



Shifting power relations in “the getting of wisdom”

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Abstract

Some researchers have argued that student teachers should be encouraged to access the wisdom of their supervising teachers through observations and interviews. In this article we discuss two student teachers' contrasting stories about their experiences in trying to access experienced teachers' wisdom. In particular, we focus on the power relations between the student teachers and their cooperating teachers. Through this study we have come to believe that it is possible for student teachers to develop wisdom of practice, deliberative wisdom and wisdom-in-practice through observation, inquiry, reflection and practice within a community where members are prepared for “positioning” and shifting power relations. © 2000 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

During their mandatory school practicum, student teachers appear to be at the bottom end of a power differential with their school-based supervising teachers and university-based teacher educators (Veal & Rickard, 1998). Few studies have provided rich descriptions of the tensions and power relations inherent in these relationships (Graham, 1997), especially from the student teachers' perspectives. In this article we focus on the shifting power relations between two student teachers and their school-based teacher educators (or supervising teachers).

2. Power relations in teacher education

In structural discourses, power can be described as “a commodity disproportionately held by some groups and wielded over or used against others” (Kerfoot & Knights, 1994, p. 70). This was evident in Kainan's (1996) research, for example, which was concerned with the question: “How much power [do] teachers really have ... [?]” However, Foucault (1979) argued that power was not a commodity that could be possessed by some privileged person or group that ensured their continued dominance over weaker or less privileged subjects. Instead, he asserted that:

Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything but because it comes from everywhere ... Power comes from below; that is there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between ruler and ruled at the root of power relations,

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and serving as a general matrix—no such duality extending from top down and reacting on more and more limited groups to the very depths of the social body. One must suppose rather that the manifold relations of force that take shape and come into play in the machinery of production, in families, limited groups and institutions, are the basis for wide-ranging effects of cleavage that run through the social body as a whole. (Foucault, 1979, pp. 93, 94).

Like Foucault, post-structuralists question the inevitability of having to belong to one or the other category of any binary pair (Davies, 1996). In this case, the binary pair of powerful/powerless is put under erasure. This means that no one has unequivocal power and individuals can be both powerful and powerless at the same time (Davies, 1996; Davies & Hunt, 1994).

Conceived in this way, power is the multiplicity of force relations extant within the social body. But different discourses are often tied to power relations (Johnston & Kerper, 1996). Discourses can limit as well as expand opportunities to individuals; “they can denigrate one’s position in the world or enhance it, making one feel powerful or powerless” (Johnston & Kerper, 1996, p. 9). For those seeking an understanding of power relations, then, it is instructive to study the discourses used by individuals and groups, with respect to each other. As Henwood (1998) argued “subjectivities are understood as constituted through a complex interconnection of discourses, which have been defined as the interrelationship of themes, statements, forms of knowledge and positions held by individuals in relation to these” (p. 39).

While these discourses are important, multiple readings of discursive practices are made possible by considering the “positioning” of speakers within a conversation (Davies & Harré, 1999). The act of positioning “refers to the assignment of fluid ‘parts’ or ‘roles’ to speakers in the discursive construction of personal stories that make a person’s actions intelligible and relatively determinate social acts” (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999, p. 17). So, a person can position him/herself (reflexive positioning) or be positioned by others (interactive positioning) as powerful or powerless within a conversation.

Conversations have storylines (e.g., the storyline of instruction takes form when someone acts like a classroom teacher) and the positions people take in a conversation can be linked to these storylines (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999). These positions might follow a predictable course, but sometimes an initial seizure of the dominant role, for example, will force the other speakers into speaking positions they would not have occupied voluntarily. Several examples of the dynamic nature of positioning have been presented in Harré and van Langenhove (1999).

The power relations within the student teaching triad (i.e., university teacher educator or university supervisor—school teacher educator or cooperating teacher—student teacher) were the focus of Veal and Rickard’s (1998) recent study of experienced physical education teachers. On the basis of analyzing the interview transcripts of 23 participating cooperating teachers, Veal and Rickard identified two hierarchical triads; that is, the institutional hierarchy and the functional hierarchy. The institutional hierarchy was observed when the university supervisor’s discourse was accepted as dominant on issues such as placement and assessment. On the relatively few occasions that the university supervisors (US) visited the school setting, Veal and Rickard reported that the alliance between the cooperating teacher (CT) and student teacher (ST) strengthened, causing a tension or struggle between the CT–ST dyad and the US. The functional triad (i.e., CT–ST–pupils) was observed in the absence of the US. In this triad, the CT dominated the discourse between him/herself and the ST. While the CT felt powerful in the functional triad, this reverted to a sense of powerlessness when the institutional triad was reconstituted. From a post-structuralist perspective, there would indeed be shifting power relations within the triads, but the hierarchical models created by Veal and Rickard, as they admit themselves, exaggerates the separation occurring between the members of the triads. During teaching in the functional triad, for example, the ST could feel powerful “controlling” the pace and direction of the lesson, while at the same time, feeling powerless because the CT was critiquing their work. While it might not be possible to prevent such feelings altogether, it is useful to consider how

it might be possible to disrupt such hierarchies. One of Veal and Rickard's (1998) recommendations with which we would agree is the need for sharing supervision or "power" through the process of engaging cooperating teachers and student teachers in systematic investigations of everyday teaching behavior, especially when the student teacher has opportunities to initiate and direct such investigations.

3. Description of the study

The focus for the present article emerged while the first two named authors (i.e., Steve and Donna) were engaged in a study of the personal practical knowledge or craft knowledge of experienced science teachers (e.g., Rigano & Ritchie, 1999). Through her collaboration with Steve on several previous research projects about student learning (e.g., Ritchie & Rigano, 1996), Donna had developed sophisticated interviewing techniques. Interestingly, Donna was enrolled in a teacher education program at the time of the craft knowledge study. Donna found the new task of interviewing teachers about their practice a challenging learning experience. Her account of this experience was published and shared with Steve's teacher education students. Steve believed that the interview protocols that he had used with Donna might be readily adopted by his student teachers for the purposes of discussing observed teaching episodes with their school-based teaching supervisors. His students were invited to try out the protocols, in light of Donna's experience, in their upcoming practicum. Three students chose to write about their experience as an optional assignment. One of these students (i.e., John, the third named author) approached Steve mid-way through the task to express some frustration about his limited interviewing success. It appeared that, like Donna, John's frustrations could be linked to a possible power differential between the student teacher and the experienced teachers that he had interviewed. Through our on-going interactions we became interested in trying to understand these power relations and how they might have influenced the process of student teachers' professional development. As we argue

below, the construct of a teacher's professional wisdom is broader than that of craft knowledge. Accordingly, we have adopted the title from an Australian classic, *The Getting of Wisdom* (Richardson, 1910), in relation to the process in which both Donna and John engaged in their attempts to enhance their professional development as prospective teachers.

3.1. "The Getting of Wisdom": the context for the study

In *The Getting of Wisdom*, we read a dry witty account of one adolescent girl's personal development during her three-and-a-half years at a Melbourne boarding school in the 1880s. As Laura blunders through school, we see how she gradually overcomes the obstacles encountered. One literary analyst (Palmer, 1950) described Laura's upward stepwise progression as an education in disillusionment:

The steps "upward", then, are on a spiral, with widening view. The disillusion occurs only in the momentary spasm of discovery that the first foothold must be abandoned; it is obliterated in the conviction that the new foothold is more secure. And so each time upwards a little way on the spiral of successive maddening difficulties, the *Getting of Wisdom*. (p. 34)

Palmer's description might also be likened to the professional development of beginning teachers. Sure, for many teachers, just like Laura's peers, conformity might prevail over personal integrity, understanding and wisdom. But Richardson's subversive tale can be taken to suggest that "the getting of wisdom should be a defiant, individual and extravagant process or there will be no wisdom at the end of it" (McLeod, 1985, p. 86). Through on-going observations and self-analysis or reflection, beginning teachers also can step up the widening spiral of wisdom. Just like Laura, a beginning teacher will try to solve dilemmas, occasionally finding an answer, more often observing that "there is no answer or that the problem has been posed in the wrong terms" (McLeod, 1985, p. 86).

We are not the first to suggest that a teacher can become wise through professional practice.

Shulman (1987) fashioned the term *wisdom of practice* to refer to teachers' practical knowledge that could be expressed in the form of propositional statements inferred from observations or narratives of teachers' practice. This view contributed to an emerging school of thought that was influenced by the seminal work of Elbaz (1983). She identified five orientations to a teacher's practical knowledge, namely: situation, personal, social, experiential, and theoretical. These orientations have received differential attention by researchers partly accounting for the generation of such related constructs as: Personal practical knowledge (Clandinin, 1986), pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1986), craft knowledge (McNamara & Desforjes, 1978), practical theories (Sanders & McCutcheon, 1986), and wisdom of practice (Shulman, 1987). The common link between these different but related perspectives of teacher knowledge is the notion that teachers develop a type of knowledge that is distinct from formal research knowledge over the course of their careers.

A second research tradition, as Fenstermacher (1994) noted, was based on the reflective practice notions of Donald Schön which emphasized teacher reasoning rather than the accumulation of practical professional knowledge. In this tradition, researchers became interested in the ability of teachers to stand back from their practice and to reflect on what had occurred so that they might make defensible decisions for subsequent actions. The wisdom generated from such reflection-on-practice was termed *deliberative wisdom* by Feldman (1997). But Feldman also declared that there was more to becoming a good teacher than the possession of knowledge (i.e., wisdom of practice) and then reasoning about one's practice (i.e., deliberative wisdom). What was missing was understanding of being a teacher and what it meant to teach. With reference to sociocultural theory, Feldman crafted his case for a third type of wisdom that he called: *wisdom-in-practice*. This type of wisdom is developed through the understanding of one's own being and others in particular situations. As he explained:

It begins with the recognition that teachers are people in the role of teacher, who act as teachers,

and teach in educational situations. It is in their being as teachers that their understandings arise through meaning-making in those situations, and why they act as they do. And it is also through their being in these situations, with their web-like structures that extend not only through time and space, but also across human relations, that teachers come to understand others through a hermeneutic interpretation of their interactions. (p. 768)

This suggests that wisdom-in-practice comes about through teachers' interactions with other people and artifacts within educational situations. Because an individual's understanding of his or her own being cannot be separated from the situations in which interactions occur, wisdom-in-practice can never be fully accessed. In a sense, it is largely tacit in nature. Nevertheless, researchers need to investigate unconventional techniques in their attempts to uncover wisdom-in-practice (Feldman, 1997). But all three types of wisdom are required for good practice (Feldman, 1997). According to Feldman (1997) this means that teacher educators have a responsibility to explore environments which might foster the getting of wisdom for prospective teachers.

3.2. *Re-presenting data: storytelling*

Some researchers have generated elaborate models to represent teachers' wisdom of practice (e.g., Batten, Marland & Khamis, 1993). While these models might have informed the researchers about teaching and perhaps their teacher education programs, it is less likely that such models have impacted on teachers' practices. A promising alternative is the representation of teachers' wisdom through story.

Doyle (1997) argued that teaching is best known through story and that this understanding takes the form of provisional models that account for how things work in classrooms. As he explained:

A classroom is a realm in which events take place, and it is through participation (i.e., action) in these events that students come to understand what the enacted curriculum embodies as content.

If teaching is event and action with respect to a curriculum, then story is a quite appropriate, if not the only, way of knowing teaching. A story is, essentially, a “telling or recounting of a string of events” ... that explicates in a coherent manner for time, sequence, and continuity. (p. 95)

Connelly and Clandinin (1994) also argued that stories are central to teacher education because the telling and writing, retelling and rewriting of stories can lead to awakenings and to transformations in the practice of teachers. By writing about and retelling teachers’ stories, we give ourselves the opportunities to “awaken to the possibility of retellings, to new ways of telling ... stories” (p. 154). Through our telling and retelling of such stories we can extend our individual and collective horizons of knowing (Connelly & Clandinin, 1994). As Connelly and Clandinin (1994) argued “It is story that confers meaning. It is in the stories of ourselves that we tell ourselves and tell others that we make and re-make meaning” (p. 150). By sustaining conversations with theory, research, different classroom conditions and contexts, colleagues, students, and researchers, it is possible for teachers to engage in more mindful retellings of their stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1994). These conversations involve a similar process advocated by Fenstermacher and Richardson (1993) who claimed that:

Practical reasoning is improved by helping the ... teacher frame increasingly more sophisticated and well grounded practical arguments, thereby enhancing the teacher’s ability to think more deeply and powerfully about his (sic) action. (p. 104)

3.3. *The storytellers*

We tell two stories in this article. The first story relates to Donna’s experience. At the time of writing her story, Donna was both a researcher and a part-time student teacher. Previously, Donna had been a professional scientist with a doctorate in biochemistry. When she later became interested in research on student learning and thinking she teamed-up with Steve, with whom she has completed several research projects over a five-year

period. Due to family and business commitments, however, Donna was not able to complete her teaching practicum. Her story, then, is limited to her experience of questioning experienced teachers about their practice (see Rigano & Ritchie, 1999). Like Donna, John was a mature-age student teacher. John left behind an established career as a cabinet-maker for teaching. However, at the time of writing his story, John was a full-time student in his third year of a four-year degree in education. John’s story relates to his attempt at applying the questioning protocol used by Steve and Donna with his supervising teachers during his first extended practicum. This story is an extract from John’s reflective journal or diary that he maintained during his practicum. Unlike Donna, John abandoned the interviewing protocol after discussing his frustrations with Steve. As John recalled “I felt empowered to pursue my own technique that bore fruit.” In both stories, we foreground the voices of the student teachers. This echoes the call made by Britzman (1989) for hearing the voices of pre-service teachers in an effort to understand the process of teaching and learning from their perspective.

While each story was written in the hand of the particular storyteller, we cannot claim that they were immune from Steve’s influence. Our collaboration ensured a cross-fertilization of ideas, making it impossible to attribute personal ownership to particular ideas. In this sense, Steve also was a storyteller.

As a researcher, Steve has focused on the interpretation of classroom actions from a social constructivist perspective (e.g., Ritchie, 1998, 1999). This epistemological position is shared with Donna (see Ritchie & Rigano, 1996). As Steve and Donna’s research interests widened to take greater cognizance of the social interactions within classrooms, they began to consider important issues like power and agency. In this context, it made sense for them to discuss their evolving ideas with their post-structuralist colleagues. For example, Bronwyn Davies’ helpful reaction to an earlier draft of this article also has influenced their current thinking and the stories in this article. These interactions were not limited to Steve and Donna—the experienced researchers. As they shared Bronwyn’s publications

with John, John developed such a fascination with positioning theory that he actively sought clarification from Bronwyn directly.

As a teacher educator, Steve has consistently attempted to ground his pre-service science education courses in the practical experiences of his students. Not surprisingly, his student teachers have been encouraged to take on the additional role of teacher–researcher (see, for example, Ritchie, 1995). Donna and John’s participation in the current study has reinforced Steve’s belief that student teachers can play a significant role in his own professional development as both a researcher and teacher educator.

3.4. Interview technique

The interviewing protocol used by Donna and John was modeled on Cooper and McIntyre’s (1996) techniques for eliciting experienced teachers’ craft knowledge in the UK. In both studies, the participating teachers were encouraged at first to recall any aspect of each observed lesson that was prominent in their memories. These “surface features” were then explored in order to encourage elaboration, usually achieved by the researchers’ prompting. This style of questioning is illustrated below from an interview Donna conducted with one of the experienced teachers we studied (see Rigano & Ritchie, 1999):

- Donna: What worked well during that lesson?
 Mr. R: They enjoyed the game, more than just listening. And to a lesser extent the listing of the details on the board, getting the information from the people ... I had a couple in there who decided they wanted to run things.
 Donna: What do you do about that?
 Mr. R: I had a running battle with one child today and another one I had to come down heavily on.
 Donna: What does “come down heavily” involve?
 Mr. R: One, try and stop the behavior they’re going on with, two, just by simply stopping the activity ... you can impose time restrictions, so that the time they waste in class they can make up for later.

Donna: Do you try a variety of things or do you have something that works the best?

Mr. R: It depends on the day and what’s happening [further explanation about the conditions when behavior management is necessary]

Donna: You said the game worked better than listening [returning to Mr. Ricardo’s first response]—why was that?

Encouraging student teachers to interview their supervisors in the style above is significant because it has the potential to demystify the teaching process (Batten, Marland & Khamis, 1993). As well, the student teachers might realize that successful teaching does not depend on the application of recipes, but rather a kind of flexible responsiveness to students and other circumstances (Cooper & McIntyre, 1996). If student teachers, then, had a clearer idea about what they should be learning, “their learning could be more self-directed and efficient, their own developing skills would be accessible to self-examination, and their values, goals and theoretical rationales would be open to constructive questioning and use” (Brown, 1995, p. 32).

3.5. The interviewees

While both Donna and John interviewed several experienced teachers we only focus here on each of their major informants or supervising teachers. Donna interviewed Mr. Ricardo (pseudonyms for informants are used) for the study. Mr. Ricardo was the principal of a small primary school in a city in Queensland, Australia. He had been teaching for 22 years and Donna observed him teaching a combined Year 6 and Year 7 class. Mr. Ricardo had a keen interest in teaching science. John’s supervising teacher, Peter, was a science and biology teacher in a large secondary school in the same city as Mr. Ricardo. John’s interviews related mostly to his observations of Peter’s Year 9 science class. Peter had been teaching for 12 years at the time of the study. Both Peter and Mr. Ricardo were experienced supervising teachers.

4. Donna's story

Prior to undertaking this study I had read much of the literature about the wisdom of practice of experienced teachers. Also I was aware that getting teachers to talk about their wisdom would require skilled questioning. As I observed and interviewed Mr. Ricardo over a five-week period the issue of power relations within the student teacher–supervising teacher dyad became a significant one for me. I tell my story from the perspective of a student teacher who was eager to “get inside the head” of an experienced teacher despite the potential barrier of shifting power relations.

When Steve initiated this study with Mr. Ricardo he indicated that two researchers would be observing and questioning him. I was introduced to Mr. Ricardo as a researcher. During the first two interviews with Mr. Ricardo, even though Steve did most of the questioning, I perceived no difference in Mr. Ricardo's attitude between Steve and myself. It was obvious that Mr. Ricardo was able to articulate his wisdom of practice on certain issues and was happy to do so. Being an experienced teacher, knowing that he would remain anonymous, and understanding the researchers' motives helped Mr. Ricardo to relax and share his knowledge:

I am a gabber ... Well with you people, I trust you two so I am building up that trust with you and I don't mind sharing it. Also too that I know ... I am going to be anonymous. But always at the back of my mind I hope that I am saying things that will benefit whatever is going to happen in science in year 6/7.

However, Mr. Ricardo articulated that he experienced some discomfort at the prospect of being questioned about his teaching:

I usually go into a stage of panic about Sunday night, “oh what am I going to do?” ... I guess I haven't got anything to prove, you are just gathering data ... At the back of my mind I am saying did I do my best in that lesson? How could I have made it better? What did the kids go like?

In this situation, as Mr. Ricardo perceived it, he was glad to be used as a “guinea pig” if it was for

a higher purpose, particularly to benefit the students. At the end of this interview we disclosed to Mr. Ricardo that my doctorate was in the field of chemistry and that I was a student teacher. This knowledge seemed to have had a profound effect on Mr. Ricardo's attitude toward me. I perceived that his manner immediately changed from someone who was willing to share his wisdom with me to someone who wanted to deliver packages of information that he regarded as important for a student teacher to have.

I am trying to find a means of gauging through data collecting how kids feel about science, because there is very little ... I happened to find one in an ACER booklet, now that might be interesting ... that I am going to buy ... like a survey and it comes in three kits ... I will share that with you. My teachers got excited about it.

He further went on to mention a strategy that he vaguely recalled as being popular in teacher education programs—advance organizers:

I just wished I had that before we started. Who was it that used to set up those, what do you call them — [advance organizer] — yeah, and he believed in giving kids the information before they went off.

Now instead of sharing his wisdom he was sharing things that he thought might be useful, even though he had not even tried it yet. I felt that he was giving me some “fatherly advice” and, for a fleeting period, I should take on board his suggestions, as might a “dutiful daughter”. To me, there was now an obvious shift in power going on, with Mr. Ricardo relaxing visibly and passing on his learned advice. Mr. Ricardo seemed to immediately separate his theory and practice as soon as he perceived that he was now more of a mentor than collaborator (or even a research subject). However, as a student teacher, this is not the type of information that I value from experienced teachers. I am more interested in getting at the reason they do what they do as they are teaching, their personal practical knowledge, and not in public knowledge that any teacher can access. After reflecting on Mr. Ricardo's change in manner towards me, I realized that my questioning was more important than ever. My questioning

had to dig deeper than the superficial answers Mr. Ricardo was eager to dispense so that I could access the values and beliefs that influenced his teaching.

5. John's story

The process of asking, recording, analyzing, re-asking and reflecting has helped me to understand the value of good supervisors and a good relationship with those supervisors. In addition, it has shown me that teaching experience is not something that I will “get” in a few years, but something that I already have (my personality and confidence) and something that I can develop progressively by asking for and listening to teachers' explicit practical knowledge. I am somewhere along a continuum. Writing this diary has challenged me to ask my supervisors for more than I had previously accepted, and to ask what was of immediate relevance to me. It has forced me to identify and isolate various hitherto unseen aspects of teaching practice and to look at teachers not as teachers, but as individuals who confidently combine their personalities with learned teaching techniques.

My supervising teachers were not able to separate their personalities from their styles of teaching and their classroom responses. For example, when I queried Peter about whether he taught the same now as he did earlier in his career, he responded “You sort of learn to be more yourself in the classroom. It sort of comes with experience that you know what you can do with one class and not with another.”

We continued:

John: “Yeah, but do you think you just learnt a lot of little techniques that are separate from your personality? I mean, can you separate your personality from your classroom practice?”

Peter: “No, not really. You could watch me in a class and watch Nev (other teacher in room) in the same situation and we would do things totally different. Everybody learns their own way of doing things.”

John: “So how am I supposed to learn that sort of stuff?”

Peter: “You just get it with experience.”

After carefully analyzing the patterns of teachers' responses for a week I developed a new approach and began to ask a range of teachers about the importance of personality in their teaching. The reason for this was the word “experience” which kept cropping up in sentences and signaled the end to the discussion. I have come to love and hate this word. The nature of this word first became apparent to me as a second year student doing school experience. A teacher about 15 years my junior, and only two years out of university, told me that I would understand a particular event after I had gained “experience”. I had a strong feeling that this teacher was trying to establish a hierarchy on the grounds of “experience”. This was my introduction to the way “experience” can be used as a trump card to intimidate and exclude student teachers.

I soon became aware that teachers never tell each other “You'll learn that with experience”. This realization has reinforced my view that the “experience” word is student teacher specific and I was curious in a teacher's response to my discovery.

John: “Do teachers tell each other ‘you'll learn that with experience?’”

Peter: “No, in the staff room we talk about classes and what worked and what didn't work and other teachers just try it if they want. If something works well for Nev in his Year 8 class, he'll mention it to me and I'll try it out. We know straight away what is being expressed.”

John: “So it depends more on the level of the student whether or not they can understand it. I mean, if teachers can tell teachers, why can't they tell me, why is it ‘experience?’”

Peter: “Student teachers are in a very artificial situation. They are just touching the edges of teaching. It is like how driving lessons and a driving test help you know about driving but they don't prepare you fully for what goes on out on the roads”.

John: “So tacit knowledge is only tacit to me because I am not at a stage where I can take it on board?”

Peter: “Yeah”.

This made sense to me. In my previous capacity as a cabinet-maker I could talk about the milling qualities of a particular type of timber with another trades-person, but would reply to the queries of an outsider with “you learn that with experience”. This insight has two implications for me as a student teacher. The first is that I have to form a good interactive relationship with school supervisors and effectively communicate my immediate needs. The second is that when I hear teachers in staff rooms say to me “now that you are teaching you can throw all of that university theory out of the door,” I know that they are subconsciously saying that I am not yet experienced enough to apply those theories.

Things stopped being “experience” for me after I had encountered particular events. This was essential for my understanding of teaching. My self-image did not vary during the prac, but my concept of what a teacher is changed dramatically and became diffuse and less definable. What I now identify as teaching started off having a technical nature and as I practiced and internalized aspects of it, it gained more of a personal nature and took on the character of “experience”. That is, I seek concrete and definable teaching techniques and turn them into experience through practice. This means that the better I am at picking teachers’ “experience” apart to extract what I need, the faster I will understand teaching. For me, the “experience” word no longer describes something unknown. Rather I see it as an indicator of the power/knowledge interfaces that lie between myself and the teacher. This particular concept of experience allows me to ask certain questions that help me deconstruct the power interface and access the wisdom that is entangled in it.

6. Discussion

Although Donna and John have told very different stories about their getting of wisdom, they both

have illustrated how a student teacher can be powerful yet powerless. In other words, these stories disrupt the concept of power as a commodity. For Donna-the-researcher, she was powerful when questioning Mr. Ricardo about his practice (the research subject). But Mr. Ricardo was not a victim or entirely powerless here because he also was powerful by choosing to disclose his wisdom to the researchers. Indeed, when he became aware of Donna’s student teacher status, he appeared to assume an even more powerful relationship with Donna—giving her his “fatherly advice” on indirectly related topics. A sense of powerlessness enveloped Donna momentarily until, once again, she could resume her questioning protocol. Interestingly, while Donna read Mr. Ricardo’s discourse (after Donna’s student teacher disclosure) as paternalism, the specialized language he used (i.e., reference to data collection and later to advance organizers) suggests that this might have been a dual response to Donna-the-researcher and Donna-the-student. In other words, Mr. Ricardo positioned himself as a more experienced teacher at the same time as talking in a manner that might be appreciated by or even expected from a researcher like Donna (interactive positioning). In this way, the teacher responded to the researcher in a manner that could have been seen by him as both appropriate and desired by the researcher. At the same time, when he became aware of Donna’s student teacher status, Mr. Ricardo might have meant to provide information that he perceived to be useful for a student teacher. As Davies and Harré (1999) explained:

One speaker can position others by adopting a storyline which incorporates a particular interpretation of cultural stereotypes to which they are “invited” to conform, indeed are required to conform if they are to continue to converse with the first speaker in such a way as to contribute to that person’s storyline. (p. 40)

This is particularly likely when a researcher interviews an informant as in the case of Donna and Mr. Ricardo. van Langenhove and Harré (1999) noted that in order to assess the relation between the scientific positioning of a researcher during an interview and how people position themselves in

other situations, “not only the speech-acts (e.g., interview questions) but also the positions and storylines have to be taken into account” (p. 29). Nevertheless, the power relations between Donna and Mr. Ricardo, from Donna’s first reading, shifted from researcher–research subject to mentor–student teacher and back again. These shifts were not planned nor systematic, but rather responsive to the other’s actions where both exercised changing levels of agency. This is a strong feature of post-structuralist theory. As Davies (1996) asserted “In post-structuralist theory, the inevitability to belong to one or the other category of any binary pair, the inevitability of being powerful or powerless, depending on which category you belong to, is called into question” (p. 42).

John too accepted greater responsibility for his professional learning (i.e., he acted powerfully) by directing questions to his supervising teachers about their practice. But John felt that, at the same time, he was powerless in breaking through the “experience” barrier that teachers frequently appeared to put up during these conversations. The “experience” word became a conversation stopper because John read its use to be a powerful positioning of the teacher, ascendant to the student teacher or to the one-who-could-not-know or even the one-who-has-no-right to ask further. This was particularly so in the case of the relatively inexperienced teacher who John believed had attempted to establish a power hierarchy on the basis of having more “experience”. Alternatively, these teachers might have been powerless at these moments in that they did not have access to the discourse that would allow them to elaborate their knowledge in the depth that John was seeking. But through perseverance with his evolving questioning style, John rejected the interactive positioning of one-who-could-not-know embedded in his reading of “experience” and disrupted what he perceived to be the dominant discourse. He identified the discursive practices through which such hierarchies and patterns of privilege are spoken into existence and sought alternative ways of constituting identity (cf. Davies, 1996). Emancipatory practices like those described by John, “erode the hegemonic discourses to deny the right of individuals and groups to speak differently, to speak and write against the

grain of dominant power-knowledge regimes” (Davies, 1996, p. 8).

Another emancipatory strategy employed by John during periods of reflection (i.e., deliberative wisdom) was his imagined conversations with his lecturer, Steve. John explained:

There is another dimension to my story, and that is the conversations that I am having with my lecturer in my head. These hypothetical discussions are based on many real discussions I have had with the lecturer and have the effect of giving some sort of external check on the viability of my reflections, what I have asked the teachers, and what I will ask them. My thoughts attain greater significance if I subject them to the hypothetical feedback of the lecturer. It also helps to bridge the theory–practice gap I have felt previously during school experience.

So, in the absence of the lecturer, John set up in his mind a lecturer–supervising teacher–student teacher triad without established hierarchies. Based on his real conversations with his lecturer before and during his practicum, John was able to counterbalance the dominant discourse between himself and his supervising teacher. This not only provided him with support for his planned moves, but also allowed him to bring together aspects of different discourses in such a way that disrupted the theory–practice dualism. John explained the process by which he mentally played out possible actions as follows:

I begin by visualizing situations in which I am talking to a significant person about an issue relevant to me. Then I ‘look’ at the imaginary discourse and subject it to transcript analysis placing particular emphasis on the role I played and on the way I positioned the other participant. It doesn’t matter if I visualized the participant (e.g., lecturer or supervisor) realistically or not; what matters is how and why I have positioned myself in relation to them and them in relation to me. By doing this ‘mind-script analysis’ I am able to see repetitive patterns of thought and if and how I position myself as either dominant or subservient in real life situations. By

being aware of my mental discourses I can then attempt to redefine and reposition myself in actual situations.

Referring to Dewey and his contemporaries, Prawat (1998) argued that all dualisms were problematic for two major reasons. First, from an ontological perspective, Prawat argued that dualisms wrongly emphasized the origins of knowledge over its consequences. Instead of focussing on the mental representation aspects of knowledge, the true test of an idea, he claimed, rested “in its ability to open up new aspects of the world, in a cognitive-perceptual sense, for the inquirer” (Prawat, 1998, p. 201). The second problem with dualisms was that they tend to be inherently antagonistic in that one party is elevated over the other. As Prawat observed, this tendency has led to many unsatisfactory either-or educational debates giving rise to several ineffective fads in public education. For John to have disrupted the theory–practice dualism deliberately so early in his career, opens up exciting possibilities for his future professional development.

John’s addendum above also demonstrates even more clearly the potential emancipatory benefits for student teachers to seek their supervisors’ wisdom through questioning. As Davies (1996) noted “emancipatory strategies are premised on the possibility, even desirability, of seeing from more than one point of view” (p. 8).

Apart from illustrating the shifting power relations between student teachers and their supervising teachers, Donna and John’s stories have helped us understand better the nature of wisdom and how student teachers can become wiser. Both were not satisfied with superficial responses from their supervisors. Rather than hearing about impersonal trends or issues, Donna desperately wanted to uncover the *raison d’être* for Mr. Ricardo’s classroom actions. In terms of Feldman’s (1997) classification of teachers’ wisdom, Donna wanted to identify Mr. Ricardo’s wisdom of practice and deliberative wisdom. Like Donna, John also was interested in the more technical wisdom of practice and his supervisor’s deliberative wisdom. He did so by “picking at” that “experience” word through his evolving questioning protocol. There was an additional feature

to John’s story. John had the opportunity to do more than ask questions—he also could try out for himself various ideas in the classroom. Through the combination of questioning, reflecting, planning, teaching and reflecting, John developed his concept of teaching. The wisdom of practice expressed by his supervisors through their interviews was internalized as John practiced these (and other) ideas in the classroom. These ideas took on a more personal nature, through his being-as-a-teacher, and he began to make sense of the “experience” word. As Feldman argued “understanding of one’s own being can never be separated from the individual and can never be fully accessed because it is constituted by our being in the world” (p. 768). John’s realization of what it started to mean being a teacher corresponded to Feldman’s (1997) concept of wisdom-in-practice. Donna was not able to develop this wisdom because she did not undertake her practicum. Similarly, student teachers and non-teachers cannot access teachers’ wisdom-in-practice by reading teachers’ stories, vignettes, narratives or discussing models of effective teaching (e.g., Cooper & McIntyre, 1996). The missing dimension will always be wisdom-in-practice. It appears that all three types of wisdom need to be developed to understand fully the complexities of teaching. In essence, we support Feldman’s (1997) claim that “good practice entails all three varieties of wisdom, and that both teacher educators and researchers of teachers and teaching need to pay attention to all three” (p. 770).

Before entering their respective teacher education programs, both Donna and John had established themselves in alternative careers. In teaching, it has been argued that a person’s self-image is more important than is the case in occupations where the person can more easily be separated from the craft (Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1994). Accordingly, a well-developed individual identity and a sense of connectedness to others beyond the self, appears to be an important personal requisite for teachers. Because Donna and John were both mature age students, possibly with well developing self-identities, one wonders whether the interviewing and reflective techniques employed by them would be as helpful to younger student teachers. But student teachers come from a wide range of

backgrounds and personal histories. The multiple influences on personal history coalesce to create a set of frames and predispositions which may even contradict one another (Graham, 1997). This means it is conceivable that mature aged students, presumably with more colorful personal histories than their younger peers, might even experience greater difficulty with the interviewing and reflecting techniques. Clearly, additional stories from a wider range of student teachers are needed before one can better assess the viability of this approach.

We have demonstrated that for both Donna and John, the process of interviewing experienced teachers about their practice helped them to make better sense of teaching. Although Donna found the protocol useful, John became frustrated with his application of this technique. Even though Donna was supported directly by a teacher educator through a cognitive apprenticeship, John set up a similar but virtual relationship in his mind with his lecturer during his practicum. The latter case we suspect could not be expected of other student teachers. In fact, based on the experience of recent innovative practicum programs (e.g., Erickson, Mayer-Smith, Rodriguez, Chin & Mitchell, 1994; Graham, 1997), it appears that it is important to establish supportive learning communities between university-based teacher educators, supervising teachers and student teachers where both the theory–practice and powerful–powerless dualities are problematized. Conversations between community members have the potential to assist “pre-service teachers to recognize why teaching is far more than a collection of useful strategies and why implementation cannot follow recipes or routines” (Erickson et al., 1994, p. 595). Erickson et al. submit that such discourse “helps to locate the ‘theoretical knowledge’ presented in university coursework in a practical context and illustrates how teachers’ personal theories become situated in the everyday problems of teaching” (p. 595). Furthermore, learning communities in which members are fully prepared for reflexive positioning of student teachers as people-who-need-to-know need to be established and supported if powerful acts like John’s persistent questioning are to be accepted by teaching staff as a legitimate position.

7. Conclusions

The technique of interviewing experienced teachers about their practice empowered Donna and John in their relationships with teachers. No longer were they passive recipients of technical knowledge or pieces of “fatherly advice”. Instead, they were able to direct their own learning by partially accessing the wisdom of these teachers. Based on their experience, it is possible to advise other student teachers about the possible benefits and barriers to such practices. As well, teacher educators might be able to alert supervising teachers to the possible barriers that might exist in such relationships. By chipping away at perceived hierarchical relationships together, we might enhance the professional development of student and beginning teachers.

Through Donna and John’s stories we have demonstrated that it is possible for student teachers to disrupt the dominant school-based discourses which might reinforce the unhelpful practice–theory duality. By developing questioning strategies (see Rigano & Ritchie, 1999), student teachers can begin to access more experienced teachers’ wisdom of practice and deliberative wisdom. However, it is only possible to develop wisdom-in-practice while being in the world of teaching. By using techniques that help to develop all three varieties of wisdom, student teachers can enhance their getting of wisdom.

Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.
(Proverbs 4:5)

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