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Disciplining the practice of creative enquiry: the suppression of difference in teacher education

Abstract

In this paper, we suggest that the pursuit of ahistorical, universal truths in education is antithetical to creativity, learning and motivation in preservice teachers. We argue that learning to teach is a dynamic process embedded in networks of power in which educational truths are politically *accomplished* rather than innocently discovered. We identify regulatory discourses in education which we believe encourage conservatism through claims to ground practice in apolitical notions such as 'best practice', scientific evidence or ahistorical reason. We claim that these are merely attempts to privilege or naturalise existing configurations of power and knowledge. Furthermore, we claim that such disciplining encourages a dependency and inflexibility in new teachers since it claims to absolve them of their responsibility for judgements made in the teaching moment. We draw upon examples from our own research to illustrate how such discursive mechanisms serve to foreclose students' creativity and argue that inventiveness cannot occur through rational enquiry alone. We suggest instead that *competing* discourses of teacher identity and practice are required for change and that this calls for a culture in teacher education wherein students' courage to act on conviction and undertake creative enquiry is valued.

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Introduction

In this paper we argue that the hope of an unambiguous, settled solution to the problem of teacher education is a chimera. We do not however intend this to suggest pessimism. On the contrary, we suggest that the *absence* of such certainty is productive whereas the *pursuit* of certainty is antithetical to student teachers' learning. The problem of education has perplexed philosophers and educationists alike for centuries and as Kant lamented, the art of education and the art of politics are infuriatingly difficult to define let alone undertake.[1] They continue to be so in contemporary times. A period of political, economic and philosophical uncertainty has ushered in a wave of anxiety about the professional learning of teachers (Britzman, 2003; Edwards et al, 2002; Furlong, 2000). On the one hand, we find teacher education cloaked in state-mandated standardisation. On the other, we note an increasing proclivity for the different, the transgressive and the local. Whilst we are encouraged by the educational potential of the latter, we are disheartened by the former development. For in what follows, we argue that learning to teach is inevitably a dynamic practice embedded in networks of power and that claims to have depoliticised this process are merely attempts to preserve practice and to privilege - that is to *naturalise* - existing configurations of power.

In claiming that the pursuit of certainty regulates students' learning and conduct is also to claim that it regulates their identity[2]. When we speak of 'learning' here we do not refer merely to that which we know in our supposedly 'disembodied' minds; rather, learning shapes *the way we are*, the practices we enact, the values and beliefs to which we ascribe (Paechter et al, 2001). This is a dynamic, social process which involves both being shaped by and shaping institutional norms and discourses. Learning constructs self and social identities through the various social positions inhabited (Cole, 1996; Dillabough, 1999; Samuel & Stephens, 2000). Social performances are influenced by the tools available for identity construction but social interactions nevertheless constitute its ongoing renewal. Viewed this way, professional identity construction is a process of struggle infused in *relations of*

power (see for example, Britzman, 2003; Buendia, 2000; Johnson, 1997; Phillips, 2001; Roberts, 2000; Samuel & Stephens, 2000; Volkmann & Anderson, 1998 and Goodson & Cole, 1994).

As well as claiming that pre-service teachers' identities and practices are regulated by the pursuit of certainty, we also identify in this paper the particular discursive, regulatory mechanisms at work, and examine how these serve to suppress the development of creative pedagogy. One mechanism we identify is Initial Teacher Training (ITT) policy in England, which underwent significant reform in the 1990s. The *Professional Standards For Qualified Teacher Status* (TTA, 2003) purport to offer definitive, measurable outcomes for student teachers' learning. Yet such standards are not innocent. A standards based teacher education system relies upon assumptions and commitments which need to be made explicit in order that they may be critically evaluated (Beyer, 2002). This paper traces the philosophical assumptions and values underpinning a standards model to *technicism* and argues that such prescriptions hinder creative thought and action in student teachers. A further mechanism of regulation we identify is the persistence in education of a belief in an objective, transcendent *rationality*, the assumption that there is a neutral vantage point from which student teachers, by submitting to the technology of reason and logic, may discern order, laws and clarity across teaching dilemmas within particular contexts.[3] Such beliefs inhere in some versions of the *reflective practitioner* movement.

These discursive, regulatory mechanisms *privilege* an appeal to evidence, objectivity, the market and/or reason and we argue that by doing so they suppress the generative potential of power and difference in education. Most disturbing of all is that, in declaring themselves as fail-safe 'rule-books' for pedagogical practice, we suggest that such foundationalist discourses deny student teachers the responsibility and conviction necessary for contesting and thus for (re)fashioning teaching practice.

We begin first with an examination of the crisis of teacher professionalism and we link this to the broader 'knowledge crisis' of which it is a part. Having discussed the relation between knowledge, practice and power, we then go on to discuss in detail the discursive mechanisms we believe suppress creativity in teacher education. Finally, we draw on examples from our own research to illustrate how such mechanisms served to foreclose our own students' creativity and learning.

The crisis in teacher education

The crisis in teacher education is associated with two significant and interrelated changes. The first is the transformation of teachers' working conditions and professional culture in recent decades. This has contributed to low morale and, for some primary teachers, even a desire to leave the profession (NCE, 1993). Whilst there may be improvements in educational effectiveness measured in terms of test scores, and whilst new teachers may start out with high motivation, they suffer increasing disaffection and low self-efficacy arising from feelings of restricted possibilities in terms of their role and their moral or educational purpose (Farber, 1991).

The second change relates to a crisis within professionalism more generally, characterised as an inability to define the exact criteria by which to measure the 'good teacher' (Furlong, 2000). Teacher professionalism has traditionally embodied two criteria; a teacher must have mastery of specialist knowledge and skills together with the autonomy to apply these according to their professional judgement (Edwards et al, 2002). However, the absence of definitive standards in teacher education comparable to other professions (such as medicine or architecture for example) has been increasingly targeted as a cause of educational ineffectiveness. This eventually contributed to the decision to introduce national standards for teacher education in the 1990s (Beyer, 2002). Such standards, as Beyer (2002) argues, constitute *authoritative,* final rubrics detailing the performances, knowledge and dispositions with which student teachers must comply.

Yet, as Edwards et al (2002) suggest, this 'standards' model of professionalism (and the behaviourist model of learning upon which it rests) - whilst appearing to offer a reassuring remedy for the malaise of uncertainty - has long been philosophically discredited. Such critiques are found in post-structuralism, interpretivism, hermeneutics, pragmatism, the sociology of knowledge, social constructionism and the philosophy of science[4] and they offer a devastating challenge to the notion of teacher professionalism as the straightforward application of a body scientifically-tested objective knowledge and models to local cases. In other words, after what has been referred to as the 'discursive' or 'cultural turn' in the human and social sciences, knowledge can no longer be divorced from power (Hall, 1997). On the contrary, power is *necessary* to the production of knowledge, as truth and meaning are struggled over, contested and fashioned in cultural sites of action. Since this includes

the pedagogical knowledge of pre-service and inservice teachers, it is an understanding of this relationship between knowledge, practice and power to which we now turn.

The crisis of representation: knowledge, practice and power

In Lyotard's analysis of the postmodern condition of 'doubt' (Lyotard, 1984), he speaks of a growing 'incredulity' towards the metaphysical assumption of naïve realism, the belief that a knowable, static world 'out there', independent of our minds, perceptions and language, can supply *universal, unchanging* standards of correctness for our knowledge.[5] This shift, or crisis of which he speaks leads us to conclude that professional knowledge cannot be thought of as propositional and apolitical – as words describing what classroom reality *is like*. Following Wittgenstein and Dewey, meaning resides not in objects of the world 'in themselves' to then be innocently *discovered* by us; rather it is only our *use* of things which furnish them with meaning:

> Things are objects to be treated, used, acted upon, enjoyed and endured, even more than things to be known. They are things *had* before they are things *cognized* (Dewey, 1925, p.28).

Thus, as Foucault (1980) would also insist, we cannot first establish an accurate description of the world (or the classroom) as it is and then prescribe what to do on this basis. Rather, it is necessarily the political act of engagement in culture which makes meaning possible. Meaning for an individual is dependent upon the purposes, criteria and conventions operating within a particular social community of practice (Wittgenstein, 1969; Fish, 1989). As Feyerabend suggests:

> Gaining knowledge, according to this account, is a process that involves a teacher, a pupil and a (social) situation shared by both; the result, knowledge, can only be understood by those who participate in it. Written notes aid them in remembering the stages of participation. Being incapable of replacing the process, they are useless for outsiders (Feyerabend, 1987, p.110).

Thus the search for formal propositions which innocently capture and describe *the* reality must be abandoned. Moreover, as Biesta and Burbules' (2003) example below suggests, meanings or 'realities' may thus *clash and compete,* depending upon the cultural practices at play in any situation:

> This first of all means that everyone's experience is equally real. The horse trader, the jockey, the zoologist, and the palaeontologist will have their *own* experience of a horse (Biesta & Burbules, 2003, p.43).

Foucault's concept of 'discourse' is useful here, for it also attempts to overcome the distinction between what we say and what we do (Foucault, 1980). Discourses, on his view, are formations of ideas and practices associated with particular social activities and institutions within specific historical and cultural locations. This constructionist perspective does not therefore claim that meaning is subjective. Rather, it is related to communities of practice, the socially-constituted purposes of which render experience meaningful through the bestowal of aims, criterion of relevance, conventions and so on (Fish, 1989). A tacit, unwritten 'cultural covenant' regulates the meanings made (Hall, 1997). Discourses thus inscribe relations of power and operate as systems through their conceptual relations and categorical distinctions. This is not to suggest, however, that traditions such as education are entirely conservative. As well as regulating what can be said or done about teaching in educational institutions and what cannot, power is also productive. The sites of meaning construction are those very rituals and social practices of classrooms, since meaning is constituted by teachers rather than 'found' by them. Knowledge continuously evolves in action and there is potential for both conflict and intersubjectivity wherein purposes, meanings and conventions are negotiated or reinscribed – indeed *newly created* - over time.

If it is the case that discursive formations define teaching practices, regulate conduct and construct identities, then the search for neutral, ahistorical or certain foundations for teaching standards is futile. If learning to teach is fashioned through political struggle, can there be justification for imposing one, allegedly objective account of teaching and learning upon student teachers? Whose account would this be? Such questions are troubling, for they force us to acknowledge that because knowledge is contextual and contingent, we are all ethically answerable for what we do. Without a foolproof, rule-book of absolute foundations to free teachers from the burden of uncertainty, teaching solutions are conditional, complex, *moral* judgements. Nevertheless, rather than come to terms with this uncomfortable conclusion, some models of teacher education have claimed to offer more secure foundations. It is the first of these to which we now turn, a model which claims to base teaching upon the foundations of 'hard evidence'.

Technical rationalist models of teacher development: positivism

The technical-rationalist account of teacher development stands accused of offering a view of reality as fixed and thus, the purpose of teacher education as the delivery of fixed competencies, skills and knowledge which teachers as 'operatives' then apply. Parker (1997) for example, describes how technical-rationalism, embedded within the philosophy of positivism and the metaphysical assumptions of naïve realism, has influenced various models of teacher development. He argues that such models constitute teacher training rather than teacher education in that the ends are pre-specified. Teacher professionalism, on this view, requires a general consensus regarding the ends of education and results in a theory-practice divide wherein the disciplinary knowledge of sociology, psychology, philosophy and history provided by university teacher-education departments can be transmitted to student teachers as techniques to guide professional practice aimed at the achievement of pre-specified ends.[6] Learning to teach requires the *technical* acquisition of a set of procedures which can be measured as a set of behaviours applicable to any pedagogical context. The explanation of social phenomena must employ the experimental, inductive procedures and justificatory standards of the natural sciences to arrive at universal laws governing the causal relations of social phenomena (Parker, 1997). Appeals to these laws offer an escape from spatio-historical contingency and political complexity through their ability to predict and control teaching and learning. The assumption is that scientific theory, founded upon reliable evidence, can be confidently applied to the complex social world of practice.

Technical-rationalism is not without its detractors (Furlong, 2005; Popkewitz, 1987; Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Parker, 1997). Furlong notes that technical-rationalism in education "creates the impression of disinterestedness and objectivity. It implies there is a common framework for people with fixed goals" (Furlong, 2005, p.127). He and other critics would object that this is not possible. For if meaning is constituted through political action within discursive formations, teachers' different experiences, values and assumptions about the purpose of education will inevitably frame teaching competencies, theory or knowledge differently. This disagreement between technical rationalism and its detractors originates in the incommensurable epistemological premises from which adherents on either side of the dispute begin. It is a quarrel between the representationalists and the constructionists. According to

Parker (1997), the 'reflective practitioner' movement, influenced in part by critical theory, emerged out of this dispute as a critique of technical-rationalism.

Critical Theory and teachers as researchers

The 'reflective practitioner' movement contends that the education of teachers can be realised neither through the delivery of a pedagogical blueprint of techniques, nor through the disinterested delivery of disciplinary knowledge. Practical reasoning cannot be the application of prescriptions which logically derive from general maxims, for the very significance and thus the *meaning* of these terms are interpreted within, and thus arise *out of* their use in intentional action within highly particularised conditions. Such approaches reject means-end, positivist rationality and 'routine action' and require instead that teachers submit their practice to the test of *rational interrogation* (Parker, 1997). This approach embraces the contextual contingency of classrooms and the ecological validity of teacher research whilst eschewing positivist generalising about practice (Winter, 1989; Elliot, 1991). Parker (1997) traces the philosophical roots of rationalist approaches to the Enlightenment tradition of Critical Theory (Habermas, 1990), the critical pedagogies of Freire (1972), Schon (1983) and Giroux (1997), and the critical thinking tradition of Ennis (1996), Paul (1990) and Lipman (2003). On this view, the ends *and* means of education are rationally interrogated by the reflective practitioner and this informs his or her examination of situated practice. The teacher reflexively assesses their context in order to continuously (re)construct pedagogical ends and means in a dialectical relationship (Parker, 1997). Practice is ultimately answerable to *reason and evidence*.

However, reflective teaching nonetheless claims to depoliticise the construction of meaning through the deployment of reason. Founding decisions ultimately upon rationality, it seemingly purports to create a power vacuum which can liberate teachers from the burden of uncertainty and ethical judgement. Moreover, in assuming a 'core, essential self' which can stand outside discourse, it aims to emancipate teachers from ideology, habit or tradition. Yet, as Tabachnick and Zeichner (1991) contend, the *meaning* of 'reflective practice' is necessarily framed by a student teacher's, policy-maker's or researcher's intentions which are in turn framed within particular discourses. Therefore, its meaning cannot be cleansed of bias or values; rather, ideology is *necessary* for its meaning.

This has led to an unhappy situation for the reflective practitioner movement. The purpose of education is currently fiercely contested following what Woods and Jeffrey (2004) describe as the 'restructuring of education'. Teacher education and education more generally has been reframed in recent years within the 'new managerialism' and policy context of public accountability, through what Cope & I'Anson (2003) call a 'discursive restructuring' towards market logic and the values of productivity and performativity. For Lyotard (1984), the ascendancy of the 'new right' has come about through the State's ability to reframe education within the discourse of neoliberal marketisation, with a turning towards the scientific assumptions of technical-rationalism for legitimacy. An era of intensified global competition has led to more centralised control over education and increased rationalisation. There is now an imposed curriculum and standardised assessment measures through which efficiency is prioritised as the primary moral purpose in the quest for controlled progress. In the context of teacher education, this led to the government reforms which introduced *uniform* standards for qualified teacher status in England and other industrialised nations (Beyer, 2002). Thus, on the one hand, student teachers are encouraged to construct their own pedagogical expertise through 'reflective practice' and 'action research', but on the other, the assumption is that 'effectiveness' is measured *only* in terms of performance in league-tables and National Curriculum indicators. This odd state of affairs appears to deny that the meaning of 'effectiveness' arises only through its instantiation in practice. It denies that what one actor in their context may perceive as excellence, another socio-politically positioned actor may view as mediocrity or even failure. Rendered unintelligible through their disconnectedness from a meaningful context, critics such as Cook (2001) charge that such terms are rhetorically employed by those who seek to enforce their *own* interpretations of them and legitimise educational structures which prioritise a centralised curriculum delivery model of education, a model which others argue merely operate to maintain existing structural and educational inequality.[7] Thus, even though there is *official* policy endorsement of reflective practice (TTA, 2003), educational ends are nevertheless fixed and teachers are subject to the principle of performativity, whereby their worth is to be measured in terms of their ability to demonstrate efficiency in optimising given outputs. The aim is to define 'best practice' scientifically and impose it through performance-related schemes. In other words, there is a current danger that reflective teaching is viewed only within the framework

of a technical-rationalist, positivist paradigm, the very paradigm from which the reflective practice movement claimed to offer emancipation.

Carr and Kemmis (1997) attempt to overcome this impasse by acknowledging this reframing. They suggest that those who reject quasi-market logic render 'standards' meaningful within a distinct notion of reflective practice which can stand as an alternative. Their model of critical action research aims to cultivate the emancipation, critical rationality and autonomy of teachers through *explicit* reflection upon the broader social, economic and political context as a means to transform education and address injustice. Yet nonetheless, the foundation upon which this view rests is that of reason and rational discourse as a means to enlighten and emancipate teachers from the distortion of hegemonic ideology. Again, the difficulty here is this bold claim for transcendent rationality as a means to liberate teachers from ideological 'distortion' (Parker, 1997). For it is *only* the values and practices of particular circumstances which render terms meaningful (Fish, 1989). 'Best practice' is a political term requiring qualification in concrete circumstances. Reason cannot elevate teachers above history and culture to a transcendent state of autonomy and absolute truth for they cannot stand apart from their historically and locally constituted intentions and practices.

Such professed alternatives to positivism thus act as a conservative force on educational enquiry rather than as a means of its development (Thomas, 1998; Parker, 1997). This is because reflective teaching relies upon the empiricist assumption that an established pedagogical theory should only be refuted by the evidence – the 'facts' available to reasoned reflection in and on practice. That is, the student teacher or teacher must test their theory against the *reality* of practice, demonstrating intellectual integrity and submitting to the results of reason. This assumption, however, presumes empirical 'facts' exist *independent* of a theory - that perception of classroom evidential facts can be theory-free[8]. This commitment to reason assumes a *non-partisan, transcendental* standpoint from which one may survey competing claims about reality and empirical 'facts' (Scheurich, 1997; Fish, 1989). This supposition thus betrays the reflective practice movement's original assent to the sociohistorically situated nature of a teacher's perception and reason. Reason cannot provide an escape from partisanship. Values cannot be separated from knowledge, because beliefs are not what we think *about* but what we think *with* (Fish1989; Graff, 2004; Olson & Worsham, 2004). Reason is not in opposition to belief but is

dependent upon it; thus 'empirical evidence from outside' is not a challenge to beliefs but is itself interpreted within a framework and thus acts as support for the convictions and beliefs *from which reason emerges*:

> People 'understand' or are 'persuaded' by a position or belief because it fits into a preexisting belief structure. This description of the relationship between faith and reason, rhetoric and epistemology is a sharp contrast to the prevailing liberal-humanist perspective that emerges from the tradition of Enlightenment rationality…a tradition that regards the mind as a kind of 'calculating and assessing machine that is open to all thoughts and closed to none'… Fish contends however that the mind must begin with a first premise, a fixed commitment to a value or idea, and that this premise both enables thought about a subject at hand and is unavailable to thought precisely because it is thought's enabling condition (Olson & Worsham, 2004, p.148).

In other words, beliefs are a *precondition of thought*, of reason. Student teachers, it would seem, cannot be open-minded to beliefs which are hostile to the assumptions and beliefs from which their reasoning begins. Their beliefs *constitute* self rather than self or consciousness being separable from their belief. Student teachers cannot stand aside from their beliefs and convictions for they cannot by necessity be self-conscious of ideals that are themselves constitutive of their consciousness. That "would be tantamount to rising out of our own ideological perspective in order to examine that perspective from outside of itself" (Olson & Worsham, 2004, p.149). This does not preclude a student teacher's self-conscious and critical reflection upon their practice after the teaching event, but is to say that such critique will necessarily be within a discursive framework required to render the act and evaluation of teaching comprehensible. Other critics have further suggested that an insistence on making tacit understanding explicit may actually *impede* the development of student teachers' teaching competence:

> There may be valid socio-political arguments for establishing a self-conscious professional rhetoric – to afford collective protection against government interference and attempts at 'deprofessionalisation', for example – but such considerations should not be confused with an implicit psychology of adult professional learning: 'what works best'. It may be, for instance, that explicating and theorising one's competence through discussion and reflection is a process that needs to come later in the course of professional development once considerable tacit expertise has been established, and that tutors and mentors who try to start the process too soon may impede the development of that very expertise (Atkinson & Claxton, 2000, p.3).

Of course this throws doubt on the possibility of belief change at all. Whilst there are studies which attest to the transformative potential of student teachers' beliefs (see for example, Segall, 2001; Goodwin 2002; Weber and Mitchell, 1996; and Levin, 2000), there are also those which suggest

students' beliefs are extremely robust (Calderhead & Robson, 1991). The foregoing issues therefore raise two important questions in relation to understanding student teacher learning. Firstly, if all observation is framework-dependent, and therefore selective and partial, how might a student teacher observe any 'fact' which disconfirms their perspective? How therefore is change possible? Secondly, if logic and order is given primacy over a student teacher's particularised moral judgement (possibly refuting orthodox theory or the dominant discourse), how do we protect their judgements from the educational establishment's assumption that these are merely the irrational prejudices of the inexperienced and naive?

The pluralist critique: incommensurable rationalities?

> Life can be seen through many windows, none of them necessarily clear or opaque, less
> or more distorting than any of the others (Berlin, 2001, p.4).

In answering these questions we might turn to those who claim that progress in knowledge occurs, not through rational analysis alone, but through *contrast and pluralism* (Berlin, 2001; Feyerabend, 1993; Fish, 1989; Foucault, 1980). Pluralist critiques claim that knowledge is not a set of theories aimed at convergence, eventual commensurability or one truth, but rather it is "an ever-increasing *ocean of mutually incompatible alternatives*, each single theory, each fairy-tale, each myth that is part of the collection forcing the others into greater articulation and all of them contributing, via this process of competition, to the development of our consciousness" (Feyerabend, 1993, p.21, original emphasis). In other words, the principle of consensus does not respect the *creative potential of difference*.

According to Foucault (1980), there are always different discourses circulating simultaneously in any culture as well as overlapping discursive formations. Hence it might then be plausible to suggest that change is dependent upon the existence of a *plurality* of (partial and sometimes incompatible) discourses and irreconcilable desires which depend for their meaning upon their contrast or difference to other discourses. On this view, though change may be possible, it cannot be assumed that all students, potentially reasoning from different discursive formations at different times, will necessarily converge on a universal, timeless pre-specified outcome. Perhaps then the problem is not actually whether change occurs at all, but rather whether there can be a general theory of such change. The

literary theorist Fish (1989) for example, in writing about belief change, contends that change is a *given* since minds are 'engines of change'. One's beliefs are justified within a structure of beliefs through which the belief is made meaningful, and it is this which offers the possibility of change in belief as when one belief is brought to consciousness which conflicts with another belief in the face of a crisis or dilemma. Nevertheless, he contends that such shifts are contingent upon a person's structures of belief and chance events. They cannot be engineered for we cannot know exactly what crisis, what moral dilemma, what set of circumstances will dislodge a belief and result in an internal restructuring of a belief system. In this respect, a change in beliefs is dependent not only upon chance events but also upon the socio-historical circumstances within which a teacher's knowing is embedded. Change cannot be characterised as a predictable, linear convergence upon an understanding of best practice *for all*. Rather it is to say that *alternative, competing theories or discourses are required* if (interpreted) 'empirical' data refuting the student teachers' original theory is to be available to perception.

The claim here is that different, alternative and intuitive knowledges are not abnormalities to be remedied via reason but rather the very genesis of creative thought and piecemeal progress. As Thomas (1998) argues, pure rationalism hinders this creativity since it relegates untheorised, local, imaginative or embodied knowing (that which is only later accessible to formalisation). He traces the situatedness of thought and the fragmentary nature of knowledge to its roots as a strong theme running through the philosophical traditions of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Dewey and latterly through Feyerabend, Foucault and others. However, the forces of conservatism in education are considerable. Despite its association with creativity and progress, situated, partisan thinking is largely disparaged in education says Thomas, treated rather like a blemish threatening to deface the homogenization, impartiality and rational purity of established educational theory.

Our argument thus far has been that the discourses of technical-rationalism and reflective teaching have become 'naturalised' in teacher education. They have acquired the authoritative claim to truth which occurs when the power struggle required to achieve their dominance has been obscured or forgotten. Thus, in what follows we wish to suggest that these discourses potentially foreclosed our students' creativity and learning. In positioning 'effectiveness' solely as an evidence-based, rational or

commercial matter and thereby appearing to offer a 'secure' foundation for the making of pedagogical judgements, these discourses absolve new teachers from their responsibility for shaping and contesting practices, for acting upon ethical conviction and from the burden of acting without the a fail-safe 'rule-book'.

Interrogating discourse in student accounts

> Educational research is, unavoidably, a rhetorical affair. Like any other texts, research texts – reports, articles, instruments – are 'fabrications'. Their truths and findings are put together – that is, built or woven (depending on the sense of fabric that one prefers) to achieve particular effects and structures – rather than artlessly culled from a pre-existing world Out There……this is never an innocent business" (Maclure, 2003, p. 80).

As Maclure (2003) notes above, constructionists would accept the validity of political, rather than realist (word-world correspondence), epistemological claims for their research. As we examine the accounts from our own student teachers below, the focus of analysis is therefore necessarily upon spoken discourse.[9] Thus, we were interested in these texts as sites wherein social meanings are constituted, reproduced and contested. Constructionist discourse analysis is concerned with the discursive nature of educational realities (Maclure, 2003). We have collected a variety of textual material in our investigation of teacher education but for the purposes of this paper, we have drawn upon student accounts given in narrative-biographical, semi-structured interviews. We believed these provided us with the richest source of analytic material. Our research was conducted within our own institution, a teacher education programme in a university in the North-East of England[10]. The interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed, thematically coded and analysed by the authors and was guided by our aim to explore how discursive devices constituted and shaped our students' understandings of teaching and teacher identity. To this end, we investigated whether students drew upon commonly-shared discursive resources or what Potter and Wetherell (1987) refer to as 'interpretive repertoires.' In our analysis, we also searched for *patterns of variation* (Tonkiss, 2004) or tensions, created by contrasts and contradictions within and between different discourses circulating and competing for supremacy. We also sought to identify *silences*, that is, where particular ways of talking about teaching were warranted or privileged over alternative accounts (Tonkiss, 2004).

I want to be a proper teacher but I want to do it *my* way: the discipline of 'best practice'

One way in which our students' creativity was disciplined was through a technicist discourse of 'best practice'. Here, learning to teach was seen as a matter of scaling the ladder of competence to arrive at 'effective' teaching. Significantly, truth was seen as a technical matter of correctness to unquestioned criteria:

> There are lots of students who want to be told exactly how to teach…A, B, C, D and that's what they think they should get out of the university *(male, mature entry student)*.

> …..with literacy and numeracy strategies it almost appears as if there *is* a right answer….*(male student)*.

> When you don't know anything about teaching you cling to the structure (of the literacy hour) …. because you feel that bit more comfortable when you go into the lesson knowing that at least you have a structure to follow….*(female student)*.

The word 'cling' used in the third extract is significant since it implies a need for steadfast safety mechanisms in a precarious world, an authoritative methodological crutch in the face of classroom complexity. We thus discerned in our students' accounts a tendency to speak of a desire to control and entirely *eliminate risk* from teaching, and evade failure:

> In the school I'm in, the climate isn't one where I'd feel safe to experiment with stuff…I think I'd just want to do things the way the teacher does them *(female student)*.

> What's hard is that you've got the responsibility of someone's class…it's not a trial and error situation where if you make a mistake it's ok...*(male, mature-entry student)*.

> When you go into … workshops you're thinking 'well it's alright to think in a different way' but I can't help feeling that's going to be the death of me because you know teachers will say 'you're different…you're naïve…oh yes, I thought that when I came out of training school but you'll soon see the light *(male student)*.

And the belief that 'effective' teaching is achieved by imitating exemplary practice appeared to guarantee students much desired security and status conferred by acceptance into an established profession:

> At this stage (in the course) there's not a lot of room for creativity and if you did try to do things differently you'd be marked down for that and you wouldn't pass the course…..*(male, mature-entry student)*.

Though the conservative tendency to seek the security of sanctioned techniques was prevalent in the accounts, there were also traces of disaffection associated with the restrictive penalties of such

technicism in relation to moral and educational purpose. It suppressed possibilities for the weaving of a different identity, for self-reliance and for creative pedagogy. Students' accounts are thus marked with traces of competing truths and ambivalences reminiscent of both gain and loss. A mature-entry male student, for example, spoke frankly of what he called his need to 'stick with what's safe' and yet he also voiced resistance to some institutional practices:

> If you're asking me for the next 25 years to deliver structured literacy and numeracy lessons in a certain way then I will probably be one of the people in 5 years to drop out.

And, though drawn to the comfort of compliance, he had also begun to note opportunities within competing and partial discourses to fashion an identity and pedagogy more in keeping with his view of himself as a creative and active social agent:

> …but yet in Professional Studies, there *is* a message that we can be ourselves and creative later on….they're (tutors) making us question how there isn't just one approach....it's one viewpoint - but it's not the whole answer.

One young female student had even begun to reassess the role of discontinuities and transgressions as potentially productive. In discussing her search to clarify her educational commitments, she had begun to note the *constitutive potential* of difference when discussing competing values with her peers in university seminars:

> …before I came on this course I didn't think there was a role for teachers to criticise things…..I thought it would be quite radical you know……I didn't think it would be so welcomed and celebrated…I like it….It made me a lot more critical and allowed me to stand back a little bit and think is that decision correct for me, you know, is that what *I* want?

It is Graff's contention (2004) that thinking is structured by conflict since it is through exposure to different beliefs that one's own beliefs are clarified. This is not to claim that such exposure will eventually lead to a 'universal synthesis', for difference, as Derrida (1998) would claim, is constitutive of meaning. Graff suggests our aim should not be to "muffle conviction, but to bring it out into the open where as students and teachers we can better decide where our own convictions lie" (Graff, 2004, p.38). In other words, a plurality of perspectives raises awareness that there might be more than *one* set of standards (and perhaps emergent ones) to which students might ascribe.

Nonetheless, creativity and difference were overwhelmingly viewed as risky transgressions, potentially punishable deviancies, or irrationalities. Students were obliged to conform to what Ball

(cited in Woods and Jeffrey, 2004) calls 'assigned social identities' which confer the status of 'proper teacher'. These are those identities imputed by others with the authority to judge competency. It was, for example, politically hazardous to contest officially sanctioned theory and practices:

> I think what comes through on government videos is that the ideal lesson is one where the kids are quiet and put their hands up but when we go into lessons we see that's not happening …and you want a bit of reality. It's a dilemma, a political one…you know… if I don't play the game then I get bad marks *(male student).*

The trouble with the discourse of evidence-based 'best practice' is that it implies an 'applied science' of professionalism that precludes the impassioned engagement which Foucault would argue is necessary for change. Technicism promises to relieve students of the burdensome responsibility of engaging in the risky, political and imaginative struggle to *make* and remake realities (Maclure, 2003). This danger applies also to educational theory. The suggestion that theory can be straightforwardly applied to practice is powerfully authoritarian and conservative. For theory, rather than guiding practice from the outside, must *arise out of* social practice as alternative, partial stories told about classrooms *compete* in action. Britzman (2003, p.69), for example, in her study of preservice teachers' learning, contends that theorising is not "an imposition of abstract theories upon vacuous conditions. Theorising is a form of engagement with and intervention in the world." In this sense, teachers *talk and enact* institutions, practices and realities into being (Heritage, 1984) and social realities are therefore political, and creative *accomplishments* as communities engage in the political process of negotiation through intentional action. 'Realities' are created and continuously reconstructed as "the oldest of truths are to some extent remade" (Dewey, 1907, p.74). As Thomas (1997) points out, it would be better to call the patterns we construct through insider experience within a social practice, generalisations rather than 'theory'. The common academic or official view of theory as grand truths unencumbered by practice, politics or moral predilection, may be detrimental to our students' creativity if they perceive loyalty to theory a substitute for judgement[11]. Judgement requires an assessment of each context as it presents itself to us and theory cannot override this and tell us what to do. The danger with discourses claiming to have prespecified *the* theory or *the* best practice for all, or to have defined the boundaries of rational exchange within inflexible standards of success, is that they

discourage students' willingness to engage in the ongoing *social creation and negotiation* of teaching practices. Their own judgement may be disregarded in the quest to comply with perceived mainstream teaching and educational research practices and standards. That is to say that "to use only tried and tested methods contributes at best to sclerosis in thinking; at worst, it traps students and researchers of education in the methods – and indeed the minds – of others" (Thomas, 1998, p.152).

A further disturbing possibility is that some students, finding themselves at odds with officially-sanctioned practices, may attribute this to their own inadequacy. Despite valuing the opportunity to engage in debate, students also spoke of a hope that conflict, rather than being constitutive, could be *eradicable* and that their future as 'real' teachers would be vested with (as yet absent) power to determine their pedagogies:

> There's an overall way of teaching which we have to demonstrate in order to pass the course and then what you do after that it's kind of up to you and that's when you become a real teacher….once you're established in a school they'll value you as an individual (*male, mature-entry student*).

> They're (the National Curriculum and policy directives) restrictive yes…but it's good for students coming out of PGCE and hopefully we won't be that restricted later when you're more experienced and confident (*female student*).

Thus, students spoke of conflict and difference as a temporary *deviation* from the norm rather than the means by which professional identities and practices are continually (re)constructed. In the current policy climate of technicist solutions, commensurability and scientifically determined, standardised 'best practice', we view such hopes as threats to the future of creative education as we see it.

I should be coherent but I'm living with inconsistency: the discipline of rationalism

Another discourse associated with the disciplining of our students' creativity is that of rationalism. Here, order, consistency and logic are privileged over, and prior to, conviction. Thus, there was a belief that 'reflective practice' could bring relief from the burden of moral dilemmas and indeterminate situations by assisting one in adjudicating confidently between incommensurable values. One student, for example, found himself questioning his allegiance to behaviourism after reading Kohn's *Punished by Rewards* (Kohn, 1999):

> (The book is) kind of an alternative view to the popular behaviour model and it's one of the most thought-provoking books I've ever read because it challenged all the things I'm seeing and doing (*male mature-entry student*).

He recognised a shift in practice would come at a price. Yet, rather than tolerate such loss, there was an expectation that the matter of competing, incommensurate 'goods' (between his desire to cultivate intrinsic motivation and his desire to confer praise) should be amenable to reasonable resolution:

> I don't agree with giving people stickers to do something that they should do anyway because eventually they'll lose the will to do it…because they'll do it for the sticker and not because they want to do it….having said that in my own life I do that…I praise somebody because you quite like the behaviour that they've showed and you're actually doing what you're not agreeing with…so I'm getting all kind of…there's a conflict there and we don't do enough on this course to *understand* these conflicts.

Another student found irreconcilable conflicts haunting her decisions and her reflections and appeared to believe that this contradiction in thought and practice must inevitably condemn one to failure:

> …I had come to the point where I realised I had totally contradicted myself and I thought 'I'm going to fail'. …. that's very, very scary because you're just one teacher in a big sea and there's so many issues that contradict each other and what I found is that I had my own ideas but that they were contradictory to each other and how can you achieve one whilst trying to achieve the other…..? (*female student*).

There are too many competing conceptions of improvement in education to allow smooth progress towards untroubled clarity in the face of indeterminate situations. We agree with Brown and Jones (2001, p.163) that agency is not that "..which can be found embedded within the 'grand narrative' of human liberation which is premised on and fortified by belief in the coherent and autonomous individual. Nor is it found within communicative action where individuals, by engaging in ideal, transparent speech acts can seek to avoid relations of power". Whilst we would not wish to devalue reflection on practice nor educational dialogue in the process of learning to teach, we remain concerned if these become reified goods, ends justified in themselves, for then there is a danger that they become rigid methodologies which inhibit the strength of conviction needed for making difficult judgements in action. It is particularly important that students do not feel that conflict is a taboo to be repressed or eradicated. Rationalism assumes that ethical decisions can be reached unequivocally by appeal to univalent principles, appeals to reason, or notions of 'best practice'. This denies the ongoing political, discursive constitution and reconstitution of identities and practices. We are troubled by the

assumption of convergence, the expectation that it should be possible to meet all priorities or that the principled application of one, consistent truth to all particular cases is necessarily advantageous.

I know what I want but I'm not sure: the discipline of certainty

> The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty (Wittgenstein, cited in Blake et al, 2000, p.195).

Wittgenstein's work draws our attention to the alarming absence of foundation, common standards or ultimate justification for our daily decision-making and actions. His suggestion is that, in the face of incommensurable values and provisional solutions, we must not resort to a paralysing doubting of everything; rather we must yet engage with a dynamic world and act on our present convictions, beliefs and intentions as they present themselves to us *in the immediate contexts of action*.

Foundationalist discourses, by contrast, are dissatisfied with a lack of solid ground to stand on. They revere the non-contradictory, unified self, and relegate the hybrid, contingent self to a position of *lack*. They confer blame upon student teachers for contradiction and inconsistency and imply a need on the part of the student to eliminate such pathologies permanently, positioning "uncertainty as both a character flaw and a problem of management that can be solved by what inheres in the person" (Britzman, 2003, p.225). They deny "the power relationships that shape classroom life" (Britzman, 2003, p.225) and hence the potential of power as a catalyst for new learning is lost since it is assumed that learning is an affair which can be understood once-and-for-all rather than an ongoing struggle. The third source of discipline we identified in our students' accounts then, was a belief that ignorance, partiality and doubt are pathological afflictions to be eradicated by appeals to authority:

> The nature of being in a classroom is that you want to be reassured that what you're doing is right….not going in blind …so you can be sure you know the answers before you go in……you have to have someone telling you where you're going wrong and where you're going right to check you're on the right track. I wouldn't feel confident to criticise; I'm too new (*female student*).

Whilst we would concur with those who suggest that teachers can learn much from experienced mentors (Day, 1999), we are concerned by this student's belief that mentors (or indeed researchers, tutors and policy-makers) have the means for telling her what to do, for "educational research can only ever show us what has been possible in a specific situation – even if that situation was the specific

situation of something called a 'representative sample' – but it can never tell us once and for all what to do" (Burbules and Biesta, 2004, p.110). Educational knowledge, the product of educational enquiry, cannot alleviate us from the responsibility of deciding the *moral* thing to do.

Moreover, we found guilty admissions of partiality, ignorance and error, as if the risk of uncertainty constituted a *lack in them*, or a difficulty to be overcome through concealment:

> …..as long as teaching placements are pass or fail, you're not going to get people taking risks…they're going to do it anonymously because there's a fear of failure *(male student)*.

> I find all these theories hard…I don't think I'm very good at it…I get confused about all the theories but it's just my ignorance I think…*(female student)*.

> I don't have confidence in my own opinions because it's all new to me…you're so used to people saying you should think this way or you should be learning this and it's hard to get out of that…..so I probably don't look at things as critically as I should but I go along with it *(female student)*.

More disturbing was the assumed possibility of overcoming ignorance by dogged persistence and a professed 'openness to everything':

> …you've got to be open to everything and not be small-minded….you've got to be aware of your limitations…you've got to be open to everything *(female student)*.

> You need to have humility with people because I think you'd be an ignorant person if you didn't take on other people's ideas *(female student)*.

This open-mindedness was not tempered with the understanding that it cannot eliminate partiality from one's judgement or reconcile the incommensurable values and competing obligations that often characterise pedagogic encounters. That is, there was no acknowledgement that, since one cannot do everything, one has to take a stand about what it is best to do, or that it is only through our knowing to what we are opposed that our own convictions achieve clarity. Our concern as teacher educators then is that discourses of certainty suggest to students that open-mindedness provides a means of finally grasping the truth, the *complete* solution. If this chimera remains beyond reach, it may lead instead to self-blame or the blaming of others:

> ….people get really scared when you (the tutor) don't give them the answer and it'll probably come back as negative feedback on your (university) evaluations…*(male, mature-entry student)*.

We would suggest that teaching is always characterised by the need to act with some personal conviction in the face of uncertainty. It is always to some extent an enquiry, irresolvable in any

absolute or 'once-and-for-all' way. Without such striving and difficulty there is no concomitant delight in accomplishment, no feeling of having achieved something by virtue of one's own efforts. Yet as Blake et al (2000, p.205) note, "Ignorance is seen today as just a lack, a gap to be filled in, a debility to be cured." They go on to root such disparagement in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment discourse captured in both progressive and conservative educational traditions. Without teacher educators' faith in their new teachers' creative potential, in their capacity to *go beyond what is already established*, the possibility of expanding pedagogic possibilities in the future is foreclosed. As one student commented:

> We're all self-doubting and you need others to have faith in you …I know I'm confident in myself but I worry if someone says I can't do it and I don't want anyone having that judgement on me …..it should be *me* making that judgement (*male, mature-entry student*).

Conclusion

We have argued in this paper that social practices such as teaching produce *meaning,* and that meanings, in turn, fashion teachers' conduct. From a constructionist perspective, since nothing has meaning outside of discourse, practices are always discursively regulated *but also* potentially transformed. Thus practices are both dynamic *and* infused with relations of power. Teachers' learning is not therefore an ahistorical and dispassionate matter. The 'truth' about education or about teachers' or pupils' learning is that which has competed for, and achieved, pre-eminence through a political process. We are concerned that the discourses of technicism and reflective teaching are conservative, an effect which has come about through their naturalisation. The creative and political *struggle* necessary to their eventual success has been obscured or overlooked. Our argument in this paper has been that such conservatism is detrimental to new teachers' creative spirit. We are concerned that authoritative discourses which purport to provide reliable foundations (timeless, acultural rule-books) absolve students from the moral responsibility and decisive conviction necessary for shaping education. Whilst such discourses may provide welcome respite from provisionality and insecurity for vulnerable new teachers, they also deny them their role in the political process of *accomplishing* the meanings and practices of education. Though reflective practice does demand that students think critically about official definitions of good practice in relation to their educational aims and context, the social milieu in which they learn is nevertheless infused with *status and power*. Their reputations

and careers all too often hinge on how successfully they uphold the legitimated official discourse of standards or the authoritative theoretical accounts of researchers. Reliance upon foundations therefore leads to dependency, inflexibility and a restrictive, one-dimensional view of educational standards.

Our argument is therefore that creative change is unlikely to occur through rational exchange alone. We have argued that possibilities for change are dependent upon the availability of multiple, *competing* perspectives of teacher identity and practice. Yet our students found risk-taking injudicious in the face of policies which pathologise transgression and inventiveness. Foucault's analytics of power point to the techniques which serve to regulate subjects (Foucault, 1977) and is germane here. One of these techniques is 'normalization' wherein the beliefs, actions and values of those failing to conform to the standard designated as normal are characterised as deviant. As Blake et al (2000) comment, creative possibilities are then diminished. For standards become one-dimensional and contestable only to the extent that their realization has or has not been accomplished:

> A standard, we should recall, is in one of its meanings a single scale, like Celsius or Richter, on which all temperatures and earthquakes can be ranked. The standard, and thus the goals and values, are one and the same for all. (All that is, must be *commensurable*.) Absurd to object that you were trying to do something *different* with your pupils or students… (Blake et al, 2000, p.xi).

As Feyerabend (1993) notes, *rational* exchange is different to *open* exchange. Rational exchange restricts debate in terms of pre-established standards whereas open exchange offers potential for change not dependent upon logic but rather upon the irrational, the contingent, the imaginative and the play of *contrast and difference*. Of course this precludes the possibility of *complete* solutions. All situated judgements entail the juggling of competing priorities. Change is not predictable for it is neither amenable to the rational technology of control nor to an Enlightened state of liberation from competing, incommensurable obligations. But if our students are led to *expect* such totality, we should not then be surprised when this leads to disappointment, disaffection and a culture of blame.

Rather than expecting liberation from ideological distortion, they should, however, expect an opportunity to argue for their position on substantive educational matters (such as the need to *act* on a conviction in the teaching moment) whilst *also* being allowed the possibility of adaptation to changing circumstances across time and space. We are arguing in this paper for practical, *inventive* (rather than merely rational) enquiry. This does not mean being wholly indiscriminate since that would militate

against the conviction needed to *act*, to test ideas, to take risks. The very notion of risk-taking entails a belief that not all outcomes are equally worthy. Such aspirations do "not imply an abrogation of thought about educational problems; rather it implies a plea for such thought not to be constrained within parameters of particular kinds of theory and putatively rational enquiry. It implies an encouragement of the student's and the researcher's unrestrained intelligence so that they do whatever seems best – not what is implied by some theory, or what is consistent with some existing body of knowledge" (Thomas, 1998, p.156). This requires a climate wherein student teachers' roles as creative knowledge *producers* is recognised (Day, 2004; Edwards, 2001), where practice may lead to unplanned yet nonetheless fruitful inventions and solutions. These are conditions within which student teachers' enquiries may grow in unpredictable, as yet unprecedented, directions for practice.

Ultimately this is a question of trust, and belief in the moral and creative capacities of our students. Educational practice may progress but this requires that new teachers possess the political courage and creative will to make it happen. We have argued in this paper that we ought to liberate such courage in our student teachers so that they, in their turn, may liberate such courage in their pupils. As Nietzsche asserted, imagination and responsibility are central features of personal development through education:

> If we are not accountable…we shall wander the world seeking someone to explain ourselves to, someone to absolve us and tell us we have done well (Nietzsche, cited in Blake et al, 2000, p. 227).

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[1] See Behler, E (1986) for a discussion of Kant's views on the impossible art of educating.

[2] A vast literature in philosophy, the social sciences and education deals with the socially constructed nature of identity. When we talk of identity in this paper we refer to *self-identity* by which we mean the ways we conceptualise our subjective self, and *social identity*, by which we mean the ways we are conceptualised by others. In particular, we draw upon a post-structuralist perspective on the human subject. Here the subject is not thought of as unified, autonomous or stable with fixed attributes but emerges relationally, constituted within and across a range of discourses (see Sarup, 1988; Peters, 1998). When we refer to *professional or teacher identity*, we include both social and self-identity in that we understand teacher identity to be influenced both by the conceptions, images and expectations in society about what a teacher should be like, and also what a teacher believes to be important to their work based on their values, experiences and beliefs (Beijaard et al, 2004).

[3] For a discussion of the dominance of rationalism in educationalists' thinking generally and the unhappy consequences for creativity in education to which it leads, see Thomas (1997;1998).

[4] We refer here to critiques of all ahistorical foundations for knowledge, a theme running through Western philosophy, particularly in the work of post-Nietzchean European thought and American neopragmatism.

[5] Rorty (1998), for example, has named the assumption that our language corresponds with reality as 'the correspondence theory of truth' and offers a neopragmatist alternative wherein language acts as a tool to meet

our purposes rather than as a mirror on the world. This is not a rejection of realism as such but a critique of the reality-scheme distinction. See also Dewey's transactional realism which understands experience itself as constituting reality in that our understanding of the world is always already implicated in meaning arising out of action and we cannot therefore 'check' our knowledge agrees with a pre-existent, uninterpreted, given reality (Dewey, 1958).

[6] See Thomas (1997) for a discussion of how the authority vested in psychological theory - for example, the proclaimed essentialist nature of children's cognition - has influenced teacher education negatively.

[7] In spite of recurrent warnings about the role the education system currently plays in increasing the gap between affluent and poor families in relation to access to and the benefits of education, there are those who argue that teachers' decisions are nevertheless heavily regulated by policed mechanisms in which the penalties of acting on different interpretations of 'equality of opportunity' if they so desired are too severe to warrant non-compliance as a worthwhile option. See for example, Ball (2003).

[8] This could be referred to as naïve realism, an epistemology related to positivism. However, we accept that there are a range of realist positions which are more complex, such as scientific realism for example which has attempted to deal with criticisms aimed at assumptions of theory-free observation. A fuller discussion is given by Scheurich (1997).

[9] In traditional, modernist notions of research, validity relates to the extent to which findings correspond to the way things are in reality. Yet this conception is based upon a correspondence theory of truth and an epistemology which, as discussed above, is problematic. The postmodern, pluralist turn suggests that there are different ways of storying the same events (Huttunen et al, 2002). This is not unbridled relativism or subjectivism for, when seen within a pragmatist account of knowledge, all knowledge is still nevertheless meaningful only within the social or discursive practices of particular socio-historical contexts.

[10] The research in this paper draws on interviews with ten students carried out in the university department, but in order to illustrate key aspects of our argument in detail we draw in particular on three students who were interviewed at the beginning *and* end of their post-graduate certificate in education programme. Interviewees comprised a mature-entry, white British, male student (34) who had previously spent several years in retail management, a young, white British male student (22) who had come into teaching straight from his first degree in geography, and a young, white British female student (22), also straight from her first degree in English. Though we have been rigorous in our analyses, we do not claim realist validity for the use of their accounts here. In recent years, there have been moves to reclaim the 'authentic' voice of teachers in educational research in an attempt to minimise 'distortion' and correct the privileging of the researcher's view. However, Maclure (2003) and Scheurich (1997) argue that aspirations to liberate the authentic representations of interviewees (as opposed to 'insincere fronts'), assumes a binary universe of realism with the concomitant metaphors of applied science. Maclure suggests instead that life-history researchers and their subjects *produce* (always incomplete) texts as part of the unceasing construction of social reality. Research is thus generative rather than representational.

[11] This is not to deny, as stated elsewhere in the paper, that making practice amenable to self-conscious reflection and engaging in rational exchange, may be helpful for students as they participate in the socio-political process of debating educational issues.

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