Abstract

Becoming a teacher involves more than the acquisition of a new set of skills and knowledge. It involves a change in one’s identity, and this change seems affected by tensions experienced during the teaching practicum. This multiple case study explores the points of tension experienced by 18 student teachers during practicum in a TESOL Certificate program in order to better understand transformations in one’s identity when one becomes a teacher. The study aims to address two questions: “What are the points of tension experienced by student teachers during their practicum and what are the discourses they engage in to talk about these tensions?” and “How can curricular and methodological changes in a TESOL program support the emergence of a transformational discourse when experiencing tensions?”

The study uses a theoretical framework that conceptualizes the location of becoming a teacher in Bhabha’s (1998; 2008) Third Space, explores and extends Mezirow’s (1990; 1991; 2000; 2012) system of Transformational Education, and makes use of Bakhtin’s (1968; 1981) notions of dialogism and chronotopes of time, space, and threshold as constructs for creating, collecting, and interacting with the data. Freire’s (1970; 1974; 1992) notion of power underlies all aspects of the study from exploring the implications of inhabiting the role of teacher-as-researcher (Zeni, 2001) to the avoidance of prescriptive outcomes in program design.

The study involved the collection of written and video data from three cohorts of student teachers throughout their four-month TESOL certificate program. A dialogical approach was applied to the analysis of the data that interweaves the experiences of the teacher-as-researcher with the experiences of the participants. The results indicate that student teachers experienced personal, interpersonal, knowledge, cultural, pedagogical, and methodological tensions, but more significantly, four discourses (blaming, explaining, questioning, problem-solving) were identified and explored for their transformational potential.

The outcomes of the study indicate that some of the above discourses are more transformational than others. Suggestions and examples for developing a TESOL teacher education practice that provides time and space for transformational discourse to emerge are presented.
Keywords: teacher education practicum; TESOL; identity; third space; dialogism; transformational education