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Contradictory Realities in Learning to Teach

One of the most provocative questions in the research on teaching was raised over fifty years ago by Willard Waller in what is now known as the first sociology of teaching.¹ There, Waller asked, “What does teaching do to teachers?” This question opens the underside of teaching, the private struggles we engage as we construct not only our teaching practices and all the relationships this entails, but our teaching voices and identities. We are invited to explore the felt experiences of our teaching lives because such a question allows us, as Walter Benjamin put it, “to brush history against the grain”² in order to uncover the dynamics, tensions, exclusions, and inclusions engendered by the activity of teaching.

When we stop and look at teachers in this way—to see teachers as being shaped by their work as well as shaping their work—we are able to shift the discourse of teacher education from an instrumentalist belief in controlling and manipulating variables—an orientation based upon the suppression of subjectivity—to a dialogic discourse. A dialogic discourse can take into account the discursive practices and their social relationships that realize pedagogy and the lived experiences of teachers. Such a commitment requires implicitly the teacher’s presence and our own capacity to listen to the teacher’s voice. For in considering what teaching does to teachers, our concern is with *how* the activity of teaching expresses something about the subjectivities of teachers and determines ways teachers come to construct their teaching identities. This present study is concerned with such problems.

Waller’s question is extended to the arena of student teaching for it is there that one first confronts the multiple meanings, constraints, and

possibilities of the teacher's identity in the process of constructing one's own. In its broadest sense, this study asks the question: What does learning to teach do and mean to student teachers and those involved in the practice of teaching? In its more specific sense, this study explores how our teaching selves are constituted in the context of learning to teach, and how the selves we produce constrain and open the possibilities of creative pedagogies. In focusing on the ways teachers construct themselves as they are being constructed by others, this study does not provide the reader with grand solutions about the best way to learn to teach. Instead, my intention is to raise thorny questions about the inherited discourses of student teaching and to theorize the contradictory realities that beckon and disturb those who live in this field.

Theorizing about these questions reorients us to the work of teachers, and requires an understanding not simply of the structures of schools or the skills necessary to teach there, but the construction of one's identity as a teacher. To pursue this, we must develop a "double consciousness" of persons and of places, relating those involved in the practice of teaching to the history, mythology, and discourses of the institutions framing their work. We must cultivate an appreciation for the *process* of education that can critically take into account what Maxine Greene has termed, "the immediacy of the felt encounter,"³ and become concerned with whose immediacy is felt and what possibilities are encountered. To value such a process, learning to teach must be rendered problematic. The complexity of relationships—both given and possible—that work through pedagogy must be understood as intimately shaping the subjective world and the discursive practices of the teacher.

Enacted in every pedagogy are the tensions between knowing and being, thought and action, theory and practice, knowledge and experience, the technical and the existential, the objective and the subjective. Traditionally expressed as dichotomies, these relationships are not nearly so neat or binary. Rather, such relationships are better expressed as dialogic in that they are shaped as they shape each other in the process of coming to know. Produced because of social interaction, subject to negotiation, consent, and circumstance, inscribed with power and desire, and always in the process of becoming, these dialogic relations determine the very texture of teaching and the possibilities it opens. They fashion as well the ways teachers understand their practices and the subjectivity that bestows this practice with identity. Indeed, negotiating among what may seem to be conflicting visions, disparaging considerations, and contesting interpretations about social practice and the teacher's identity is part of the hidden work of learning to teach. This unmapped territory, then, must be charted in ways that can permit a double consciousness of how systemic constraints become lived as individual dilemmas.

The story of learning to teach begins actually much earlier than the time one first decides to become a teacher. The mass experience of public educa-

tion has made teaching one of the most familiar professions in this culture. Implicitly, schooling fashions the meanings, realities, and experiences of students; thus those learning to teach draw from their subjective experiences constructed from actually being there. They bring to teacher education their educational biography and some well-worn and commonsensical images of the teacher's work. In part, this accounts for the persistency of particular worldviews, orientations, dispositions, and cultural myths that dominate our thinking and, in unintended ways, select the practices that are available in educational life.

The overfamiliarity of the teaching profession is a significant contradiction affecting those learning to teach. We have all played a role opposite teachers for a large part of our school lives. It is taken for granted that we all know what a teacher is and does. This knowledge is based upon years of observation. It must be remembered that by the time a person enters teacher education, she or he has spent approximately thirteen thousand hours observing teachers.⁴ As Dan Lortie notes,⁵ this observation time is not passive but is charged by the relations of power operating in compulsory contexts. Observation skills acquired through schooling allow students to "survive" in classrooms: students not only learn to interact with the formal curriculum of teaching and learning, but act as well within a hidden curriculum. In fact, those who are most "successful" actively read the text of the teacher—her or his moods, behaviors, values, judgments, discourse strategies, and classroom expectations.

It is little wonder that many students leave compulsory education believing that "anyone can teach," for it is so easy to "read" the teacher and anticipate her or his practices. Indeed, for many students, pedagogy is not rooted in the production of knowledge but rather in its public image. For those who leave this world to enter teacher education, their first culture shock may well occur with the realization of the overwhelming complexity of the teacher's work and the myriad ways this complexity is masked and misunderstood. But what occurs as well is the startling idea that the taking up of an identity means suppressing aspects of the self. So at first glance, becoming a teacher may mean becoming someone you are not. It is this dual struggle that works to construct the student teacher as the site of conflict.

To view the work of teachers as "easy" implies a particular understanding of their practice. Robert Everhart, in his ethnographic study of junior high school males, describes how the experience of observing teachers, within the context of school structure, shapes what these students come to understand about the work of teachers:

From the student point of view there was little else involved in what teachers did in the classroom other than represented in this simple

“factory model” of learning; that is, the teachers pouring in the facts and the students pouring them back in the form of papers and tests. . . . The student picture of teachers provided little room for emotion, with the exception of that associated with student violation of school standards. The teacher’s world, in the student’s eyes, was straightforward and linear, hardly complex at all.⁶

Issues of pedagogy do not enter into a student’s view of the teacher’s work. Rather, the teacher’s skills are reduced to custodial moments: the ability to enforce school rules, impart textbook knowledge, grade student papers, and manage classroom discipline appear to be the sum total of the teacher’s work. Hidden is the pedagogy teachers enact: the ways teachers render content and experience as pedagogical, consciously construct and innovate teaching methods, solicit and negotiate student concerns, and attempt to balance the exigencies of curriculum with both the students’ and their own visions of what it means to know.

Rarely disclosed by teachers themselves and absent from the student’s account are the more private aspects of pedagogy: coping with competing definitions of success and failure, and one’s own sense of vulnerability and credibility. Residing in the “heads” and “hearts” of teachers, and emerging from their personal and institutional biography, this “personal practical knowledge,” or knowledge made from the stuff of lived experience,⁷ is so intimately a part of teachers’ enactments that its appearance as skills becomes taken for granted. Taken for granted as well are how their discursive practices come to express something about the structure of institutional life, and the ways in which power and authority are experienced there.

Stereotypical images of teachers abound. If some are said to “look like teachers,” they are thought to resemble the subject content they teach. Teachers are said to look “bookish,” “brainy,” “like a narc,” “a big head,” “mean,” or, in the case of women, “like an old maid.” Trapped within these images, teachers come to resemble things or conditions; their identity assumes an essentialist quality and, as such, socially constructed meanings become known as innate and natural.

Likewise, the backhanded compliment of “Funny, you don’t look like a teacher,” attempts to disassociate the individual from a social caricature.⁸ Many of these stereotypes, commonly associated with women teachers, are profoundly sexist and reveal a disdain for the teaching profession’s female roots.⁹ In the dominant society, so-called favorable images that characterize the teacher as selfless also mirror the stereotypes associated with women. Like the “good” woman, the “good” teacher is positioned as self-sacrificing, kind, overworked, underpaid, and holding an unlimited reservoir of patience. Waller observed:

We may say that [the] favorable stereotype represents the community ideal of what a teacher ought to be and that the unfavorable one represents the common opinion of what a teacher actually is.¹⁰

The persistency of such stereotypes, however, does more than caricature the opinions and hopes of a community. Such images tend to subvert a critical discourse about the lived contradictions of teaching and the actual struggles of teachers and students. Stereotypes engender a static and hence repressed notion of identity as something already out there, a stability that can be assumed. Here, identity is expressed as a final destination rather than a place of departure. For example, the image of the “good” teacher is implicitly antiworker in that any attempt to unionize, agitate for better working conditions, or seek more of a voice in the governance of schools is viewed as an individualistic example of being “selfish,” “greedy,” “into power,” or “unprofessional.”¹¹ In the case of women teachers, who are merely seen to carry their “natural” abilities into the marketplace, they are apt to be characterized as either martyrs or idiots.¹² Male teachers are expected to assert a machismo identity in their classrooms, and depending upon their proximity to this image, become characterized either as wimps or as tough guys.¹³

These images displace the collective concerns of real teachers with measures of individual behavior based upon adherence to patriarchal conventions, notions of a unitary non-contradictory identity, and images of professionalism that preclude the struggles of gender, class, race, and generation. In either case, the multiple identities of the teacher—both given and possible—become lost in a cycle of cultural determinism.¹⁴ Such a cycle depends upon the process whereby the identity of a teacher becomes overpopulated with cultural myths.

To explore the cultural myths that summon teachers and their work requires an excursion into superficial knowledge, how it becomes produced and lived. Superficial knowledge is first of all ensconded in the situations of visceral knowing; it is made from the stuff of tacit understandings and the discursive practices that are produced and then produce and organize how educational life is interpreted and lived. Superficial knowledge makes available particular practices as it orients understanding. Sherry Turkle, in her ethnographic study of the French popularization of psychoanalytic culture, termed the problem of superficial knowledge as “decipher[ing] some elements of an emergent modern mythology.”¹⁵ While we all live in myths, some myths instigate repressive notions of pedagogy and identity, while others open us to the dialogic. This latter image of teachers—as negotiators, mediators, and authors of who they are becoming—is the place where identity becomes infused with possibilities.

As suggested above, superficial images of the work of teachers become the material for cultural myths about teaching and may bear upon the expectations,

desires, and investments one brings to and constructs during the process of becoming a teacher. Cultural myths offer a set of ideal images, definitions, and justifications that are taken up as measures for thought, affect, and practice. These images instantiate the characteristics of modern myth: value-laden, it is masked by a naturalized appearance that seems complete and speaks for itself. A myth makes available particular discursive practices that position situations as given without the quality of contingency; its form asserts a stable meaning despite unstable contexts by offering reasons in the guise of motives.¹⁶ As Roland Barthes observes, a myth, as a language for codifying what a culture values, serves contradictory functions: “it points out and it notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes it on us.”¹⁷ Teachers’ classroom appearance, sustained by school structure and serving as the basis for cultural myths, represses teachers’ subjectivity: they are subsumed by predictability and hence immune to changing circumstances and incapable of interventions. The overfamiliarity of the teacher’s role, the taken-for-grantedness of school structure, and the power of one’s institutional biography are open to the suggestions cultural myths offer about the work and identity of teachers. In the case of learning to teach, cultural myths partly structure the individual’s taken-for-granted views of power, authority, knowledge, and identity. They work to cloak the more vulnerable condition of learning to teach and the myriad negotiations it requires.

One such myth, explored throughout this study, is rooted in the very structure of student teaching. The myth that experience makes the teacher, and hence that experience is telling in and of itself, valorizes student teaching as the authentic moment in teacher education and the real ground of knowledge production. There, normative notions collapse the distinction between acquiring pedagogical skills and becoming a teacher by objectifying experience as a map. In this discourse, everything is already organized and complete; all that is left to do is to follow preordained paths. The problem is that when experience is perceived as a map, it is taken to order perception and guarantee essential truths. For example, conventional wisdom such as “we learn by experience,” or “experience is the best teacher,” legitimizes the regime of a particular discourse on experience. And while such slogans are taken up as common sense, what is expressed in actuality is a discourse of common sense.¹⁸ As a discourse, common sense depends upon what is already known—the obvious—and hence resists explanations about the complications we live. Missing in this valorization of experience is an interrogation into how the dynamics of social expression—the discourses that bear upon the conceptual ordering we give to construct experience as meaningful—produce accompanying discursive practices that constitute experience as already filled with essential and unitary meanings. Such a myth presents experience as given and

implicitly requires the student teacher to accept preordained meanings as natural and self-evident.

Despite the persistency of cultural myths that position the teacher as expert, as self made, as sole bearer of power, and as a product of experience, those learning to teach feel a rupture between the ethic and the experience, because learning to teach constitutes a time of biographical crisis as it simultaneously invokes one's autobiography. That is, learning to teach is not a mere matter of applying decontextualized skills or of mirroring predetermined images; it is time when one's past, present, and future are set in dynamic tension. Learning to teach—like teaching itself—is always the process of becoming: a time of formation and transformation, of scrutiny into what one is doing, and who one can become.

The image of teaching advocated here is dialogic: teaching must be situated in relationship to one's biography, present circumstances, deep commitments, affective investments, social context, and conflicting discourses about what it means to learn to become a teacher. With this dialogic understanding, teaching can be reconceptualized as a struggle for voice and discursive practices amid a cacophony of past and present voices, lived experiences, and available practices. The tensions among what has preceded, what is confronted, and what one desires shape the contradictory realities of learning to teach.

Learning to teach is a social process of negotiation rather than an individual problem of behavior. This dynamic is essential to any humanizing explanation of the work of teachers. Teaching concerns coming to terms with one's intentions and values, as well as one's views of knowing, being, and acting in a setting characterized by contradictory realities, negotiation, and dependency and struggle. Yet the normative discourse of learning to teach presents it as an individual dilemma that precludes the recognition of the contradictory realities of school life. The contradiction here is that while learning to teach is individually experienced and hence may be viewed as individually determined, in actuality it is socially negotiated. However, as will be discussed throughout this study, the press for individual control over the teaching process obscures its social origins; individual notions of power privatize contradictions and thereby thwart those learning to teach from theorizing about and effectively intervening in such contradictory realities. Moreover, the vulnerable condition of being a social subject becomes "taboo" discourse when learning to teach is viewed as a private dilemma of acquiring predetermined dispositions and skills, and of taking up preexisting identities.

This study takes up the above concerns. Its organization follows my own chronology of coming to understand the contradictory realities of learning to teach. The first two chapters of this study are meant to orient the reader to

my theoretical investments. The concepts I use to work through the meanings of practice, pedagogy, and becoming, and the discourses that express their particular meanings are theorized in the first two chapters. Chapters 3 and 4 narrate the stories of two different student teachers as they set about learning to teach in high school settings. As will be explained in each of these chapters, I have ordered their narratives chronologically because I learned of their episodes week by week and because this sense of time unfolding qualified their sense of the immediate and their visions of the future. Chapter 3 magnifies the world of Jamie Owl, a student teacher in English studies, while chapter 4 looks at Jack August, a student teacher in social studies education. Chapter 5 pulls the ethnographic zoom lens back and considers the contradictory views of professional educators: secondary teachers, school administrators, and teacher educators. Chapter 6 is concerned with the multiple voices and heteroglossic tensions working through the discursive practices of teacher education, and the last chapter returns to the textual dilemmas of narrating conflict in an ethnography of learning to teach.

THE STUDY OF LIVED EXPERIENCE

This book is an ethnographic study of the contradictory realities of learning to teach in secondary education and how these realities fashion the subjectivities of student teachers. An ethnography is the study of lived experience and hence examines how we come to construct and organize what has already been experienced. Lived experience “hints at a process whereby we attribute meaning to what happens to us.”¹⁹ The purpose of such a research style, as Linda Brodkey argues, “is to examine how in the course of dramatizing their own lives, individuals also fabricate material culture.”²⁰ As an ethnography, this narration is constructed from the perspectives and experiences of its central subjects: student teachers, classroom teachers, university professors and supervisors, school administrators, and myself, the researcher. Each represented perspective has different investments in positioning the ways in which one learns to become a teacher. Such investments complicate the stories of learning to teach. What makes this reality so contradictory is the fact that teaching and learning have multiple and conflicting meanings that shift with our lived lives, with the theories produced and encountered, with the deep convictions and desires brought to and created in education, with the practices we negotiate, and with the identities we construct.

This is not the problem. Rather, when such multiplicity is suppressed, so too is our power to imagine how things could be otherwise. Here I am referring to the dilemmas of carving out one’s own teaching territory within

preordained borders, of desiring to be different while negotiating institutional mandates for uniformity, and of struggling to construct one's teaching voice from the stuff of student experience. How do student teachers and the significant others with whom they interact make sense of their inherited and socially constructed circumstances? Part of what I attempt to theorize is the complicated process of theorizing, how "the small imaginings of local knowledge"²¹ and cultural myths about teaching are discursively produced and lived, and how the conditions of learning to teach inscribe the subjectivities, voices, and practices of its subjects.

Two questions—part descriptive and part interpretive—initially shaped this study: What is it like to learn to teach? And what does it mean to those involved? These questions are ethnographic because they required my presence in the world of student teachers for the purpose of understanding student teachers and the practitioners who surrounded them as they understood themselves. But I did not enter this world as innocent or as an empty vessel waiting to be filled with the knowledge of student teachers. Indeed, throughout my career, I have been a student teacher, a cooperating teacher, and a teacher educator. These positions have shaped my present understanding. My project, then, is not merely to describe what happens to those learning to teach from their perspectives alone. Unlike traditional educational ethnographers who enter the familiar world of school and linguistically render this familiar experience as strange, my project is to take the familiar story of learning to teach and render it problematic through cultural critique and by asserting multiple voices.

The above questions become critical when they are juxtaposed with questions about the context and structure of student teaching. The context of student teaching is not a neutral zone where one "receives" either the rudimentary foundations of a teaching style, or the unitary position on the nature of the teacher's work and the identity one must assume. Neither is the structure of teaching innocent of ideology and the normative discourse of what it means to know and learn. Rather the context of teaching is political, it is an ideological context that privileges the interests, values, and practices necessary to maintain the status quo, and ironically, the powerlessness of teachers.

Because learning to teach means coming to terms with particular orientations toward knowledge, power, and identity, and because it is experienced in a context characterized by an unequal distribution of power that acts to constrict people's lives, I am also interested in how people become entangled in oppressive structures. My concern is to theorize not just about what student teachers do but what it is that structures their investments, interpretations, and practices. In this way, I share Roger Simon and Donald Dippo's concern that a critical ethnographic work theorizes:

How people are implicated in the regulation and alteration of the terms of how they live together and how they define what is possible and desirable for themselves and others. . . . It is an interest organized by a standpoint which implicates us in moral questions about desirable forms of social relations and ways of living. Thus the interest that defines critical ethnographic work is both pedagogical and political. It is linked to our assessment of our own society as inequitably structured and dominated by a hegemonic culture that suppresses a consideration and understanding of why things are the way they are and what must be done for things to be otherwise.²²

This is not to suggest, in approaching the social arrangements of teaching from a political perspective, that the conditions one confronts are immutable. Rather, the critical questions I raise concern the complex relationship between learning to teach and our capacity to transform the experience of education through a deep commitment to social justice, personal thoughtfulness, and an openness to difference, contradictions, risks, and change. Juxtaposed with the descriptive and interpretive questions previously raised, then, are two critical questions: How do student teachers see themselves as resisting cultural hegemony? How can student teachers come to take up discursive practices that both challenge the taken-for-granted passivity presently dominating learning and teaching, and fashion activist and participatory styles of knowing and being?

An attentiveness to language and the personal voices of the participants in this study allows us entry into their practical world. Language shapes and is shaped by meaning. Voice, in this context, suggests the individual's struggle to create and fashion meaning, assert standpoints, and negotiate with others. Voice permits participation in the social world. Through the alterity of the speaker, voice affirms one's relationship to the world and to others. Here I am using alterity to refer to the dialogue between the self and others, to the idea that one can only know the self through relationships with others. Consequently, voice suggests the inflections and intonations of who we are. It is the means whereby we reaccentuate language with personal meanings. And while we may speak the same language, it is with a polyphony of voices.

The study of voice, however, makes for a cautious study in three regards. First, we do not have one voice but many. Our voice is always contingent upon shifting relationships among the words we speak, the practices we construct, and the community within which we interact. As practices, perspectives, and communities shift, so too does the voice we use to name them. Second, our capacity to make language work for us is problematic. There is never a simple correspondence between the words we use and the things to which we refer. Language can mask and illuminate, and also affirm and

challenge, how we understand our social conditions. It has the potential either to reproduce given realities as immutable and ubiquitous, or to produce critiques that have the potential to construct new realities.²³ Third, interpreting the voice of others leads to the development of yet a different voice. My dilemma as a researcher is to reconstruct and critically re-present the voices of others, and, in so doing, care for their integrity, humanity, and struggles.

Uma Narayan, in discussing the difficulties of understanding others, describes two necessary stances the listener must assume: methodological humility and methodological caution. Methodological humility requires the listener “sincerely conduct herself under the assumption that, as an outsider, she may be missing something, and that what appears to be a mistake on the part of the insider may make sense if she had a fuller understanding of the context.” Similarly, methodological caution requires the listener “carry out her attempted criticism of the insider’s perceptions in such a way that it does not attempt to, or even seem to amount to an attempt to denigrate or dismiss entirely the validity of the insider’s point of view.”²⁴

To assume a critical voice then, does not mean to destroy or devalue the struggles of others. Instead, a critical voice attempts the delicate and discursive work of rearticulating the tensions between and within words and practices, or constraints and possibilities, as it questions the consequences of the taken-for-granted knowledge shaping responses to everyday life and the meanings fashioned from them. A critical voice is concerned not just with representing the voices of oneself and others, but with narrating, considering, and evaluating them.

Re-presenting the voices of others means more than recording their words. An interpretive effort is necessary because words always express relationships, span contexts larger than the immediate situation from which they arise, and hold tensions between what is intended and what is signified. In repositioning the voices of others, we can begin to tease out what Raymond Williams terms “the structure of feeling,” or the particular sense of life constructed by those who live it.²⁵ In detailing the ordinary days that compose the struggle to teach, part of my goal is to represent—for the reader’s interpretation—the structure of feeling engendered by learning to teach. Yet a further lacuna of representation must also be acknowledged. And this is the danger, as Linda Brodkey so aptly warns, “of confusing the narrative of lived experience with experience.”²⁶ They can never be synonymous. Nor is an identical correspondence a desirable or possible goal. The retelling of another’s story is always a partial telling, bound not only by one’s perspective but also by the exigencies of what can and cannot be told. The narratives of lived experience—the story, or what is told, and the discourse, or what it is that structures how a story is told—are always selective, partial, and in tension. The contradiction is that while the ethnographic narrative pushes the reader to accept the story of

student teaching as a unitary whole, characterized by a beginning, a middle, and an end, the theoretical perspectives I employ work to disrupt the myth of the seamless narrative and the omnipresent narrator.²⁷ Thus the structure of feeling supposed by my narration should be read as radically contingent.

My focus is on the situation of the student teacher because the student teacher's delicate position in the classroom allows insight into the struggle for voice in both teaching and learning. Marginally situated in two worlds, the student teacher as part student and part teacher has the dual struggle of educating others while being educated. Consequently, student teachers appropriate different voices in the attempt to speak for themselves yet all the while act in a largely inherited and constraining context. This struggle characterizes the tensions between being and becoming a teacher as student teachers draw from their past and present in the process of coming to know. Often, however, it is this struggle that is absent both from the research on learning to teach and from the normative practices of mainstream programs in teacher education. Part of this text will account for these silences as it reconstructs the polyphony of voices that mediate, persuade, and produce particular forms of practice and the concurrent discourses that legitimate or challenge them.

THEORETICAL ISSUES IN THE STUDY OF PRACTICE AND VOICE

Styles of theorizing are usually of two types: a search for mechanisms or a search for meanings.²⁸ A search for *mechanisms* entails a functionalist account of how things work, or do not work. It is a concrete search that attempts to posit explanations for specific problems and to prescribe solutions. A search for *meaning*, a style of theorizing practiced in this text, begins with a different set of assumptions. Such a search is interpretive, constructivist, and critical, moving back and forth between the story, its telling, and the contingencies of perspectival borders.

This style of theorizing, rooted in narration, is reflexive and not reducible to discrete variables. As Linda Brodkey explains: "The outstanding epistemological advantage of interpretation is the realization that although experience cannot be recovered, it can be narrated."²⁹ Central to this project, then, are the assumptions that meaning is historically contingent, contextually bound, socially constructed, and always problematic. Thus any search for meanings must be situated in the practical context within which they are voiced. The place of departure for the search for meaning is with the material practices of the subject. So while personal meaning is the sense each individual makes, it can never be reducible to one essential source.

Like the practices they articulate, personal meanings are in some ways difficult to pin down. They can appear to be the property of an individual,

while also connecting that individual to a social community. They can seem ostensibly objective, and unencumbered by value or feeling, yet are underscored and sometimes undone by the deep convictions that sustain particular interests. Personal meanings can seem self-evident—and then become elusive when one attempts explanations. Appearing immutable, personal meanings can crumble during times of disputation, negotiation, and symbolic interaction. And within such dynamics, personal meanings may assert the unitary meanings we desire at the expense of recognizing the contradictory constructs we live. How we understand the context and evolutions of our practices determines whether we see a specific context as socially constructed, individually determined, or naturally inherited. These constructions will then shape interpretive possibilities and the discursive practices that accompany them. Because personal meanings are contingent upon context and upon the perspectives of others, they are always shifting. Consequently the meanings one makes from practice are in a state of continual and contradictory reinterpretation as other contexts and other voices are taken into account or are ignored.

To say that personal meanings are contradictory—they simultaneously express the said and the unsaid, pose myths and construct realities, and can be seen as belonging to individuals and cultures—is not to assert a dreary relativism that all meanings are equal, accurate, just, or empowering, or that communication is either impossible or a mere matter of individual thought and determination. Just the opposite: this capacity for contradiction, or the situation of multiple and conflicting meanings that constitute the heteroglossic in language, can serve as the departure for a dialogic understanding that theorizes about how one understands the given realities of teaching as well as the realities that teaching makes possible. Central to this study, then, is the problem of how subjects produce and reproduce meanings and myths about education through their theories, practices, routines, discourses, contexts, and reflections on educational life, and how such meanings produce identities.

Finally, a style of theorizing that is concerned with interpretation and meanings must also attend to the perspective and power of the researcher. In the case of ethnography, the researcher's presence always already implicates her in her own research in at least two significant ways.³⁰ First, because ethnography is predicated upon not simply being there but with establishing relationships with people, the researcher, if invited, is obligated to sympathetically participate in the lives of those she studies. This sympathetic participation should reflect a delicate balance between probing the motivations, intents, investments, and practices of persons, and respecting their boundaries of privacy and vulnerability. It is a difficult participation to invite because typically such participation is not mutual. I am not the one revealing my stories, fears, and vulnerabilities. Nor is it possible, given this kind of

relationship, for me to feel the kind of misrepresentation that emerges inevitably from multiple retellings of stories that are not my own.

Second, researchers have the power to reinterpret and hence authorize the experiences and voices of others in ways that may clash or not resonate with the lived experiences they seek to explore. I am referring here to a different kind of representation, made possible by the theoretical investments of the researcher. My own theoretical investments, described throughout this text, are rooted in critical traditions. No doubt other researchers, drawing upon other epistemological traditions, would differently interpret my constructions. Multiple perspectives on the same event, however, are both inevitable and desirable. The delicate work of interpretation depends upon difference. Consequently, the best I can do with such power is to take the advice of Linda Alcoff. Rather than approach my data through “a veil of ignorance,” where my own interests and investments are supposedly held in some fictitious abeyance, “political theory must base itself on the initial premise that all persons, including the theorist, have a fleshy, material identity that will influence and pass judgment on political claims.”³¹ Indeed, as someone who has spent significant time in school and university settings, my investment in understanding the messiness of learning to teach is an investment in self-understanding and in the desire to help refashion the contexts where I live.

DISCOURSES OF EXPERIENCE

Our capacity to produce contradictory meanings determines the problematic nature of education and the language we use to describe our experience there. A problematic can be understood as, “a conceptual structure that can be identified both by the questions it raises and the questions it is incapable of raising.”³² For example, the structure of teacher education naturalizes the social organization of schooling. Typically, teaching programs are organized like schools, by grade levels and academic areas, and this deflects attention from the assumptions that built such a structure in the first place. The compartmentalized orientation of both schools and universities excludes consideration into other ways to organize knowledge and persons. To approach education and the language of experience as problematic, then, is to study its discourses and discursive practices in such a way as to reveal its commissions and its omissions.

Here, we are concerned with how student teachers express their practice: what they name and what remains unnamed. Through critique we are made able to challenge what Michel Foucault terms “regimes of discourse,”³³ or the authoritatively sanctioned and conventionally taken-for-granted ways of un-

derstanding, speaking, and acting. In this regard, Foucault's description of silences captures some of the implicit power dynamics of discourse:

Silence itself—the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers—is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within overall strategies. There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required in either case. There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses.³⁴

Silences express power struggles because “certain accounts count,”³⁵ and discount others. These accounts are made from the stuff of discourse. Drawing on the work of Foucault, Thomas Popkewitz defines discourse as “set[ting] the conditions by which events are interpreted and one's self as an individual is located in a dynamic world.”³⁶ A discourse becomes powerful when it is institutionally sanctioned. Discourse positions the subject in a dual way: in relation to what and how something is said and in relation to a community that makes particular practices possible and others unavailable. For example, every curriculum, as a form of discourse, intones particular orientations, values, and interests, and constructs visions of authority, power, and knowledge. The selected knowledge of any curriculum represents not only things to know, but a view of knowledge that implicitly defines the knower's capacities as it legitimates the persons who deem that knowledge important. This capacity to privilege particular accounts over others is based upon relations of power. Consequently, every curriculum authorizes relations of power, whether it be those of the textbook industry and demographics, established scholars, business and industry, specific traditions of knowledge, or theories of cognition and human development.

Power, however, is not an abstract thing. Power works through persons and is “instantiated in action, as a regular and routine phenomenon.”³⁷ A person's capacity to act in ways that act upon the actions of others is not so much a matter of individual charisma, or lack of it, as it is the ability to “draw upon modes of domination structured into social systems.”³⁸ Such a view of power can account for the ways persons learn to police their own behavior and desires, to construct desire from relations of power, and to conform to the

orientations and mandates of inherited contexts. The teacher's authority to control a class, for example, is sustained by school rules and regulations, curricular organization, and an administrative structure. The male administrator's capacity to act paternalistically or chauvinistically toward women teachers is sustained by traditions of patriarchal structures. While these types of power are legitimated by traditions of school organization and social structure, their realization depends upon persons' actions and how power acts upon their actions.

Which accounts count depends upon whose voice is valued in the larger culture. Adrienne Rich provides the example of women's history: "The entire history of women's struggle for self-determination has been muffled in silence over and over."³⁹ Such silences sustained by institutionalized patriarchal discourse, Rich observed, sever women from their history and constitute "one of the ways in which women's work and thinking has been made to seem sporadic, errant, orphaned of any tradition of its own."⁴⁰ Its effect is to render women voiceless and then blame them for not having voice. These silences are what Tilly Olsen calls *unnatural*, "the unnatural thwarting of what struggles come into being, but cannot."⁴¹ The work of feminists has shown that these silences, while inherited, are not immutable, the struggle for voice is implicitly a political one marked by the power struggles of resistance and domination.

Power, then, is relational (although not usually equal), and exercised within a context of resistance. This relationship informs its internal dynamics. Understanding the *context* of power, in concert with the *relationships* it articulates and effectuates, allows us to move beyond an abstract notion of individual autonomy to construct a cultural theory of meaning grounded in social circumstances and material practices. Moreover, any theory of power must also be sensitive to the capacity of persons to interpret and intervene in their world. Such a view of human agency allows us to raise the question: Could persons have acted and interpreted differently? That is, what enables or constrains particular forms of practices and the discourses that legitimate or challenge them?

Marx considered the problem of human action in its historical context in an early work, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. There he analyzed the relation history has to social consciousness, and the historical forces that appear to unconsciously shape and limit our capacity for creative practices:

[People] . . . make their own history, but do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances directly chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in cre-

ating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis, they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries, and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honored disguise and this borrowed language.⁴²

Although Marx was describing a specific historical crisis, his observations suggest how historical forces are subjectively taken up to shape the material culture and the practices of persons. Such a concern can provide insight into the problems of social change, and in particular the paradox of constructing emancipatory social relationships from an oppressive past. In many ways, the student teacher is confronted with a similar dilemma—between tradition and change—because when student teachers step into the teacher’s role they are confronted not only with the traditions associated with those of past teachers and those of past and present classroom lives, but with the personal desire to carve out one’s own territory, develop one’s own style, and make a difference in the education of students.

Yet the problem of acting in an inherited context, while at the same time trying to establish one’s authority in a situation charged by power struggles, often finds student teachers embodying the very traditions they hoped to change. In fact, the student teacher is struggling between two kinds of “ideological practice”: concrete practice, or the practical activities of persons, and symbolic practice, or the socially normative categories persons appropriate to define and organize their experiences. It is this disjuncture between one’s theory of and practice in the world that characterizes ideology not so much as a set of ideas but as a constitutive and contradictory system of social practices.⁴³

Returning to Marx’s description for a moment, we can begin to consider how linguistic practices (a “borrowed language”) become imbricated with social relationships (“traditions of dead generations”) to compose the ideological practices of persons.

The concept of “borrowed languages” is richly developed in the work of Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, who connects language to the process of becoming:

The ideological becoming of a human being . . . is the process of selectively assimilating the words of others. . . . The tendency to assimilate others’ discourse takes on an even deeper and more basic significance in an individual’s ideological becoming. . . . Another’s discourse performs here no longer as information, directions, rules, models and so forth—but strives rather to determine the very bases of our ideological interrelations with the world, the very basis of our

behavior; it performs here as *authoritative discourse* and an *internally persuasive discourse*.⁴⁴

Bakhtin explained there is always a power struggle and hence a dialogical relationship between authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse. This relationship determines one's ideological becoming: the orientations, investments, beliefs, and dispositions that are already inscribed in the specific discourses we take up. Bakhtin's categories of discourse presuppose particular images of knowledge, history, and agency: he poses epistemological as well as ontological purposes.

Authoritative discourse is discourse that demands allegiance, an a priori discourse that operates within a variety of social contexts and partly determines our "symbolic practices," or the normative categories that organize and disorganize our perceptions. It is "received" and static knowledge, dispensed in a style that eludes the knower, but dictates, in some ways, the knower's frames of reference and the discursive practices that sustain them. Bakhtin termed such discourse the "word of the father, adult, teacher, etc." in that these positions already have the power to authorize subjects. As Bakhtin explained: "The one perceiving and understanding this discourse is a distant descendent; there can be no arguing with him."⁴⁵ Examples of authoritative discourse in education include such contradictions as education must return to "the great books" of the academic canon and abandon the influence of the civil rights movement for a more inclusive curriculum, or that curricula must be aligned more closely to the needs of industry, technology, and national defense.⁴⁶ Authoritative discourse, then, sets the conditions for discursive practices.

Internally persuasive discourse occupies the same terrain but it is "denied all privilege."⁴⁷ Unlike the unitary meanings authorized by authoritative discourse, internally persuasive discourse pulls one away from norms and admits a variety of contradictory social discourses. As renegade knowledge, internally persuasive discourse has no institutional privilege, because its practices are in opposition to socially sanctioned views and normative meanings. It is the discourse of subversion. Internally persuasive discourse is, as Bakhtin argues, "half ours," and as we struggle to make it our own and as it clashes with other internally persuasive discourses, "this discourse is able to reveal ever newer *ways to mean*."⁴⁸

Discourse that is internally persuasive provisions creativity, the play of meanings. It celebrates the ambiguity of words. For Bakhtin, internally persuasive discourse is the site of departure rather than a place of arrival. A tentative discourse, subject to negotiation and shifting contexts, and able to voice possibilities unforeseen, internally persuasive discourse is a discourse of becoming. Like the word itself, this style of discourse expresses relationships

between persons and things. As a many-voiced and heteroglossic discourse, it suggests something about one's subjectivity and something about the objective conditions one confronts. In education, internally persuasive discourse provisions engagement with what we know and the struggle to extend, discard, or keep it: it is characterized by those surprising questions—raised by the students and the teacher—that move from exhausted predestinations to the unanticipated. Internally persuasive discourse is opened during times of spontaneity, improvisation, interpretive risks, crises, and when one reflects upon taken-for-granted ways of knowing. In this way, internally persuasive discourse is always in dialogue with authoritative discourse.

In both kinds of discourse, however, the word is not conceived as merely mirroring the intentions of its speaker or in mimesis with the social reality it attempts to encode. In each discourse, meaning is mediated by history and context, and by the speaker and listener. This dynamic quality propels the struggles between authoritative and internally persuasive discourse and between concrete and symbolic practices. Inasmuch as the word always inheres in particular worldviews and particular epistemological commitments, or ways of knowing, the struggle to express oneself is always in tension with history and with the voices of others. It is worth quoting Bakhtin's words at length:

All words have the "taste" of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions. . . .

As a living, socio-ideological concrete thing, as heteroglot opinion, language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own. And not all words for just anyone submit equally easily to this appropriation, to this seizure and transformation into private property: many words stubbornly resist, others remain alien, sound foreign in the mouth of the one who appropriated them and who now speaks for them; they cannot be assimilated into his [or her] context and fall out of it; it is as if they put themselves in quotation marks

against the will of the speaker. Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated—overpopulated—with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process.⁴⁹

Words, and their meanings then, carry the intentions and contexts of historical subjects—ideas that precede but do not preclude the speaker. Our words signify communities of discourse that realize language as social. These communities—authoritative and personal—are always in conflict. Bakhtin's description of the word as slippery, elusive, and bearing the capacity to assert another's intentions and meanings in opposition to the speaker's efforts, is of special concern in this study where teaching is reconceptualized as a struggle for voice. For in considering such a struggle, our concern is extended to the contexts and circumstances that make signifying practices possible.

The struggle for voice begins when a person attempts to communicate meaning to someone else. Finding the words, speaking for oneself and feeling heard by others, are all a part of this struggle. While tone, accent, and style qualify meaning, meaning is never realized by the individual alone. The struggle originates with the individual, is shaped through social interaction and mediated by language. Voice suggests relationships: the individual's relationship to the meaning of her or his lived experience and hence to language, and the individual's relationship to the other, since understanding is social. It may be sparked by personal intent, but voice is always negotiated within context and situations, and by the meanings of others. The struggle for voice, then, is always subjective, dynamic, interactive, and incomplete; it is never a matter of mechanical correspondence between the speaker's intentions, the language, and the listener. Admitting this struggle into the discourse of teacher education allows us to ask: For whom does the teacher speak: the curriculum, the school, the profession, the students, the teacher? How does the teacher negotiate between the polyphony of voices and the competing interests that each represent? And, what do student teachers think about when they consider their own voice?