

## Teacher Personal and Professional Identity Integration:

## Alsup's Exploration of Teacher Identity Discourses

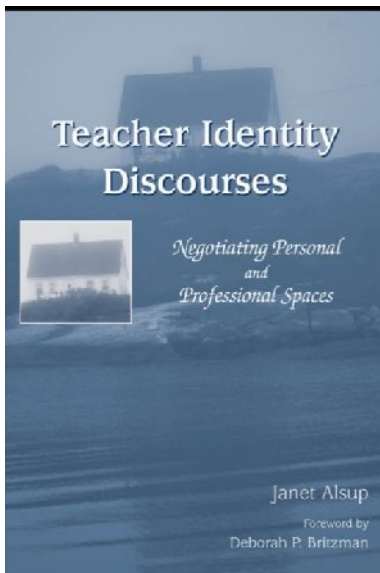
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| Title     | Teacher Identity Discourses: Negotiating Personal and Professional Spaces       |
| Author    | Janet Alsup   |
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Borderland discourse, as a transformative type of teacher identity discourse, reflects a view of teacher identity that is holistic—inclusive of the intellectual, the corporeal, and the affective aspects of human selfhood. Within borderland discourse there is evidence of contact between disparate personal and professional subjectivities, which can lead to the eventual integration of these multiple subject positions. (p. 6)

The quote above can capture the main idea of Janet Alsup's book, *Teacher Identity Discourses: Negotiating Personal and Professional Spaces*. The idea of borderland discourse—where the personal identity and professional identity collide and overlap—echoes within each chapter in this book. In this borderland discourse, the contact between personal and professional identities brings about tension, changes, and integration—processes which can lead teachers to become more mature and ultimately happier.

Alsup's original book was published in 2006 and the electronic version of the book appeared in 2008. An earlier review of this book by Smolcic (2006) offered a useful summary and identified several key points and ideas in each chapter. However, I believe Alsup's book merits additional consideration because her ideas are still relevant to current teachers and to teacher education institutions. More importantly, it is relevant beyond the geographical boundaries of the U.S.—as some education issues faced by teachers are similar in many parts of the world. So is in Indonesia, as teachers also face similar challenges of becoming professionals.

In this book Alsup argues that teacher training and teacher knowledge are not adequate in preparing for successful and happy teachers. Based on her own experiences and others' stories about being teachers, she builds her case of integrating personal and professional identity in discourse. She states explicitly that her intended readers for her book are preservice teachers and

teachers in elementary and high schools. Beyond her explicit audience, this book is also intended for educators and those who are concerned with teacher education.

The book is divided into ten chapters that show how the author's ideas on teacher identity are developed and structured. The first chapter provides the backgrounds of how the project of exploring teacher identity comes into reality. Chapter Two to Five present and discuss the nature of being a teacher and the development of teacher identity. In these chapters, the tension of conflicting identities and the enactments of identity in teaching are discussed. Chapter Six raises the outside school issues that influence the development of teacher identity and Chapter Seven argues that the integration of personal and professional identity can be realized in discourse. Chapter Eighth to Ten focus on pedagogical implications of her findings. Those chapters talk about what teaching is, about teacher's beliefs, and the final remarks about teacher identity and the importance of "knowing thyself".

Indeed, reading the book, I could feel that many ideas resonate in me as my interest is similar to Alsup. I am interested in teacher identity and how it develops through time. I am also interested in the borderland identity—which, prior to reading the book, I interpreted in a different notion from Alsup. She suggests the idea of borderland identity as the integration of spaces between personal and professional identity. What I brought in my mind when I was reading about the borderland identity was the cosmopolitan identity that takes into accounts the idea of "movement"—the integration of different cultures.

Based on her own history, experiences, and preservice teachers' stories about being teachers, she builds her case that it is more important for teachers to reconcile the tension between personal and professional identity as teachers rather than merely building pedagogical skills and knowledge. Traditionally, identity can be perceived as multiple personae as suggested

by Ochs (1993) as presented in Golombek and Jordan (2005). It is “a cover term for a range of social personae, including social statuses, roles, positions, relationships, and institutional and other relevant community identities one may attempt to claim or assign in the course of social life” (p.517).

For Alsup, identity is more fluid than personae: it is dynamic and it is shaped and reshaped in discourse as teachers are positioning themselves towards different issues and different authorities. It is also positioning of teachers as a personal as well as a member of professional community. The tension between the personal and professional, then, should be resolved in identity integration. Failing to do so, teachers will be easily worn out and their learning curve will reach a plateau. On the other hand, reaching the identity integration will help teachers to view constructively their personal and professional lives and finally can lead them to become a better and happier teacher.

I found the idea of identity integration similar to that of being an authentic teacher—a teacher who do not wear others’ shoes and a teacher who shows who he/she is. I agree with Alsup that showing the personal self in the classroom can be very difficult, especially for those who are new to the profession: preservice teachers and new teachers. She suggests that new teachers and preservice teachers focus first on understanding themselves and their early conception about the profession so that they can develop their own teaching philosophy and finally can integrate their personal and professional identity.

Alsup also argues in this book that the integration of teacher identity is facilitated in discourse: teachers’ talks, teachers’ connections, and teachers’ engagement with their professional community and with their students in the classroom. The space of integration between personal and professional identity takes place in these discourses. The idea of creating

space for integrating personal and professional identity discourses is parallel to the idea of third space suggested by Bhabha (1994) in *The Location of Culture*. Since then, the idea has been widely applied in education such as reflected in works done by Gutiérrez (1998, 1999) who explored third space and hybrid identity as the results of technology and globalization. This idea is also very close to Palmer's (1997) works on teaching, identity and integrity—that highlight the importance of self-integrity and spirituality. Even though Alsup does not explicitly talk about third space in this book, her idea can be seen as a part of this tradition.

What I found interesting in Alsup's book is that she is critical of many public schools that do not really support the teacher personal and professional growth—which I also find true in many public schools as well as poorly-managed private schools in Indonesia where teachers are left to develop their career without enough support from the institutions. The author is also critical of teacher education and teacher training institutions, which, in general, care less about the aspects of teacher professional identity development. Traditionally, educators and teacher education institutions have been more concerned with teacher knowledge than teachers' personal and professional growth. In her own words, the author raises this issue by reflecting:

As my metacognitive awareness of my teacher self increased, I began to wonder why university teacher education programs didn't directly address issues of professional identity development. Most teacher education programs talk about issues of professional demeanor, dress, and communication. However, these are not the professional "identity" issues that concern me the most. The issues I'm worried about are the aspects of identity development that involve the integration of the personal self with the professional self, and the "taking on" of a culturally scripted, often narrowly defined, professional role while maintaining individuality. (p. 4)

Interestingly, Alsup also raised the issue of teacher image—which in various cultures is considered as a feminine domain. The feminized teacher image, which is the norm in most schools and teacher training institutions, is still the main discourse of being a teacher. In this cultural image, teachers are expected to be caring and in many ways to be nurturing as mothers do to their children. These expectations can be very limiting and might not fit to all teachers.

In conclusion, for preservice teachers and novice teachers, this book can be a great resource for exploring teacher personal and professional identity. This book is also relevant as a reference to develop a personal teaching philosophy. In Chapter Eight, for example, the author explores teaching metaphors that could help situate and build teaching philosophy. Similarly, in Chapter Nine, Alsup exposes teachers' beliefs and their relevance to classroom practices. More importantly, this book is relevant to teacher developments programs and teacher training institutions in providing a framework for a reform that integrate the aspects teacher professional identity formation in addition to the traditional cores: subject matter and pedagogical knowledge.

Last but not least, personally, I found this book compelling. I can widen my perspective on teacher identity and the integration of personal and professional identity and it sheds light on my understanding of being an authentic teacher and authentic self. The echoing idea of Socrates' "know thyself" appears within each chapter in this book as a uniting thread in understanding teacher professional identity integration—which is one of the goals to become better and happier teachers.

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**Book Reviewed:**

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