am in a constant dilemma, whether I should intervene or not, and if so how much, because Facebook is not legal for the use of children under the age of 14(...)"

From this teacher dilemma, a common conflict arises in its face value: Should the teacher be involved in incidents that occur outside of school hours but affect the atmosphere in the classroom - or perhaps this is not included in the duties of the teacher? However, in this case it is apparent that this is a conflict that presents a new, more complex reality that the teacher encounters during class. A total of five conflicts were tallied in this category.

5. Intrapersonal conflicts, in the pedagogical-didactic domain with a cognitively expressed resolution

Teachers raise many questions relative to other fields; the questions express conflicts about fundamental issues at the school, but come without examples. Some conflicts are about the curriculum: "(...) Do I need to change the curriculum of my class because of educational considerations, which are contrary to the policy of the Ministry of Education and the position of the headmaster?" And later on the assessment of learning:

"(...) Exams for the indices of effectiveness and growth in schools, should I invest in producing achievements, only because they can be viewed by other teachers at the price of neglecting other subjects". Other conflicts deal with the ability of the students: "(...) Should I adjust the level of teaching to higher level students or the middle level ones?" Conflicts that involve management of the class, which in turn affect the teacher's way of teaching: "Should I teach only when the class is quiet, and in this way waste valuable time, or should I teach while there is still some noise, although classmates disturb each other to learn?" A total of seven conflicts were tallied in this category.

6. Intrapersonal conflicts in the pedagogical-didactic domain with a behaviorally expressed resolution

In this domain teachers also raise many questions in comparison to other areas, with no demonstrating examples and with no detailed explanations. These are significant questions that present conflicts for the teachers. Conflicts which are related to the load of study materials such as: "(...) Should I teach according to the requirements of the Ministry of Education and teach the full scope of the study material, or should I adjust the teaching material to the needs of my classroom students and their capabilities?" Some conflicts relate to the student as an individual, such as:

"Should I elevate the grade of a student (who does not deserve it) in order not to damage his chances of success in the future (acceptance to a new school, success in matriculation exams(...))"

Some conflicts are related to other duties in the school, whose content suggest a self-expectation to meet the system requirements. However, the teacher's personal view of the world may contradict these expectations, such as: "Should I as a coordinator report to the headmaster when I find that a certain teacher copied a curriculum and did not prepare it by herself as required?", "Should I receive educational and therapeutic recommendations from an instructor who does not have experience in my field of expertise?" A total of seven conflicts were tallied in this category.

7. Intrapersonal conflicts in the philosophical-ethical domain with a cognitively expressed resolution

Teachers report conflicts that represent discrepancies with honor values, such as: "Should I, as a pedagogical coordinator, report a colleague, who is also a friend in my private life, to the headmaster?", "(...) The main conflict is walking on eggshells with my students, and being careful not to accidentally hurt them emotionally by using a misplaced word." Some conflicts reflect values of tolerance and restraint: "Sometimes a child arrives with very violent patterns of behavior that I feel I just cannot stop him from hurting other children, that poor child, why should he be blamed? This is what he knows from home, this is the way they deal with insult, disappointment and despair. On the other hand, it is exactly my place as an educator to try to address wrongdoings and mediate it as much as possible." And additionally:

"Should I spend time in implementing values, with the price of not meeting the load of the study material?" A total of four conflicts were tallied in this category.

8. Intrapersonal conflicts in the philosophical-ethical domain with a behaviorally expressed resolution

Teachers raise a relatively large number of questions related to internal conflicts while facing the system, such as: "Should I enforce a penalty imposed by the headmaster that I find to be unjust?", "Am I obligated to enforce the headmaster's decisions even if they contradict my commitment to the class?", "what should I do when my personal views are in contradiction to the requirements

of the system in which I work?", "Should I give books to students even though their parents have not paid the education payments to the council as yet?" A total of six conflicts were tallied in this category.

9. Interpersonal conflicts, in the personal domain with a cognitively expressed resolution

One conflict was found to be related to the interpersonal relationship between teachers and students: "(...) Should I punish a student (who deserves it) with the involved cost of damaging our personal relationships?" And the other conflict is related to personal assistance to a student by a teacher in extreme cases: "Is it possible to force an employee of the educational system to provide medical treatment including inserting a suppository into a student's anus during an epilepsy seizure? (There is a medical certificate and parental consent, but the staff is not ready to administer a drug other than orally.)"

10. Interpersonal conflicts, the personal domain with a behaviorally expressed resolution

Teachers bring examples to illustrate conflicts that create strong clashes between them and the students, such as:

"Many kids feel close enough to me to share things such as 'yesterday my father beat my mother and threw a plate at her..' my first duty as an educator is to report it to the professionals (...) on the other hand, what about the student's trust? What is the reason for him to share with me every detail and find relief from the distress by sharing with a person he trusts (...) it tears me up inside and obviously I have to report this situation because it is for the benefit of the child who should be rescued from the situation ..." Similarly, another teacher raised a conflict:

"Should I report to the school social system (counselor, coordinator) a problematic secret (which requires the intervention of an adult) that has been revealed to me by a student who asked me not to tell?" Some teachers find a way to express resolution of this type of conflict, and report it. Others see it, consciously or unconsciously, as damage to their relationship and communication with the students. Other conflicts raise the conflict created between the teacher, as a private person, and the working conditions:

"If the school forbids a student from wearing a nose ring and I already have a nose ring." Another teacher introduced an internal conflict which disturbed her greatly. The conflict reflects the offending attitude of other teachers towards her work as a corrective teacher "Blatant interference of other teachers to my function as a corrective teacher and their will that I will teach the regular class material to my students."

11. Interpersonal conflicts, social-cultural domain with a cognitively expressed resolution

Teachers report about conflicts between colleagues that the proposed resolution is an intervention by the school headmaster:

"Should I involve the headmaster in a professional conflict between me and another teacher on the staff?", "Team work between the first homeroom teacher and the second, how do we keep the

daily level (...) of uniform reference, should I involve the headmaster in professional differences of opinion between myself and a teacher of a parallel class / one of the homeroomteachers?

12. Interpersonal conflicts, in the social-cultural domain with a behaviorally expressed resolution Teachers raise the issue of conflicts between teachers and problematic students in the class, such as: "School rules statethat after a violent event,studentsare not allowed to come to school.

How should a teacher treat a studentwho iskownto be regularly battered at home, and would get beaten even more if the parents knew about it", "(...) Should a student who keepson disturbing (and has a negative influence on the entire class) be expelled at the request of his parents or be handled in the class?", "Should a student be punished, or disciplinary steps be taken at the cost of damaging the personal relationship with the parents, or is it known that the parents will try everything in their power to overturn the decision at any cost", "Should I be offended by a parent's criticism which is not justified even according to the headmaster's opinion?" It is apparent that these conflicts bring another significant character to the forefront - the parents. Other conflicts were also reported that deal with the uncertainty of the teachers towards negative and unpredicted behavior by a student:

"Should I punish a positive and hard-working student who cheated and copied in an exam, or should I be empathetic and show restraint?"

Some of the conflicts dealt with collegiality and personal loyalty towards staff members, such as: "As a member of the management team: Should I support the standpoint of the headmaster despite the dissatisfaction of the staff about the issue, or should I "contradict" it?", "Should I get involved in a school problem that does not concern me directly or should I ignore it?" "Should Italk to a colleague about her lack of motivation to perform certain work with a group of studentswhom I have to work with later and "harvest" the fruits of her lack of effort?" Sometimes there is a conflict between school policy and the understanding, thoughtfulness and flexibility towards the students, such as the observance of rules related to external looks and appearance, that could damage the personal relationship between teacher and student.A total of eight conflicts were tallied in this category.

13. Interpersonal conflicts, in the pedagogical-didactic domain with a cognitively expressed resolution

In this category the conflicts include questions about issues raised between teachers and a figure who is not a student such as an instructor: "Should I consider the advice of experts (in the content or didactics field) which contradictsmy experienceand judgment?", ora headmaster:

"astudent with high potential gets an average grade of 60, and after analysisit turns out that he should take oral tests. When the headmaster asks the teacher to consider the recommendations, the teacher claims that he has no time for this ... Should the student suffer because of the rights of the teacher? What is more important?" Or towards a colleague: "How do I work and maintaina

productive and stable bilateral relationship with the teacher of a parallel class when the weekly overlap hours are few (2 hours a week)?"

The teacher has a conflict; on one hand she wants to work with a colleague teacher, and on the other she wants to operate in accordance with the system, which makes it difficult. There is also the conflict of the teacher with the system: "If the exams of the Ministry of Education are difficult for some students who do not conform, what should I do?"

14. Interpersonal conflicts, in the pedagogical-didactic domain with a behaviorally expressed resolution

Teachers raise many conflicts which concern solutions for treating problematic students: "Should I report to enforcement agencies outside the school (welfare, police) about the problematic or dangerous behavior of a student, or should I try to solve it myself?", "Should I report a student who has difficulties, at the request of the system, even at the cost of labeling him a "weak" student?". Other conflicts concern the relationship with colleagues: "Should I offer an important educational initiative with the risk of irritating my colleagues at work (because of the extra work "produced")?", "Should I comment to other teachers about deviation from procedures or non-professional work?", "Should I report about the misbehavior of a fellow teacher that was carried out against a student?"

15. Interpersonal conflicts, in the philosophical-ethical domain with a cognitively expressed resolution

In this category the conflicts were few. One conflict concerned the value of equality between the students and the system: "Should the students be allowed to experiment with democratic moves in the school system (such as a student council activity) at the cost of breaking the regulations or the school spirit?"

One teacher referred to a conflict on the value of trust between the three parties involved: the teacher, the staff and the management. The conflict arose during a meeting between the teacher and the headmaster or his deputy:

16. Interpersonal conflicts, in the philosophical-ethical domain with a behaviorally expressed resolution

In this category two conflicts were found that were related to violence, the first towards a student: "Should I report the dangerous or violent behavior of a student to his parents, even though he asked me not to?"

The other related to a colleague: "Should I react when a colleague teacher insults or humiliates students or should I restrain myself?"

From the ethical aspect there is a conflict that causes confrontation between the teacher and the system which does not operate properly, as he sees it: "Should I report to the Ministry of

Education/supervisor when events occurring on the school premises are not known to the education system ... (Misuse of hours given, etc.)"

An additional ethical conflict confronts the teacher with her colleague, who does not operate fairly and honestly: "Should I tell/comment to the headmaster about difficulties and deficiencies which I recognize in the group that I teach that result from the lack of motivation and poor performance in the instilling of the teaching staff, by a colleague who has no motivation to teach - but has a position in school, how do I express it without offending anyone?" In summary, the content analysis of the interviews indicates that teachers today confront with a wide variety of identity conflicts that can be equally divided between intrapersonal (34 conflicts) and interpersonal conflicts (35 conflicts).

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The world of the teachers in the changing reality is infused with conflicts that need to be confronted during the process of forming a professional identity. This is a dynamic and complicated psychological process which combines intra- and inter-personal aspects, and is affected by the broader interaction system between the teacher and his environment (Kozminsky and Kloir, 2010; Galman, 2009; Lampert, 1985; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). The purpose of the current study is to examine the nature of the most common conflicts which trouble teachers in their professional identity. The results of the analysis are compatible with the review of the literature and raised sixteen categories which characterize the identity conflicts of teachers.

One of the central insights emerging from the analysis is that the conflicts that trouble teachers nowadays are very complex. Each of the described conflicts includes three different aspects; two of the aspects refer to the conflict itself – type of conflict and the content domain it includes, while the third aspect refers to the possibility of a solution to the conflict – a passive cognitive solution which involves taking a cognitive decision, versus an actively behavioral solution involving real action. The assortment of conflicts derived from this insight points to diverse and concrete conflicts that occur in school and beyond. These results indicate that it is important to understand that the teacher is in a field of intra- and inter-personal conflicts, and that the environment affects the complexity of the conflicts (Fisherman and Weiss, 2011; Rodgers & Scott, 2008; Reeves, 2009). These conflicts are essential for the growth and formation of professional identity, and the building process of a professional identity is leveraged towards personal and functional growth (Day & Gu, 2007).

The conflicts assist the teachers to re-examine their professional identity during the process of their professional growth. It is evident that teachers still lack resources and tools that will assist them in interpreting and evaluating information, whenever a gap forms between their perception and the perception of the environment, and whenever there are conflicts between and within the sub-identities that make up the identity. Therefore, it is important to teach pre-teachers the aspects of the professional identity conflicts as early as the training stage, in order to allow them to process these conflicts both cognitively and behaviorally. This is because the training

processes of young students significantly affect the formation of their professional identity as teachers (Schepens, Aelterman&Vlerick, 2009). The experience of teachers which begins with interactions with colleagues, students and parents is essential for the shaping of their professional identity (Pearce & Morrison, 2011). Therefore, it is possible that the exposure of young students and novice teachers to relevant and meaningful conflicts, in the "safe" framework of training and professional classes, through various activities, such as: role playing, dilemma analysis and mock trials, may invite a discussion on a variety of alternatives and legitimate identities and by so doing to acquire tools and skills tailored for future effective management of professional identity conflicts.

The largest group of conflicts found related to intrapersonal conflicts located in the pedagogical-didactic domain with a solution expressed by cognitive and behavioral forms. It seemed that teachers are busy and preoccupied with pedagogical-didactic situations as the central issues of their work,

which include conflicts that concern the curriculum, teaching methods, learning, assessment and classroom management. These conflicts are many and thus point to their deep potential in the process of shaping professional identity. It is possible that this stems from their restricted concepts and behaviors executed in a centralized system, which is unable to satisfy the variety of educational needs of society. Still, there is a sense of openness and autonomy in decision-making, since they have the authority and are responsible for the results. Teachers talk about the considerations and the possible course of actions in order to make meaningful choices. Perhaps they are found in a process of a personal-internal self-exploration process and build a commitment to the teaching profession - two key and complementary core processes which shape professional identity (Meeus, Idema&Maassen, 2002).

Most of the interpersonal conflicts were in the social-cultural domain with behaviorally expressed resolution. It is apparent that teachers are busy with social-cultural situations, including interpersonal relationships between the personalities in the school, students, parents, peer teachers and headmasters. These results support the argument that school culture has a strong influence on the formation of professional identity of the teacher (Troman, 2008). Teachers report that conflicts can create fruitful discussions in the context of teaching and improving the quality of the organization, on the one hand, but they may also create tension, anger and even alienation on the other. Beck (2013) argues that cooperation and dialogue can deepen the understanding of conflicts. Therefore, it is important to present the conflicts of teachers in an intelligent and effective manner, and it is recommended to regularly perform in-class and school-based dialogue sessions, tailored to the target audience, aimed at raising conflicts and understanding them, while establishing norms of behaviors in the classroom and in the school.

In this research teachers' conflicts are presented with moving narratives alongside short and sharp questions. It is likely that in both forms the conflicts played a key role in the life of the

teacher. The conflict which described a discrepancy between the identity elements caused increased emotional involvement that is involved in perception and behavioral management, which in turn induced reflective and professional processes and thus led to a process of forming a professional identity. Without the conflict the significant processes of shaping the identity of the teacher will not occur. Dilemmas and conflicts are healthy and essential processes for the formation of professional identity (Beck, 2013). The present study is innovative since it examined the "role" of the conflict as an essential catalyst to the process of forming professional identity, in an era of changes in the education system. The conflicts identified in this study are frequent and meaningful to the teachers, they are a powerful force in the development of identity, they undermine the world of the teachers and as such serve as a catalyst for action and change (Bosma & Kunnen, 2001; Schachter, 2002). Notwithstanding, it should be noted that the study subject is highly sensitive and quite intimate in nature, and not all teachers wished to be exposed and speak about personal situations that occurred during their work. Evidence for this can be seen in the small number of intra- and inter-personal conflicts reported. Therefore, it is recommended that future research use different tools, such as metaphors, case studies, in-depth interviews and questionnaires. In addition, it is recommended to further examine the demographic characteristics of the teachers, such as seniority in teaching, education, gender and level of religiosity.

6. References

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