

Exploring Teachers' Professional Identity in the Context of the Current Political Conflict in Palestine

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Abstract : In many areas of the world there are political conflicts the consequences of which have an inevitable impact on the educational system. Palestine is one such country where the experience of political conflict, going back over many years, has had a devastating effect on the development and maintenance of a stable educational environment for children and their teachers. Up to now there have been few studies that have focussed on the effects of living and working in a war zone on the professional identity of teachers. The aim of this study is to explore how the formation of Palestinian teachers' professional identity is affected by their experience of the current political conflict its impact on the school social culture. In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the impact of political violence on the formation of the professional identity of Palestinian teachers, a qualitative multiple case-study approach was adopted which draws on sociocultural theories of identity formation. An initial study was first conducted in six schools and this was followed by an in-depth study of teachers working in three further primary schools. Data sources included participant observation, a research diary, semi-structured group and individual interviews. Grounded theory, constant-comparative methods, and discourse analysis procedures were used to interpret the data. The findings suggest that the Palestinian primary school teachers negotiate multiple conflicting identities through their every day experiences of political conflict and the schools' social culture. This tension is formed as a result of the historical cultural meaning that teachers construct about themselves and within the current unstable and unsettling conditions that exist in their country. In addition, the data indicate that the geographical location of the schools in relation of their proximity to the events of the political conflict also had an influence on the degree of tension inherent in teachers' professional identity. The study makes significant theoretical, practical, and methodical contributions to the study of the formation of teachers' professional identity in countries affected by political conflict.

Keywords : identity, political conflict, Palestine, teacher's professional identity

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