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Narratives that nudge: Raising theoretical questions about reflective practice

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Abstract

The narratives of pre-service teachers in this paper tell a story which interrupts the notion that reflective practice necessarily produces a transformative self. Although this argument is not new, the extent to which the utility of reflective practice is taken for granted in the current context of teacher education (beginning and continuing) remains greater than ever. We show how this normative construction of reflective practice and the understandings of self that it produces in the narratives of pre-service teachers are undermined in the context of schooling. We suggest that further research is needed in this area. Through this effort we raise questions about the spaces in which reflective practice is assumed to operate and the ways in which the reflective self it assumes has been disconnected from society and relations of power. We situate ourselves as teachers, teacher educators and researchers who desire theoretically informed positions from which we can begin to critically address, extend or displace our current understandings of these issues. This paper raises questions about reflective practice and its relationship to pedagogy within the current context of schooling.

Introduction

Since the earlier part of the twentieth century, reflective thinking has received attention (Pedro, 2005) as a human process with the potential to make change. Teachers have been, and still are, urged to engage in reflection as a way of improving their practice. In much of the imagery of popular culture, however, reflection has been represented as a 'natural' afterthought of 'journeying' through one's life. This is almost always normatively underpinned by a neo-liberal discourse in which individuals can 'self-actualize' and hence 'write' the stories of their own lives in any way they

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choose. Often, when transformation towards what is perceived to be a better trajectory has not been achieved, individuals are blamed based on the assumption that it is necessarily their fault.^{2, 3} These subject positions of late capitalism, complicit with whatever workings of power, merge with issues of identity in teacher education and teaching where reflection has various, different meanings. What happens to this nexus in the context of schooling? As a young, male teacher and teacher educator one of the authors has experienced alienation in Australian schools and often felt unable to 'write' a different future other than this for himself, unable to join others in schools to imagine many different futures. A young, female colleague who is also a teacher and teacher educator voiced similar thoughts; this made space for dialogue about these experiences. Both have listened to many students in teacher education tell similar stories about experiences in schools and this paper is the product of a struggle to find theory that helps make sense of such lives and to provide theoretical fragments that support students in teacher education to make sense of their own lives (hooks, 1994). This is what has led us here.

The design of the approach was driven by this desire. In crafting together this story, it has always been our intention to present a situated account, one that speaks for our experiences, not those of other people. We have jointly authored this text and wish to be as explicit as we can about our relations in this endeavor. To this end, we have tried as best we can to indicate how this representation has been produced, sometimes through awkward, unconventional devices (such as footnotes in titles that explain the processes we engaged). It is our intention to invite responses that help us learn and create bigger conversations than just our own about reflective practice and its relationship to pedagogy within the current context of schooling.

A partial underview of the reflective practice literature⁴

The literature about reflective practice discusses the variety of definitions used and referred to by professionals, as well as experienced and beginning teachers (Borko, Michalec, Timmons, & Siddle, 1997; Strong-Wilson,

² I would like to thank Andrea Allard for her presentation, titled 'Views from the margins: analysing the narratives of young women who leave school early', on Thursday, 18th May at the University of Melbourne and for reminding me of this point in a personal conversation.

³ As we were editing the final version of this paper, Sarah sent an email to Dean (authors), which said the following: 'I listened to Ian Thorpe's entire press release speech on msn last night and he talked a LOT about reflection. It was really interesting. I'm sure it's not relevant to the paper but he did talk a lot about reflection and retrospect. Doing this research has made me pick up on the term 'reflection' a lot. When ever I hear it my ears prick up. People say 'well, looking back on it, I would have done it better' or 'looking back on it they were the best times of my life' etc'.

⁴ This section was written by Narelle Lemon and later edited by Dean Pierides who added the title, tables and inserted the section into the rest of the text.

2006). Reflection is understood to have a different meaning in different circumstances. Zeichner (1994) states that there is confusion in the term reflection as it is presented in the teacher education community. Loughran (2002, p. 33) writes that for some it 'simply means thinking about something'. Richert's (1990, p. 525) definition adds more detail suggesting that reflective practice is 'the ability to think about what one does and why—assessing past actions, current situations, and intended outcomes—it is vital to intelligent practice, practice that is reflective rather than routine'. For Zeichner (1983) thinking reflectively means situating one's thinking within the social, political or economic contexts of schooling. Hatten and Smith (1995, p. 34) describe reflection as 'deliberately thinking about action with a view to its improvement.

Dewey (1933) wrote in the early twentieth century about the term reflection, and even though it has been said that he was before his time, Dewey's concept of reflection as an active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge that may be conscious and voluntary has been supported by those following in the later twentieth century and early twenty-first century. It has been widely supported that reflection is a process in which a person tries to make sense of thought (Brookfield, 1995; Jay, 2003; Loughran, 1996; Wilson & Clarke, 2004), something puzzling, troubling or interesting (Schön, 1983; Walters, Seidel, & Gardner, 1994) while simultaneously reflecting on and evaluating the understandings which will have an effect on future actions (Brookfield, 1995; Hativa & Goodyear, 2002; Loughran, 1996; Schön, 1983; Walters et al., 1994).

Reflection when mentioned in the literature is usually referred to as an instance of purposeful thought (Loughran, 1996; Wilson & Clarke, 2004), thinking about what one is doing (Jay, 2003). It entails a process of contemplation with openness to change, a willingness to learn, and a sense of responsibility for trying our best.

When taken further, Walters *et al.* (1994) identify reflection in terms of three component attributes: reflections in light of complex problems or projects, reflections that reveal pursuit of an individually defined problem; and reflections that record deliberations on standard of quality. This theory is developed in Killion & Todnem's (1991) research, which break down the classification into three types of reflection, those being reflection-on-action (thinking about action), reflection-in-action (reflecting during action) reflection-for-action (thought then action follows).

Recent research on reflection considers the analysis of types of reflection more closely. Here we have found Jay and Johnson's (2002, p. 77) typology particularly helpful:

Typology of reflection: dimensions and guiding questions

Dimension	Definition	Typical questions
<i>Descriptive</i>	Describe the matter for reflection	What is happening? Is this working, and for whom? For whom is it not working? How do I know? How am I feeling? What am I pleased and/or concerned about? What do I not understand? Does this relate to any of my stated goals, and to what extent are they being met?
<i>Comparative</i>	Reframe the matter for reflection in light of alternative views, others' perspectives, research, etc.	What are alternative views of what is happening? How do other people who are directly or indirectly involved describe and explain what's happening? What does the research contribute to an understanding of this matter? How can I improve what's not working? If there is a goal, what are some other ways of accomplishing it? How do other people accomplish this goal? For each perspective and alternative, who is served and who is not?
<i>Critical</i>	Having considered the implications of the matter, establish a renewed perspective	What are the implications of the matter when viewed from these alternative perspectives? Given these various alternatives, their implications, and my own morals and ethics, which is best for this particular matter? What is the deeper meaning of what is happening, in terms of public democratic purposes of schooling? What does this matter reveal about the moral and political dimension of schooling? How does this reflective process inform and renew my perspective?

Source: Jay, J. K., & Johnson, K. L. (2002)

Jay (2003) reports how earlier work (Van Manen, 1977) described levels of reflection, lower being reflection of technical application of knowledge and skills. He goes on to report that mid level reflection emphasises examination of underlying assumptions, with the highest level referring to values and beliefs with a moral emphasis.

Zeichner (1994) discusses a framework for reflection where each level is developed from a different underlying assumption about the aims of education. He defines categories of reflection, such as academic, social efficiency, developmentalist, social reconstructive, and generic, with no one being more important than the other. The levels of reflection have also been explored by Valli (1997) with identification of five types of reflection (following in a set hierarchy) these being technical, reflection in/on action, deliberative, personalistic, and critical. Here we have found Lee's summary table useful (2005, p. 702):

Level/content of reflective thinking		
Proponent	Theme	Level/content
Habermas (1970)	Theory of cognitive interests	Empirical-analysis: explore education through a theoretical knowledge base Hermeneutic-phenomenological: fundamental justification of & legitimatization of common practices Critical-theoretical: self-understanding, emancipatory learning & critical consciousness
Van Manen (1977)	Levels of reflection	Technical rationality: methodological problems & theory development to achieve objectives Deliberative rationality: pragmatic placement of theory into practice Critical rationality: value commitment toward educational process
Valli (1990)	Images of teaching	Technical rationality: non-reflective, technical Practical decision-making: technical within a reflective context Inculcation/indoctrination: moral, ethical, & social in a nonreflective mode Moral reflection (1. deliberative, 2. relational, and 3. critical)
Grimmett et al. (1990)	Levels of reflection	Technical: instrumental mediation of actions Deliberative: deliberation among competing views Dialectical: reconstruction of experiences
Sparks-Langer and Colton (1991)	Orientations to reflective thinking	Cognitive Critical Narrative
Mezirow (1991)	Levels of reflection	Non-reflective action Habitual action Thoughtful action Introspection Reflective action: content, process, and premise
Lasley (1992)	Pedagogical functioning	Technical Conceptual Dialectical
Taggart (1996)	Reflective thinking pyramid	Technical level Contextual level Dialectical level
Kember et al. (1999)	Coding categories for reflective thinking	Habitual action Introspection/thoughtful action Content reflection/process reflection/content and process reflection Premise reflection
Lee (2000)	Depth of reflective thinking	Recall Rationalization Reflectivity

Source: (Lee, 2005, p. 702, table 2)

As discussed above, the term reflective practice has many meanings (Grimmett & Erickson, 1988; Richardson, 1992) and carries diverse interpretations of the notion of *problem* (Loughran, 2002). There is a tendency to look at reflective practice and the relationship to problems negatively, i.e.: what went wrong? What do I have to change? Why didn't that activity work? (Alger, 2006). Loughran (2002, p. 33) suggests that 'what the problem is, the way it is framed and (hopefully) reframed, is an important aspect of

understanding the nature of reflection and the value of reflective practice'. 'Problem' however should be one of the starting points, not the only starting point (Dewey, 1933; Loughran, 2006). Dewey (1933) discussed reflective phases in which reflective thought flows out of one another and support one another; although a problem may be important, it often 'seems to attract more attention than may be warranted and in doing so afforded great status than other aspects of the reflective process' (Loughran, 2006, p. 45). Value from those aspects of practice that were successful must be acknowledged (Loughran, 2006). With regards to process, we have found Lee's summary table useful (2005, p. 701):

The process of reflective thinking

Proponent	Theme	Process
Dewey (1933)	Reflective thinking process	An experience Spontaneous interpretation of the experience Naming the problem(s) or the question(s) that arises out of the experience Generating possible explanations for the problem(s) or question(s) posed Ramifying the explanations into full-blown hypotheses Experimenting or testing the selected hypotheses
Schön (1987)	Reflective thinking approach	Reflection-in-action Problematic situation Frame/reframe the problem Experimentation Review consequences/implementation
Pugach and Johnson (1990)	A peer collaboration framework	Reframing through clarifying questions Problem summarization Generation and prediction Evaluation and reconsideration
Gagatsis and Patronis (1990)	Progression of reflective thinking	Initial thoughts Reflecting on the subject and trying to understand Discovery and (partial) understanding Introspection Full awareness
Eby and Kujawa (1994)	A model of reflective thinking	Observing Reflecting Gathering data Considering moral principles Making a judgement Considering strategies Action
Lee (2000)	Reflective thinking process	Problem context/episode Problem definition/reframing Seeking possible solution Experimentation Evaluation Acceptance/rejection
Rodgers (2002)	Reorganized Dewey's phases	Presence to experience Description of experience Analysis of experience Intelligent action/experimentation

Source: (Lee, 2005, p. 701, table 1)

Mason (2002, p. 7) introduces the notion of 'noticing' in relation to reflective practice and suggests that 'every act of teaching depends on' how what is noticed will influence the nature of reflection and action. Throughout the process of noticing, and through the framing of self, 'reflection becomes a necessary mechanism for the enhancement of professional learning and therefore engenders much more active and demanding prospects for practice' (Loughran, 2006, p. 52). Following this reflection becomes a part of the work of teachers.

It is the involvement in learning that is important in the development of one's use of reflection (Loughran, 1996, 2006). In our role as teachers we learn, teach and use reflective and metacognitive processes (Wilson & Clarke, 2004). It is Schön's (1983) notion of 'reflection on action' and 'reflection in action' that set the foundations for teacher reflection and the sense of framing and reframing, whereby 'the self might be engaged in (as well as learn through) the reflective process' (Loughran, 2006, p. 43). Reflective inquiry should lead to continuous professional development (Alger, 2006). In a very 'practical' sense, we believe that Ward and McCotter's rubric could be of use (2004, p. 250):

Reflection rubric				
	Levels			
	Routine Self-disengaged from change	Technical Instrumental response to specific situations without changing perspective	Dialogic Inquiry part of a process involving cycles of situated questions and action, consideration for others' perspectives, new insights	Transformative Fundamental questions and change
Focus (What is the focus of concerns about practice?)	Focus is on self-centered concerns (how does this affect me?) or on issues that do not involve a personal stake. Primary concerns may include control of students, time and workload, gaining recognition for personal success (including grades), avoiding blame for failure.	Focus is on specific teaching tasks such as planning and management, but does not consider connections between teaching issues. Uses assessment and observations to mark success or failure without evaluating specific qualities of student learning for formative purposes.	Focus is on students. Uses assessment and interactions with students to interpret how or in what ways students are learning in order to help them. Especially concerned with struggling students.	Focus is on personal involvement with fundamental pedagogical, ethical, moral, cultural, or historical concerns and how these impact students and others.
Inquiry (What is the process of inquiry?)	Questions about needed personal change are not asked or implied; often not acknowledging problems or blaming problems on others or limited time and resources. Critical questions and analysis are limited to critique of others. Analysis tends to be definitive and generalized.	Questions are asked by oneself about specific situations or are implied by frustration, unexpected results, exciting results, or analysis that indicates the issue is complex. Stops asking questions after initial problem is addressed.	Situated questions lead to new questions. Questions are asked with others, with open consideration of new ideas. Seeks the perspectives of students, peers, and others.	Long-term ongoing inquiry including engagement with model mentors, critical friends, critical texts, students, careful examination of critical incidents, and student learning. Asks hard questions that challenge personally held assumptions.
Change (How does inquiry change practice and perspective?)	Analysis of practice without personal response—as if analysis is done for its own sake or as if there is a distance between self and the situation.	Personally responds to a situation, but does not use the situation to change perspective.	Synthesizes situated inquiry to develop new insights about teaching or learners or about personal teaching strengths and weaknesses leading to improvement of practice.	A transformative reframing of perspective leading to fundamental change of practice.

Source: Ward, J. R., & McCotter, S. S. (2004)

Data and methods (for inquiry and representation)⁵

This paper attempts to fill the lacuna in 'research that includes the perspectives, questions and voices of cooperating teachers and prospective teachers' (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005, p. 16). Following this suggestion by Cochran-Smith and Zeichner, I attempted to engage three former students from the Graduate Diploma in Education at the University of Melbourne, at the end of their course, in a conversation about particular experiences over the year, the spaces in which these occurred and the role of reflective practice. With an awareness that much of the research about 'learning to teach' has been 'largely silent' with regards to the contribution it makes 'to the well-being of those being researched' (Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998, p. 167), the intention was to design a set of questions that would allow all of the participants to learn about ourselves and this object of study through our engagement with the ideas found and those generated; the intention from the start was to engage dialogically. The one-year course is structured in such a way that students have tutorials running all year in their subject areas along with other semester-long subjects. Anthony, Sarah and James were enrolled in the same tutorial group for both semesters in a sequence of these semester-long classes that focuses consecutively on 'learning and teaching' and 'curriculum and assessment'. I was their lecturer in these classes and from the start of the year they forged a relationship with me, each other and the rest of the students in this class where a strong sense of belonging had developed.

At the end of their course I invited them⁶ in an email to join me for an interview and to work together through some of the general areas of 'teacher education and teacher practice'. These particular participants were selected because they made company with each other, were roughly the same age and had previously expressed an interest in continuing to develop their ideas about pedagogy after the semester was over. If they were still interested in participating, they could reply by email to set up a date and include a response to two questions:

1. What are your thoughts on becoming a teacher?
2. How have you experienced this in various spaces throughout this year?

In their acceptance of the invitation, Anthony and Sarah responded to the request with an exuberant desire to contribute; I then structured their interview questions based on their responses. All interviews began with me inviting the participants, with the option to decline and hence not participate, to 'co-author'.⁷ When they accepted, I asked them to tell me

⁵ Written by Dean Pierides.

⁶ I also invited one other female student who declined because she was traveling out of state and had various family commitments during the dates that I was available.

⁷ I use this term very lightly here because the most significant part of the production of this text is the whole academic year of classroom interactions, email exchanges, telephone

what they thought this work was about. James was busy at the time and not able to respond to the questions by email. After he accepted to participate I asked him the two questions in the interview instead. Following this response, I asked him as I had with Anthony and Sarah, to tell me what he thought the research was about.

All three thought that this kind of work must be like a science experiment. That is, they initially assumed that there must be some hypothesis and that they were being tested against this. When asked what they thought all of this was about, Anthony, Sarah and James responded respectively: 'the perception that beginning teachers have on the profession'; 'different pathways that education should go'; and, 'some sort of tracking or... evaluation of... people's perceptions of what it is to be a teacher, of what it is to do teaching'. All three interviews were followed by an informal discussion where I shared how social science studies are not necessarily positivist and may not always be structured using the logic of experimental design. This argument is predicated on the assumption that qualitative research can answer descriptive, explanatory and causal questions (Eisenhart, 2006). They then provided some further insight regarding what we discussed in the interview. At this point, our power relations shifted and we worked together to shape how these ideas might be represented. I have included this in the section of this paper titled 'Discussions and conclusions after the interviews'. After 'writing up' the data stories, I invited Anthony, Sarah and James to review them and provide any insights of their own in a joint discussion with all four of us participating. From this, conclusions were drawn and used as a structure for writing the final section of the paper. The very final draft was edited by all of us to produce the current version of this paper.

Data stories that 'nudge': Magical binders with watershed moments or flies on the wall that are bottom of the rung in fluid places?⁸

Anthony

For Anthony, reflective practice is 'the only way to go'. It's about 'stop[ping] along the way to think' and asking questions about what you are doing. It is 'definitely a skill that takes training' which does not just switch 'on and off', and it takes time but 'not a whole lot of time'. 'Non-reflective thought' is the easier option; in this mode when you have to take a position on an issue 'you either swallow it or you don't'. Reflective thought, on the other hand, is 'not a task' with yes or no answers. It's not, 'like a book', which

conversations and face-to-face discussions that precede it. Even the interview itself contributed more significantly to the meanings herein than the production of the text itself.

⁸ Anything that appears inside quotations in this part of the paper was said in an interview, or added later, either by Anthony Weare, Sarah Knowles or James Fiford depending on the subtitle. The sections were assembled in dialogue with Dean Pierides and each section was then discussed again and edited collaboratively with the person it represents.

you can take into school with you and just 'use that book for x amount of years'.

He conflates reflective practice with reflective thought more generally and suggests that it's 'almost a kind of response to, to things that have happened, rather than an action'. This lack of agency silences Anthony when he engages in reflective practice in schools:

I mean reflective practice is just that. It's just you sitting there nodding your head thinking there is no way that I am gonna ever do this or be this kind of person. Or, you sitting there thinking man, this is a really good idea I wanna try and, try this out when I'm a teacher.

As a student teacher, Anthony felt like a 'fly on the wall' and he says that 'you're going in alone' when you engage in reflective practice. Teachers in schools are not using reflective practice 'to the extent that they could be'. He believes that 'maybe it hasn't been articulated as reflective practice for teachers' and attempts to engage in conversation about it may very well be futile. He recounts in the first edit of this paper:

I walked into a placement enthusiastic and positive to try these wonderful inclusive and free teaching and learning techniques that looked so attractive on paper at university. When I reached the school I realized I didn't have the support of my colleagues as much as I did at university. They almost trusted in my ability to run a negotiated curriculum and inquiry based projects but I had virtually no experience in them what so ever. Not once did we sit down to try and negotiate meaning between my young and relatively inexperienced knowledge, and their more established knowledge of experience but most importantly that of their class. I told the teacher I wanted to try this, or try that. And they gave me the freedom to do so, and I'm grateful for that, but I did feel as though when they did fail to achieve the results, reflective thought involved abandoning them altogether, or that a certain class isn't capable of that, rather than tweaking it slightly. It felt as though there were two ways to do things, the old way, and every other way.

Even though he is rendered voiceless when his attempts are short of what the teachers perceive to be perfect, he resists the temptation to reject reflection completely, suggesting a different form of reflective practice that engages a 'collective consciousness' in which he has the support of his colleagues. This is his way of breaking out of the paradoxical loop created when people are expected to learn through a constructivist paradigm using instructional pedagogies. He believes that change is possible but understands that this political project is partial:

to say that it's the, the eh, the final answer, the final solution would be undermining reflective thought in the first place... reflective practice is, does have a place. So it's not completely useless, and it's not the be all and end all.

Although his 'motivation's completely shifted' and on the way to our interview he was telling his brother that he's 'stoked', he is still quite worried about a number of things. Amongst these is a concern about becoming a teacher who uses a *magic binder*.⁹ Anthony says that, even though the teachers did acknowledge that the contents of this collection need to be adapted to suit different classes, they never really explored the idea that perhaps from the students' perspective everything they were doing was part of a bigger, more exclusive picture.¹⁰ He is concerned about the reasons why this might happen:

I worry that that I'm not gonna have time to engage in, in reflective practice... And, I worry that after a year then I'll have my magic binder and I'll use it year after year after year.¹¹

Reflective practice, as he has defined (refined?) it, has worked well for Anthony in a 'university setting' but once you take it 'out' and 'into' the 'school setting' the 'support network' is not there and you are 'basically all alone in the school'. The supervising teachers, many of whom will be mentors to beginning teachers, 'lack... understanding of what you're trying to do':¹²

Everything that my supervising teachers pulled me up on. So and so was doing this, so and so was doing that, I saw it. I saw it. I spent about two minutes thinking about it. I just chose not to act on it... everything they brought me up on, I knew I'd d-, I knew that I'd done or hadn't done.

He is clear about the fact that his 'supervising teachers were open' to his 'point of view', but it wasn't until he 'towed the line' that his 'marks turned around'. When he tries something new and it fails, Anthony wants someone who will 're-think it together' with him not someone who will instantly drop it because they 'can't deal with it'. He suggests a collaborative form of reflective practice in which we engage in dialogue, state our opinions and 'if you like it, take it, if you don't throw it right back at me'.

⁹ Anthony describes this as a kind of repository of ideas and teaching artefacts used as a reference by most teachers with which he worked.

¹⁰ In this kind of reflection, the ultimate in reflective thought, Anthony suggests that you call into question your very being.

¹¹ He adds in the first edit: 'because it is the easy way out, there is no time to really re-invent the wheel for every year, every class, and every student; that kind of practice would definitely be the most effective way to teach'

¹² Anthony later adds: 'They seem to have a different motivation for being in front of the class. It is more about survival than actually getting through to the students. You can't do this, you can't do that, time, money, ability, all factors which limit the kind of education you provide to the students. I felt like the university was teaching us one thing, and the supervising teachers were teaching us that it's all nonsense, and that this is the real-world. A senior educator said to me the other week that "university doesn't teach you to survive". This concerns me, considering it came from a leading teacher at a progressive state school. As if there is some force out there that we as beginning teachers are waiting to face. It results in the culture of cynicism, but I believe it starts elsewhere'.

Sarah

For Sarah, reflective practice 'could mean two things'. It is either a 'professional development type thing' or a form of assessment (e.g. asking questions such as 'what can I do better?'). She didn't elaborate on the former but for the latter a very clear distinction was made between reflecting 'truthfully' and 'untruthfully'. For her first two teaching rounds, Sarah says this:

I always was ignoring in my head because I just wanted to get through the day, I just wanted to get my mark at the end of the day... I'd go home in tears, and I'd be, I'd be disgusted with myself because I was teaching how I'd been taught for fifteen years or whatever. So I sort of, I'm not only thought I was wasting my time but I felt guilty because I thought I was wasting their, the students time, ummm, and they weren't producing work.

This suggests that 'reflecting untruthfully' is not about the reflective process itself but about which manifested thoughts are uttered publicly. Sarah identified her final teaching practicum as the 'last chance' and decided to teach 'revolutionary theatre' with one of her classes. This lent itself well to reconfiguring her pedagogical approach. She can 'actually trace back sort of steps and little turning points with that particular class' and, with regards to her supervisor, she 'could start to stand up' for herself in response to 'some of the things that he was saying'. Perhaps this was *truthful* reflective practice which makes public some the tensions that Sarah previously held privately. For example,

I came up to my supervisor and I said, look I really want this to be an opportunity to be able to teach how I, how I really want because I haven't for the last two rounds and there's things that I wanna try, ummm, and if they fall flat on their face then that's fine but I really need to do this because I haven't had a chance to do it. And, um, and regretted that, but then I, I got my teacher, my supervisor saying well that's all very well and yet, you know, what did he say? Um, yeah you'll, you'll, you'll you will start out, you will start out trying to get kids to think for themselves but then eventually you'll just work out that they just wanna be told what to do. So, um, he thinks that he's had enough reflective practice, that it's not gonna work, and um, (tut), and basically I suppose that, that ex, um... experiential knowledge um, he really thought that, that whatever he knew was more valid because he's been doing it longer, and that there was no point trying any more. Um, and I definitely felt very much like a student teacher and like anything I had to say or try was really not very valued, because what would I know?

This makes Sarah feel 'like the bottom of the rung' and the 'first year-out teachers' told her that they 'felt the same'. In conversations with teachers she always feels instructed, particularly when they say 'it takes a few years for you to develop a... teaching style'. Sarah thinks this is 'crap because shouldn't you be trying to develop all the time?' The teachers she has talked to 'think that they reach this certain point... they think they've reached this nirvana, or whatever' and this stops them from trying anything new. At the same time,

she wonders whether 'you don't see teachers walking around like student-teachers sort of working out ways in which to approach things' because they 'aren't allowed to have that doubt because they're employed and... they have to look like they know what they're doing'. She says this might be deterring them from reflecting.

Nevertheless, she told a story about an incident where two students were 'very rude' to her and the teachers punitively punished them without even consulting Sarah. Furthermore, what 'pissed [her] off' most about this incident was how 'basically it was all about, you know, let's fix this problem and let's, let's not bother about all the crap that's already happened, let's just fix it'. Instead, Sarah advocates for acknowledging 'the good and the bad, so that you can progress' rather than just getting 'rid of the problem'. She says that this is where reflective practice is needed.

James

According to James, reflective practice is about 'constantly having an open mind', 'not being content to have found something that works and sticking with it because it works to a certain aim that you have at the start', asking questions about how things work, whether it would work for 'another group', and, 'this concept of thinking about your thinking, so thinking deeper than, that just uh, achieving a goal or an aim'. He has trouble locating where it happens because his thoughts have shifted over the year. Some of his 'major understandings of, of what it is to, to if you like be a teacher' have come from less 'fluid places' but over time these have become 'much more fluid'. With this shift, he describes how he sees his students:

I see very little difference now, so, it's not that my students in my coaching are the same students in my classroom and yet I'm almost imagining they are one in the same now. So yes, they're individuals but I don't see that um, that they, yeah that they are divided by, because one's in the cricket team and one's in my class for English and, or my Korean student who is, who are adults, I don't see them as being different, the, the motivations for me are the same, and, and the joy that I get from each of them, have been equal and at different times.

It is also hard to locate because there are no 'watershed moment[s]'. When asked to pinpoint spaces, he says that he will 'interpret spaces as... different scenarios'. These scenarios for James are the 'three placement schools', the tutoring he does with some adult English-language learners and sports coaching. When challenged to discuss why he neglected to mention *scenarios* outside of specific educational interactional settings he divides his response into 'mind reason[s]' or 'brain reasons[s]' and 'personal relationship' reasons. For the former he talks about the 'strands' of his life of which the educational settings take up the most significant portion. For the latter, he talks about his partner, friends and family. He suggests that his 'entire friendship group... is based in teaching'.

Admittedly, James says that reflective practice is 'a term that [he doesn't] necessarily ascribe to', 'a catch-cry or an idea that is bandied around' with the assumption often being made 'that if someone has given some thought to what it is they've done they have deeply reflected'. However, he does believe that his teacher education has allowed him to 'increase... [his] knowledge in this... area', knowledge about himself, and it has given him 'another language to talk with'. He says that what others call reflective practice, has 'become more and more important' to him, 'it has gone from something I'm learning, to acquire a skill to do a certain job' to 'actually, a part of me', 'inside of me'. In schools, he sees a 'massive divide', so massive that he 'couldn't comprehend... the level to which [he] would be shocked' when he first encountered it. He projects into the future:

But I am amazed at what I see, where I'll be going to in terms of an institution or a community, how little that meshes with (pause) how I'm feeling about teaching. And that, I'm not even being disappointed about it, I'm ack..., I'm being challenged by it amazed by it, yes I have disappointment but it's not in terms of a, all is lost disappointment. Um, and it's not to say there's not sufficient signs that I, I can share this with those in the community already. I, I don't doubt that people have, same ideas as me about aspirations and, and doing the best they can and improving themselves constantly, improving in reflecting. Uh, it's just that institutionally overall I see that that is, a real struggle because it's quashed or it's relegated to, to some sort of um, pie in the sky ideal.

Teachers are not willing to change in this regard because it 'suits their ends to stay the way they are. He highlights the futility of most professional development programs by saying that they are 'just to fill blocks', that they don't necessarily have a real structure and a real outcome' or that the 'real result' is hardly ever 'positive for the kids'.

So on the one hand they're, they're advertising this and they're trumpeting this, um, new pedagogy, new whatever, but it really doesn't suit their purpose because they're, they're smoothly running that they run to a timetable and um, and therefore they make it very difficult for the teacher. And unless the teacher is willing to, unfortunately almost go against the grain or buck the trend or rock the boat, it's not going to happen. And from what I see too many... when..., who I see at the moment, don't want to rock the boat, not so much for getting in trouble, just because it makes their life a bit more difficult. That's disappointing to me.

His motivations 'don't fit in with... probably... any school at the moment, that [he's] seen'. This is because 'they have their pragmatism... it's still too easy for them to say, we have to dispense with the idealism... in order to get the job done, be it time constraints, be it curriculum constraints'. The 'real fear' that James faces is that he 'end[s] up in a place where um, you literally have to fight every time to implement what it is you believe in'. At the same time he is confident that 'if you are literally living what you, you are

espousing then you're going to have an impact'. He is aware that many practicing teachers perceive this, and have said that they do, as the naïveté of a beginning teacher:

[teachers] would say, we have the luxury of saying that because we don't have the burdens of marking, we don't have the constraints of time, we don't have the, you know, the classes with their shifting daily, you know, complexities, we don't have all that. So we have the luxury to sit here and say that.

Towards the end of the interview, after we discussed in more detail what this work is about, without being conscious of it James started referring to it as 'reflexive practice' rather than 'reflective practice'.

Discussions and conclusions after the interviews: The in-between space where life happens¹³

Anthony suggested that his motivations for reflection were entirely different from those of his supervisors. The supervising teachers were more interested in control, behaviour management and knowledge transmission whereas he was more interested in inclusivity and relationships. He said that on his first two teaching rounds he 'just wanted to do well', whereas throughout his third teaching practicum he was more interested in focusing on pedagogy. He said:

If it wasn't for my critical analysis on the third round, it would have been at best a pointless hurdle jump and at worse it would undermine all the things that I think are the right way to teach.

Anthony felt that what needs to be argued is that reflective practice is contestable and means different things to student and beginning teachers than it does to more experienced teachers. He also suggested that his focus on relationships is more about creating a sense of belonging and not about management and control. In many ways, he was reflecting and consolidating many of the ideas about pedagogy we had visited in our course throughout the year (for example Boomer, 1992; Brady & Marsh, 2004; Dixon et al., 2004; Freire, 1970; Hay & Moss, 2005; Kincheloe, 2004; Kohn, 1993, 1996; McLaren, 2003, amongst others).

In a similar discussion after the interview, Sarah said that reflecting on how much she has changed over the year has been a motivation in itself. One of the arguments she felt might need to be made and considered more closely is about the representational processes and formats used for reflection. She suggested that emailing friends and lecturers might have

¹³ The first part of this title is quite literal. That is, the ideas were drawn out of the conversations that followed the interviews and a structure was created based on these ideas. Dean Pierides then assembled the text which was edited together with Anthony Weare, Sarah Knowles and James Fiford.

become a more significant form of private reflective expression than journaling and that the public form of this might in fact be blogging. Documentation in her teacher education course, usually in the form of journaling or written reflections on lesson plans, is problematic and not conducive to what she previously referred to as *truthful* reflection. She also felt that reflection should not be about changing tricks but rather about attempting to change everything. She moved our discussion to what she called the 'in between space' where 'life has happened', 'personal changes' have happened and where she has 'changed entirely as a person'. She said: 'I couldn't teach how I want to teach now with who I was'.

These comments are the consequence of a time where 'paradoxically, local, praxis-oriented inquiry has become increasingly attractive to the state (oppressive or otherwise) as a tactic to be employed in the governance of educators and their work' (McWilliam, 2004, p. 119). The corporate 'packaging' of this kind of inquiry renders it apolitical, something of which beginning teachers like Anthony, Sarah and James are acutely aware. For example, as Anthony says, practitioner inquiry is not like a book, in Sarah's words a professional development type thing, or according to James filling blocks without real results for students, with tools represented as six steps to reflection in a box.

Conclusion¹⁴

Although we agree that there is a need for more 'detail about how professional educators can help beginning professionals develop the skills of reflective practice and acquire initial experiences' (Russell, 2005, p. 199) and that 'reflective practice can and should be taught' (Russell, 2005, p. 203) we are troubled by what happens when we and our students learn how to, and then, engage in this practice in schools. What is the utility of reflective practice in these *scenarios*?

Perhaps much of this is about schools that 'do not allow for or value the critical dialogue and narrative discourse essential for the formation of the self' so that those 'agentive moments' that intend to create 'spaces for discourse and collaboration' (Gratch, 2000, p. 119) become absent or private. This silencing and subsequent internalization can be understood, from one perspective as a microaggression. Or maybe teacher education programs 'are currently based on the assumption that the agency required... follows easily from the reflective construction of professional knowledge' (Klein, 2003). It could be both. Over a decade ago O'Donoghue and Brooker (1996, p. 107) say:

Teacher educators and supervisory teachers involved in preservice field studies programs must share, or at least be sympathetic with the

¹⁴ The conclusions in this section were written by Dean Pierides based on the interviews, analysis and other parts of the process. This was then edited by Anthony Weare, Sarah Knowles and James Fiford. The final version was edited by all the authors.

program's theoretical and philosophical frameworks. Otherwise, reflectivity will be no more than a meaningless buzzword.

Their results echo Anthony's and Sarah's suggestion that their 'supervisors' priorities in this regard were only 'at the level of technical reflection and, even then, only in a very limited sense' (O'Donoghue & Brooker, 1996, p. 107). If teacher education courses support student-teachers in engaging with critical reflection and taking on identities other than technicist ones, for example 'teachers as philosophers' (Gordon, 2004), 'teachers as researchers' (Kincheloe, 2002), and/or 'critical complex' teachers (Kincheloe, 2004), what happens when they/we enter schools where these knowledges are undermined? It has been argued that 'some teachers of young adolescents seem to be able to reinvent themselves in ways that make a difference for this group of students' (Smyth, 2006, p. 31); this is evident in some of the stories that we present here. This data, however, do not answer questions about what happens when these 'reinvented' selves are in conflict with their (only invented? and by whom?) Others. For this, Smyth (2006) would suggest that ethnographic approaches are necessary in order to address the complexities of such contexts; I would argue, ethnography that questions 'the traces of its colonial past and postcolonial guilt' (MacLure, 2003, p. 104). Similarly, we are quite sensitive about 'stretch[ing] the limits of story too far' (Wideen et al., 1998, p. 165) and we are not proposing a framework for rethinking teacher education. All we can hope to do here is present a situated account of three beginning teachers and their experiences of schools and teacher education.

Furthermore, the spaces in which reflective practice is assumed to operate, such as the reflective journals so loathed by many student teachers and school students alike, are cumbersome and commonly *untruthful*, to use Sarah's words. It may have been previously the case that 'teacher talk' was an alternative, and perhaps a better one (Emery, 1996), to journal entries for eliciting reflective practice however, as indicated by Sarah's suggestions, new media and other informal *scenarios* are now also sites for reflection. We understand very little about what is happening in this 'convergence culture, where old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways' (Jenkins, 2006, p. 2). Anthony's response to this has been to carry his idea of *collective consciousness* further by creating an online discussion group. He has invited a number of his peers, people he has met in his one-year teaching course, but this group remains largely silent. When discussing his ideas and visions, he imagines a rhizomatic structure where reflection happens collectively and the network (literally) is not sustained by his own actions as a central figure.

The narratives these beginning teachers tell are eerily similar to the response various advocates of qualitative inquiry have had towards neoliberal social policy (Lather, 2006). Consider how Anthony, Sarah and James have been frustrated by the same things that Ashmore, Mulkay and

Pinch (1989, p. 195 as cited in Lather, 2006, p. 788) discuss with regards to the 'long-running efforts in Britain to use economics to rationalize healthcare' (Lather, 2006, p. 788):

Efforts at reform and change must, and will, continue. Applied social scientists [and in this case teachers, are]... faced with the fundamental problem that the very practices they wish to alter will tend to frustrate their efforts... Confronting this 'problem'... is the essential first step towards a better form of practice... one that consists of a willingness to work with, rather than against, the actors in the domain of application; one that is collaborative rather than imperious; modest rather than megalomaniac; and wishing to learn rather than itching to instruct.

If this is so, then not only are they marginalized because of their status as 'novice' teachers in a 'profession' where they tell us that 'experiential knowledge' is used to negate other professional knowledges (see Kincheloe, 2004 for one example epistemological framework), but they are also the ones expected to *swallow it*, to use Anthony's bodily reference; even though they have *le sens pratique* (Bourdieu, 1980) they are unable to change the fact that this is a no-win situation. James alludes to the embodied aspects of this new disposition suggesting that it is a *part of him, inside him*. Here, Bourdieu's and Foucault's work on embodiment could be informative since they both claim that 'large-scale inequalities are established not at the level of direct institutional discrimination but through the subtle inculcation of power relations upon the bodies and dispositions of individuals' (McNay, 1999, p. 99). James suggests *literally living what you are espousing*; alluding to Gandhi's famous saying, James agrees that 'being the change' is also about embodiment. These tensions are perhaps telling of the contradictions inherent at this historical moment.

As with the changing population of school students, a similar solution to teacher-population heterogeneity 'proposed by most researchers is to have preservice teachers reflect more on their practice, to employ teaching approaches more consistent with constructivism [and]... [t]he list goes on' (Wideen et al., 1998, p. 168). Our suggestions are no different to the ones that follow; 'other features of a larger system must be recognized as equally significant, and addressed' (Wideen et al., 1998, p. 168). This larger system is what Sarah refers to as *everything*, rather than just *tricks*. The narratives told herein, suggest that 'the *status quo* is preserved, as it is seen to be the individual teacher who is defective, rather than the taken-for-granted dreary and alienating constructions of teacher as instrument of change that often inform the learning-to-teach process' (Klein, 2003, emphasis hers).

If 'improvement of classroom practice is more likely to occur where the standards are developed by the teachers themselves and the profession is internally regulated rather than externally controlled' (Sachs, 2003, p. 53) then where does this leave student-teachers? Furthermore, as I have argued (Pierides, 2006), elsewhere and with regards to a different issue, is it possible that we need to also shift our attention to issues outside these frames?

Discussions around the “professionalization” of teaching, vis-à-vis the “standards” and “accountability” movements have flooded the teacher education literature and research. This may very well be the “issue of the day.” Without any intention of undermining the importance of these debates or the interconnectedness of the political nature of such work with what is suggested here, I argue that attention must also be paid to a number of neglected areas of teacher education in Australia.

James names his teaching practica, tutoring, sports coaching and relationships (with partner, friends, family) as the *strands* of his life evoking a particular kind of material imagery (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988). His learning is distributed across time-space which can be characterized by ‘movement and communication’ (Massey, 1994, p. 147). There is a ‘geographical stretching-out of social relations’ (Massey, 1994, p. 147) that occurs in what he names as *fluid places* which have no *watershed moments*. This ‘construction [of pedagogy] takes a social *and* material form’ in which ‘pedagogic intra-actions perform relations of power’ (Mulcahy, 2006b, p. 57, emphasis hers). Intra-action (Barad, 2003) ‘in contrast to the usual “interaction”, which presumes prior existence of independent entities... signifies the inseparability of “objects” (teaching materials, the taught) and “subjects” (teachers); it privileges the associational or relational life of people and things’ (Mulcahy, 2006b, p. 57). Sarah, refers to the *in between spaces where life and personal changes have happened*, similarly co-implicating pedagogy with materiality and the self. A detailed actor-network theory account (Latour, 1987, 2005; Law, 1992, 1994, 2004; Law & Hassard, 1999) could be told here in which pedagogy ‘emerges as a threshold practice that involves a constant weaving to and fro between spaces and selves’ (Mulcahy, 2006b, p. 66). A poststructuralist perspective of this kind has much to offer but due to the limitations of this paper it, and a review of the concepts involved, would best be pursued elsewhere (for an excellent example of such work, refer to Mulcahy, 2006a).

Nevertheless, we have done little here with regards to ‘interrupting the socially constructed binaries around “best practice” and “experienced” teachers’ (Klein, 2003). However, in our learning we feel that we have created ‘discursive and physical spaces for novice teachers to achieve themselves as generative and innovative educators of the future’ so that ‘new “truths” of what teaching and teachers might be’ (Klein, 2003) are evoked. These spaces, however, have been humanist spaces and on the one hand the feminist poststructuralist (Hamilton & McWilliam, 2001; St. Pierre, 2000) suggestions scream at us ‘see, I told you so’ and on the other hand critical pedagogy (Darder, Torres, & Baltodano, 2003) is screaming ‘stay hopeful’. We are going deaf in both ears and wondering, where to now?

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