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The teacher at professional career entry: fragments and paradoxes

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The ageing teaching workforce

In Australia it is anticipated that a large proportion of the current workforce of teachers will retire within the next 5-15 years (Ramsay 2000; Kalantzis 2001; Auditor General of Victoria, 2001; Bradley 2003). The paradox for teachers at the career entry point is that while they are expected to quickly assume responsibility for education in this state, beginning teachers are reporting dissatisfaction with teaching and describing it as an 'unprofessional' profession. What then are the implications for school contexts, colleague support and pre-service teacher education in light of these recent understandings of the beginning teacher?

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

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

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

In the US and the UK the rates of attrition for teachers -the numbers who leave the profession - are known and attempts are being made to address general issues and concerns. In the US for example, improving induction programs for teachers has been a priority as it is reported that one third leave within the first five (Darling-Hammond 2003, p.7). In the UK, the government school system is aware that about 30% of its new graduates will leave teaching within the first five years (Bradley 2003, p.4).
In Australia we don't know how many teachers are leaving nor do we fully know their reasons for doing so. Estimates put the figure for Australia is at least 20%. In the report by the Australian Council of Deans of Education - ACDE, (Kalantzis 2002, p. 5) the figure of 70% is cited as the number of teachers that leave the teaching profession before reaching the top of the incremental 8-10 year salary scale. This report points to the salary levels as an issue for concern. However, the salaries for teachers in their first year of teaching are the highest in Australia (Auditor General, Victoria 2001, Section 7). It is comparable with payment for those entering the professions of medicine, law and engineering (Kalantzis 2002, p. 4). The dissatisfaction expressed by beginning teachers, however, points to other key factors rather than salary.

Research on beginning teachers


Veenman (1984) using meta analysis reviewed eighty-three studies published between 1961 and 1983 across nine countries. The criteria for including studies in the analysis, is firstly that studies must address 'problems' of beginning teachers and secondly, they 'must be based on empirical research' (p. 148). Veenman discusses the concept of 'reality shock' and the five indications identified by Muller-Fohrbrodt, Cloetta and Dann, (1978, cited in Veenman 1984, p. 144).

These indicators are:

Perceptions of problems: This category includes subjectively experienced problems and pressures, complaints about workload, stress, and psychological and physical complaints.
Changes of behaviour: Implied are changes in teaching behaviour contrary to one's own beliefs because of external pressures.
Changes of attitudes. Implied are changes in belief systems (e.g., a shift from progressive to conservative attitudes with respect to teaching methods).
Changes of personality: This category refers to changes in the emotional domain (e.g. lability-stability) and self concept.
Leaving the teaching profession: This disillusion may be so great, that the beginning teacher leaves the profession early.

The term 'reality shock' has permeated subsequent literature in the field of beginning teachers. Veenman (1984) uses the term, to 'indicate the collapse of the missionary ideals formed during teacher training by the harsh and rude reality of everyday classroom life' (p.143). He also argues that beginning teachers become increasingly conservative and authoritarian in the first few years of teaching (pp. 144-147). Further he identifies eight significant problems common to beginning teachers in both primary and secondary schools.

- Classroom discipline
- Motivating students
- Dealing with individual differences amongst students
- Assessing students' work
- Relationships with parents of students
- Organisation of class work
Teaching resources
Addressing individual student problems

This widely cited study focuses on the 'problems' or deficits of beginning teachers. Further whilst he acknowledges the existence of studies 'with notes from diaries, essays from beginning teachers with reflections on their first year(s) of teaching, and anecdotal descriptions' (p. 148), these studies are excluded from his analysis.

Veeman's meta analysis (1984), using predominately survey methodology has framed and dominated the research agenda on beginning teachers over the past two decades. The discourses of the field 'problems' and 'deficits' continue to circulate uncritically. The continued emphasis on construction of hope/less/ness is for example evident in the Victorian Ministerial Advisory Committee of the Victorian Institute of Teaching, Beginning Teacher 'Education Course Satisfaction' survey (2000). The survey focuses on 22 areas of competence, such as knowledge of the subject, knowledge of appropriate curriculum materials, familiarity with the Curriculum Standards Framework II, classroom management, management of student discipline, using computers and software, teaching students from different backgrounds. The instrument pre-empts the identification of 'problems' with provision of the cause - namely, attributing blame to the inadequacy of the university based education course, particularly in respect to working knowledge of the school environment. While Chubbuck, Clift, Allard and Quinlan (2001, p. 367) question the 'deficit' approach to beginning teachers, it is Martinez (1994) from Queensland, Australia, who nearly a decade ago alerted us to the prevailing and limited research focus surrounding beginning teachers:

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

Methodology

In contrast to the seminal research that defines the field of beginning teachers this paper reports recent qualitative studies from our research and practice as teacher educators. Drawing from recently commissioned research for the Victorian Institute of Teaching, (White & Hildebrand 2002) and a study of sixty beginning teachers and a micro study of the 'internship' experience of teacher educators in Tasmania (Moss, Fearnely- Sander & Moore 2002), we explore the paradoxical representations of the identity of beginning teachers through multiple perspectives.

Influenced by postmodernist thinking and poststructuralism we are attempting to theorise the experience of beginning teaching as representing many voices. The data that supports this paper seeks to disrupt and relocate the discourse of beginning to teach as a relocation of identity. And for each individual beginning teacher there is no single voice. All stories...are partial; they are particular rather than general, they represent a perspective, a way of seeing that is complex and multifaceted, rather than universal. (Kamler 2001, p. 174). And further as Alvesson & Skoldberg (2000) explains:

The individual does not speak with a single voice - or even a dominant one - but may represent different voices; for example, evaluations, thoughts, feelings and how factual information is conveyed can be constituted in different ways. A single interview, for instance, can generate interpretations demonstrating that the subject is expressing multiplicity (multiple discursive constitutions). The ambiguity in the particular interview must be
emphasized. Individuals, according to post-modernism and post-structuralism, are ambiguous, equivocal and inconsistent (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000, p.189).

Data

Our 'data stories' include a research project commissioned by the Victorian Institute of Teaching (White & Hildebrand 2002) n=53 individual teachers consulted over a period of nine weeks from May to July in 2002, 5 teachers in their initial year who are participants in an 'authentic conversation' group (Clark, 2001), beginning teachers who responded to open-ended emailed questions throughout 2002 (n=32), beginning teachers who attended two five hour professional learning sessions (n=18), (White 2003a) and the work of Moss, Fearnley-Sander and Moore (2002), a micro study of the 'internship' experience of teacher educators and their interns and recent graduates. In the later study two teacher educators worked along side an intern and a recent graduates of their courses, interrogating what it means to begin to teach in the middle years of schooling. The common focus in these studies is on the lived experiences and storied experiences of teachers in early years of teaching, that is 0-5 years of teaching experience.

Time for another head count
Just listen!
Do it quietly
Need more sleep!
Drowning in paper
What will we do tomorrow?
Too much to do - too little time
Need more sleep!
Meetings and yard duties - when the hell do you teach?
Not another meeting
Meeting the parents tonight - your chance to suck up
Need more sleep!
Good teacher moments
Well done!
Inexperienced but passionate - makes you look bad, idiot!
Need more sleep!
(Anon., Induction Project, University of Melbourne, May 2002)

Dear Education Minister,

I think you should legislate for a greater time allowance for beginning teachers to develop resources and familiarise themselves with protocols of the schools they are working in. There should be a formal consultative process established for new teachers to discuss issues confidentially with an appropriate staff member. This should be facilitated by sufficient time release. Increase the sense of security for new teachers by providing funding for more permanent positions for beginning teachers. Currently it is not uncommon for teachers to have to apply for the position they are acting in three times in a twelve-month period. This is a time consuming and stressful practice which takes time away from teaching and planning...The first year of teaching is a highly demanding and stressful experience...

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

When I was thinking of quitting teaching last Friday (PMT always contributes to that feeling) I felt comfortable about ringing her and metaphorically crying on her shoulder. Ended up at her place the next day being entertained by her two boys. She's very approachable, down to earth, knowledgeable, not over-the-top but very encouraging and somehow helps you see things you need to change without actually saying you're doing anything wrong.
(Jane, email communication, 14/3/03)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I came in and floundered around, and I hated first term. I didn't know what I was doing. I was teaching senior English last year, and all of a sudden I'm Maths, and all these things little things I did not know about...

I think a lot of what we teach has no relevance to kids, I mean Jane and I have changed a lot of what; I mean we don't have an actual syllabus that we follow, but there is a list of things we are supposed to cover, and its just boring. We're supposed to do Deserts and Rainforest in Grade 7, Ancient Greece in Grade 8, and we've tried to find things relevant to them... And even with like I was saying about the syllabus, I was teaching Ancient Greece earlier this term and one of the teachers said "Oh we do that in Grade 8", so I said, "Where is that written down?" "Oh it's not, it's just how we've always done it" But nothing is said to any body. So yea, there's lots of that.

I've been learning. This is my first year here and I've been learning a lot. Little things like in a staff meeting just a couple of weeks ago, someone was talking about students being away; when you hand in your folder at the end of the year with all the notes the kids have brought back...Oh, do I have to do that? Like I'd kept them, just chucked them in a drawer, but I mean, just little things like that. Everyone says here's the handbook, but there's still all those sort of unwritten rules of procedure and stuff that you don't have a clue about.
Beginning teachers and professional identity

These data of recent studies (White & Hildebrand 2002, White 2003a, Moss, Fearnley-Sander & Moore 2002) reveals a condition of silent rage among teachers. While grappling with issues of professional identity, these teachers have been astounded at both the complexity of teaching and the lack of professionalism within the profession. The multiple constructions of life as a beginning teacher reveal them positioned and unpositioned by feelings of power and powerlessness, assuming roles as heroes and victims, enthusiasts and cynics, masters and apprentices. The dilemmas of participation in organizational structures that expect them to act willingly but respond hierarchically in contract lead market driven employment practices, are of concern. As A Class Act (Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee) states:

(existing induction procedures are ad hoc. They depend for their success on the support of school principals and staff and on the good will and skill of selected mentors. In general they receive no backing from education bureaucracies and no financial support...there is no formal structure for induction, there is no attempt to ensure that it is of adequate quality, or even that it takes place at all... (1998, p. 209).

In Australia, broadly systems responses to improving outcomes for beginning teachers rely on retention practices achieved through mentoring and induction programs and the discourses framing emergent teacher professional standards. As members of the teaching profession and practising teacher educators we are deeply troubled by what we learn about teaching from our graduates as they begin their careers

Mentoring and induction programs

Affirming the social reality of learning to teach, Newman (1991), Darling-Hammond (2003), Tickle (2000) and Clark (2001) describe quality mentoring and induction programs as modelling the importance of talk in the culture of teaching. As they go about 'talking shop' (Clark 2001) mentors and beginning teachers can both be engaged in professional learning - sharing current concerns and rethinking their practices to enable better student outcomes. Tickle in earlier work states:

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

Whilst concurring with (Ramsay 2000, p. 64) in respect to the quality of induction as 'one of the most important determiners of the self-perceptions which beginning teachers will hold as professional practitioners', and the willingness of teacher education to actively contribute to 'a professional structure, with responsibility for standards' (Ramsay 2000, p. 14) the proliferation of more mentoring systems and standards procedures are unlikely to transform current practices for beginning teachers. A surprising number of beginning teachers report that their mentor program didn't work (White & Hildebrand 2002, p. 9-17). The main reasons for this appear to be:

1. The wrong people are sometimes given the job. Often Leading Teachers or those with POLs (Positions of Leadership), KLA (Key Learning Area) or Unit Coordinators and Assistant Principals are appointed as mentors. These people are usually juggling many demands on their time, tacking on the job of mentor to their load is an unrealistic expectation. One beginning teacher reported active bullying on the part of his official mentor (metropolitan Melbourne, interview 2002).
2. Some mentors will only help the beginning teacher in an expert-
relationship. Collegiality and discussion about classroom approaches is discouraged, as the 'transmission' model is preferred. In other words the beginner is there to listen and learn and doesn't have anything of use to offer.

3. The mentor is never officially named as such. Therefore the beginning teacher isn't sure that they are entitled to ask the pseudo mentor for support and time.

4. The mentor isn't sure of what they are supposed to do. They tell their beginning teacher to 'just ask' if they need any help and otherwise avoid them.

5. The mentor sees their role as one for first term and crises only.

**Professional standards and beginning teachers**

In Victoria, the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) is in the process of developing standards that will form the certification process for full registration (Victorian Institute of Teaching, 2003). The draft document states that:

These descriptions outline the practices that teachers in the Standards and Professional Learning Project have identified as essential components of professional practice for all teachers to understand, strive to develop and be able to demonstrate in time. These descriptors are not a checklist of competencies for beginning teachers to master at a given time. They are a guide to effective practice and should be used to help teachers demonstrate the quality and complexity of their professional work. (p. 3)

The document, although still in draft form has traceable structural antecedents deriving from standards written for highly accomplished teachers in Australia and the U.S.A. While the document frames expectations of learning and teaching that are considered important the professional practice requirements are little different in orientation to the previous National Competency Frameworks for Beginning Teachers (Australian Teaching Council, 1996), the document that has guided teacher education assessment during the decade of the nineties. Tickle (2000) argues that the standards used to assess beginning teachers raise some problematic issues. He suggests:

> (t)he identification of teaching standards that is happening across the globe is evidence of the most endemic problem of induction. There has been a failure to comprehensively identify the nature of professional knowledge of what new teachers should know and be able to do, or what kinds of persons they should be or be willing to become. A failure to manage the changes in responsibilities that teachers have, in such a way the new entrants can reasonably make sense of what they must learn and do, has added to that problem (Tickle 2000, p.8-9).

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

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

We argue that the voices of the beginning teachers through their narratives define emergent and changing teacher identities (Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000). These professional identities are fragmented and offer a counter narrative to those who advise them. Thus by problematising identity issues for beginning teachers it is hoped that greater understanding of the complexities of their realities is revealed. Identities or categories like 'beginning teacher' exclude and they fix. Terminologies such as 'beginning teacher' or 'newly qualified teacher' are discursive constructions and reflect stereotypes and prejudices. Veenman's (1984) often cited study provides a useful case in point. The aspirations for the (re)generation of a profession are entangled in discordant displacement of
meanings of what it is to become a teacher. We would assert that systems can and will need to pursue the agenda of induction, mentoring and standards, but the assumptions currently are that our beginning teachers as members of the profession are 'deficit' in need of 'fixing' from a more experienced and hierarchically positioned other.

What do 'othering' and power(less) positions of beginning teachers mean for the immediate future of the profession in the short term in Victoria and Australia? Our beginning teachers allude sharply to the lack of collegiality, collaboration and the restricted capacity of schools to reculture as learning communities. Places where teachers and students learn and transform their thinking require a generative force.

If we are to be in a position to 'negotiate visions of futures worth working for' (Gough 2002, p. 5) we must accept that 'we stand at the center of our own histories and fields of visualisations as responsible, engaged and embodied actors' (Gough 2002, p. 5). Therefore we would urge that in order to shape a future for the profession, we must find ways to hear the voice of beginning teachers, a voice which says not "What can I [expert teacher] do for you [beginning teacher]?" but rather "What do you [beginning teacher] know about us [the teaching profession]?" Then perhaps we would find ways of working on issues such as mentoring and professional standards that are connected by the social reality of learning to teach. Such forces are likely to require less than bureaucratic encumbrances than current practices and will stand out as authentic learning experiences for all.

References


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Moss, J. Fearnley-Sander, M. & Moore V. (2002) 'I do lots of things that the University would not approve of'. What counts as professional knowledge in the eyes of pre-service and beginning teachers -implications of the encounter for the role of teacher educators in pre-service middle school preparation, paper presented to the Australian Association of Research in Education, Brisbane December 2-5.


Note:

1. Luke and Luke (1995, p. 358), in reference to the Australian social science community, outline the differences between postmodernism and poststructuralism. Poststructuralism is linked to the work of the French philosophers Foucault and Derrida, whilst postmodernism draws from the work of Lyotard and the sociologist Baudrillard. The distinction, by contrast, is not evident within the United States and Canada, where the term postmodernism is used as a group of techniques and knowledges loosely connected with the analyses, artefacts and phenomena of post-industrial culture and economy. Our arguments and language are drawn from the interpretation generated by Luke and Luke (1995), and offer theoretical openings for educational research and policy development.

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