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Author(s): Arvaja, Maarit

Title: Tensions and striving for coherence in an academic's professional identity work

Year: 2018

Version:

Please cite the original version:

Arvaja, M. (2018). Tensions and striving for coherence in an academic's professional identity work. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 23(3), 291-306.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2017.1379483>

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To cite this article: Maarit Arvaja (2018) Tensions and striving for coherence in an academic's professional identity work, *Teaching in Higher Education*, 23:3, 291-306, DOI: [10.1080/13562517.2017.1379483](https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2017.1379483)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2017.1379483>



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Published online: 21 Sep 2017.



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Tensions and striving for coherence in an academic's professional identity work

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of 'new managerialism' in academic institutions and professions has given rise to tensions between one's professional self and work context. Such tensions often originate from a misalignment between institutional and personal values. This study builds on a dialogical approach to identity and discusses the role of inner tensions and conflicts in terms of making sense of one's professional identity. These aspects are explored and exemplified by introducing a sample case of one individual student and university researcher/teacher, Anna, who participated in one-year Pedagogical Studies for Adult Educators. Leaning on the narratives of Anna's learning diaries and a later interview, the article describes tensions and critical conflicts in her professional I-positioning. The study shows how tensions and their resolutions, at their best, can lead to constructive identity work, thereby finding a new personal sense resulting in a more integrated professional identity.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 7 November 2016
Accepted 28 August 2017

KEYWORDS

Dialogical self; I-position;
professional development;
professional identity; tension

Introduction

The current and on-going changes and reforms in the higher education sector have brought new demands and expectations to academic staff in terms of their roles and work (Billot 2010; McNaughton and Billot 2016). The changing higher education policy context and so called 'new managerialism', with its emphasis on accountability, control, productivity and efficiency, have resulted in the fragmentation of academic labour, harsh competition for funding, diminished autonomy, and increasing administrative duties (e.g. Churchman and King 2009; Kreber 2010; Ylijoki and Henriksson 2017). Many academic positions are also characterised by insecure and short-term employment (Ylijoki and Henriksson 2017). It has been said that universities have become more corporate, commercial and managerialist (Churchman and King 2009). These qualities have undermined 'traditional academic values' such as collegiality, collaborative management, academic freedom and pursuit of truth (e.g. Winter 2009; Ylijoki and Henriksson 2017). All these changes have also increased the competition and widened the gap between research and teaching (Korhonen and Törmä 2016).

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This shift in academic institutions and professions has given rise to tensions between one's professional self and work context. Such tensions often originate from a misalignment between objective institutional values and personally held values, such as devotion to student-centeredness (e.g. Kira and Balkin 2014; McNaughton and Billot 2016). Many academics feel they must pursue governmental and managerial aims rather than primarily scholarly objectives (Billot 2010). In other words, as academics have to position themselves into a more corporatized, commercial and managerialist environment (Billot 2010; Churchman 2006), this revised institutional focus seems to clash with values held by many academics (Briggs 2007). It has been suggested that there is a growing divide between the perceived professional self and that prescribed by the organisation (Billot 2010). Churchman and King (2009) describe this as a tension between private and public stories. The public and 'authorised' stories do not necessarily reflect the expectations, values and experiences perceived by the academics themselves. Personal stories (Churchman and King 2009) or personal projects (Clegg 2008), often characterised by strong value orientations and a deep sense of engagement, do not always endorse the economic and managerial priorities set by institutions. Taylor (2008) further argues that the sense of loss of freedom and autonomy felt by many academics embeds a more fundamental loss, namely the loss of respect and public regard. Although tensions inevitably arise, these deeply felt personal effects on identity, of changing expectations, demands and roles, are often downplayed by institutions (McNaughton and Billot 2016). However, continuing and unresolved conflicts and nonalignment between individuals' and organisations' expectations may result in resistance to institutional demands (Billot 2010) and hinder the development of a cohesive professional identity (Hermans 2001; Silver 2003). On the other hand, conflicts and resistance can also be a trigger leading to change and professional development (Kindered 1999; Sannino 2010). Even though resistance is often considered a sign of disengagement, it may instead be a sign of intense involvement (Kindered 1999).

Along with the above-mentioned changes, it has been suggested that the university, as a collective, is perishing. Billot (2010, 718) argues that 'there exists a collection of differing staff groupings, rather than a unified homogenous collective with shared values and objectives'. Also, Whitchurch (2008, 88) talks about a 'mosaic' rather than a collective of the staff. According to Ylijoki and Henriksson (2017), academic careers are segmented, fragmented and polarised.

Changes in higher education, however, pose, not only threats, but also opportunities for staff (Billot 2010). A study by Ylijoki and Henriksson (2017), on junior academics' career stories, shows that there are radically diverse ways of making sense and build an academic identity and career in current university contexts. They found five types of career stories with distinct roles – a novice of the academic elite, a victim of the teaching trap, an academic worker, a research group member, and an academic freelancer – each of which were embedded with specific underpinned values and displayed different characteristic relationships with their academic work, colleagues, department and university. An important finding was that none of these story lines was in a dominant or hegemonic position over the others. The study also showed that traditional academic values had a strong cultural standing in the current university context. This suggests that, even though university is changing, academic culture retains its multi-layered character; 'older layers do not disappear when new ones emerge' (Ylijoki and Henriksson 2017, 14). In accordance,

Clegg (2008, 343) suggests that rather than being under threat, academic identities are expanding and university offers possibilities ‘for valorising difference’.

This study builds on a dialogical approach to (teacher) identity (Akkerman and Meijer 2011; Hermans 2003) and discusses the role of inner tensions and conflicts (e.g. Engeström and Sannino 2011; Sannino 2010) in making sense of one’s professional identity. I explore and illustrate these aspects in the light of a case of one individual student and university researcher/teacher, Anna, who participated in one-year Pedagogical Studies for Adult Educators (PSAE). The pedagogical studies were built on the ideas of experiential learning (Malinen 2000), where the participants were encouraged to critically reflect on their personal and work experiences to make sense of their self-identities as a teacher. In this paper, I focus on exploring the tensions between Anna’s professional sense of self and ‘the institutional voice’ of the university, as experienced and manifested in her narrative consisting of learning diaries and an interview, which was conducted a year after the pedagogical studies.

In the following, I first conceptualise identity from the perspective of the dialogical approach, after which I discuss the role of tensions in re-negotiating one’s identity and I-positioning. Finally, I concretise the conceptual framework in light of Anna’s case.

Dialogical approach to identity

Recent conceptualisations on (professional) identity lean largely on postmodern view (Akkerman and Meijer 2011). Accordingly, identity is characterised by such conceptions as multiple, discontinuous and social. Identities are changing, dynamic, continuously negotiated and reshaped in interactions with others (others in the broad sense; e.g. other people, groups, institutions and cultural categories) (Akkerman and Meijer 2011; Lee and Schallert 2016). It can be said that identity negotiation is manifested in active reflection and interpretation between the person and the social (and cultural) context, in a process where the individual’s personal experiences, interests, values and beliefs, relative to his/her professional self, are reflected and negotiated in connection with the situational expectations and external conditions of work (Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop 2004; Clegg 2008; Vähäsantanen and Billett 2008).

Akkerman and Meijer (2011) argue that there are some problems in leaning purely on postmodern views on identity. For example, if identity is constantly changing, how can a person maintain a coherent sense of self long term? They suggest that we need to consider also the modern stance on identity which sees identity as unitary, continuous and individual. Accordingly, this study takes a dialogical approach to identity and leans on dialogical self-theory (Hermans 2001, 2003), which combines features of modern and postmodern approaches to identity (Akkerman and Meijer 2011). According to Hermans (2003, 109), the

concept of the I-position combines the notion of ‘position’ by which the self is extended towards a discontinuous heterogeneity of the individuals and groups of the society, and the notion of the ‘I’ that preserves the continuity and agency of the same self.

Dialogical self is composed of multiple I-positions changing in response to social settings one encounters (Akkerman and Meijer 2011). The different I-positions (e.g. I-position of a teacher, academic, mother or hard worker) are embodied in voices

(Bakhtin 1981) which can be interpreted ‘as a speaking personality bringing forward a particular perspective of the world’ (Akkerman, Admiraal, and Simons 2012, 229). I-positions are stances that people use to express their various voiced perspectives (Akkerman and Van Eijck 2013). Thus, I-position links voice to a person’s identity. Therefore, voices are not only in what we say, but also in who we take ourselves to be (Akkerman, Admiraal, and Simons 2012). Dialogical self is a negotiated space and the voices within the self can be diverse or even contradictory (Akkerman and Meijer 2011; Hermans 2001).

Dialogical approach, building on the Bakhtinian framework, emphasizes the intrinsic relatedness of the self and other (Hermans 2003). This means that the words of other people, groups and communities enter into a person’s internal dialogues and create an ‘inner society of voices’ with oppositions, agreements, disagreements, negotiations and integrations. Even though voice and position constitute one another, position can be interpreted to be the dynamic aspect of the voice which is constantly negotiated in interaction and dialogue (both external and internal). In dialogue, different points of view meet in a constant play of agreement/disagreement, or identification/differentiation (Seikkula, Laitila, and Rober 2012; Wortham 2001).

I-positions are not only positions with an experiential I-quality but also positions with an experiential we-quality (Hermans 2003). Hence, groups, communities, and cultures are merged as collective voices in the self. Collective voices are not outside the self as an external community, but are part of individual self as generalised others (Mead 1934), authoritative voices (Bakhtin 1981) or different third parties (Grossen and Salazar Orvig 2011), linking the individual self as part of the broader historical and social community.

According to the dialogical approach, identity is narratively constructed (Wortham 2001) and the construction and development of identity always involves connecting the past, present and future (Billot 2010; Henkel 2000; Lee and Schallert 2016). People define who they are (their self-identity) and establish their voices and I-positions in terms of their unique set of experiences (Hermans 2001). In this sense, narrative and self are inseparable. Through narration, people construct their identity by integrating old and new experiences (Hermans and Hermans-Jansen 1995). As a result, the components of the individual’s identity ‘emerge from the imagined and projected as well as the real’ (Billot 2010, 712). Past experiences are used as a reflective mirror for evaluating new understanding, shaping also the future self (Lee and Schallert 2016) and creating possible selves (Markus and Nurius 1987).

Tensions in identity work

In this paper, the focus is on tensions and conflicts that occur between one’s professional sense of self and the institutional context of work. More particularly, attention is paid to the discursive manifestation of these conflicts (Sannino 2010). While identity is dynamic, it needs a sense of continuity (Henkel 2000). Since people have a natural tendency to keep up the self as a coherent construct (Hermans and Kempen 1993; Ho et al. 2001), the unity of the self is held together through constant internal dialogue (Linell 2009). Internal dialogue refers to the occurrence of several voices within a single thinking individual. It is a dialogue between (the voices of) the selves of the same person (Ho et al. 2001) and/or dialogue on ‘self-in-relation-to-other’ taking place with (the voices of) the actual or ‘imagined’ other (Hermans 2003, 104).

Internal dialogue is often double-voiced. In double-voicing, according to Wortham (2001), the person positions or articulates him/herself, engaging in dialogue with various voices by juxtaposing them with each other. While voices are drawn from the complex social world, they get engaged in a dialogue that involves multiple perspectives and often conflicting positions. Therefore, a double-voiced discourse often involves ‘a conflict’. In terms of a dialogical self, encountering a tension can be manifested in an internal dialogue between different voices or positions (Linell 2009). The discursive manifestation of these conflicts or inner tensions can appear as critical conflicts or double-binds (Engeström and Sannino 2011; Sannino 2010).

Vasilyuk (1988, cited in Sannino [2010]), talks about critical conflicts, referring to situations where individuals face inner conflicts and doubts, that in the face of contradictory motives, paralyse them. However, even though critical conflicts create tensions, discomfort and confusion, they can also be seen in a positive light; as a prerequisite for transformation and emancipation. Sannino (2010) uses the notion of experiencing, based on Vasilyuk’s (1988) work, to describe a process that creates favourable circumstances to engage in transformation. At the heart of the process of experiencing, there are inner conflicts and contradictions ‘in terms of struggle between heterogeneous principles’ (Vasilyuk 1988, 171 cited in Sannino [2010]). These struggles specifically refer to conflicts between motives of a single person. Through critical conflicts and tensions, the process of experiencing opens possibilities to face, become aware of and work out contradictions.

Although critical conflicts refer to experienced inner conflicts of an individual, their roots are often in contradictions that stem from the culture, institutions and organisations to which the individual is attached (Engeström and Sannino 2011; Sannino 2010). Therefore, personal crises are often intertwined with contradictions in collective activities (Sannino 2010) and take place between personal and collective voices in the dialogical self (Arvaja 2015, 2016; Hermans 2003). Therefore, experiencing consists of ‘both dilemmatic motives of the individual and contradictory systemic tensions at the level of activity which the individual inhabits’ (Sannino 2010, 840).

Tensions are essential in professional identity work. Resistance (e.g. towards a change), which is often underlying the tensions, is an active dialogue between the past and the future (Kindered 1999). According to Sannino (2010, 839), ‘resistance manifests early forms of agency’. Giving individuals opportunities to critically reflect on their own experiences, engaging them in reflective identity work (Cohen 2010) or core reflection (Korthagen 2004), offers possibilities for learning and revising their I-positions. Inner tensions and contradictions likely to arise from this identity work can be manifested in discursive processes of experiencing, through which individuals can become aware, make sense of, and resolve these contradictions (Sannino 2010). Encountering and reflecting on one’s deeply felt, personal values may lead to self-understanding that enables more conscious choices (Korthagen 2004).

The case of Anna

In this section, I exemplify the conceptual framework. I show how tensions experienced in one’s professional positioning can result in renegotiating and redefining one’s professional sense of self. I also demonstrate the continuity, the need and the drive for coherence in the

professional sense of self, as part of the dialogical self (Hermans 2003). In doing so, I lean on purposefully selected data excerpts taken from the learning diaries and an interview of an individual student, Anna (a pseudonym), who participated in one-year Pedagogical Studies for Adult Educators (see Arvaja [2016]). While pursuing her pedagogical studies, Anna is also working at the university in a position that comprises mainly research work, but includes teaching as well. Anna completed her PhD over five years, before the pedagogical studies, and has worked at the university for over ten years in various positions involving both research and teaching. Despite her experience, she does not have a permanent position at the university.

The overall aim of the programme, called Pedagogical Studies for Adult Educators (PSAE), is to support and develop the participants' pedagogical competence through the principles of dialogue, explorative attitude and personalisation (Malinen 2000). These principles are embedded in pedagogical practices consisting mainly of group discussions (e.g. learning and reading groups, drama) and individual reflection (e.g. learning diaries). Completion of the pedagogical studies gives the students a qualification to teach in the field of adult education (a qualification needed in Finnish universities).

As part of the studies, Anna wrote 18 learning diaries during the academic year. I conducted the interview with Anna a year after the pedagogical studies. Most of the learning diary excerpts I present here are selected based on a previous study on this data, which dealt with the process of positioning in teacher identity work (see Arvaja [2016]). For the purposes of the present study, I selected narratives that illuminate the relationship between Anna's professional self and university as a work context. When exploring the data excerpts here, I pay special attention to discursive contradictions when Anna voices her professional sense of self and/or the work context. Tensions and contradictions, and their discursive manifestations, such as critical conflicts and double binds (Engeström and Sannino 2011; Sannino 2010), can be seen as a means of arousing (and tracing) changes in one's identity and I-positioning.

Renegotiating professional I-position

Participation in the pedagogical studies can be regarded as 'an arena' that helped Anna confront, become aware of and identify hidden phenomena behind conflicting motives in her work. In the first set of excerpts we see how the pedagogical studies contributed to strengthening her I-position as a teacher, while decreasing her motivation for her work as a researcher:

It's frightening, too, how my enthusiasm for teaching/guidance is increasing throughout my participation in the PSAE, since the increasing shift of my interests outside my current job description are weakening my motivation to work in my current job [research]. Luckily enough, it seems I can start teaching at the turn of the year, so perhaps I can then direct my energy to that. (Diary 8)

For me, the danger of PSAE actually lies in that I think it's one reason why I am now experiencing such a strong work identity crisis. In fact, I have had this crisis for two or three years already, I guess, but PSAE is opening my eyes more to the notion that the career I have ended up with is not the right one for me. [...] But, I mean, PSAE is increasingly opening my eyes to the idea that teaching/education is work that I want to do. (Diary 10)

Anna's inner tensions and confusion that she is facing when engaging in the pedagogical studies and related ideas are brought out explicitly in her discourse. These are also reflected in the emotional tone of her discourse, as she is using strong, emotionally loaded words like 'frightening' and 'danger'. There is a critical conflict (Sannino 2010) between two diverging motives relative to her work. During the pedagogical studies, Anna's I-position as a researcher is weakening while her I-position as a teacher is strengthening. The pedagogical studies with related ideas, values and ideologies offer Anna a 'second stimulus' (Sannino 2010) that provides a new frame of reference to assess and critically reflect on her experiences and current professional position. The programme seems to promote new awareness about her professional sense of self ('opening my eyes'), contributing to re-defining her professional I-positioning (Akkerman and Meijer 2011). As the example demonstrates, Anna is experiencing a personal crisis involving conflicting motives intertwined with contradictions in her collective activities (Sannino 2010).

Anna's dissatisfaction with her current situation at work stems from the fact that the practices and values prevailing at Anna's department conflict with her own:

[...] yet my research motivation, or my motivation for employment in the current department, has been decreased because of the competition, the poor management of our department and the lack of support and encouragement for one's work from the superior (or senior colleagues). (Diary 8)

And pedagogical education is hardly ever appreciated in our department [...] When I was applying for PSAE and told my superior, his comment, somehow illustrating the general attitude of our department, was, 'Well, go for it then, but do it with as little effort as is possible'. But there is no point in these kinds of studies, if one is not genuinely motivated and willing to develop oneself! (Diary 10)

Anna points out competition, poor management, and lacking support as negative features of her work environment. Anna's department seems to stress the importance of 'being' an academic rather than 'being' a (good) teacher, whereas Anna prefers and values pedagogical competence. Therefore, Anna's values and expectations deviate from those of the department. This causes personal distress and incoherence (Hermans 2003) in Anna's professional positioning and sense of self. Anna also takes a critical position regarding the university at large:

The latest curriculum reform and time limits set for students to finish their studies have, in my opinion, driven university education toward a direction that resembles mass production. Earlier, students could, for example, write a Master's thesis for two different subjects, but now this is prevented. Also, studies must proceed more straightforwardly, which may prevent choosing more unusual subjects as one's minor. We can say, therefore, that academic freedom has been reduced also for students during and after all these reforms. (Diary 15)

Anna's internal dialogue is double-voiced (Linell 2009; Wortham 2001). There is a contradiction in Anna's discourse that can be explained through the concept of double-bind (Engeström and Sannino 2011). The theme of this double-bind is the curriculum reform gearing university towards mass production vs. academic freedom and students' opportunities for unique choices. Therefore, in Anna's everyday practice, there is an evident gap and struggle between two poles of activity; the University pole and the Student pole. This kind of a double-bind is typically a situation that cannot be solved by an individual alone and shows an impossibility (of action) in discourse. The situation

also manifests itself as a critical conflict (Sannino 2010) in Anna's professional position. Her I-position as a teacher is based on student-centred orientation with the aim of truly helping students, supporting and respecting their uniqueness and individuality. However, she feels that the university does not support these values:

Discovering one's potential, talents, etc. requires time and also time for oneself. As efficiency thinking has spread into university as well, it may affect students' possibilities to recognise and apply their strengths. Even though I would truly like to help students in their choices and study-related problems, I feel that the university world does not give much chance for this. Because lecturer posts are filled by research merits (and I don't believe this will change), so if you consider a career then everything 'extra', like giving more time to students, should be cut off. This is one reason why I want to leave university, as so many things there seem inhuman. [...] In the university world, self-interest can surpass humanity, and if you want to help students more than you 'must', at worst it can be a 'suicide career-wise'. [...] Because I have already decided to try and seek a job elsewhere, I can now also invest more in both teaching and in students. (Diary 16)

This narrative further confirms, and makes explicit, a personally experienced conflict between Anna's I-position as an academic (focus on research work) and her I-position as a teacher. Her emotionally and morally charged personal distress is manifested in conflicting motives (Engeström and Sannino 2011; Sannino 2010). While Anna, as a teacher, would like to help students and give them time, as an academic, she should publish as much as possible (research merits valued), which limits the time given to students. These aims and motives are in obvious contradiction and therefore cause distress in Anna's professional positioning. Also, more generally, she feels that the university system is not aligned with her (teaching) values (Korhonen and Törmä 2016; Sannino 2010). Anna describes university as an unethical and inhuman institution that does not give due credit to a devoted teacher (Ylijoki and Henriksson 2017). The institutional values, demands and practices, and Anna's own professional sense of self are in contradiction. To maintain her identity and personal sense of what it means to be a teacher (and an academic), Anna feels she is compelled to leave the university.

Overall, Anna's last diary entry well characterises and voices her ideology as a teacher and professional:

The lecture and the book are increasingly opening my eyes to why I do not find my work motivating anymore (haste, poor leadership without positive feedback, the real values of the work community deviate from those of mine ...). But let's return to a more pedagogical discussion. Although the lecture and the book by Hämäläinen dealt more with work communities, I find that many things can be applied to teaching and guidance as well. For example, when we talk about good personnel management and how it creates conditions at the workplace, such as employees being enthusiastic about their work, I think this can be transferred almost directly to teaching and guiding. In other words, the teacher or supervisor should be genuinely interested in the students, listen to them and give them time. In addition, the teacher-student relationship should be characterised by mutual respect. Giving positive feedback is very important. So, these are the same things that can be found in good leadership, and have constantly come up in PSAE. Indeed, perhaps the best way to influence work motivation is to improve conditions and social interaction (trust and interest in others, as mentioned above). (Diary 18)

The pedagogical studies clearly provide a second stimulus to start Anna's reorientation process. In the above example, Anna is externalising her inner conflicts and internalising a meaningful second stimulus (i.e. pedagogical studies), which provide a context for

identifying a conflict between different value and activity systems (Sannino 2010). The pedagogical studies, in general, as well as the lecture and book on motivation and well-being at work, represent a voice that Anna adopts in her identity construction (Wortham 2001). For Anna, they represent a voice that is in accordance with her personal and ideal professional voice or core qualities (Korthagen 2004). This voice consists of characteristics such as the importance of dialogical relationship, which Anna narrates as essential in her professional positioning, but is lacking in her own work community.

As one's perceived identity, as a member of a work community, arises from a sense of belonging, existence of validating and complementary stories, and experiencing we-positioning, collegiality and common purpose (Billot 2010; Churchman and King 2009; Hermans 2003; Korhonen and Törmä 2016), it is no wonder that Anna's work motivation in the current situation seems weak and wavering and she is in crisis with her professional identity. Anna draws a clear distinction between her voice and the voice of the department and university and the ideology and values they represent. Her work environment does not enable her to act according to her ideals and values – rather on the contrary (Kira and Balkin 2014). There seems to be an experiential split between Anna's lifeworld and the system world (Calhoun 1991).

The above examples show how, in Anna's discourse, there is a continuous tension between different value and activity systems (Engeström and Sannino 2011); she depicts the university's policy as managerialist, characterised by mass production and a drive for efficiency, along with limited choice and time, while she sees that the traditional academic values and humanistic ideals she prefers are deteriorating (cf. Ylijoki and Ursin 2013). In Anna's discourse, this tension is manifested in a double-bind, especially between different poles: the Student pole, consisting of opportunities and time to find and support one's own potential and strengths and the University pole, which stresses efficiency in studying, teaching and research. For Anna, these two aims seem incompatible; acting according to one violates the other. This also shows a critical conflict in Anna's I-positioning relative to teaching. The role of a teacher/researcher (academic manager), as defined by the institutional authoritative voice (Bakhtin 1981) or public story (Churchman and King 2009), does not 'fit' with the I-position of a teacher (as a devoted helper and guide), as characterised by Anna. In practice, for Anna to hold onto and follow her convictions (i.e. truly help her students), this would mean a 'suicide career-wise' at her department, where emphasis is placed on research activity and merits rather than teaching achievements (also see Korhonen and Törmä [2016]). Hence, Anna's everyday practice involves a constant inner struggle: 'Even though I would truly like to help students in their choices and study-related problems, I feel that the university world does not give much chance for this'. As Vasilyuk (1988, 199) points out, a critical conflict is 'a situation of impossibility'. In her discourse, Anna positions herself as powerless and innocent, in the sense that the responsibility for the current situation at the university is attributable to anonymous external forces on which she has no influence. Anna positions herself as critical, yet powerless, with respect to the hegemonic institutional voice (cf. Ylijoki and Ursin 2013).

Keeping up coherence in I-positioning and the dialogical self

Anna's interview, which was conducted a year after the pedagogical studies, reveals that Anna has maintained her student-oriented approach and is also making plans for the

future to keep up this positioning. Anna has left her department, working at another department in a position that is more in accordance with her professional sense of self:

- Anna: Now I've been at the xx Department for two months as a part-time department secretary taking care of some teaching matters.
- Researcher: Yes.
- Anna: It's been quite or [emphasizes] really nice, as I would now like to go for educational administration or something like training or guidance, you know ...
- Researcher: Yes.
- Anna: ... where you can find employment. I'm now gaining some experience from that sector too.
- Researcher: I see. What makes you interested in educational administration?
- Anna: Uh well, perhaps that one can promote students' matters and ... I wish that it would then include some guidance too. As of now, there's been fairly little guidance work, you know, but something where I can help students get forward in studies and life and so on. In some ways, it's like positive work.
- Researcher: Yes, as I was reading your diaries, I got a feeling that you weren't terribly satisfied staying there ...
- Anna: Right, right, I wasn't, I wasn't! I was crying for happiness when I left (both are laughing). I was carrying, I was carrying the last cardboard box to the car and just kept on weeping that 'Oh my, this is such a relief'.
- Researcher: Oh well, that's really ...
- Anna: Yes, it was too hard with the competitive environment. The students were wonderful and teaching was incredibly nice. I felt that, along with PSAE, I also like developed as a teacher and got really good student feedback ...

There is clear continuity (Henkel 2000; Hermans 2001) in Anna's professional I-positioning and sense of self, as observed a year after the pedagogical studies. Her deep devotion to 'promoting students' matters' is still maintained even though her work context, expectations and activities have changed. Anna's interview clearly demonstrates the personal liberation (Engeström and Sannino 2011) she felt ('I was crying for happiness when I left') when leaving the previous job that maintained the continuous situation of double-bind and critical conflict for her. Similarly, the resolution of the inner conflict is manifested in finding a new personal sense and negotiating new meanings (Engeström and Sannino 2011) regarding her professional positioning.

Anna's interview further shows how the process of renewing her professional I-position – evident during pedagogical studies – is still sustained, and has led to progressive development regarding her professional sense of self, also directing her future plans:

- Researcher: If you could decide, just for yourself, what would you be doing five years from now and what role would teachership have there, if any?
- Anna: A practical dream would perhaps be that I might wanna be, or [voicing emphatically] I would like to be an amanuensis [assistant] or something similar, someone who would deal with teaching matters, getting to guide students and possibly even teach something in a small scale.
- Researcher: Uh-huh.
- Anna: But yes, I would like to be in contact with students as that is what is for me ... I've found it so wonderful to teach or be with students ... It is just somehow a terribly important thing for me nowadays.

From the above example, we can see that the most important thing for Anna, in her professional sense of self, is to be in contact with students and to help students ('terribly

important'). When she is projecting her future 'possible self' (Billot 2010; Markus and Nurius 1987) she does not identify herself with a teacher I-position but rather sees herself in a position that enables her to actualise narrated characteristics. This shows Anna's tendency to keep up coherence and unity (Hermans 2003), her professional identity strongly integrated with her personal sense of self (also see Arvaja [2016]). Regarding her professional self this means negotiating multiple and discontinuous I-positions in response to various contexts to maintain coherence and unity in her professional identity and sense of self (Akkerman and Meijer 2011). In her earlier positions as a researcher and teacher, the resolution of conflict between the underlying motives associated with these differing I-positions led her to predominantly identify herself with the teacher position and divert from the researcher position (Wortham 2001). When Anna moved to another job that involved more teaching administration, she found that also through that position she could maintain her professional identity, living up to ideals that make personal sense (Rajala and Sannino 2015) and are most relevant in her professional I-positioning (i.e. maintaining a student-centred approach). Thus, the motives underlying her activity remained the same even though her position changed. Anna could continue her personal project reflecting a strong value orientation and deep sense of engagement (Clegg 2008). As a result, the inner conflicts and their resolution (i.e. the process of experiencing, Sannino [2010]) led into a more coherent and integrated dialogical self (Hermans 2003), which was also projected in her plans (Lee and Schallert 2016). This, in turn, offers a possibility for progressive rather than regressive movements (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010) regarding her narrative self-construction and future work plans.

Discussion and conclusions

Through reflective identity work (Cohen 2010) and the process of experiencing (Sannino 2010), Anna externalised, and became aware of, conflicting motives underlying her activities, noticing that the contradictions affected her well-being at work. The roots of these conflicts laid in the differences between her experienced personal motives and collective (institutional) motives. As a consequence, the resolution of these inner conflicts led to strengthening her voice as a teacher, characterising and voicing herself as a person primarily wanting to help and guide students.

In externalising the conflicts between her voice and the voice of the university, Anna adopted the stance of resistance (Sannino 2010). Anna's case illuminates how resistance, at its best, can be a move toward authorship: 'It is an act along the path of appropriation and empowerment, or making "mine"' (Kindered 1999, 213), and how 'living through a crisis' (Kozulin 1991, 14–15) leads to stronger agency. Further, according to Kindered (1999, 208), resistance is a way of saying no, but at the same time it also 'expresses a desire for more engaging and less degrading work relations and activities'. Resistance, which manifested in a struggle and critical conflicts between different motives in Anna's discourse, led towards working out the conflicting motives and thereby strengthened Anna's own voice and agency. In this process of experiencing, Anna could externalise her inner conflicts and internalise a meaningful second stimulus (Sannino 2010) – the voice of the pedagogical studies – a voice that was in accordance with her own values and ways of seeing, thinking and doing in the world (Gee 2011). Anna identified

(Wortham 2001) with the voice of the pedagogical studies, which strengthened and resonated with her own voice. As a consequence, she could 'live through' her professional sense of self, which was tightly integrated with her personal sense of self, even though the work contexts changed.

Akkerman and Meijer (2011) conceptualise teacher identity, from the perspective of dialogical approach, as 'an ongoing process of negotiating and interrelating multiple I-positions in such a way that a more or less coherent and consistent sense of self is maintained throughout various participations and self-investments in one's (working) life' (315). Anna's case illuminates this strive for coherent and consistent self. In her narrative, tensions emerged when inconsistency between her multiple I-positions, or between the self and relevant others, was encountered. These tensions manifested as critical conflicts in Anna's discourse (Sannino 2010). The way out of these tensions was based on the desire to keep up and maintain coherence in one's personal and professional self (Hermans 2003). It showed in 'efforts to create internally coherent, purposeful biographical narratives' (McNaughton and Billot 2016).

The case demonstrates how university, with its 'market-driven trends' (see Ylijoki and Henriksson [2017, 2]), may turn out to be a challenging environment for academic work. Anna's case represents one story, or narrative of an academic in that context. It resembles a story of 'resistance and loss' (Ylijoki and Ursin 2013) and a story of 'the victim of the teaching trap' (Ylijoki and Henriksson 2017). In these story lines, the university is seen as a managerialist and unethical institution. There is also a career risk that comes from a mismatch between teaching and research merits; being a devoted teacher results in cutting off from research (and vice versa).

From the organisational point of view, Anna's story might be a story of failure; she goes down the career ladder from researcher/teacher to secretary. However, from the personal point of view, her story can be regarded as a story of success. By becoming aware of contradictions and working them out, she can construct (and keep on constructing) a coherent and consistent dialogical self, leading to personal and professional well-being. In agreement, Clegg (2008) draws a more optimistic picture of university, as a place to find spaces to develop one's personal projects. These paths do not necessarily develop according to predefined career ladders. According to Clegg, 'elite spaces' are less likely to be capable of sustaining personally felt and valued admirations and projects. Also, a recent study by Ylijoki and Henriksson (2017) showed that there are numerous ways to find balance between one's personal projects and institutional strategy, even if not always in harmonious ways. Anna stayed at the university, finding a space and direction that allowed her to live up to her values and deep sense of engagement (Clegg 2008).

This study aimed to demonstrate how tensions, and their resolutions, can lead to constructive identity work and, through personal sense-making, can eventually result in a more integrated professional identity. Academic work is a profession where excessive inconsistencies between one's personal and professional selves inevitably give rise to friction within the individual, like our sample case illustrated. Anna's case showed the power of core reflection regarding an academic's professional orientation (Korthagen 2004). Core reflection leads to self-understanding that is necessary for making more conscious choices. Through core reflection, individuals become more aware of their core qualities, that is,

their deeply felt, personal values or qualities; ‘the real me’. Hence, core reflection (Korthagen 2004) and the process of experiencing (Sannino 2010) help academics consciously direct their development in coherence with their personal self (Arvaja 2016; Korthagen 2004).

Korthagen (2004) also talks about the level of mission, deeper levels of one’s personal qualities that the person regards as pertinent to her/his existence. Our sample case gave evidence of one academic living up to her mission: Anna was deeply devoted to helping her students in general and in finding their own paths. Anna became not only cognitively aware but also emotionally in touch with her core qualities, which led her to the conscious choice of relying on those qualities, deciding on and directing her plans accordingly (Lee and Schallert 2016). It can be said that Anna found her ‘authenticity’ as a professional by leaning on her values and purposes, such as truly caring about the students and their learning, which transcended her own subjectivity and related (morally) to an inner commitment to certain values (Kreber 2010).

This study also raises concerns. If there is constant competition between research and teaching, and greater institutional recognition and rewards are associated with research (e.g. Korhonen and Törmä 2016; Kreber 2010; Ylijoki and Henriksson 2017), as was experienced by Anna, there is a greater risk of fragmentation of professional identities and I-positions, along with ill-being and controversies in the academic community. Åkerlind (2011) argues that isolating teacher identity from one’s broader development as an academic limits professional development as a teacher. Can universities really afford to lose their teachers? Furthermore, institutionally managed corporate stories, for example, with reference to demands for increased efficiency and productivity, do not fit and resonate with many of the personal stories, as this, and other research, has shown (e.g. Churchman and King 2009). Moreover, ignoring the personal stories ‘neglects the agency of the staff and the depth of commitment to their view of the profession’ (Churchman and King 2009, 514). This, in turn, is a loss of opportunity and potential, in terms of the creativity and innovativeness of the committed academics.

The primary problem is that university management is trying to promote cohesion through unifying practices in a situation where it should be seeking and supporting plurality to preserve the development of cohesive individual identities (Hermans 2003), and thus promoting wellbeing among the academic staff. Therefore, a greater emphasis should be put on opportunities to build multiple, subjective positions and context-specific and unique identities (Billot 2010; Churchman and King 2009). This means recognising and appreciating deeply committed personal projects (Clegg 2008) and private stories (Churchman and King 2009), even if they do not always conform with the corporate ones.

Acknowledgements

I express my warmest thanks to PhD Anita Malinen, the teacher of the Pedagogical Studies for Adult Educators, and ‘Anna’, the case student in this study.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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