

## **Understanding the social self: the role and importance of reflexivity in schoolteachers' professional learning**

### **Introduction: 'What is a teacher?'**

Recent research by the author and others (Moore 2004a; Moore and Ash 2004; Moore, Edwards *et al* 2002) suggests that beginning teachers, no less than experienced teachers, are inevitably engaged in ongoing philosophical and pedagogical repositionings and reorientations in the face of their unfolding professional experience and expertise, and that these inevitably impact either positively or negatively on the development of their professional learning. These repositionings and relocations, which we might wish to be principally informed by constructive, critical reflection on practice, take place within and are strongly influenced by a bewildering barrage of voices or gazes - some dating from our social and educational pasts, some from our ongoing experience - advising or instructing the teacher both what it is to *be* a teacher and what one has to achieve in order to be 'good' at it (Britzman 1989, 1991; Moore 2004b). I imagine we all know what these voices are, though such knowledge does little to abate the havoc they can cause. They are the voices of the news media and of films and books and television programmes; the voices of politicians and taxi drivers; the voices of our families and friends, of people in bars and shopping malls and in the street; the voices of our students, of our colleagues - those on and not on the teaching staff - and of our students' parents; the voices of our tutors and mentors; and also the voices of those remembered teachers from our own school days, the ones we aspire - often self-destructively - to be like. As Hewitson (2004) and others have suggested, these voices do not always chime, often presenting themselves (Britzman 1991) as 'cacaphonic'. The voice of government policy, for example, may not always sit comfortably with the voice of our own preferred, internalised pedagogic orientation, and the voices of our university tutors may not always agree with those of our parents and friends. To quote one student on a study carried out by Moore and Atkinson in the late 1990s (reported in Moore 2004: 41-2):

*'Every time I go home I'm getting told why [setting students by ability] is better than mixed ability, and why silent working is better than group work, and why everyone should wear school uniform; and I just can't answer it. Every time I start telling them something else, I feel I just can't argue the case. I don't even sound convincing to myself. They just keep telling me I'm following the party line and I shouldn't listen to what I'm told at [the university] because it's all full of do-gooders and lefties, and quoting all these good and rubbish teachers I had when I was at school, and how I got good results in the subjects where the teachers were most strict.... And then I come back [to the university] and I'm listening to totally the opposite. And when I'm here this all makes sense again, but... I'm just totally confused.'*

### **The power of predispositions and the outlawing of the affective**

As has been argued elsewhere, it is the preconceptions and predispositions that student teachers bring with them to their pre-service courses that often exerts the greatest influence on the ways in which they experience and make sense of new classroom interactions and that may present the greatest obstacle to the development of new learning. Afonso and others have argued in this regard that the power of the beginning teacher's prior beliefs and perceptions can be so strong that they act as 'filters', affecting the ways in which pre-service programmes themselves are experienced and approached (Afonso 2001; see also Hollingsworth 1989, Weinstein 1989, Aminghuo 1998, Wideen *et al* 1998, Britzman 1991, Goodman 1988). This is a view which echoes Mezirow's wider analysis of adult learning, in which acquired 'meaning schemes' and perspectives effectively 'protect' the individual from challenging existing assumptions and beliefs, setting up "boundary structures" for perceiving and comprehending new data' (Mezirow 1991: 49). Such schemes and perspectives, Mezirow argues, serve to:

*'diminish our awareness of how things really are in order to avoid anxiety, creating a zone of blocked action and self-deception.'*

(Mezirow 1991: 49. See also Rose 2001)

The (beginning) teacher, however, is not just exercised by an intellectual challenge in making sense of classroom and staffroom encounters through separating out the false voices from the friendly ones - or, as Brookfield (1990) puts it, of hunting down and challenging their existing assumptions. In addition to this - but fundamentally and inextricably bound to it - is a project that affects our lives far beyond the confines of the school walls, and that may be seen as the shaping force of each individual biography and each subsequent, very personalised 'way of experiencing'. This is the more emotional, often less visible human need for the love and justification of our fellow beings: the need for reassurance that we are who - or what - we claim to be and that we are appreciated for being it. As one student teacher poignantly summed this up in a recent research study into the professional learning of beginning teachers carried out at the Institute of Education, University of London:

*'With teaching, it's not just how you see yourself, it's about how you see how other people see you: how you see yourself being seen.'*

(Moore and Ash 2002)

I want to suggest that these emotional, affective aspects of classroom experience and professional learning are typically overlooked, marginalized and even pathologised by those other voices telling us who and what we should be (particularly those encountered through government edicts), and that this marginalisation of the affective is precisely what underlies the difficulties many of us experience in moving beyond our 'boundary structures'. Indeed, one of the reasons why these voices often appear so cacaphonic is that we are invited to make sense of them - if at all - in ways that decontextualise them from our individual histories of ways of feeling, and indeed from our individual ways of experiencing classroom life (McLaughlin and Talbert 1990). That is to say, we are expected to learn about teaching against some kind of non-affective blueprint as if we could do so without simultaneously developing understandings of who we are, what we want and how we have come to respond to social life in the ways we do.

## Powerful discourses

In trying to make better sense of the various imperatives of what we should be and what we should be doing, I have suggested elsewhere (Moore 2004a) that we locate these voices within larger, overlapping discourses of teaching and teacher education that guide and dominate perceptions of teaching and teachers in the wider social world. I have, somewhat tentatively, identified three of these, which I have called the *competent craftsperson* discourse, the *charismatic subject* discourse and the *reflective practitioner* discourse.

The competent craftsperson discourse, currently enjoying worldwide popularity in the field of teacher education but also, increasingly, in the fields of Further and Higher Education generally (see, for example, Bernstein 1996), comprehends schoolteaching fundamentally in terms of a set of acquired and discretely demonstrable skills and strategies, to be learned through a combination of formal teaching and practical application. The teacher within this discourse, which has little to say about individuality, local circumstances or reflection on practice (Maguire 1995), is understood and configured as 'made' rather than born (Britzman 1991). The art of teaching itself can be described in lists of skills and achievements, which often double as the assessment criteria against which teachers' and student teachers' performance is judged. The charismatic subject discourse, always popular in the public imagination and in feature films about teacher heroes and saviours, emphasises, by contrast, the individuality and communicative skills of the teacher, tending to underplay knowledge *about* teaching and representing teachers as born rather than made - or at least made in ways that are informal, contingent and not easily reproduceable. Such teachers are typically portrayed in filmic representations as deliberately 'throwing out' perceived wisdom, preferring to rely on instinct and native wit rather than on acquired competences (Dalton 1999, Mitchell and Weber, 1996). In the reflective practitioner discourse - popular in recent years in university departments offering pre-service and professional development courses for teachers and expounded by, among others Schon (1983, 1987), Valli (1992) and Elliott (1993a, 1993b) - emphasis is given to thinking about and articulating one's always developing, never perfect practice, firmly grounding new learning in the context of

the *practicum*. Becoming more effective as a teacher within the terms of this discourse cannot simply occur through the acquisition and development of skills and strategies or of a more 'charismatic' classroom persona, but via informed analysis of the nature and causes of classroom interactions.

Each and all of these discourses, if sensibly and critically engaged with, can provide useful frameworks for the understanding and betterment of what we do, as well as supporting us through the challenges that await us in our many and varied classroom encounters: each and all can help us become 'better' at what we do. They all, however, share three common difficulties. The first is that each discourse becomes dangerous when allowed to dominate at the expense of the others: that is, when it becomes the sole or nearly the sole lens through which what we do is perceived, understood and accounted for. This particular difficulty has beset the competent craftsperson discourse in the UK and elsewhere in recent years, suggesting a technicist blueprint for teacher development that leaves teachers and student teachers floundering for advice and support when the universal advice offered by the discourse appears to have only marginal applicability to the particular teaching situations in which the teacher finds themselves (for example, in a tough inner-city school whose students do not fit the image of the ideal student implicit in much of this discourse). It has also affected and restricted the development of the reflective practice discourse, in that this discourse has effectively become 'colonized' by the competent craftsperson discourse to the extent that reflection itself is seen in terms of a competence rather than a process or function, with the emphasis on its 'demonstrability' rather than on its effectiveness (Johnson 1989). To quote one beginning teacher, frustrated at the constant requirement to 'provide evidence of reflective practice' via individual lesson evaluations on her teaching practice:

*'The whole idea of reflective practice is all very well, but it's very individual, and I think we fall too often into the trap of assuming that reflective practice is x, y and z when perhaps for other people it's different ... It's like with teaching: teaching for everybody is different. ... We've been given these sheets to help us do reflection, to be more reflective in our practice, and on the one hand they're helpful but on the other hand if a certain thing doesn't happen in your lesson or you didn't pick it up as happening in your lesson, how can you reflect on it? So*

*whilst you may be meeting these dreaded standards, you can't always "evidence" it. And I think one of the things with our society today is that we're obsessed with paper-work, and we're obsessed with assessment. But we're not just obsessed with assessment, we're obsessed with the way that the assessment happens, and the way that it's proven. And I think whilst it's helpful to have frameworks, it's easy to feel that if you haven't ticked all the boxes then in some way you're failing.'*

(Moore & Ash 2002, quoted in Moore 2004: \*\*\*).

The second difficulty with these discourses is that they tend to have little or nothing to say in response to the stress and upset that inevitably arises from time to time out of the often highly-charged atmosphere of the classroom and the staffroom, other than the platitudinous and (from a psychoanalytical viewpoint) futile instruction to 'leave one's emotional baggage at home'. Far from encouraging explorations and understandings of the experiencing self, these discourses - even, ironically, that of the charismatic subject - have a rationalistic turn, traceable to common idealist roots. Within this turn, the individual subject is not only held ultimately responsible for their own conduct but is not encouraged and often not allowed to introduce reflections of personal and wider circumstances - whether present or past - into discussions and explanations of what is going right or wrong.

This difficulty relates closely to the final difficulty, which is that each discourse has the capacity - indeed, in the case of the charismatic subject and competent craftsperson discourses the tendency - to emphasise individual choice, responsibility and (often) blame at the expense of recognising and valuing idiosyncrasy and diversity but also of underestimating the impact and influence of wider social issues and failings on the teaching and learning situation. In a particularly perceptive indictment of the currently favoured competent craftsperson discourse, Bernstein points up this 'personalisation' of the teacher's craft as a somewhat cynical attempt to deflect debates and understandings of educational failure away from social policy failings by concentrating perceived failures on schools, teachers and even students and their families. In Bernstein's words, we are pointed 'away from the macro blot on the micro context' (Bernstein 1996: 56).

## **The importance of reflexivity: understanding the effects of our past on our experience of the present**

The individualising policy turn to which Bernstein alludes is curious in that although it focuses attention away from systems towards individual performance it simultaneously underestimates individuality by way of its universalising tendencies. To summarise this apparent contradiction, we might say that public policy in one respect does focus on the contingent/idiosyncratic aspects of teaching - that is to say, the here and now, the 'practical and practicable', rather than on the wider picture, the more broadly applicable theory - but that in doing this it simultaneously promotes a certain kind of universalism that turns us away from other contingent/idiosyncratic aspects such as teachers' differing biographies and 'selves' or the backgrounds and attitudes of their students or the resource environment in which they work.

As has already been suggested, what such a turn tends to bring about is a concomitant underprivileging - at times, almost an outlawing - of the emotional, affective aspects of classroom teaching and of the classroom *experience*. Experience itself too easily gets to be configured within this turn as something 'out there' waiting for us to engage with it, when what we should be doing is guiding ourselves towards understandings of the experiencing itself - in particular, why it is that we experience things in the ways that we do, and why and how we experience them differently from one another (why, for example, certain classroom events and interactions particularly please or upset or anger some of us when many of our colleagues appear to remain relatively indifferent to those same kinds of events and interactions and more easily to respond to them in a measured and strategic way). Such understanding, which is what I mean here by 'reflexivity', involves active, conscious development of self-understanding: that is, understanding our social selves and how those selves have been produced through experience over time.

Anna Freud famously argued that teachers should not just consider but actually have a *duty* to attempt to understand their own actions and re-actions in the teaching situation in order to avoid the possible negative consequences on their students of a failure or a refusal to do so. To quote Britzman and Pitt's summary of this position:

*'teachers' encounters with students may return them involuntarily and still unconsciously to scenes from their individual biographies. Such an exploration requires that teachers consider how they understand students through their own subjective conflicts. ... The heart of the matter, for Anna Freud, is the ethical obligation teachers have to learn about their own conflicts and to control the re-enactment of old conflicts that appear in the guise of new pedagogical encounters.'*

(Britzman and Pitt 1996: 118)

Anna Freud's suggestion that how we experience life in the classroom may be strongly affected by how we experience and have previously experienced life -including family life - outside the classroom is reflected in a number of projects undertaken by teacher educators that involve the encouragement of practitioners to describe and interrogate their own autobiographies (see, for instance, Quicke 1988, Schon 1988, Cole and Knowles 1995, Thomas 1995). Part of that activity, aimed at helping practitioners to understand more clearly 'the way in which a personal life can be penetrated by the social and the practical' (Thomas 1995: 5) and to make sense of 'prior and current life experiences in the context of the personal as it influences the professional' (Cole and Knowles 1995: 130), involves encouraging individual teachers and student teachers to critique difficulties they may be experiencing in the here and now within the context of previous roles and experiences they have encountered 'outside' the classroom situation in, for example, their family life or their own schooling, rather than ignoring or denying such encounters. Inevitably, this also introduces issues of *desire* (Hargreaves 1994, McLaren 1996, Boler 1999) into understandings of practice:

'What do I want from these interactions?' 'What do others want of me?' 'What am I afraid of?' 'What do I want to do about the things I don't like here?' - and perhaps the hardest and yet most glibly answered of all: 'Why did I choose to become a teacher [in the first place]?'

Britzman and Britzman & Pitt have pushed this a little further, and rendered the phenomenon more explicit through referencing it to Sigmund Freud's notion of repetition (Freud 1968: 454), whereby we unconsciously seek out new sites for old, unresolved conflicts. The classroom in particular, Britzman and Pitt suggest:

*'invites transference relations because, for teachers, it is such a familiar place, one that seems to welcome re-enactments of childhood memories. Indeed, recent writing about pedagogy suggests that transference shapes how teachers respond and listen to students, and how students respond and listen to teachers....'*

(Britzman and Pitt 1996: 117, 118, emphasis added: see also Felman, 1987; Gallop, 1995; Penley, 1989).

Such an approach to understanding the difficulties and anxieties we may sometimes feel in the teaching and learning situation may be seen as running counter to the advice often given to teachers, cited above, to 'leave their emotional baggage at home'. This advice, of course, is well meant, but it may be impossible to achieve. What we should really be doing, these commentators seem to suggest, is not so much to leave our emotional baggage at home as to make sure that it is appropriately managed in public places - including, in this case, the public places of the classroom and the staffroom: that it is not, for instance, left in the aisle for oneself or others to trip over; that certain items are better left inside than taken out; and that sometimes there may actually be something forgotten inside the baggage that can help us out of a difficult situation. In other words, the emotional aspects of the classroom experience cannot be denied; nor can they be made to go away by pretending that they do not exist or by treating them as some unwanted sickness. Furthermore, the past never goes away either: it leaves its legacy within us, shaping how we experience and respond to new and often challenging situations and how we proceed - successfully or unsuccessfully - to conflict resolution. The beginning teacher who says to her visiting tutor 'I have tried everything, and everything has failed' may well find herself stuck in an *impasse* precisely because she still seeks answers to her questions in discourses of competence, reflection and charisma rather than adopting a more reflexive turn; that is to say, continuing to configure

and understand the problem as ‘out there’ in the objective relations of the classroom rather than considering the possibility that it might, in part at least, be located ‘internally’, in some place that is much harder to find.

As has already been indicated, seeking out this other place is not a question of *substituting* the competent craftsman, reflective practitioner or charismatic subject discourses with the reflexive turn, but rather of adopting it ‘outside’ those discourses in a way that makes it easier and more profitable to enter, to understand, to negotiate and perhaps to benefit from them; that is to say, a contextualising function that helps replace morbid, unconstructive ‘self’ criticism (‘Something *in me* is wrong’) with constructive, reasoned, ‘action’ criticism (‘Something *that’s being done* is wrong’). To cite one popular dictionary definition of reflexivity, this is not just an ‘action of mind by which it is conscious of its own operations’ but includes, additionally, the concept of a representational technique whereby part of a picture is ‘illuminated by light from another part of the same picture’ (The *Chambers English Dictionary* 1990: 1233-34): in this case, the part of the picture relating to specific incidents, encounters or feelings is illuminated by the historical, biographical context within which those incidents, encounters and feelings are experienced.

### **Seeking a mandate: issues of identification**

Earlier, a young beginning teacher was quoted. With teaching, she said,

*‘it’s not just how you see yourself, it’s about how you see how other people see you: how you see yourself being seen.’*

This same teacher went on to say:

*‘What you inevitably end up doing is looking at the pupils and judging yourself through them. The children are in your head all the time [...] That exposure ... I mean, I have never been in that kind of situation before. It’s a big thing ... My kind of strengths and weaknesses are kind of really there, in front of me.’*

(quoted in Moore 2004:\*\*)

For a number of beginning teachers taking part in this same study (op.cit.) it was a sense of seeing themselves *as their students might be seeing them*, including, in some cases, a very powerful desire to be *liked* by their students, that constituted the dominant gaze on their developing practice. For others, it was a desire to measure up to absent-but-ever-present teachers they had had themselves at school, or had seen teaching impressively at their practice schools. For all ten of the young teachers in this particular study, this sense of exposure was accompanied by a sense of *fear* of exposure (to quote one student teacher, Sarah, ‘There are certain people you’re not going to ever admit to that things are going wrong’): a mixture, perhaps, of wanting to be able to be ‘oneself’ with pupils and colleagues - of *exposing oneself*, in a sense; of being ‘found’ - and of being afraid *to* be found, with all one’s shortcomings there for all to see. In some cases this led to a decision that true exposure could only be countenanced once a certain degree of ‘self improvement’ had been achieved, or in the temporary adoption of a classroom ‘persona’:

*‘It’s a bit of a persona in a way and not really wanting that persona to be too far away from who I am, because then it feels like you are having a role all day long and I think that’s very hard work, having to actually pretend to be someone different.’*

(quoted in Moore 2004:\*\*)

Though voiced by seemingly very confident people, such confessions may be seen to reveal the sometimes fragile nature of the human psyche and, in particular, the way in which that fragility is put under particular pressure or particularly exposed in the teaching situation. They may also cast some light on the difficulties experienced by some ‘failing’ students, as well as helping us to understand what makes the ‘meaning schemes’ (op.cit.) of some adult learners more durable and resistant to modification than others.

By way of exploring a little further these situations and experiences, I want to rehearse, very briefly, some of the ideas of Slavoj Žižek (see also Moore 2004b), whose interest in our understanding of the social self involves, among other things, taking key concepts of the psycho-analyst Jacques Lacan (cf. Lacan 1977, 1979) and applying them to the everyday situations and experiences within which we all habitually find ourselves. Offering a potentially helpful heuristic for making sense of the ways in which we (differentially and individually) experience and make sense of our social (including our professional) lives, while falling short of advising us to adopt the risky pursuit of self-psycho-analysis, Žižek suggests, after Lacan, that each of us develops or achieves a specific identity or identities inside the socio-symbolic world into which we are born. This socio-symbolic world - referred to by Lacan as the 'Other' - effectively 'fixes' our place within it, announcing to ourselves and to others who and what we are. Precisely because these identifications are - or appear to be - produced within the 'Other' we require constant reassurance that we are that which we think and are told we are being. The 'subject', Žižek says:

*'is always fastened, pinned, to a signifier which represents him [sic] for [others], and through this pinning he is loaded with a symbolic mandate, ... is given a place in the intersubjective network of symbolic relations.'*

(Žižek 1989: 113)

Developing these ideas a little more fully, Žižek adopts the terms 'imaginary' and 'symbolic' identification to throw light on our professional positionings and the self-understandings in light of which they are made. Imaginary identification here refers to 'the way we see ourselves', while symbolic identification refers to 'the point from which [we are] being observed to appear likeable to [ourselves]' (Žižek 1989: 106). Žižek argues that although each form of identification has, at its root, the individual's desire to satisfy and to be loved, and to find out what action/behaviour is *required* in order to satisfy and be loved, in the case of imaginary identification the subject seeks to emulate, perhaps through the kind of role-playing referred to by one of the beginning teachers cited above, qualities that they feel they have discovered in other individuals (for us, for example, other

teachers) in order to achieve the desired effect. In the case of symbolic identification, however, the question inevitably arises: 'For *whom* is the subject enacting this role? *Which gaze* is considered when the subject identifies himself [sic] with a certain image?' (ibid. p.106).

From the point of view of initial and continuing teacher education and development, what this suggests is that in addition to copying models of 'good practice' found in other people, the practitioner will be making a judgement of what that good practice is, not from some ideal, primordial, disinterested point of view, but from a particular perspective within the symbolic order. This may be the perspective of a particular set of shared social practices and beliefs, but it might equally (and simultaneously) be the perspective of a specific individual or group of individuals. Constant references to parents and their views, for example, might be seen as a symptom of a deeper anxiety in the beginning teacher, who feels her/himself to be continually spotlighted under the paternal or the maternal gaze.

For Lacan and Žižek, difficulties arise as a result of a 'gap' between 'the way we see ourselves' (imaginary identification) and 'the point from which [we are] being observed to appear likeable to [ourselves]' (symbolic identification) (Žižek 1989: 106) - typically linked, in the professional field, to the requirement for a 'symbolic mandate': e.g. 'I have been mandated to be a teacher, but what must I be - what am I expected to be - within the terms of the symbolic order, the "Other", and within the terms of my own image of self, in order to *justify* my role as teacher, in order to be able to *explain* my mandate to myself and to others?' Žižek argues that it is an ability to move beyond such questions, or to come to view them as unnecessary (i.e. 'There *is* no mandate to support the role I seek to assume.') that is necessary if the difficulty caused by such questions is to be removed. Similarly, it is an *inability* to move beyond such questions - an obsessive pursuit of the answer to the question 'What do others - what does *the* Other - desire of me, beneath it all, beneath the demands that are being made upon me and that I am meeting but still without being liked?' - that results in continued anxiety, in a sense of failure and lack of self-worth and, ultimately, in failure itself.

**Conclusion: identification, reflexivity and pedagogy**

If such issues may be seen, at first glance, as marginal or fanciful in terms of professional learning, there is ample evidence in the research data - in, for example, stories of moving away from 'needing to be liked for who I am' to 'focussing more on my students' development, and hoping they may come to like and respect me as a result', or of adopting classroom 'personae', or of overcoming feelings of professional inadequacy, or of being concerned about 'how you see yourself being seen' (Moore 2004) - to suggest that this particular field of enquiry might offer useful insights not only into understanding the nature of successful teaching but also - and more pertinently perhaps - into understanding how better to support beginning teachers who appear to have many of the necessary attributes for pedagogic success but still find themselves failing in the classroom under the weight of anxiety and of what one of my own student teachers referred to as the 'over-personalisation' of difficulties. In terms of the successful beginning teachers in the research study to which I have alluded, we might say that, for whatever reasons, they had learned - either before joining the course or during it - not just to be pragmatic and eclectic in terms of classroom *practice* but (another thing altogether) to be 'comfortable with a [social-professional] *self* that is complicated and inconsistent' (Laupert 1985: 193, emphasis added). Furthermore, this was something of a requirement for the development of authentic reflection on their practice leading to improvement *in* that practice. We might not unreasonably hope that a deeper understanding of how they have achieved such relative comfort, or of the impact of previous and ongoing experiences *on* that achievement, might provide us with invaluable help not only in offering appropriate support in the development of our students' own reflective practice, but in working with student teachers for whom such an achievement comes far less easily and whose accomplishment is likely to require far more pain.

In this regard I have offered Zizek's analysis, like that of Britzman, somewhat tentatively but nevertheless optimistically. Their ideas - and those of Lacan (1977) and Freud (1968) on which they are to a degree predicated - offer us exciting possibilities which require a lot more careful thought on our part if we are to make the most effective use of them. They can, however, help us toward finding - and fitting - another important piece in the jigsaw of mapping and understanding classroom experience and practice - to be considered alongside the other voices, pressures and

tensions to which the (beginning) teacher is subjected, to be sure, but also as a context and a process: a context within which better sense can be made *of* those other voices, pressures and tensions; and a process that involves 'reaching inside the self' to discover what voices we have internalised, in what ways those internalisations have been made, and what - and whose - purposes they may serve.

The reflexive, 'self-critical' approach is not an easy one (see Boler's [1999] linking of it to a 'pedagogy of discomfort'). However, by addressing, including and putting us more in touch with our '*feelings*' it is a vital tool in broadening our perspectives, in resisting the narrow parameters of professional reflection established and promulgated within dominant public and political discourses, and in enabling us to approach the 'cacophony of calls' (Britzman (1991: 223) to which we are subjected, in an instructive rather than a reactive way. Self-understanding may not make any one of us a better teacher on its own. It is arguably, however, a prerequisite to *becoming* not just 'better' - in our own terms, not just in others' - but happier, too, and more fulfilled in the work that we do.

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