

## Playing Teacher: Artful Negotiations in the Pre-service Classroom

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**Key words:** arts-based; pre-service teachers; identity; teacher education; poetic inquiry; representation; elementary education; poststructuralism

**Abstract:** In this paper, the author draws on poetic analysis and artful inquiry to explore the ways in which pre-service teachers perform their subjectivities. Using a poststructuralist lens, the author seeks to complicate often idealized (re)presentations of Teacher created by students within the courses she teaches while considering the possibilities of engaging critical and artful inquiry in teacher education. Voices and genres intersect throughout the text as a means to illustrate the complex nature of performing self within the work be(com)ing Teacher, while offering space for dialogue and diverse interpretation.

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## 1. Be(ginn)ing (Re)search

Absence (does not) make(s)  
the heart grow fonder  
in speaking  
truths

For a long time this idea seemed to hold strong for me, both as a teacher educator and as a researcher. I believed that my work required me to maintain a distant role where myself and my emotions remained absent, silent. If I were to speak of my own subjectivity, I would somehow taint the story. However, as I began to delve further into the exploration of pedagogy and research methodology, I discovered that I lived within the text, within the teaching. Even in my silence, my being-my (un)knowing remained, and thus, it became important to acknowledge my presence with/in the process. This paper tells both a my-story and writing-story (DENZIN, 2003) of the epistemological journey of a teacher educator who (re)searches pre-service teacher subjectivity, all the while seeking

to acknowledge the intersections between (my)self and other. I begin this story by first identifying the methodology, process, and theory that informs my evolving understandings. From this position, I enter into the stories of be(com)ing teacher layering my subjectivity upon the representations created by my students, offering a new, multi-dimensional space for interpretation and consideration for pedagogical possibilities. [1]

I draw on poetic analysis and inquiry (PRENDERGAST, 2007) as tools to explore the ways in which pre-service teachers present and imagine themselves as teachers. These (re)presentations are drawn from my own personal reflections of self-as-Teacher<sup>1</sup> as well as from a two-year study at two state institutions of higher education (MACKENZIE, 2006). The study invited students to engage with multiple genres as vehicles to explore their *own* perceptions of the position and rules of being Teacher, as well as the hopes and desires that both haunted and drove them into the classroom. Each student was asked to create a visual representation as well as a description of the meaning of this representation. Using a poststructuralist lens, I seek to attend to my own position as a teacher educator working with these students, a former teacher, as well as an artist and (re)searcher as a means to open space for disruption and dialogue as I engage with their representations. Voices, my own and those of my students intersect, as image and poetry, throughout the text as a means to illustrate the complex nature of performing self within the experience of be(com)ing Teacher. These intersections are also meant to acknowledge the idea that all research writing is both dialogic (RUSSELL & KELLY, 2002) and autobiographical (ELLIS & BOCHNER, 2000; ELLIS, ADAMS & BOCHNER, 2010; LEGGO, 2008) as the positions of my(sel)ves, my students, and those interacting with the text shape the meanings that emerge (ST. LOUIS & CALABRESE BARTON, 2002; LAPUM, 2008) across the landscape of the text. [2]

## 2. Self in (Inter) Action

The paper serves as an experience in itself, engaging all those involved in the construction of meaning. HASKELL, LINDS, and IPPOLITO (2002) note, "knowing evolves not only within 'minds,' but emerges collectively through engagement of shared action. In this sense, if there is a 'location' for knowledge, it is not an objectively precise place or space or tangibly concrete point" (para.7). [3]

In fact this location is situated within the individual or collective desire for answers. We often search for specificity of Truth within our (re)search(ing), for stability within location; however, the search is shaped by our subjectivity (MACKENZIE, 2010; BERRIDGE, 2008; MILLER-DAY, 2008; DOORNBOS, VAN ROOIJ, SMIT & VERDONSCHOT; ROTH, BREUER & MRUCK, 2003) and is thus fluid as knowledge continues to emerge and evolve (MACKENZIE, 2008). Our positions within the fleeting moment lead us to accept, reject, or (re)negotiate our own movements across the landscape of the construction of meaning attached, in this case, to the process(es) of becoming Teacher. The story unfolds

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1 Throughout this article I have chosen to capitalize the word Teacher as a means to attend to how tightly woven the profession is with one's identity. This is the name by which one is called.

through an interactive, multi-vocal and collaborative (DAY, 2002) text of living inquiry, in which text is defined as that which communicates and symbolizes the deepest form of experience/interaction for the participants and writer(s). The notions of loss and rupture with/in the context of a pre-service teacher's "reality" are those which might be embraced allowing for "openings," "slippages," and "displaced meaning" (SPRINGGAY, IRWIN & WILSON, 2005, p.898) providing both the researcher and those who choose to step onto the page, the space to move about this kaleidoscope of knowing, peeking into the shadowy spaces to come to a new sense of playful knowing and possibility among the rules. I want to explore the many caverns, echoes and silences among the particular vocalizations that exist upon the page, becoming actively involved and present on this (re)searching journey. As LUCE-KAPLER (1997, p.193) remarks of her own experience working with women in a writing group, there are consequences to remaining hidden within the text of research:

"If I remain hidden in the research text, then I can be a woman speaking for other women relating 'our' experiences of writing in the world. But that is to write from the patriarchy; to leave oneself open to assumptions. I have to add my voice to many, but stand up and be heard. Take responsibility for the research I am writing, the writing I have researched."

This is  
my  
story

our



Figure 1: Narcissa returns (Personal artful inquiry, Spring 2006)

"Voices ... so many, desperate to be heard ... become a loud menagerie down the hallways of today's school communities. As I began my career as an educator it was those voices I wanted to hear, to help. To help my students channel themselves, to grow both emotionally and intellectually. It is my belief, that for one to succeed in all academic arenas—s/he must be heard and accepted for all that s/he is. In order for that to happen s/he must come face to face with her emotions." (Personal Journal, Entry 1)

I stepped  
into a room  
towering  
above  
insecurity  
desperate  
to be  
accepted  
while I grew  
learned,  
I also  
felt  
I lost [4]

I admit that often I think of myself as Teacher and find my body overwhelmed; rocks of emotion break the glass of my memory and I find myself feeling frozen. This young teacher who I once was struggles with this new role of teacher educator, I want to open spaces for dialogue and change yet, find myself in the same position as many teacher educators "... unable to combat what they perceive as firmly entrenched stereotypes and ideas about teaching" (WEBER & MITCHELL, 1995, p.27). LISTON (2003) notes, "[w]ithout attending to learning's emotions, we distort and underestimate the activity that defines our lives, without underlining the emotions of learning in our teaching, we pass on a heritage that will disfigure the souls of others to come" (p.103). Teaching by its very nature is an emotional vocation and it is this emotion situated within the historical moment that leads one along various paths of being and responding within the pedagogical insight. The only option is to educate oneself, to reflect upon the roots of the emotions and to become versed in the ways of the other, s/he who moves across various definitions of being—s/he whom we both love and hate. [5]

By recognizing that another exists with/in both my-self and my-story I am able to move into a dialogic space (IRIGARAY, 2004) of pedagogical possibility. My story is one amongst many, rid with emotion and a sense of purpose that I fear without keen attention, might cast a shadow upon the possibilities that can exist in the process of be(com)ing Teacher. The words I speak, the poems I (create and) explore by drawing on my students words are in a sense my own, but at the same time they belong to everyone. Across this textual landscape, I seek to create belonging, disrupting my story by offering up spaces within the text—inviting the voices of self and other to become collaborative authors in the space of living inquiry. This collective dance of confusing experience is one that invites both discomfort and *aporia* (DE COSSON, 2002). However, as we begin to unfold and (un)tangle the layers contained within the story, inscribing our own graffiti (GRUMET, 1988) of subjectivity upon the text, we begin to move upon a landscape that holds spaces of ever evolving, pedagogical possibility. [6]

While acknowledging my own role and place within the journey of research, I believe it is also important to consider the place and space of research upon the page. The blurring of genres offers a rendering of the confusing nature of the world around us, especially in teaching. There exist variations in the terrain and we must move through this geography—adapting, becoming and losing along our journey. Genres become entangled as the understandings of the movements of be(com)ing Teacher begin to unravel and break, leaving the reader and writer to ponder the structures that position them within the context of vocation as well as within the text. There is no single answer to the struggle, no single struggle; instead what exists upon this paper's landscape is an opportunity to release attachment, while becoming attentive to the breaks of being that invite one to enter into the pedagogical dialogue of experience and possibility. Each shard of experience shared through what I strive to offer as an open textual space invites one to be openly present to what is, or what perhaps was, imagined. It is through this presence that we might release and claim the desired possibility of agency with/in that which may bind; thus growing within the context of being Teacher—ever evolving and becoming as subject. The struggles remain, but voices begin to enter into a dialogue, claiming agency in difference and moving forward in reflexivity and possibility. [7]

### 3. (Im)Possibilities of the Fragmented Dialogue

Poststructuralist theory serves as the lens that acknowledges the confusion of the collective be(com)ing of each participant's subjectivity across specific contexts. NEALON and SEARLS GIROUX (2003) remark on the possibilities of this clarifying/confusing lens of poststructuralism by stating that "... it is when you don't know or can't figure out the underlying structures of meaning that the existence of these structures becomes more apparent" (p.134). By seeking out what is being said and unsaid and breaking down those structures that shape the truths of participants, multiple images and stories unfold—but can never be claimed as ultimate truths existing outside a single moment: knowing slowly slips through the hand of discourse and one is left to redefine truths s/he believed to be real (WEEDON, 1996). RICHARDSON (2002) intimates,

"Poststructuralism ... points to the continued cocreation of *Self and social science*: Each is known through the other. Knowing the self and knowing the subject are intertwined, partial, historical, local knowledges. Poststructuralism, then, permits-nay, invites-no incites-us to reflect upon our method and explore new ways of knowing." (p.929) [8]

The stories of a moment become renderings that exist as "visual, aesthetic, textual, and educational performances that play alongside one another, reverberating in excess" (SPRINGGAY et al., 2005, p.908). For as FELMAN (1997) reminds us, there is no totalizable knowledge nor can we totalize ignorance, instead I believe it is important to become present to the truths that exist within the single moment, looking into the depths of the image and emotion, until one is almost lost. While lost the researcher searches, breaking through the boundaries of the moment to become part, but not completely, of the collected

stitches and folds that create an image of the complexity of Teacher, both known and unknown. It is through this unfolding or untangling of images and texts that the reader is invited to become a participant within the dialogue of unraveling (WILSON, 2004; LATHER, 2003) the moments of be(com)ing Teacher. As WHEELRIGHT (1962) points out:

"Language that can adequately, or almost adequately, speak forth the truths of human experience, must itself be living; and sense those truths are always somewhat dark, kaleidoscopic and elusive, and appropriate language will to some extent, and with chosen controls, reflect those qualities." (p.43) [9]

As language becomes something lively, moving beyond being simply a tool for claiming Truth, it opens doors to invite a present exploration through knowns into the multifarious world of unknowns. [10]

#### **4. Dreaming of the (Im)Possible**

What  
I know  
do you  
know  
who

When pre-service teachers enter teacher education programs, they arrive with a wide variety of pre-conceived notions and desires that have a strong role in the experiences and expectations they will have as students and teachers. It is important, therefore, as teacher educators that we carefully consider these notions and desires so that we may be responsive to the needs of our students, while also offering opportunities for them to see and grow beyond what they believe to be the realities of teaching.

"Dear Future Teaching Self,  
Why do I want to teach?

I know I am not quite sure the exact reason that I want to teach but I know I want to do something important. I know I don't want to be known by millions for something frivolous but for being an inspiration. I remember all the teachers that helped me. I know teaching wasn't something I wanted to do my whole life but the experiences that I've had have swayed me into a direction I never thought I would go. Whenever I get discouraged, I just have to keep remembering that this is what I wanted regardless of whatever anybody else wants for me. I know it is not going to be easy and I should probably do something like accounting, but I know that wouldn't make me happy, and isn't that the ultimate question that I have to keep asking myself: Am I going to be happy?" (Student letter, Autumn 2005) [11]

Each semester, I ask students to write a letter to the teachers they imagine themselves becoming. There is often a sense of apprehension in these letters, a searching of sorts within the ambiguity of expectation and desire, regarding what

it might really mean to be Teacher and how, by choosing this profession s/he will be perceived by others in the world. In their excitement to *be(come) the best teachers they can be* they forget to take the deep breath of critical reflection. Instead they cling to answers and images that have been deemed successful and true: they may struggle with the internal and external interrogation that goes into becoming a teacher. BRITZMAN (1991) points out, "[t]he problem is to distinguish how we come to know what we know, what it is that structures what we know, and how our knowledge of the world works to position experiences as lived" (pp.214-215). However, it is very difficult for many pre-service teachers to reflect upon that which shapes their movement as they fuse together the opaque shards of discourse that shape what they believe about the nature of being Teacher. Reflection leads to vulnerability and it is the vulnerability that many equate with failure. Yet, PALMER (1998) reminds us that "[t]o reduce our vulnerability, we disconnect from students, from subjects, and even from ourselves. We build a wall between inner truth and outer performance, and we play-act the teacher's part" (p.17). While the "play-acting" PALMER refers to may seem fun for a while most eventually find themselves at a loss, fearful of the often disturbing demands of the institution itself yet lacking the awareness to thoughtfully dialogue toward change. When the playing stops many beginning teachers find themselves feeling alone, caught in a space they cannot fully name or recognize. O'QUINN and GARRISON (2003) remark that if one is frozen within the image of loving teacher, s/he is unlikely to become an "active agent of it" (p.55). Feeling a lack of agency, many find themselves searching within an infatuation that leads to feelings of hopelessness as they struggle within their profession. Yet, PALMER (1998) notes

"... the most practical thing we can achieve in any kind of work is insight into what is happening inside us as we do it. The more familiar we are with our inner terrain the more sure footed our teaching—and living—becomes." (p.5) [12]

It is important to help pre-service teachers become aware of the disconnections within their practice and to encourage them to look both internally and externally at the factors that have brought them to the profession and shape their expectations of themselves as Teacher. Perhaps then, when the beginning teacher finds herself/himself lost s/he may be able to gaze deeply within the context of practice, asking questions and finding a sense of praxis amidst the ambiguity and discomfort of a very personal profession. [13]

I invite the pre-service teachers I work with to engage with the brambly landscape of being Teacher as a means to help them consider the steps that they might take along their journey as teachers, steps that with awareness might lead to a greater sense of agency and praxis rather than a sense of helplessness. There is often a struggle as many students resist ideas that exist outside their own spaces of desire, reluctant to examine that which might call everything they believe they know about teaching into question. These visions can seem dangerous for the pre-service teacher as they open one to the vulnerability of becoming one who does not fit within the ideological notions of being Teacher; thus the teacher risks rejection and, as such, many stuck within the chilly space of (in)de/finite being. [14]

## 5. Stepping Into the Space of Be(com)ing

As pre-service teachers step into the space of preparation seeking to know the *rules* so that their movements as Teacher might be met with success and recognition, few stop to reflect upon the relationship of these rules to themselves, the world, or another. Yet, Teacher is a word, a profession packed with much emotion, politics and power—rooted in a past full of contradictions entwined with ideology, myth and the desire for something better. Ultimately, as BRITZMAN (1991) points out, it is the power of these contradictions that preserves the *status quo* and often leaves teachers feeling powerless, as if they must *endure*. However, SAMESHIMA (2007) remarks, "[t]he teaching profession is dramatically strengthened when teachers understand who they are, know how their experiences have shaped their ideologies, and find and acknowledge their place of contribution in the broader context of the educational setting" (pp.34-35). Engaging pre-service teachers in the experience of be(com)ing Teacher through an arts-informed dialogue that moves beyond surface methods and rules may open up new spaces for reflexivity and action across a terrain that seems pre-determined. Through this experiential and active dialogue

"[s]pace thus becomes something more than a void in which to roam about, dotted here and there with dangerous things and things to satisfy the appetite. It becomes a comprehensive and enclosed scene within which are ordered the multiplicity of doings and undergoings in which man engages." (DEWEY, 1980, p.23) [15]

This order is not as neat as many pre-service teachers might desire; rather, it is messy, built upon the stories of many living within society. The art making and inquiry that takes place in my classrooms mirrors this messiness and calls for an intimacy between producers that leads to vulnerability, but also deeper awareness of self, other, and experience. In fact, it becomes an experience in itself, and it is through experience, SAMESHIMA (2007) remarks, that "... we create our understandings of life and who we are, what we stand for and what our conceptions of the world are" (p.11). [16]

In my Elementary Education courses I ask students to consider: what does it mean to be a teacher? When pre-service teachers are asked to read into the meaning of this word, this practice of Teacher, the denseness of contradictions becomes evident—responses are often vague or rigid as each student seems so often to be seeking the *right* answer to describe his or her place within the profession, to make the grade and be accepted by those around her. To strengthen the quality of dialogue I believe it is important to push students beyond those hegemonic spaces of intellectual knowing and rightness into spaces of discomfort, discovery, and inquiry that weave emotion and intellect into the unpredictable. Thus, I encourage students to explore their knowing through a variety of artistic genres, including those that they struggle to fully understand. This struggle moves them beyond performance or the desire to be right, into a space of performativity and reflection, where they must be fully present to what is taking place, where they must take risks. IRWIN (2004) reflects "[visual] imagery surrounds and confronts us regularly through media, popular culture, ritual,



tradition, and cultural activities" (p.32) yet when it comes to being recognized as a way of knowing or processing in the general teacher education classroom it is often overlooked. By engaging students in the work of creating visual representations of themselves as teachers, they are able to return to previous images while also (re)constructing these images and performances as something that reflects their evolving sense of self and practice. My goal is to create a classroom where experience, inquiry, and community intertwine emerging as a lifelong process that my pre-service teachers might take with them as they enter their own classrooms. [17]

## 6. Mindful Multiplicities

Tell Me

I want to learn how to be a good teacher ...

I want you to tell me how to make activities fun ...

I want to know how to get a job ...

Please

tell me

what I should do ...

be ...

More than a few eager pre-service teachers have entered my classroom exhibiting a strong desire to "get the rules," follow them, and achieve the image of the successful Teacher that has been for so long engrained upon their consciousness. A certain sense of danger emerges for both the teacher educator as well as the pre-service teacher when they become confronted with a desire that is rooted within a space of conformity. BRITZMAN (1998) points out that "... conformity in its adherence to dictates of social convention, privileges routinized behavior over critical action. Its centripetal force pulls toward reproducing the *status quo* in behavior as it mediates our subjective capacity to be in the world" (p.29). Mothers, fathers, neighbors, brothers and sisters, even past teachers have all helped etch a particular image of what the work of be(com)ing Teacher might look like. Pre-service teachers often cling to these images, believing success to be achieved when they fit the mold that has been determined for them.

"Teachers should enjoy every subject they teach in order for students to be eager to learn. Teaching with enthusiasm and energy is important because it is contagious. Students react to a teacher's vibe. Therefore the vibe should be a good one."  
(Student reflection, Autumn 2005)

"Every voice speaks to particular ways of knowing as it positions the speaker within an epistemological community. Each of our images of what constitutes knowing, and hence knowledge is part of what structure's one's subjectivity: what is valued as truth and what is discarded as fiction." (BRITZMAN, 1991, pp.23-24) [18]

Considering BRITZMAN's statement, it becomes easy to recognize the conflict of the teacher educator; students arrive with their particular ways of knowing and it is this knowing that shapes their responses to our own teaching and questioning.

What, then, does the teacher educator do when she finds herself confronted with images of the sunny teacher shining the light of her enthusiasm and love upon eager children?

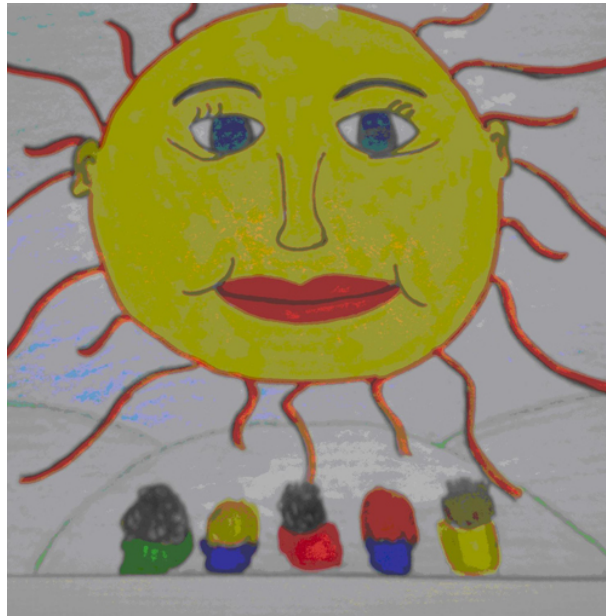


Figure 2: Sunny teacher (Student artwork, Spring 2006)

The sun is warm  
comforting  
always there on a day like this  
lighting the world  
encouraging one to come out  
and play  
in its rays  
Teacher  
I am like the sun  
warm  
comforting  
gentle  
loving  
a shining  
guiding light  
in the life of a child [19]

## 7. Mythic Desire

I look at how my students attempt to name themselves as teachers in writing assignments or visual representation of how they perceive themselves as Teacher, or even in their own work of "playing teacher." Across this often vague collection of smiling people, trees, books, letters, and desks there rarely appears a recognition of their own subjectivity or self within the context of the classroom; it would seem/seems that instead students are following a script they struggle to make their own. They want to hold tight to the portrayal of one who is love trying to become the individual in the mythological image, they seek the formulas for becoming she who already is, shying away from the possibility of becoming someone different, open to vulnerability and perhaps even failure (O'QUINN & GARRISON, 2003). I encounter an unspoken desire on the part of many pre-service teachers to see the job of being teacher as easy—grasping for the formulaic image of rules, books, procedures—but they do not see or are afraid to admit that there might be a struggle, to consider what BRITZMAN (1991) has discussed as the "more private aspects of pedagogy." Furthermore, when I ask students to consider how their experiences will impact their teaching they move within the safety of generally shallow responses. It is likely that I will hear responses such as "my family is important to me," "my friends support me and have helped me become a good person." This same "happy" view is displayed when they are asked to practice their role in the classroom, the relationships that they create either as students or teachers often resemble those of children doing the work of play—voices change and they return to their own childhood memories of "playing teacher." I consider these reflections and ways of naming as limited, built around an infatuation with an image that they have yet to shake up, to see beyond the inflection of voice, smiles and shapes.

I have strong foundation  
Indestructible from the core  
learning established  
cannot be broken  
but I can  
take these pieces  
without judgment  
hear  
both sides to the story  
determined to finish anything  
I start  
life can have rough patches  
but I am confident  
and creative  
will do what  
I am told

I listen  
under pressure  
my teaching will be great



Figure 3: School girls and the brain (Student artwork, Spring 2006)

My life  
is one of order  
and learning  
what I have been given  
I will give  
to my students [20]

At times I wonder, observing the infatuation with the cliché images of teacher, evident not only in my observations of students' works but also in the research of MITCHELL and WEBER (1995): might it be safer for the pre-service teacher to dwell with/in the blind desire? Would it be possible for them to remain comfortable within this mythic state being as they move into their own classrooms? There is a degree of comfort as one imagines herself as caretaker, information giver, and challenger. Yet, what disservice would I do my students if I did not ask them to look again at the images that they have created to name themselves, searching for the multiple voices at work so that they might recognize that there may be rough terrain in the life they are choosing to embark upon. BRITZMAN (1991, p.6) notes:

"While we all live in myths, some myths instigate repressive norms of pedagogy and identity, while others open us up to the dialogic. This later image of teachers—as negotiators, mediators and authors who are becoming—is the places where identity becomes infused with possibilities." [21]

It is the myths that often draw many students to the profession of Teacher as they imagine themselves, myths that exist across discourse communities. ROBERTSON (1997) remarks on the ways in which those be(com)ing Teacher use these myths, noting that "[b]eginning teachers actively deploy the material of everyday life—including images of teaching from film and other forms of popular

culture—to help shape their thinking and learning" (p.75). Yet, as they draw on these images, few recognize how embedded within a hegemonic view of Teacher they are; instead they see that which is presented as the ideal, she who must learn how to emulate and be(come). The pedagogies and identities of pre-service teachers do not stand alone, but rather, as LEMERT (2002, p.128) comments,

"... most of the actions and feeling that helps us enter into working relations with fellow members of the world are not all that private ... (t)hey are in fact, performances we execute in acceptably close conformity to widely accepted social rules." [22]

While dreaming of themselves in the ideal role, MITCHELL and WEBER (1995) remind us that "those who teach are in the position to re-enact, perhaps in unconscious ways, the very same scenes that they themselves have experienced" (p.34). When they begin to question this image and how s/he may or not be able to fit within the mold, many teachers begin to reevaluate their place within the profession.

I think I should be  
considerate  
caring loving  
fun  
approachable so that everyone  
is comfortable  
I need  
to be  
consistent  
in my beliefs  
demonstrating  
good morals  
inside and out  
I want to be loved  
to be wanted.

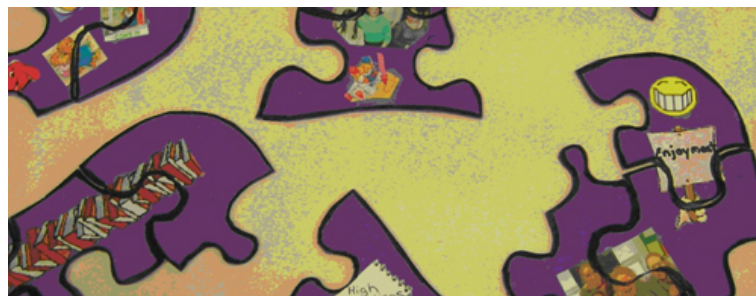


Figure 4: Puzzle (Student artwork, Autumn 2005)



Figure 5: Living tree (Student artwork, Spring 2006)

Roots separate  
    what I have known  
throughout my life  
    like the tree takes water  
                                I take in information  
my mind  
    staying  
active and healthy  
                                at the trunk all this information comes together  
helping me be  
    the kind  
    of teacher  
                                I want  
to be  
    I           will spread  
    my knowledge  
to students  
    so hopefully  
they too will sprout roots  
    with interest  
    of  
their own [23]

Many of these pre-service teachers are not quite aware that they are situated within the folds of the "Truth of Education," that their desires are socially constructed (MARTUSEWICZ, 1997). They are caught up by the image of fictions long (u)nrecognized that have slowly, without reflection and action, evolved into mythological truths of being one within the world. GREENE (1973, p.31) makes

note of both the potential power and dangers of this fictive knowing quoting KERMODE:

"Fictions can degenerate into myths whenever they are not consciously held to be fictive. Fictions are for finding things out and they change as the needs of sense-making change. Myths are the agents of stability, fictions are the agents of change." [24]

Within the traditional structure of schools, it would seem that many students find themselves, often unaware, searching for something that has been so solidified in ideology that it might seem hard to gain awareness; however, there are spaces of possibility even within the myths. [25]

## 8. Contradicting Ambivalence

In her work with student teachers, BRITZMAN (1991) problematizes the tensions of the becoming pedagogy of Teacher as she explores the ways those practicing Teacher negotiate through the complex terrains of discourse as they work to make sense of the "multiple meanings, constraints and possibilities of the teacher's identity in the process of constructing one's own" (p.2). As BRITZMAN notes, after years of being "schooled" there is a certain overfamiliarity with the practice of Teacher; many of those be(com)ing Teacher, believe they know the profession well, having been students for many years they often take for granted actions and expectations. BRITZMAN (1991, p.3) remarks:

"The mass experience of public education has made teaching one of the most familiar professions of 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."

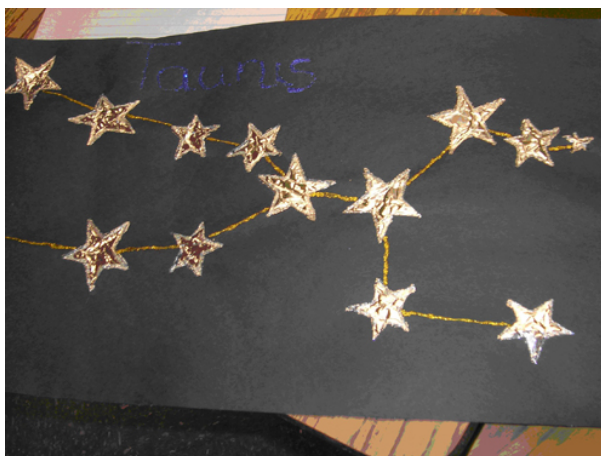


Figure 6: Constellation (Student artwork, Spring 2006)

Visualize  
I am a teacher  
    self in the sky  
the stars of my constellation  
    shine brightly  
full of  
    imagination  
    creativity  
laughter                   to get me through  
organization  
    understanding in exploration  
and most important of all  
    inspiration  
    and individuality  
for  
    it is most important to stay true to who  
    you are [26]

Upon entering the landscape of be(com)ing Teacher, many find themselves bound in contradiction as they negotiate through the multiple and often contradictory discourses of teaching and learning. There are many directions one might take when moving through the multiple discourses of be(com)ing Teacher. Too often pre-service teachers find themselves actively absent, unaware of the impact of their own subjectivity upon their profession. This absence of awareness leaves many of those be(com)ing Teacher feeling trapped as they move beyond that which they thought was the absolute, known practice of teaching. BRITZMAN (1991) calls those be(com)ing to enter into a space of *double consciousness*, becoming actively aware of their position across and through the multiple discourses of be(com)ing. It is this active awareness that offers one the opportunity to enter into the dialogic space of be(com)ing. As the one be(com)ing Teacher becomes aware of his/her movements through and beyond those "surface images" that speak of Teacher, s/he may become able to dialogue with rather than accept those definitions of pedagogy and practice that speak loudly across the cacophony of ideologies that the dominant society speaks of as "common sense" definitions of teacher and pedagogy.

"I am constantly in motion, moving with my students. We are having fun. I am laughing so hard I start to cry. I am inspired by my students, and I am inspiring my students. The smell of the room is sweet. I am pleased that every dream I have ever had is coming true. The children are laughing and falling around. They never had so much fun in school. They don't want to leave, never grow up. They think their teacher is the best. But they know a time will come when they have to leave me. They are only in Kindergarten, but they know no one can change their mind about school. They



love it and don't want to leave it. I have given them a new place to go, something great to enjoy. Yes, this is my heaven." (Student reflection, Spring 2006) [27]

Many teachers find themselves at a crossroads when they enter the classroom, no longer can they rely on the pleasures of "playing" teacher; instead, they have to answer to those around them who demand that they name themselves according to the various normative structures of the social system within which they are working. While there are pedagogical possibilities as one begins to engage in dialogue with these structures, there can also be much confusion and alienation within the field of education. GREENE (1986) notes that "... teachers are too deeply uncertain when it comes to risking 'in the name of full human connection' because they are uncertain as to what it signifies to realize an ideal of the self" (p.180). As one seeks to find a place, a name within the struggle, s/he is bombarded with mixed messages and expectations regarding exactly who s/he is meant to be. The reaction to these contradictory messages of expectation is often one of ambivalence. KELLY (2003) considers this sort of ambivalence to be "double edged: It is the lens through which one views and is viewed. Ambivalence not only manages one's impulse to hate; it also manages trust, the extent to which one will love (and believe oneself to be loved)" (p.158).

"I am swirling with excitement as I stand in front of my first classroom. The walls are decorated with encouraging posters, my artwork, and plans for the future. My students desks are arranged in groups around the room, their names taped to the tops, pencil boxes on the inside and notebooks in them.

Bell rings

They file in, all 23 of my first, second grade class. The boys are wearing blues and greens, the little girls have pink barrettes, yellow ribbons, pigtails and braids. There is chaos as they find their seats, some complaining about who they are seated next to, others too nervous to complain.

I breathe it all in ...

This is my moment. I see my face in every child's eye. This is what I've wanted to do for the last 20 years and I am finally doing it. I don't even know them, and I think I already love them.

I have the freedom to teach them, to instill in them values, to love them, to make them step outside the box. It is the most exciting and frightening feeling. What if I don't do a good job? I can't think that way, I must do a great job ... I have faith in myself." (Student reflection, Autumn 2005)

"Neither identity, however, could be embodied without contradictions. Nor were they sufficient for constructing creative, participatory, and relevant pedagogy, because such identities are only capable of defining students in terms of what they lack— authority or freedom—and defining the teacher as the sole agent of the classroom." (BRITZMAN, 1991, p.226) [28]

As the student speaks her dream of self as Teacher she does not say, "I am not sure"; however, ambivalence exists as she speaks in contradiction, noting that "she has the freedom to teach them what she wants" but worried that she will not

do a good job. She has yet to recognize who or what it is that defines her work as good or bad, yet there is an awareness—even in her dreams, that exhibits a sense that things may not be as she so desires. [29]

## 9. Performing Resistance

Ask me

who

I am

I resist

become

yet

I do not

know

Teaching is, as AYERS (1993) points out, autobiographical: "[o]f all the knowledge that teachers need to draw on, self knowledge is the most important (and least attended to)" (p.129). Yet, when pre-service teachers present their own (re)presentations of a teaching self, their bodies are often absent, illustrating the pattern of those life stories that might be forgotten; past, present, and future become something that they cannot quite be present to, they reach for the image instead.



Figure 7: Apple math (Student artwork, Autumn 2005)

Can you see  
me  
it is I  
performing  
before the lights that shine  
in my eyes  
I cannot see you  
see me  
I try to remember  
the script you have given me  
to not forget the lines  
for what might be  
if I forget  
or I fall off  
the stage  
you have created. [30]

ARNSTINE (1995) notes that "Education can succeed only if teachers know what they are teaching for" (p.22). As pre-service teachers work to make sense of Teacher, many struggle to come to terms with the purpose(s) of this profession as it relates to their own desires. Students are both encouraged and discouraged from becoming teachers and it is within these conflicting messages that they ask themselves "will I be happy ... is this the right choice?" Yet few during the early work of be(com)ing Teacher ask "what is it for?" While they struggle to ponder the reasons behind the profession, when I ask students to create representations of whom they see themselves as teachers and learners, the pre-service teachers I work with are often eager to take on the task.

"A bright light shines upon their faces, a group of pre-service teachers exploring the impact of current policies on their teaching and the learning of their students. An eager young woman stands in the front of the room ... reading from a script, she begins 'today the standards tell us we will be learning about ...' her voice drifts off as attention is drawn to the students in the class. Students shift in their seats, playing with bubble gum and passing notes—whispers about tonight's party are audible to the listener. As the moments continue, one is invited into another teaching and learning moment between the student and teacher. It is silent sustained reading time ... as the teacher announces this time to the students she makes it very clear that this is a requirement of the curriculum—not a time for choice, but rather a distinct slot of time for a specific activity. Each student takes out a book—some reading upside down, others with their books on the desk while their eyes roam about the room. There is another student reading in the classroom—her activity is focused as she clearly engages with the text she is reading. It is a *Harry Potter* book ... as the teacher's eyes roam around the room she notices the guerilla text and quickly comes to the side of the student. 'What are you reading?' she demands. The student confidently states

'*Harry Potter*, this is my favorite series.' The teacher moves in closer to the student—standing tall as the student slips further down into the safety of her seat. In a voice for all to hear, the teacher charges, 'this book is not on the list of approved books from the school board, I must confiscate it.' The student attempts for a brief moment to challenge this, but is quickly struck silent by the teacher's repetition, 'this is not on the list of approved books from the school board; I must confiscate it.' Taking the book with her, the teacher returns to her desk and the stack of papers piled upon it. The student who has lost her book sits silently, moving deeper into the space of her chair, until it seems like she has almost disappeared. In that moment the light disappears and the television goes black" (Notes, Summer 2005).

"Teachers are not merely victims of society's cultural imagery. Although they are born into powerful socializing metaphors, some of them manage to break and recreate images while making sense of their roles and forming their self-identities."  
(MITCHELL & WEBER, 1995, p.26) [31]

As I invite students to enter into the dialogue through their own work of creating and (re)presenting renderings of themselves as Teacher, sharing my own evolving understandings, images and text begin to tangle. The ambiguity of the experience of be(com)ing Teacher begins to weave into something visible as pre-service teachers negotiate through multiple discourses, becoming both aware and at moments unaware of the terrain along their own journeys. Hope emerges as discourses begin to engage upon the page.

Love and joy dance up/on my psyche  
    Inspiration and play  
        Exist  
            in a place of learning  
                a place where others have failed  
to inspire  
        perhaps          have failed to inspire me  
but today  
        I will be successful  
My students will love          me  
        in my                                  heaven [32]

NORMAN (2001) notes that our lives and stories are layered. As the voices of those who have been silent about their experiences fold into the textures of self and other, they may begin to join together into a chorus of collective silence and struggle that might be able to become heard amidst the cacophony of expectations which have so often hindered any possibility for movement beyond the boundaries of what should be. DAVIES (2000, p.42) discusses the value of this sort of collectivity when she examines the collective biography:

"Through listening to the stories of others, through talking out loud the remembered fragments, through writing the memories down and seeing how language shapes

them with cultural patterns of meaning—making, the collective group searches for the kind of 'truth' that comes from inside the remembered even and also from the process of remembering."

I am in the image  
but the image is not me  
existing in temporality  
light of new moments  
shines upon  
the fragments  
of an (un)known  
self  
bleeding  
experience  
across  
the crystallization  
of my subjectivity  
flowing light  
upon  
my perception



Figure 8: Whirling timeline (Student artwork, Spring 2006)

"I begin with a simple white canvas so that all of the people could use their visual learning ability. I am a visual learner and I think it is the only way I could truly represent my learning and teacher definitions. This canvas is like our minds, ready to absorb knowledge. The first layer of the canvas represents the ever-changing seasons in life or unpredictable situations that may occur. The top layer is the background that creates my personality and teaching philosophy. Everything from the places I have been, the people I have met, to when I won awards. I have included all

of these things because *a teacher is what she has learned and what she is open to*. Teachers should learn each day from *everything* around them.

The painting has *layers*. You can add more *to change* it whenever necessary. The layers represent flexibility. The different layers should represent different *sides to a person* and what they are *able to withstand* in their classroom. Students come from various backgrounds and the *differences* throughout *my life* have *equipped* me to help their *emotional* needs as well as *decide* how they learn information.

Different children learn in different ways and the different seasons represent the *different possibilities a teacher may have to endure*." (Student reflection, spring 2006) [33]

Entering these fragments upon the performative landscape, one may find agency through awareness but this does not mean that the work might not be (un)comfortable. However, this awareness invites one to sense that their experience is not theirs alone, that it exists within a context. Noticing the contextual nature of the experience, those be(com)ing Teacher begin to recognize themselves as multifaceted selves in relationship with others who move through the space of learning the "rules," others who may question or concur, yet might also engage in a playful dialogue of praxis within the process of learning to teach. [34]

## 10. Playing With the (Im)Possible

PALMER (1998) notes that "... teaching is a daily act in vulnerability" (p.17). In their movements of be(com)ing Teacher, many students work hard to avoid this vulnerability as they attempt to learn the rules. They often become very good at "playing teacher." It is these same rules and ideas that have echoed across their consciousness and sense of self in the world, from birth—yet few have stopped to think, *why?* Through the arts-informed interrogation of self performance, I see students repeating the same rules they have heard before as they try to make them their own. It is often disheartening for teacher educators as they observe students seemingly internalizing and accepting hegemonic ideas of Teacher. However, it is important to recognize that through the experience of art making and inquiry, students begin to engage with multiple messages. There is often conflict as multiple discourses contradict what it is they know and believe they might be(come) in relationship to practice. It is this conflict that opens doors to new possibilities and relationships as one tries to make sense of what is happening within experience. And so s/he who is be(com)ing Teacher must never stop his/her search with/in the rules, so that s/he might begin to recognize the nature of her own movements across the tangled and ambiguous discourses that name Teacher. [35]

Imagine the Teacher, sitting quietly in the classroom one afternoon—miserably wondering, what it is that s/he might do to move beyond the ambiguity that leaves its imprint upon him/her every day. All one has to do is to step into a faculty lounge to see that teachers do in fact have conversations about their work—delight and frustrations; yet, rarely do these talks go beyond the surface moving

toward active awareness. What would she do, if she was able to "speak" of her experience of be(com)ing Teacher knowing that it was welcomed? What then would happen, if in the sharing she discovered that there were structures that impacted her experience and sense of self within the experience—would she feel a greater sense of agency, would she begin to reflect upon her experiences differently? There is much talk about action research in the classroom these days, but I wonder what might happen if we also encouraged a living and artful inquiry into person and pedagogy that is both critical and playful, as teachers and pre-service teachers engage with their movements with/in their surrounding context? I do not believe the work of this inquiry can offer (up) answers, but rather the pedagogical possibility of what might be, offering hope amidst those feelings of ambiguity and longing that linger along the path of be(com)ing Teacher. [36]

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## Citation

MacKenzie, Sarah K. (2011). Playing Teacher: Artful Negotiations in the Pre-service Classroom [36 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12(1), Art. 30, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs1101306>.