Language Teacher Identities

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Co-constructing Discourse and Community

Matthew Clarke

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Foreword

Matthew Clarke has written a book that is at once as familiar as it is surprising, one that is filled with echoes of the known and with explorations of the new. The theme – that education is a means of both individual and social transformation – is a familiar one; as is the underlying pull in that transformation between the values and perceptions of the present and future on the one hand and those of the past on the other. And in terms of learning processes, tracing the development of new teachers' practices and identities through their preparation and onwards into schools is a recognizable trajectory in the search to understand how professional learning takes place and how contexts of place shape the exercise of that learning. Further, within that trajectory, the demands that preparation in curriculum and in classroom pedagogy must induct these new teachers into different ways of thinking and teaching than their predecessors is also usually a given.

Amongst these many markers of familiarity however, Clarke's argument and design stand out as different and distinctive. What makes them new is the degree to which he is able to expose what is often invisible in the processes of individual and social learning, and the resources that seem to shape these processes. The context of his work brings together a unique constellation of gender and professional identity with the learning and exercise of pedagogy and subject matter, all within a newly transforming society.

In an almost eerie way, the voices of these Emirati women who are becoming new teachers at the beginning of the 21st century in a country recently united from separate states, or emirates, echo those of their sisters of another time and place. Two centuries earlier, in the first half of the 1800s, as the colonial United States was expanding westward, public education took on a central role in promoting social cohesion. The one-room schoolhouse, presided over by the 'school marm', had its central mission to develop children's skills in literacy and numeracy, which in turn would support male suffrage and extend the new economy westward. Gender played a central role in this social calculus. Reformers of the period – Emma Willard, Catherine Beecher, and others – argued that women were best suited to providing this education that could create and support the social integration of these new communities into a new nation and thus to create a vision and discourse of social cohesion. In her 1846 treatise titled, *The evils suffered by American women and American children: The causes and remedies*, which gives a flavour of that time, social and educational reformer Catherine

Beecher cited both data and ideology to support this movement, when she wrote:

> Wherever education is most prosperous, there woman is employed more than man. In Massachusetts, where education is highest, five out of seven of the teachers are women; while in Kentucky, where education is so much lower, five out of six of the teachers are men. … The educating of children, that is the true and noble profession of a woman – that is worthy the noblest powers and affections of the noblest minds. …

Beecher continues, arguing that while women are uniquely matched to teaching, there must be appropriate preparation.

> As it is, the employment of teaching children is regarded as the most wearing drudgery, and few resort to it except from necessity; and one very reasonable cause of this aversion is the utter neglect of any arrangements for preparing teachers from this arduous and difficult profession.[1]

Thus it seems that gender and teaching have often coalesced in the knitting of nationhood, whether in the United States of the early 1800s or the United Arab Emirates of the 2000s. And just as often, the forces that create conditions and propel this work are overlooked or under-studied. The work of building social coherence through classroom teaching is invisible work, both because of who has done it and the fact that we have generally been poorly equipped to follow the strands of public reasoning and discourse into the individual worlds of teaching. These social forces, whether in early 19th century America or the early 21st century in the UAE, are powerful and largely invisible to the conventional lens. They can be found in language, in the social and political discourses that offer sources of reasoning for action.

Clarke's careful analysis brings this politics of invisibility closer to the surface. In showing how these women weave together reasoning drawn from the rhetoric and framing of national debates, and the social history of teaching in the Emirati context, along with the ideology of 'modern' language pedagogy, Clarke lays out their work of becoming new teachers. And then into all this complex mix comes the English language, as a subject matter and as a means of social and global access. Its global, lingua franca dimension is fundamental, not just to what these new teachers teach but just as much to how they learn to be the teachers they are and hope to be. In fact, to continue the parallel, the literacy of the American one-room schoolhouse, though originally conceived as pluralizing access to the Bible as a religious text, quickly took on a wider role in social access and participation. So too one could argue, the English which is a subject matter in these Emirati classrooms is a ramp to a different world. Participating in the language changes

it; teaching it as a young woman to a new generation of Emirati students will likely alter the language as it changes them. And in any case, like the dancer and the dance, the two processes cannot be separated, which is at the heart of the identity dilemmas that Clarke frames.

So this is a principal contribution of Matthew Clarke's work, I would argue, namely that to study this politics of invisibility, one has to situate one's examination. And that situating is not simply a research process; it is centrally about the phenomenon of identity in practice. Language is key to the situating, both as a methodology for making more evident how the politics of invisibility operate through discourses, ideas, and notions of what is 'modern' and 'right' and also as the object being studied. It is rare to find work on teacher identity that brings together these two dimensions with as much rigour, care, and attention to both the specifics of participants' words and to the wider frames of discourse.

In her poem of the same title, Alice Luterman writes about the constant challenge of the daily, which she calls 'the invisible work that stitches up the world day and night'. In a very real sense, teaching can also be invisible work. The important dimensions are not, as one Emirati teacher notes in a series of rhetorical questions, the public and visible aspects of the job; they are, as Catherine Beecher would have agreed, the underlying values work:

> I also always asked myself questions: Is education only a page to be taught in a book? Does education mean using a stick to deal with inappropriate behavior? Does education mean to show your power over students?... What values are fostered in the teaching and learning of young learners? (Chapter 6, p. 000)

Matthew Clarke's book helps to make the mechanisms of new teachers learning to do this 'values' work visible. It is, arguably, work that has been done for centuries – mainly by young women – in many diverse societies on the cusp of social transformation; it is certainly work that deserves the more careful thought and consideration brought to it by this study.

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Note

1. Hoffman, N. (ed.). 2003. *Women's 'True' Profession: Voices from the History of Teaching* (2n ed) (pp.74–75). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Introduction

Learning to Teach within an Evolving Community of Practice

> There is more than a verbal tie between the words common, community, and communication … The communication which insures participation in a common understanding is one which secures similar emotional and intellectual dispositions.
> Dewey, 1963 [1916]: 4–5

> The individual consciousness not only cannot be used to explain anything, but on the contrary is itself in need of explanation from the vantage point of the social ideological medium.
> Volosinov, 1973 [1929]: 12

This book explores the development of the first cohort of students to complete a new teacher education degree in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). As part of this exploration, it offers a way of thinking about teacher formation as a dynamic process of identity development within an evolving community of practice. It draws on insights from recent work in discourse theory to account for the co-construction of knowledge, identity and community, and to recognize the inescapably political nature of the meanings through which identity and community are constructed. In addition, the book offers insights into the ongoing processes of educational, social and cultural development, in a country located in a part of the world that is of immense geopolitical significance, yet at the same time is both under-researched and often subject to stereotyping and caricature. Finally, the book suggests some possible directions for future research to provide greater understanding of language teacher education that may have resonance for teacher education more widely.

Within the context of increasing globalization, the Middle East is critical to any understanding of our contemporary world. Home of much of the world's oil reserves, and hence central to global energy issues, as well as unwitting host to the conflicts that have in many ways become the litmus test of East–West relations, including the Israeli–Palestinian struggle and more recently the invasion, and subsequent fracturing, of Iraq, the region assumes a significance that far outweighs its geographical size or population. The Middle East is also a region that has gone through – and continues to experience – startling change, progress and development in many