

Research Paper

“How” not “What”: The Significance of Tensions and Discourse on Identity Transformation during a TEAL Teaching Practicum

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Abstract

Becoming a teacher involves more than the acquisition of a new set of skills and knowledge. It involves a change in one's identity, and this change is often precipitated by tensions experienced during a teaching practicum (Mezirow, 2000). This multiple case study explores the points of tension experienced by 18 student teachers during practicum in a Teaching English as an Additional Language (TEAL) certificate program at a university in British Columbia to better understand identity transformation when one becomes a teacher. The study aims to address two questions: “What are the points of tension experienced by student teachers during their practicum?” and “What are the discourses they engage in to talk about these tensions?” The results indicate that student teachers experience personal, interpersonal, knowledge, cultural, pedagogical, and methodological tensions. However, more significantly, four discourses (blaming, explaining, questioning, and problem-solving) were identified and explored for their transformational potential. Recommendations for developing a teacher education practice that supports transformational discourses are presented.

Introduction

Students who enter English as an additional language (EAL) teacher education programs experience the move from the role of student to the role of teacher, which can be described as a period of identity transformation. The practicum is often the component where aspiring teachers experience the most significant disruption to their identity through the challenge of multiple tensions. These tensions may be considered “disorienting dilemmas” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22) on the journey to identifying as a teacher. In my experience as a teacher educator for a post-baccalaureate Teaching English as an Additional Language (TEAL) credential at a university in British Columbia, Canada, all student teachers experience tensions during practicum, and this should be viewed as a positive phenomenon of the practicum experience because of the possibility of transformation.

Mezirow (2000) identified points of tension, or in Transformational Learning Theory terms, the disorienting dilemma as the first step in Transformational Learning Theory. Mezirow's phases of transformational learning may or may not occur in a predicted sequence, but the disorienting dilemma is viewed as a precursor to engage in transformational learning:

Transformative learning is often initiated when learners come up against their limitations, go beyond the habitual, experience the unaccustomed, meet, split or break down, face dilemmas, feel insecure, or must make incalculable decisions (Illeris, 2003, p. 11).

My original multiple case study¹ explored the types of tensions that student teachers were experiencing during practicum, but what I discovered through a thematic approach to the discourse analysis of the data is that the *way* student teachers spoke and wrote about their tensions was far more predictive of the degree of identity transformation that they experienced during practicum than the type or magnitude of the tension.

Theoretical Framework

The term *points of tension* is used in this study as synonymous with Mezirow's (2000) disorienting dilemma, which is the starting point in the process of Transformational Learning Theory. Willis (in Taylor & Cranton, 2012) applied an existential perspective to Transformative Learning; he "points out that learning, and particularly transformative learning, is a personal dynamic process" (p. 214) that goes beyond merely changing one's perspective and can be seen as affecting changes to "actual processes of human existence—to processes of human being and becoming" (p. 212). From the existential perspective the experience of learning is viewed not so much in its structure (a change in perspective) but more in its overall experience (a change in *being*, becoming different). This response to learning is not restricted to a change in intellectual perspective, which it often is, but to a deep sense of enrichment, of becoming somehow better and brighter, more potent and alive (Willis in Taylor & Cranton, 2012). Adopting an existential understanding provides agency to student teachers, which points out that learning "is made up of a series of chosen acts of self-orientation in response to some life challenge" (p. 214). In addition, several complimentary philosophical notions are incorporated in order to conceptualize the complexity of interacting with tensions and the resulting transformation of identity.

A number of theorists have identified the transformative role of tensions. Freire (1970) asserted that education must provide room for disagreement, questioning, and critique; Bhabha (1994) described the metaphorical Third Space, in this case the space between being a student and being a teacher, as a location of disruption; Bakhtin (1981) talked about the harmony and dissonance found in dialogism, which when applied to education reflects a socio-cultural approach to learning.

Also, Bakhtin's (1981) chronotope of the threshold is a useful metaphor for considering what may happen in terms of tensions in the time and space of the TEAL practicum. Threshold is defined as "the chronotope of crisis and break in life" and as "highly charged with emotion and value" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 248). The "threshold is a liminal space that refers to a transitory, in between state or space, characterized by indeterminacy, ambiguity, hybridity, and the potential for subversion and change" (Johnson, 2012, p. 140).

The metaphors of the Third Space and threshold are easily accessible to student teachers; they can imagine the space of transformational possibility that they will experience and that choosing to move across or through a threshold/doorway inevitably leads to something new while choosing not to move forward indicates a desire to remain in the comfort (or discomfort) of sameness. While Mezirow (2000) has described a way of *doing* transformational learning, Bakhtin, like Willis (2012), has left the process of transformation up to the character, motivation,

¹ The multiple case study referred to in this paper is fully described in my doctoral dissertation (Densky, 2017). This paper draws significantly on the study in the dissertation and presents some of the findings, data, and conclusions.

and circumstance of the individual.

Illeris' (2014) work on "Transformative Learning and Identity" considered identity transformation as the outcome of meaningful learning with the connection between the individual and the surroundings as central (p. 69). Illeris offered a social constructivist approach to identity transformation, claiming "that mental phenomena and processes are developed in the interaction between people" (p. 53). Therefore, the interactions between student-teachers, their EAL students, mentor teachers, and practicum advisor become the stage for exploring the new identity of *teacher*.

Once student teachers enter the classroom and begin preparing and delivering lessons, they are at the tension-filled point of no return; the significant question is how, not whether, tensions will be dealt with, and it is precisely during these moments when life becomes interesting.

The Role of Tensions in TEAL Teacher Education: A Review of the Literature

The TEAL teacher education literature includes very little on the significance of the practicum experience and even less on the role of tensions. Crookes (2003) has asserted that "scholars continue to comment...how S/FL [second/foreign language] teachers develop is still a topic little understood (Cumming, 1989; Freeman, 1996), and the practicum remains an under-theorized and under-researched area" (p.2).

Most often, tensions are expressed as obstacles to overcome through some kind of remedial approach rather than as points for identity transformation. Castaneda-Trujillo and Aguirre-Hernandez (2018) claimed that "some failures in the teaching education system can be identified in relation to providing pre-service teachers with the adequate procedural knowledge of (the) classroom...and ways to cope with the current difficulties that may arise in the different educational scenarios" (p. 159). This claim may be illustrative of a problem-based approach to learning where tensions are identified as problems that can be prevented, avoided, or remedied with the right combination of knowledge and methodological skill.

TEAL teacher education textbooks include very little on the role of tensions and identity transformation beyond an indication that there will most likely be some tension experienced during the course of learning to teach. A common theme in most of the literature is the negative discourse related to tension. Tensions are represented as synonymous with "stress and anxiety" (Richards & Farrell, 2011, p. 17), "conflict" and "contradiction" (Burns & Richards, 2009, p. 174), "professional problems" (Ur, 2012, p. 285), and "potential disaster(s)" (Harmer, 2007, p. 178).

Since 2020, language teacher identity has become a focus for research and publication in the field of TEAL (also known as Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages [TESOL]) (Ozgehan & Yazan, 2024; Tajeddin & Yazan, 2024; Yazan, 2023), and includes some specific work in the area of tensions. Much of the recent literature reviewed is from an international perspective and is autoethnographic or based on a small number of case studies. Conversely, this study involves a Canadian, and specifically British Columbian, perspective with a relatively

diverse and comprehensive number of both native and non-native speakers of English as the student-teacher participants in a multiple case-study. The robust data from this study provide a unique exploration of the role of tensions and the significance of the resulting discourses on the transformational experience of student teachers.

While some of the current literature (Ozgehan & Yazan, 2024) has looked at how tensions are a component of a teaching practicum, approaching the phenomenon of tensions from a capacity model that accepts tensions as significant opportunities for learning and transformation has not been found in the educational literature related to TEAL. In addition, little has been found in the literature that relates to how student teachers describe their interactions with tensions. As a result, this study explores two key research questions in order to better understand the nature and transformational possibility of tensions experienced by student teachers during practicum:

1. What are the points of tension experienced by student teachers during their practicum?
2. What are the discourses that they engage in to talk about these tensions?

Methodology

A multiple case study approach was used in the design of the study for several reasons. Case study methodology focuses on understanding rather than explaining and aims to give the reader an experiential understanding of the case (Stake, 1995). In addition, a multiple case study approach addresses rival explanations for tensions such as the time of year of the experiences or the dynamics of the group. Through replication of experience (Yin, 2009), the hypothesis that all student teachers experience tensions during practicum can be explored. As a result, three TEAL practicum classes from three consecutive semesters were chosen for this study, which ensured that these cases are typical and not extraordinary.

Participants

Eighteen student teachers consented to participate in the study; 17 identified as female and one as male. There were four non-native English speakers from Japan, Russia, and India. The participants ranged in age from early 20s to late 50s. Eight participants were recent graduates from undergraduate degrees. All but one participant held a bachelor's degree prior to entering the TEAL program. One participant held a master's degree. Many participants had careers prior to the program including a flight attendant, nurse, hair stylist, and several teachers.

Data

The qualitative data for this study were generated during the TEAL practicum, which involves 13 weeks of weekly three-hour seminars, ten hours of classroom observations of a variety of English language classes, and a minimum of ten hours of solo teaching under the supervision of a mentor teacher in an English language class.

Data sources included student journals and digital video recordings. The student journals were a required component of the practicum course, but how, what, and how much was

expressed in the journals was left up to the individual student teacher. Students were expected to write reflections about the classes that they observed, reflections on each of their teaching hours, and reflections on various assigned or suggested topics throughout the course. The students were also encouraged to use their journals as an ethnographic tool for processing their experiences during the semester, and they could write at any time about any topic. Data also included 6.5 hours of video recordings that were made during debriefing sessions with each class during the weekly seminar. The first part of each weekly three-hour seminar was used to share and debrief the experiences related to the practicum during the previous week.

Analysis

Taking a thematic approach to discourse analysis, the data were analyzed using emergent coding (Creswell, 2007). The data were initially coded and classified into six major themes of tensions. The data were re-coded according to the six main themes. Data were double-coded when it fell into more than one thematic category. The six themes were analyzed and coded according to emergent subthemes. The data were re-coded again using emergent coding to determine not only what the themes of tension were, but to categorize the type of discourse the student teachers used to describe the tensions. By looking at not only *what* student teachers were saying about tensions, but also looking at *how* they were expressing their experiences added an additional depth of understanding to the analysis. A dialogical approach was further used to analyze the data recognizing that the researcher does "...not simply enter into the participants' world but they are at least partly responsible for its creation in the first place by virtue of asking particular questions, having particular interests and having different styles of analysis." (Sullivan, 2012, p. 11) In addition, some of the data from debriefing sessions included the voice of the researcher and thus, the researcher is the creator of some and witness to much of the data collected. The results are illustrated with excerpts from the data, with minor corrections for some spelling and punctuation.

Results

Tensions were identified as anything that was viewed as causing some degree of discomfort. Student teachers reported a variety of tensions that can be put into the following categories:

- Personal
- Interpersonal
- Knowledge
- Cultural
- Pedagogical
- Methodological

Personal tensions included issues around tuition, family, and health. Interpersonal tensions involved issues between the student teacher and the practicum advisor, the sponsor/mentor teacher, and the students in the practicum class. Student teachers felt tension related to knowledge when they found themselves in situations where they were unable to answer questions or explain concepts and felt challenged by students. Cultural tensions emerged for the student teachers when they felt discomfort related to cultural differences between

themselves and their students, which sometimes led to making overgeneralizations about cultural norms. Pedagogical tensions related to differences in beliefs about teaching and learning between student teacher, EAL students, and sponsor/mentor teacher. Methodological tensions referred to issues with technology, timing, and lesson delivery. Four thematic categories of discourse that were used by student teachers to describe the tensions they were experiencing were identified: blaming, explaining, questioning, and problem-solving.

Blaming

Blaming may be seen as defence or regressive discourse. Blaming can be viewed as a defence mechanism, or what Illeris (2003) has called an “identity defence” which he describes as “a mental defence that we are all inclined to mobilize if we get into a situation in which we feel our identity threatened” (p. 239). “(I)f learners are pushed too far, they will most likely react with defensiveness and resistance—or possibly complete withdrawal from the learning process” (Ettling, 2012, p. 542).

Some student teachers blamed themselves for the tensions that they were experiencing during their practicum:

Like always the warm up activity never seems to go as planned. I had worked it out in my head that half of the students were to be on one side of the room and the other half would line up on the other side of the room, but my nerves got the better of me and so I never lined the students up and the result being a mass confusion of students going all over the place and not really knowing what they should be doing. (Mia)

Noticed my voice/stumbling/unsure—not yet a tool to use—need practice ... Difficult in middle—seemed too much talking. Not competent. (Rose)

I said that I felt nervous because English is my second language and I’m still learning it. I always used Japanese in my English lessons and this is my first time teach (sic) international students ... I’m timid, easy to get nervous and not very smart ... I have so many things to improve. (Chiko)

It is interesting to note that Mia, Rose, and Chiko are quite diverse in terms of first language background, nationality, age, and prior teaching experience. Therefore, engaging in a discourse of blame can happen to a teacher at any stage of a career and is not confined to non-native English speaking teachers or novice teachers in general.

The practicum advisor and sponsor teachers are key figures in the practicum process, and it is not surprising that student teachers use them as targets for rationalizing their tensions. For example, Gwen attributed her lack of confidence to the involvement of her sponsor teacher during this debriefing session:

Gwen: I did not have a smooth week. I taught two classes, it was supposed to be just a half hour warm-up ... I had the level 2 and level 3 194 reading class ... I got into the level 2 class, and did my lesson, it took longer, we weren’t really sure how long it was

going to take ... I was nervous, but it went okay, apparently. According to [my sponsor teacher] it went okay, she thought it went really well ... [my sponsor teacher] gave me some quick feedback and said “go have the next hour as a break before you teach the other class” ... I looked over the stuff, went in, paired the students up, and then I got completely overwhelmed, panicked, and luckily [my sponsor teacher] saw it and got out into the hallway before I actually started to cry, and I completely, well not completely, it was just a few tears, but I had my little break down, and then I went to the washroom to kind of straighten myself out ...

Elizabeth: Did your nerves just catch up with you, do you think?

Gwen: Normally, when I taught [redacted] class, I wasn't nervous at all, like it was just all of sudden it just hit me, but then I went back in and calmed down ... I think part of it was because I didn't feel very familiar with my lesson plan because [my sponsor teacher] more organized it than I did ...

The EAL students in the practicum classes were also a common target of blame for student teachers. Some student teachers viewed their students as a hurdle to their success. Mia explains how her expectations of her students were far from the reality:

The thing that caught my attention was the lack of energy in the room. I guess I was expecting students to arrive excited and ready to learn. There were a couple of students that I could see were quite eager, but the rest showed no signs of enthusiasm. (Mia)

Kerry blames the expectation of her students to be “spoon fed” when an activity did not go as planned:

It may also be because they are used to having much of the information that they are responsible to learn spoon fed to them at times, and don't respond well when it isn't. (Kerry)

In general, the blaming discourse was more frequent during the early stages of the practicum. At the beginning of the practicum, the student teachers had not built relationships with their classmates, sponsor teacher, or students. As students progressed in their practicum, they became more involved with both the classes they were teaching and more significantly the students they were teaching, which resulted in less blaming of self, supervisors, and students for their discomfort.

Blaming can become paralyzing if the student teacher cannot move beyond it. When a student teacher stands at the threshold of transformation, a decision to cross into the unknown and explore is made. Not all student teachers are prepared to deal with what that crossing entails, and thus, produce a discourse that rationalizes their retreat.

Explaining

Another common discourse identified was explaining; student teachers explained why things did

not go well and often came up with conclusions about students, learning, teaching, and classroom dynamics. This discourse involves intellectualizing the experience of the tension by creating a *knowing* rationalization of the experience. This rationalization would be a comfortable and familiar discourse for students who have spent many years of their lives in higher education. Like the blaming discourse, explaining seems to be a mental defence to the discomfort of the tension; through explaining, student teachers can maintain their sense of identity related to competence, as Tanya illustrates:

I also saw one student in this class who was always (almost) sleepy, not interested in learning, and behind the others. Now and again, I made my conclusion: it doesn't depend on a teacher, how good he/she is in his/her teaching, he/she will always have somebody in his/her group who is completely indifferent to studying and isn't shy to demonstrate it! It's not acceptable! (Tanya)

Sara explains that her tongue-twister poem and rap dance did not go over well because "... it was too early in the morning or just too embarrassing" while Chiko explains that the lack of participation from some of her students is a result of age and trying to appear "cool":

Some students seemed to be tired and reluctant to join maybe because of the morning class. The students are young! Some seemed to be looked cool. They might think joining activities is not cool. (Chiko)

The rationalization of why tensions were experienced utilizes the intellect of the student teacher, which deflects the emotional experiencing of the tension. As a result, the student teacher creates a discourse around what happened in the classroom without considering alternate perspectives.

Questioning

The discourse of questioning involves the student teacher entering the chaos, crossing the threshold, and engaging with the disorienting dilemma. Taking time to sit in the tensions and wonder can be an uncomfortable yet productive stop on the transformational journey, as can be seen from the journals of many of the student teachers:

I have a hunch that the more negative remarks probably came from my quiet group. I wonder if I maybe called on them or tried to work with them more than other groups and maybe alienated them a little? (Constance)

The next exercise was pretty flat. I had a very difficult time getting class participation. I'm not sure if my directions were clear enough or students were just tired. (Mia)

But why did everyone have to take so long doing the Words in Discussion exercise. I felt like I spent so much time standing there being useless. I wonder if it was actually my class if I would have had more to do (prepping for after the break, etc.)? Or was I doing everything I should have been? Did I miss something? (Caissene)

Asking questions creates a discourse that utilizes the power of dialogism because one assumes that there will be an answer to a question; questions may be answered by fellow student teachers, sponsor teacher, practicum advisor, or the self. Questions may not be answered but may lead to a higher level of inquiry, as Rose illustrates here with the cyclical nature of questioning:

The answers we have found only serve to raise a whole set of new questions. In some ways, we feel we are as confused as ever. But we believe we are confused on a higher level about more important things. (Rose)

Johnson (2006) explained how inquiry can enable students to confront the taken-for-granted assumptions about what is and what is not possible within the context in which they teach, to systematically problematize their own everyday practices, and to regularly ask the broader questions of not just whether their practices work, but for whom, in what ways, and why (p. 248–249). Through questioning, the student teacher enters into dialogue with others or the other *I*. By questioning assumptions, behaviours, and actions, the student teachers actively engage with the tensions in a vulnerable manner. They actualize that they do not have all of the answers and are willing to live in the *unknowing* while they develop their teaching practice and begin identifying as *teacher*.

Problem Solving

The problem solving discourse demonstrates that student teachers were developing a “sense of agency” (Mezirow, 2012, p. 78). Through this discourse, student teachers display a confidence in approaching the tensions with awareness, creativity, empathy for the learners, and a plan of action. By attempting to solve problems, student teachers are taking responsibility for the success (or failure) of their teaching practice, acting dynamically, and actualizing their emerging identity as a teacher, as these examples demonstrate:

Sometimes we just assume everyone will understand the activity, and things will go the way we imagined—definitely the wrong way to think. I feel it is so important to state things about three times so that the students with less comprehension will have time to process it. (Mia)

I think a good teaching moment would be to turn an incorrect answer into a chalkboard exercise providing other student participation to solve the errors. (I didn’t do this). (Kyle)

[M]aybe I should explain the main ideas [and] stopping the CD. It should be more clear. Maybe providing them a transcript is also a good idea. Okay, I’ll do it at the next lesson (Chiko)

Abby used a problem solving discourse by first identifying a tension (dealing with late students), explaining the need for dealing with the tension (disruption of class), and then rehearsing what to say to the EAL students in class:

Handling the late students—I am sure there are different ways to deal with the late students. For every student, receiving a positive tone from the teachers serves as a

motivator. But I think, I also need to come up with other manners of handling a late student, if he/she makes it a habit. As a teacher, I need to ensure all of the students convenience and avoid disruption. For example, a student who was late for the third time—“Are you okay A?” “Are you sure about when the class starts?” “Could you please make it on time for the next class? You know you are missing a lot.” (Abby)

Student teachers were aided in their problem-solving discourse through dialogue with their Sponsor Teacher as Gwen describes after she had an issue related to time management of an activity:

The scanning game dragged out horribly. That took forever. I probably should have ended it earlier really instead of just prodding them along to play ... So when I met with [my Sponsor Teacher], we talked about how I could have made the warmup shorter. We came up with: use fewer prefixes and suffixes; have students speak from their seats; and actually watch the clock. (Gwen)

Thematically categorizing the various discourses used by student teachers is useful for gaining insight and understanding into how they author their internally persuasive discourse throughout their practicum. One temptation of this type of discourse analysis is to create a hierarchy to the discourses, placing one type of discourse above or below another in terms of transformation, engagement, or reflection, which would not be useful as the following dialogue between a group of student teachers and their Practicum Advisor (PA) demonstrates that all discourses may be utilized to engage with a disorienting dilemma:

Rose: I was very, very impressed with how much phonetic information I don't have. That was such a focus for everybody who asked a question. It was about the sound of the letters, how do I spell that, how, what does that mean in the sentence, but it, and how much I don't hear what they're actually saying, like, how much I don't hear, you know “f” “v.” Simple things like that. And to calm down and be quiet enough to actually hear the question that they're asking.

Kerry: We can learn to look for stuff like that though. We talked about that in our last class. Unless I took Linguistics, I wouldn't know voiced and unvoiced, that's the kind of stuff you become aware of now that, you become aware of ... you start to see it, once you become aware, you see it everywhere. You become aware of underlying structure of any class or speech. I think, my biggest flaw is that I don't know any of the rules of grammar, I just know how to obey them. Like, I follow them, I'm really strict on grammar, I can't stand, I'm not a person who corrects speech, but I don't know why, and then, that's my flaw and I'm going to be in a class and a student will ask “Why can't I say this?” ... and all I can say is that it's not right.

PA: So what would you say? It's going to happen to all of you, if it hasn't happened already. Students are going to ask you a question and you don't know the answer and what are you going to do and what are you going to say?

Elizabeth: I'm lucky because I have a copy of the textbook the students are using so I

have the explanation of the grammatical rules and plus, before I do my lesson plan, [my sponsor teacher] and I talk about what the topic is going to be, and so if I say I don't know the difference between "be going to" and "will," which is what we're doing next class, then she gives me a way to explain it. And then it's up to me to memorize it and put it in a, you know, a catchy way people will remember. She makes sure that I kinda know what I'll need to be discussing before I move on before I leave, hopefully, I think...

Kerry: I think we will pick up on ...

Rose: The thing that is happening to me in the moment is "oh you didn't put a comma in there." I'm doing, I'm deconstructing my own self, in the same moment I'm trying to teach a class to somebody else, and I just learned that voiced/voiceless, you know what I mean, some simple little thing, but I'm also deconstructing while I'm teaching. It's like insanity (laughter).

Kerry: I think that is the difference between my two lessons. I had to think about everything I said in the first class, and I had to think about nothing, I didn't think about transition, I didn't think about how to make them interested, because they made me comfortable enough. You know, I didn't have to think on eight different levels, I just had to, which is what I think you're thinking ... by then you're not listening to what they're still saying ...

Rose: Exactly.

Kerry: But, I think, a part of getting used to it is to tune out the stuff you don't need to hear.

PA: But it's going to happen, no matter how well prepared you are. It usually happens with grammar when you end up going down the grammar black hole. We've all been there, and it happens often in writing classes, and you decide "let's just do some editing together" and you start doing editing with students, and you can correct the error, but they're going to ask you "why isn't that right?" And it won't be like in a grammar class where you're very structured and sequential. It's going to come at you from any which way, and unless you know your grammar inside and out you're going to get times when somebody says "why can't I use this word, why do I have to use that word?" or "why can't I put this here and that there?" What are you going to do?

Elizabeth: Is it okay to admit, like, okay, I don't know this rule right now but let's just look it up, so I can give you the correct explanation? Can you do that, or would that put your authority in question? Cuz I would rather, that's what I would do. Let me go find out the right answer and I'll come and explain it to you so you'll understand. But what if they don't respect you if you don't know it off the top of your head?

PA: Well, it's better than teaching something wrong...

L: Don't let ego get in the way.

Rose and Kerry, who begin with a self-blaming discourse due to their lack of phonetic, linguistic, and grammatical knowledge, move into an explaining discourse of how difficult it is to operate on multiple levels. From there, a questioning discourse arose with input from the practicum advisor about the appropriate response to challenging questions. They then finished up with a problem-solving discourse that was drawn from the expertise of the practicum advisor and each other. All of these discourses occurred within less than ten minutes. Therefore, all of the discourse types can be viewed as dialogical and integral to transformation because the student teachers are engaging with their experiences in the manner that is accessible to them due to personality, life history, maturity, and emotional state at the time of each incident/experience. In addition, the dialogue that occurred during debriefing sessions in the form of questions and comments from both fellow student teachers and the practicum advisor acted as catalyst for a change in discourse in many situations.

Discussion & Recommendations

Through the identification and analysis of discourses used when student teachers experience tensions during teaching practicum, it becomes clear that some discourses lead to more transformation towards the identity of *teacher* than others. All discourse is dialogical and involves communication with an *other*; the other may be classmates, sponsor teacher, practicum advisor, friends, or the self. However, despite the power of the dialogical meeting of consciousness, some discourses can be seen as more transformational in nature, relating more to reflective practice, or evidence of experiencing the chronotope of the threshold or working through the disorienting dilemma.

However, it is an unfair assumption to view student teachers who use a specific discourse as more or less transformed by their practicum experience or more or less reflective. Historically transformative learning has been seen as leading to a positive outcome, e.g., a better person. However, as Illeris (2003) pointed out, the disorienting dilemma may be encountered with defence or regression, which is evidenced in blaming and explaining discourses that do not preclude transformation. For example, some student teachers come to the realization that teaching is not what they want to do during the practicum, and this realization sets them on a different course entirely. Thus, there is a highly temporal element to the dialogue/discourse that occurs. Student teachers are operating in several temporal dimensions: their historical past, the moment of interaction during practicum, and the reflecting on the moment (in journals and debriefing sessions). By engaging with tensions, student teachers are also operating in terms of authoring a future teacher self that may begin to define their attitudes, beliefs, and values as well as future teaching style.

In summary, six recommendations for teacher educators to consider are presented as a result of this study:

1. **Conceptualization:** Teacher educators can conceptualize points of tension not as negative places but merely uncomfortable ones with the potential for transformation as Lange (2012) reiterated: “It is also intriguing that at the point of greatest instability lies the greatest potential” (p.203).

2. **Development:** Teachers educators can develop skills to work with students who are using blaming and explaining discourses. These students are most likely struggling with their practicum experience and require support. Teacher educators may require professional development and access to resources in order to provide students with effective support at critical moments.
3. **Acceptance:** Teacher educators can accept and respect that to *not* transform is a choice, and all student teachers will not be engaging with their practicum experience in the same way at the same time.
4. **Model:** Teacher educators can model transformative discourses such as questioning and problem-solving. By resisting the urge to blame students for their shortcomings during practicum and through modelling the practice of questioning that leads to problem-solving when faced with tensions, teacher educators can act as models for ongoing identity transformation and embody the catchphrase of *lifelong learning*.
5. **Dialogue:** Teacher educators can create time and space for dialogical work. Teachers are constantly asked to do more with less in terms of teaching more students and/or courses or offering courses in shorter and more intense delivery options. While the focus of a teacher education program may be on developing knowledge and skills for student teachers, it is necessary to provide time and spaces, like an open-ended journal and group dialogue, to reflect on experiences as student teachers move towards identifying as teachers.
6. **Examination:** Teacher educators can examine power imbalances in the classroom. For some student teachers, engaging in blaming discourse is a reaction to the perceived power imbalance during practicum. The power of the supervisors may be seen as unquestionable; sponsor teachers have the power to dictate what and how material will be taught, and the practicum supervisor has the power to evaluate; thus, student teachers might see themselves as the victim of an oppressive educational system. Student teachers who are blaming their practicum advisor or sponsor teacher for their nervousness or inability to competently deliver a lesson are focused on the perceived power of those individuals rather than viewing the practicum advisor and sponsor teacher as resources. Perhaps focusing on formative feedback during the practicum rather than grades or competency checklists would disrupt the traditional student-teacher power dynamic and create a dynamic learning community based on support and collaboration.

Regardless of who enters the dialogue, student teachers who engage in questioning and problem-solving when faced with tensions present themselves in the willing position to consider multiple competing perspectives while authoring an internally persuasive discourse. This demonstrates the possibility of a collaborative pedagogy (Stewart & McClure, 2013) that involves student teachers as equal participants, sharing the power in the classroom while they engage in the process of collaborative knowledge making through dialogue. The polyphonic spaces that open up as a result of questioning and problem-solving have the potential to empower and transform identity as student teachers realize that there are multiple possibly competing answers to a question and that all voices in the learning community are valid.

Conclusion

In teacher education, tensions are often dealt with in terms of a deficiency model; if one experiences and expresses tensions, then they should fix the problem because they are doing something wrong. Johnson (1996) raised some excellent questions related to tensions and the practicum: “How much tension, or dissonance ... is helpful (or harmful) to pre-service teachers as they learn to teach? ... How might a teacher preparation program have made ... [the] practicum experience less like ‘hazing’ and more like professional development?” (p. 48)

It is impossible to know which tension or magnitude of tension would lead a student teacher to become overwhelmed and unable to use questioning or problem-solving discourses. The ability to work through tensions varies from person to person and depends on a variety of factors. In order to address Johnson’s (1996) questions, I would like to propose that a capacity model of teacher education built around transformation and identity work is possible. This model would build on the strengths, skills, knowledge, and identity that each student teacher brings to the practicum and acknowledge and accept tensions that arise as key points of learning rather than uncomfortable situations that must be quickly remedied. The key is for the student teacher to remain in the tension and interact dialogically with self and others for as long as necessary. As a teacher educator, it is my responsibility to have the skills and resources to provide student teachers with time, space, and support to do so.

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