

The development of a clinical perspective through a setup of practice analysis

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1. Object and problem

At the outset of their prospective careers, young student teachers are often victims of delusions of imaginary mastery over classroom reality and the transmission of knowledge. Students' forgetfulness, lack of punctuality, refusal to learn, agitations, various aggressions, insubordination and insolence constitute a part of the almost daily reality of certain student teachers. These situations affect the young novice and sometimes end up throwing her seriously off balance.

Faced with this problem, the University of Luxembourg has put into place a setup of practice analysis within the confines of secondary school teacher training in 2005. This setup aims to support student teachers in developing their capacity for practice analysis and in developing their professional identity.

Personally, I have opted for a psychoanalytically oriented clinical approach. Such an approach is based on an epistemological framework that considers the subject at odds with her otherness, her unconscious psychism as discovered and conceptualised by Freud and Lacan: a subject that does not necessarily know what s/he truly desires.

Thus I start from the fact that the student teacher in her profession is not solely a conscious subject, but also an unconscious subject. This work furthermore takes into account the distinction between the self and the subject confined by constraints and bound up within the dimensions of the imaginary, the symbolic and the real (Lacan). This also implies that the teaching subject is considered in her sexual and libidinal dimension. Indeed Freud reminded us in 1930 in „Civilization and Its Discontents“ of the great significance work has on the economics of the libido.

As speaking beings we are subjects whose unconscious prevents us from being masters in our own home. This brings about that the subjects acting in a situation are divided between what they intend and what they do, between what they say they have done and what they have actually done, between what they intend to do and what they cannot prevent themselves from doing. This is why desire and jouissance are of equal importance with the dimension of the cognitive at play in a teacher's practice, and consequentially constitute a necessary object of analysis.

The logic of such an approach requires us to become aware that personal and professional identity, and thus the self, have to be articulated with the subject of desire. How could one indeed hope to develop and assimilate new signifiers if one cannot arouse the desire

to go beyond established knowledge and beyond the representations of the teacher's profession that constitute the basis for a student teacher's identity?

My objective for this kind of practice analysis group work was to help student teachers develop a clinical perspective for what does and does not work in the classroom. The goal is to help them open themselves to the Otherness of the Other and to that which resonates within them, puts them „ill“ at ease, baffles them, or procures them a feeling of jouissance, and to tackle that which they do not understand in their own actions and their practice. Practice analysis aims to get student teachers to the point where they consider themselves implicated parties in their observation and judgement of students, to enable them to take the risk and assume the responsibility of voicing and sharing what challenges and troubles them. This implies taking into account unconscious transference as well as that which underlies the pedagogic relationship. It is precisely in this work on transference that clinical analysis ought to enable student teachers to perceive their own relation to knowledge and their own history of learning (Britzman, 2003), to truth and ultimately to the real at play in their relationship with their students.

Setup and studied corpus

The setup in place in Luxembourg extends over about 20 hours of group work; the group consists of 12 to 15 student teachers. The clinical approach is woven into teacher training course structure, and inscribed into a duration of one entire year and its alternation between field work in the classroom and training at university.

The process takes place in three stages:

- a period of group analysis;
- a period of writing;
- a period of interviews between individual student teachers and instructor-researcher.

The group analysis stage entails for each student teacher to present an interpellating situation in front of their peers. These sessions are governed by the rules of speaking in turn and mutual respect for all participants. They are limited in duration and constituted by the following sequence:

- The student teacher presents a situation, s/he formulates her enquiry in relation to the experience, and puts her question to the group and the instructor-researcher;
- Interrogation by her peers in order to better contextualise and understand the problem.
- The student teacher's peers put forward hypotheses regarding the determining factors of the reported situation, and the feelings and actions at work. They may add action hypotheses. These different suggestions and hypotheses are not discussed, the protagonist does not intervene; s/he is required to assume a listening stance;
- Based on the protagonist's question, her discourse and above all the position s/he occupies therein, and the signifiers emitted by her and her peers, the instructor-researcher underlines certain elements, attempts to effect a return to what s/he has

heard and adds her own hypotheses where deemed appropriate. The quality of his listening should in itself already inspire the protagonist and the other student teachers. The instructor brings in and elaborates useful theoretical concepts for the analysis of this kind of situation. He only rarely gives advice. It is rather up to the student teacher to discover for himself new hypotheses regarding her practice and to thus subjectify her educational training;

- At the end of the session, the student teacher who presented her situation formally thanks the group and optionally explains or comments on what s/he has taken away from the activity.

Following these sessions, the student teacher puts in writing the situation processed by the group of peers, or another, similarly interpellating situation. This writing-up allows her to reflect on the educational actions or teaching actions in question. This is how s/he contextualises and connects ideas and affects, old signifiers and new ones.

On the basis of this piece of writing, the instructor meets each student teacher for an *individual and clinical interview* of about one hour.

2. *Enquiry and methods of data collection*

Considering the challenges and implications of a setup targeting the introduction into „a profession of the human“, continuous research seems warranted. As part of this action-research undertaken in 2009 and continuing in 2012 I have asked myself the following questions:

- What are the possible effects and limits of such an approach ?
 - What resistances may appear?
 - Do written production and individual interview yield added value?
- What are the challenges for an instructor-researcher working on the different kinds of transference involved?
- What epistemological problems arise in the process?

Data collection is based on:

- Note-taking by the instructor-researcher during group analysis sessions,
- Student teachers' writings about presented problems,
- Notes taken by the instructor-researcher after the clinical interview,
- Interviews conducted at the end of the course with certain student teachers about the effects of the clinical approach.

3. *Results of the research approach*

Based on interviews with eight student teachers and my notes taken during the three stages of the process, I seem able to formulate a first set of conclusions.

4.1. *There are things that go beyond our actions*

According to the student teachers' opinion, „the practice analysis sessions have helped us better understand ourselves in our own actions and words as well as the actions and words of students.“ Through this approach some have actually managed to (re-)discover that it is important for them to „think beyond the visible gestures of the profession and to ask about the „why“, about the meaning and signification of a teacher's action and practice.“

Certain student teachers admit to have understood „that each action, each individual gesture is always connected with the relation the student and the teacher each have towards the fundamental questions about the meaning of life, about identity, about the purpose and meaning of school, of the law, and about desire...“

Student teachers claim to have discovered the importance of asking themselves „the question of [their] own relation to knowledge, to academic knowledge, to knowledge to be taught and to unconscious knowledge of the subject“, to ignorance, and therefore also their relation to Otherness.

4.2. The teacher is a divided subject

Certain student teachers assert having learned to „apply words“ to the „drives“ in the classroom and the „quest for jouissance“ that characterises human life. They have discovered „the ambiguity that can characterise speech and action, those of students as well as [their] own.“

3.3. Professional identity anchored in the symbolic

Certain student teachers have expressed their suffering from being caught up and stuck between the expectations of the different parties implicated in teacher training. Symbolic identifications have taken place with regard to their teacher colleagues, their instructors and the members of the practice analysis group. „Master signifiers“ have been put into place and had an effect of nomination. Thus one student teacher talks of having „discovered the importance of professional status as a doorway into the symbolic dimension of the teacher's profession, and to be able to distinguish from it the imaginary dimension of the role that implicates the self of the subject.“ She further states that this „distinction between the symbolic and the imaginary, between ideal-of-the-self and ideal-self, help [her] situate [herself] in the interactions and transference on the part of [her] students, as well as help [her] understand and react more appropriately.“

This brings us to the dimension of „nomination“, of the „name-of-the-father“ (Lacan 2005), the ideals that anchor a student teacher. Possibly connected is the reflection of someone who considers that „this profession constitutes a vocation“. This evokes the dimension of desire. The signifier „vocation“ might well indicate that desire is always also „the desire of the Other“ (Lacan). And in this sense, the teacher should not fixate upon an object or method, but should let herself continually be called, be guided by another signifier, interpellated by another subject, ultimately by Life. (Vasse).

4.4. Being a teacher means confronting Otherness and working on lack

This approach has made some student teachers discover the Otherness of the adolescent in front of them, subject of desire and in search of jouissance, at times even fatal. Some among them have confessed being more sensitive to speech and gesture. They have perceived that the relationship to a student can be determined by representations firmly anchored in their own childhood experiences (Siegfried Bernfeld, Serge Leclaire), representations that have often become rigid and not been reflected.

It is in this sense that one of the student teachers has worked on a situation where a class took pleasure in considering themselves „a trash class“... „even more so by telling that to a young student teacher easily destabilised by such a confrontation, incomprehensible for“ her. ... „a „quest for nothingness“ seemed to rule“ in relation to academic knowledge. In her write-up, the student teacher concerned judged that this quest „hinged on a true need that left no place for educational requirements.“ A sort of „lack of lack“ (Lacan) seemed to have established itself in this class. The challenge for the student teacher was to support her students in moving from „nothingness“ to lack as „cause of desire“ and to achieve this, among others, through a project on the signifier „trash“.

4.5 One-dimensionality is to be replaced by the manipulation of different discourses

The student teachers' confrontation with the search for satisfaction on the part of adolescents constitutes one of the major challenges of teacher training. Skill in dealing with the demands of students, considering them in their own desires and issues related to their drives, may cause problems to young teachers. The student teacher may be under an illusion of omnipotence, assuming everything to be perfect if their students appear quiet and studious, or believing that any problems can be resolved using an entire arsenal of punitive measures. But then s/he may discover that there are other expectations at work in a class, „demands for recognition and love“ such as those found by a student teacher „furthermore of the same nationality as the students“, desires that can manifest themselves brutally, in this case through the stealthy inclusion in a paper pyramid construction project of a slip of paper with the phrase: „[X], bitch, go f*ck yourself“. From this experience the student teachers in the group could realise that the signifier „pyramid“ in a mathematics course cannot be reduced to a single signified, but may just as well be linked to other signifiers within a quite singular chain. As the situation is multidimensional, the response to such a conflict situation similarly has to be differentiated.

„Rebellion against these adolescents“ may take root in a student teacher's psychism for a long time.

4.6 Methodological and group approach creates a sheltered and fertile setting

According to student teachers, by being „very structured“ but also favouring a certain kind of free associations, the procedure gives a sense of „security, guidance“ and allows „a rigour of group work“. There were the necessary „trust and respect“ for an exchange to take place wherein „the subjectivities of the different parties were respected.“ At times, members of the group seemed to take „real pleasure“ in working on a problematic situation. According to student teachers' testimonials, this setting „made possible a favourable dynamic of research in the group as well as a growing autonomy in the formulation of working hypotheses.“

What often occurred was that, just as one thought to have sufficiently clarified a point and wanted to move onto another, one member of the group would ask a question about an aspect they couldn't relate to, that had no name for them. This relaunched the enquiry at the heart of the group. These relaunches make the group not settle for the certitudes of certain pedagogical and other discourses, ward off the passion for ignorance and maintain „a relationship with that which (for the moment) isn't known.“ (Leblanc).

The approach as a whole seems interesting, because it allows one to locate and „delve into“ openings presented by a perspective that regards „academic knowledge as caught up with students' unconscious desires“ , that can be tried out „for example within the framework of a literature, history or science course.“

The group proposed its reflections as hypotheses. Psychoanalytical and other concepts constituted an offer of necessary or useful knowledge in order to better understand a situation and possibly glimpse at the truth that is „half-said“ through an experience. Through this rigorous but not exclusive approach, the student teachers' desire has been „aroused, [that of] experiencing the truth of one's own self and of the world. By making a hypothesis her own, s/he will find out whether it corroborates or controverts her experience, whether it helps her better formulate what s/he is looking for. This approach of practice analysis setup is thus also intended as an opportunity for student teachers to free themselves of erroneous belief that the Other's knowledge guarantees the truth of one's experience.

4.7 Writing and interview constitute an added value

Putting a challenging situation into writing by itself ought to allow one to articulate knowledge and truth. The reactions regarding the written production were mixed. For some it provided „a challenge to go further.“ For others still, „it was important to have a record of what [they] thought and wrote at one particular moment in [their] progression through teacher training.“ Writing with his “transformative” and “revealing” function allowed them to create what Ricoeur terms „a narrative identity“.

The interview between instructor and student teacher has been judged „very useful“. This encounter allowed them to dig up once more the issues in question „to go further“.

5. First conclusions

After this first research phase, I have come to a number of first conclusions:

- The psychoanalytically oriented practice analysis setup constitutes a space-time where student teachers and instructor can permit themselves to develop their own knowledge.
- Practice analysis group work has allowed student to gain some distance from certain imaginary positions, from the real, to become sensitive to the dimension of

the unconscious subject in the classroom. They have been able to develop new signifiers for themselves.

- Student teachers have emerged as witnesses for their colleague articulating her experience and her enquiry. It has become apparent through their words that they desire allowing themselves to risk new strategies and to find and live their own style;
- A first analysis of transference at work in the group has helped me to develop this setup. Firstly I saw myself put into the position of subject supposed to know, of the bringer of knowledge under the guise of analytical concepts. Furthermore, I saw myself in a role of protector, preserving a setting for training that was not to become too intimate. Thus one student teacher refused to speak of „psychoanalytical concepts“, but rather used the signifier „philosophical notions“. A certain amount of initial reluctance to present a situation to the group may be understood as a defence against an instructor as a subject supposed to know or a subject supposed to desire. For other student teachers, the question of the desire of the Other replayed itself within the practice analysis setting, asking me for instance the question: „am I on the right track?“ The instructor must not identify with the object causing the student teacher's desire. Indeed were that to be the case, the instructor would risk that a student teacher remained imaginarily fixated on her instructor, either in love or in rejection. The instructor has to guarantee a symbolic relationship with the students that in turn allows for the transference of transference;
- This attention to transference in effect has ultimately allowed me to become aware of my own need for recognition.
- It is also with regard to transference that we can demonstrate the usefulness of a three stage setup: presentation, write-up and individual interview with the instructor. Indeed during group work, some student teachers transfer their knowledge onto their peers and it is only during the process of writing and during the interview that some of them have begun to put into words their resistances and some of their limitations. The three stages of the approach effectively act as a „break/link“, furthering a process of subjectification on the part of student teachers;
- It seems expedient to undertake a project of joint reflection on how the individual functions within the group, i.e. on transference, at some point in the future. This approach would allow the clarification of how transference operates: the demands, the requests, the alienations in class. Such an approach can also have effects on a biographic, identity, even therapeutic level;
- What I have been able to observe throughout this research work is that the students' identifications with the discourse of others that help her constitute her own identity, but that also risk to lock her in certainties. In this sense, the practice analysis group enables the questioning of a conception of teaching, of classroom

management or of interpreting relations. To a certain extent, the clinical practice analysis group constitutes a moment of „relationship to that which cannot be known“, to the truth. The manner there displayed of speaking, of being affected, of taking pleasure and becoming aware of it, allows us to better understand what students and their parents tell teachers and to better respond to them as holders of their own knowledge. Therein lies the reason for a psychoanalytically oriented clinical approach based on the hypothesis of the unknown, the unconscious.