

Becoming a Teacher

Introduction

To learn to teach is also *to tell a story* of what learning to teach ‘does’ to and for [pre-service] teachers. In this effort, the narrative impulse bumps up against the work of not quite knowing if the story can do justice to the emotional experience of learning itself. (Britzman 2003, p. 10)

Deborah Britzman titles her book about the process of learning to teach, *Practice makes practice*, in order to highlight the sense in which learning to teach is an ongoing process. There is no sense in which ‘practice makes perfect’ (whatever ‘perfect’ might mean) when learning to teach. Certainly, a sustained commitment to striving for improvement is crucial for the professional English teacher. However, for some English teachers, the quest for perfection leads to a continuing state of self-flagellation when this ‘perfection’ is unable to be realized. As Mark Howie writes, ‘To teach is to live with guilt,’ as the ever-dissatisfied teacher seeks to overcome his/her perceived weaknesses and imperfections. (See Mark’s STELLA narrative, ‘Slow learner’)

Learning to teach is a process that starts well before pre-service teachers begin their formal teacher education studies (be that a diploma or a bachelor degree), and all practicing teachers will attest that it is a process that certainly does not finish at the conclusion of these formal studies.

Britzman is one of many educators who advocate teachers using writing, especially reflexive narrative writing about practice - ie. reflecting not just on the self but also on the institutions, cultures and contexts which mediate this practice. She explains how this sort of writing can be used to prompt and focus a teacher’s professional learning.

(See Dennis Atkinson’s 2004 article, ‘Theorising how student teachers form their identities in initial teacher education,’ in *British Educational Research Journal*, 30.3, June, pp. 379-394, for a discussion of reflexive narrative writing. See also Parr & Bellis, from the options on the next page.)

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Teacher Narratives

But rather than talking from any would-be objective perspective about ‘Becoming a teacher,’ we devote this section of the website to pre-service and early-career teachers writing about their ‘becoming.’

Choose from the wide variety of narratives below about English teaching practice and learning to teach English. The narratives are written, in most cases, by pre-service English teachers at Monash University over recent years. Some narratives are written by Monash graduates who are now early career teachers, and some are collaborative pieces co-written with more experienced colleagues or with teacher educators.

We intend to add to this collection of pre-service and early-career teacher narratives. If you would like to contribute your authentic teacher narrative (less than 1500 words preferred), please send it atn@education.monash.edu.au.

Collaborations

Graham Parr & Natalie Bellis, 'Autobiographical inquiry in pre-service and early-career teacher learning: the dialogic possibilities'

Scott Bulfin & Katrina Mathews, 'Reframing beginning English teachers as knowledge producers: Learning to teach and transgress'

Shona Gibson, 'Narrative of a pre-service teacher'

Early career teachers

Anna Wild, 'What am I doing and where am I going? Conversations with beginning English teachers'

Natalie Bellis, 'A beginning: Using writing and STELLA to construct a professional identity'

Pre-service teachers

Cherri, 'English and English teaching'

Janine Sayers, 'What is it, this teaching of writing?'

Jennifer Tischler, 'You make a few good points here but ...'

Jo-Anne Rechner, 'What do you want to be when you grow up?'

JS, 'Doing English – Relishing English' 'English and English teaching'

Karen Orre, 'English as voice and power'

Katrina H, 'She was a junkie for the printed word'

Madeleine Coulombe, 'English and the "Rustle of nature"'

'The Rustle of nature, Part II: A Reflection on the teaching of writing'

Mayo, 'To teach, or not to teach ...'

Natalie Bellis, 'I think I need a special English Teacher suit'

NN, 'Our opinions didn't matter – only hers'

Sam Boucher, 'Sinking, swimming or just floating with the tide'

'Crossroads / Crosswords / Cross purposes'

SS, 'None of us has any love for the system that ...'

Yoel Doron, 'Making the familiar strange'