

At the Edge of Language: Truth, Falsity, and Responsibility in Teacher Education

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Introduction

Imagine yourself in a school gymnasium....

I got into some problems with the administration. I tried to split up one group because they were unevenly matched. The previous day they were just killed so I tried to split them up and I didn't explain my rationale beforehand or while I was doing it.... So I tried to move them over and somehow the students collaborated that they wanted to stay on the same team.... I found out this after...the fact that they actually switched ... and went back to their own teams...like they were before.... So I expressed my frustrations, you know, silently say[ing] I just don't like it. [Laughing] So they saw me do this and I chewed out a student beforehand.... And so she obviously got really upset about it and the students who actually collaborated to form their own group again...talked her into...going to the administration and filing an incident report that I had driven a student to tears and swore at them.... So I'm in the lunchroom interacting with the staff ... and the Principal comes up and says, "What happened in class today?" I didn't mention what I expressed in frustration and I said nothing like this happened ... because I knew what it was going to look like.... (Reza, student teacher)

We have been unsettled by Reza's narrative for some time now. In part we were stunned that a prospective teacher would act so aggressively towards

a student and then lie in his own self-interest. In part we were disturbed because we had grown up believing that lying or “bearing false witness” or intentionally deceiving another was just not morally responsible. However, we also felt some uneasiness with our dis-ease. The incident raised a series of questions concerning the relationship between subjectivity (identity), language and responsibility in the case of this student teacher: Why would Reza lie? What would it mean to tell the truth on this occasion? How is Reza’s subjectivity constituted in this moment of so-called deception?

The case study reported here is part of a larger, multidisciplinary study of conflict in the professional education of teachers, physicians, nurses and social workers (Phelan, Barlow, Myrick, Rogers & Sawa, 2002). How is conflict experienced, understood, negotiated and contested? What do these understandings tell us about what counts in professional education and the profession itself? These are the questions that preoccupy this team of researchers, representing the four helping professions of Education, Medicine, Nursing and Social Work. These are some of the questions that are poorly understood as evidenced by the absence of a substantial literature on the topic.

The first difficulty posed by the absence of inquiry into conflict in professional education is that we lack knowledge and experience in educating for difference, whether that difference is cultural, philosophical, personal or other. The curriculum in professional schools tends to focus on widely accepted bodies of knowledge and skills that comply with provincial or professional regulations and are presumed to be transferable from one individual to another. The focus is on avoiding conflict, harmonizing differences and ensuring *sameness* of outcome (Carson & Johnston, 2000). The second difficulty emerges when we try to address issues of conflict or difference in coursework. The absence of secure knowledge about how conflict manifests itself and is understood awakens ambivalence among students in a context that is already fraught with the uncertainties of forming professional identities (Carson & Johnston, 2000). So, conflict often becomes one other thing that prospective professionals must endure as part of professional preparation’s rite of passage.

We hope to address both these difficulties by theorizing about how prospective and practicing professionals “work difference” in field education (Ellsworth & Miller, 1997, p. 245). “By working difference, we do not mean “working through difference.” Rather, “working difference” suggests a constant kneading of categories and separations. We do not view conflict as necessarily problematic in professional education; rather, it is a crucial site for the production and legitimization of particular kinds of professional identities, particular “truths” about what constitutes knowledge and “best” practice in schools, hospitals, community and social agencies.

On Language and Lying: A Poststructuralist Framework

Our dis-ease with Reza's experience and our interpretation of it might be traced to our post-structuralist understanding of truth and its relationship to language. Raised within a Platonist tradition to believe that "truth is found, eternal, and universal" (Diprose, 2001, p. 153), writers like Foucault and Nietzsche have led us to think otherwise. Their model of language rejects a metaphysics of presence, that is, that there is "a world 'out there' that is simply 'present' and to which all our understandings (meanings) are in relation" (Osberg & Biesta, 2003, p. 87). Language mediates experience, subjectivity and truth.

Discourse is "a particular way of talking (and writing and thinking)" that involves certain shared assumptions (Belsey, 1980, p. 5). Discourses organize meanings and practices and allow certain ways of thinking and acting to be considered correct or acceptable, while others are viewed as incorrect or unimaginable (Britzman, 2000). Discourse, as a domain of language use, ensures that knowing must always fall short of a correspondence ideal of descriptive adequacy (Breazeale, 1979).

Innocent Lies: Producing Truth

If language is not "a transparent, neutral medium for the communication of timeless truths or the reflection of things in themselves," then we must ask, what is truth? Foucault answers,

Truth is of the world; it is produced there by virtue of multiple constraints.... Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is the types of discourses it harbours and causes to function as true: the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true from false statements, the way in which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures which are valorized for obtaining truth: the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault, 1979, p. 46)

Truth, then, is something society or groups within a society (e.g., a profession) have to work to produce, rather than something, which appears in a transcendental way. Different discourses represent different interests that are constantly vying for "truth" status or power. "The site of this battle for power is the subjectivity/identity of the individual" (Weedon, 1997, p. 40). For example, cognitive theories of learning have achieved such status in education and have succeeded, despite the earlier dominance of behaviourism, in disciplining teachers to see, act, and think in particular ways in relation to their students (Popkewitz & Brennan, 1998). The difficulty is that educators forget that our construction of learning as a cognitive act is simply that: a construction and not a truth.

Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions; they are metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force, coins

which have lost their embossing and are now considered as metal and no longer as coins. (Nietzsche 1979, p. 84)

Forgetting our own constructions and endowing them with the status of “truth” is for Nietzsche a form of lying or falsity. This is unconscious, innocent lying according to conventions that one has inherited and involves lying in several ways: “linguistic convention informs experience by universalizing different perceptions under a single concept; giving the expressed perception the status of truth involves forgetting that truth is constructed; and imposing one’s own cultural perspective on others involves denying the possibility of other perspectives” (Diprose, 2001 p. 153). We no longer see the coins, to use Nietzsche’s example, but only the metal. If preservation of social/professional life is the consequence of truth, then one would have a social/professional duty to lie unconsciously in this sway (Diprose, 2001).

Uncommon Lies: Misusing Conventions

The second kind of lying, for Nietzsche, is also innocent and involves “misus[ing] fixed conventions by means of arbitrary substitutions are reversals of names (81) ... a matter of just seeing things differently to the majority because one’s experience is informed by different conventions or is in some other way uncommon” (Diprose, 2001, p. 153). Such lies threaten the stability of the status quo and are typically silenced. A subject who decides to act outside established discourses, for example, must establish the right for him/herself to speak or act otherwise. The difficulty associated with doing so is substantial as we risk ourselves and our actions being named ‘insane/not rational’, ‘taboo/immoral’ or ‘false/dishonest’ within sanctioned discourses. One’s legitimacy is always in question when one defers from the norm.

During the Apartheid in South Africa, for example, taking responsibility for one self involved “moral risk” for some (Babbit, 2001, p. 1). “When one’s prospects for self-realization are undermined by existing social expectations, one has to pursue and impose alternative conceptions of meaningfulness” (Babbit, 2001, p. 1).

The situation of moral risk is one characterized by “explanatory burden” (Babbit, 2001, p. 5).

When we explain an action or event, we give reasons for it; we identify the cause. In situations of moral risk, in which adequate meaningfulness is being pursued, the identification of appropriate causal relations requires more work, more storytelling, and telling oneself the right sorts of stories requires direction. (p. 5)

Stories are important means of struggling to identify what is salient in one’s understanding of what is good or true and what constitutes one’s obligation or duty in a given situation (Clark & Swensen, 1998, p. xxvi).

Willful Lies: Preserving Truth

A third kind of lying is “willful lying in order to preserve truth” (Diprose, 2001, p. 154). Willful lying sanctioned by law was necessary to support policies of forcible removal of indigenous children in Australia and elsewhere: “We are going to see your mother,” rather than “We are going to fly you out of here,” “Your parents are dead,” rather than “I’m not going to tell you where they are” (Diprose, 2001, p. 154). Such willful lying was designed to sever indigenous children from what was considered to be foreign and harmful ways of life to what was perceived to be the common good. Of course, because good is not common and truth not universal, willful lying is harmful to its targets in that it denies their truths and their cultures within its regime of truth. It is in this sense that truth can become “more life-denying the more it forgets it is convention and hence the more inflexible it becomes” (Diprose, 2001, p. 155).

How, we wonder, are truth and lying implicated in teacher education? Our question is a limit question, always both urgent and unanswerable in any context-free way (Lather, 1996). As such our intent is to intertwine two readings of Reza’s case in a helical fashion. The first reading provides a realist tale that stems from our interviews with the triad of participants during the field experience. This conventional reading resonates with the ‘official’ story of Reza as a student teacher, living as it does within the accepted institutional structures, practices and relationships of the practicum. Our second (mis)reading is informed by Nietzsche and is an attempt to deconstruct the discourses that structure and provide meaning to the realist tale. It is perhaps the other side of truth, the lying involved, that is of interest to us in this second reading. We ask: Does lying characterize professionalization, that is, the education and entry into the profession, of prospective teachers? Does lying attest to the alterity that professionalization offends? Does professionalization support the destruction of difference within the profession of teaching?

To view professional identity as unfinished does not imply the deconstruction of the profession; rather, “it establishes as political the very terms through which [professional] identity is articulated” (Butler, 1999, p. 148). By studying the narratives of student teachers, mentor teachers and faculty advisors, we begin to catch a glimpse at a profession in the process of being made, caught, as it were, uncertainly in the act of composing its image and its truths (Bhabha, 1990).

Research Design

In this three-year, multidisciplinary study (2002–2005) of conflict in professional education, we make use of the notion of “collective case studies”

(Berg, 2001, p. 229). The collective case study includes three triad relationships (student, field instructor and faculty member) in each of four professional faculties—Education, Medicine, Nursing and Social Work. Each profession provides one instrumental case (Stake, 1994) that when combined with the other three serves a supportive role in studying conflict in professional education in all four fields. We are focusing the study in the context of four professional programs at a large research university in Canada and on the major field experience—practicum—in the final year of each program.

Data Generation: Teacher Education

While there are three interactive and mutually supportive stages of data generation in this study, we draw on data from Stage 1. During Stage 1 we collected stories about conflict from triad members involved in the practicum. Typically, in an attempt to make the familiar strange, we conducted the interviews with participants from a discipline other than our own. For example, it was usual for a researcher in Education to interview participants from Social Work. All members of the research team engaged in analysis of all the transcripts, however. In this manner, we hoped to ensure that the study is not only *about* four different professions; it also contains perspectives *from* four different professions: interpretations from Medicine, Nursing, Social Work and Education of themselves and of each other.

Participants were all involved in the major practicum, which was thirteen weeks in duration. We announced the research study at the beginning of the practicum semester by giving brief presentations in a series of seminars and orientations made up of practicum students. During those presentations we emphasized that while we were interested in conflict, we did not necessarily view conflict as problematic. We were primarily interested in how and what differences emerged during the practicum and how these differences, be they cultural, philosophical or personal, were worked/negotiated/played out. It was approximately one month or so into the practicum experience that students began to contact the researchers with a view to participating. In Education, four student teachers came forward and all were visible minorities, two males and one female. Reza was the first to volunteer and he did so within the first month of his practicum.

Once students expressed interest, we asked for contact information for their faculty advisors and field mentors. While some students suggested that they contact their own advisors and mentors regarding the study, others asked if we would do so. One mentor teacher declined involvement but we proceeded to interview the student and faculty advisor nonetheless.

The case study we draw upon in this article includes a series of three separate conversations with each member of a triad in teacher education: a student teacher, Reza, his partner teacher, Carol, and faculty advisor, George, during practicum.

During our conversations with the mentor teacher and faculty advisor we asked about previous experiences in field experience, reasons for their involvement and their views on the teacher education program as well as on teacher education more generally. Student teachers spoke of their program experience overall (campus and field), their reasons for choosing teaching and their ongoing experience of student teaching. We asked all participants to describe their current practicum experience and any notable incidents. We asked each of the participants to provide their understanding of conflict and asked if and why they considered their relationship within the field experience to be conflictual. During the second and third interviews, we invited participants to return to experiences previously recounted with a view to reconsideration in light of current experiences. All conversations were audio taped and transcribed.

Interpretation and Representation

Critical discourse analysis of the data allowed us to identify and describe discourses of conflict but also to explain how and why particular discourses were produced in the context of field education (Teo, 2000). Not only did we wish to affirm participants' experiences and understandings of conflict, we wished to interrogate and explain how and why they came to understand conflict in the way they did. Critical discourse analysis focuses on language as the primary instrument through which dominant understandings are transmitted, enacted and reproduced (Foucault, 1972; Pecheux, 1982).

In the process of telling stories about field experience, mentor teachers, faculty advisors and student teachers drew on a discrete set of linguistic resources. The stories they told us told on them as well, as it were. During analysis we first attended to participants' narratives in terms of their central themes, rhetorical devices such as metaphors, contrasts, hyperboles and euphemisms, coherence, presuppositions, disclaimers, word choice, and style (Van Dijk, 1997).

We then attended to the grammar implicit in participants' narratives. Student teaching is a relational category: a student teacher relates to the students, the mentor teacher, and the faculty advisor. These relationships are not rigid but fluid and shifting. They could be described in terms of a network with various nodes and clusters shifting over time and space. For example, while a student teacher may be positioned as powerful in relation to students within the confines of a classroom, s/he may be

repositioned in the expansive space of a gymnasium. The idea of a network of relationships within which the practicum is set is close to the linguistic notion of transitivity.

Transitivity concerns the linguistic manifestations of the roles of participants and the ways in which they relate to each other. It focuses on agency—who does what to whom? In a sense, the linguistic nexus subject-verb-object is the establishment of a worldview, of a view of the ways in which relationships are drawn. (Footitt, 2002, p. 88)

An examination of grammars—who does what to whom—implicit in the narratives participants told about various events provided some insight into the workings of power in institutions. Reza's utterance, "I tried **to move them** over ..." is one example. Implicit in this short phrase is a worldview of teaching with teacher as subject—centre of control—and students as an objective, physical body that can be moved from one space to another. Power relations produce forms of subjectivity and behaviour rather than repressing them (Mills, 1997). Transitivity analysis invites a consideration of power, control and agency (Footitt, 2002). At its root is the belief that participants could have spoken otherwise, that "a range of choices is open to a writer/speaker and that any 'text' could conceivably have been produced in a different way" (Footitt, 2002, p. 89). Choices are not predetermined but are conditioned by the discourses that are available to us at that time.

The discursive meanings have been articulated in stories already told, stories of good and bad student teachers/mentor teachers. The circulation of story and its constituent metaphors and grammars, then, is a key mechanism in the perpetuation of a discourse.

We may suspect that there is in all societies, with great consistency, a kind of gradation among discourses: those which are said in the ordinary course of days and exchanges, and those which give rise to a certain number of new speech acts which take them up, transform or speak them, in short, those discourses which, over and above their formulation, are said indefinitely, remain said, and are to be said again. (Foucault, 1980, in Mills, 1997, p. 67)

Yet, while the traces of certain discourses may persist, there is always the possibility of potential meanings yet to be unfolded within future narratives (Schrag, 1997). In the context of conflict, for example, participants may find themselves having to seek out alternatives as old metaphors break down.

The horizon of narrativity thus suffers a temporal imprinting, emerging from a past and advancing into a future, recollective of stories that have become part of a tradition and anticipative of accounts, both fictive and factual, yet to be rendered. Narrative comprises the continuing context, the expanding horizon of retentional background and a protentional foreground, in which and against which our figures of discourse are called into being, play themselves out, and conspire in the making of sense. (Schrag, 1997, p. 19–20)

The hope that guides this inquiry is that we identify the sources of thinking and acting otherwise that may exist in the discontinuities and the breakdowns of teacher education. Such are the imaginings.

Lying According To Convention: Stories Of Misunderstanding

I tried to split up one group because they were unevenly matched.... So I tried to move them. (Reza)

Having previously rejected mixed skill groups as “one of her [Carol’s] silly rules,” Reza decided to change his team forming practice and to incorporate his mentor teacher’s idea. Although he recognized that same-skill groups had “just killed” the students the day before, he also felt “under pressure” to adapt Carol’s practice to his own, “just to placate” her.

... [I]t was more a matter of letting go of my beliefs ... to kind of make things go smoothly and integrating her philosophy into my practice and ... it didn’t feel right to be doing that but I had to do it given the circumstances. (Reza)

The circumstances to which Reza refers were rather difficult ones from his perspective.

She [teacher] was pushing me to get into full-time teaching when I felt I wasn’t ready. And so, she dragged me kicking and screaming into this period.... Like she was in the position of power ... her letter of recommendation or her evaluation at the end meant everything.... I couldn’t confront her with it because I knew what kind of roles we were playing there.... I just went with the flow. You know, whatever she asked, she got kind of thing. (Reza)

Carol perceived Reza as not being “well-prepared” and as having insufficient “practical knowledge” with which to engage students in competitive team sports, a central element of the prescribed junior high curriculum. George, the faculty advisor, accepted the terms of Carol’s evaluation and agreed that Reza tended “to rely a lot more on personality ... as opposed to his subject knowledge.” However, George wondered if Reza’s reluctance to become involved in team sports was cultural: “Now, why is it? Because he hasn’t been included ... or he hasn’t really had a genuine desire to be included in those things? I’m not sure if it’s a cultural thing that he’s moved away or if it’s a genuine disinterest.”

Initially, Reza accepted the terms of his ascribed incompetence and described himself as “unfamiliar with the subject matter”; he explained that he was “staying ahead of the game by researching” each evening at the school. However, this was not enough. Reza’s “whole attitude” continued to be a problem for Carol and she wondered about his “professional fit.” She contrasted his experience to her own. As a student teacher, she had been “worried,” “up late,” “tak[en] the teacher’s suggestions” and “really

work[ed] hard to make a good impression.” He, on the other hand, arrived at school minutes before the students. He was “arrogant.” Moreover, he needed to make a greater effort to fit in with the other teachers in the physical education department; instead he took his newspaper to read during lunch.

Carol and Reza became increasingly frustrated with one another. He perceived himself as working hard to fit in (he had joined the staff sports league) and to master the curriculum. She continued to perceive him as problematic and “different” from her previous student teachers. While Carol continued to emphasize punctuality, Reza dismissed her concerns as a guise for other issues. He perceived her as an incompetent mentor teacher. He described himself as being prematurely “dragged kicking and screaming” by Carol into full-time, solo teaching because “the teacher had her own idea of what [he] should be doing there” and that she didn’t understand the philosophy of the program because she hadn’t read the handbook.

I guess the fault lies with ... different people’s expectations and knowledge of the program.... A better articulation of the University’s vision of what I should be as a student teacher because obviously she wasn’t prepared ... then maybe he [George] should have told her, you know, “This is what is going to happen with the student teacher and this is what we expect from them and this is what you should expect from them and so on, and it was just kind of left up in the air.... I guess that’s the real world. You know, you never really know what the expectations are going to be. I guess the fault lies with ... different people’s expectations and knowledge of the program.... (Reza)

While Reza was troubled by Carol’s expectations, Carol continued to be troubled by Reza’s lack of responsiveness to her suggestions.

That’s part of the test too ... what is this person going to do with the information you’ve given them ... the experience they’ve had here? What are you going to do with that information? What are you doing to meet these goals? (Carol)

Finding the Code

Field experience is one example of how we try to bring so-called “real life experiences” of teaching and learning into teacher education. However, the two problems that exist with such a presentational approach are that first, it results in one dimensional ways of learning and second, it relies upon the assumption that the world contains some original presence which is separate from our knowledge of it, and which can therefore be simply and immediately presented (Osberg & Biesta, 2003).

... presentational forms of learning end up in socialization and adaptation and make it difficult to create critical distance and therefore result in one-dimensional ways of learning.... (Osberg & Biesta, 2003, p. 87)

The task of socialization is to find the code or classification of reality ready made and to accommodate to it (Barthes, 1977). The code in this case is the achievement of understanding/avoidance of misunderstanding, and as a result, success is akin to attaining sameness and continuity between teacher and student teacher. The task of the student teacher is to understand and to take the classroom teacher's practical advice. Reza learned that his practice must reflect that of his partner teacher. The specification of a collectivity such as "my other student teachers" allows Carol to identify a norm against which particular student teachers like Reza are isolated and assessed. Learning to teach, then, becomes an exercise of smooth adaptation to that norm.

On one level, Reza has found the code; he is conscious of the "game," as he calls it elsewhere, that is afoot. Recall his statement, "I said nothing like this happened because I knew what it was going to look like" or "I knew what kinds of roles we were playing here." He complies in order to placate. On another level, however, he appears unconscious that he is engaging in a similar "game" with his own students. Reza's conception of the teaching-learning relationship as a mapping of what he knows/desires/plans for and what the students can learn, is telling. The task of good students is to follow the instructions of the physical education teacher and to demonstrate their compliance through their actions. "Tough days" are those when students don't get this.

On tough days it's a feeling that I have of running against a wall. I'm saying something but it's not going over to the students or to who ever I'm trying. To communicate ... and them not getting the message, either because of my inability to impart the message effectively or just because they're not in the mood to be listening to me that day. And I try different strategies to try to correct that on the spot, but often it ends up being a class that I don't really accomplish much. And that's how I kind of measure my success is how much I accomplish, and bad days are the ones where I feel that all the objectives that I laid out haven't been accomplished and stuff, so that's how I define it. (Reza)

The frustration and incredulity expressed above are also evident when the students either seem not to understand his request to change teams or simply refuse to comply with his wish.

I go, like, "You're a really good student ... why is this not working? Like, I asked you to move over this and why ... why are you not doing this? (Reza)

"For a curriculum or pedagogy to "work," some classroom moments—and ideally all of them—have to result in a fit between what's being taught and the student's understanding" (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 45). Ironically, Reza has learned exactly the script of his partner teacher, although she may see it otherwise: "I don't understand...I'm trying to help you here. Why has he not taken my advice?" Carol echoes Reza's incredulity at the non-compliance of his own students.

Eliminating Difference

“Getting it” is akin to achieving “a good fit” between what has been planned and achieved outcomes, in a word *sameness*. The notion of getting what the partner teacher intended and demonstrating it in one’s lessons is part of a broader script for teaching itself: “Not being prepared is not a good thing because things often go wrong in that class where you’re not prepared” (Carol). We spend a great deal of time with student teachers helping them plan such excesses as mis-understanding and non-compliant behaviour OUT of their day. By promoting and sustaining a culture of understanding and smooth functioning, teacher education prescribes a particular set of relations of self-to-self and between self and others.

Thus, the space of difference is effectively wiped out of pedagogical relations. Difference is a problem to be avoided and it represents something that can “go wrong” in a lesson. Difference must be explained away in some fashion by reference to culture [“not interested in team sports”], intellect [uses personality rather than knowledge] or character flaw [arrogance]. Difference has to be overcome in some way [threat of evaluation, working harder, knowing more content, changing attitude]. There is always an excess that cannot be eliminated or explained away. References to Resa’s “culture” punctuate the transcripts as the classroom teacher and faculty advisor struggle to understand why Reza doesn’t achieve professional “fitness” despite their best efforts.

The problem of “getting it” is a problem with the project of understanding itself and its binarized opposite—misunderstanding. We do much to avoid this acknowledgement, however, when we insist that student teachers would get it “if only they had the right cultural competencies, intellectual skills, or moral virtues” (Ellsworth, 1997 p. 47). This, of course, allows understanding itself to escape scrutiny. It preserves understanding and its expression in field experience as the proper, desired, and ultimately attainable relationship that defines success for student teachers. This narrow interest in understanding makes it possible to act as if a student teacher’s relationship to the teacher education program and those associated with it is NOT “a messy and unpredictable event that constantly exceeds *both* understanding *and* misunderstanding” (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 46). By presenting ourselves as only desirous of student teachers’ understanding, we address them from a place that is supposedly neutral and universal. We constantly, in our choice of texts, structure of program or curriculum experience, place student teachers within relations of knowledge, desire, and power. Student teachers in turn enact modes of address that place us within competing relations (Ellsworth, 1997).

The situation is confounded in part by the movement to professionalize teaching and to improve the accountability of teachers and teacher educators (See Alberta Education, 1995). As a result, the curriculum in

schools of education tends to focus on widely accepted competencies that comply with provincial or professional regulations and are assumed to be transferable from one individual teacher candidate to another. Anything other than this approach (e.g., Inquiry-based teacher education) awakens ambivalence among policy makers, teacher educators, student teachers and school personnel about the value and rigour of teacher education.

In this study, a student teacher's question regarding why we teach art history in the junior high school was recently met with the responses from classroom teacher: "If you think like that, you shouldn't be an art teacher." Within days the student teacher was asked to leave the placement school. Later, he reflected on his experience saying, "I learned that it's probably best to lie to everyone just to save my own skin." The narrative of understanding/misunderstanding breeds fault (you didn't get it) or guilt (how could you not get it?) and as Trinh Minh-ha would have it, this is a discourse of arrogance (1989). The repressive operations of this meta-language of understanding/ misunderstanding see to it that the moment student teachers open their mouths they are immediately asked to account for themselves, to salute and show their identity papers (Cixous, 1981).

Telling the truth involves working "according to fixed convention" (Nietzsche, 1979, p. 84) demonstrating punctuality, accepting partner teacher's advice, being knowledgeable in a practical sense, being humble, fraternizing with other teachers but even more importantly perhaps, buying into the project of understanding or "getting it" as the ground of pedagogy. Not doing so involves an unacceptable deception because of the potentially harmful effects that not lying can have on the stability and preservation of the dominant discourse of the teaching profession. Will they lie? Will they tell the 'truth'? Will they lie in order to tell the truth?

Lying As Misusing Fixed Conventions: Grammars Of Reporting

If this continues to happen, then we'll be talking to your advisor. If it continues to happen after that, then you're at risk of not passing this practicum.... They know in the end they're getting a reference letter, right? They know that. (Carol)

The narrative [evaluation] that the partner teacher will write at the end of the day ... is going to be the most important thing in their career probably.... (George)

I would rather exist in subordination than not exist. (Butler, 1997, p. 7)

Local school boards in Alberta insist that "a final narrative from the ... teacher accompany the employment application," and in George's words, "the narrative ... is the most important thing ... the stepping stone to their career." Typically, letters of reference are cut and paste from the narrative

evaluations. Reza began to fear that even the conferences he had with George during which he “spoke out” about his conflict with Carol, “would come back to haunt him.” His anxiety level was heightened because he understood that Carol’s end of term evaluation “meant everything.” Two weeks prior to the end of the semester and the writing of the narrative, tension mounted. George explained that with just two weeks to go student teachers think that, “Well, if I do anything wrong now, it’s going to be written on the narrative and that’s ... so important.... They feel as though they’re being watched which they are.” Then the incident described at the outset of this paper occurred. Reza “chewed out” the non-compliant student in the gym.

So I expressed my frustrations, you know, silently say I just don’t like it. [Laughing] So they saw me do this and I chewed out a student beforehand.... (Reza)

The female student, who, interestingly, goes unnamed throughout the transcripts, and who will be known here as Chloe, asserts herself as subject of the action. If Reza constructs the practicum as a “game,” Chloe seems unaware that such a game is in play. She takes the incident in the gymnasium seriously and files an official “incident report.” In doing so, she transgresses ‘normal’ relations of power. Reza refuses to accept her agency suggesting that it was her “group” who “talked her into ... filing a report.” Positioned as the object of yet another official document—the incident report—he cannot afford to accept its ascriptions; the more he does so, the more his competencies shrink (Minh-ha, 1989).

Cautioned by the principal to phone Chloe’s parents before they received the incident report, Reza was further supported by Carol who acknowledged that while he “may have done some things wrong, junior high school girls can blow things out of proportion.” Chloe was, in Carol’s terms, “being a pain.”

Stabilizing Meaning

Communication, now in its written form as incident report and narrative evaluation, continues to be viewed not only as an unambiguous, transparent and a singular act of meaning but one that allows for voice and fair representation and truth. Carol observes Reza and provides empirical evidence of her judgement of his competence as a student teacher. Chloe, again based on her experience with Reza, is urged by peers to report the event in the gym. Reza counters the facts/truth, from his experience. The school principal summons the facts/truth with his question: “What happened in class today?” Each speaker is positioned as a source of knowledge; each can represent their experience using words as signs of

a real substance, “the incident” that occurred elsewhere (Weedon, 1997). However, our capacity to make language work for us is problematic and over-rated (Butler, 2004). Meaning is historically contingent, contextually bound, socially constructed and always shifting (Britzman, 1997). Incident reports and narrative evaluations are the results of our desire to stabilize meaning, to render it unitary, coherent and conventional.

The predominance of a representational view of language allows teacher education to keep order, to keep the web of interactions structured. It does so ontologically through repetition—the monotony and probability of what will happen and how it will work out—of teachers’ comments on the evaluation narrative wherein “good” student teachers begin to look interchangeable, their differences indecipherable. Not unlike the acts of evaluation, themselves, “good” student teachers become “islands of regulation in a sea of randomness” (Bauman, 1993, p. 123), objects of relationships that are monitored, standardized and codified. The narrative evaluation operates as a visible institutional morality. It establishes, repeatedly, over and over for each student, what counts as the good student teacher. It further establishes what does not count. In doing so, it addresses the student teacher in terms of who the program or the profession wants them to be. Through the final narrative evaluation, the mentor teacher who holds out the promise/threat of continued existence plays to the student teacher’s desire to survive, to be intelligible within accepted norms.

While attempting to ensure uniformity of and conformity to conventional ‘standards’, we may end up with more difficulty that we managed to get rid of (Bauman, 1993, p. 5). The constraint of affect and emotion is striking in our interviews with Reza and his teacher. He does not name the student. Neither does he call his teacher by name in a series of three, hour-long interviews. There is a sense of dissociation, a refusal to connect with the experience, or suffering, of the student, and perhaps, even to his own suffering. He justifies both his “chewing out” the student and later his “lying on the incident report” in terms of the “pressure” he felt. Is a diminished affective reactivity his only recourse if he is to survive in the profession? When power relations are asymmetrical triad members are allowed an extremely limited margin of freedom. In order to outwit or resist the supervisory system, Reza may have resorted to stratagems such as denial, in order to remain intelligible within the script of the good student teacher.

Effacing the Other

We begin to see how representational practices can efface the face of the other. Cautioned by the principal to phone Chloe’s parents before they received

the incident report, Reza is further supported by Carol who acknowledged that he “may have done some things wrong” but that “junior high school girls can blow things out of proportion” and who described Chloe as “as being a pain.” We are struck by the phrase “blow things out of proportion” which seems akin to Nietzsche’s second kind of lying as “misusing fixed conventions by means of arbitrary substitutions or reversals of names” (p. 81). Being “in proportion” would seem to suggest that Chloe was being reasonable within the terms of dominant discourses. To be “out of proportion” suggests being off kilter or being unreasonable. Interestingly, Chloe engages in reverse discourse, wherein she utilizes an accepted institutional practice (incident report) and its implicit mimetic function to report the truth of the incident, to question institutional norms such as a teacher’s authority. In her misuse of convention, she is seen to be lying. Nietzsche (1979) suggests that “the group [w]ill exclude the liar...not so much because of the “deception” itself but because of the harmful effects that such lying has on the stability of the dominant culture” (p. 81). The principal, Carol and Reza become allies in the face of the other that is the student or the parent. By seeing things differently to the majority (principal, classroom teacher, student teacher), Chloe puts herself at risk. Her legitimacy is in question and she is denied the capacity of a responsible subject. The profession protects itself. Through the teacher’s categorization of “junior high school girls” and the principal’s suggestion of a preemptive phone call, Chloe is disallowed from mounting a challenge against the effects of Reza’s actions.

However, complications and contradictions persist. Chloe becomes an object of the action [Carol had a talk with the Principal but wouldn’t discuss it further with the researchers] but so too Reza, as Carol struggles to understand the incident. As a teacher, Reza is forgiven. As a Muslim, he remains suspect.

I don’t know if it was a cult ... a gender issue was part of it there or not. I mean he certainly didn’t ask a guy to move. The relationship with the girl didn’t deteriorate and I didn’t see it continue to happen so I thought well, maybe it’s a cultural thing.... He’s a male student from a culture where women are not highly regarded.... I certainly wouldn’t ask him.... (Carol)

Not unlike Chloe, Reza’s capacity for responsible/responsive action is thrown into question. Carol’s speech disassembles him into a series of traits: “male,” “from a culture where women are not highly regarded,” “arrogant” and the totality of the moral subject is reduced to a collection of attributes of which no one can conceivably be ascribed moral subjectivity. As Nietzschean “over men,” teacher and principal are allowed the capacity to accuse, to judge, to choose. Groups—student teachers, junior high school girls, multicultural others—“are incapable of following the voice of reason consistently since [they are] constantly in danger of being diverted

and led astray by emotions" (Bauman, 1993, p. 121). "It's a culture thing" (Carol). Reza and Chloe are both positioned as other. Their varied forms of resistance operate as both a recuperation of power but also a retention of that subordination (Butler, 1999). Their respective resistance has a tinge of the carnivalesque—a temporary transgression [Recall Reza's laughing as he retells the story of the incident to the researchers] but in the end, the potential disruptive or deregulating impact of responses are neutralized. Chloe apologizes, fearful that she is "in trouble." Reza pronounces the incident as "a misunderstanding"!

And yet, Reza appears ambivalent. Consider his description of the meeting in the principal's office. Chloe, Reza and the principal are present.

The Principal brought us in ["so the student got pulled from class"] and said, "Talk about what happened."... [T]he Principal spoke to her with me in the room as well. So, he's asking her questions ... stared her down ... like a witness or something like that.... Or I'd look away and try and give her a chance to express what's going on. [S]he explained what was going on ..., that she ... took it in the wrong context and didn't understand what was going on, but she thought she was in trouble ... because of all this that had happened ... so the Principal reassured me that she's not in trouble and I reassured her.... I said, "Look, this was just a misunderstanding." (Reza)

While on the one hand, he maintains his position of denial and uses the narrative of understanding/misunderstanding to sustain that position, he also seems to be concerned for Chloe's well-being. He tries, for example, to avert his gaze from her as she speaks. He seems disturbed by the principal "star[ing] her down" and the fact that Chloe thinks that she is in trouble. The tension between the fear for his own survival and his anxiety about hurting Chloe becomes more evident as our conversation with him ensues. Although he never regrets "lying on the incident report" (although his admission to the researchers is ambivalent in this regard), he does express regret at losing his temper. "I learned to keep my temper in check...to get a perspective on things ... just a class ... one class. It's not do or die. But then the pressure's on when the partner teacher is watching you."

A show of pity, "a sympathetic emotion directed toward another's pain and suffering" (Diprose, 2001, p. 150), is not, however, an expression of responsibility for mistakes made. In the end, he remembers his own situation and forgets that of Chloe. Pity is of little benefit to the sufferer, Chloe; it may well be a vehicle of domination and appropriation of the other (Nietzsche, 1974).

Pity is egotistical, because it interprets the other's suffering in terms of one's own experience and so "strips away from the suffering of others whatever is distinctly personal." (Diprose, 2001, p. 160)

What is personal about suffering is the other's attempt at self-expression, to reinterpret her experience. To pity is to risk subsuming the other's truth and accompanying self-formation within the truth of the dominant discourse; pity, so understood, is a form of assimilation (Diprose, 2001). Might we also interpret Carol's response to Reza as a form of pity without responsibility? Carol explains,

I don't like thinking I'm responsible for somebody not getting hired. So I would maybe write it so it's not all there in black and white.... (Carol)

Reza graduates and the accepted terms of teaching and teacher education are preserved.

Truth As Life-Preserving Fiction: Imaginings Of Otherness

Because in-between grounds always exist, and cracks and interstices are like gaps of fresh air that keep on being suppressed because they tend to render more visible the failures operating in every system. (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 41)

In our readings of Reza's case to this point, the teaching profession and teacher education appear to be somewhat self-interested. Both appear as projects of fulfillment, rather than projects of responsibility or even surprise (Todd, 2003). Student teachers, mentor teachers, faculty members and administration seem to provide little more than "embodied performances of a sterile script" (Todd, 2003, p. 42). There seems to be little opportunity for student teacher or teachers to consider the relations set into play by the rational proceduralism of official documents such as narrative evaluations and incident reports or phone calls to parents. As such communication between and among actors seems predetermined, decided upon in advance of the encounter, set within the terms of the larger narrative of "the good student/student-teacher" and the "diligent administrator." It is evident that both presentational and representational practices rely on "a metaphysics of presence"—"the idea that there is a world 'out there' that is simply 'present' and to which all our understandings (meanings) are in relation" (Osberg & Biesta, 2003, p. 87). Simply put, participants believe their own stories. The decidability and stability of teaching and teacher education prevails. And yet, as Trinh Minh-ha (1989) writes, "cracks" exist.

Finding Cracks

Interestingly, it is during the phone call to Chloe's mother where the conventional narrative of understanding/misunderstanding begins to break down. As such, the incident offers some insight as to where the condition of responsibility in teaching and teacher education might lie.

He asked me to call the parents ahead of time and explain your [sic] point of view before they get the letter from the student.... This particular student's

parents were ESL as well so I can speak their language but I tried to explain over the phone. But the woman took it really, really like seriously. I'm trying to explain the situation.... She doesn't understand what I'm saying. (Reza)

Reza initiates the phone call at the principal's request confident that explanation would not be difficult. It is at this juncture that we hear that Chloe's mother's is a second language speaker. So too Reza. Both spoke Farsi as their first language. Language was on his side, he assumes. He anticipates the communicative act. However, language fails him. The mother (whom we shall call Anjum, but whose name does not appear in the transcripts either) responds with feeling, taking the incident seriously. Reza recounts his surprise and frustration. It is in the mother's refusal to understand clearly, that is her refusal to locate herself with conventional truth, that we move beyond teaching as a project of self-interested fulfillment towards teaching as a project of possibility and surprise (Todd, 2003).

By phoning the mother, Reza enters the non-social, the so-called a-rational private world that fails to follow procedural norms or serve procedural discipline in the form of incident reports. Anjum is upset about her daughter's well being; her responsibility cannot be neutralized. Her concern for her daughter is disruptive, refusing regulation or closure. As Kristeva (1980) has shown us maternity is an experience within the Symbolic that allows a manifestation of the borders that divide the Symbolic from the semiotic. The maternal exists on the edge of language. To refuse understanding is to attend to the alterity of the person. She does not interpret her daughter's plight as that of a kind, of say, "junior high school girls," as purely symptomatic of themes she can pull from her arsenal of knowledge, as though the meaning she imposes is all there is to the story (Todd, 2003). Unlike the institutional response that sought to know Chloe in order to *know* its duty, there was no need for the mother to possess or know the daughter in order to *feel* her responsibility. So how do we, with Reza, begin to appreciate that it may not be so much a matter of misunderstanding what is being said as it is a matter of the impossibility of ever knowing the other through these significations (Todd, 2003). Communication is inherently ambiguous because it gestures beyond any stable meaning toward the very otherness of the other that marks her as radically distinct from myself. And it is this relation to the other as one of unknowability where the ethical promise—and and risk—of ambiguity lies" (Todd, 2003, p. 33).

In Closing

A profession, not unlike a nation, is a manufactured product, a cultural artifact, a matter of shared imaginings (Anderson, 1991). A large part of our imagining teaching, as we have seen here, is its realist narratives

of understanding/misunderstanding, getting it/not getting it, fitting/not fitting. Teacher education plays a crucial role in perpetuating “understanding/misunderstanding” as a habitual pattern of inference in the profession. By promoting and sustaining a culture of “understanding,” teacher education prescribes a particular set of relations of self-to-self and between self and others. What seems to panic us most in the profession is difference. Language fails us constantly. Communication is ambiguous. Yet, we persist in trying to wipe out, through understanding (and mechanisms such as narrative evaluations and incident reports), the space of difference between a teacher and a student, and in doing so we erase and deny the very possibility of responsibility (Ellsworth, 1997).

Our explorations of Reza’s case suggest that lying may well characterize professionalization and that in doing so it attests to the alterity, different ways of being and knowing and acting that professionalization offends. The possibility of rejecting a representational view of language and communication would invite an acceptance of the unknowability of the other, that is, the otherness of the other. Difference, conceived as a relation between self and other rather than a quality of either, can then be lived as the site of responsibility.

What makes it a responsible response is its openness to an unanticipated future, where its signifyingness remains open-ended to the other’s predicament, as both a student and a person. Thus, when I show love, generosity and affection, I do so to ensure that further openness and communication are possible, and that the other is given the space and time to become themselves responsive/responsible subjects.... (Todd, 2003, p. 41)

Even Nietzsche, it should be noted, was keen to make some sense of the ordinary distinction between “truth” and “lies” and suggested that truths might also be judged by their utility for human life. In other words, we make distinctions between truth and falsity so that we can live well together as social beings. These distinctions are perhaps necessary lies/illusions or “life preserving fictions” (Breazeale, 1979, p. xxxvii).

A Reflexive Endnote

Throughout this paper we have argued that teacher education, and more specifically the narrative accounts of teaching and student teaching performance, rely largely on a mimetic view of representation. Our position as researchers is ironic, at best, given our own assumption that we as narrators can access and represent the reality of the practicum experience for Reza and his colleagues. We recognize that the mimetic view is evident in a series of textual moves in our own account.

- 1) *The establishment of authority.* First, we established authority by speaking with the authoritative ‘we’ as in ‘we were there’. Of course, only one of us was present to the participants and for the brief time of the interviews. The rest of us had a series of interview transcripts with words divested from their embodiment in persons. Our authority is further established by our claim of an appropriate research design and theoretical framework.
- 2) *The assumption of clarity.* Second, by creating interpretive clarity around the narratives provided us we present this research narrative to the reader assuming that the object (or performance or manuscript) to be presented will be viewed as an unproblematic and discernible shift from the readers’ initial ignorance (absence of knowledge and experience of this case) to knowledge. As researchers we could be accused of facilitating a kind of “imaginative merging” of two cognitions thereby shutting down the very question of difference (Britzman, 1997, p 33). We come dangerously close to assuming that we know what the participants mean and what motivates them as they speak. It is difficult to disentangle factors of propositional truth and social relations in a participant’s motivation (Fairclough in Mills, 1997, p. 152). Ambivalence is important here as we acknowledge the possibility of alternative interpretations or readings. Moreover, the intertextuality implicit in our use of direct speech from participants juxtaposed with their descriptions of “official documents’ such as incident reports suggests that there is a fundamental ambivalence in who is speaking. We have constructed Chloe, for example, through what others have said about her. Our interest is not in simply describing what we think is going on in this particular network of relationships but rather in illustrating the complexity of the workings of power relations within professional education as a whole.
- 3) *The removal of dialogue.* While we have tried to create the vestiges of dialogue by relativizing the official story of a student teacher’s experience with a deconstructive tale, we have opted for clarity rather than try to represent the research team’s ongoing conversations about the ethics of studying and representing difference. What was our responsibility in Reza’s case? Ought we have stepped in and to do what exactly? Was it right of us to stand by and watch Chloe be silenced? Ought we have sought out Chloe for an interview? To what end? In whose interests? What role did our respective positioning as Catholics, Jew and Secular Humanist play in our interpretations? The dialogical and situational nature of the experience of researching is banished from the text. We embrace clarity and abandon ambivalence.

The relationship of teaching/learning/researching is separated from the final product it generates—this article.

- 4) *The texturing of difference.* We use a range of contrastive or antithetical relational structures and expressions such as X instead of Y, X is different from Y (Fairclough, 1995). There is a strong sense that participants have fallen short of some standard of better/more responsible practice.
- 5) *The narrativizing of utterances.* While participants presented narratives of their experience, none laid out the narrative as we do here. We have created a narrative by drawing on a range of comments, impressions, utterances shared by participants.
- 6) *The play of the concrete and the abstract.* One event in a gym is used to organize that narrative and is recalled repeatedly to support the generalization that a representational view of language supports teaching, learning and teacher education.

Do our accounts suffer from rigidity, certitude and normalizing power? Or, is there some space for newness or difference? The key to producing narrative accounts differently may lie in our rejection of a representational view of language and an acceptance of the unknowability of the other, that is, the otherness of the other. This would entail becoming incompetent writers, writing against our selves, writing for difference rather than sameness, allowing ourselves to be unsettled by otherness and not simply fit it within our cognitive frames. Rather than succumb to narrative smoothing, we have tried to focus our account on discontinuities, ruptures and the unexpected (Lather, 1998). We have tried to attend not just to the stories we tell but also to how research narratives are told and staged. In Barthes (1977) terms, this means writing obtusely, challenging the universality of symbolic meaning (the already said) and questioning common sense as seamless, inviolate truth.

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