

Paper to be presented at the annual conference of the Australian Association for Research in  
Education  
Queensland University of Technology, Kelvin Grove, Brisbane  
30 November – 4 December 2008

**“If only I could just teach”: Early career teachers, their colleagues, and the operation of power**

Dr Ann McCormack & Professor Jennifer Gore  
University of Newcastle, Australia

**ABSTRACT**

The aim of this study was to examine aspects of teacher socialisation that occur in schools, but outside the classroom, and their effects on early career teachers' induction experiences, professional growth and retention. Institutional aspects of socialisation such as organisational, school and community culture and induction practices as well as personal and social-professional factors were investigated and the impact of power relations in these situations analysed.

The study involved a sample of 27 teachers who were in their first three years of teaching and working in a range of school contexts in the state of New South Wales, Australia. The study utilised questionnaires and interviews to gather data which were coded and analysed for common themes in terms of the project's main aim and research questions. Foucault's techniques of power, as adapted by Gore (1995), were used as a framework to analyse the micro-level functioning of power relations in the socialisation and professional growth of these early career teachers through categorising as well as contextualising the interview data.

The results from this study highlighted the underlying role that power plays in the induction of early career teachers. The need to conform to the school culture in terms of pedagogy and social-professional relationships (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002), presented major challenges to these teachers as they sought to achieve self confidence, respect, and recognition whilst negotiating micro-level power relations.

**BACKGROUND**

Attracting people to teaching and employing them in schools does not ensure successful careers in teaching. The 'revolving door' of early career teacher attrition (Ingersoll, 2001) is a crucial matter that is gaining increasing attention around the world not only among educators but also among politicians and other concerned citizens who recognise the quality of educational provision as critical in the well-being of nations. Retaining early career teachers and supporting their development have risen dramatically on national educational agendas (Schuck, Brady & Griffin, 2005; Wang, Odell & Schwille, 2008; Williams, Prestage & Bedford, 2001)

Research has shown that regardless of initial teacher education the first years of employment are an important segment of a teacher's career, having long term implications for teacher effectiveness, job satisfaction and career length. As early career teachers make the transition from university into the workforce they encounter many new challenges and responsibilities and must find a professional place within the culture of the school (Herbert & Worthy, 2001; Williams, Prestage & Bedford, 2001). They must interpret and interact with the context in which they find themselves and in the process undertake complex behavioural and conceptual professional learning (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). Much of the previous research on early career teacher socialisation and development has focused on the "ecology of the classroom," highlighting issues such as failure in behaviour management, excessive responsibilities, low level of resources, time constraints, teaching in unfamiliar specialisations or grades and high teacher-student ratios as common factors impacting on teachers in their early years (Gitomer, 1999; Lohr, 1999; McCormack & Thomas, 2003; Ramsey, 2000; Williams, 2002; Zeichner & Gore, 1990). Other studies have focused on aspects such as teacher background,

issues of social inequality and state policies as having major socialisation of novices teachers (Atchinstein, Ogawa & Speiglmann, 2004). An emerging line of important research has addressed the role of direct pedagogical support in improving classroom practice, as critical in retaining early career teachers who deliver high quality teaching and improved learning outcomes (Gore, Williams & Ladwig, 2006; Gray & Smith, 2005; Williams, 2002; Williams, Gore & Cooper, 2004). Our analysis takes a complementary look at factors that operate outside the classroom in order to help us understand how early career teachers are socialised into their schools. These factors are particularly salient in contexts where early career teachers receive little direct pedagogical support. That is, in the absence of powerful forces that mould their *teaching* (Gore, Williams & Ladwig, 2006), it may be the forces that mould them as *teachers* that currently have the greatest influence on shaping the next generation of teachers.

Historically, socialisation has been defined as the process by which individuals acquire the values, interests, knowledge, skills and culture of a group (Merton, Reader & Kendall, 1957). Previous research into teacher socialisation has identified both individuals and institutions as shaping socialisation patterns with factors such as teachers' backgrounds, local contexts, and state policy environments having important and lasting impact on new teachers (Zeichner & Gore, 1990). Pierce (2007) used the term "liminality" which is derived from the latin *limen* meaning "threshold", to explain how the right of passage known as beginning teaching often finds teachers caught between the intensity of performing in the classroom and the "muted compliance tacitly expected of newcomers among other adults in the new school context" (p.32). Pierce (2007) explains that during this liminality stage, early career teachers move from their university programs and student teaching into a profession which they have idealised and experienced only in partial ways, and that professional teaching requires them to begin anew in the culture of a new school. Understanding as much as possible about the "factors that collide and converge during liminality in teaching" (Pierce, 2007, p.32) will help in assisting the plight of early career teachers.

What happens inside the context of school organisations can strongly influence both the personal and professional dimensions of early career teaching (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). Teaching is complex and unique and consequently schools are difficult to organise as workplaces with each developing their own identity and culture (Williams, Prestage & Bedford, 2001). Within the school context culture embraces aspects of professional policy and practice as well as personal interactions and protocols, and social-professional activities among staff (Schuck, Brady & Griffin, 2005). Researchers have highlighted the important need for collegiality with veteran teachers for early career teachers to assist them in understanding the expectations within a school and subsequently having their contributions recognised and acknowledged (Beck & Kosnick, 2007). It also helps new teachers to feel supported which will ultimately lead to a greater sense of autonomy (Woods & Weasmer, 2004). Feiman-Nemser (2003) emphasises the importance of supporting and surrounding early career teachers with a professional culture that focuses on constructive learning rather than just a period of coping, survival and adjustment. She states that "this depends largely on the working conditions and culture of teaching that new teachers encounter" (p.57).

For many early career teachers, however, this culture can be isolating and discouraging (Britzman, 2003; Ingersoll, 2003; Williams, Prestage & Bedford, 2001). Faced with feelings of inadequacy and struggling to find a level of confidence in their classrooms, many early career teachers face further alienation in the school organisation which can serve to drive them away from teaching (Schuck, Brady & Griffin, 2005; Woods & Weasmer, 2004). Sabar (2004) uses the analogy of migrants when describing the process early career teachers go through in adapting to school culture. Needing supporting social networks, experiencing feelings of marginality, and coping with differences between expectation and reality are issues common to both groups. The culture of a school can help address these issues or exacerbate them (Schuck, Brady & Griffin, 2005). Disciplinary power can also be used in a more subtle ways to ensure that early career teachers are inducted into the culture of a school and system. Socialisation into this culture then becomes an interpretative and interactive process between the teachers and the new context of school as an organisation (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002).

Although not always intentional, many schools do not help new teachers to feel established in their professional identities outside their classrooms (Pierce, 2007). Having a professional identity means teachers are respected and recognised by their students, peers and community for their knowledge, pedagogy competency and contribution to their school and education. Instead early career teachers

are often subjected to a range of practices and relationships imbued with techniques of power that can affect their actions, beliefs and sense of themselves. Developing a socially recognised identity as a 'proper' teacher constitutes a highly valued working condition for any beginning teacher, so criticism and confusion caused by school micro-politics can increase feelings of vulnerability and lower self esteem considerably (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). Many early career teachers are torn between their pedagogical beliefs and knowledge developed during their preservice education and the pressure to conform to the culture and practices of their colleagues and school. This pressure and the micro-political reality of schools deserve explicit attention (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002) in helping to understand the difficulties faced by novice teachers and ways to improve their experiences.

Adopting a theoretical lens provided by Michel Foucault's (1983) concept of power relations, as adapted by Gore (1995), is used in this study to analyse how techniques of power are exercised in schools in the process of inducting early career teachers into the prevailing culture. Gore (1995), drawing on Foucault's conception of power relations, formulated eight distinguishable (though often simultaneous and interrelated) practices that enact power relations in pedagogical settings. These recognisable practices (defined below) are surveillance, normalisation, exclusion, classification, distribution, individualisation, totalisation and regulation. Whilst every school and teaching appointment is different and the role of context cannot be generalised or overlooked, previous research has consistently identified common classroom factors impacting on the socialisation of early career teachers such as .... Student behaviour, curriculum support, teaching materials and infrastructure and structural time facilities (Kelchtermans, 2002). The more neglected area of non classroom factors, enacted through power relations, which impact on teacher induction are the focus of this analysis. Based on these parameters our study sought to investigate the following research question:

In what ways does the exercise of power by, and in relation to, their colleagues affect early career teachers' socialisation?

## **METHOD**

The work on which we draw for this paper involved a sample of 27 teachers who were in their first three years of teaching and working in a range of school contexts in the state of New South Wales (NSW), Australia. Participants were all recent graduates of a teacher education program at a large regional university who had gained permanent employment in NSW Department of Education & Training government schools. The group involved 10 male and 17 female teachers with an average age of 26 years. They were teaching in schools ranging in size from 130 students to 1,200 students in both city and rural settings.

The study involved a mixed mode design with both quantitative and qualitative data collection procedures utilising questionnaires and interviews respectively. In this particular analysis we draw only on the interview data, to convey some of richness of these teachers' experiences. Two hour interviews were conducted at a time and location chosen by the early career teacher and confidentiality was ensured by the use of a pseudonym when reporting the data. The participants were given the interview questions in advance to give them time to consider their responses. The interview transcripts were returned to the participant prior to analysis for verification and the opportunity to delete any information supplied to the researcher which the participant did not want disclosed.

The data from the interview transcripts were analysed using a thematic approach involving comparative analysis. This analysis was undertaken using coding and classifying as a means of interrogating the data as well as using coding and retrieval (Gough & Scott, 2000). The study sought to understand the meanings that the participants ascribed to their experiences and also coded their responses using Foucault's techniques of power as adapted by Gore (1995). This coding was used as a framework to analyse the micro-level functioning of power relations in the induction and socialisation of these teachers. The codes were both descriptive (summarising the main issues addressed) and interpretive (codes reflecting the framework). The participant responses will be quoted using a name; primary (P) or secondary (S) level of teaching; and city (C), or rural (R) location. These classifications will be used to assist in the categorising and contextualising of the data (Maxwell & Miller, 1993).

## RESULTS

The participants in this study all reported an early sense of confidence and enthusiasm for teaching following their initial four year teacher education program. Their undergraduate course provided a strong foundation in pedagogical methods as well as discipline studies and all had completed a ten week internship in one school which involved undertaking responsibility for a class or classes and had worked with a colleague teacher (or teachers) teaching the equivalent of two thirds of a full teaching load. Most were able to articulate individual philosophies of teaching and had come into teaching with a common desire to make a contribution and difference to the lives of their students. Two participants explained their early approaches to teaching:

I really did not make the most of my time as a student at school and I often found it frustrating as a lot of the teachers seemed to lack interest in what they were teaching, lessons seemed routine and boring. I really wanted to be different, I wanted to do something different, include a lot of hands on type activities, technology and really get the kids involved and interested in science. (Peter, S, R).

And;

I could not wait to teach, I felt I could take on anything and I was ready! My grades were good at uni and my pracs had been enjoyable and rewarding.... I was finally going to do something useful with my life and have an impact on the future generation. (Sarah, P, C)

For many participants, as their time in teaching progressed and they undertook the tasks of a full time teacher, the initial enthusiasm was worn away by the institutional realities of schools as workplaces. Most of these early career teachers had idealised the profession they were entering and found the resulting demands, both personal and professional, challenging. This approach is evident in the following teacher comment:

I had always wanted to be a teacher and thought it was one of the best jobs I could have, teaching kids physical education which was my love. However, I have found it very tough trying to manage the classes and all of the admin type work . I feel pretty stressed at times and know this affects my teaching and the way I interact with the kids. I just want to relax in my teaching but feel pressured to perform. (David, S, C)

Although the school contexts and induction experiences of the participants were different, it became clear, when analysing the data, that there were some commonalities in their responses and concerns relating to the situations they encountered. In what follows, we have analysed their responses in terms of the eight techniques of power in an attempt to understand more fully the impact of power relations on the socialisation of this group of early career teachers.

## TECHNIQUES OF POWER

### ***Surveillance***

Surveillance involves actions such as supervising, closely observing , watching or threatening to watch a person or activity (Gore, 1995) Although most of the early career teachers had experienced supervision in their initial teacher education many thought that they would be allowed to develop their teaching with minimal observation or watching from colleagues. Many felt vulnerable by the increased visibility of their teaching and although they were relatively isolated in their classrooms, they often felt the scrutiny of parents, principal and peers. They were highly aware that as new mostly younger teachers, their actions were continually perceived, interpreted and judged by others. Susie explains her concerns in this interview comment:

I often feel really unsure ... and uncomfortable with the principal, colleagues and parents breathing down my neck. As a new teacher I am working really hard to do my job, but feel it is not enough. As I was one of the lucky ones to get a permanent job....

now it's like they are watching me, testing me and waiting for me to slip up somewhere. Sometimes I just want to be invisible and do my own thing! (Susie, S, R)

Steven also commented on how this surveillance was being used to judge his professional qualities and challenge his professional autonomy:

I feel pressure to have a quiet, hardworking classroom although the way I like my class to work is to try to encourage students to engage in conversation and I also like to do role plays. However, I know from the looks and comments I get from my colleagues sometimes that they think I am not coping. It has been suggested that I do some team teaching with the other Year 5 teacher. I think this is so they can check me out more closely. (Steven, P, R)

However, some level of surveillance or supervision was also expected by these teachers and if not received it was seen by some as a lack of interest in the early career teacher. In this recognition, we see both the productive and the repressive effects of power. Surveillance may indeed be inherent to learning and teaching (Gore, 1995) such that a teacher who is not observed can feel unsupported, with negative effects on self confidence. Peta explains her position:

Oh, I felt really abandoned! It was like you've got this job, so just get on with it. I thought there would be some type of observation and feedback to give me an idea as to how I was travelling. Anyway in my first year I think the deputy came into my room once and then I got my Teaching Certificate. Since then there has been very little monitoring. I did not know whether to take the lack of interest or supervision as a vote of confidence or a snub. (Peta, P, C)

Here, the lack of surveillance of classroom teaching not only did not support the development of Peta's teaching but it can be seen to have shaped, through its absence, a less secure sense of her self as teacher than might have been possible.

### **Normalisation**

Foucault (1977) as reported by Gore (1995), "highlighted the importance of 'normalising judgement' or normalising as a functioning of modern disciplinary function" (p.171). Gore (1995) defined normalisation as invoking, requiring, setting or conforming to a standard when defining what is seen as normal. This standard is seen as a minimal threshold one must achieve or optimum towards which one must move. The teachers in this study reported many examples of the pressure they received in their early days of teaching to conform to a standard or set of teaching principles that played out in their schools. Often these principles were part of an underlying culture which prevailed with the veteran teachers as the gatekeepers. If new teachers challenged these norms it sometimes led to the new teacher being ostracised or excluded. The enactment of these norms was encapsulated in the adage, often quoted by the early career teachers, "this is how it is always done here". Many teachers in our study found that this attitude challenged their strongly held beliefs and they felt immense pressure to conform to their school norms particularly in terms of their pedagogy and behaviour. Shane explains how he was confronted by such normalising processes:

I was very keen to introduce the use of cooperative learning and a rich task for my Year Six class but when I brought up the idea at a meeting of the other Year Six teachers I was promptly told "we do not that here, we stick to the basics at this school, ...none of those new ideas thank you, .....we know what works in this school". I tried to defend my ideas but was out voted and just had to comply with what they always did. I found this rather boring, frustrating and limiting for both my students and myself. (Shane, P, R)

Similarly, Peter explained:

As a young teacher I was keen to get to know the students and .... You know, their interests. I thought this would help me to connect with them and in my teaching. But I was quickly told in no uncertain terms to keep my distance from both the parents and students. It is like it is us against them in this school. Personally I think they felt threatened to begin with that I was able to chat to the students so easily. (Peter, S, C)

This example also demonstrates how exercises of power by school colleagues to get early career teachers to conform to standard school practices and relationships had a constraining effect. In such instances the potentially negative effects on the professional development of early career teachers as well as on the learning opportunities for their students become readily apparent.

### **Exclusion**

Gore (1995) explained "exclusion as a technique for tracing the limits that will define difference defining boundaries and setting zones" (p.173). This technique can be seen as the opposite of normalisation although, as illustrated above, they often operate together or as a result of a norm being imposed. That is, as the previous quote from Peter's interview demonstrated, he was excluded from forming the type of relationships with his students that he perceived as being important to meeting their needs. This boundary or zone-setting was enacted by his peers who were imposing their school cultural norms on his behaviour. What is accepted as normal in a given context is often determined subsequent to the identification of particular behaviours as pathological, or unacceptable. Indeed, the norm is often only named, only *needs* to be named, if an individual does something that does not conform.

Teachers in this study also faced exclusion from a social-professional perspective where issues related to the quality of interpersonal relations within the school impacted on their socialisation. Almost every teacher in the study strongly emphasised the importance of good interpersonal relationships with their colleagues. These relationships helped them to feel comfortable in their new workplaces and more importantly assisted them to understand the dominant school and community culture and values. These relationships also provide opportunities to share concerns and discuss pedagogical issues, an important working condition for early career teachers. Many reported early difficulties and feelings of exclusion and isolation, and silently enduring negativity from peers and community. Shane explains his difficulties in a smaller rural school that had an atmosphere of mistrust and conflict amongst the teachers:

This is a bit of a closed school community.....you know they don't accept strangers easily and I have to tread lightly at times. A lot of the older staff have lived in the community for a long time, I travel in and they are a bit suspicious of us 'blow-ins' and think we are going to change things... If you get some of the older staff offside it can really make for a hard time in the staffroom and the pub after school on Fridays when we socialise. (David, S, R)

In this statement we see how exclusion operates to limit or temper the behaviours of early career teachers. Previous research has drawn attention to the significance of collaboration and collegiality at school and individual teacher level in contributing to enhancement of practice (Hargreaves, 1994; Williams, Prestage & Bedwall, 2002)

### **Classification**

Another common technique of power identified by Foucault (1977) is the differentiating of groups or individuals from one another and classifying them. This has the potential to be repressive for early career teachers when they are classified as a group, a class of teachers, and defined by various notions of deficiency or inadequacy. Such classification during their induction can have the effect of reducing self confidence as early career teachers (often rightly) sense a lack of respect or acknowledgement of their efforts and contribution. Kate provides an example of this as she explains her struggle for recognition in her school during her induction and the expectations placed on her:

I am sick of being the work horse and not getting any thanks for it! I sometimes feel that because *I am the beginning teacher* that I get all of the jobs nobody else wants.... just to test me. No one wanted to be sports organiser so it came to me as I was the 'young one and had plenty of time' to do it! So far nobody has actually said I am doing a good job, which can be a bit disheartening at times. (Kate, S, C)

James found being constantly classified as an early career teacher both frustrating and professionally stifling as he struggled to use his knowledge and ideas to improve the learning outcomes for his students. He explained:

To be honest with you, I do not agree with many of the assessment ideas used in our Year 10 History programs and feel they really do not address the syllabus outcomes as well as they could... but whenever I have tried to put in my bit, I am basically told that as a *beginner* I do not have the experience to make such judgements. I feel pigeon holed and put back in my place. I may not be right but feel I deserve to be given a chance to voice my ideas. (James, S, C)

In both of these cases, power was being exerted over the new teachers through classifying them and then assigning roles or expectations based on the expected norms for that classification within the organisational structure and culture of the school. It can be seen how this classification, enacted by colleagues, resulted in these teachers questioning their identity and status, and how it is likely to impact negatively on their professional self esteem and job satisfaction.

### ***Distribution***

Past research has confirmed that most early career teachers who gain permanent employment in NSW schools usually do so in hard to staff schools in the more remote or disadvantaged areas and are often given the more difficult classes to teach (McCormack, Gore, & Thomas, 2006; McCormack & Thomas, 2005; McCormack, & Thomas, 2003; Williams, 2002). This has the effect of placing the teachers in very challenging environments to begin their careers, in many cases, without much support in terms of release time, professional development or experienced mentors. The contextual factors associated with these school communities are sometimes overwhelming for new teachers as they struggle to find their place in the classroom, school and community.

Foucault identified distribution of bodies in space as contributing to the functioning of disciplinary power. We can see this in the widespread treatment of early career teachers who should be nurtured, assisted and thoughtfully inducted into the profession but are instead treated to a 'sink or swim' approach often in harsh conditions.

Kristin explained her experiences:

Yeah it was really tough at first ... This town is so small and the school has had many changes of teachers due, I think, to the isolation and social problems in the community. For me it has just been survival for the past two years... I really felt thrown into it all and don't feel like I have become a better teacher, but I am still here... I am not sure for how long, as I often feel like I can't do this forever! (Kristin, S, R)

### ***Individualisation***

Teaching can be a very individual and isolating job as many teachers spend large amounts of time in their classrooms with very little feedback from peers. This is particularly pertinent for primary teachers who have the one class and limited release time. It can have the effect of causing feelings of isolation and a longing for conversations with other teachers in the schools, not only for social reasons but as a form of professional validation. A system of mentors for individual teachers can help alleviate isolation by providing support and assisting in developing teaching style, skills and strengths (McCormack & Thomas, 2003; Williams, 2002). Gore (1995) identified the technique of individualisation as giving individual character to oneself or another as a common power technique in pedagogical contexts. Both the repressive and productive effects of individualisation are evident in the following passages.

Sarah was teaching in a large city primary school and explains her experiences with a mentor:

She was appointed to assist me in my induction and we developed a great relationship that has continued until this day. \_\_\_\_\_ is a great teacher and provided a sounding board for me in all ways. The main thing she did was not judge me and we had great communication.... This allowed me to do things my way..... If I had a problem we could always discuss possible solutions rather than her tell me what I should do. (Sarah P, C)

On the other hand, some of the early career teachers complained of having personal and school values and practices imposed on them by their mentors, therefore impacting on their sense of themselves and their personal autonomy. Zac explains:

Her intentions were good but she just would not let me explain why I had chosen to use a particular strategy, she did not like group work because of the noise level so thought I should not use it. But it is my class and that really annoyed me... I really did not find her supervision helpful. (Zac, S, R)

### **Totalisation**

The early career teachers in this study often mentioned in the interviews the pressure they felt to conform to the specific groups of the school, faculty, grade level or the staffroom, each with their own assigned expectations. Feeling vulnerable they aligned themselves with groups to be accepted and part of the school culture. Gore (1995) defined 'totalisation' as "giving collective character, constructing whole groups" (p.179). Totalisation, through becoming part of a group, can have a positive effect by providing support, communication avenues, recognition, and acceptance. Kristin found strength, support and a sense of community within her faculty group:

The English faculty are great ...they are a very supportive group both socially and professionally. It is great to have a group of people who both respect me and are prepared to discuss and share ideas and suggestions, both personal and professional, I have been lucky in that way. (Kristin, S, R)

On the other hand, totalisation can serve to disenchant, as some groups work against stability and harmony in a school, particularly if governed by gossip and unresolved grievances. Peter relates the situation at his school:

The staffroom where my faculty sit is full of tension which makes life pretty unpleasant ... There are unresolved issues between the head teacher and two other staff and two camps have developed within the group. I just tend to go to the common room at lunchtime where some of us play table tennis and talk about the footy. Yeah, it's the way I cope as I don't want to get too involved in that sort of petty stuff in the staffroom. (Peter, S, R)

Here, Peter's totalised view of his faculty as an entire group of colleagues with whom it was difficult to associate may well have limited opportunities for his professional growth through productive connection with his most immediate colleagues, those in his own discipline.

### **Regulation**

Gore (1995) defined regulation as "controlling by rule, subject to restrictions, invoking a rule, including sanction, reward, punishment" (p.180). Teaching in NSW schools has its own set of rules and regulations in the form of a teaching Code of Conduct (insert ref) which regulates teacher professional behaviour and more recently the NSW Institute of Teachers Professional Teaching Standards (ref) which are required for accreditation. Furthermore, most schools will have teacher expectations or rules which are bound up within the particular culture of the school. These can be as simple as designated car parking spots and use of school equipment through to a requirement for lesson registration and submission of marks and reports. Sometimes these rules challenge the beliefs and practices of early career teachers who may not feel empowered to question them. Ali explains her situation:

I find the discipline system here really inconsistent and frustrating...Oh, there is this level system and merit cards but my head teacher chatted me about giving them out too much as the kids think I'm too nice and the others don't give them! I believe in rewarding kids for their efforts and not focusing on punishment all of the time. (Ali, S, C)

Many of the rules invoked in schools, as they relate to early career teachers, are for the purposes of accountability and monitoring. As newcomers to the schools they are caught between the intense creativity needed to constantly adjust to and develop ways of engaging with students in the classroom and the restraining compliance expected of newcomers in a school context. This becomes particularly evident from Shane's description of his relationship with his supervisor:

I felt that rather than helping me \_\_\_\_ is continually assessing and reporting on me. This stresses me out..... I feel I have to concentrate on doing the things the Induction



Program the school has set up. All I want to do is to be able to get on with my teaching rather than feeling like I am an extra worry or burden on him. (Shane, S, R)

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The transition from initial teacher education into the workforce is widely understood and documented as one fraught with apprehension and challenges. For early career teachers themselves, it is often questions of how they are going to manage their classes and how successful they are going to be in their classrooms that are reported as most pressing and most worrying concerns. (AEU, 2007; McCormack & Thomas, 2003) The data we have analysed above, while never intended to compare the relative pressures of classroom and what we have called “non-classroom” matters, provide clear indication that negotiating the classroom and curriculum in addition to developing relationships with their students is only one set of challenges facing early career teachers. We argue however, that the Foucauldian analysis of techniques of power that we have undertaken here enables us to identify the complexity of early career teachers’ relationships with their colleagues and the professional culture operating in a school. For instance, we have seen that some early career teachers experience as oppressive the constant sense of being watched, particularly when they are not given any substantial feedback, while others reported a degree of anxiety about not being watched and hence being unsure of themselves as developing teachers. Underpinning both of these concerns with surveillance is a general uncertainty.

Indeed, when the passages above are analysed as a group, we can see early career teachers who report feeling:

- Unsure of themselves, because of a lack of collegial feedback
- Constrained in their actions, through the normalising invocation “we do it this way here”,
- Unwelcome, in some contexts
- Deficient, in the simple designation “beginner,” associated with different treatment (either good or bad)
- Impotent, in even attempting some of the things they might like to try
- Undervalued, in not being listened to
- Surviving, rather than thriving in their first years as practising teachers
- Lonely, when their colleagues are not welcoming or supportive.

We have counter examples, like Sarah and Kristin, who report being nurtured and valued, but such accounts were not prevalent among our 27 participants. The intensity of these largely negative perceptions of themselves as teachers, borne of their relationships with colleagues, sheds light on the departure from teaching of some early career teachers. The more positive examples we have in these data also shed light on ways in which and contexts in which power could be exercised differently. As Francois Ewald (1992), Director of the Foucault Centre in Paris reminds us, “we have a responsibility with regard to the way we exercise power: we must not lose the idea that we could exercise it differently” (p. 334)

Understanding factors that impact on the premature departure from teaching of many recent graduates, is crucial if we are to assist and retain our future colleagues. Bullough & Gitlin (2001) explain this importance by maintaining that the process of becoming a teacher is “of vital interest to the educational community in part because it is a means by which the community is sustained and reconstructed... The professional community has a responsibility for building and shaping our collective social being” (p.17).

The participants in this study were acutely aware of the expectations for their role as teacher and were sincere about and committed to their chosen profession. However, as their comments indicate, they often felt “let down and unsupported”. Attempting to negotiate the techniques of power described above, in addition to grappling with the demands of their classrooms proved, in some cases, overwhelming. Ali typifies this line of thinking:

I sometimes think if only I could just teach, just get on and do it my way ... you know me and my kids it would be so much easier. But it is all of the other stuff that goes on in the staffroom and the school politics which make life hard. They did not teach me about that at uni.(Ali, S, C)

While 84% of the early career teachers in this study reaffirmed their intention to continue teaching for the present time, many expressed the possibility of a career exit within the next five years citing examples from the range of concerns outlined above as contributing to this decision. Peter's comment is typical of this approach when he stated:

Yeah I am happy to give it a bit longer and it does get easier as time goes on but if I am not feeling more satisfied and like I am really achieving something in this school and more accepted by the older staff I think I might be looking for a different career path in a few years time. I might go back to uni and try law or something (Peter, S,R)

Our analysis has highlighted the importance of self confidence, respect, recognition and support as factors which impact on early career teachers' induction and professional development. Communicating important organisational requirements and expectations and helping new teachers to understand school and community cultures, often through normalising processes, is only part of what colleagues can do to contribute to the success of early career teachers. Our analysis demonstrates the importance of establishing strong social-professional relationships that help these teachers to grow in confidence and to more fully feel a sense of being part of the teaching community of the school. For Peter to feel uncomfortable in his own faculty staff room or for Zac to be given no chance to explain his pedagogical choices to his mentor are clear instances where the exercises of power in these contexts were not productive for the professional learning of these teachers.

Analysis using a Foucauldian approach has enabled us to see the many ways in which power relations impact, both positively and negatively, on the professional lives of early career teachers in their workplaces. It provides us with insights into how schools, and in particular how more experienced colleagues, might exercise power differently in order to support and retain early career teachers. Specifically we have demonstrated the importance of developing supportive school cultures that dispel feelings of professional isolation and help enhance productive induction practices which can genuinely assist new teachers to become professional and effective practitioners.

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