

Professional Paradoxes: Context for Development of Beginning Teacher Identity and Knowledges

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Abstract

It is anticipated that the current workforce of teachers in Victoria, Australia will retire within the next 5-15 years. The paradox for teachers at the career entry point is that while they are expected to quickly assume responsibility for education in this state, beginning teachers are reporting dissatisfaction with teaching and describing it as an 'unprofessional' profession. Drawing from recently commissioned research for the Victorian Institute of Teaching, a study of sixty beginning teachers and a micro study of the 'internship' experience of teacher educators, this paper explores the consequences of what counts as professional knowledge. By problematising identity issues for beginning teachers it is hoped that greater understanding of the complexities of their realities is revealed. The aspirations for the (re) generation of a profession are entangled in discordant displacement of meanings of what it is to become a teacher. What do 'othering' and power(less) positions of beginning teachers mean for the immediate future of the profession? What then are the implications for school contexts, colleague support and pre-service teacher education?

Introduction

This paper draws from a number of recent studies on beginning teachers explores the consequences of what counts as professional knowledge for the incoming generation of teachers. It is anticipated that the current workforce of teachers will retire within the next 5-15 years (Ramsay, 2000; Kalantzis, 2001; Auditor General of Victoria, 2001; Bradley, 2003). The paradox for teachers at the career entry point is that while they are expected to quickly assume responsibility for education in this state, beginning teachers are reporting dissatisfaction with teaching and describing it as an 'unprofessional' profession. What then are the implications for school contexts, colleague support and pre-service teacher education in light of these recent understandings of the beginning teacher?

The ageing teaching workforce

Most Australian teachers were employed in the 1970s (Preston, 2001) and it is generally forecast that this current workforce will retire within the next 5-15 years (Preston, 2002; Kalantzis, 2002; Ramsay, 2000). The Victorian Auditor General's (2001) report noted that:

approximately forty-five per cent of the government teaching work force will be progressively reaching retirement age over the next 10 years. The ageing of the teacher work force, coupled with natural attrition, will mean that the Victorian teacher labour market is likely to be in a position of shortage over this period unless there is an increase in the number of new entrants to the profession.

Teachers at the career entry point are expected to take over the teaching positions in our schools as well as assuming the mantle of power – the leadership positions - and they are also expected to do all of this rapidly. The paradox is that they appear to be shunning the profession for its lack of professionalism. Indeed many teachers in their first year are highly critical. Ironically, beginning teachers are clearly and urgently needed within the school systems, yet are often employed on contracts for as short a period as six months (Bradley, 2003, p.4).

In the US and the UK the rates of attrition for teachers –the numbers who leave the profession - are known and attempts are being made to address general issues and concerns. In the US for example, improving induction programs for teachers has been a priority as it is reported that one third leave within the first five years (Darling-Hammond, 2003 p.7). In the UK, the government school system is aware that about 30% of its new graduates will leave teaching within the first five years (Bradley, 2003, p.4). In Australia we don't know how many teachers are leaving nor do we fully know their reasons for doing so. Estimates put the figure for Australia is at least 20%. In the report by the Australian Council of Deans of Education (Kalantzis, 2002, p. 5) the figure of 70% is cited as the number of teachers that leave the teaching profession before reaching the top of the incremental 8-10 year salary scale. This report points to the salary levels as an issue for concern.

However, the salaries for teachers in their first year of teaching is the highest in Australia (Auditor General, Victoria, 2001, Section 7). It is comparable with payment for those entering the professions of medicine, law and engineering (Kalantzis, 2002,

p. 4). In this article we argue that the dissatisfaction expressed by beginning teachers, however, points to other key factors rather than salary.

Entering the teaching profession

It is widely recognised within the research literature and the profession that the transition to the workforce from pre-service education is fraught with difficulties and challenges.

No period is more important for the development of teachers than the initial induction into the profession. For too long, and in sad contrast to most other professions, many new teachers have been left to struggle with the complex and challenging demands of their first job completely by themselves, in professional isolation (Andy Hargreaves in Tickle, 1984, p. viii).

A significant body of research indicates that beginning teachers are generally not prepared for the workload encountered in the school, nor the complexities of the interpersonal relationships they must navigate (Board of Teacher Registration, 1991, in Dowding, 1998; Wideen, Mayer-Smith & Moon, 1998). At the classroom level, beginning teachers often struggle with classroom management, with meeting the individual needs of students, and with the management of curriculum and resources. (Moss, Fearnley-Sander & Moore, 2002). Much of the research literature during over the past twenty years about beginning teachers has focused on the 'problems' they are perceived to experience or bring to schools (e.g. Veenman, 1984; McDonald and Elias, 1983). Martinez (1994) alerted us to the somewhat limited research focus in this area a decade ago:

It is my thesis that research and policy in this area are based exclusively on a deficit theory of the beginning teacher...Such a unidirectional structuralist view of beginning teacher socialisation seems implicitly to pervade literature and policy...In summary these limitations include (a) definition of problems in terms only of practice; (b) reification of problems without consideration of institutional and social contexts; and (c) heavy reliance on quantitative research methods and interpretations to reveal central tendencies, to the exclusion of investigation and analysis of beginning teachers' everyday situations. (Martinez 1994, p.174-175)

Professional knowledge

The professional knowledge valued and measured in standards and appraisal processes so favoured by governments and bureaucracies world-wide has "evident associations with behaviorist principles and with curricula defined according to pre-specified and measurable objectives and outcomes" (Tickle 1999, p. 121). This view of teaching is profoundly limited and fails to acknowledge the intense social interactions of teaching and the development of affective aspects of teaching like empathy, compassion, flexibility, tolerance, and so on (Tickle, 1991, 1994; Marti & Huberman, 1993). The image of a teacher as an instructional-technician who unquestioningly implement the policies and programs of others evokes a sad, stricken image of the profession.

Within this context, the question 'what counts as professional knowledge?' is foregrounded. Significant research about teacher learning in recent years has shifted from what teachers *do* to what they *know* and what informs this knowing (Cochrane-Smith & Lytle, 2001, p. 45). Our interest is how this relates to those entering the

profession. Beginning teachers need to fit into the specific school context and learn the practices and traditions of the individual school as part of the inculcation into the school culture. Ironically, however, beginning teachers are increasingly being assessed on their ability to teach using standards that ignore the school context, local issues and less measurable aspects of teachers' work. While teaching is clearly a profession comprising complex theoretical understandings together with practical skills (Kalantzis, 2001) the use of standards, particularly for beginning teachers, indicates its external status as a craft or technical occupation.

Connelly and Clandinin (1988) coined the term 'personal practical knowledge' to encompass a broad range of tacit knowledges teachers possess. They incorporated teachers' past experience, current practices and future plans and described teachers as knowledgeable and knowing professionals (p. 25). Their epistemological interest in teachers encompassed a breadth of knowledge – theoretical, personal, practical and intuitive. They did not confine their understanding of knowledge to the more conventional and narrow view of teacher knowledge as skills and content. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) describe their fascination with teachers "as knowers: knowers of themselves, of their situations, of children, of subject matter, of teaching, of learning" (p.1) and talk of 'knowledge landscapes' .

The traditional 'technical competence' (Zimpher & Howey, 1987) view of teaching emphasises classroom management skills and the ability to work with external, government mandated curriculum frameworks. Kleinhenz, Ingvarson and Chadbourne (2002, p.7) boldly assert that this view of teaching is an appropriate one.

Teachers learn best when their learning is focused on the elements of the 'technical core' of teaching and learning. The technical core comprises the central features of teaching and learning, such as knowledge of subjects, knowledge of students, knowledge of how to facilitate students' learning - features that are articulated in good sets of standards for teachers' practice.

Explorations of the experiences of beginning teachers have often focused on problems and deficits. We have sought to get beyond the 'cover stories' told, in an attempt to unearth the 'sacred stories' and 'secret places' in which these stories are shared (Connelly & Clandinin, 1996, p. 25). Much of the information about beginning teachers has not been written by them, but by people who assume that they know what it is to be a beginning teacher.

Methodology

Influenced by postmodernist thinking we are attempting to theorise the experience of beginning teaching as representing many voices. The data that supports this paper seeks to disrupt and relocate the discourse of beginning to teach as a relocation of identity. And for each individual beginning teacher there is no single voice.

All stories...are partial; they are particular rather than general, they represent a perspective, a way of seeing that is complex and multifaceted, rather than universal (Kamler, 2001, p. 174).

And further as Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) explain:

The individual does not speak with a single voice – or even a dominant one – but may represent different voices; for example, evaluations, thoughts, feelings and how factual information is conveyed can be constituted in

different ways. A single interview, for instance, can generate interpretations demonstrating that the subject is expressing multiplicity (multiple discursive constitutions). The ambiguity in the particular interview must be emphasized. Individuals, according to post-modernism and post-structuralism, are ambiguous, equivocal and inconsistent (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000, p.189).

Data

This article draws from a number of sources. These 'data stories' (Lather & Smithies 1997) include a research project commissioned by the Victorian Institute of Teaching (White & Hildebrand, 2002) n=53 individual teachers consulted over a period of nine weeks from May to July in 2002, 5 teachers in their initial year who are participants in an authentic conversation group, beginning teachers who responded to open-ended emailed questions throughout 2002 (n=32), beginning teachers who attended two five hour professional learning sessions (n=18), (White 2003a) and the work of Moss, Fearnley-Sander & Moore (2002), a micro study of the 'internship' experience of teacher educators and their students. The focus in all the studies is on the storied experiences of teachers in their first year of teaching.

Time for another head count

Just listen!

Do it quietly

Need more sleep!

Drowning in paper

What will we do tomorrow?

Too much to do – too little time

Need more sleep!

Meetings and yard duties – when the hell do you teach?

Not another meeting

Meeting the parents tonight – your chance to suck up

Need more sleep!

Good teacher moments

Well done!

Inexperienced but passionate – makes you look bad, idiot!

Need more sleep!

(Anon., Induction Project, University of Melbourne, May 2002)

Dear Education Minister,

I think you should legislate for a greater time allowance for beginning teachers to develop resources and familiarise themselves with protocols of the schools they are working in. There should be a formal consultative process established for new teachers to discuss issues confidentially with an appropriate staff member. This should be facilitated by sufficient time release. Increase the sense of security for new teachers by providing funding for more permanent positions for beginning teachers. Currently it is not uncommon for teachers to have to apply for the position they are

acting in three times in a twelve-month period. This is a time consuming and stressful practice which takes time away from teaching and planning...The first year of teaching is a highly demanding and stressful experience...

(Georgia and Jake, Induction Project, University of Melbourne, May 2002)

When I was thinking of quitting teaching last Friday (PMT always contributes to that feeling) I felt comfortable about ringing her and metaphorically crying on her shoulder. Ended up at her place the next day being entertained by her two boys. She's very approachable, down to earth, knowledgeable, not over-the-top but very encouraging and somehow helps you see things you need to change without actually saying you're doing anything wrong.

(Jane, email communication, 14/3/03)

My official mentor has thus far not even asked how I'm going!

(Bridget, email communication, 11/3/03)

Well I think heads of schools really need a shake-up. I think the heads of schools – anyone in responsibility at schools really needs a good shake-up, a wake-up call that look, if you're going to hire new teachers and they're going to be cheap but they're also very dynamic young people, and – but you keep a closed door policy, 'We're so important that we have to make appointments to see you in one week's time'. I think that's an absolute joke. I think people aren't so busy, and I heard the complaint that – I mean I've heard the excuse that, 'Oh, we're dealing with multi-campus and big businesses'. Well most multi-nationals now are much flatter organisations than just the ordinary suburban school...So I don't know why we're talking about big business, it's only a school...what makes a good leader, because I mean managers are out of date. And it's leadership qualities...I'm including those qualities that include being vulnerable, include having your ear open, include hearing all voices, acknowledging diversity and multiculturalism and harmony amongst staffrooms and students. And not just caring about what the students think, but also caring about how the staff feel and how they feel towards the students and each other because that's going to reflect on what the students think at the end of the day...I just wish that those leaders...had the opportunity to actually hear some of these honest voices...

(Marcus, interview transcript, pp. 16-18, 15/7/02)

Matthew's story is of being a beginning teacher in rural Australia. He has not returned to teaching this year.

I'm now a competent and confident teacher...well I sort of always knew I could do it, just the shock of the whole thing hit me all at once... and I couldn't quite get my head around it...I've thought about it a lot and...I think I expected it to be easy and it's incredibly difficult. And I just wasn't prepared for that from my Dip Ed. And that really surprised me...And then there was this...all this stuff that I just couldn't do...way too hard for me. I'm giving it up...I just can't believe how difficult it is...I had no idea last year and now I have a very good idea. I'd rather be digging ditches...

(Matthew, interview transcript, pp.5-6, 17/7/03)

Beginning teachers and professional identity

The data of these recent studies (White & Hildebrand 2002, White 2003a, Moss, Fearnley-Sander & Moore (2002) reveals the experience for many beginning teachers as one where a silent rage exists. While grappling with issues of professional identity, these teachers have been astounded at both the complexity of teaching and the lack of professionalism within the profession.

Quality mentoring programs such as that described by Newman (1991) and by Clark (2001) model the importance of talk in the culture of teaching, and show how much informal professional learning occurs during such authentic conversations. In this way both mentors and beginning teachers may learn something about themselves, their practices and their pedagogical beliefs. 'One of the best ways to come to an understanding of what one believes is to talk it through with others who understand the challenges of being a good teacher in an uncertain time' (Clark, 2001, p. 173-4).

As they go about 'talking shop' (Clark, 2001) mentors and beginning teachers can both be engaged in professional learning - sharing current concerns and rethinking their practices to enable better student outcomes. In designing the activities and processes for mentoring beginning teachers into programs and schools, a process where mentors actively engage in informal, yet regular and highly 'authentic conversations' (Clark, 2001), ought to be established.

...a more inclusive notion of teacher development, in which the essentials of being a teacher, and the bases of personal growth, perspective, and identity, can sit legitimately alongside subject knowledge, instructional strategies, and curriculum organization as worthy of educational and educative attention. (Tickle 1999, p. 127)

Tickle (2000) argues that the standards used to assess beginning teachers raise some problematic issues. Indeed the Victorian Institute of Teaching is in the process of developing standards which will be used to allow or block teachers gaining full registration. Further Tickle notes:

The identification of teaching standards that is happening across the globe is evidence of the most endemic problem of induction. There has been a failure to comprehensively identify the nature of professional knowledge of what new teachers should know and be able to do, or what kinds of persons they should be or be willing to become. A failure to manage the changes in responsibilities that teachers have, in such a way the new entrants can

reasonably make sense of what they must learn and do, has added to that problem (Tickle, 2000, p.8-9).

What is our collective professional responsibility to those entering the profession?

- mentoring & induction
- employment processes & tenure
- ongoing contact with universities

Ramsay (2000) in his review of teacher education in N.S.W. points to a number of critical areas where particular attention is needed:

the need to improve the transition from teacher-in-training to fully-fledged teacher, using mentoring, internships and better induction. A professional structure, with responsibility for standards and working with the universities and employers to define their respective responsibilities in teacher education, would have an important role in enabling this important transition to occur more effectively than is the case at present (Ramsay, 2000, p. 14).

He argues that induction is a critical career point for teachers:

The quality of induction following appointment to a teaching position is one of the most important determiners of the self-perceptions which beginning teachers will hold as professional practitioners. What happens in induction is critical to shaping the quality of the teacher's future performance. The induction period is a major test of the extent to which employers, school leaders and the profession are interested in and committed to the quality of teaching in schools (Ramsay, 2000, p. 64).

Knowledge management calls for a school to develop a deep capacity among its entire staff to be at the forefront of knowledge and skill in learning and teaching and the support of learning and teaching. This is more than occasional in-service training or professional development. This is a systematic, continuous and purposeful approach that starts with knowing what people know, don't know and ought to know. It assumes a 'new professionalism', as already described, and includes a range of functions such as selection, placement, development, appraisal, reward, succession planning, contracting of services and ensuring that every aspect of the workplace is conducive to efficient, effective and satisfying work (Caldwell, 2003, p. 8).

A surprising number of beginning teachers have reported in 2002 that the mentor program didn't work. The main reasons for this appear to be:

1. The wrong people are sometimes given the job. Often Leading Teachers or those with POLs (positions of leadership), Subject or Unit Coordinators or Assistant Principals are appointed as mentors. These people are usually juggling so many demands on their time, tacking on the job of mentor to their load is unrealistic. One beginning teacher even reported active bullying on the part of his official mentor (Independent school, metropolitan Melbourne, interview 2002). This was certainly an inappropriate choice of mentor;
2. Some mentors will only help the beginning teacher in an expert- novice relationship. Collegiality and discussion about classroom approaches is

- discouraged, as the 'transmission' model is preferred. In other words the beginner is there to listen and learn and doesn't have anything of use to offer;
3. The mentor is never officially named as such. Therefore the beginning teacher isn't sure that they are entitled to ask the pseudo mentor for support and time;
 4. The mentor isn't sure of what they are supposed to do. They tell their beginning teacher to 'just ask' if they need any help and otherwise avoid them;
 5. The mentor sees their role as one for first term and crises only.

Conclusion

Transformation of the profession undoubtedly calls for innovation. However, if we are not to have an over-worked profession, a capacity for systematic innovation must be balanced by a capacity for systematic abandonment (Caldwell, 2003).

There is clearly a need to extend the substance and methods of teacher development, particularly for those entering the profession. Consistent with this theory, Kane (1994), who used a longitudinal study of 2 beginning teachers to investigate survival at the expense of intelligent action, suggested that the evolution of a pre-service teacher's propositional knowledge into procedural knowledge was hampered by a teacher education system that allows such knowledge to be 'encountered independent of it's system of use'. She goes on to ask the question 'why do people who have successfully completed a teacher education program 'apparently by-pass their pedagogical knowledge for less valid and less effective alternatives'? Kane concludes that the beginning teachers remain reliant on modelling the practices of those they regard as more knowledgeable, which suggests that if pre-service teachers experience difficulties implementing the theory based strategies advocated at the university, they return to or adopt the strategies that they have seen successfully used by those they regard as more able.

Further we acknowledge how significant it is for teacher educators to simultaneously map the culture of our own, our pre-service teachers' and beginning teachers' identities – the exploration and exposition of the values that guide our action and deeds. The kind of participatory inquiry illustrated in these studies works to foster understanding of the link between identity, agency and practice elaborating the 'culturally available iconographies of teacherhood' (MacLure 1993, p. 320). While these multiple understandings may initially displace the beginning teachers, forming discordant identities is central to professional career entry.

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Connelly and Clandinin's (1988, 1995, 1996, 1998, 2000) powerful development of the relationship between the researcher and the researched has informed this study. I was crying in the toilets and about to give it all up. I was such a mess. I thought I should give it all up. It's a real contrast to how I am tonight – pretty positive and confident about my teaching.

(Meg, authentic conversation group, personal communication, 27/3/03)

Further McLean (1999) comments that

Conceptualising...deficits in the beginning teacher is now considered useless at best, and at worst, as perpetuating the powerlessness of beginning teachers in the process of their own professional development. (p. 56)