

3-2014

## Discourses of Experience: The Disciplining of Identities and Practices in Student Teaching

Anita Sanyal Tudela

*Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile*, [asanyal0708@gmail.com](mailto:asanyal0708@gmail.com)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte>



Part of the [Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Sanyal Tudela, A. (2014). Discourses of Experience: The Disciplining of Identities and Practices in Student Teaching. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 39(3).  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2014v39n3.8>

This Journal Article is posted at Research Online.  
<https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol39/iss3/8>

## **Discourses of Experience: The Disciplining of Identities and Practices in Student Teaching**

Anita Sanyal Tudela  
Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile

*Abstract: The aim of this paper is to understand how ideas about teaching and learning to teach are structured and regulated in the student teaching component in university teacher education, and how these ideas are linked to the constructed identities of the student- and the collaborating teacher. I use critical discourse analysis to unpack the everyday language of collaborating teachers. I argue that, through the continued citation of assumptions about experience, the student teacher and collaborating teacher are constructed within prefigured and recognizable categories. This process sanctions and forecloses particular practices. I argue that this mechanism makes way for the reproduction of pre-established teaching practices, which uphold systems of power.*

### **Introduction**

There is little dispute in teacher education about the importance and necessity of practical experience in learning to teach. Scholars and student teachers alike attest that a focus on practice is an essential cornerstone of good teacher education programs. In Chile and elsewhere, student teaching is a near universal component in university teacher education. There are studies of actual processes that highlight tensions and complexities in student teaching (Paris & Gespass, 2001; Zeichner, 2010; Martin, Snow, Franklin Torrez, 2011; others), however there remains unquestioned faith in the necessity of this practical experience (Britzman, 2003).

The aim of this paper is to understand how ideas about teaching and learning to teach are structured and regulated in the student teaching component in university teacher education, and how these ideas are linked to the constructed identities of the student teacher and the collaborating teacher. I am interested in uncovering the assumptions about teaching and learning to teach that are circulated in this space, and in making visible the practices that are legitimized and those that are foreclosed in the process.

I analyze the discourse of collaborating teachers to understand the ways the collaborating and student teacher are discursively constructed. I begin by discussing the role of discourse in the production of identities and practices. I next present the framework and modes of inquiry for analysis. In the analysis that follows I draw on everyday language at teacher meetings to support claims about how the student teacher and collaborating teacher are constructed, and about what practices are sanctioned. Throughout my analysis and the following discussion I pursue the argument that pre-established teaching practices are reproduced and regulated through the student teaching component, which upholds existing systems of power.

## Discourse as a Regulatory Mechanism

A Foucauldian perspective on discourse permits an understanding of its regulatory function. Discourses structure what knowledge is reasonable, possible and practical within specific fields, or delimited systems of meaning (Mills, 2004). Professional everyday discourses shared among teachers serve this function by structuring knowledge and practices that are understood as reasonable or doable as well as unreasonable or impractical. Student teaching is one particular discursive field, where student teachers learn how to act as professionals in schools. This context sets up what ideas and practices are available to student teachers and what ideas and practices are obscured. Foucault (1982) writes,

The activity which ensures apprenticeship and the acquisition of aptitudes or types of behavior is developed there by the means of a whole ensemble of regulated communications (lessons, questions and answers, orders, exhortations, coded signs of obedience, differentiation marks of the 'value' of each person and of the levels of knowledge) and by the means of a whole series of power processes (enclosure, surveillance, reward and punishment, the pyramidal hierarchy) (p. 787).

In this way, practices that fall within the already-understood range of possibilities are permitted and legitimized, and practices which question or fall outside that range are automatically excluded through their rendering as impractical or inappropriate. Certain practices become engrained, unquestioned, and naturalized. In teaching, for example, these practices are evident in the structures and arrangements of schooling and predominant practices in the classroom (i.e. classroom management strategies, logics of the lesson plan, the arrangement of the physical classroom space, among others). The exercise of such practices is validated by professional knowledge, which is inherently dependent on assumptions, even if unquestioned and installed in everyday language/discourse. They are the product of tacit, but well-regulated and repeated actions and implicitly rely on ideological orientations regarding the role and purposes of schooling (Atkinson, 2004).

Butler (1997) builds on this notion in arguments about the discursive construction of identity as creating preconfigured and recognizable subjects, which in this paper are the student teacher and collaborating teacher, and the concomitant configuring of possibilities for action. As Butler (1997, p. 5) writes,

... to be addressed is not merely to be recognized for what one already is, but to have the very term conferred by which the recognition of existence becomes possible. One comes to 'exist' by virtue of this fundamental dependency on the address of the Other.

Student teacher and collaborating teacher identities are mutually dependent in order to make true their identities and roles as such. These identities are reified and confirmed within the spaces of shared teacher discourses. This construction is simultaneous and reproduced within everyday language through a process that is "inaugurative ... seek[ing] to introduce a reality [which is] accomplished ... through a citation of existing convention" (Butler, 1997, p. 33). The "existing convention" that underlies the production of student and collaborating teacher in this context is what I call the discourse of experience, which refers to a commonly understood set of assumptions about the role experience plays in becoming a teacher. It functions to make possible certain practices and prohibits others through "a kind of unofficial censorship or primary restriction" (Butler, 1997, p. 41). Through the constitution of specific identities of student teacher and collaborating teacher, some teaching practices are legitimized and made possible and others are considered unreasonable or impossible.

## Modes of Inquiry

The analysis draws on recorded group conversations from a year-long project involving two groups of 8 and 10 collaborating teachers in two Chilean university teacher education programs. The groups met in monthly meetings during the course of 2013 to discuss issues and challenges in the student-teaching component in the respective university teacher education program.

I participated in the groups as the lead researcher on the project. I am a professor in one of the universities, though I do not have direct involvement with the student teaching component, and did not know any of the participants prior to the study. Teachers were invited to participate through contact with the teacher education programs. One of the objectives of the study was to create a space for critical interrogation of classroom practice and teachers' work with student teachers. In each meeting, my role was to propose questions and materials for discussion. Many topics, ranging from the role of the collaborating teacher in general, to discussions about the learning of specific classroom practices evidenced in videotapes of student teachers, were discussed in the meetings. The analysis in this paper is drawn from various conversations during the course of the year that evidenced the construction of the student teacher and collaborating teacher identities.

In the two universities, the student teaching component involves 2- 3 days a week during a semester of student teacher work in the school with a collaborating teacher. It is accompanied by a university course led by supervisors and focused on student teachers making sense of their school experiences. The universities do not select collaborating teachers; rather they are teachers who have worked with student teachers in the past or are asked by their principals to take on student teachers because the school has made an agreement with the university. Beyond the units that student teachers plan and teach, their experience generally depends on the immediate necessities of the classroom and collaborating teacher. This ranges from making copies and grading exams to helping individual students or groups who are having problems. In this sense, a large part of the work between collaborating and student teachers is intuitive. Therefore, what student teachers learn in these spaces is also not necessarily a result of deliberate processes or intentional learning, rather it is largely subject to these immediate needs. Student teachers' success is somewhat dependent on how they can insert themselves naturally and intuitively into school and classroom life (i.e. they can intuit when and how individual students or groups need help in class or they can identify when a teacher needs help passing out papers or controlling behavior; they know when and how to provide support). Collaborating teachers who either had student teachers the year prior or concurrently with the meetings participated in the groups.

I view the conversations within the two groups as a common discourse structured within a social field shared by teachers (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). This discourse embeds naturalized ideas about teaching and learning that are collectively understood in professional teacher circles. I draw on Mills' (2004) definition of discourse as "sets of sanctioned statements which have some institutionalized force," and therefore, a "profound influence on the way that individuals act and think" (p. 55). Discourses "limit what can be said and what can be counted as knowledge" (Mills, 2004, p. 57). I use critical discourse analysis to unpack the everyday conversations in these groups to make claims about the construction of the identities of student and collaborating teachers in this space, and about the teaching practices that are sanctioned or legitimized and simultaneously marginalized.

I am interested to uncover effects of power as manifested in language. I am less interested in how student teachers learn to teach than I am in the mechanisms by which certain ideas about teaching and learning are tacitly reproduced in the student-teaching component. I

focus on ideas about teaching and learning that are collectively and unproblematically accepted in order to reveal the assumptions these ideas uphold. The guiding questions that orient my analysis are: How are student teacher and collaborating teacher identities constructed in the teacher group conversations? And, how do these constructions function to reproduce taken-for-granted ideas about practice?

### **The Common Sense of Teaching**

I use the term “common sense” (Britzman, 2003; Popkewitz, 2000; Kumashiro, 2009) to describe certain taken-for-granted normative discourses and practices that structure teachers’ work through reproducing assumptions about students and teachers and the purposes of education; they shape the kind of knowledge valued in schools. These normative discourses inscribe ideas about quality and constitute principles that configure what is deemed good educational practice and its purposes (Popkewitz, 2000). This system of ideas configures understandings about what constitutes an “educated person” and underlies cultures and practices within and around education (Popkewitz & Brennan, 1998).

With specific attention to the student-teaching component in teacher education, Britzman (2003) argues that the complexities of teaching, including dilemmas, conflicts and uncertainties are often hidden from student teachers’ view. What student teachers witness as they pass through their own schooling experience and as they observe their collaborating teachers are practices that are effects of those dilemmas and uncertainties. Attention to classroom management, student control, or other symbolic elements of teaching and learning are natural and intuitive foci since they are the most visible and available aspects for students/student teachers. This forms their default orientation about schooling and their expectations for what they will learn in their student-teaching. Britzman (2003) writes, student teachers

bring to their teacher education their educational biography and some well-worn and commonsensical images of the teacher’s work. In part, this accounts for the persistency of particular worldviews, orientations, dispositions, and cultural myths that dominate our thinking and, in unintended ways, select the practices that are available in educational life (p. 27).

In 1982, Denscombe argued that a failure to dislodge the focus on symbolic or behavioral aspects as principal foci of classroom life results in the repetition of practices that are oriented around causing the appearance of a well-functioning classroom, without considering more profound or substantive questions in teaching/learning (i.e. the nature of disciplinary learning or the social reproduction functions of schooling, for example). This attention and focus on control of student behavior, therefore, normalizes specific sets of educational practices, in turn configuring teachers’ work. The availability of such practices offers comfort and stability in that they are consistent with most student teachers’ a priori expectations.

### **The Discourse of Experience**

I identify a “discourse of experience” (Britzman, 2003) embedded in the broader conversations about the meaning and tasks of a collaborating teacher. It serves as one discourse situated within the broader set of discourses of teaching, and contributes to situating the production of subjectivities (Atkinson, 2004). The discourse of experience in the context of the conversations of the teacher groups is a way of referencing assumed stages of development or

maturation in teaching, the process through which teachers gain expertise through experience. Viewed as a continuum of experience, the discourse of experience permits the positioning of student teachers and collaborating teachers at opposite ends of the spectrum. Experience ultimately is a key difference between collaborating teachers and student teachers. Youngblood Jackson (2001) writes, “the teacher/student, expert/novice binaries are laden with meaning, meaning constructed by those who are situated within the unstable relationships between power, knowledge, experience, and subjectivity” (p. 387). The discourse of experience confers authority to collaborating teachers (experienced teachers) to be conveyers of appropriate knowledge for teaching, who in this way, are “gatekeepers” for the profession. Through this discursive positioning, collaborating teachers authorize appropriate practices and label others impractical or impossible given the constraints of the job. I do not intend to suggest that collaborating teachers serve as this authority independently or consciously. Their identities as authorities or experts is constructed within the discourse of experience simultaneously as the identities of student teachers, reifying each subject’s respective knowledge and practices. Therefore, as the collaborating teacher is constructed in an authoritative role, student teachers are understood as learners, novices in teaching and in need of instruction. It is this logic and the pre-established binary that gives the student-teaching component of teacher education its importance. It is an unquestioned notion that the student-teaching is a central experience for learning to teach, in part, because of the logic that “experience makes the teacher” (Britzman, 2003, p. 30). In the sections that follow, I describe the identities along the continuum of experience separately to unpack the assumptions in each stage and conclude with a discussion of the discourse of experience as a whole.

### **The Student Teacher**

Through the discourse of experience, the student teacher is configured into a predetermined set of traits that place her/him within a preset identity based on assumptions about learning to teach. While the student teacher identity is preconfigured and recognizable – it exists within the continuum of experience—it is also set within “multiple, conflicting subject positions” (Youngblood Jackson, 2001). The student teacher is at once understood as vulnerable, innocent and in need of guidance, and she/he is considered as a colleague, a contributor to the school community, possessing new and up-to-date knowledge. While contradictory, this dual construction requires, on one hand, attention to the need for student teachers to understand school and classroom situations, but on the other hand, makes necessary for them to rely on the knowledge they bring to the classroom to contribute in ways hoped for by collaborating teachers and the school community. In many ways the options available to student teachers are the common sense ideas they bring with them.

One major struggle for student teachers, which corresponds to the intuitive understandings they bring to their student-teaching, concerns control of student behavior. This is hardly surprising since it is part of a common sense notion of teachers’ work. The following excerpts related to classroom management and its impact on student teachers make visible assumptions that bear on the positioning of student teacher and collaborating teacher in the discourse of experience:

The young people (the student teachers) talk about how they have had bad experiences, and it is precisely those students that we should listen to, especially because they can become demotivated or even abandon the study of teaching as a result.

For example, Mati ... was really down because the kids behaved badly, she was destroyed. I told her that this happens to everyone and not just once, it happens all the time, [that] I have cried in desperation when the kids are terrible. I told her that it happened to me here, at this school and at others, but it is something that with time you begin to overcome and you know how to improve. But, you can't give up ... these are things that happen to teachers.

Jorge failed his student teaching last year. He told me he had had an awful experience. And, now I see him interacting with my students, who are difficult students, and I see that he has learned to [be around them]. They listen to him, they interact with him. So, we have to open up opportunities for student teachers that are just starting to integrate [to learn to act like a teacher].

In general, student teachers' bad experiences are derived from failed lessons or difficulty managing student behavior. This is a point of frustration and concern. They are vulnerable to negative experiences, which, if they are not able to overcome, might turn them away from the profession, or demotivate them. In these situations, the student teacher "fails to live up to the symbolic mandates of becoming a teacher," which in turn interrupts the "symbolic order" of teaching (Atkinson, 2004, p. 389), evidenced by student teachers' success at "act[ing] like a teacher."

By situating the school students as the cause of the negative classroom experience, they become "a disruptive element that is perceived to prevent a successful lesson" (Atkinson, 2004, p. 389). Within the collaborating teacher quotes above are two assumptions that reveal orientations indicative of student teachers' positioning on the continuum of experience. First, as student teachers gain experience, they will gain the ability to control student behavior, so as not to have negative and frustrating experiences (or not be upset about the perceived failure of the lesson due to student behavior). The difficulty in maintaining student behavior is natural part of "what happen[s] to teachers," and, with experience is possible to "overcome." Experience alone is missing in order for student teachers to overcome this difficulty. What is meant by "experience" is not made explicit and this facilitates the reliance on common sense to understand its meaning, which points to the second assumption: that, classroom control is a necessary precondition for teaching subject matter and, without it, there no chance of being perceived as a legitimate member of the teaching profession (Denscombe, 1982).

These two assumptions underlie ideas regarding teaching and learning that couch the cause of student teachers' frustration or choice to leave the profession as poor student behavior. This logic reiterates the primacy of controlling student behavior in teaching and reifies this focus. Student behavior, therefore, becomes the most important factor in the process of students' learning to teach. This orientation is consistent with and reinforces student teachers' expectations upon entering their student-teaching (Denscombe, 1982) and, therefore, seems like a natural first step. Student teachers understand themselves and their students "within imaginary identifications" maintained by specific logics in which "the failure of the lesson is accounted for" (Atkinson, 2004, p. 383). These logics are dominant discourses of teaching.

The vulnerability of the student teacher, particularly to demoralization stemming from poor student behavior, is one aspect of the constructed student teacher identity. Simultaneously she/he is constructed as a contributor to school and classroom community, and considered a colleague. Justified by the need for the student teacher to practice taking on the professional role as teachers, collaborating teachers must "give [student teachers] the space so that they practice acting like they are teachers, they have some knowledge" (quoted from collaborating teacher

conversation). The process of students taking on this identity also has practical implications; they are seen as potential collaborators in the school project:

One has to introduce them [to the class] as teachers, who will be working with us, who has the same authority [as me], where if she/he tells you something you should obey ... and at least with Marce, this worked great. They respect her. You should see when she taught a class, she managed the group really well, because, sure the kids see her as a teacher and they greet her just like with their other teachers

... the contribution that the student teachers can make is a contribution to our community. It can help us detect elements that perhaps we should rethink or reorient. Here, it is not only students that benefit. They benefit our entire school community. That is why, I think it is important that we are capable to generate that space, where they can feel like they are contributing ... As Mauricio says, the perspective that they can offer is super valuable. They are up-to-date [on practices and methodologies], that is what they are studying and we have been out [of university] for five, six, seven, eight years, and with “bad habits” of practice. So sometimes we lose perspective on what we should be doing. This is a contradictory positioning to the novice and vulnerable learner. Positioning the student teacher as colleague and contributor to school life sets the frame for the activation of generalized assumptions about school in order to “contribute.” That the student teacher “managed the group really well, because ... the kids see her as a teacher” reinforces and makes explicit the notion that taking on the professional role of the teacher involves upholding the symbolic elements, or appearance of a well-functioning class, cited earlier in this section (Atkinson, 2004). Student teachers must act like teachers, an act that is readily recognizable by other members of the school community.

The assumptions about student-control, and the common sense expectations for learning are validated through the simultaneous consideration of student teacher as novice and vulnerable as well as capable of taking on the professional role. Alternative interpretations, for instance, linking the aspect of student behavior to elements of planning, are made less accessible and visible for student teachers. And, in a similar way, critical interrogation that challenges or questions the focus on behavior as disconnected from substantive elements of a lesson foreclosed. The citation of a particular set of assumptions that reproduce already-existing practices is therefore evident in the construction of the student teacher.

### **The Collaborating Teacher**

The collaborating teacher identity occupies space at the other end of the continuum. This construction reflects a similar relative positioning of newer and more experienced collaborating teachers as seen between student teachers and collaborating teachers. We might then consider three positions on the continuum of experience beginning with student teachers, then newer collaborating teachers, and finally more experienced collaborating teachers. In general, more experienced collaborating teachers are assumed to be ‘formed’ after some years teaching after they make sense of and fully develop their teacher identities, and only then are ready to take on student teachers. They cite experience as allowing them to fully develop their professional identities so as to be prepared enough to teach others:

... since I was also fresh out of university, most probably I wouldn't be able to make big contributions, because I was also learning. In general, when you enter, you aren't fully prepared to be a teacher.



I thought that the moment when I would accept a student teacher would be when I, theoretically speaking, had developed my own style of teaching. Only then could I teach someone [how to be a teacher].

The discourse in the quotes reinforces experience as a distinguishing factor in developing one's practice. A few assumptions can be identified. First, experience leads to full development and certainty in ones' position as teacher and as teacher educator; this is often considered expertise. Presuming ones' positioning as at the end of a process of development subsequently positions newcomers at the beginning of the continuum. A second assumption is that expert teacher knowledge is a formed and complete body of professional knowledge. Therefore, what newer or future teachers must do then is learn what is there to learn. This view of teacher knowledge references experience with the assumption that one achieves expertise only through experience. In this way, dominant views of teaching are upheld in that the student-teaching component "presupposes an acceptance of the way things are [and] tends also to reinforce the ideas and images of education that prospective teachers bring to their training" (Britzman, 1986, p. 446).

It is worth paying particular attention, however, to the specific positioning along the continuum of less experienced collaborating teachers in comparison to more experienced teachers. The way this identity is configured provides evidence of tradeoffs that are normalized in the discourse of experience. The inexperienced collaborating teacher identity is a teacher who does not have enough experience to permit her/him full certainty in her/his teaching and who is still making sense of her/his role. Consider the ideas offered by first or second year teachers who have taken on student teachers. They have doubts and their language reflects a certain discomfort with their position. They echo uncertainties about teaching future teachers because of their newness in the profession.

I am just achieving that the kids don't turn their backs to me [...] It makes me uncomfortable that she [my student teacher] calls me 'profe'. I tell her, Jeni, call me Carmen, but she always calls me 'profe', so she also attributes all the responsibilities of being her teacher to me. [...] So, if you make a mistake or teach poorly, they (the student teacher) can copy your mistakes. So, she made me notice that I am like the mother.

In this case, a teacher who still has her own questions and doubts about her professional abilities worries about her qualifications to be a teacher educator. She is perturbed when the student teacher calls her "profe" (teacher) and worries about the consequences of her mistakes for the potential reproduction of those mistakes by her student teacher. The concept of teacher knowledge underlying her language is that it is certain, and denotes an assumed "correct" way of acting in the classroom. It also reiterates the idea that experienced teacher knowledge is formed and complete.

Other collaborating teacher comments highlight the tension these teachers encounter as they struggle to negotiate dominant discourses of schooling and their own personal professional commitments.

... I have noticed that we are technocrats. [For example] if I am teaching language, I don't talk to those who are teaching math, I don't talk to those who are teaching biology. And, its like you [bring up the idea of teaching cross disciplines] they look at you like you are crazy. And, worst of all is when they tell you, "ah, its just that we are in Cerro Navia (a poor community in Santiago)." [I say] even more reason [we should be critical of being technocrats]!

... it isn't that we don't teach critical thinking. It's that when we do teach critical thinking, and a student goes and raises his/her hand because he doesn't agree with

something about the school [...] the school is against that, they sanction her/him or censor her/him. [The school administration says] one thing, but when the teacher actually does that, it's a problem and they (the teacher) are marginalized. That is the thing. In that context, the angst starts to set in, and the teacher becomes unhappy and with lower self esteem. It's always like SIMCE, SIMCE, SIMCE (the standardized test). [...] But, *all* the advice is related to the test. When we do we value the teacher that worries about the other [stuff]? The one who gives up her/his break because they are seeing students? When do I begin to see students as individuals instead of the class? In what moment? When class is over? During the break?

The examples of tensions cited in the quotes above are common among new teachers and student teachers. These tensions, between personal commitments such as teaching critical thinking and prevailing existing norms in schools, combined with their doubts about being ready to serve as collaborating teachers, solidifies their place on the continuum of experience and their identification as “new” teachers. The way such tensions get worked out is telling:

Last year was my first year teaching, with all my doubts [...] the thing I left behind are all the questions that I have in my head [...] I don't think [now] I have the answers, [but,] now I am happy, because I have come out of my little-girl -naiveté phase, where I thought I could change the world [...] Last year all my self-esteem [...] and everything I wanted to do, it all came down on me and interrupted everything.

... but, I think that something has changed in me. Last year I was too perfectionist, and in wanting to be perfect, nothing worked, so this year I am more reasonable.

The necessity for the teacher to stop struggling and come to a point of balance or reconciliation with her/his teaching is the reasoning implied in the cited quotes. Teachers who achieve this balance or certainty – achieving experience – stop being idealistic or naïve, and are “reasonable.” My claim here is not that all experienced teachers do this; rather that this is the assumption in a shared everyday discourse that is repeated.

New teachers often experience conflicts between their idealism and the reality they encounter in the classroom, in what Pearce and Morrison (2011) call “borderland discourses,” which characterize their search to reconcile discourses from their university education and their profession. Ball (2003) discusses the performative nature of teaching focusing on the consequences of “policy technologies; the market, managerialism and performativity” (p. 215). Teachers are increasingly destabilized as certainty is “elusive, purposes made contradictory, motivations ... blurred and self worth is uncertain” (Ball, 2000, p. 3). Teachers enter the profession with ideas and discourses that are often in conflict with school cultures, demands, etc. This “elusive” certainty is “resolved” by abandoning the questions and focusing on the least common denominator: classroom management, the symbolic representation of the teacher. We see this play out with the citations presented above. However, the tradeoffs that are required, or made reasonable, in order to achieve this reconciliation should be questioned. This stabilization begins to be evident in the last series of quotes. They indicate a necessary tradeoff, but one that suggests that, in order for teachers to begin to achieve that certainty of the experienced teacher, they must give up personal professional commitments if they are not consistent with dominant discourse. Ball (2003) explains this tradeoff:

A kind of values schizophrenia is experienced by individual teachers where commitment, judgment and authenticity within practice are sacrificed for impression and performance. Here there is a potential ‘splitting’ between the teachers own judgments about ‘good practice’ and students ‘needs’ and the rigors of performance (p. 221).

## The Discourse of Experience and the Production of Identities and Practices

In interpreting the discourse of experience as a whole, I invoke Scott's (1991) complication of experience understood as the "origin of knowledge" taking the individual (the collaborating teacher) as the "bedrock of evidence on which explanation is built" (p. 777). Instead, I echo her argument that the identities of student teacher and collaborating teacher can be understood as "constituted through experience" (Scott, 1991, p. 779). I propose that the "citation" (Butler, 1997) of experience as that which makes the teacher is a mechanism for disciplining of student teacher and collaborating teacher identities, molding them into categories that are pre-established. These identities are fixed on the continuum of experience, but reflect at times contradictory or conflicting positions, as in the case of student teachers and newer collaborating teachers. They are individually regulated and dependent on the orientations of the larger discourse in which they are produced (Atkinson, 2004). Through the citation of the assumptions identified in earlier sections, dominant and subordinate ideas of teaching are ordered, producing possibilities for the acceptable and unacceptable. Butler (1997) writes, "power ... renders manageable what might be otherwise too unwieldy or complex, and what, in its complexity, might defy the limiting and substantializing ontology presupposed by the name" (p. 35). In the discourse of experience, student teacher and collaborating teacher identities are rendered manageable and within a predetermined set of limits. Interrogations or commitments that fall out of the limits are deemed disposable and, as in the case of newer collaborating teachers, are disregarded as "little-girl-naïveté" or other unreasonable, unthinkable or unacceptable alternates. Thus, "student" and "collaborating" teachers and the shared meaning associated with the names form a pathway for the continued reliance on preexisting, professionally accepted practices. As such, the discourse of experience is a disciplining technology and the subsequent practices it sanctions or forbids effects of power (Foucault, 1982).

I contend that through the continued citation of the discourse of experience existing norms and practices of teaching – or common sense – are reproduced.

Conventional wisdom such as 'we learn by experience' ... legitimizes the regime of a particular discourse on experience, [...] such slogans are taken up as common sense, what is expressed in actuality is a discourse of common sense. As a discourse, common sense depends upon what is already known – the obvious – and hence resists explanations about the complications we live (Britzman, 2003, p. 30).

The assumptions articulated in previous sections appeal to common sense and are embedded in the accepted discourses of the profession. There is little possibility for the interruption of these assumptions since in order to be legitimized as a teacher, what matters are the symbolic elements that entail the performance of teaching. The implication, therefore, is that the knowledge of teaching is an already organized and complete body of knowledge, and that student teachers simply need to "accept preordained meanings as natural and self-evident" (Britzman, 2003, p. 30-31). By reiterating the obvious in teaching, what is ultimately necessary for future teachers to learn is instrumentalized and fails to interrupt the ideas brought from years of experiences in schooling, since the complexities of pedagogical decision making or political/ideological underpinnings of teaching are seldom the focus of attention. What counts is acting like a teacher. The discourse of experience frames the management of student behavior as the ultimate learning to be extracted from gaining experience.

The recipes and practices of teaching, then, place certain boundaries on what is acceptable ... Particular sets of norms are privileged through the 'wisdom of practice' and concerns about the psychological management of children. It is here that we can

consider how ‘purposes’ are socially constructed through principles generated to enable teachers and students to participate and act in school. In this sense ... the experiential reasoning of the teacher is an effect of power (Popkewitz, 1998, p. 83).

Since common sense practices are privileged, initial priorities with which student teachers arrive into their teacher education, remains in place.

## Possibilities

Rethinking teacher education, and in particular student teaching, is necessary in order to interrupt the cycle of reproduction of common sense practices, and to make possible the development of new and critical pedagogies. I propose that student teaching be rethought as a somewhat special place where questioning or more critical pedagogies can be “tried out.” I argue that, in practical terms, the priority of student behavior control will be reinforced automatically—by default— when student teachers take on their initial professional roles as teachers. They will undoubtedly learn from their colleagues about managing student behavior. It is part of the dominant discourse in teaching and learning and highly productive in schools. I argue that the important question is how might teacher education take more advantage of the student-teaching component, especially since it is the only time where future-teachers are supported in learning processes inside the school and classroom? I emphasize “take advantage of” specifically in order to propose new and more complex interrogations of teaching practices and to displace the convenient and “natural” focus on existing practices. Student-teaching might be considered a space in which dominant frameworks are purposely questioned, and dilemmas or conflicts inherent in the profession made concrete learning material. I contend that purposefully helping student teachers negotiate the dilemmas or tensions they will encounter, and making explicit the tradeoffs they will confront, might better prepare them to be agents of change, and to disrupt and redefine dominant features of teaching.

## References

- Atkinson, D. (2004). How student teachers form their identities in initial teacher education. *British Educational Research Journal*, 30(3), 379-394.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01411920410001689698>
- Ball, S. (2000). Performativities and fabrications in the education economy: Towards the performative society. *Australian Educational Researcher*, 27(2), 1-23.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/BF03219719>
- Ball, S. (2003). The teacher’s soul and the terrors of performativity. *Journal of Education Policy*, 18(2), 215-228. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0268093022000043065>
- Britzman, D. (1986). Cultural myths in the making of a teacher: Biography and social structure in teacher education. *Harvard Educational Review*, 56(4), 442-456.
- Britzman, D. (2003). *Practice makes practice: A critical study of learning to teach*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press
- Butler, J. (1997). *Excitable speech: A politics of the performative*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Denscombe, M. (1982). The “hidden pedagogy” and its implications for teacher training. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 3(3), 249-265.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0142569820030303>

- Foucault, M. (1982). The subject and power. *Critical Inquiry*, 8(4), 777-795.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/448181>
- Kumashiro, K. (2009). *Against common sense: Teaching and learning toward social justice*. New York: Routledge.
- Martin, S. D.; Snow, J. L.; Franklin Torrez, C. A. (2011). Navigating the terrain of third space: Tension with/in relationships in school-university partnerships. *Journal of Teacher education*, 62(3), 299-311. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0022487110396096>
- Mills, S. (2004). *Discourse*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Pearce & Morrison (2011). Teacher identity and early career resilience: Exploring the links. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 36(1), 48-59.
- Paris, C. & Gespass, S. (2001). Examining the mismatch between learner-centered teaching and teacher-centered supervision. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 52(3) 398-412.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0022487101052005006>
- Popkewitz (1998). *Struggling for the soul: The politics of schooling and the construction of the teacher*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Popkewitz, T. & Brennan, M. (1998). Restructuring of social and political theory in education: Foucault and a social epistemology of school practices. In Popkewitz, T. & Brennan, M. (Eds.), *Foucault's challenges: Discourse, knowledge and power in education* (3-38). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Popkewitz, T. (2000). The denial of change in educational change: Systems of ideas in the construction of national policy and evaluation. *Educational Researcher*, 29(1), 17-29.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.3102/0013189X029001017>
- Scott, J. (1991). The evidence of experience. *Critical Inquiry*, 17(4), 773-797.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/448612>
- Wodak, R. & Meyer, M. (Eds.). (2009). *Methods of critical discourse analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Youngblood Jackson, A. (2001). Multiple Annies: Feminist poststructural theory and the making of a teacher. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 52(3), 386-397.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0022487101052005005>
- Zeichner, K. (2010). Rethinking the connections between campus courses and field experiences in college- and university-based teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 61(1-2), 89-99. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0022487109347671>