Meaning-making from the Practice of Personal Pedagogies: The Cases of Australian Secondary Teachers and English Teachers of Travellers

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Abstract

The notion of personal pedagogies highlights the enduring centrality to educational outcomes of teachers ' philosophical and professional subjectivities. Those subjectivities help to frame and inform the teachers ' practice-based actions and to contextualize and underpin the meanings that they make from that practice.

Abstract (Continued)

This paper illustrates this argument by reference to two groups of teachers: secondary school teachers in Australia; and teachers of Travellers (mobile communities such as circus and fairground people and Gypsy Travellers) in England. The qualitative, naturalistic and interpretivist analysis maps multiple meaning-making trajectories as the selected teachers articulate their engagements with widely ranging pressures and possibilities related to their personal pedagogical practice.

Abstract(Continued)

In particular, the paper compares within and across the two contexts clusters of strategies concerned with initiating, reacting to and ignoring various manifestations of educational and sociocultural change. These strategies encapsulate both potential stressors in their practice and possible dilutions of and solutions to those stressors.

Overview of presentation

- Conceptual and methodological resources

- Australian secondary teachers

- English teachers of Travellers

- Possible implications

Conceptual and Methodological Resources

- Literature on teachers' work and identities as multiple and shifting subjectivities enacted in specific contexts and sites (e.g. Hall, 2004; Woods& Jeffrey,2002)
- Subjectivity as "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (Weedon,1987, p.32; cited in McDougall, 2004,p. 95)

Conceptual and Methodological Resources (Continued)

Ecologies of practice (Stronach, Corbin, McNamara, Stark & Warne, 2002) as a conceptual lens:

…it was clear that such an 'economy' [of performance] was always written against other beliefs and practices. Professionals' talk was shot through with different warranting appeals. As well as those auditable commodities of the 'audit culture'…professionals in both groups [of teachers and nurses] made frequent appeals to different sorts of registers which we came to label 'ecologies of practice'.

These comprised the accumulation of individual and collective experiences of teaching or nursing through which people laid claim to being 'professional' – personal experience in the classroom /clinic/ ward, commonly held staff beliefs and institutional policies based upon these, commitments to 'child-centred' or 'care-centred' ideologies, convictions about what constituted 'good practice', and so on. (p. 122) 7

Conceptual and Methodological Resources (Continued)

…the most influential aspect of ecologies of practice seemed to be the *crucible of classroom experience*. It was there that innovations seem to have been tested, adapted, resisted, embraced or ignored. It was there that things had to 'work'. And it was there that a sense of the vocational commitment and reward of the teacher was most vividly expressed… (p.124; *emphasis in original*)

8

Conceptual and Methodological Resources (Continued)

The relationship between economies of performance and ecologies of practice:

…generated a *tension* for professionals, and it seemed to us that it was in living this tension, with its contradictions, dilemmas, compromises, etc., that they experienced themselves as professionals. The job of understanding professional 'work' and 'belief', accordingly, involved reading these tensions, and locating 'professional' experiences betwixt and between these affiliations.(p. 122; *emphasis in original*)

Conceptual and Methodological Resources (Continued)

- Qualitative, naturalistic, interpretivist research design based on two separate multisite case studies

- Data analysis focused on participants' words as mediated and indirect reflections of the irpersonal pedagogies and practice-based meaning-making

Australian Secondary Teachers

- Data drawn from three secondary school contexts
- Semi-structured interviews

- Classroom observations and post observational

  discussions

- Naturalistic and grounded theory methodology

Australian Secondary Teachers (Continued) One Case Study

- Independent, co -educational, day and boarding school
- Catering for regional and rural students
- Academic, artistic and sporting achievement highly regarded
- Very experienced classroom teacher who contributed heavily in support of sporting activities, high commitment to students

AustralianSecondary Teachers (Continued)

Personal pedagogy of leading change:

• "A comfortable school to teach in. I can work here and make a difference."

"With experience, you tend to realise there are lots of ups and downs and you've got to see your way through it. You go into teaching because you think you can do something to help , so it's up to me to find out all the new information. There's always so much reading to do , and trying to prepare assignments and tests. That's over your head all the time. If I don't do it, the kids will miss out."

Australian Secondary Teachers (Continued)

Personal pedagogy of resisting change:

- "…no one looks over your shoulder; not because they trust you to do the right thing – they are just so busy with other things. The staff here have been here for ages – they are not going to do anything that's provocative or scandalous, so, as far as the classroom goes, I'm a free agent. We don't pull with the boss on every issue. I know what works and I will keep doing it for my students."

Australian Secondary Teachers (Continued)

Personal pedagogy of articulating philosophy about practice:

• "I've got to the stage – well, I can't do much about it so I'm not going to bother any more; I can shut it off. It's good for me, but probably not for the institution as a whole. I tend not to say anything at staff meetings when issues come up and I feel strongly about it any more, for I know it won't change anything. I re-orient my focus. I am still ambitious, but I focus more back to the classroom to see what I can fix right away."

Australian Secondary Teachers (Continued)

Personal pedagogy of ignoring and not engaging:

" … when the principal throws a tantrum about something he feels fragile about and walks out, everyone goes quiet. To avoid this we just keep it all 'froth and bubbles'; we don't rock the boat."

Australian Secondary Teachers (Continued)

And yet with regard to personal choices the teacher says regarding the staffroom:

- "I avoid the staff room. I find it negative and depressing. I like to be open minded and less cynical about the job. I'm friendly with the staff, but I don't spend much time there. For I don't find that it helps me maintain my equilibrium."

1

English Teachers of Travellers

22 semi -structured interviews with 26(18 female and 8 male) heads of service and teachers in 19 Traveller Education Support Services in England between March and July 1999.

Over 200, 000 words of transcripts

Currency of data maximized by subsequent contact and collaboration with some participants (e.g.,Currie & Danaher, 2001;Danaher, Coombes& Kiddle,2007; see also Danaher, 2005)

EnglishTeachers ofTravellers (Continued)

Complex contexts of work and identities of English teachers of Travellers:

- Travellers a traditionally marginalised set of communities
- complex interactions with Traveller families and school principals and teachers
- varied impact of legislation (1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act) and policy (introduction of the literacy hour)
- opportunities and constraints of European collaborative projects (European Federation for the Education of the Children of Occupational Travellers)

EnglishTeachers ofTravellers (Continued)

- Focus on selected words from a head of service in a relatively large TESS in a prosperous regional centre
- Had previously worked with "children with emotional and behavioural difficulties "; saw an advertisement for "reintegrating [Traveller] children back into mainstream education"
- Has a prominent role in the National Association of Teachers of Travellers

English Teachers ofTravellers (Continued)

Personal pedagogy of bringing institutional and individual into closer alignment:

…in terms of a lot of the strategies that you have to adopt, thinking about ways of helping children, on the one hand, who have got difficulties, but also it's about working with people in school where there's a very strict regime which isn't actually terribly flexible when it comes to having children in who may not fit the system terribly well. Not because there's any fault involved; it's just because of the circumstances. So it prompted me. I'd already started to think about ways of how you deal with institutions on the one hand, people who don't understand the necessity to be flexible, and people who are having difficulty adapting to the system on the other. Working with both sides, as it were."

(Continued)

- Personal pedagogy of initiating and engaging with change:

"We have to decide the best way of setting up a service and operating that service in a particular area. Even though we have neighbouring counties, we do actually operate in different ways. This service is much bigger; it's quite a large service. It involves teaching staff, also learning support assistance and education welfare officers. It involved changing; there was quite a bit of change really.

You'd have to talk to people in the service as to whether or not this is a good or bad thing. They tell me that they think it's a good thing. But it's involved changing very much our whole approach…[here] to how the service worked with Travellers and with schools and with other agencies. We became much more Traveller focused, and started to work as a team far more, and people were not – the understanding, the background, of where people were coming from, what the framework was, was very solidly about the rights of Travellers and Traveller children in particular to have access through education rather than (which had been more of the case previously) that people were more isolated, more part of the school community, and trying to perhaps see things from the school perspective more. That has changed, significantly."

English Teachers ofTravellers (Continued)

Personal pedagogy of articulating philosophy and practice:

But schools have a responsibility for all of the children that go in. Local education authorities have a responsibility for all children, and that includes Traveller children. So it's not a half measure. This is why we don't take them out and teach them in a field. It's not just a philosophy; it's good practice to say they must be included totally in what goes on. There must be a recognition of what organisations' and institutions' responsibilities are, and we are a support service. We are there to support, first and foremost, the Traveller children access education. They have a right of access, in fact, and we're there to facilitate them and to liaise and to put in help and support into schools and to work with other agencies and to work with parents and the community as well to enable that to happen.

The focus has to be the rights of the child, and we have to be clear what that is. You can't have a half measure on that."

EnglishTeachers ofTravellers (Continued)

Personal pedagogy of lobbying of various kinds:
"We talk to people in the Traveller community about this as an education service. Obviously, if it's a highly mobile group, we find out [whether] they [have] been served notice. When are they likely to be moving? Have the police visited? Has the land owner come along? If children are in school, if we're setting up support services, our service, it make a difference. It could mean that there'll be a delay in the amount of time taken to move them on. And people do consult with us. But it's very inadequate.

Then, at another level, some of us are constantly petitioning almost the county to set up more transit sites, and transit sites; we haven't got any in [this county], and they won't do it. Yet, we…[and] some of the other agencies feel that there is evidence that there's a huge need for more transit sites, and that actually it would benefit the county, those institutions i they were also financially, as well as in other ways."

English Teachers ofTravellers (Continued)

Personal pedagogy of adhering to a commitment to educational provision:

…what we all have to remember is, at the end of day, we do have to hang on to this belief that people do have certain fundamental rights. The reason why that is – why it's helpful to all of us, those of us who work in fields like this – that we actually believe that it's nicer and it's better to live in a world where people are going to get on with each other. Again having a fundamental belief in the benefits of having education. It's not simple. It's taking on board that we're dealing with human beings, that these are complex issues, but it is possible to make a difference."

Possible Implications

- Richness of data in both case studies

- Multidimensionality of each teacher case

- Potential utility of ecologies of practice (Stronach,Corbin, McNamara,Stark & Warne,2002) as a conceptual lens

- Meaning-making and personal pedagogies are linked with lived experience of individual biographies

Possible Implications (Continued)

- Lots of continuities and diversities displayed by the two teachers' strategies across and within specific contexts and sites

- To implement the macro, need to consider impact of micro factors and local contexts, which in turn constitute and create the macro

Possible Implications (Continued)

More broadly, the authors argue that researching personal pedagogies such as those examined in the paper is vital if the project of rescuing teachers ' work from continuing deprofessionalisation and managerialism is to endure and if the meaning-making from the practice of those pedagogies is to be enabling and transformative rather than constraining and self - defeating.

28

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Thank you for participating!

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