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Heroes and Villains: The insistence of the imaginary and the novice teacher's need to believe

Introduction

This paper draws on research on the practicum carried out as part of university-school system partnership between the New South Wales, Association of Independent Schools and the University of New South Wales, Australia[1]. The aims of this partnership research project included documenting the complex, multidimensional nature of mentee and mentor teacher[2] experiences on the practicum, with a specific focus on modes of feedback and professional conversations around mentees' lesson preparation, implementation and evaluation. Located within this wider study, the current paper focuses on insights from interviews conducted with pre-service teachers. These interviews underlined how the practicum experience is far from a linear process of socialization, involving progression from ignorance to knowledge, outsider to insider, and underlined how "development contains a tendency to repeat, regress, and fixate upon moments of breakdown or gratification" (Britzman, 2007, pp. 1-2). More specifically, in relation to the title of the current paper, the interviews revealed a tendency among the pre-service teachers to either valorize or demonize their mentor teachers. In order to gain insights into this process, the paper explores this tendency through psychoanalytic theory, including Lacan's three registers of the psyche – the *imaginary*, the *symbolic* and the *Real*. We also draw on a Lacanian reading of *fantasy* as the protective structuring of social reality by simplifying and softening its inherently tension-laden and contradiction-ridden contours.

The paper links the student teachers' tendencies to valorize or demonize their mentor teachers to the fantasy-related notion of the "need to believe" that

[1] The New South Wales Association of Independent Schools is the peak body representing the independent (i.e. private) schooling sector in New South Wales. The University of New South Wales is one of a number of teacher education credentialing institutions in New South Wales.
[2] We will use the terms supervising teachers and mentors, and student teachers, pre-service teachers and mentees, interchangeably in this paper.

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frequently emerges in novice teaching in the form of a demand for certainty and an idealization of the teacher's knowledge and authority (Britzman, 2009). Drawing on these ideas, the paper reads the pre-service teachers' accounts of their mentors as instances of imaginary fixation, involving "beatific" or "horrific" fantasies. The former involve blissful and idealized, though naïve, states of mind, while the latter envisage doom-laden disaster scenarios. In each case, such fantasies serve a stabilizing function, enabling the pre-service teacher to objectify, "fix" and hence manage the intense emotional demands of schools and classrooms and thus survive what Britzman (2003) describes as the oxymoronic experience of being a student-teacher, in which one is neither student nor teacher yet expected to be both. The paper concludes with considerations of how universities and schools, mentees and mentors, might be encouraged to recognize the emotionality of the practicum experience (Hastings, 2010), as well as the misfit between social expectations and psychic experience, as potential pedagogical resources that might enrich the social identities available to new teachers.

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The problematics of teacher education

The complex challenges of teaching include balancing the diverse needs and competing demands of multiple groups and individuals (e.g. students, parents, peers, managers, administrators, policy-makers, politicians), whilst integrating multiple types of knowledge (e.g. developmental, social, cultural, linguistic, curricular, pedagogical), all within the flow of practice with precious little time for respite or reflection (Darling-Hammond, 2006, pp. 34-35). This complexity means that teacher education, like teaching generally, is problematic in the sense that it is necessarily dilemma-ridden rather than solution-based; that is, it is characterized by competing demands and complex situations that need to be managed rather than solved (Loughran, 2010, p. 13).

The complexity of teacher education is grounded in (at least) three underlying "problems" confronting teacher educators and pre-service teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2006, pp. 34-40). First, we face the "apprenticeship of observation" and the fact that students come into teacher education with extensive exposure to the

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surface, performative dimensions of teaching yet with little or no understanding of the complexity underlying the practice. Second, we grapple with the problem of enactment and the difficulty of moving from knowledge “of”, or knowing “what”, into knowing “how”. Third, we confront the problem of complexity, already noted above, and the challenges arising from the fact that teaching is a dynamic practice that is never predictable or routine (Adoniou, 2014; Davis & Sumara, 2005). Each of these, in turn, can be read as manifestations of deeper conflicts between the demands of inner and outer worlds of practice and as indices of tensions between psychic and institutional reality (Britzman, 2009; Ellsworth, 1997). With this in mind, the current paper utilizes teacher identity as a construct for thinking about the multiple complexities of teacher education and learning to teach, insofar as identity is a paradoxical commixture of the social and individual, the personal and political, the rational and the emotional, the synoptic and the dynamic (Alsup, 2006; Author, 2009a, 2009b). In order to think through some of this complexity and paradox in relation to teacher education and the formation of a teacher identity, we draw on ideas from psychoanalytic theory.

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A psychoanalytic reading of pre-service teacher identities

The Lacanian theorization of identity we draw upon engages with complexity by arguing that the subject is constituted by paradox in that it is neither fully self sufficient and internally agentive, nor totally alienated and externally determined, but “extimate”, i.e. neither fully inside nor outside but both simultaneously, in a manner that problematizes the hard and fast distinction between the inner and outer worlds of one’s being. The paradoxical nature of the Lacanian subject is embodied in the unconscious, a phenomenon which is both deeply within, yet simultaneously something from which the subject is alienated. It is also embodied in language, a resource the subject relies on to construct its sense of self, and of being in the world, but also a resource that can never provide the basis of a coherent and integrated identity, since its meanings are always dispersed across a chain of signifiers, rather than residing reassuringly in any single signifier, and since its existence precedes and exceeds that of the individual subject.

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In thinking further about the complexity of identity and the conflicted nature of the human psyche, the distinction between the imaginary and symbolic registers of the Lacanian psyche offers further insights. The imaginary register, like its Freudian counterpart, the ego, is characterized by a tendency to seek out and hold on to perceptual unities; whereas the symbolic register is socially and linguistically mediated and characterized by multiplicity and fluidity. For Lacan, the fixity or stasis associated with the imaginary is linked to the ego, which is formed through identification with the external specular image in the mirror stage. The ego is thus an imaginary structure oriented towards the perception and retention of stable and enduring gestalts, unlike the subject, which is a fluid structure or configuration formed through the ever-shifting and *un*stable signifiers of the symbolic. In this sense, the ego is a conservative force; as Evans (1996) puts it, “because of its imaginary fixity, the ego is resistant to all subjective growth and change” (p. 51). This resistance to growth and change is also a resistance to open engagement with the world beyond the self: “the unity of the ego is a refusal of the essential complexity of the subject’s involvement with the Other” (Boothby, 1991, p. 209).

The same fixed, immobile qualities that characterize the ego are also characteristics of one of its main forms of defense through the projection of fantasies (Evans, 1996, p. 60). Through the deployment of fantasy, simplified and reductive – yet also harmonious in the sense of adding up to a coherent picture of reality – structures are maintained at the expense of engagement with more complex, but also more threatening, versions of the world. The division of the world into two camps, those on the side of “good” and those on the side of “evil”, is just one example of such fantasmatic structuring of reality. This all or nothing tendency towards idealization, as Britzman (2009; see also, Phelan, 2013) notes, frequently returns in novice teachers as a powerful “need to believe”. This need manifests itself in forms such as “demands for certainty and as a belief that learning is a tonic to conflict as opposed to conflict’s delegate” (p. 6), as well as in “their idealization of knowledge, the teacher’s authority, and the splitting into good and bad” (p. 7). Such tendencies towards idealization, including the desire to disavow conflict in favour of harmony

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and unity and the division of reality into simplified good and bad categories, are classic symptoms of fantasmatic projections.

It is important here to point out, that fantasy is not an entirely disabling phenomenon. As Ruti (2009) notes, "fantasy can be an essential vehicle for the crafting of the kind of identity that feels viable and worthwhile"(p. 99). Thus it is important to distinguish between the sorts of creative fantasies that enable us to encounter the world in novel and original ways and the narcissistic fantasies that restrict our development. Critically for the purposes of this paper, narcissistic fantasies impose a simplified and reductive coherence, causing "our identities to appear both reliable and immediately readable to us" (Ruti, 2009, p. 101). For the novice teacher, fantasy can serve as a source of inspiration through the projection and depiction of the contours of the professional s/he aspires to become. Additionally, it can be a potential source of illusion and stagnation through the operation of reductive and simplified models and frameworks. The growth resistant operation of the narcissistic fantasmatic structure can be challenged in at least two ways.

One of these ways is through an encounter with the Real, that traumatic kernel of emptiness at the core of our subjectivity, whose presence we feel through its distorting, dislocating and disorienting effects on other aspects of our lives, rather like the black hole whose existence we glean from its warping effect on objects in space around it. In the context of teacher education, we can relate this idea of the intrusion of the Real to instances such as the student teacher's traumatic encounter with the otherness of students who, to their growing horror, have no interest in accommodating the needs and wishes of *any* teacher, let alone a diffident novice, and between whose agendas and those of the student teacher there is little, if any, alignment.

The second, and more manageable way in which narcissistic, growth resistant fixations can be challenged, is through the operation of the signifier, i.e. through "a symbolically mediated process of exchange [which] submits the imaginary

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organization of the ego to a continuous pressure toward re-formation" (Boothby, 1991, p. 159). The signifier thus provides ways for pre-service teachers to move beyond the potentially deadening and immobilizing effects of narcissistic fixation and fantasy. In the terms set out in the title of this paper, this means ameliorating student teachers' demands for belief – for systematicity, coherence and certainty – and developing a degree of tolerance for, and capacity to creatively respond to, tension, paradox and ambiguity. Such symbolic mediation has considerable potential for mentoring in the context of the practicum component of teacher education, as we will see in discussing the findings from the interview study on which this papers draws. The following discussion provides details of this study.

The research study: Improving practicum experiences

The interview study on which this paper draws sought to gain deeper insights into the synergies, tensions and contradictions in the reported experiences of pre-service teachers. The study was located in a social constructionist epistemological framework and drew on socio-cultural and psychoanalytic theory to inform the data collection and analysis, using interviews as the data collection strategy. Six pre-service teachers agreed to take part in semi-structured interviews, which occurred after their final practicum. In these interviews, participants were asked to discuss their experiences on practicum, including their interactions with their mentor teacher and how they felt their working relationship with the mentor impacted on their teaching and learning. All interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. Ethical approval was sought and received for this study.

Due in large part to the constraints of space, this paper draws on data from just three of these semi-structured interviews, presented below as vignettes. It is important to note that these three were not atypical of the wider group – they were certainly not bizarre or freakish outliers, through the following analysis might paint them in that light (e.g. as gushing enthusiasts or caustic critics). Indeed, we believe they are probably more typical of teacher education students (and their mentors) than not. We say this partly based on our experiences working with such students over a number of years but also based on the teacher-as-hero narratives that

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pervade popular media and film (e.g. Ayers, 2001). Nonetheless, in presenting these three vignettes, we recognize that they cannot be taken as representative of the wider group and we disavow any grand claims to generality. Rather, our analysis is a "symptomatic" one, involving an iterative shuttling back and forth between data and literature, whereby "the data and theory are textualized, engaging literature, theory and texts in order to make speculative claims of meaning" (Janzen, 2013, p. 382), which might be read as symptoms or traces of phenomena with wider potential salience and relevance. Critically, the purpose of such an analysis "is not to prove, but to put the symptom into relation, to take notice of the particular and the peculiar, to consider what might be being rendered and referenced, and to put these moments into conversation with theory" (Janzen, 2013, p. 382).

Of particular importance to the current study was a tendency on the part of some pre-service teachers to either elevate or demonize their supervising teacher – to view them as either a hero or a villain, which, in turn seemed to influence the mentor-mentee relationship and communication. The hero-villain theme was an aspect we identified to some degree in our analysis of all the interviews but given the limited space of a paper we focus on two vignettes of cases where it came through with particular strength as well as on one where it did not.

Heroes, villains and beyond: Three vignettes

In the following discussion we present three vignettes of pre-service teachers and their depiction of their relations with their supervising teachers. Two of the participants, Denise and Tess were from postgraduate teaching programs, while the third, Harry, was from an undergraduate program. All participants have been de-identified with pseudonyms used in the following discussion. We begin with a case of demonization of the supervising teacher, followed by one involving the elevation of the supervising teacher to the status of hero, before finally exploring a more nuanced response to the mentor-mentee relationship.

Denise and her demon

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Denise was a pre-service teacher from the two-year Masters of Teaching program. All the professional experience placements, including a four-week practicum in Semester 1 and a final internship of six weeks in Semester 2, are undertaken during the first year of the degree. Denise, a science graduate of Lebanese-Australian background, was in her mid twenties and had come straight from her undergraduate studies into teacher preparation. Both Denise's practicum placements were in complex, culturally diverse schools serving populations of backgrounds not dissimilar to her own. A crucial value for Denise as she engaged in her practicum placement was encouraging her students' educational aspirations and to engender self-confidence in them, based on a belief that they would thus be capable of emulating her own success.

Denise believed that she would be accepted as a legitimate member of a professional community and provided with support in her professional development as a teacher. However, these expectations were not met in her placement: "Then you get out there and the teacher tells you, 'I don't want to see you in the staff room,' so you've got six periods you haven't even started to plan. That was me, basically, for the whole six week block." For some pre-service teachers this situation would have prompted an increased determination to demonstrate teaching ability but Denise seemed to fixate on what she saw as a significant lack of interpersonal support. This perceived lack of support extended to her planning of activities for the classroom: "I'd come up with an idea and then my supervisor, she says, 'I've never done it that way,' she goes, 'but you can give it a go'… So it was sort of me testing out strategies and, if it failed, it was me that would fall on my face, not her." Similarly, Denise appeared frustrated by what she saw as her supervising teacher's casual and offhand attitude to planning lessons and the lack of written feedback on her plans: "My actual lesson plan never got written on so the copy I printed out and showed her stayed completely plain, perfectly done. It was never destroyed, it was never written on, it was never anything". Likewise, she found fault with what she saw as her supervising teacher's lack of engagement with her classroom performance: "she would just sit in the lab side of the classroom and just sit there…she'd be on her laptop doing her own thing".

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Denise seems to have felt unsupported insofar as her supervising teacher did not engage with her ideas. This perceived lack of support, engagement and recognition seemed to undermine Denise's confidence in her own ability: "If your supervisor's not comfortable with it, not comfortable with technology, not comfortable with a new idea, then it's just sort of – because there's a bit of doubt in your head when you're going through the lesson now… If I had been seen as an equal at the beginning, then I would have been willing to try more things." Denise's wish for a more equal relationship extended to her ideals for working with students in class, where she aspired to create "a level playing field within the class". However, her supervising teacher advocated a more traditional and strongly hierarchical relationship, recommending that she say to the students, "I'm the teacher, you're the students, you listen to me."

Yet despite her avowals of a desire for equal relations with her supervising teacher, when challenges arose in the class, Denise seems to have expected at least her moral, if not physical support, and was clearly frustrated by her unwillingness to provide this: "'It is your class now. Do what you want. I'm not going to step in at all', and that was it. She cut ties completely with the class for six weeks. She was like, 'It's all on you. Whatever you want to do with them, you do', and that was it." Her repeated use of the expression, 'and that was it', suggests that she expected – and was waiting for – a lot more: "I wanted more of that mental side of her role rather than her just sitting there going 'It's all your lessons, it's all on you'".

At other times, Denise felt her supervisor was guilty of unprofessionalism in discussing her teaching ability with students in class. A particular incident arose with a student who had been giving Denise considerable trouble in the class and who, after being reprimanded by Denise, "got up and started speaking to my [mentor] teacher, wanting to know if I was going to be passed or failed based on what he was doing in class…she chose to speak to him…she said 'Miss is an excellent teacher, she's been doing really well so it's likely that she'll be passing'". Regardless of the

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accuracy and veracity of this report, Denise clearly felt aggrieved by what she perceived at this violation of her professional status.

Denise seems stuck, angry and frustrated. Moreover, her stuck-ness and her frustration may be linked, in that her melancholic reading of her reality may well be preventing her from seeing agentic possibilities for moving forward. In Lacanian terms, "melancholia represents a victory of the subject's fantasmatic fixations over its sublimatory capacity to redirect desire along more rewarding lines" (Ruti, 2006, p. 158). Her seeming fixation on the negative "represents a triumph of the imaginary over the symbolic, of fantasy over the signifier, of sadness over narrativization" (Ruti, 2006, p. 158). In this way, Denise exemplifies the lure of the imaginary with it tendency towards rivalry and its preference for iconic identification with a cohesive, but necessarily oversimplified, ideal and the related need to believe. By demonizing her mentor teacher, Denise is able to project her negative feelings onto her and preserve space in her own psyche for the inverted mirror image of these feelings, thus protecting herself from the need to challenge or question her ideals, against which, any thing less than complete satisfaction is liable to be read as a failure. As Kristeva (2007, p. 721) puts it, "the failure of the paradise syndrome inevitably leads to depressivity". Despite the fact that Denise did in fact pass her practicum, proving herself to be at least a "good enough" teacher, who was able to "get by" (Bloomfield, 2010), her almost totally negative rendering of the relationship with her mentor seems to have had the unfortunate effect of blocking any attempt on her part to develop or gain anything positive from the situation.

Harry and his hero

Harry was a pre-service teacher studying in the four-year, dual-track Bachelor of Arts (BA)/Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree, majoring in History and Drama. Entering his degree straight after competing his schooling, he was passionate about drama and wished to inspire his students with a similar love for the subject. The BA/BEd degree includes two professional experience placements: a four week-placement in Semester 1, Year 3, and a final six-week placement of in semester 2, Year 4. Harry's first practicum was in a mixed gender suburban high school serving mainly students

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from white Anglo-Australian backgrounds similar to Harry's own. His second practicum was in an independent, Anglican school for girls, located in a wealthy suburb in the city in which the university is located. In contrast to Denise, who seemed to miss few opportunities to criticize her supervising teacher and seemed fixated on what, in Lacanian terms, we might call a horrific fantasy, Harry seemed somewhat star-struck by his supervisor and could thus be described as fixated on a beatific fantasy. Key elements of this fantasy are age and gender, which were forefront in Harry's consciousness. "I had a young – she was in her late twenties or early thirties – a woman". Not only was his supervisor young, she was pleasant, easygoing and relatively undemanding. "She was just really lovely and very relaxed… I'd give a suggestion for a lesson. 'Yeah that sounds really good, yeah, that's fine'". Clearly this was a very different relationship than between Denise and her supervisor – instead of tension and stress there was harmony and relative relaxedness.

The relationship became so supportive that towards the end of the placement Harry reported his supervisor as saying, "you don't need to send me your lesson plans; you don't need to send me that stuff. I trust you". This further elevated her in Harry's estimation – "That trust was really nice…I really liked that" – leading him to emphasize once more the pleasant and relaxed nature of the relationship. "She was just, yeah, really relaxed, very supportive". The result of this easygoing relationship was that when it came to completing Harry's final report, "she gave me a lot of positive comments and she was able to answer it and just basically there was really no negative comments", just as in Harry's evaluation of his supervisor, everything is positive and nothing is negative.

It is interesting to contrast the repeated expressions (compulsive repetitions) in Harry's testimony with the repetitions in Denise's. Whereas Denise's expression 'and that was it' seemed to capture her frustrated sense of expectation, Harry's repetitions of "really" – "*really* lovely", "*really* good", "*really* nice", "*really* relaxed" – convey a contented, almost complacent relationship with his mentor, which forms a contrast to Denise's negativity, but which could be seen as equal in its sense of stasis and lack of agentive activity. That is, while Denise consistently engaged in simplified,

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"horrific" fantasies, in which everything was read through a condemnatory lens, Harry engaged in simplifying, harmonious "beatific" fantasies, in which everything contributed to a confirmatory scenario. Harry's response to his mentor may also reflect a deep sense of relief, insofar as he had experienced a far more troubled relationship with his mentor in his previous placement; in other words, it may be that the positives he read into the new "beatific" situation were amplified by their contrast to the "horrific" meanings he drew from old.

Tessa – traversing the fantasy

Tessa was a pre-service teacher in the 18-month Graduate Diploma program, which comprised the first year of the Masters of Teaching degree, the difference between the two being that students wishing to take out the latter qualification needed to complete an additional semester involving four masters-level subjects. Teaching was a career change for Tessa, who had completed an undergraduate degree in English and subsequently worked in marketing. Tessa's two practicum schools were very different from each other, the first being an academically selective school, with an emphasis on qualifications, achievement and success, serving an ethnically mixed population drawn from a wide range of suburbs across the city, while her second practicum was in an Islamic school whose population came mainly from surrounding suburbs. Of central importance to Tessa was striving to become an effective teacher and motivating her students to learn and enjoy their studies.

In contrast to Denise and Harry, who tended to view their situations as either highly negative or positive, Tessa, presented a more balanced perspective. This can be seen in the way she responded to an open question about how the practicum experience had been for her: "The positive was I had a sounding board, which was the other prac student and I also got an opportunity to do team-teaching which was really valuable. The negative was a lot of the feedback that we got from the mentor was generic". Expanding, a little later on in the interview, on the nature of the feedback she received, she again offered a more critical perspective in terms of analyzing her experience: "It was good but it was mostly positive. It's a good thing to have positive feedback but it doesn't help me... I'd rather a bit more constructive feedback where I

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can improve because that's the main point." In other words, rather than taking the positive feedback she received at face value and using it to bolster a heroic image of her mentor as an imaginary – and static – reflection of how she would like to see herself, she stood back and analysed the feedback in terms of its value for helping her move beyond her current location in terms of her development as a teacher. Perhaps in part because she is in a paired placement with another student teacher, Tessa is less invested in the relationship with – and hence less vehement in her judgments about – her supervisor. This is reflected in the language with which she describes her supervisor and her supervisory practice, using terms relatively neutral terms like "generic", and in her use of qualifying language like "mostly" and "a bit more".

Even when she engages in explicit criticism of her supervising teacher, she resists placing all responsibility for the situation on her supervisor and consequently avoids diminishing her own agency or absolving herself of responsibility. We see this in the following excerpt in which she is commenting on the lack of critical feedback from her supervising teacher and the fact that she did not pick up on curricular gaps in the content taught by the student teachers: "It's as though she sort of just tuned out and went 'Yes, the kids were well-behaved' and it was like 'Mm, but they're missing stuff that we're not covering that we're just not aware of'". Here Tessa manages to balance her critical comments with recognition of her own shortcomings, while when reflecting on the reasons for her supervising teacher's non-interventionist approach, her explanation was empathetic and understanding, rather than merely dismissive: "I think she just didn't want it to be intimidating which it wasn't and which is fair enough… it wasn't that she was lazy or anything like that; I think it was just that she wanted us to have a play around". She also balances her critique with appreciative comments such as the following observation about her supervising teacher and how she had managed to circumvent the limitations of the professional teaching standards-formatted observation forms: "what she did really well was that she wrote her own notes; she followed the lesson and wrote her own notes as she went which was really, really good because it was her own thoughts at the time".

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Overall, and in contrast to Denise and Harry, Tessa's more self-reflective and nuanced comments, and acceptance of her own shortcomings and responsibilities alongside those of others, is instructive. In terms of the psychoanalytic theorization we have drawn on in the paper, we can say that she traverses the fantasy, refusing what Eagleton (2009) refers to as 'the insistence of the imaginary', with its seductive but illusory promises of harmony and wholeness, and thereby resisting the temptation to fall into either the hero-izing or the demonizing mode that characterizes her peers' responses to their supervising teachers.

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Discussion

In presenting these three vignettes, as noted earlier, we see our analysis as a symptomatic one, in which the themes we identify are read as symptoms or traces of a phenomenon, i.e. the tendency to self-servingly elevate or pre-emptively denigrate the mentor figure on whom one's evaluation, indeed one's future, depends, that may have wider salience and relevance. Certainly, responses to our analysis from colleagues suggest that the tendency towards idealization and/or demonization is a recognizable enough phenomenon to warrant serious consideration, both of its nature and its potential amelioration. In concluding, we would thus like to offer some tentative thoughts about how the tendency towards ideality (including idealization and demonization) in novice teachers might be turned to constructive ends.

In our earlier discussion, we noted how a common strategy for managing the anxiety provoked by the complex and pressurized nature of novice teaching is to engage in fantasmatic projections that simplify and dichotomize the messy inchoateness of classroom and school realities, reducing the latter to either beatific or horrific scenarios through a privileging of the imaginary over the symbolic register. As such, it is important to note that the supervisor demonization and heroization evident in the first two cases represent diametrically opposite pre-service teacher constructions of and responses to what are arguably similar professional autonomy conditions created by their supervising teachers, suggesting that the origin of the fantasmatic projections lies to a considerable degree within the pre-service teachers

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themselves. More specifically, the transferences of feeling we have presented above, both positive, as in the case of Harry, and negative, as with case of Denise, reflect a powerful process of imaginary identification in which the pre-service teachers manage anxiety and uncertainty by casting (in the dual senses of assigning roles and of projecting a shape or shadow onto something) onto their mentor a vision of how they wish to see (or *not* see) themselves. It may be objected that we are deploying the binary structure of heroes and villains as a framework to critique the tendencies of student teachers to find solace in dichotomous meanings. But as Derrida (1995, p. 234) recognized, deconstructions can never entirely transcend and supersede, but rather remain parasitic upon, that which they deconstruct; in the case of the imaginary register, with its mirror-like reflections of self and other, binaries and dualisms comprise its fantasmatic core and hence cannot be expurgated from its analysis. What is more, it is not just the binary of hero-villain per se that is problematic but equally the insistence of imaginary fixation, and consequent resistance to development and change that is at stake here.

We also noted how these fantasies allow novice teachers to sustain the powerful need to believe. What Britzman (2009), drawing on Kristeva (2007), sees as characteristic of beginning teachers, the need to believe finds fulfillment in the antagonistic division of people and objects into binary categories of good and bad and in the separation of theory from practice, pedagogy from psychology and teaching from learning. Pre-service teachers tend to want “techniques that promise successful pedagogy and imagine psychology as a last resort to explain a student’s failure” (Britzman, 2009, pp. 2-3). We would argue that this tendency toward imaginary fixation is exacerbated by the paradox at the core of teacher education, whereby “newcomers learning to teach enter teacher education looking backward on their years of school experience and project it into the present. Teacher educators greet these newcomers as if they lack school experience and have no past” (Britzman, 2007, p.2). On both sides of the encounter, the past is silenced even as it continues to shape the present.

In the context of thinking about how to ameliorate novice teachers’ tendency to

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ideality, we might conceive of this space in terms of providing affordances for the potential of the signifier to resist the fantasmatic fixations of the imaginary by considering, and striving to articulate, how past experiences and conceptions of education might be silently operative in the present. The point here is not to replace the projections of the imaginary with workings of the symbolic but rather to draw on the resources of the latter to raise awareness of, and hence unsettle, the tenacity of the former, on the grounds that "normalcy is… a balance struck between the claims of imaginary fixity and symbolic fluidity" (Boothby, 1991, p. 123).

Here we would highlight the value of tools and artifacts of the sort we have been piloting as part of our research study[3], for example, a "problem-solving" tool that provides a structured template that asks person completing it to consider the perspectives of all relevant parties. The use of this tool enables either party to document their concerns and anxieties via the written medium – potentially less directly threatening and confrontational than a direct face-to-face verbal approach. Indeed it may be the case that the use of this tool contributes to the capacity of the person completing it to understand the issues at hand, including their own and others' relationship to them, in a way that either ameliorates or even solves the problem at hand. Such tools introduce a third element into professional conversations, turning them in effect from dyadic – and potentially antagonistic – encounters, grounded in imaginary projections, to triadic dialogues mediated by the symbolic order (Muller, 1996). This is particularly pertinent when the symbolic register is conceived, not just as the realm of law and prohibition, but as a potential source of creative singularity (Author, 2013; Ruti, 2012). Such tools thus offer the potential to nudge the pre-service teacher beyond imaginary fixations by "metabolizing the need to believe not through acting out but through the pleasure that comes with thinking, questioning and analyzing" (Kristeva, 2007, pp. 224-225). The conversations afforded by such tools have the potential to combine educational and therapeutic discourses, focusing on emotional and identity issues (Boote, 2003; Hastings, 2010), as well as on pedagogy, fostering recognition of the benefits of

[3] Space does not permit an elaboration on the specifics of the tools here but for an in-depth discussion and analysis, see Author, 2015.

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explicitness (Margolis, 2007). Such tools offer resources to assist mentees in developing and consolidating recognition that teaching is an inherently problematic, paradoxical and open-ended endeavour. They are also a much-needed resource for mentors in evaluating the performance of student teachers (Ell & Haigh, 2014), while also assisting and supporting the latter in the journey – a journey essential to effective teaching – from simplified imaginary ideality to multifaceted complexity.

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