Chapter 3: Becoming a Teacher: Self and the Social Location of Teacher Education

ROBERT V. BULLOUGH, JR.¹
University of Utah

INTRODUCTION

Cutting across several literatures, ‘Becoming a Teacher’ is anything but a simple topic. I have had to set some parameters. Because preservice teacher education confronts what Lortie (1975) called an ‘apprenticeship of observation,’ I necessarily touch on issues related to teacher development grounded in biography and prior experience. Recognized as developmentally important, the first or second years of inservice teaching form an additional parameter (see Olson & Osborne, 1991). With only an occasional exception, most of the studies I draw on were published or presented within the last five years and build on earlier research. This was necessary in order to make the task manageable. I recognize the inherent dangers that come when drawing on studies produced in different countries and contexts, and so I have tried to exercise caution when linking studies and making comparisons.

The chapter is organized into several sections, beginning with a brief discussion of teacher socialization. I then present the story of becoming a teacher that emerges from much of the literature, along with a synopsis of that story that supports efforts to explain teacher development through stage theory. Sections follow that illustrate the complexity of becoming a teacher, and how much of the process is idiosyncratic, dependent on the interaction of person and place (see Yee, 1990). Attention then turns to the centrality of prior experience and teacher beliefs in becoming a teacher and to contextual influences, including the wider cultural context within which students become teachers and within which teacher education takes place and beginning teachers work. A discussion of some of the issues facing formal teacher education then follows along with a section that presents a portion of the range of innovative responses to the problems and challenges facing teacher educators including changes in process, content, and field work context. The latter includes discussion of the PDS (professional development school) movement. The chapter is framed by the belief that the school is a site of the clashing of modern and postmodern worlds, a clash which presents teachers with conflicting demands that make it increasingly difficult to form a professional identity. A case is made for a respectful

B.J. Biddle et al. (eds.), International Handbook of Teachers and Teaching, 79-134
© 1997 Kluwer Academic Publishers, Printed in the Netherlands
teacher education, one that focuses on self-formation, that engages beginning teachers in exploring their beliefs and the contexts within which they learn to teach in relationship to their moral responsibilities to care for and educate young people. The argument supports a process—rather than an outcomes-driven view of teacher education, a view that includes a challenge to teacher educators to consider our own commitments, our orientations to the good. In the final section, I note that becoming a teacher continues long after preservice teacher education ends, and that ultimately a respectful teacher education involves linking pre- and inservice education.

SOCIALIZATION

The phrase, 'becoming a teacher,' is broad and slightly slippery, yet that is what this chapter is about. Because of its functionalist baggage, I have hesitated to use the term socialization to describe my focus. Nevertheless, my views have been heavily influenced by recent socialization research that shows the process of becoming a teacher to be 'highly interactive' and fraught with contradiction, involving the 'constant interplay between choice and constraint,' a process 'that teachers influence and shape...' even while seeking a place in the community of educators (Zeichner & Gore, 1990, p. 341). The message is clear: 'The community shapes the individual... but the individual also shapes the community' (Prawat, 1991, p. 240). Thus, becoming a teacher is 'not a simple transition from one role to another; it is a social process involving complex interactions between and among prospective and experienced teachers and their social situations' (Lawson, 1992, p. 164). A functionalist view blinds us to the ways in which we are, as Shakespeare would put it, 'self-borne' (King Richard II, III.ii.80). I am especially concerned about this aspect of becoming a teacher, an area that has received comparatively little attention.

A STORY, IN GENERAL

When viewed at a distance, and perhaps through slightly squinting eyes, a pattern appears running through many tales of becoming a teacher that can with some ease be put into narrative form—'a setting-complication-resolution structure' (Nespor & Barylske, 1991, p. 810), a story. The general themes are of certainty giving way to experimentation and eventual stabilization (Huberman, 1993); of trial and error approaches to learning to teach giving way to more systematic development (Featherstone, 1993; Johnston, 1994), of a clashing of conceptions of self with institutional role expectations and cf an eventual but not always happy resolution. That this is a rather common story is supported by large
empirical studies from such diverse places as Switzerland (Huberman, 1993),
Australia (Smith, Cook, Cuddihy, Muller, Nimmo, & Thomas, 1991), and the
United States (Marso & Pigge, 1989), as well as numerous case studies (e.g.,
Aitken, 1994; Aitken & Mildon, 1991; Bullough, 1989a; Schmidt & Knowles,
1993).

The story itself is composed of a series of ‘chronologies’ (Britzman, 1991)
that represent turning points in the tale, stories embedded within stories:

Students who enter teacher education bring with them their first
chronology negotiated throughout their cumulative classroom lives....
Their student experiences in the university and teacher education
constitute the second chronology. Student teaching furnishes the third
chronology.... A fourth chronology begins once the student teacher
becomes a newly arrived teacher.... Each ...represents different and
competing relations to power, knowledge, dependency, and negotiation,
and authorizes frames of reference that effectuate discursive practices
in teaching. (p. 55)

The story of becoming a teacher begins, then, well before the neophyte enters a
teacher education program. It begins at birth, a point to which I will return, but
more formally with the ‘apprenticeship of observation’ that Lortie (1975) called
to attention and so felicitously labeled. The point is now taken for granted,
although what to do about it remains a source of lively debate. Neophytes come
to teacher education having spent thousands of hours sitting in classrooms as
students, presumably learning and observing teaching, and some come from
families of teachers and have grown up playing teacher. As students, they know
teaching from one side of the desk and often assume that they know it from the
other as well. Their familiarity with teaching is both a blessing and a curse to
becoming a teacher. This fact distinguishes teacher education from other forms
of professional education and sets for it a uniquely difficult educational task,
one often forgotten by those who long for high status professionalism. Thus,
many beginners enter teacher education already certain of their ability to teach
but lacking an ‘appreciation for the complexity and uncertainty of the teaching-
learning relationship’ (Weinstein, 1990, p. 279) and resistant to efforts to
reconsider their views (Kuzmic, 1993). Their certainty, in part, is based on the
view that caring is the essence of good teaching, and above all else beginning
teachers care and are warm, friendly, and understanding, or at least perceive
themselves as such (Perry & Rog, 1992; Weinstein, 1989, 1990). A service ethic
motivates them to teach (Morales, 1994).

Once admitted to teacher education, beginners are anxious to get into the
schools, to show their stuff. Direct classroom experience, they assume, is the
most important aspect of becoming a teacher: ‘The myth that experience makes
the teacher, and hence that experience is telling in and of itself, valorizes student teaching as the authentic moment in teacher education and the real ground of knowledge production’ (Britzman, 1991, p. 7). Being perceived as too theoretical, foundations courses take a beating (Stones, 1989), as do methods courses taught by presumably out of touch professors who offer content judged ‘irrelevant’ (Hatton, 1994). The situation is exacerbated by the ‘lack of articulation between course-work and field experiences [which is] a common problem in teacher education’ (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1989, p. 376). In effect, for the many beginning teachers who already assume they know enough to teach and who frequently assume that ‘teaching subject matter involves telling or showing’ (McDiarmid, 1990, p. 13), practice teaching is synonymous with teacher education.

Student teaching begins on a high note. Beginning teachers fully expect to be extraordinary: ‘I’m going to go out and set the world on fire and things are going to be wonderful’ (quoted in Wildman, Niles, Magliaro, & McLaughlin, 1989, p. 473). Weinstein, for example, reports that of the teacher education students she studied prior to beginning field work, 92% rated themselves ‘slightly above average,’ ‘above average,’ or ‘much above average,’ with respect to their teaching performance’ (1990, p. 282). During student teaching, however, optimism often gives way as the neophyte seeks to negotiate a personally satisfying, productive, and institutionally acceptable teaching role within someone else’s classroom and begins to confront knowledge limits, particularly about students, but also about adapting content for secondary teacher education students (Huberman, 1993, p. 199). As one student remarked:

Part of my problem with feeling that the practicum was a performance exam rather than a learning experience was tied to my perception that I wasn’t allowed to try alternative methods and that I was expected to adopt the teaching style of my cooperating teachers. This perception was tied to my image [of myself as independent]. I’m uncomfortable in situations that seem unnecessarily limiting or restricting, or when I’m expected to behave in ways that seem unnatural to me. Student teaching wasn’t a happy experience. Only now am I beginning to understand that part of my negative feelings was due to a sense of selling out — compromising who I am in a desperate attempt to please my cooperating teachers and hating myself for it. I never shared these feelings with those teachers…. (Clift, Meng, & Eggerding, 1994, p. 269)

Contradictions abound, as ‘preservice teachers strive to enact or play out their personal images of teaching despite contextual realities which are often at odds with them’ (Cole & Knowles, 1993, p. 459). Ironically, as Stones puts it, ‘there is not the remotest possibility of student teachers becoming clones of the teachers
they observe' (1989, p. 4). Tension results from seeking to 'be myself,' as one beginning teacher put it (Schmidt & Knowles, 1993), while simultaneously seeking to fit into a cooperating teacher's program in order to assure a good evaluation and to establish authority within the classroom (Johnston, 1992). Beginning teachers badly want to belong, to be 'defined as a teacher by pupils and accepted as a teacher by colleagues' (McNally, Cope, Inglis, & Stronach, 1994, p. 229). Student teacher and cooperating teacher philosophies sometimes conflict unhelpfully (Clift, Meng, & Eggerding, 1994). The developmental and evaluative responsibilities of cooperating teachers intertwine, and the result is increased novice vulnerability and conservatism, an unwillingness to take risks (Bullough, 1990; Stark, 1994). And tension results when students turn out to be unlike what was expected, unlike what the beginning teacher believes she was like as a student, a belief that serves as a model, the 'right way' for how others learn (Hollingsworth, 1989; Holt-Reynolds, 1992; Knowles & Holt-Reynolds, 1991). These differences often have a profound influence on beginning teacher development (Bullough, Knowles, & Crow, 1989). Greater professional growth appears to be associated with the 'tendency to see pupils in multifaceted terms, to reason psychologically, and to respond effectively to pupils' (Kagan & Tippins, 1991, p. 464). To reason in this way often requires adjusting initial views of students and their potential for learning. Not surprisingly, when students do not learn as expected, beginning teachers often blame them for failure (McDiarmid, 1990). Practical concerns dominate (see Alexander, Muir, & Chant, 1992). Management is an especially lively issue — although some classes are so well routinized by cooperating teachers that such issues do not arise until later — and sadly 'student teachers may learn to manage pupils and classrooms without learning to teach' (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1989, p. 367).

Not surprisingly, beginning teachers usually leave student teaching with their initial views intact. Student teaching is not considered by them to be a 'realistic experience' (Clift, Meng, & Eggerding, 1994, p. 275). They adapt to the 'role assigned to them, focusing on surviving and playing safe' (Stark, 1994, p. 61). They cope with the dilemmas of student teaching in ways that maintain their beliefs, their conceptions of themselves as teachers, while looking ahead to having their own, 'real' classroom. They work 'within the given constraints, while still recognizing that this was not the way they would work in their own classrooms' (Johnston, 1992, p. 132). Thus, they exit teacher education still optimistically anticipating the future.

Teacher education does little to challenge prior beliefs:

Rather than challenging students' initial beliefs, teacher educators tend to focus on issues on which they and their students already agree.... As a consequence, most prospective teachers complete their teacher
International Handbook of Teachers and Teaching
Biddle, B.J.; Good, T.L.; Goodson, I. (Eds.)
1997, XXV, 1474 p. 4 illus. In 2 volumes, not available separately., Hardcover
ISBN: 978-0-7923-3532-0