Inventing Themselves as Teachers:
Prospective Teachers Talk about Theory in Practice

By Jane Danielewicz

During a conference, Gina,[1] one of my students, a young woman preparing to be a high school English teacher, attempts to articulate what she is in the process of learning about teaching. At one point I pose the following questions[2]:

> When you think about actually teaching, what will you be thinking about that will help you teach? Do you have a set of intuitions, beliefs or theories about what you think should happen? (long pause)
>
> Do you have some things...that you believe are true about learning or teaching that are sort of like a lens to guide you? (pause)
>
> If someone asked you "Why do you teach the way you do," what would you say?

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After another pause, Gina says, finally, "Well I just want...I want to make sure that when I teach that everybody feels like they can express themselves, and...I want to make it...so that they feel like they're a part of the classroom....I want to challenge them,...and I want them to feel like they can...be successful."

Then I probe, "Why is it important for students to be a part?"

And Gina elaborates: "Because if you don't...feel

like you're a part of it, [you are] bottom of the barrel or whatever, then you're not going to pay attention. You'll space out."

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Despite the fact that Gina finds it difficult to pose a theory about the way she might teach in the future, she eventually offers some tentative beliefs. I discover that I can translate her hesitant words into recognizable teaching principles, commonplace but powerful: First, teach students not subject matter. Second, students learn more when they are socially involved in the classroom community. Experienced teachers, I think, would concur. At any rate, I would not have to read far to find such advice in well-respected books about teaching. This kind of knowledge is significant because it has the potential to actually help Gina as a beginning teacher since she will have a theory to guide her as she plans activities and then teaches on any given day.

It is my intention as Gina's teacher to foster exactly this kind of self-conscious articulation of personal theories of action. Although such abstractions, hunches, or intuitions are difficult to put into words, with patience Gina succeeds. We are both also pleased by her response, and surprised (I am—since no two students ever say the same thing; she is—because she really does have priorities). Using what she has read, heard, and listened to over the course of the semester, Gina has managed to construct and articulate theories of teaching she most values, good ones that I hope will remain with her as she moves through and beyond student teaching. Once spoken, her latent beliefs have overt substance. We can discuss further the connection between student involvement and learning, and now that I know her concerns, I can suggest techniques or methods to create Gina's ideal classroom where "everybody feels like they can express themselves."

This exchange illustrates two issues that I believe are critical in developing students into teachers: that university classroom experiences—including reading, discussion, writing, activities, and all discursive interactions—can enable soon-to-be-teachers to think about personal theories of teaching; and that deliberately thinking about and articulating such beliefs will assist in their adoption of a teaching identity. I arrived at these conclusions after I began to study the effects of one of my courses on preservice teachers. My original intention was to investigate whether the course content (literacy methods in the content areas) could be more effectively learned by manipulating the course's structure (more collaborative and process-oriented). But entirely different issues emerged once I began listening to and observing my students. The question of who they were going to be as teachers and how they were going to make that transition occupied my students' attention, even while they were sincerely trying to learn about ways to enhance literacy or integrate writing into their content teaching. What follows is the story (albeit not a narrative) of three students and their experiences in my course, alongside my analysis of their attempts to become teachers.

Three women (95 percent of my students are women) are the study's subjects.

All are juniors and secondary education majors, but from three disciplines: Maureen in mathematics, Amy in social studies, and Gina in English. Using an interpretive ethnographic approach, I kept observation notes and interviewed students at three different points (at mid, end, and post-semester). Other sources of information include notes from my teaching journal and all the students' written work produced including exams, papers, unit plans, and teaching philosophies.

For rhetorical reasons (because I wish to represent the non-linear process by which these students establish theories about teaching), this research report does not follow a traditional format. Following the introduction, the report's midsection is structured as a mosaic, a writing form that mimics the recursive and associative processes of thinking and learning. An actual tile mosaic is composed of individual bits of stone; by arranging and juxtaposing many tiles of different colors and sizes, the maker creates patterns and images. Close up, a mosaic may appear to be random pieces, but from a distance, read holistically and through each individual's interpretive eye, the seemingly atomistic mosaic becomes meaningful. Such is my hope for how readers might encounter the central body of this text, where I have grouped and arranged small segments as well as contrasted tone, voice, speaker, and style. Taken together, these sections represent not only what my students believe about teaching but how they came to believe it.

In discussing ethnographic practices, Norman K. Denzin (1997) believes that "the worlds we study are created, in part, through the texts that we write and perform about them." No matter whether they are transcriptions of actual speech or written interpretations, these texts are "always dialogical—the site at which the voices of the other, alongside the voices of the author, come alive and interact with one another" (p. xiii). As a written form, the mosaic helps me to avoid foreclosing the gaps among voices (my students and mine) that slide past one another, allowing room for perspectives or interpretations other than my own to emerge from the text. Furthermore, the mosaic acts as a representation that cannot be easily resolved, just as it is impossible to finalize the definition of a term of like "theory," which falls into a conceptual category that has no predetermined content. Theory is something which teachers must create for themselves.

I resume the traditional research report form in the conclusion, where I make a case for why prospective teachers should engage in theorizing (as they have conceived of it), and situate personal theorizing within the process of teacher identity formation. Finally, I argue for structuring teacher education programs to allow many opportunities for prospective teachers to engage in dialogic discourse, the means through which identities are constructed.

What My Students Say

When I asked Amy whether or not she was a teacher, and how she thought one became a teacher, she began by confessing that perhaps I had picked the wrong

person to be in my study. "My desire to be a teacher and to never teach a day alternates from one day to the next. I never know whether I will stick with it..."

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Maureen's goal to be a math teacher results from her difficulties with language, particularly her dislike of writing: "[Math] was the only subject I could get good grades in," she laughed in her first interview, reporting her past struggles with language. On the midterm I ask students to describe themselves (in the third person) teaching a fifty-minute lesson in their subject area, then to reflect on the experience of this exercise. Maureen comments: "While I wrote, I honestly thought about the fact that I was running out of time and I needed to think of something fast or I wouldn't finish! I came to understand that I didn't have my ideas as organized as I thought." Her need to comment on her inadequacies reveals that she thinks of herself primarily as "student"; she is too pressured to think or reflect about herself as a teacher, the real point of my question.

However, by the end of the course, Maureen finds time to consider not only herself as teacher, but also the role language might have in her math classes. She believes that talk is critical to learning and teaching. In her teaching philosophy, Maureen writes: "Students are great conversationalists. In my classroom, I want to take advantage of this quality. Students will sit in groups of four or five people. This group will work together to get a true understanding of what is taught that day. It helps students to talk about how they individually learned." Maureen concludes that unarticulated understanding is not true knowledge; I agree.

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Part of my job as a university professor is to prepare students to become high school teachers who will promote literacy, no matter what subject matter they teach. While this is my charge, it turns out not to be my mission. I have discovered that before my students can evaluate whether or not they would adopt any of the practices I advocate in the course—such as using peer critique groups to improve writing—they have to imagine themselves in the classroom, functioning as teachers. At first, I simply commanded that act of imagination: "Okay, so you're in your classroom teaching history, now what are you going to do with that chapter you assigned to read for homework..." or some such scenario.

Although dutiful, my students' imaginations remained unmoved by my exhortations. In an attempt to understand this immutability, I read and re-read the interview transcripts carefully, and found myself focusing on the act of conversing, on the educational process of speaking: not what students had learned but *how* they were thinking and learning, and not what the transcripts revealed, but *how* I went about trying to make sense of the students' reported experience. My students were talking their way into the identity of teacher. By "talk their way into" I don't mean "to convince," except insofar as they need to convince themselves that this is an

identity they can assume.

As I learned more about how my students were reacting in class, I tried to move my teaching from a pedagogy of exhortation to a one of knowing (Berthoff, 1990). What knowledge can they construct for themselves? After all, language is a means of making meaning. Talking (and I'm using this as a catch-all category for linguistic interaction whether spoken or written, formal or informal, individual and collaborative) entails forming and reforming what one thinks, believes, and perhaps who one is. Can language be a means of making identities, of making students into teachers, of helping students make themselves into teachers? I do believe it's so, and one more notion: language (in all its forms, but always *in dialogue*, in the public space of the classroom) is the shuttle creating the weave of theory to practice.

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One day in conference, Gina expressed great frustration about her future as a teacher. "I can't plan a lesson on this book [*The Great Gatsby*]. I thought and thought, but I just can't do it. If I can't think of a single lesson then how can I possibly be a teacher?" I reply: "Of course it's hard, and of course you don't know yet the best way to do it. That's why you're in the class." Gina asks: "So it doesn't mean I'm stupid?" My concern in this teaching moment is to reassure her and to promise help, knowing that techniques—what she seeks—is not what she needs. Not knowing enough content makes Gina feel she cannot *be* a teacher. However, I know it is not the mechanics but, instead, learning the process of creating an assignment that's crucial.

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Amy writes on her midterm: "Every teacher's job is to help students to learn, and if part of that learning involves teaching how to read, or even how to read more effectively, then it is the teacher's responsibility to take on that duty in the classroom.... As Mr. Henderson (the principal) said, [teachers] need to 'stress basic reading skills while teaching content,' not in place of content. It seems then that Mr. Henderson wants [teachers at his school] to focus more on processes than on product. The students are going to understand history because they are immersed in it in the classroom, so the teacher must help them sharpen their skills while they are learning. Integrate the reading skills into the lesson."

While initially pleased with this response, now in retrospect I wonder: "She's a really smart student and of course she writes precisely what I wish her to say. She talks facilely about theory and practice, but what evidence is there to suggest that she isn't just saying this stuff? It sounds good, but is it deep enough under her skin, and will it last when she actually begins teaching?"

The limitations of existing structures for teaching my own students (*i.e.*, the expectation that I will give them written mid-terms) frustrates me and also makes me despair of attaining teacherly security. Am I really helping them to become

teachers or just passing on glib cleverness? It means everything to me, that difference between their knowing something abstractly (Amy uses the words "integrate," "process," "product"), and their real actions that indicate significant internalized knowledge.

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It came as something of a shock for me to realize, listening to the interviews, that preservice teachers, the ones who are about 20 years old, have not exactly chosen to be teachers. They have just been obedient: both Amy and Maureen were told by others (guidance counselors, other teachers, people connected to school) to "think about it." Neither one felt it to be a calling.

Of course every question I asked my students during the study *presumed* that they had in fact deliberately chosen teaching as a profession. Which means that my class, although I feel it's not overly geared toward method, is far more mechanical than many of these students need. I think of Carla, one of my star students from last semester. Smart, persistent, sophisticated in an utterly charming, but not stuck-up way, hard-working, reflective; she dropped out of student teaching a week into the semester. "I *could* do it," she said, "but I was miserable. I just couldn't make it *feel right*."

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Now I see that I have all too often offered the wrong plate: "Here are ways of teaching," I say, "that will help you to be the best teacher," but never the more heartfelt, critical, deep, complicated question: "Who among you wants to do this and why? Or why not?" Imagining this as the most basic starting point in my class is frightening. It means that I must be the model, the teacher who enacts the dialogic practice she espouses, the one who turns them on to teaching, who is able to translate what a joy it is to be with them. Or who prompts them to tell their own story, one that places them in the featured role of teacher, a story that they can believe.

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I ask Gina, "What has led you to want to be a teacher?" She replies, "Because I was a really good student in high school." And later I ask: "Can you say something about good teachers you've had?" She grins and brightens: "The best teachers? They were always interested in *me*. In what *I* had to say."

Theorizing, in Practice

We were out for morning coffee, a few graduate students, George (another faculty member), and I, all of us in the midst of one project or another, a quasi meeting of the qualitative research group. I didn't realize it was my turn until George asked casually, "Well, what have you learned?" I mumbled something perfunctory about the students—something unsatisfactory, inarticulate. The con-

versation moved on, but George's question continued to cycle through my mind relentlessly like a song's refrain.

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Then *many months later* I find I have an answer. Aspiring teachers need to know much more about theory than about techniques or methods, which they can invent, on the spot, if they need to. But theory! It can't be so easily formulated or spontaneously generated. Theory, or beliefs they can name and thereby claim, is the bedrock, the sturdy backboard against which a teacher can push as she sets goals, plans activities, invents curriculum, acts in the classroom.

And this experience—not having a satisfying answer to a simple question posed with good intentions by an interested friend—allows me suddenly to recognize the core of my students' problems. During the interviews, there are long pauses when I ask my students to articulate what beliefs lie behind their teaching. (Gina's reaction in the opening example is typical.) "They can't, they don't, they won't," I rail. My questions reveal huge gaps—crevasses even—between what I think my students should be able to say and what they actually do say. Then I remember that it took me months to answer George's question. I realize instantly that what's powerful here is not my answer (or theirs) but the fact of his having asked it to begin with.

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Teacher: "Generally, when you think about teaching...in the future...how important to you is theory...or the notion of theory."

Amy: (pause) "Like what...like what?"

Teacher: "Well, tell me what you think of...when I say the word 'theory.'"

Amy: "Um—I think theory alone is somewhat pointless. Um I think...I think theory is good if you then follow it up with how it's really going to be used. It's the same kind of thing...you can say well, here's this...theory. There are...you know...times when you would possibly use it.... Or...think of a time when you might have to use this. You know you don't have to spoon feed it to everybody. But...um...I think just telling it to some people...without attachment to anything is sort of pointless."

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"Theory," I announce in class, "is everything that isn't action." It can be something homespun, personal, familiar. It is the account that action gives of itself, or the reasons offered prior to action for setting out to do something in *this* way rather than *that*. On the exam, I tell my students to consider everything we've read as theory and to use it to explain their positions. Yet nothing we read is presented by the authors as "theory," the way it might be in classes dealing with Jean Piaget or Lawrence Kohlberg.

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My teaching method I adopt from John Dewey (1922/1994). I want students to be deliberate about their teaching practices and to deliberate about their theoretical beliefs. Dewey describes deliberation as

> ...an experiment in finding out what the various lines of possible action are really like...but the trial is in the imagination, not in overt fact. The experiment is carried on by tentative rehearsals in thought which do not affect physical facts outside the body. Thought runs ahead and foresees outcomes, and thereby avoids having to await the instruction of actual failure and disaster. An act overtly tried out is irrevocable, its consequences cannot be blotted out. An act tried out in imagination is not final or fatal. It is retrievable. (p. 140)

In their positions as aspiring teachers, assembled to learn in a classroom in Peabody Hall on campus, my students are well-positioned to profit from Dewey's prescription. Experiment, he advises, to discover possible actions. And we do, sometimes in the form of a case study, each student proposing a specific activity sequence to teach content and process together. The range of solutions, traditional to quirky, both surprises and energizes us. The ensuing discussion, lively and involved, promotes questions and debates about what beliefs may be consistent with the suggested practice: Why would you have students work together on that problem? Or, wouldn't it be chaos to let students develop their own research topics? Students argue vociferously, sometimes sticking hard to a position or at other times abandoning something in mid-sentence when the contradictions suddenly become apparent. For example, it's not uncommon for a student to claim that "individuals learn differently," and then to propose lecturing with illustrated examples for the fifty minutes in their imagined algebra 1 class. If another student doesn't catch the contradiction (in this case, different learning styles but teaching in one mode only) I usually do, asking the class to work through the disparity between claim and intended action.

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Dewey is not just a theorist but a pragmatist as well. He suggests that deliberateness both precedes and inhabits the site of instruction. Thus, learning to teach does not depend solely on living through actual disasters; imagination is a powerful tool. The student who begins to question her lecturing style before she is immersed in a public non-tracked high school during student teaching has a better chance of living through that first awful week than the one who never gave her assumptions much thought. As imaginary teachers, circumscribed only by the limits and realities of the university classroom, a student may change her mind, retrieve her lesson design, think about those ESL students who are bound to be there, and invent new structures, which are open to safe scrutiny.

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I ask Maureen: "When you're in your classroom teaching, how are you going to know what to do? What's going to guide your planning—thinking?"

"I guess, she replies, "it really depends on what kind of kids you have—going back to [the idea that] you learn at home...and stuff,...especially at first, basic Math classes, those kids are going to be most likely less disciplined or have learning disabilities.... I guess I'm going to have to base my teaching on the way my kids are...their environment or upbringing will determine how I teach them."

Maureen believes that flexibility is critical to teaching and she sees herself as adjusting to meet the needs of her students. Her job rests not so much on what she knows about mathematics, but on how perceptive she is in knowing her students and how quickly she can invent new ways to teach the material. She is right, and, like Gina, thinks more about how students learn than the content she is teaching.

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Despite this theorizing, students never mention my class as one concerned with "theory," although we use what we read, write, and discuss to construct theories every day. For instance, "Determine what the student can learn first, then plan what to teach based on what you discover." Or another, "Capitalize on the intense peer relationships of adolescents; the social context of the classroom is the most powerful force affecting literacy learning." Furthermore, we do as we say; for example, exploring theories about group dynamics by working in various different collaborative ways. And we discuss endless other kinds of abstract information that are all relevant materials for theory building.

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Maybe the problem here is semantic. By theory, I mean a level of generalization that tries out the claim that what works *here* may also work *there*. But so often for my students it seems that "theory" designates what is most baffling about the university; it demands from them a certain form of discourse whose rules and etiquette they have not mastered and whose point they have not grasped.

Facing the silence to which my students are reduced when the word is introduced, I realize that my Deweyean bias runs counter to most academic uses of the term. "Theory" in the academy usually designates some account of depersonalized structures—be they developmental models or stages in cognitive processes—that purport to tell teachers how best to present material in order to facilitate understanding and retention. Instead, I want students to attach the word "theory" to the act of deliberation, to their attempts to articulate beliefs which are often unconscious and contain significant contradictions. Theorizing means being self-conscious about one's beliefs, one's identity, and intentionally considering how those beliefs might translate into future action.

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In another session, I ask Gina, "What beliefs will guide your teaching?" After a long pause, she replies: "I don't think that intelligence is predetermined. Everyone is smart. *If you have a good teacher, you can pretty much do anything.*" I think to myself, "Close, you're getting closer to articulating an idea, to making a link between what a teacher does and how much students learn."

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On another occasion, I ask Amy: "Do you think you have any educational theory of teaching?" (pause)

Amy: "...Well I think...(sighs) Ed 72 is *supposed* to be based a great deal based in theory...and we learned...we did learn like behavioral theories...like um...motivational theories...those kind of things." Yet I have heard Amy in class, countless times, explaining her theories of teaching: "When a teacher models the work she asks her students to do, she catches their attention. And her actions prove her belief in the importance of the assignment without her needing to say a word." But Amy herself doesn't realize she already knows and lives according to these highly developed theories.

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Despite my repeated maneuvers during the interviews to promote their thinking, I have little faith that the word "theory" for my students has any current, pragmatic, usable meaning. It's not a functioning concept, not in circulation of their daily lives. Even with my prompting and the intense effort of conferencing with these students, they still seem very far away from experiencing the process of teaching the way I do—inventing activities and running them up against my goals, taking stock of students' progress, listening to feedback and adjusting my daily plans, and providing an assignment or some reading materials when an issue arises in class.

Emergent Theory

In educating prospective teachers, one of my primary goals is to encourage students to begin developing personal theories of action. (In fact, my motivation for conducting this research was to determine whether or not I was successful in terms of meeting this goal.) Theories of action are necessary for effective instruction since they the foundation on which good teachers plan and actually teach specific content while taking into account situation, context, and students (Argyris 1982). Practicing teachers exhibit theories of action when they turn static knowledge about subject matter or professional knowledge related to teaching and learning into dynamic plans and actions in the classroom. These theories are refined as teachers observe

and reflect on the many small experiments they carry out daily in teaching their students (McCutcheon 1992). But what about prospective teachers who as yet have no students or school setting in which to act out and thereby invent theories of practice? Might they have emergent theories of action?

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In her final interview, Amy states that: "All of the experiences you've had... make up your person, and *have* to make up part of your teaching style. If you are a white, Protestant, middle class, mainstream American, then, and you've never come into contact with anybody that's really different than you, you're gonna go into a classroom, and be in shock and you're not going to know what to do...you're gonna...essentially not teach as well as you could to a lot of students who are different than you are..."

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Gina comments that "the presentational mode of teaching—lecturing—is really bad but that's mostly what I got. It struck me how ineffective that mode of teaching was [when I was writing about those three other teachers]. I hadn't thought about that before. I'm a conservative person and I just thought that's how I'd teach.... In some classes they tell you about that new kind of thing [groups, collaboration]. It sounded like new age to me. But I'm really starting to believe it."

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A month after the class is over, Maureen remarks that: "When people tell me that I'll have to teach the lowest, worst math class, it sounds like people have given up on the kids.... I'm going to experiment and try to find the best way to teach them...even if I don't teach kids a lot of, like, math...I'm probably going to be teaching them how to learn...the way we learned in your class...not exactly teaching them content but teaching them process more.... Something more beneficial to them later on in life...than knowing math...than knowing a subject...."

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This is Gina's fifth try (four false starts precede this exchange) at answering my question about beliefs: "And it doesn't sound like an education principle, but people will want to please you if they like you...and if they feel like you expect something from them. If you feel ignored, you're going to play that role...you're going to sit in the back and not talk and not participate...so what you need to do is make sure that everybody—like this teacher at CH High, he knew all their extra-curricular activities—he knew them, and it was really cool,...and I think that's a good way to make students want to do something for you."

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Amy comments that she has "always thought of teaching history from a variety of perspectives—I thought of it a long time ago. History, too, is full of emotions. Everything we do deals with feelings and emotions, and that's where those decisions came from. When you're studying history—it's hard to feel those feelings, you can't really, but you can try to go back and look at the white Southern mayor, or King's writing, or ...think about what it means as a woman to deal with the fact of slavery. Women...Native Americans so many movements came out of the civil rights movement. You can extract from other readings, and things, ...the feelings, how did they feel about things."

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On several occasions Maureen has discussed the tension she anticipates when faced with the dictum to cover required material yet teach in a way that puts students first. Now she resolves this issue by imagining a new structure for her lessons: "I realized after having your class that if you don't get everything done, it's no big deal. You *have* to have a goal, but don't make it so rigid."

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Certainly theorizing in action is difficult if next to impossible for undergraduate education majors like Maureen, Amy, and Gina, who have no teaching experience nor any way of interacting with students as part of their regular course work. (I certainly advocate teacher education programs which are dialectically constructed, integrating teaching experiences and course work.) While acknowledging the existing limits of free-standing courses and fighting for change, I structure my course to move students toward generating potential theories of action. The dialogic process of talking, examining, probing, stumbling around in words, is the key, as I hope my students have demonstrated in the excerpts above. Sometimes we do not know what we believe, or do not have any opinion on a subject, until we have assembled some words to present one. At the very least, the intellectual practice of thinking, acting, reflecting, will allow students to get a feel for the process of theorizing, rather than to have to learn it (along with everything else) while they are actually teaching.

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I am interested in what the form, its shape and pattern, of my research report means to you as readers and teachers; it's a question similar to my concerns about teaching. The way I vary the structure, activities, discourse opportunities for students—these are embodiments of my own theories of action. The form my teaching takes *is* the theory. How we behave in the classroom and what we ask students to do are enactments of our beliefs about teaching. I'm not suggesting that we stop trying to articulate theories and principles for our students, but these statements need to be contextualized and demonstrated, not by words which tell, but

by actions, including speech acts, that show or model.

If I am not actively teaching—demonstrating what I believe and how that gets translated into action in the classroom—then all my efforts to develop teachers are wasted. I display my own constantly evolving teacher self to my students as I go. To do otherwise would clearly demonstrate that I have no theory of my own, even as I urge them to consider the theoretical premises of their own contemplated practices.

Doing the Right Thing

At the conclusion of my last session with Maureen, I turn off the tape recorder as we say our good-byes. Maureen continues to talk (or else I do). Both she and Gina were curious about "how they did in the interview" and I say, "Oh, I'm not evaluating you, but the class, whether the experiences we had in class, or here in the School of Education in general has helped you to be a better teacher." Then Maureen states what I sense is true but for which I have no certain proof: "Well, she says, "I've never just sat down and talked to any of my professors about what I was doing. Just...you know...for an hour. Sitting here talking about it really helped...I've got it in my mind. Your asking these questions has helped me to think about it. Now I can kind of see how I'd do it. It has helped. Talking about it makes me think about it."

Maureen's closing comments are revealing in several ways. Her anxiety about her performance in the interviews demonstrates how she clearly identifies herself as student, overwhelming her fledgling teacher-self. At the same time her insights emerge when she occupies the student role, but only when she is engaged in dialogue structured by the teacher. My questions have scaffolded her theory-making. (This result is both ironic and fortunate, making me think that interviewing all my students should become a standard practice.) Maureen will be student teaching in the semester following my course. Although there's evidence that she is grappling with the idea of herself as teacher (remember her earlier comments about teaching math as a process), this identity has not yet coalesced, no doubt due partly to her lack of experience.

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Katie, a former student who has already finished her student teaching, arrives one day in my office to ask for a recommendation. We talk. Exasperated, she exclaims, "What are these education classes for anyway? They can't teach you what you need to know." She grimaces. "Telling you to write your tests so you have some literal questions, some interpretive questions...." She snorts. (I cringe, recognizing in her description a connection to an earlier instantiation of my class.) She continues: "You just have to do it and learn for yourself."

Although I share her frustration about the usefulness of classes where we talk about teaching "in theory," I hear that she has learned something. Her education

courses hardly gave her everything she needs, but they are a resource she calls upon as she tries to cope in her new situation. She says "I had a lot of ideas different from my teacher [her cooperating teacher], and I just did them—groups, essay tests, papers—because he just didn't want to teach anymore. He would just leave the room." As her comments indicate, she theorizes as she practices, a process that both demonstrates but also fosters her growth as a teacher.

She continues: "But in my hardest class [which was Asian History—a course for which she'd had no preparation or background], I just fell back into doing things the wrong way, because it was easier and I just didn't know what else to do." She gestures—putting her hands out in the front, palms up as if warding off an oncoming flood: "It hard to keep that stuff back, keep away the old stuff, the old way of teaching, and do what's right."

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Knowing what to do and doing it right is tied up with knowing who we are as teachers. Katie's comments reveal her struggle to accommodate inside and outside forces, which is the very method by which she negotiates and recognizes her identity as a teacher. I use the term "identity" in the postmodern sense in which selves are always multiple and shifting, not singular or fixed. Given this perspective (Foucault 1976, 1981), identities are never permanently established, but need to be constructed daily, even moment to moment, embedded in particular interactions between knowledge, experience, and person occurring in local, specific contexts. Thus, our identities shift, move, change, adjust, depending on the discourses in which we momentarily are participating.

For novices, becoming a teacher means attempting transformation while juggling multiple demands. In mentoring new teachers, Deborah P. Britzman (1994) insists that we can ameliorate this transition if we don't conflate the teacher's *role* and the teacher's *identity*: "The newly arrived teacher learns early on that whereas roles can be assigned, the taking up of an identity is a constant and tricky social negotiation" (p. 54). Becoming a teacher starts long before students stand in front of their first class. If we accept the proposition that students are constructing identities not just stepping into prescribed roles, there is much we can do (and indeed must do differently) in teacher education programs.

Katie, now with some experience after student-teaching, perceives that being a teacher is about constructing a self instead of just learning the ropes. Her realization is necessary to further progress since, clearly, we cannot confer identities onto our students. They must participate actively and wholeheartedly in the enterprise. But we can focus their attention on the distinction between acting like a teacher and becoming one.

Conclusion

Putting together these pieces of my study has left me with several convictions about the notion of teacher identity I wish to investigate further. First, constructing identities is a process that depends on multiple factors such as participation in various communities, involvement in different discourse practices, membership in ethnic or racial groups, etc. Having actual teaching experience does not automatically cause an individual to create a teacher identity. Experience is necessary but not sufficient. Beyond a doubt, experience is invaluable since it allows novice teachers to experiment in fact instead of only in imagination. Compared to the other three students, Katie, having finished the teaching practicum, struggles with far more sophisticated issues surrounding who she is and wants to be as a teacher. She can, for instance, provide a reason for the times she had to teach badly: lacking content knowledge, she lectured in class on the notes she took the night before. Unlike my other students, she can pass judgments about useful methods because she has tried some of them out.

Although farther along than the others, Katie remains deep in the process of identity development, an effort that can be acknowledged and supported. While we might interpret Katie's comment that you have to "learn for yourself" as a pledge to take responsibility for herself (which is definitely a good thing), an altogether different interpretation of what she means is possible. I think she's insisting that no one has helped her and that no one can.

Despite Katie's pessimism, novice teachers do not have to go it alone. From personal contacts, I know that Katie enjoyed continuing interaction with other student teachers as well as the university faculty who supervised her. But perhaps more time and extensive, structured conditions are necessary. With continued opportunities to engage in discursive practices, my students can construct identities, especially if they are challenged to confront and sort out an array of conflicting and powerful interactions with different constituencies (students, cooperating teacher, peers etc.) and institutions (school, university, etc.). Whereas a role has predetermined characteristics and scripted behavior which can be adopted or put on like a costume, an identity must be newly invented and imagined by individuals on an ongoing basis within particular social settings. As teacher educators, we should not be fooled into thinking that students who are capable of playing the teacher's role can thereby claim an identity which reliably sustains them as teachers.

Therefore, identity construction should be part of the agenda in teacher education courses. I must endeavor to make "becoming a teacher," not just "acting like a teacher," a recognizable goal for students. Partly this entails using practices that dwell on the idea of teacher and of teaching as a vocation (See David T. Hansen's book, *The Call to Teach*). Not feeling "the call to teach," as Amy's experience reveals, prevents the deep attachment and hard work necessary to

fabricate an identity. Amy tried to think herself into teaching by adopting the role of teacher (in fact she was the best student teacher in her area this year). But this strategy failed in the end. Though she received much praise and encouragement, after graduation she did not even apply for a teaching position.

Second, identities are constructed by participating in dialogic discourse. By discourse, I mean instances of language in use. Language is a sign system out of which we make meaning. It is through language that we name and thereby distinguish concepts and experiences for ourselves, yet language is never private or individual. Mikhial M. Bakhtin (1988) reminds us that language is a social system and thus inherently dialogic. The words we use to express ourselves are always imbued with multiple layers of social history. Furthermore, we are always engaged in multiple discourses, with each discourse embodying particular knowledge, power, past history and, most importantly, agency. If we accept in teacher education the theory that language is the conduit through which experience is translated and selves are fabricated, then what we ought to be doing in the classroom becomes clearer. Encourage students to engage in as much discourse as possible; a rich array of competing and conflicting discourses are best.

In Gina's struggles to articulate her theories about teaching, she rejected some positions in favor of others, arriving finally at the idea that the best teachers make students feel special and included. On the spot, in an interview with her professor, Gina was pressured to arrive at a satisfactory position, quickly discarding competing propositions. Perhaps her understanding could have been enhanced if she expressed those partly articulated and rejected voices, argued through those positions with her peers, and debated the merits of different perspectives. In courses without associated field work, case studies and classroom observations, which students can analyze and reconceive, are two existing practices promoting the discovery that there is no one way of being a good teacher, no always-right solutions.

My third point is that all education courses should encourage prospective teachers to understand the value of theory and theorizing and to actively engage in theory building. Obviously my concerns lie not with abstract educational theories, but with personal theories of action, which Gail McCutcheon (1992) describes as "sets of beliefs, images, and constructions about such matters as what constitutes an educated person, the nature of knowledge, the society and psychology of student learning, motivation, and discipline" (p. 193). Without coherent, broad, and flexible theories to guide their teaching plans and actions, novice teachers will be stuck with blind experimentation. For instance, some students may remember a particular strategy or technique like jigsaw grouping from a methods class, but when applied to a novel situation, in a real school context, it may turn out to be completely useless without an underlying rationale.

Over and over I have listened to new teachers lament the fact that their teacher education courses did not prepare them for teaching. The kind ones hasten to add that the fault is not mine, not ours, at the School of Education. Teaching, they report,

is such an overwhelming experience that nothing could prepare one for it. But in my heart of hearts, I disagree. It is not specific methods that need to be learned, but rather ways of thinking, and ways of living a life as a teacher. In other words, a teacher education program should help students develop a reflective self, someone who is capable of thinking through and about one's students and subject matter. Such thinking is a process, the one habit of mind I strive to teach my students. It is the practice of grounded theorizing, an activity that occurs with greater facility when we establish a curriculum that promotes students' identity development as teachers. Our challenge now is to envision and create education courses which are contexts that stimulate theorizing instead of reductive settings for promoting teaching techniques and methods.[3]

Notes

1. All student names are pseudonyms. I am grateful for the students' permission to use their spoken and written words, quoted verbatim, in this article.
2. Some transcription guidelines: pauses of a few seconds are represented in the printed text by a series of three dots (...). Longer pauses are indicated by the word "pause." Commas and periods are indicators of a speaker's falling intonation contours.
3. I wish to thank my writing group, especially Judith Farquhar and Laurie Langbauer, along with colleagues John McGowan and Alan Tom for reading and responding to earlier drafts of this article

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