

Strategic Compliance

Silence, “Faking it,” and Confession in Teacher Reflection

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I FIRST ENCOUNTERED reflection in teacher education at a small private college in the southeastern region of the U.S. in the late 1990’s during my first adjunct instructor position filling in for a professor’s sabbatical leave. I had already been a student teacher supervisor for a year, visiting various classrooms and using the teacher education department’s triplicate forms to complete observations and evaluations of student teachers’ lessons and final portfolios. Reflective thinking had not been identified as a performance indicator on any of the checklists or evaluation points named on the forms. But accreditation for the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) was looming this particular year, and the department chair was asking the faculty to provide “artifacts” that showed evidence that preservice students were learning to become “reflective decision-makers.” The program faculty and I struggled to realize, locate, and concretize the students’ evidence of something none of us realized we were supposed to be teaching and evaluating. Thus began my participation in the conversation about reflection in teacher education.

Years later, after many semesters of evaluating students’ reflections on lesson plans, philosophies of education, and course readings, I turn to the topic again, prompted by a group of teachers whose recoil to reading other teachers’ narrative reflections challenged what I thought was a prized and sought after practice that informed everyday teaching experiences. Particularly, the teachers asked why some of the teachers narrating their stories seemed to “beat themselves up” about their failures to reflect appropriately on dilemmas they faced or unexamined assumptions they held toward certain students in their classrooms. As I began to ask similar questions about the presence of confession-like narratives of reflective practice in the reflection literature, I also noticed the presence of accounts of practitioner ambivalence towards the encouraging teachers to engage in reflection and the efforts to address that ambivalence from teacher educators. Since my research interests center on teacher knowledge and encourage listening to what teachers have to say about their experiences, this alternative and insistently voiced ambivalence towards reflection compelled further exploration of these reluctant and sometimes critical responses to teacher reflection.

I do not see this persistent thread of ambivalence and critique emerging from teachers' experiences with reflection as a problem to be overcome by better teacher preparation pedagogy, or more clearly defined understandings about reflection. Rather, I see its presence in the reflection literature as an opportunity to think more deeply about reflection as conceptualized and enacted in teacher education research, practice, and curriculum. I agree with Francis and Ingram-Starrs' (2005) observation that "those [voices] we ignore have more to teach us" (p. 551). Of particular interest to me are accounts in the literature that express teachers' engagement with written reflection experience as strategic compliance to discursive expectations and programmatic values that, even though well intentioned, aim at controlling teachers and how they think about their work (Akbari, 2007; Baszile, 2008; Fendler, 2003; Francis & Ingram-Starrs, 2005; Hobbs, 2007; Moore & Ash, 2002). In a 2008 keynote address to the Encontro Nacional de Diática e Prática de Ensino (ENDIPE) in Brazil, Zeichner (2008) voiced a similar observation, questioning whether the work on teacher reflection promotes "compliant implementation of external directives" that make it "easy for teacher reflection to merely become a tool to more subtly controlling teachers" (Conclusion section, para. 3).

For example, Hobbs (2007) shared her own experience with writing reflections for a sociology course requirement that asked students to write reflections on "negative patterns of behaviour in our families" (p. 405). As a student, she felt reluctant to reveal such personal history to the evaluation of her professor. She recounted, "I resorted to strategic deception, revealing carefully contrived stories...which awarded me the marks I wanted" (p. 414). Hobbs felt that her instructor required revelations, perhaps confessions, of personal issues that she was reluctant to share. So she remained silent about those personal issues she wished to keep to herself and offered the "carefully contrived stories" that may not have been reflections of her actual experiences but that complied with her instructor's expectations.

Moore and Ash's study of teachers' experiences with required reflection activities for a postgraduate certificate course identified similar compliance. During the course, the requirements associated with the written reflections as formal evaluations of growth in reflective thinking often led to similar frustrated compliance. One participant commented, "...as student teachers and as professionals we get so obsessed with what's down on the piece of paper and what the ink says that we're not making the connection between what the ink says and what's...in your head...I think there's a mismatch there" (Moore & Ash, 2002, p. 10).

Experiences such as these, read alongside comments similar to Zeichner's questioning of teacher reflection as a subtle way of controlling teachers, suggest that teacher reflection curriculum, education, and research enact a kind of disciplinary power that normalizes teacher reflection through mainstream educational discourses. Particularly when written reflection is required and assessed as evidence of professional growth or attainment of certain standards, disciplinary power elicits the production of teacher reflections that often emerge as strategic compliance with programmatic and institutional demands rather than contemplations of lived experience—a "mismatch" between "inking and thinking" (Moore, 2004).

Certainly, any professional program of education within an academic discipline implicates particular disciplinary features that require the development of the skills, knowledge, perspectives, and ethics by which it is distinguished. In teaching, reflective thinking is considered an indication of professional growth and maturation and the reflective practitioner is considered an ideal to which to aspire. Therefore, normalizing judgments with related technologies of examination and assessment of teachers are inevitable, especially in a profession shaped under public scrutiny and dependent on public funding. The point here is not to suggest

that normalizing practices in teacher curriculum, preparation, development, or research can or should be eliminated; they are unavoidable. What this paper suggests is that teacher reflection as it is represented and enacted programmatically in curriculum and research has often led to teacher frustration and strategic compliance to externally imposed notions of teacher reflection that may undermine the transformative practice and empowering purposes for which teacher reflection is so enthusiastically advocated.

In this paper I examine this strategic compliance and three of its features documented in the teacher reflection literature as effects of pastoral power working through processes of normalization emerging from teacher education curriculum, professional organizations, and educational research. To develop this trajectory of thinking, I first discuss Foucault's theorization of pastoral power, identify its relevant characteristics, and overview the professional and political influences shaping its effects. Next, I draw out the connections among selected characteristics of pastoral power and three features of strategic compliance that include silence, "faking it," and confession. In the final section I offer an analytical discussion of how these characteristics work in the reflection literature in order to provoke deliberations on both the beneficent intent of the wielding of pastoral power in educational discourses about reflection and the value of practitioners' compliance/resistance generated by the workings of that power. This challenges our own reflections on reflection and its installation in educational discourses.

Power: "a moving substrate of force relations"

Foucault's work is known for many things, among them the critical troubling of long-held assumptions about knowledge, truth, the self-defining Cartesian subject, and notions about power inherited from the Enlightenment. One of his most provocative and generative assertions was that knowledge claims, such as those put forward by professions like psychology and medicine, are not objective, discrete, and separate from the language, political interests, cultural influences, and technologies supporting and legitimating them (Foucault, 1965/1988, 1973/1994). Instead, Foucault suggested that knowledge claims are the effects of power that emerges from everywhere. In *History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume 1* (1978/1990), Foucault offered a description of power as:

...a moving substrate of force relations, which, by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power, but the latter are always local and unstable...is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. (p. 93)

The instability and fluidity of power suggests the uncontrollable and unpredictable workings and manifestations of power as it is transferred through networks of merging and diverging interests and relations, rather than as a monolithic, linear force moving in one direction from a locatable source. What this means for this paper is that reflection as a knowledge claim resulting from experience can be seen as an effect of power that operates in multidimensional directions including from and through the reflective practitioner.

Foucault (1972/1980) theorized that power is disciplinary in that it is enacted through networks of power relations in and through modern social and cultural institutions to shape and

construct bodies and individuals, and “inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives” (p. 39). Disciplinary power considered broadly refers to the power relations that work like a car’s differential (Sandoval, 2000) to leverage the pressures and influences among and between individuals and institutions. It entangles individuals and institutions in and through institutional, governmental, social, and cultural discourses operating as ensembles of exclusions, inclusions, permissions, and prohibitions. These, in turn, are embodied in qualifications, regulations, requirements, laws, policies, and customs as discursive practices that shape and are shaped by the fluctuations and differentials of power and its relations. Pastoral power figures in Foucault’s work as a specific form of disciplinary power descriptive of the paternal and hierarchical relationships among varieties of institutions charged with governance and regulatory responsibilities

Pastoral Power

Particularly, Foucault (2004/2007) claimed that pastoral power has shaped the development of national governments as modern welfare states that assume comprehensive responsibility for the welfare of their citizens to the extent of caring for their health, social stability, economic prosperity, and education in order to ensure both the nations’ and their citizens’ progress and security. According to Foucault, pastoral power traces its genealogy to the Christian Church’s development of the pastorate and provides a uniquely Western precursor to the “government mentality” (Graham & Neu, 2004), or “governmentality” of the modern welfare state (Foucault, 2004/2007). Modern welfare states, rather than wielding sovereign power over bodies of their populations, use pastoral power’s disciplinary technologies such as hierarchical observation, examination, and regulation in order to manage and control populations. These technologies individualize subjects within the government’s power by using various requirements and prohibitions to count and evaluate them. This renders them visible and intelligible and, therefore, accountable to and controllable by governmental or institutional agencies. The exercise of these technologies is carried out as an extension of the government’s care and concern for the collective population, and moves it in the direction of progress – economic, social, cultural, scientific, technical, political – deemed appropriate by governmental leadership in order to maintain order and security.

Pastoral Power in Teacher Reflection: A Confluence of Interests

The concept of pastoral power has been used to characterize similar governing and regulatory processes and discourses in education and, by extension, teacher education (Foucault, 2004/2007; Popkewitz, 1998; Graham & Neu, 2004). Pastoral power’s processes of managing its population through overseeing the inculcation of proper habits and obedient dispositions for growth and development manifests in teacher education’s benevolent intent of guiding teachers to “ensure apprenticeship and the acquisition of aptitudes or types of behavior” that lead to quality teaching and student learning and thus fulfill education’s responsibility to the nation/state (Foucault, 1983, p. 219). These purposes find expression in the regulations, qualifications, and requirements state departments of education place on teacher education and maintain through processes of hierarchical observation, regulation, and examination of teacher education programs

at private and public universities and colleges within states. Further, accrediting and professional organizations such as the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), and the International New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) contribute to this network of oversight and regulation with input into state policies and their implications for teacher education programs. Teacher reflection is common currency in all of these overseeing agencies both as a benchmark of professional development and as an evaluative tool.

For example, INTASC, a consortium of state education agencies and professional organizations identifies ten principles desirable for new teachers. One of those is “The teacher is a reflective practitioner who continually evaluates the effects of his/her choices and actions on others (students, parents, and other professionals in the learning community) and who actively seeks out opportunities to grow professionally” (INTASC). NBPTS also consistently includes the concept of reflective practice in its standards across a variety of certificate types and development areas, and asks its candidates to submit written reflections on the teaching artifacts submitted for evaluation. The certifying body for university and college based teacher education programs, NCATE, identifies reflective practice as a characteristic of “Acceptable” and “Target” Professional Knowledge for teacher candidates (NCATE). Because these organizations exert authority in teacher licensing and certification, they occupy a position from which they articulate required standards and performance of reflection both by teacher candidates in teacher education programs and practicing teachers seeking national board certification. Teacher education programs generally conform to these standards and address the requirement for evidence that their programs foster and develop candidate reflective thinking through the prominent use of reflective essays, journals, and portfolios as evidence of reflective thinking.

The increasing influence of the push for standards and accountability from governmental agencies, policy makers, and professional organizations, as well as the momentum from current public discontent about “teacher quality,” increased public scrutiny of teachers, and neoliberal threats to university based teacher education programs, heighten pressures to rebuild public trust in teachers and the field of education. This confluence of factors emphasizes the teachers’ integral role in student learning and directs attention to improving “teachers’ dispositions or abilities, so they can better intervene in students’ learning processes—think of the standards and rubrics for the obligatory critical self-reflection in teacher education programs” (Taubman, 2009, p. 146). Taubman points out that these political, academic, and societal interests, with the cooperation of professional organizations such as NCATE, place the blame for student failure on “bad teaching,” and offer the tonic of “disciplinary technologies and audit practices” (p. 144) to make things right.

Even research on teaching has joined in the efforts to further standardize, regulate, and even quantify teacher reflection, thus extending what some have called the “audit culture” of the marketplace to teacher thinking (Taubman, 2009). Some efforts have purposed “to further describe and delineate reflective practice...outlining the many dimensions and settings which characterize its practice” (McKenna, 1999, p. 9). Typologies have been proposed that break down reflection to discrete components that can be observed and measured for teaching and assessment purposes (Jay & Johnson, 2002; Luttenberg & Bergen, 2008; Valli, 1997). A few studies have suggested standards for teacher reflection as indicators of degrees of cognitive complexity in teachers’ thinking, and devised instruments whereby teacher supervisors and administrators can measure reflection (Arredondo, 2005; Arredondo-Rucinski, Franco, Nocetti et. al., 2009).

So teacher reflection, a concept described by Liston and Zeichner (1996) as “a holistic way of meeting and responding to problems...Reflection involves intuition, emotion, and passion” (p. 9), has become not so much a dynamic process of inquiry and inspired deliberation, but an object of surveillance. As a product of teacher thinking, reflection appears to offer a window into teacher thinking and decision making through which evaluations of that thinking are made for formative and summative purposes by a variety of overseeing individuals and agencies (Minott, 2008; Spalding & Wilson, 2002; Taubman, 2009). Seen this way, teacher reflection is then deployed as a site in which disciplinary technologies of hierarchical observation and examination stemming from pastoral concerns manage and regulate not only teachers’ behaviors and acquisition of teaching techniques, but also their thinking. Fendler (2003) described this shift as a consequence of pastoral power moving from “training behaviors, to educating minds, to disciplining souls” (p. 22).

With the panoply of federal, state, and professional interests weighing in on teacher quality and the perceived utility of teacher reflection as a tool for observation, examination, and regulation, the strategic compliance described by Francis and Ingram-Starrs (2005) and Zeichner (2008) plays out in the reflection literature as an effect of these power relations ebbing and flowing with regulatory and coercive purposes in the political and professional contexts of education. The three particular features of strategic compliance noted in the reflection literature, silence, “faking it,” and confession, seem to describe ways in which individuals articulate their interests and experiences with pastoral power’s disciplinary technologies in strategic ways that both resist and conform to their pressures (Akbari, 2007; Baszile, 2008; Fendler, 2003; Hobbs, 2007). Of course, the expediency and protection strategic compliance seems to offer does not come without negative consequences for individual teachers, the teaching profession, teacher education, and the meaning of what it means to reflect, as will be seen in the next section.

Strategic Compliance: Silence “Faking it,” and Confession in Teacher Reflection

Strategic compliance in teacher reflection, then, is produced as a discursive practice that manipulates and is manipulated by teachers in response to the use of reflection as a form of assessment by educational institutions to measure teachers’ and preservice teachers’ performance of reflection against informal or formalized standards (Hargreaves, 2004; Hobbs, 2007; Moore & Ash, 2002; Pecheone, Pigg, Chung, & Souviney, 2005; Roberts, 1998). Clegg, Ton, and Saeidi (2002) noted in their study that even when they had provided no explicit direction regarding the format or content for reflection, their teacher participants’ interview responses indicated the presence of “tacit, or underlying messages surrounding the idea of reflective practice...and that it constitutes a Foucauldian discipline with its own rules” (p. 139). Hobbs (2007) pointed out that the coupling of formal assessments with reflection offers teachers “two options: choose to reveal only those ideas that the assessor might look on favorably or else generate strategic beliefs and opinions” that may not be what they actually believe (p. 413). This results in three features of strategic compliance that can be discerned in the reflective literature: silence, “faking it,” and confession.

Silence

Scholars and practitioners have written about how practices associated with teacher reflection as strategic compliance produce various kinds of silences at a range of levels from what an individual feels can be said or expressed (Francis & Ingram-Starrs, 2005; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Griffith, 2000; Hobbs, 2007; Mazzei, 2008), to silences in teacher education and the reflection literature about the relations between race, gender, class, ability, or sexuality and teachers' reflective processes (Baszile, 2008; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Kumashiro, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1996; Milner, 2006). Silence seems to operate in several ways. For some teachers, silence is evoked from their position as "other" in response to regulatory examination that does not recognize what is considered unintelligible to mainstream discourses about reflection favored by various supervisors and evaluators. The unintelligible often includes experiences, conflicts, and voices of teachers as racialized, gendered, classed, sexualized, or abled persons and/or teachers as indecisive, bitter, disinterested, or emotionally fragile individuals (Baszile, 2008; Hankins, 1998; Hobbs, 2007; Hole, 1998; Milner, 2006; Moore, 2004). For others, silence is chosen as a self-protective response to practitioners' beliefs that requests for reflections on personal experience, thoughts, or feelings, especially those with an autobiographical focus, are intrusively personal (Francis & Ingram-Starrs, 2005; Gunn, 2003; Hobbs, 2007).

Denise Baszile's (2008) essay about her experiences as an African American preservice teacher in a majority white teacher education program offers an analysis of teacher education's depiction of the "racially neutral practice" of teacher reflection (p. 371). She, along with other scholars, asserts that much of the reflection literature depicts teacher reflection as a cognitive concept unmediated by how race, gender, class, disability, and/or sexuality work in educational institutions and social and cultural dynamics to construct the teacher's sense of self in relation to her work and to her students (Baszile, 2008; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Milner, 2003, 2007; Vavrus, 2002). In not writing about, or in being silent about how teacher reflection is contingent on these experiences, the reflection literature proliferates conceptions of reflection as genderless, classless, abled, and racially neutral practice. More specifically, Baszile pointed out that the lack of scholarship about nonwhite teachers' reflective experiences and research on challenges they face in a world that is just as "culturally and racially complex," maintains the silencing of their voices and experiences (p. 371).

Baszile (2008) further explained that repression of these experiences can take the form of an "oppressor within," so that nonwhite teachers are convinced "that to be normal, to be acceptable requires degrees of self-negation and thus self-alienation" (p. 385). She shared how she adapted her reflective journal to her professors' expectations that she "not get caught up in focusing on the racial dynamics but to keep my focus on teaching the novel (*Huckleberry Finn*), and the lessons I was learning about teaching" (p. 378). This illustrates how disciplinary power works to regulate the focus of teachers' reflections for the sake of being recognizable within mainstream discourses to meet performance goals.

Silences of the "other" can also include the "voicelessness" of teachers who do not experience reflection as it is often represented in the literature or who see reflection as distraction from teaching (Author, 2008, 2010, 2011). This allows no space for teachers' knowledge of practice that diverges from that sanctioned by the academy such as those that challenge the benefits of reflection or offer alternative explanations for ways of thinking about their practice. Akbari (2007) and Fendler (2003) both noted that the current emphasis on the technologies of reflection catalogued in rubrics, checklists, and typologies assumes that teachers have not been using reflection and need to learn how to do it or to improve what they have been doing from norms and models approved by teacher education. Akbari (2007) went further to observe that in

his reading of the reflective literature, “only academic reflection or academically sanctioned reflection is approved of and promoted; teachers’ voices are not heard at all in texts that promote reflective practice” (p. 200).

My own research with practicing teachers who read and critiqued several published teachers’ reflective narratives revealed conceptions of teaching that diverged from thinking about it as reflective activity (Atkinson, 2008, 2010, 2011). A twenty-six year veteran commented, “I know reflection is so positive and good, and I just never had that much time to think about what I was doing, and so...it’s a balance of a little thought and a lot of inspiration.” Another experienced teacher observed, “There’s a lot of intuition in teaching. It’s not an exact science; there’s just kind of an art to it. And it just happens sometimes.” Their comments ran counter to the representations of deliberative and systematic reflection in the reflection literature so lovingly detailed in typologies, models, and rubrics. This places their observations and knowledge generated from experience outside of academic sanction, in effect excluding and silencing their voices in research about the profession in which they are invested.

“Faking it”: Fictionalizing Reflection

Faced with revealing attitudes or experiences that either never occurred or might not win approval, some teachers compose what Hobbs (2007) called “carefully contrived” accounts of reflective experiences (p. 414). Hobbs’ own experience shared earlier in this article testifies to her experience of “faking it” by writing “strategic deception, revealing carefully contrived stories” so as to give the teacher what he wanted and get “the marks I wanted” (2007, p. 414). A student in Moore and Ash’s (2002) study referred to the mismatch between what actually made it into his written reflections and what was in his head as the discrepancies between “inking and thinking” (p. 9).

Teachers have noted the problem of providing evidence of reflection on specific experiences that never took place. Moore and Ash studied teachers’ experiences with reflection in a teacher certification course. One student who did not find the lesson reflections helpful observed,

We’ve been given these sheets to help us do reflection, to be more reflective in our practice, and on the one hand they’re helpful but on the other hand if a certain thing doesn’t happen in your lesson or you didn’t pick it up as happening in your lesson, how can you reflect on it? So whilst you may be meeting these dreaded standards, you can’t always ‘evidence’ it.” (Moore & Ash, 2002, p. 10)

The recourse for some is to make claims that were not experienced such as Hobbs (2007) found. Several student teachers in her study described collaborative lesson planning in their reflective journals. In private conversations she later learned that these teachers rarely wrote lesson plans, much less planned lessons collaboratively. Russell (2005) reported how teacher education candidates referred to reflection as “fluff” and told stories “of individuals who invented experiences simply in order to complete an assignment quickly” (p. 200).

Hargreaves (2004), analyzing various types reflections written by nursing students, remarked that when students are asked to produce reflective narratives of experiences, they are asked to “produce stories” (p. 199) that legitimate favored attitudes or dispositions. Illegitimate stories that expressed inappropriate or unapproved attitudes or beliefs would rarely be offered for

assessment, because they would receive low grades. Legitimate stories identified as valedictory, condemnatory, or redemptive by Hargreaves illustrated values and beliefs sanctioned by the legitimating and assessing person and/or institution. Valedictory stories lauded a positive outcome to an experience. Condemnatory stories described a negative outcome and the writer's guilt or anger over the situation. Redemptive stories took on the confessional tone, most often as confessions of inappropriate or unacceptable beliefs or attitudes that were changed through the writer's experience.

Many of the experiences of reflection referenced in the literature used for this paper pointed to a trivialization of reflection, "a sort of simulacra of reflection designed to meet the assessment criteria but without any commitment to reflective practice" (Clegg, Tan & Saeidi, 2002, p. 143). I believe Hargreaves' (2004) conclusion, as it regards nursing students, is applicable to teacher education, that the accountability climate, the "audit culture" as Taubman (2009) might say, creates conditions such that these professionals are not free to express their reflections on experience freely or find themselves faced with situations in which they must produce reflections focused on externally imposed criteria. Reflection and the reasons for which reflective practice is held as a value in professional practice have become entangled in the matrix of accountability power relations.

Confession

Several scholars noted the confessional tone many reflective narratives adopt (Boud & Walker, 1998; Fendler, 2003; Francis & Ingram-Starrs, 2005; Hargreaves, 2004). Foucault (1978/1990) wrote that we are a "confessional culture," that uses the speech of self-disclosure to self-identify in particular ways that often stake out new identities. More specifically, Fendler (2003) drew connections between the self-disclosure central to acts of confession and the reflective journals quite often required in teacher education. She considered this a demonstration of how pastoral power takes interest in the inner workings of teachers' minds and even their souls. Further Fendler pointed out that the self-disclosure compelled by journal and autobiographical requirements establishes a location for hierarchical observation and surveillance of teachers' thinking. The teacher herself can observe and evaluate her own thinking through reflective deliberations in the writing process. When required for assessment purposes, a journal provides a site for examination of a teacher's thinking and sense of self in relation to her profession. Teacher educators or supervisors then evaluate and make decisions about the qualities and dispositions of her academic, political, and ideological thinking and the self-identity portrayed within it.

In the sense that evaluators are examining evidence of professional development and growth, they are looking for the formation or initiation of new identities in teachers' reflections with both formative and summative purposes. Gay and Kirkland (2003) wrote of the importance of critical self-reflection in their work with prospective teachers. They stressed how their engagement with their students "involve thoroughly analyzing and carefully monitoring both personal beliefs and instructional behaviors about the value of cultural diversity and the best ways to teach ethnically different students for maximum positive effects" (p. 182). In her study with practicing teachers and student teachers, Gunn (2010) found that two students did not submit required reflections because of a reluctance to reveal personal experience to public scrutiny. They told her "they do

not want to have a written record of something that showed they had made a mistake or done something ineffective in the class” (p. 215).

Journals provide a space for intervention and even intrusion into the teachers’ thinking that, despite admirable intentions such as drawing the teacher’s attention to damaging and prejudicial beliefs or guiding the teacher to see the inequitable consequences of instructional practices or assumptions, raises questions about how far teacher education reaches across the boundaries of public and private often in the name of social justice. Fendler (2003) commented that these questions draw attention to how “pedagogical practice has shifted from training behaviors, to educating minds, to disciplining souls” (p. 22). In submitting such reflections for examination and assessment, confessing a failure of some sort followed by the profession of the new understandings or practices performs two functions. First, for the individual teacher, it provides appropriate “evidence” of reflection and confirms the practitioner’s growth and adoption of desired dispositions. Secondly, the repetition of what is transgressive alongside that which is redemptive reinscribes and normalizes favored or sanctioned practices and values in what Fendler (2003) described as “participation in a litany or catechism as a technique of reiteration that constructs a particular self-identity,” namely, that of the normalized reflective practitioner (p. 22).

This is not to discount the importance or sincerity of the awakening experiences and realizations about their practice that many teachers come to, their resolution to transform, nor the benefits they enjoy from these transformative experiences. But the coupling of assessment with reflection and the blurring of the boundaries between public and private allows for doubt about the motivations and claims made in these confessions/professions. Confessional reflective narratives also may surface in reflections produced to demonstrate professionally acceptable thinking and “dispositions” on a range of topics from cultural diversity to the belief that “all children can learn.” Since reflective documents and expressions are used to evaluate the presence and/or development of reflective thinking and practice, they serve as techniques of regulation and normalization that define by reward (good grade or certification) or punishment (bad grade, rewrite, or non-certification) what reflection is. Consequently, they also set normalized and standardized limits and outlines of what the reflective practitioner ideal is. However, this may backfire in that teachers who read these published confessions may recoil from the personal nature of the narrative and, in so doing, may retreat from engaging in critical reflection on how race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability discourses operate in schooling practices.

My own experience with the group of teachers mentioned in the introduction illustrates some counter effects of this tension. When this group read Hankins’ (1998) reflective narrative about her “painful interrogation of her own racism” (p. 98), one teacher’s response was “I saw that as a weakness ... I think you have to get over that.” Since many other teachers agreed with his comment, I wondered whether the personal and confessional nature of the narrative may have foreclosed the teachers’ willingness or abilities to engage with thinking about the ways in which teachers’ unexamined racial prejudices hurt their students and reproduce inequities in schooling. In rejecting the confessional narrative they saw as too revealing and a reflective practitioner they saw as too personal, the teachers also rejected an urgent and necessary invitation to consider how their racist attitudes and assumptions may be affecting their own students and practice.

Closing Thoughts

This paper has considered how pastoral power, operating in teacher education, curriculum, and research, in seeking to instill informed and deliberative habits of reflective thinking, acts not only with beneficent will but also with unintended and troubling outcomes for practitioners, teacher education, and the meaning of reflection itself. The analysis looked at how pastoral power has appropriated educational discourses that value and promote reflection in order to manage and control teachers without seeming to, by “assum[ing] a common good that seems yet another thinly disguised masking of power” (Francis & Ingram-Starrs, 2005, p. 550). This examination of three features of strategic compliance as effects of pastoral power’s disciplinary technologies questions how this produces teacher reflection practices that undercut or minimize the critical and transformative purposes for which reflection is promoted and encouraged, but also opens up spaces for critique. Spaces for critique offer possibilities for more nuanced reconsideration of how reflection is conceptualized as a site for assessment rather than as a process of exploration and reflexive deliberation in response to changing teaching contexts.

Common to all of the disciplinary technologies deployed by pastoral power is their deployment for purposes of increasing the surveillance and individualization of its subjects. Hierarchical observation, examination, and regulation stress the inspection and improvement of the individual for her own good. The normalized reflective practitioner, as regulated through these technologies and as illustrated in the examples included throughout this article, consistently appears as an individual acting alone in response to the world of teaching experiences. This challenges us to further examine ways in which we can conceptualize, research, and teach more critical and collective approaches to reflective thinking that respect it as a mediated and deeply contingent, collectively and historically produced process rather than an independent and autonomous action of a single individual. The reflective practitioner idealized in the reflection literature may itself be more of a “reflective fiction” created in academic scholarship and teacher education curriculum and pedagogy than a reality experienced by practicing teachers. Our responsibility is to point this out and work with teachers to support their critiques and to unmask the working of power and learn to redirect it in ways that foster intellectual growth, collective inquiry, and sustained interrogation of the meaning and reality of reflection as a collective and shared experience among educators.

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