

## (Un)Becoming a Teacher: Negotiating Identities While Learning to Teach

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Becoming a teacher involves more than transposing teaching skills onto an already-established personal identity: it means including the identity “teacher” in one’s life. Beginning teachers must negotiate at least three teaching identities: those they bring with them into teacher education, those they develop while doing university course work, and those they develop during student teaching practicums. Because university and school experiences are generally only weakly connected for beginning teachers, the negotiation of these disparate teacher identities often remains unacknowledged and uninterpreted. By describing what happened when we used a “writerly” text in the teacher-education classroom, we show the importance of creating curricular locations for the interpretation of the teaching identities student teachers negotiate as they learn to teach.

Devenir un enseignant implique plus que de simplement transposer des habiletés d’enseignement sur une identité personnelle déjà établie: cela signifie plutôt d’inclure l’identité “enseignant” dans la vie d’une personne. Les enseignants débutants doivent composer avec au moins trois identités reliées à l’enseignement: celles qu’ils amènent avec eux dans le cadre de la formation des maîtres, celles qu’ils développent en suivant des cours universitaires et celles qu’ils cultivent au cours de leurs stages en enseignement. Puisque les expériences du milieu scolaire et celles du milieu universitaire ne sont généralement que faiblement reliées pour les enseignants débutants, composer avec ces identités disparates demeure souvent un aspect non reconnu et non interprété. Les auteurs, en décrivant ce qui s’est produit lorsqu’ils ont utilisé un texte de type “littéraire” dans une classe de formation des maîtres, démontrent l’importance de créer une place dans les programmes universitaires pour l’interprétation des identités reliées à l’enseignement avec lesquelles les stagiaires composent pendant qu’ils apprennent à enseigner.

### A NARRATIVE OF DISCONTINUITY

The room was silent except for the soft scratching of pencils on test papers. Sonja glanced around the class with the calm, in-charge expression she had been practising in front of her mirror — the look of a professional.

This was her first week as a student teacher and already she imagined that this was her own class. She glanced around the room again. This seemed easy! The

problems of junior high school must be exaggerated. Hand out the test, watch them work, prepare for what would be taught next. Who couldn't do that? Then she heard the quiet rustle of pages being flipped—not the pages of a test paper. Sonja had a moment's pleasure in being able to recognize a problem, and then realized she would have to do something about it. In the far corner Kelsey was reading his math book, making no effort to hide his cheating.

A sudden twinge of panic stung Sonja's throat. What should she do? "Easiest first," she thought. "I'll make eye contact. Stare at him to make it clear that I know he is doing something wrong. Then he'll shut his math book and no-one will even notice that there was a problem."

She rested her chin on her palm and directed her coolest stare in Kelsey's direction. It wasn't long before he felt her gaze and looked up to meet her eyes. But instead of blushing and closing his book, as Sonja had anticipated, he stared back until she felt her own gaze wavering.

"What are *you* looking at?" he scowled.

The other students stopped working on their tests and looked up with interest. Sonja hadn't known her heart could pound so loudly. All she wanted to do was run out of the classroom and never come back. But, instead, she took a deep breath. She sensed that if she couldn't handle this, she might as well give up her dream of becoming a teacher. But why was it so difficult to know what to do next?

Proximity. She would try that.

Kelsey's eyes did not waver as she walked towards him. In fact, Sonja was certain that she could see a glint of amused defiance in his expression. He knew what she was thinking. She stopped beside his desk and stood quietly for a moment, keeping her hands behind her back so that Kelsey would not see their trembling.

"Got a problem?" Kelsey asked, no quieter than before.

"Close your math book," Sonja whispered. "You're cheating."

"So?"

The class had not gone back to their tests and Kelsey was not at all intimidated by her nearness. Without thinking, Sonja slammed the book shut over his hand.

"Ow! You hit me! You're in big trouble now!" Kelsey hollered, glancing at his audience with pleasure.

"Out!" Sonja shouted back. "Out! Go to the office!"

"I don't have to listen to you," Kelsey sneered.

Panic and tears threatened to overwhelm Sonja when the door opened and her supervising teacher returned. Instantly, all the students, including Kelsey, went back to work. The math book slid under his desk.

"I've really blown it," Sonja thought as she returned to the front to tell the teacher what had happened. "I don't think I can do this. I don't think I *want* to do this."

## THE FICTIVE IDENTITY

Tears rolled down Sonja's cheek as she related this experience to us and her classmates.<sup>1</sup> Although she had felt prepared for teaching, this encounter with Kelsey forced her to confront the dissonance between the kind of teacher she thought she would be and the teacher who reacted strongly to Kelsey's rebellious behaviour. Like that of many beginning teachers, Sonja's experience was discontinuous with projections she had made of what it would be like to teach. We believe that narrating these discontinuities in the context of the teacher-education classroom makes it possible to investigate the question "Who am I becoming?"—a question that continually surfaces for beginning teachers as they learn to teach. As Bruner (1990) and Kerby (1991) have suggested, narrations of lived experiences offer opportunities to interpret the relations among past, present, and projected events.

Although we acknowledge the importance of interpreting narrations of lived experiences, we believe these activities often entrench an understanding of teaching identity as something that hangs, suspended, between teaching and non-teaching experiences. The popular phrase "becoming a teacher" represents this belief. When teaching identity is understood in this way, learning how to teach is described as a process of transposing teaching skills onto persons who have the virtues required to become a teacher. The self that comes to the enterprise of teaching is viewed as the foundation for the skills and behaviours needed for effective teaching. Understood in this way, the project of teacher education becomes one of transposition rather than transformation. Good teachers acquire "teaching skills." Britzman (1991) suggests that this and other cultural myths about teaching and teachers contribute to the shaping of a teaching identity:

In the case of learning to teach, cultural myths partly structure the individual's taken-for-granted views of power, authority, knowledge, and identity. They work to cloak the more vulnerable condition of learning to teach and the myriad negotiations it requires. (p. 7)

We have come to believe that beginning teachers negotiate the dissonance between their pre-teaching lives and their lives as experienced teachers with a "fictive" identity. This fictive identity, like characters in literary fictions, is composed not only of elements of the student teacher's already-experienced world of understanding, but also of the various cultural myths associated with the idea of "teacher." As they learn to teach, beginning teachers negotiate at least three conceptions of self-identity: the "pre-teaching" image of themselves as teacher they bring to teacher education; the "fictive" image that develops while they learn to teach; and the "lived" image that forms during their interactions with students in the practicum. Although we do not believe these exist in

isolation from each other, we have found this “three identity” formulation a useful heuristic for understanding the complexities of learning to teach and, furthermore, have found it helpful in developing teacher-education curricula that call into question the idea that one can maintain an identity separate from the role “teacher.”<sup>2</sup>

#### INTERPRETING THE US/NOT-US RELATION

In his novel *The English Patient*, Michael Ondaatje (1992) chronicles the lives of four strangers who come together for a time at the end of World War II in an abandoned, bombed-out villa in northern Italy. Because one of these characters, a pilot who is burned beyond recognition in a plane crash, does not reveal his name or any personal details about himself to the others, he is assumed to be of English descent, and is referred to by the others as “the English patient.” The only artifact the English patient salvages from the crash is a worn copy of the Greek historian Herodotus’ *The Histories* (trans. 1954), which he has carried with him for the past thirty years. Because he has made it a habit to write in the margins of the text and paste in clippings from newspapers, other books, letters from others, and notes to himself, the book has grown to more than twice its original thickness, and is referred to by him as his “commonplace book.” By reading from this book, the other characters come to know more about him. The book has become what Merleau-Ponty (1962) calls a “cultural object.”

In the cultural object, I feel the close presence of others beneath a veil of anonymity. *Someone* uses the pipe for smoking, the spoon for eating, the bell for summoning, and it is through the perception of a human act and another person that the perception of a cultural world could be. (pp. 347–348)

With this passage Merleau-Ponty expresses the importance of knowing the relations among things. What becomes significant is not so much knowledge of the artifact itself but knowledge of the relationship between it and the world. Who has used the pipe? What was eaten with the spoon? Where was the bell previously located? Gadamer (1990) calls this continual process of interpreting the relations among past, present, and projected experience a “fusing of horizons” (pp. 306–307). The artifacts that surround the human subject, whether material (such as the pipe, the spoon, the bell) or linguistic (the stories we tell of our experiences), become “commonplaces” for these ongoing interpretations. For the English patient, his copy of *The Histories* becomes material evidence of his ever-evolving and transforming self. Each time he rereads a passage, each time he adds new words, he ritualizes the process of self-interpretation. At the same time, his commonplace book serves as a location for communal interpretation. As others read the book, their knowledge about the English patient deepens and,

at the same time, their understanding of themselves changes. As they interpret themselves, they interpret one another and their sense of community.

This formulation calls into question the location of “identity.” Is the sense of self located in the human subject? Or is it somehow circumscribed in one’s relations with others within a perceived and contextualized world of significance? Sartre (1956) has suggested that when in the presence of another person, one experiences himself or herself as viewed from the perspective of the other. This is the experience of being judged, of being endowed with a meaning not of one’s own making. One is no longer a being for oneself but, instead, a being for the other. At the same time, one can become the subject that interprets the other. One can also become the author of one’s own interpretations. These interpretations, however, cannot be extricated from one another. They overlap and intertwine within an ever-evolving and unstable web of contextualized relations.

Coming to know oneself occurs during the process of being in relations with others—relations always mediated by the cultural objects that circumscribe lived experience. A sense of self-identity does not really have a fixed location inside the body of the individual but, rather, is ambiguously located amid the human subject’s perceived and interpreted relations in the world. Further, some cultural objects, because of their histories of involvement with human subjects, more clearly announce some sense of self and collective identity. For the English patient, his copy of *The Histories* is such an object.

This understanding of identity suggests that a sense of self or communal identity is not stable, continuous, or fixed. Identity cannot be contained within immutable categories. This theory of identity is, however, in the lexicon of modernism, counter-intuitive. In the Western world at least, persons generally speak about themselves as if they were somehow detached from others and the world. As Taylor (1989) suggests:

Modern culture has developed conceptions of individualism which picture the human subject as, at least potentially, finding his or her own bearings within, declaring independence from the webs of interlocation that have originally formed him/her, or at least neutralizing them. It is as though the dimension of interlocation were of significance only for the genesis of individuality, like the training wheels of nursery school, to be left behind and to play no part in the finished person. (p. 36)

A sense of personal identity cannot be subtracted from a sense of communal identity; the sense of self alters as social relations and situations change. Moreover, the memories of past selves change when they are viewed in relation to new experiences. At the same time, because each person is always involved in many discursive systems, the sense of personal and communal identity is always multiple. Furthermore, as Davis (1995, in press) suggests, there is really no fixed boundary between a sense of identity and a body of knowledge. Individual and collective identities and expressed knowledge continually shape one

another. As the self continues to be reinterpreted, what the self expresses as knowledge changes. Learning about things that are “not us” means being involved in a learning relation that informs one about himself or herself. Sumara (1996) calls this the continually evolving relation of “us/not-us.” Gadamer (1990) uses the metaphor of conversation to announce this idea:

We say that we “conduct” a conversation, but the more genuine a conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner. Thus a genuine conversation is never the one that we wanted to conduct. Rather, it is generally more correct to say that we fall into conversation, or even that we become involved in it. The way on word follows another, with the conversation taking its own twists and reaching its own conclusion, may well be conducted in some way, but the partners conversing are far less the leaders of it than the led. No one knows in advance what will “come out” of a conversation. (pp. 383–384)

Like a conversation, lived experience may be described as the interrelation necessarily occurring between the human subject and everything not the human subject. A sense of self is circumscribed among the interstices of the us/not-us relation, and personal identity is generated through the interpretation of that relation. Because these relations exist within normatively inscribed discursive practices, to many people (particularly those of mainstream groups) they seem seamless and invisible.

The continual interpretation of overlapping and intertwined relations sponsored by the need to remain viable in the us/not-us relation means that conventionally understood boundaries between self and other, human and world are not distinct or fixed. In *The English Patient*, for example, the villa’s four inhabitants frequently become confused about the beginnings and endings of personal and collective identities. Through their ongoing practice of reading and interpreting the English patient’s commonplace book they are able to make sense of these blurred relations. However, it is actually not the text that becomes the commonplace where interpretations and understanding accrue. Rather, the interpretive commonplace occurs within the cumulative and collective intertextual relations among readers, texts read, other experiences, and contexts of reading. When the villa’s inhabitants interpret *The Histories*, they are not merely commenting on the text; as Iser (1989, 1993) has suggested, they are engaged in “literary anthropology,” in which responding to the text becomes a process of self-discovery and self-interpretation.

It is also significant that the four characters feel estranged from their remembered sense of self. That they are simultaneously strangers to one another poses a double conundrum, because the inability to define themselves is only exacerbated by this strangeness. How does one renegotiate the boundaries of one’s sense of self when the associations and the landmarks are unfamiliar? Although the characters desperately try to “read” the others’ thoughts — searching for a trace of the other and, simultaneously, a trace of themselves — they find,

over time, that the sense of self can only become known through shared readings and interpretations of the English patient's commonplace book. The book becomes the cultural object that creates a commonplace for social and communal interaction, helping each character to develop deeper understanding of the relationship among past, present, and projected senses of self. Furthermore, readers of *The English Patient* become part of this complicated process of understanding and self-interpretation. They become involved in a literary anthropology in which their interactions in the commonplace, announced by their reading of a literary work, redefine the boundaries of their various identities. At the same time, this interpretive work helps them to develop deeper understandings of how these identities are always culturally and historically effected.

The idea of the "commonplace location" announced by the reader's interpreted response to a work of literary fiction can become useful in understanding how remembered, fictive, and lived identities interact within the curriculum of teacher education. Just as the reader of the fictional text learns to integrate the self that comes to the text with the emergent "reading self" conditioned by the text, the beginning teacher must learn to integrate disparate senses of the "pre-teacher" self, the "fictive" teacher self, and the "lived" teacher self. If curriculum is understood as the intertextual relations among teachers, students, texts, and the contexts of learning, the questions that should be asked of teacher-education curriculum are: How does the tightly woven fabric of curricular relations teach what student teachers learn? How do these learnings function to maintain or integrate these disparate senses of self? Can what is known about the interaction between readers and literary fictions illuminate the identity-negotiation students experience while learning how to teach?

#### A COMMONPLACE LOCATION

Barthes (1974) makes a distinction between "readerly" and "writerly" experiences that underscores the need to become creative with the print texts used in teacher education. According to Barthes, writerly texts are those requiring greater-than-usual participation from the reader. As opposed to readerly texts, which attempt to provide a tightly woven set of experiences, writerly texts contain more spaces and gaps (Iser, 1978) for the reader to negotiate. Typical of novels such as *The English Patient*, where readers need to become vigilant of how they are involved in a more open (Eco, 1989) literary form, the writerly text disrupts the usual seamlessness of the reading experience.

We believe that many teacher-education programs encourage a readerly rather than writerly response from students. Like many forms of Western schooling, learning to become a teacher resembles what Franklin (1990) calls a "prescriptive practice," in which theoretical knowledge is presented in university classrooms geographically and ideologically distant from school classrooms. Like readers of

the readerly fictional text, students involved in these readerly teacher-education practices often become lost in a fantasy-text bearing little relation to their actual experiences in the world. The move from a readerly to a writerly interaction requires that the usual seamlessness of the “learning to teach” experience be interrupted. Within the locations announced by these interruptions, readers (beginning teachers) are better able to perceive the usually invisible architecture of intertextual construction.

It was during our experience of reading and responding to *The English Patient* with a group of English teachers that we became aware of the interpretive possibilities offered by a “writerly” experience. Because we found this text more open and ambiguous than most novels, several of us adopted the practice of inscribing our reading responses directly “between the lines and in the margins” of our copies of the novel. Because we (Dennis and Rebecca) found this response practice useful, we came to believe that material inscription of a reader’s thoughts into a text could convert usually “readerly” reader-text experiences into more “writerly” ones. By making material our responses, we interrupted the flow of reading and, as a consequence, opened new interpretive locations. We found, for example, that by going back and rereading our comments, we became more aware of how our “identities” were unstable, multiple, and defied categorization. As we continued to read and interpret our reading of *The English Patient*, we began to feel differently about ourselves and each other. Because this reading and response strategy had been so successful in our teacher reading group, we (Dennis and Rebecca) wondered what it would be like to include it in the general curriculum and instruction course we were teaching.<sup>3</sup> Could we develop an activity to help beginning teachers understand the complexity of learning to live a life that includes the practice of public school teaching?

Like many teacher-education programs, the one in which we taught<sup>4</sup> offered pre-service teachers a combination of university courses and seminars, various classroom observations, and practicum experiences. To encourage interpretations of these somewhat disparate experiences, we had previously asked students to keep daily journals. Rather than becoming a location for critical reflection on experience, we found that the journals generally devolved into chronologies of daily events. Because we wished to help students to understand how their various experiences in teacher education were interrelated and interactive, we developed an assignment we believed would provoke a more “writerly” reading and interpretation of their learning-to-teach experience.

In previous years, we had included as part of our course John Dewey’s (1902/1956) *The Child and the Curriculum*. As in many North American teacher-education programs, this canonical text had become a largely unquestioned part of our teacher-education program. Because, at that time, we believed this text continued to address contemporary educational issues, we used it as the foundation for a “commonplace book” assignment. After providing our students with



some written information about *The English Patient*, and the concept of the “commonplace book,” we gave the following directions:

*Webster’s* defines a “commonplace book” as a “book in which noteworthy quotations, poems, comments, etc. are written.” Just as Herodotus’ *The Histories* functioned as a commonplace for the English patient and others at the villa, we believe that your commonplace book will evolve from individual “writing in,” responding to, and rereading pieces of text in relation to various experiences you will have this semester. The purpose for developing such a book for this course is to define a location in which to explore what it might mean to live a life that includes the practice of teaching. We will be using John Dewey’s (1902/1956) *The Child and the Curriculum* as the focal text for the commonplace book. We will be looking at sections of the essay as they relate to class discussions, other readings, and in-school practicum experiences. You are encouraged to write/respond “in the margins” and “between the lines,” and to insert notes, clippings, photographs, or any other artifacts that help you to articulate your experience of learning to teach.

We hoped that through deliberately interrupting Dewey’s text with insertions of their remembered experiences, students would find an opening in this text—an interpretive possibility—within which they could begin to examine their evolving senses of self-identity as teachers. This did not occur. Although students did write “in the margins” and “between the lines” of Dewey’s text, their responses closely resembled the content and tone of the journal entries we were attempting to eschew. Rather than initiating a dialectical relationship with the text, students continually reacted to the text by comparing it to their teaching experiences. Sonja’s narrative presented at the beginning of this article, for example, emerged from a written response she had made to Dewey’s (1902/1956) call for educators to:

abandon the notion of subject-matter as something fixed and ready-made in itself, outside the child’s experience; cease thinking of the child’s experience as also something hard and fast; see it as something fluid, embryonic, vital; and we realize that the child and the curriculum are simply two limits which define a single process. (p. 11)

Dewey’s idealized formulation of the intertextual quality of curriculum, for Sonja, became a critical commentary on her own response to Kelsey. She wrote:

I understand that the child’s experience must, somehow, be considered along with the teaching of the subject matter. But what about my experience? My responses to student misbehaviour and defiance are not likely what Dewey would expect—and they are not what I expected. I’m quite confused about who I’m supposed to be as a teacher. It seems like this person is very unlike me or the teacher I expected I would be.

This entry was written after she had spent several days observing and participating in the teaching of junior high classes in an inner-city school. Sonja’s

troubling experience occurred in the midst of course activities focussing on the subject of classroom organization, management, and discipline. Because one of our course aims was to help students become aware of the metaphors used to describe classroom interactions, we encouraged them to reread sections of *The Child and the Curriculum* dealing with the teacher's role vis-à-vis students and the curriculum. They were also asked to read several other articles on this subject and, with teachers, to participate in seminars on classroom organization and management.

We had hoped that the activity of inscribing their responses to these various activities into Dewey's text would help generate critical class discussion around issues of curriculum, pedagogy, and teaching and learning to teach. We expected that these discussions would illuminate for students the complex identity negotiations and transformations necessarily accompanying these activities. It was in the midst of a class discussion in which students were asked to share some of their commonplace book constructions that a number of students (including Sonja) revealed the dissonance they felt among the idealized teaching image implied by Dewey's words, the images of the teachers they expected to be, and the remembered images of their interactions with students during their practicum. Comments such as "I'm not acting like the teacher I wanted to be" and "I'm surprised to find myself sounding like teachers I didn't like" were typical. Our immediate response was to ease the students' anxiety by taking up their questions of "what to do" about students like Kelsey. Near the end of class, however, Sonja expressed her exasperation with these efforts by suggesting that these sorts of discussions would not help her to know how to handle situations such as her encounter with Kelsey. We knew she was right, and this realization provoked us to call into question the procedures we were using to guide student response and interpretation. Why had our recent innovation merely reproduced the typical dissonance between projected and lived experiences of teaching?

In the end, we concluded that we had chosen the wrong kind of text to announce the desired commonplace for critical response. Because it presented a relatively seamless and unified theory of the relation between the child and the curriculum, students found their own experiences difficult to integrate into the text. The act of "interrupting" the text with their own responses did not create a location for critical enquiry into the identity transformation occurring while they learned to teach. Although it was not immediately apparent to us, we eventually learned that the very construction of Dewey's text and the context of reading was what prevented them from doing so. To respond to Dewey, students first needed to situate themselves as readers according to the text's conditioning qualities.

Like many Western philosophic texts of this type, Dewey's text functioned as a particular technology (de Castell, 1990a, 1990b) that excluded marginal subject positions and reading identities. Because the text was authoritative in tone and

in presentation (that is, the author was presented to students as a philosophic authority), and the context of reading was “schooled” (that is, subject to the conditioning “ranking and sorting” functions of the university classroom), and the responses were further subject to the gaze of the teachers (that is, they functioned as material for curricular assessment), students’ experiences were effectively delegitimized. We realized that if we wanted to offer students an opportunity to enquire critically into the processes and practices conditioning their “learning-to-teach” experiences, we needed to construct a reading location that would provoke them to become different sorts of readers (Eco, 1994). This text, we believed, needed to present some of the competing discursive practices associated with learning to teach so that students might come to understand the complex identity negotiation they were undergoing within their teacher-education program.

#### A WRITERLY TEXT

Rather than using one complete text as a location for reading response and interpretation, we created a “writerly” text by juxtaposing selections from various published texts with quotations from research transcripts.<sup>5</sup> The final product was an example of bricolage, in which seemingly unrelated fragments were collapsed into one textual form. Because we wanted to make explicit for students that we had constructed this text, we performed an oral reading for them. We named it “Stories of Teaching” and have reproduced it here:

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#### *Stories of Teaching*

“Once assignments are made and students begin work, it is essential that the teacher be aware of student progress. This can be accomplished by circulating throughout the classroom and systematically checking each student’s work. The teacher should scan the class for a minute or two at the beginning of seatwork activity to make sure that everyone has begun.” (Evertson & Emmer, 1982, p. 28, cited in Arends, 1991, p. 171)

“High school is hell. Most teachers don’t understand how awful it really is. There is nowhere to hide. If it’s not the teachers watching you, it’s all the other kids.” (Taylor, Grade 11 student)<sup>6</sup>

“Panopticism, as discussed by Foucault (1977) in his book *Discipline and Punish*, a history of the prison system, is derived from the word “panopticon,” a plan for an efficient prison designed in the early 1900s. Its most innovative feature was a design that allowed the warden constant surveillance of the prisoners from a vantage point in a tower surrounded by cells for individuals. Because these cells were fully open in the front (bars only) and lit from behind, prisoners were exposed at all times. Foucault writes:

They are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible. The panoptic mechanism arranges

spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately. (p. 200)

The idea of the panopticon, Foucault suggests, has polyvalent applications:

It is a type of location of bodies in space, of distribution of individuals in relation to one another, of hierarchical organization, of disposition of centres and channels of power, of definition of instruments and modes of intervention of power, which can be implemented in hospitals, workshops, schools, prisons.” (p. 205)

“It was Mr. Moscowitz’s first year of teaching. He wore a plaid suit, was short, and had terrible facial acne. His only crime was he could not control the class. Control was everything. Mr. Moscowitz didn’t carry authority in his body, so it didn’t matter that he asked you to sit down.” (Goldberg, 1993, p. 12)

“Although educational research of the last decade has come to acknowledge the degree to which the teacher mediates between the child and the curriculum, the response of curriculum developers, book publishers, and administrators to this perception of the potential power of the teacher has been to prescribe teacher/student interactions by providing scripts for their discourse. The move to acknowledge the influence of teachers and, simultaneously, to control it is evident in . . . the scripts imposed in teacher-effectiveness courses and evaluation protocols.” (Grumet, 1988, p. 90)

“I think at certain points, I did become assimilated into school life but I don’t feel a part of it. I don’t think I ever did. I felt bad because I didn’t like the school environment. I never felt it was healthy or natural, I never felt comfortable there.” (Jamie Owl, student teacher, cited in Britzman, 1991, p. 112)

“When I first started teaching this novel and all these personal emotions came up, I thought that I would do like always—subtract myself from them. But that hasn’t been very easy. I’m not sure you can do that without causing a great deal of harm to yourself.” (Ingrid, high school English teacher<sup>7</sup>)

“The primary responsibility of every professional is to render the service needed by the client, not what the professional prefers. Therefore, teaching behaviours are determined by student need, not teacher style. Skilled teachers have a repertoire of styles.” (Hunter, 1994, p. 12)

“For those who leave this world to enter teacher education, their first culture shock may well occur with the realization of the overwhelming complexity of the teacher’s work and the myriad ways this complexity is masked and misunderstood. But what occurs as well is the startling idea that the taking up of an identity means suppressing aspects of the self. So at first glance, becoming a teacher may mean becoming someone you are not.” (Britzman, 1991, p. 4)

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Iser (1989) explains that the fictional literary text “provokes translations of itself into terms of the prevailing situation” (p. 208). These translations, he suggests, function like a “divining rod” that points to the impulses which led to them. Because we believed our text functioned as a writerly fictional text, we thought that by reading it aloud to our students, we would become part of the event of divining. Grumet (1991) has described this divining function as a form of “pointing to the world,” suggesting that teachers who choose to read to their students “point” to some aspects of the world and not others. Shared reading, then, announces a commonplace location within which to interpret intertextual and interpersonal relationships.

As we read this text to our students, we were reminded that we were also persons continually learning what it means to live a teaching life. In fact, we found that we were emotionally moved by our own text, for although we had organized the pieces of this text, before this event we had not read it aloud in a public place. It was the public reading with our students that seemed to create an emotional response. As we glanced across the room at each other we realized immediately that each of us had had a similar response experience. The text had, it seemed, collected our experiences and, during the event of reading, illuminated for us why it was so difficult to teach about teaching—and why, like our students, we felt the experience of splintered selves. Who were we becoming as teacher educators? Did the selves that had been public school teachers still exist? Or were our narrated stories about our prior experience as classroom teachers describing other selves that remained alive only in the fictive reconstructions of memories of those events? How was being a university teacher different from being a public school teacher? Were we, like our students, attempting to “become” the fictional image of university professor that we had constructed for ourselves? And what of the “self” that stood before the students during the event of reading? How does one speak when one gains, during an event of curriculum, new understanding about oneself and one’s relations to others?

For us, this curriculum event had become a location for self-interpretation. And so, as the students wrote responses to this text, we each did so as well. We were grateful for this five minutes of space to collect ourselves and our thoughts, for we knew that what would follow would differ from previous situations with this class. There was a tension, an electricity in the air that was new. After the five minutes, we asked whether anyone wanted to share what they had just written. At first, there was only a trickle of response, largely concerning the issue of “surveillance.” Within moments, however, came an avalanche of discussion—often heated and emotional—about the experience of being “watched” while learning to teach. Some students talked about the pressure they felt to acquire more conservative haircuts, to buy “teacher” clothes, to remove earrings, and so on. Others spoke about how they had carefully constructed responses to Dewey and other readings they thought best typified those that might be given by a “good” teacher. Others spoke frankly about how that day’s experience of

responding to “Stories of Teaching” in the presence of their peers and university professors had been yet another example of the appropriation of their feelings and responses for classroom purposes. Others reacted strongly to the juxtaposition of comments from teachers and students, and particularly to Britzman’s statement about “becoming someone that you are not,” suggesting that they would never allow that to happen.

Some students in the class resisted the idea that learning to teach meant taking up a new and often uncomfortable identity. Several students readily dismissed responses to the text (their own and others’) that called into question the value of “becoming a teacher.” They seemed immediately to understand what we would later conclude: that learning to teach means engaging in acts of forgetting, discarding, silencing, and ignoring. Because a number of students were clearly becoming uncomfortable with this continued examination of their personal responses, we decided to shift the discussion by using our own response to the text as another interpretive location. We specifically discussed how our response was conditioned by our public school teaching experiences. In addition, we explained that our reading of the text was affected by other conditions in our lives. One of us, for example, read this text as a white, middle-class woman who was also a writer of fiction, and who researches what it is like for women writers to teach in public schools. The other read this text as a white, middle-class man who is interested in the function of the literary imagination in school settings. Although it was also true that he read this text as a gay male, and that this “writerly” text provoked a strong response around issues of silencing and surveillance, this information was not disclosed to the students. (We mention this here, because, as we will later show, it was this deliberate omission that further reinforced, for us, the problems with developing teaching around “fictionalized” identities.)

Because we felt some students needed another opportunity to express and extend their response, we asked the class to think about the day’s reading and response activity and to write a page or two of critical interpretation. The following excerpts are representative of the range of responses given:

*Anjali:* This entire semester I have felt exhausted, and I now think it’s because I feel like I am always being watched. It’s even worse than being a student in school because while I’m teaching I know that I’m also being taught. How can you really be yourself when you feel exposed all the time?

*Andrew:* At first I was really annoyed by the Britzman quote. I thought, “I’m not becoming someone I’m not!” But then I thought about how I am worried that I should not be working part-time in a bar if I’m a student-teacher, and I probably should not wear an earring. And, I know that there are some things about myself that cannot become known in schools, and that is unfortunate, because they’re some of the things that make me feel unique.

*Mena:* There really isn't anything about me that I think I need to change in order to be an effective teacher. I don't feel at all like I'm becoming someone else, nor do I think that students are being watched all the time—at least not in a negative way. Observation is an important part of teaching, I think.

*Geoff:* For me, teaching is not about surveillance, becoming someone I'm not, or reciting scripts made by someone else. I find that I'm able to be *exactly* who I was before teaching. In fact, because I'm teaching in the community where I was raised and went to school, I'm not noticing some of the difficulties relating to students that other student-teachers seem to have. Maybe not everyone should be teaching?

As we reflected upon this class, it became apparent to us that the reading of and responding to a more “writerly” curricular text had announced a commonplace location for interpretation. The complexity of multiple and competing identities came into full relief for many of our students as they responded to this text. Suddenly, it became more apparent (to them and to us) that learning to teach meant learning about oneself and, for many, it meant learning how to become someone else. This activity created a curricular space in which we could discuss how we and our students were located within competing discursive practices that functioned to shape our teaching and non-teaching identities. For us as their teachers, it meant examining our complicity in the practices we were critiquing. In our teaching journals we wrote about the discomfort this reading and response event had created for each of us:

*Dennis:* I thought that the move from public school to university teaching would make it possible for me to be more open with my students about my gay identity, but as I was reading the “Stories of Teaching” to the class I realized that although my teaching location had changed, my teaching identity had not. I was still trying to enact teaching with a fictive teacher identity. Because I have not “announced” myself as gay, many students, I am sure, assume that I am straight. I am disturbed that I did not explain to the class that I had read and interpreted this text as a gay male. And, in the end, it was this withholding of an important aspect of my identity that prevented me from participating fully with them in an enquiry of what it means to live the life of a teacher.

*Rebecca:* I tell students that they are in the midst of becoming teachers and that this course will be part of that experience. I speak about my own experience in the classroom, but only as an outline: where I taught, what I taught, whom I taught. I don't tell them I am running away. Running away from conversations about diets, hockey pools, and despair in the staffroom. Running away from an institution where I feel constrained, watched, unappreciated. Running away from an environment where I kept my writing life distinctly separate from my writing classroom. If I told them all this, they too might run screaming from the classroom.

These responses helped us understand that it was important to continue to investigate, with our students, the dissonance between normative practices that circumscribe learning to teach and the remembered, lived, and projected experiences of those who come to the practice of teaching. It helped us to understand that we needed to ask students to map the landscape of their pre-teaching identities, the ones formed while they were learning to teach, and the ones they experienced in front of students during their practicums. Using the “three identities” formulation as an heuristic device helped us and many of our students to understand better what was at work during their teacher-education program. A commonplace location was announced that assisted in the negotiation of these disparate and often competing senses of self-identity. Further, it helped render problematic the belief that learning to teach was a project that could be completed during teacher education. Most important, it created a critical location where students could begin to enquire into how the act of teaching shapes the identities of those who choose to teach. And, for many, this meant wondering whether they were prepared to make this transformation.

(UN)BECOMING A TEACHER

Despite the difficulty she encountered with Kelsey in the early stages of her practicum, Sonja successfully completed her teaching degree. Although this might seem like cause for celebration—after all, she *was* able to develop a successful teaching identity and manner—we find ourselves feeling ambivalent. We continue to ask ourselves what provokes students to respond to teachers as Kelsey responded to Sonja? What identity transformations must occur for teachers like Sonja to be able to avoid these challenges?

We have come to believe that often these situations arise when students become aware of the competing and conflicting identities embodied by the beginning teacher. As Sonja stood among students in the classroom, both she and they were, in some way, aware that behind the mask of “teacher” there stood another self, another life, another set of experiences removed from the rituals of public schooling. Because the “fictive” teacher Sonja had been constructing had not yet become woven into her pre-teaching and lived-teaching identities, it conflicted with both. When this occurs, the body of the teacher betrays these identity conflicts. Although Sonja was able to step into the role “teacher,” she had not acquired the culturally defined teaching manner. We find that we are more depressed than excited by Sonja’s success, for we understand that for her to have been successful, she must have developed a “lived” teaching identity that appeared unified and seamless to her students. This, of course, does not mean that Sonja’s sense of identity was or is this way—she simply learned to suppress those aspects of herself unbecoming to the identity of public school teacher.

It is crucial for teacher educators to understand that for some students the merging of disparate identities is relatively simple and unproblematic. Those who



represent mainstream groups are generally already closely aligned with cultural images of what teachers should look like and of the sorts of lives they should live. For others (such as visible minorities, immigrants, lesbians, and gay men), however, the dissonance between the identities they bring to teaching, the fictive teaching identities they construct, and the lived experience of teaching is often vast. Negotiating the territory among these conflicting remembered, lived, and projected senses of identity is, for many, an exhausting and often insurmountable task (de Castell & Bryson, 1993; Ng, 1993).

For us, the inclusion of a more “writerly” text of curriculum rendered more visible than usual the competing discursive practices in learning to teach. From our and our students’ responses, and the many discussions that followed this activity, it became clear that this text announced a commonplace location for interpretation which, like those announced by the reading of literary fictions, functioned to collect and reorganize previously unconnected past, present, and projected identities and experiences. Through the interpretation of our and our students’ responses to this text we were able to articulate more clearly how pre-teaching, fictive, and lived teaching identities and experiences continually fold into one another while an individual teaches and learns about teaching.

For many students “becoming a teacher” entails not enriching their lives with a wider repertoire of abilities and insights but, rather, discarding and excluding various identities and experiences that do not conform to the constricting cultural myths and practices conditioning the teacher-education curriculum. We use the phrase “(un)becoming a teacher” to affirm the already well-announced (Britzman, 1991; de Castell & Bryson, 1993; Lewis, 1990) need in teacher education to render visible the usually invisible homogenizing practices associated with learning to teach. Rather than uncritically celebrating the process of becoming a teacher, we strongly believe that university teacher-education programs must create commonplaces for interpretation that make explicit the various discursive practices and competing identities which converge as students learn to teach. The phrase “(un)becoming a teacher” is meant to suggest that learning to teach is a form of “unbecoming” the identity one brings to the process of learning to teach. The phrase also announces that these identity negotiations and transformations are often considered personally “unbecoming” by the individual undergoing them. As we have experienced personally, and as many of our students have told us, becoming a teacher means changing who you are. For some, this is an “unbecoming” experience.

For us, (un)becoming a teacher means making more explicit for beginning teachers the cultural myths about teaching reproduced as they learn to teach. One way to accomplish this is to participate with our students in writerly interpretive practices that make us face each other and ourselves. Our experience suggests that engaging in these practices often produces a curriculum more ambiguous and disruptive than usual. We believe, however, that these disruptions are not only important, but *necessary* in university-based teacher-education programs.

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The preceding narrative is a fictionalized account of Sonja's experience. In order to create a text that would invite readers into Sonja's experience, we developed this fictionalized account based on the narrative of experience she presented in class and further conversations we had with her after this in-class disclosure. All names (other than the those of the authors) presented in this narrative and in the rest of this article are pseudonyms. Because this article is an interpretation of the authors' teaching experiences, the specific anecdotal information depicted in it emerges from our teaching journals and notes, course assignments and documents, students' journals, and personal memories of these teaching events.
- <sup>2</sup> For another example of the consequences of the "fictive" teacher identity, see Sumara's (1995) article "Counterfeiting," in which he discusses how these identities produce fictionalized teacher responses to literature read with students in schools.
- <sup>3</sup> This course occurred during the students' first "professional semester." During this semester students took several other courses (educational psychology, subject-specific curriculum courses, and foundations courses) and completed a six-week practicum.
- <sup>4</sup> At the time this course was taught we were both graduate students in the Department of Secondary Education at the University of Alberta.
- <sup>5</sup> These research transcripts were part of Sumara's (1994) study, *The Literary Imagination and the Curriculum* (published in 1996 as *Private Readings in Public: Schooling the Literary Imagination*).
- <sup>6</sup> This comment was made during an interview the first author had with a student as part of a study of the experience of reading literature in school (Sumara, 1994).
- <sup>7</sup> Ingrid made this comment during an interview about her reading and teaching of Wyndham's (1955) novel *The Chrysalids* to a group of Grade 10 students. This interview was part of the study described in note 6.

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