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Beginning Teaching Identity: A Narrative Account**

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**The Rollercoaster Ride of Establishing a Middle Years of Schooling
Beginning Teaching Identity: A Narrative Account ®**

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to explore how middle years of schooling educated beginning teachers perceive their identity construction through teaching within their first year at school, generally referred to as the induction period. Internalised individual factors such as perceived teaching beliefs and practices were investigated in accordance with professional issues of self interests and socio-cultural interests that challenge and confront beginning teachers. Framed in the background was an analysis of socialising factors within a school organisation, namely induction programs and practices and the influence this had on the construction of a teaching identity.

The study involved a sample of four Middle Years of Schooling teachers who were in their first year of teaching and working within a different range of contextual school organisations. The study utilised narrative research to explore these four teachers' stories which is considered an effective analytical tool to gather powerful and rich data in the construction of identity. Kelchtermans & Ballet's (2002) study on beginning teachers' beliefs, ideas and practices was used as the theoretical framework to analyse how perceived beliefs and practices impact on beginning teaching identity through categorising and comparing interview data.

The results from this study found how constructing a middle years of schooling beginning teaching identity became a rollercoaster ride of a developing, weakening and reaffirming process. It highlighted the influential importance that perceived teaching beliefs and practices has on the development of a teaching identity when framed against powerful school organisational professional issues that confront and challenge these beliefs (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002).

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents a snapshot view from a study into four middle years of schooling (MYS) beginning teachers' stories of establishing a teaching identity. What is highlighted is why a study that focuses on MYS beginning teachers encountering their first year of teaching, generally referred to as an induction year, is important. MYS teachers differ from primary and secondary teachers because fundamentally they teach to the specific adolescent age range. Therefore, their teaching strategies focus on cognitive, cultural, emotional, physical, psychological and social aspects attributed to adolescent learning development (Bahr, 2005; Carrington, 2006; Pendergast, 2005). The study explored how four MYS beginning teachers shaped their teaching identity through their perceived teaching beliefs and ideas over their first year as full-time teachers. The study further sought to investigate what positive or negative influences their MYS teacher education may have had on their establishing of this teaching identity. From Kelchtermans & Ballet's (2002) study of professional issues that challenge beginning teachers' beliefs and practices, this researcher adopted a modified research instrument to incorporate MYS theoretical aspects. This was then utilised as a framework to measure these 4 MYS teacher educated beginning teachers' perceived experiences within their first year of teaching.

This snapshot view is the story of one MYS beginning teacher's journey in the shaping of a beginning teaching identity. It is a narrative of his preconceived, realised and reflective teaching beliefs and practices framed within the establishing of a teaching identity against the background of unfamiliar teaching surroundings. This MYS teaching identity whilst strongly perceived as 'real' became challenged through teaching experiences leading to uncertainty and confusion. On reflection after acknowledgment of modified teaching beliefs and practices, there was recognition of a strong and positive reaffirmed attachment to a MYS teaching identity and practice. To gain a clearer understanding into the nature of this MYS beginning teacher identity construction requires a clearer picture of what being a beginning teacher entails, and how this is related to beginning teacher induction.

BACKGROUND

Beginning teachers enter the teaching profession with having the burden of fulfilling two jobs, learning to teach and teaching. This is in stark contrast to their more experienced teaching peers who generally have the one encumbering task of teaching (Valli, 2000). The first year for beginning teachers can generally be defined as a crucial time as they negotiate

un-habituated teaching paths whilst faced with these burdensome expectations (Valli, 2000). Underlined at the crux of this negotiation are powerful socialising and structural forces that beginning teachers encounter whilst acclimatising to a school organisation (Connors, 2007; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002; McCormack, Gore, & Thomas, 2006; McCormack & Thomas, 2003). Previous research identifies this stage as the induction period from which the idea of induction programs to assist beginning teachers successfully transcend this specific pathway have been generally introduced (O'Brien & Goddard, 2006; Valli, 2000).

Effective induction programs are characterised as being sustainable over the course of at least the first year of a beginning teacher's practice incorporating supportive strategies to enable beginning teachers to handle the difficulty of fulfilling this dualistic job requirement (McCormack et al., 2006; Valli, 2000; Wang, Odell, & Schwille, 2008). These strategies include collaborative and supportive mentoring and team teaching relationships and reductions in teaching workloads, allowing opportunities for observation of other teaching practices (Keogh, Dole, & Hudson, 2007; Rieg, Paquette, & Chen, 2007). Research argues this enabling of beginning teachers to ease successfully into teaching practice contributes to positive teaching development (Valli, 2000; Wang et al., 2008). However, Algozzine et al (2007) found that beginning teachers leave teaching early and at disturbing rates with statistics pointing to up to 50% within 5 years. Beginning teachers leave the industry early and in such great numbers for various reasons such as personal, based on family or personal lifestyle choices, or career changing reasons. Yet there is compelling evidence that they also leave due to negative teaching experiences that effect their successful development of a teaching identity (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). This may be brought about by ineffective or non-existent induction programs that impact on their teaching beliefs and practices during the first year of teaching (Algozzine, Gretes, Queen, & Cowan-Hathcock, 2007; Ganser, 2006; Valli, 2000; Wang et al., 2008).

The use of subjective educational theory is the questioning of how to apply practical knowledge to teaching situations, such as "how should I deal with this specific situation?" and "why do I think this is the most effective way to do so?" (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002, p. 107). It is when this type of subjective questioning surfaces within a new dynamism of full time teaching demands and a realistic classroom practice, that a beginning teaching identity may be challenged and compromised (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002; Marso & Pigge, 1987; Melnick & Meister, 2008). Beginning teachers take the vulnerable position of fledglings within the teaching community, and look for positive external affirmation to reinforce both the personal and professional self to establish a firm teaching identity (Kelchtermans &

Ballet, 2002; Main & Bryer, 2004). The gateway to the exploration of building this teaching confidence is through the shaping of teaching beliefs and practices, but they require the skills and tools to learn from teaching experiences, in order for this positive development (Intrator, 2006; Main & Bryer, 2004). Conversely, if these factors are denied then their personal and professional growth is hindered and reinforcement of the self is restricted, thus causing the possible negative shaping of a teaching identity (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002).

Kelchtermans & Ballet's 2002 study explored the relationship between beginning teachers' self interests influencing these perceptive teaching beliefs and practices when framed against new teaching experiences. It is relevant to elaborate on this study in order to understand how these relational factors may influence this positive or negative teaching development, ultimately leading to a strong or weak beginning teaching identity.

Shaping Teacher Beliefs and Practices

Beginning teachers are acquainted with many theoretical concepts whilst experiencing limited teaching opportunities throughout their teacher education programs. It is within the context of the first teaching year and the specific micro-political arena of that first school organisation, that their teaching practices truly take shape (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). Kelchtermans & Ballet (2002) identified several professional issues that they labelled as confrontational, challenging and which influentially shape beginning teachers' beliefs and practices. These five issues are: (1) Self interests (looking for self affirmation, coping with vulnerability, coping with visibility), (2) Material interests (e.g. teaching resources), (3) Organisational interests (job opportunities, choice of school), (4) Cultural-ideological interests (negotiating cultural and ideological aspects of a school whilst applying their teaching practices), and (5) Social-professional interests (workplace interrelations, job security) (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002).

The first four issues are the lens through which the experiences of the beginning teachers in this study were explored. Reviewing Kelchtermans & Ballet's (2002) 5th category (social-professional issues), suggested overlaps with the first four categories and was not utilised for analysis of the stories of the beginning teachers in this study and therefore was not elaborated on. For the purpose of this particular research symposium presentation, which explores narrative construction of one beginning teacher's identity, this paper addresses specifically the professional issues of self interests and cultural-ideological interests. See Smith (2008) for an elaboration of the 4 categories of professional interests that beginning teachers may experience.

Self Interests

According to Kelchtermans & Ballet (2002), beginning teacher self interests refer to behaviours and actions which support development of the self as a capable and competent teacher. When adjusting to new teaching surroundings, beginning teachers look to reinforce self affirmation when dealing with personal feelings of vulnerability as a novice teacher and as being highly visible as a new member of staff. External acknowledgement or recognition from others for a job well done is critical to this reinforcement of the self. Liu & Steele (1986) argued that in whatever context an individual finds her or himself, there is a drive to maintain a holistic integrity within the inner self. People who find their beliefs and practices challenged will look for some form of acknowledgement and recognition attributed to this contextual position, so as to maintain a protection of this integral self in terms of morals and values (Liu & Steele, 1986). According to Kelchtermans & Ballet (2002), beginning teachers emulate this practice in the thirst for acknowledgement and recognition of a teaching capability. It is the affirmation or non-affirmation of this teaching capability from other sources that shapes either a positive or negative beginning teaching identity (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002).

Kelchtermans & Ballet (2002) also described how this quest for self affirmation may lead to beginning teachers proactively undertaking other non-teaching activities within the school. This can be referred to as the 'politics of identity', where socialising maturely into an effective teacher requires the need for valued acceptance as a beginning teacher (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). In addition to self affirmation, beginning teachers must cope with vulnerability which stems from awareness of limitations in their repertoire of teaching practices. This creates a desire for beginning teachers to expend excessive energy and time in teaching activities sometimes to the detriment of their work and life balance. The third aspect of self interests in Kelchtermans & Ballet's (2002) categories is the need to cope with visibility. School spaces capture the 'fish bowl' effect in which teaching practices are highly visible in multiple locations within and outside the school. In the first year of teaching, beginning teachers are formally observed operating in classrooms, and informally observed outside the classroom by other teachers and principal staff, possibly contributing to feelings of unsettlement (Blase, 1988).

Cultural-ideological interests

A school's cultural-ideological interests relate to the explicit norms, values and ideals that exist within its institutional frame. Beginning teachers starting at a new school may

experience alignment or confliction to these existing norms due to their own perceived beliefs, ideas and values (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). Beginning teachers often will comply with the residing cultural interests of the school rather than ‘rock the boat’, often considering other choices as futile practices. Therefore, being ‘encultured’ into a school impacts beginning teachers’ identity and the degree to which this happens links to the individual beginning teacher’s self interests in terms of emotional energy investment in the process (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). Arguably, self interests play the most integral part in Kelchtermans & Ballet’s study into the shaping of beginning teachers’ beliefs and practices, and it is these self interests which dictate what actions of beginning teachers take shape and are played out. One important and less focused consideration is how MYS beginning teachers’ self interests may influence their teaching actions in respect to the shaping of a teaching identity.

MYS teachers are often placed on the pedestal of a perfect ‘role model’ for the teaching of adolescent students (Whitehead, Lewis, & Rossetto, 2007). The ideal MYS teacher is perceived to be ‘enthusiastic’, ‘innovative’, ‘caring’, and organised (Pendergast, 2002). This has tended to create dissention amongst the teaching community as both primary and secondary teachers are marginalised at the expense of the supposition of this pedestal (Whitehead et al., 2007). Yet research has found the ‘real’ MYS teacher to be ‘tired’, ‘frustrated’, ‘stressed’, and ‘overworked’ (Pendergast, 2002). This has implications for the MYS beginning teacher on two fronts; firstly not only will this beginning teacher encounter this ‘real’ situation, but is perceived to be and expected to be someone capable of performing these leadership and social attributes of a superficial identity (Keogh et al., 2007; Pendergast, 2002). They may also experience uneasy assistance due to this alienation away from the association of either a primary or secondary teacher identity (Whitehead et al., 2007). The problem for MYS beginning teachers is that they may face external pressure to ‘perform’ this superficial teaching identity but commence their teaching under the same framework as other beginning teachers in fulfilling two jobs (Valli, 2000). By requiring the development of these generic skills as well as specific skills to fully develop a functioning teaching identity, MYS teachers face different problems to that of other beginning teachers. This may exacerbate external pressures in terms of weighted expectations and outcomes on an already critical induction period generally faced by all beginning teachers in the shaping of a professional teaching identity (Aspland & Crosswell, 2002; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002; Pendergast, 2002).

NARRATIVE INQUIRY

Clandinin & Connelly (2000) argued that based on the Deweyan (1938) principle, education is life, therefore 'narrative inquiry' in this sense, is interested in lives and lived experiences of people within the educational context (as cited in Clandinin, Pushor & Orr, 2007, p. 21). 'Narrative inquiry' may be defined as a research approach in which peoples' lives are described, interpreted, and shaped into meaningful experiences by the notion of stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). For the researcher and the beginning teachers in this study, this relates to the interviews taking place over the specific time of their induction, an event incorporating past, present and future aspirations in stories. Their stories are told through their lens of being recently educated MYS beginning teachers encountering diverse school culture, whilst interacting and purposely aware of the inquirer's intentions, in gathering these stories for informed reason (Clandinin et al., 2007).

However, 'narrative inquiry' may have limitations in providing fundamental knowledge for teacher research. Knowledge about teaching can be defined within two major types, 'formal' and 'practical'. Where teaching practice implies fluidity; it resonates more suitably with the narrative mode. Conversely, where formal teaching prescription implies theoretical concepts and patterns; it resonates more suitably with a paradigmatic mode of research methodology (Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002). The importance for educational research is that 'narrative inquiry' may not be a suitable methodology for effective data analysis and interpretation from both pivotal perspectives (Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002). Yet this knowledge based research on teachers' beliefs and practices is contextual, from the point of view that teachers do know what they teach. However, their knowledge is dependent on specific teaching circumstances surrounding and shaping teaching beliefs and practices (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996; Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002). What has manifested over time within the field of educational research is a dichotomy between educational researcher input and teacher input. This dichotomy has led to important teacher research but without the 'voices' of teachers being heard (Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002). It has only been in the last fifteen years that their 'voices' have been included and seen as important contributions to challenging existing forms of teacher research knowledge (Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002). Kelchtermans & Ballet's (2002) study is an example of this methodological framework that investigated through their 'voices' how beginning teachers' beliefs, ideas and practices were changed or modified when confronting challenging issues. What has been distinctly lacking is similar research methodology that explores the 'voices' of MYS beginning teachers in how they may change or modify their teaching beliefs, ideas and practices when confronting similar as well any

other important issues. Narrative research is one such micro tool within the macro field of a narrative inquiry approach that enables these voices to be heard.

Narrative Research

Schwarz (2001) argued that productive narrative research studies focus on the teachers' reflective telling of their story, not only for the realised experiences, but for the increased enhancement of successfully developing a professional teaching identity. Development of teaching identity for beginning teachers is most important within the induction period (Elliott, 2005). Therefore, 'Narrative research' which generally has a structure that has a chronological process; a beginning, middle and end, which emulates this first year in terms of teaching experiences, can be viewed as an ideal reflective method to assist in this professional development (Elliott, 2005; Schwarz, 2001). Furthermore, Wang et al (2008) warrant this methodological approach as highly desirable for developing effective supportive structures for beginning teaching induction.

AIM AND CHOICE OF RESEARCH STUDY METHOD

The aim of this study was to explore whether the teaching beliefs and practices of four MYS beginning teachers changed over the course of their first teaching year. Central to this exploration was the investigating of how their MYS teacher education influenced these perceptive beliefs and practices in contributing to the development of a beginning teaching identity. Therefore, it was appropriate to take a narrative research methodological approach to measure these participants' teaching beliefs and practices.

STUDY DESIGN

Using the narrative inquiry design, the four MYS beginning teacher participants were individually interviewed at three separate time periods. Open ended questions were incorporated within a thematic based questionnaire to elicit richer stories of the participants' realised experiences (Elliott, 2005). Semi-structured interviews that incorporated open ended questions and that are loosely based on everyday language, elicit fuller humanistic narratives, rather than sociological based language questions that invite reports, but not human experiences (Elliott, 2005).

PARTICIPANTS

Two female and two male MYS beginning teachers, all in the mid-twenties age group, participated in this study. The two female participants taught at the same school, whereas the

two male participants taught at two other different school institutions. All were beginning teachers who commenced teaching at the same time.

INSTRUMENT

A Questionnaire was developed from Kelchtermans & Ballet's (2002) research on issues confronting beginning teachers, and comprised seven thematic categories; as previously outlined in Chapter 1 (see section 1.3). These categories were: (1) Self-interests, (2) Self-affirmation, (3) Coping with vulnerability, (4) Coping with visibility, (5) Material Interests, (6) Choice of school, (7) Coping with Cultural-ideological interests. The purpose of the questionnaire was to elicit details of the participants' perceived realised experiences to these professional issues.

Questions in each category comprised open ended questions; these questions were administered at three intervals over the study. At each interval, the questions in each category were altered slightly in accordance to the chronological process of the narrative structure. For example, for category 1, the key questions were altered as follows:

Interview 1: Can you tell me what being a beginning teacher means to you?

Interview 2: How do you see yourself in terms of a beginning teacher now?

Interview 3: Looking back can you tell me what your perception of being a beginning teacher was to how you see yourself now in terms of a professional self?

For full details of the items and variations of the questions, see Smith (2008).

PROCEDURE

The interviews took place at a destination away from the participants' school institutions. In considering the place of 'narrative inquiry', this was to ensure participants would be comfortable in these settings so as to elicit their stories more freely (Elliott, 2005). At the initial interview, participants were informed that feedback on gathered interview data would be given to them at the next scheduled interview. This was to facilitate reflective practice for both the researcher and the participants (Schwarz, 2001). Additionally, the participants were informed that drafts of the narratives would be returned to them at the end of the research process. This was to enhance the collaborative confidence of the four participants in their narratives to thus ensure rich quality of data (Elliott, 2005).

Aligned with ethical standards required in research, the four participants were informed that there was strict confidentiality in accordance to their identity and at the school

institutions in which they taught. They were also advised that they were free to withdraw from this research at any stage. In accordance with those confidentiality reasons, the participants were given pseudonyms throughout the study.

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

The data comprised semi-structured interviews by the four participants across three intervals over the course of one year. Data was gathered in this timeframe to align a typical narrative structure, which consists of a beginning, middle, and an end. The stories were for the purpose of showing participants' preconceived, experienced and reflective teaching practice over the induction period (Elliott, 2005). Each interview for all participants lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes. This time frame ensured that a full transcription of the data occurred (Elliott, 2005). Additionally, the researcher gathered qualitative contextual data, via observations such as noting the ways in which the participants expressed their experiences, perceptions and reflections, including intonation and body language (Hendry, 2007; Manser & Curtis, 2002; Pease, 1981). Interviews were transcribed from the beginning, middle and end schedule interval, and each category containing the grouped questions and the participants' responses at each of these schedules, was put together for analytical purpose.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis involved three main steps: data summary, interpretation and presentation. Interview data from the four participants were analysed broadly on and across the thematic categories. This analysis of transcripts and qualitative contextual data looked across all four participants as well as at each individual, to compare and contrast at every stage of the scheduled interviews, similar issues that were 'lived' by these participants. By framing the issues as thematic categories and grouping the questions within each of these categories, enabled summaries for interpreting how each participant similarly or differently addressed their social and teaching practices as 'lived experiences' towards these issues. For the nature of this symposium paper, is the story of one MYS beginning teacher's managing of self interests and cultural-ideological interests whilst confronting challenging issues over the course of the first teaching year. For a full transcript of all participants' responses please see Smith (2008).

CASE STUDY

It is important to contextualise both Jack's story and the interview process to ensure a coherent understanding into the nature of how these teaching beliefs and practices were

shaped and modified over the course of the induction year. This is for the purpose of identifying and interpreting how and when these changes to his teaching identity may have happened. Jack had recently graduated as a MYS beginning teacher aged in his mid twenties and beginning his teaching practice at an unfamiliar public high school with a reputation for student behavioural issues. The community environment in where the school was situated was of a low socio-economic area, and Jack had accepted an offer of permanency to teach in this school. The first interview was conducted in the initial weeks of his teaching to ascertain what his preconceived beliefs were in terms of teaching practices he hoped to bring to the school. The second interview took place after Jack had been teaching for some months, to investigate whether these beliefs had changed and why these changes may have occurred. The final interview was held towards the latter part of his teaching year and was designed to explore if Jack could explain how and why his teaching beliefs and practices were modified, and how he might relate this to his new teaching identity.

RESULTS

Self Interests

There is an undeniable link between the self-conscious and the professional conscious leading to possible tension when both ends are challenged (Berci, 2006). If this tension arises it is usually self interests that direct personal and professional decision making outcomes which have either a positive or negative effect on teaching development (Berci, 2006; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). Therefore, a beginning teacher's self interests play an integral part in the forming of a teaching identity through the changing and shaping of teaching development when challenged to comply or resist to an existing school's teaching beliefs and practices (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002).

At the first interview prior to his teaching for more than two weeks, Jack was asked what he thought he would bring to the school in terms of a beginning teaching identity. He spoke of a dualistic didactic approach in teaching students full time for the first time but also learning teaching classroom management and routines. As he gave his response he displayed edginess in his voice and general demeanour, as if excitedly and nervously anticipating his first teaching weeks. His view to a vision of what a beginning teacher may bring and the limitations that go into the making of a beginning teaching identity took the shape of an ideal pragmatism:

It's like being an apprentice to the trade, I know many theories but I'm coming to the school to apply them like an apprentice would in the trade. I'm there to teach but I'm

also there to learn.

At the next interview he had lost that edginess and had replaced it with a sense of assuredness in his voice, as if he had encountered all of the surprised expectations that had been in store for him whilst he ventured into the unknown world of full time teaching. When asked how he viewed himself from that earlier depiction of a beginning teacher, he commented on feeling different. He saw time spent as integral to a change in perception of a beginning teacher identity, but also saw relationship building as crucial in defining his new teaching identity:

It feels different because I'm not the last one here anymore; we have had heaps of contract teachers so I feel I'm further up the pecking order. Also it's because I'm getting on well with the students, but its constant hard work, keeping myself on my toes, but I think I've got a handle on it now.

By the final interview he displayed a confident and relaxed manner in his demeanor, but also a more reflective one. When asked how he saw his new teaching identity, he commented that he saw himself now as a professional whilst still learning, and was no longer that raw beginning teacher. He viewed this progress he had made in reaching the students and having them engage in learning, as essentially confirming his new teaching identity. He also talked of having to change his mind set and refocus his goals to ensure this and clarified this as important in 'surviving' his first year:

I was initially frustrated because I have had a lot of behavioural and sociological issues with the students and their parents. If I knew what I would face at the start of the year, I don't think I would have been prepared to stay or be that tolerant. I've had to lower my expectations and goals for the sanity of my teaching practice. I didn't think I could be that bold and change that, but as time has progressed and I have seen the light at the end of the tunnel in the way the students are progressing, then I feel this strategy has been vindicated and I have made a difference in their learning. These guys aren't angels, but when they say 'Sir I'm only doing this because I like you' just confirms to me that I've reached them and I think that is the most important part of becoming a good teacher.

As schools contain multiple sites for visual observations, teachers are constantly judged in snapshot moments, such as playground duty, staffroom meetings, school meetings, and classroom practices. For the beginning teacher, this inevitably means that perceived judgements of their teaching ability and identity are formed from these snapshot moments, and which may be falsely attributed to their real teaching ability and identity (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002).

When asked how he would plan his classroom behavioural management, he spoke of ensuring that there would not be unruly noise within his classroom and spoke of discerning between ‘busy’ noise and ‘disruptive’ noise. His concerns was primarily not having one classroom in which he could settle in, and was mindful of how he would approach this. He spoke of wanting to address this issue quickly within the first few weeks so as not to let it affect his teaching practice:

I want to get in and set my rules so that the classroom is working well, without too many disruptions. I don't want to have a reputation as having an unruly class, but because of the high school structure, it will be difficult because I will be moving from classroom to classroom.

At the next interview, he commented that overall he was fairly happy with his classroom management overall. The concern of noise was an issue that affected him early on and in particular with the issue of probation still in the air:

Even though I felt I was keeping a lid on things, I had the situation of getting new students after a few months and that just contributed to the noise level rising. I would think sometimes: “If anyone came in now what would they think of my teaching and how would that go down on my probation.”

But he made an interesting point about getting recognition from the principal when he made a surprise classroom visit:

I was into the middle of this science lesson and there was fair bit of noise with the activities that the students were doing and the principal walked in with some other visiting teachers. I thought “Here we go he will really have a go here” but to my surprise he came up to me to compliment me on how well he thought the class was going and commented to me he was surprised himself as to how well the students seemed to be behaving.

Cultural-ideological Interests

Beginning teachers are faced with the inevitable clash of idealised teaching beliefs and practices within the strong school cultural and social environments, in which they start their teaching (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). What frequently occurs is that the beginning teacher aligns with the current teaching practices of a school, for professional judgement, just to ensure adjusting easily to their teaching practice (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). Because of this conformity, it is often argued that the teaching identity is affected, and that restricted teaching practices are instilled which necessitate disillusionment in teaching satisfaction and provide a disengaged learning environment (Valli, 2000). It is important that contemporary teaching strategies are embraced for the benefit of future generational learners, but studies

suggest that the overbearing presence of a school's cultural environment heavily influences this teaching conformity (Valli, 2000).

When asked how and what he would expect in the utilising of his MYS skills and knowledge prior to his commencement of teaching, he had been enthusiastic to impart his newly taught teaching skills. He saw the chance to slowly have an impact on his students' learning engagement but also hoped to have this rub off on other people within the school:

I hope to make a difference in both the students' lives and other teachers by providing lots of engaging activities and strategies that I learnt over the course of my training.

However, by the second interview he had become disillusioned with these preconceived expectations of having his MYS teaching skills utilised. He spoke of the school not really practising what it preached in terms of a MYS ethos and commented on being a little disenchanted by that:

I thought the school might utilised my middle school skills, and it promotes a middle school way of doing things, but in reality I don't think it's happening. So I am disappointed at the moment.

However, by the last interview things had changed for Jack, and he commented that he now was part of a committee that were planning MYS strategies for the coming year. He reflected on his earlier disillusionment and wondered if his impression has helped him in this area:

I'm on the middle school committee to oversee teaching strategies for the coming year. I think people have noticed me throughout the year, and being asked to be part of that is just the icing on the cake.

When the question was posed to him about thinking back to when he started at the school to how he saw himself now in terms of a teaching identity, he was quick to highlight identities not associated with MYS. He also attributed this to the overriding structure of his school. Jack perceived himself to be a high school teacher rather a specific MYS teacher, although he acknowledged his identity as maybe changing into a MYS specialist:

I see myself as a high school teacher, but with my management of the behavioural problems here, and by being asked to partake on a committee on adolescent issues, maybe I will be viewed as a specialist that people can talk to about engaging students with specific teaching strategies.

At the last interview when considering what got him through his first year of teaching, he had been particularly mindful of the role his MYS teacher education had provided for him in terms of building resilience, and the skills required to establish his teaching practices. He particularly highlighted these skills acquired as essential in the establishment of his teaching

identity. Jack spoke of reflective practices and whilst not being a stickler for writing things down, commented that in his head just by asking himself every time after a lesson, if things went well or if they could be changed helped him develop his teaching practice and he attributed that to his MYS teacher education:

I'm not one for writing in a journal all the time on how things went in a lesson, but I do find myself consciously thinking about how a lesson went and how and what I should consider in my future planning, that has helped me greatly in becoming a better teacher. Thinking back, I realise that I got a lot of those skills from my training, and although it didn't seem that important at the time, it really is hitting home to me how valuable those experiences were.

Asked if there were any other considerations that was important in his first year of teaching, Jack spoke of getting great comfort from other teachers confiding in him that lessons that were intended to go well and didn't were not necessarily the teacher's fault, and this helped him in measuring his teaching ability:

I had really more experienced teachers confide in me that sometimes lessons just go according to plan, because of other reasons, it might be the day, the weather, lack of enthusiasm. It just felt great hearing that when I was considering how my teaching was going.

However, he expressed disappointment in not having the opportunity of watching other teachers in practice as a wasted chance. He commented that he had been given a full teaching workload, and did not have many opportunities to watch other styles of teaching:

I never had the chance to see other teachers in action, I am so busy with my own classes, so that's something I think that hasn't come through from my expectations.

DISCUSSION and IMPLICATIONS

When asked what type of teaching identity he may bring to the school Jack align himself quite strongly with that of a MYS teaching identity. At the first interview he had expressed a desire to implement his newly acquired MYS teaching skills and strategies, expecting this specific identity to be embraced and utilised within his school. Interestingly, he spoke of experiencing no real perceived vision of this MYS teaching identity during the initial few months at his next interview. He had demonstrated during the interview a cynicism in his questioning of the school's use of the MYS philosophy, inferring it as just a political ploy. However, by his last interview he perceived himself to be moving into this MYS teaching specialist identity. In analysing his narrative it is apparent that there is some uncomfortableness demonstrated by Jack in wanting to be labelled as 'secondary high school'

teacher. It is perhaps the case through his MYS teacher education that a tension arose due to his vision of what a MYS teacher identity can be in terms of a 'fluid' role construction (Whitehead et al., 2007). Yet, there is compelling evidence to suggest that Jack's reaffirming of a MYS teaching identity resonates with important catalytic moments throughout the year with his breakthrough with classroom behavioural issues and his invitation to the MYS committee. This he perceives as influenced by his principal's surprise classroom visit and resonates with Kelchtermans & Ballet's (2002) argument that vulnerability for beginning teachers to external criticism or praise is a crucial moment for successful teaching identity development. This could lead to significant investigation into how powerful identity construction may be in influencing beginning teachers to successfully develop their beliefs and practices. Furthermore, it became apparent that factors associated with Jack's MYS teaching education program, in particular reflective teaching practices, were important components that assisted his successful development of this positive teaching identity. It is strongly recommended that further studies explore this and other factors within MYS teaching education programs. This is for the understanding into what other strategies may be of future benefit for successful building of strong beginning teaching identities, arguably an antidote to rising beginning teaching attrition rates (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002; Valli, 2000).

Through the temporal structure of narrative research Jack has had the opportunity to reflect on his teaching practices and the role his MYS teaching education program has played in his formation of a teaching identity. It also has provided an insight into what beginning teachers really bring to the first year of practice, from that perspective lens, in terms of teaching knowledge acquired and constructed. Therefore, narrative research has had the dualistic function of contributing to the building of teacher knowledge research through the 'teaching voices' heard whilst serving as reflective tool to enhance teaching development. Accordingly, the role of narrative research within educational research may be seen as an effective tool in assisting all beginning teachers address their teaching concerns to facilitate professional development, whilst also providing valuable knowledge for future teacher research (Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002; Schwarz, 2001).

The concept of an effective induction process is one in which beginning teachers move effortlessly into their pedagogical practice and away from classroom management concerns (Valli, 2000). One aspect from an effective induction program is a reduction in teaching demands and allowance for observation of other teachers in practice (Valli, 2000). Yet in Jack's case there was no evidence that any reduction of workload was illustrated in his

story, with his description of a preoccupation with his own classes limiting his opportunities to watch other teachers in practice. Wang et al (2008) claim that under the climate of an effective induction process and program there is the opportunity for meaningful conversations within both formal and informal mentoring practices on teaching knowledge. Also important under this climate is a collaborative teaching environment that ensures a reciprocal sharing of teacher knowledge and practice, to guarantee a productive pedagogical learning environment (Wang et al., 2008). Because of the powerful cultural forces of a particular school environment, with the absence of any effective induction program, the beginning teacher may conform readily to the domineering beliefs and practices of a particular school (Valli, 2000). This limitation may affect beginning teaching beliefs and practices leading to a suppression of a disillusioned personal and professional self. This disillusionment is a possible cause to why beginning teachers leave the industry in greater numbers (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). Therefore, there is needed the consideration of effective induction programs across all school organisations and future research should focus on strategies to address this holistic implementation.

SUMMARY

Presented in this paper was one MYS beginning teacher's story of his perceived and realised experiences within the first year of teaching, namely the induction period. It illustrated how the constructing of a teaching identity became a rollercoaster ride as he juggled the mantle of teaching whilst learning to teach. Whilst he brought to the school a strongly preconceived belief of a MYS teaching identity, he found himself doubting the existence of this identity in his first year of teaching. It is only towards the latter half of this first year that he begins to reclaim this MYS teaching identity. Within the turbulent nature of this epoch was highlighted how beginning teaching perceived beliefs and practices play an important part to this constructing of a teaching identity. This resonates with other findings that external positive affirmation is integral for a strengthening of a beginning teaching identity and that self interests through teaching beliefs and practices lies at the crux of this juncture. What was also found was the influence that certain factors within his MYS teacher education had in the preparation for him to positively develop a MYS teaching identity. This positive preparation enabled him to assertively encounter adverse effects within and without his classrooms, during his first year at his new school workplace. He expressed through his story a smooth transformation from classroom disciplinary concerns, to focusing on his pedagogical teaching practices. Narrative research was found to be the guiding framework to

assist him to reflect on how his MYS teaching education helped prepare him as well as other teaching considerations throughout the first year of his teaching. This was found to be a valuable tool from a dualistic viewpoint of contributing to important educational research from the perspective of a teacher's 'voice' as well as assisting teaching professional development.

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