

Finding the 'Enunciative Space' for Teacher Leadership and Teacher Learning in Schools

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Scope of the Paper

I wish I was able to say that the abstract I wrote for this paper was designed to provocatively grab your attention. Sadly, that is not the case; what I want to speak about is real and it is deadly serious stuff -- teachers and what's happening to their work in contemporary schooling.

In this paper I make no claim to being balanced, detached, neutral or unaffected by what is happening to teachers' work worldwide at the moment. We have gone well beyond the stage of niceties like that, and more drastic treatments are called for. In Beyer & Zeichner's (1982) terms, I am making a passionate "plea for discontent". My argument, and I make no apology for it being colourful and polemic on occasions in the way I put it, is that there has been a massive "collapse of dialogic space" (Schneekloth & Shibley, 1995) within our public schools as they reel under the effects of so-called educational reforms and re-structuring, allegedly aimed at converting them into front-line warriors engaged in the restoration of sagging international competitiveness, or dragged into what Head (1996) calls the orbit of the "new ruthless economy".

The larger theoretical terrain upon which this paper is sketched, and which emerges more directly and practically out of a Collaborative Australian Research Council project entitled the Teachers' Learning Project, is based around the recent polemic, ideology and debate in the educational literature fashionably characterised as: the learning society (Ranson, 1992; 1994; Hughes & Tight, 1995); the learning organization (Jones & Hendry, 1992); and lifelong learning (Lengrand, 1989) -- notions that are by no means new, that are far from unproblematic, and that are more recently traceable to the 1972 UNESCO declaration "Learning to Be" (Faure, Herra, Kaddowa, Lopes, Petrovsky, Rahnema & Ward, 1972). At the more populist or trade end of this literature, these notions have become almost platitudinous, but more recently they have begun to attract serious scholarly interest sparked by Stewart Ranson's (1992) inaugural professorial lecture at University of Birmingham in June 1991.

As Hughes & Tight (1995) note: "The learning society has been advocated as an answer to the current economic, political and social problems by a wide coalition of interests, including politicians, employers and educators" (p. 290). The essence of their argument is that we need to be cautious because while such ideas may have a degree of emotional appeal and present a semblance of rationality to very large numbers of people, their status as "self-evident realities and slogans" (p. 292) needs to be robustly challenged. They suggest that notions like "productivity" and "change", have been allowed to take on the status of all-powerful myths. For example, the notion that productivity

"perpetuates a sense of unlimited potential, and drives individuals, organizations and nations towards more competitive endeavours" [and that] . . . continuing economic growth is not just achievable but desirable and necessary" (p. 293) [or] . . . that there is indeed a need for "continual updating of knowledge . . . and the use of education to inculcate flexible transferable skills" (p. 294) -- need serious and concerted study, something that has not happened up to this point. These are ideas that when widely accepted, bring with them powerful mixes of "individualised and collective solutions" (p. 294), not all of which may be totally justified.

Our concern in this project has been to take the notion of the "learning teacher" (individually and collectively), and to pursue what that might mean in an intense study of a small number of schools, around quite a different set of questions, like:

¥ how do schools present themselves as learning communities, and what does that look like ?

¥ where are the structured spaces within schools' and teachers' work where pedagogical knowledge and understandings can be systematically challenged, shared, and re-constituted ?

¥ what internal processes are feasible and manageable for schools as they invent for themselves ways of initiating, sustaining and maintaining pedagogical dialogue ?

¥ how do schools develop and sustain "purposeful pedagogies"

(Fernandez-Balboa, 1997), or more importantly, "pedagogies of dissent" (McLaren, 1997) that enable them to challenge the "savage inequalities" (Kozol, 1991) in the way the wider society structures educational and social inequality ?

¥ how do teachers struggle to assert the primacy of "dialogical" forms

of learning (Shor, 1980; 1996) in a wider society that seeks to silence them and urges them to increasingly place their trust in "symbolic tokens and expert systems" (Strain & Field, 1997) ?

¥ how do teachers insert their "disruptive voices" (Fine, 1992) into

contexts of "manufactured uncertainty" (Giddens, 1994), where they have been made ventriloquists for transnational capital through the provision of training and skills formation ?

¥ how do teachers resist the means-end rationality that is increasingly

de-professionalising them (Ozga, 1995) through quasi-marketised technologies of control, and in the process dismantling the notion of public education ? - indeed;

¥ how does the educational system that employs teachers support teacher

learning in other than technicist ways ?

There are two parts to the remainder of the paper. Firstly, a critique

of where schools are headed if they continue with a narrow technical reconstrual of teachers' work, as they experience this within a growing "loss of entitlement to speak" (Fine, 1992, p. 25). Over the past couple of decades there has been a progressive and ruthless construction of more and more "impoverished enclosures" (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 188) around teachers' work -- vocationalism, accountability, testing, performance appraisal, devolved responsibility, school charters, league tables, re-centralised curriculum frameworks, and other extraneous limitations on teachers' work and students' learning.

In the second part of the paper I take a more optimistic tack as I speak about some "purposeful conversations" (Burgess, 1988) we have had with a number of schools that have found ways of innovatively reclaiming the pedagogical space within which schools can be moral (as distinct from "crippling") learning communities (Macedo, 1994, p. 142) involved in exercising what Soucek (1995) calls "critical sensibility". These schools are lively educative places that somehow have found ways of working around the "killing fields of professional values" (Stronach & Morris, 1996) increasingly foisted upon them by governments. What these school have created are vibrant indigenous cultures of learning about themselves, their communities and their work -- all in a wider context of a commitment to democratic and participatory citizenship and "democratic accountability" (Epstein, 1993).

Confronting the Contours of the Oppressive Relations of Teaching

One way into the critique of what's happening to teachers' work, or what Ng (1995) calls the "oppressive relations of teaching" is to look at a cameo of the 'preferred' or 'good' teacher, and this seems to have changed little over time and from place to place. Grace (1985), for example, reported during the mid 1980s that teachers in the UK at that time were judged according to notions of "legitimated professionalism" which translated into qualities of "dependability", "commitment to the school", "executive efficiency" and "good relations with pupils in the pastoral care role" (p. 13).

Another piece of research I have finished (Smyth & Shacklock, 1998) and to be published shortly as a book by Routledge entitled *Remaking Teaching: Ideology, Policy and Practice*, found that a policy image of the preferred teacher was of one:

. . . who is prepared to focus on designated agenda; willing to accept a view of teaching constructed by others at a distance from the classroom; technically competent as measured by generic skills; displaying necessary collaboration and teamwork skills that don't threaten the aims of the organization; able to match practice to criteria as required; and, above all, possessing a compliant and flexible disposition.

The organising icons that frame this notion of the preferred teacher seem to be around an identity that increasingly regards schools and

classrooms as sites to be more "effectively managed" and where "teaching" is now almost synonymous with "managing" (Tavares, 1996). This notion of generic management, whether it be of students, colleagues, or knowledge, is heavily derivative of an ideology that classrooms have always been places to be managed -- the only difference now, is that it is management to satisfy the whims of transnational capital through the economy and the market (Smyth & Shacklock, 1998, p. 17).

I worked hard to come up with an emerging cameo of the "preferred teacher" constructed by current policy manoeuvres, and it goes something like this:

Teaching is increasingly being constructed as work in which there needs to be maximum opportunity for a flexible response to customer needs, where the teacher is hired and dispensed with as demand and fashion dictates. This ethos of schools as marketplaces means a differentiated mix of teachers, some of whom are fully qualified, others who are cheaper to employ for short periods of time and who can rapidly be moved around within auxiliary and support roles to help satisfy growing niche markets. Coupled with this is a mindset in which the teacher is required to act as a kind of pedagogical entrepreneur continually having regard to selling the best points of the school, promoting image and impression, and generally seeking to maximise the school's market share by ensuring that it ranks high in competitive league tables. A crucial element of this educational commodity approach to teachers'

work is the attention to calculable and measurable aspects of the work, especially educational outputs, for without that kind of information the capacity of the school to successfully promote itself will be severely circumscribed. There will be a need for the teacher to be a team member within the corporate culture of the school, always mindful that anything she may do will impact in some way on the schools' outside image. However, team membership which will sometimes be glorified with terms like "collegiality", "partnerships" and "collaboration" will reside very much at the operational and implementation level, for to involve teachers in strategic decision making might be to threaten the wider mission of the school. Interactions with students will occur within an overall framework of 'valued added' in which students are 'stakeholders', continually deserving of receiving educational value for money. Teaching will be increasingly managerial in nature, both as teachers are managed, and in turn, themselves manage others -- there will be clear line- management arrangements with each layer providing appropriate performance indicator information to the level above it about the performance of individual students against objectives, and the success of the teacher herself in meeting school targets and performance outcomes. The remuneration of both the teacher and the school will be based on attaining these agreed performance targets (Smyth, Shacklock & Hattam, 1997 p. 18).

This reading seems to be very consistent with that given in the UK by Hodkinson (1997) who said of the "good teacher", in the emerging

neo-Fordist context:

. . . someone who works uncritically within whatever contexts are determined for him/her, who strives to achieve targets determined for him/her by others, with resources provided (or not) by others and in ways increasingly prescribed by others. Such teachers have the responsibility to succeed, but without access to the power necessary to bring that achievement about (p. 75).

Hodkinson (1997) argues that this view of the teacher mirrors both the wider economic and social 'problem and the touted 'solution':

For the Government, technical rationality offers the illustration of a simple solution, or more accurately, series of solutions, which is consistent with broader market and tax-cutting policy objectives.

Turning education into a technical process, where quality depends upon responses of teachers to the measured outcomes which they are set deflects attention from deeper societal causes of inadequate educational achievement, effectively blaming the victims for their own difficulties -- be they individual young people, individual teachers or single schools or colleges. The focus on 'efficiency' and 'value for money' deflects attention away from more intransigent problems of social inequality or inadequacy of funding (p. 75).

The limitations and inadequacies of this technocratic construal of teachers' work are legion and obvious:

- ¥ teachers remain fixated with means-end ways of thinking about their work, and respond in vocationalised terms to the perceived needs of students and their communities;

- ¥ there is an inability to engage students in "big questions" within a broad and balanced curriculum, that fires the imagination, the spirit, the feelings and the intellect;

- ¥ teaching is viewed only in terms of standards, outcomes, performance and measurement terms, and not in terms of connecting with the lives, experiences and aspirations of students;

- ¥ a tendency to see the work of teaching in terms of compliantly following a deluge of directives;

- ¥ the risk of regarding the work of teaching, curriculum and pedagogy in increasingly fragmentary terms, and believing that this is acceptable.

Our research was "interruptive" in the sense that it was butting into the everyday lives of these teachers and their schools and asking questions, but it was also "disruptive" in the ways that it looked for ruptures, discontinuities, and breaks with tradition and custom in these places. Above all we were interested in how these schools were able to lift themselves above the deadening effect of habit and keep alive the notion that learning about the work of teaching is worthwhile

doing. We were trying to both isolate the categories of teacher learning, while at the same time interrogating them, trying to capture the contradictions, the tensions, the paradoxes and the perplexities.

Reclaiming the Shrinking Imaginative Space

Nancy Fraser (1993) argues that in contemporary society there has been a progressive leaching of "discursive space", in the context of wider political-cultural shifts amounting to a construction as well as a contestation of hegemony. In our research we are particularly interested in the resistance narratives being spoken into existence by teachers as they search for what Spivak (1988) calls the "enunciative space" -- that is to say, the opportunity to articulate what it means to be a teacher; to tangle with social issues beyond the technicalities of teaching; and having some agency within which to question and challenge the wider structures surrounding teaching and learning; and in the process gaining some ownership of the determination of one's own pedagogical work. In these increasingly managerialist times (Hartley, 1997), that is not something that can be taken for granted; teachers are continually having to bump up against the barriers and enclosures constructed by others.

Given our interests in "voiced research" (Shacklock & Smyth, 1997) -- a term we use to describe the process of capturing silenced and marginalised perspectives in schools -- we have pursued our fieldwork

according to a number of implicit principles of procedure; namely:-

- ¥ that individuals are located with a social fabric, a wider shared culture, and that to understand them and their lives, we need to tap into these wider interpretive/critical realms;
- ¥ the importance of "honouring" voice, which means listening to and responding to that listening of portrayals of self-knowledge, so that those who make the utterances know they have a voice;
- ¥ that groups who have historically been subjugated by dominant discourses, need to be listened to in multiple ways as they penetrate and puncture those stifling discourses;
- ¥ that having "authorship" in the research (for that is what it amounts to), means being able to tell stories previously made invisible, and to do that via local, anchored, or indigenous forms of knowledge -- which will look qualitatively quite different from normative, hegemonic, depersonalised knowledge.

The way we have begun to theorise the lives and experiences of teachers as they learn in situ, is in terms of describing how they present a set of visions or self-definitions they and their schools hold of themselves. We have found Seyla Benhabib's (1992) "models of public space", particularly her "critical model of public space", to be most helpful. Our starting point has been that there is no such thing as a set of one-size-fits-all teaching competencies, or a generic view of teachers' work -- rather there is a complex cultural politics of teachers' work that is culturally specific

and multi-layered. By this we mean, teaching is a social practice that transcends the domain of being a private activity that can only be understood by getting up close to the culture of the school, interpreting how teachers, students and parents are struggling to enact a vision of good teaching and learning. Using Fernandez-Balboa's (1997) term, we were trying to get inside their "purposeful pedagogy" -- how they live and teach from and within a principled moral position.

Enunciative space, then, is a metaphorical shorthand for signifying how schools have successfully found "reflective space" within which to engage themselves and their communities dialogically around issues of teaching and learning, while acknowledging that this occurs in a context of contestation and resistance. Another way of putting this is in terms of how schools find ways of overcoming the inertia not to change, and the space within which to interrogate the countervailing tendencies of individualism and hopelessness bred by an increasingly marketised view of the school. Unlike their more affluent counterparts, the kind of disadvantaged and working class schools we have been working with cannot take for granted that they will be given the spaces for interrogation -- they have to fight for this, and the politics of space and who gets to say what, have to be worked out discursively. These are schools that regard themselves as having a commitment to moving beyond "the scripted classroom" (Gutierrez, Larson & Kreuter, 1995) where actors play out predictable parts -- teachers dutifully teach by unproblematically imparting knowledge; students willingly acquiesce to other people's knowledge and agenda; parents act

out their ventriloquist roles of customers exercising choice over notions of value added education in the marketplace; and principals somehow float above all of this orchestrating, leading and managing according to generic principles in contexts where priorities are set in the national interest. The kind of schools we have been engaging with don't conform to this agenda at all -- rather, they are struggling against the progressive intensification of their work as they are expected to do more with less; they are acutely aware of the growing separation between conception and execution as the notion of the devolved school is increasingly constructed within the dramatically re-centralised (albeit distant) state; and as policies from self-styled educational experts hold the prospect of generating tighter and tighter enclosures around what they do.

What this has meant practically is that the Teachers Learning Project has sought to get up close to the cultural tradition of what it means to be a teacher in these difficult times of struggling against wider oppressive social policies, and trying to advance a more socially just agenda within and through schooling. It seems to us that these schools operate within Richard Bernstein's (1992) notion of a "constellation", defined as:

. . . a juxtaposed rather than an integrated cluster of changing elements that resist reduction to a common denominator, essential core or generative first principle (p. 8).

The notion of constellation is a particularly apt description of the way teaching communities operate to hermeneutically interpret their schools without "determinate negation" (p. 8) -- that is to say, where there is still an openness to "unexpected contingent ruptures" and where "difference, otherness, opposition and contradiction" (p. 8) are not all neatly squared away.

In our theorising about Teacher's Learning we find what we are calling the heuristics of "constellation" and "juxtaposition" to be particularly useful, because they permit the assemblage of emergent ideas that remain open to continual revision, interruption and re-interpretation in the light of further experience -- theoretical as well as practical. This is quite a different mindset to thinking about the hermetically sealed results of research in terms of "findings". We are searching for an approach in our research that breaks the mould of linear ways of thinking and acting. We have found so far that "critically researching lives" (Smyth, 1997) in the way we are, you are not dealing with static elements, or even dynamic relationships -- it is much more complex than that. Working with research subjects in these ways amounts to a process of immanent identity construction in which the research intervention itself is literally facilitating (or forcing) the construction of the data or the research account before your eyes. There is what (Harvey, 1990) terms a continual shuttling back and forth -- in the form of analysis, critique, deconstruction of taken-for-granted positions, and reconstructions of non-dominant accounts -- between particular instances, and structure and history,

and between concrete empirical relations and abstract core concepts.

The way in which we are seeking to do this methodologically goes considerably beyond the usual notions of transcript verification, member checking, and the like. We are engaging in major and multiple struggles at at least 4 levels:

¥ at the level of the reading position we bring to the project which is

one of the critical theorising;

¥ at the level of the interpretation being placed on their lives and the

work situations by our research informants in schools;

¥ at the practical and ethical level of how we make sense of the stories

told to us, what gets included, excluded, silenced or marginalised as

we construct the accounts;

¥ at the level of the representation of the account and how we maintain

a sense of fidelity to:

(a) the other members of the research team who have differing

experiential and paradigmatic lives;

(b) our industry research partners and collaborators who are joint

managers of the research with the research team;

(c) groups of 'critical friends', 'experts' and 'reference groups'

solicited to assist us as sounding boards as we construct the accounts;

and finally;

(d) a wider interested professional and scholarly audience.

While we started out with some fairly naive research questions that

aimed to find out how teachers learn in the context of their schools as workplaces, we have now arrived chastened at a much more sanguine stage where we can at least see the complexity (if not yet fully understand the issues driving teachers' learning -- and that's an important realisation). The constellation appears to congregate around notions like:

(a) democratic practices and politics of the school as socially just

learning communities for all students:

(b) coherent support structures that sustain and advance the pedagogical

work of teachers; and,

(c) a shared public discourse about teaching and learning that becomes

embedded in a culture of debate within about the school.

But as we found out when we began to put the results of our theorising around, even sensible ideas like these are fraught. For example, we were told that our representations were "too utopian" and that they failed to adequately acknowledge the struggles and resistances schools had to go through in arriving at situations like those we described of teachers' learning. We were told that much of what constitutes teacher learning is not open to the gaze of observers or even to their probing questions. School culture we were told was crucial because teachers cannot learn and take risks unless they feel valued, supported and encouraged. Schools are also contradictory places in which democratic processes have to be continually negotiated and re-negotiated within a hierarchical structure -- and this has to be done in a context mindful

of the need for provisional leadership and how to bring along the "unwilling". It seemed to us that there was a state of tension here just short of upheaval!

We believe this preparedness to see research constellations, and to struggle with how to juxtapose our theoretical readings with the local, indigenous and anchored readings of their lives by our research informants, has enabled us to advance our work to the point where we can see that teacher learning constitutes a sophisticated ability by schools to be able to show that they have been able to turn themselves around, become switched on, or unstuck at least to some degree -- and, become places that have constructed internally persuasive discourses of grassroots school reform that enable them to contest the hegemony of the authoritative managerialist discourses of reform.

It seems that these schools have quite a sophisticated way of understanding and visioning themselves, that enabled them to break out of the otherwise pessimistic and despondent cycle of "low expectations, lack of direction and external perception of failure" (National Commission on Education, 1996, p. 313) so often publicly put about. For example, each of the schools seems to have a robust, enthusiastic image of itself and of how they could strive to make their own futures:

(i) (an R-7 multi-ethnic school with high levels of poverty) -- was

pursuing a line of managing the school around dialogic encounters and a

democratic process of social justice;

(ii) (an R- 10 newly established Middle School) -- found that stepping out and taking risks in the middle years of schooling gave it the impetus to forge a direction;

(iii) (in a cluster of isolated rural high schools) -- pursuing diversity and sustainability by networking teaching expertise across schools was the pedagogical glue;

(iv) (a R-7 school struggling with issues of poverty) -- sustained itself around the notion of being a collaborative (moving towards a critical) learning community;

(v) (senior years 11-12 in an open access college) -- teacher derived their purpose from 'teaching without faces and hands' through distance education;

(vi) (all girls high school in an area of high unemployment) -- had a focus on gender in a context of advancing personal achievement for teachers and students; and

(vii) (a school in the Aboriginal Lands) -- was institutionalising schooling in moving from 'surviving' to 'thriving'.

While it is extremely risky to attempt to generalise across such a

diverse group of schools, some themes emerging from some of the schools

include:

(a) "teacher talk" is crucial in these schools. As Nias (1989) has

argued, teaching is an oral culture, and spontaneous teacher talk should not be under-estimated in the contribution it can make to the development of teachers and schools ;

(b) people in these schools exhibit a preparedness to step out and make

their own running rather than waiting for their destinies to be shaped for them by distant educational bureaucrats and policy makers;

(c) these schools have extremely insightful principals who place

teaching and learning at the forefront of what happens in their schools;

(d) leadership is important but not in terms of being forceful,

dominating or especially charismatic -- but rather it takes the form of "enabling others to do what they are good at doing" (National Commission on Education, 1996, p. 339). It is a form of leadership frequently understated in the sense that it looks more like quiet encouragement and persuasion;

(e) the direction the school takes is based on a shared and collective

commitment to take on a direction through a "whole school approach" -- rather than allowing a thousand different flowers to bloom;

- (f) there is a strong "culture of innovation" (Kress, 1993) and
risk-taking in which these schools feel they can and must find
indigenous and local ways of working out problems, and representing and
theorising to one another and their communities, what it is they do,
and with what effects;
- (g) there is a sense in which policy developed at a distance from these
schools is not allowed to paralyse what they do -- they don't accept
policy unthinkingly, nor do they oppose it outright -- rather, they
move up close to it and ask the question "how will this improve student
learning?", and then selectively appropriate and adapt or modify it to
their particular structures or circumstances;
- (h) these schools develop, review and revise the structures within which
they work, so as to be able to confront, challenge and change the
difficult and increasingly unstable conditions in which they operate;
- (i) these are "political" places in the sense that teachers, students,
parents, and support staff, have dialogic space in which they can
meaningfully manoeuvre so as to shape what the school looks like, and
as a result, have a genuine share in ownership;
- (j) these are not places that have to rely on external processes of

evaluation or appraisal to tell them what they are doing, with what effect, and what needs changing -- rather, they have forms of "collective self-appraisal" (Humphreys & Thompson, 1995) that enable the school to continually re-focus.

Afterword

Already we have started to see that the teachers in these schools have moved varying distances towards finding "dialogic space: a place for conversation" as they "collectively create, transform, maintain and renovate the places in which they live" (Schneekloth & Shibley, 1995). Following this architectural metaphor of "professional placemaking" (Schneekloth & Shibley, 1995) our experience to date is that there have been three broad moments:

- (i) Making the "dialogic space" -- that is to say, setting aside the time and the context within which pedagogical conversation can occur and not leaving it up to chance;
- (ii) The dialogic work of dialectical "confirmation and interrogation" -- where "confirmation" refers to looking at the work with an appreciative eye to understanding it and acting in respect of it, with and for others; and "interrogation", which constitutes "problematizing the work through disciplined and critical perspectives"(Schneekloth & Shibley, 1995, p. 6); and,

(iii) Framing action -- which involves practical decisions about

inclusion and exclusion emerging out of the constraints and possibilities identified through confirmation and interrogation, and which permit selective attention to aspects of the project deemed crucial by the schools.

In this we are trying to create a "critical theory of placemaking"

(Fisher, 1996) that frames questions at three levels or layers:

(a) the empirical -- describing what is and how things are, and trying

to ascertain what is present and what is absent in teacher learning;

(b) the hermeneutic -- seeking to understand why things or activities

are real for people in schools, and asking why different interpretations exist;

(c) the critical -- exploring underlying value and power structures, and

asking how things came to be the way they are, and how they might be different.

There are still a lot of issues to be fully grappled with in the complexity of this project. We have only just begun to scratch the surface of how to theorise the notion of teaching as a social practice, but even at this early stage we have developed a strong sense that some schools are able to locate that ineffable quality of how to break out of being unstuck.

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