Passing the Buck, or Thinking about Experience? Conditions for Professional Development among Teachers in a Norwegian Middle School

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Abstract

This paper uses psychoanalytic ideas to explore obstacles and conditions for learning from experience among teachers. In specific, this is about consequences of failure in relationships. A particular situation that happened during an ethnographic study in a middle school in Norway is used to get as close as possible to a teacher's feelings and perceptions of a frustrating situation. The situation is followed up to understand how the individual teacher tried to deal with the problem and how her colleagues and the school management tried to support and help her. Interpreting the situation to involve violation of all dimensions of the teacher's subjectivity (personal, professional and cultural), the problem seems to be too complex to deal with in the school organization. It seems as if teachers and leadership unconsciously avoid unbearable feelings, with the consequence that violation of the teachers is not recognised, and thus not possible to learn from. Problems were repeated rather than understood.

Keywords

Ethnography, Professional Development, Psychoanalysis, Relationships, Violation of Identity

1. Introduction

This article focuses on a case, which represents one of many smaller or bigger events I experienced during fieldwork conducted at two different middle schools in Norway over one school year. My research interest was to gain an understanding of what individual teachers and schools learn from frustrating situations. However, for some reason, trying to grasp what teachers' frustrations were actually about felt like trying to hold a live fish. It slipped through my fingers. I

followed the particular story I present here for seven months.

In the beginning of November, teacher Anne came into the staff room crying. She was having problems with a group of boys in her class. I decided to follow this "incident" to gain a deeper understanding of how Anne and her colleagues understood the problem, how Anne tried to deal with the problem and how her colleagues and the management tried to support her. Based on this, I wanted to learn something about obstacles and conditions for learning from experience [1].

In this article, I first provide a brief overview of the literature on teachers' emotion in professional development. I present the aim of the article and the method I used to identify and analyse the case. Subsequently, I present the teachers' story and offer some ways of thinking about the case that may be helpful. The case shows the consequences of failure in relationships. By "turning a blind eye" [2] to the relationships, the teachers were not able to "see" and thus not able to think about their experiences. Instead, they believed in repeatedly making a clean start.

2. Review and Aim

2.1. Literature Review

Teachers belong to occupational groups called relational workers [3], *i.e.* professions who see their relationships with other people as a crucial part of their work. In relation work, the professional self is placed centre stage because it is deeply personal being a practitioner in this work [4]. Teaching is also an emotional profession [5]. A recent review of teachers' emotions showed that emotions play a significant role in the relationships related to teachers' work and their professional identity [6]. However, the authors noted that research on emotions in the context of teachers' work and teachers' education is still relatively new.

The literature emphasizes the need for students and teachers alike to understand their own emotions and those of others and to be able to handle and express those emotions [7] [8]. Kawamura, Suzuki, and Iwai [9] underscored that, "Teachers should understand their own feelings, particularly when their students are being disrespectful. The degree of teachers' interventions depends on the degree of negative feeling of their own" (p. 1). Emotional labor (or emotion work, emotion management or "deep acting") refers to the effort a person makes in response to the emotions of others [10] [11]. Teaching is recognized as a profession demanding a high level of emotional labor [12]-[18]. Day [19] stated, for instance, "To be warm and encouraging to a student who is persistently rude or uninterested requires emotional work" (p. 37). To develop professionally, the teacher needs support in learning how to deal with emotional and other personal factors [7] [20]. In spite of this knowledge, and in spite of increasing research on teacher emotions in the school setting [18], research on teachers' professional development [7] [21] or teachers' professionalism [6] places little emphasis on emotions. Educational research on emotional barriers to learning seems to be

reserved to students rather than their teachers.

In a review of the literature on teachers' professional development practices, Opfer and Pedder [22] found that the process-product logic has dominated the literature on teacher professional learning. From her review of articles on teacher professional development, Avalos [23] concluded that cognitive theory and research have been applied to unveil the factors in teacher development. The strict adherence to problem-solving analysis models and to "evidence-based" practice may, according to Pellegrini [24], "be defenses against using one's feelings to understand another person's experience, attending to what they are saying or communicating, and helping them manage the anxieties they may be experiencing" (p. 258). Additionally, Raider-Roth *et al.* [25] focused their research questions on how relational dynamics can support and impede teachers' learning based on a theoretical stance that incorporates internal tensions, emotions, and understandings that teachers may experience.

A shift is needed away from a rational cause-and effect approach. Britzman [26] emphasized the lack of understanding regarding how teachers actually learn from their practices, their students, or their incidental anxieties that emerge due to acquiring experience. All the included studies in a review of teachers' informal learning during everyday practice acknowledged the importance of such informal learning [27]. In other words, there is a need for better understanding of the experiences of professional learning or the lack thereof in an everyday teaching practice while considering emotions.

2.2. Aim of the Study

In this article, I used psychodynamic theory as a lens to build complexity into a case in which the teacher along with the school management and the support system reduce the problem experienced by teachers to be a problem of some boys. No "learning activity" is studied and no suggestions for another model or method of staff support are offered. However, from a psychodynamic perspective, the assumption is that an emotional experience has to be acknowledged and thought about to become learning [1]. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to contribute to the research on teachers' professional development through focusing on how the teachers and the school deal with difficult emotional experiences.

3. Method

3.1. Design

In accordance with the ethics of social science research, the Norwegian Social Science Data Service, Bergen, Norway, approved the study. The case I present in this article is part of a larger research project on the conditions for learning from experience among teachers [28] [29]. For this overall project, I conducted a one-year ethnographic fieldwork at two middle schools in Norway. I spent 326 hours over 99 days in the fieldwork collecting the data. The method is described in detail elsewhere [28] [29]. To gain insights into the teachers' perspectives, it was important that the ethnographic approach emphasize long-lasting, contex-

tualized observations with repeated recognition of significant phenomena [30]. My method was also influenced by Hollway and Jefferson's [31] work on the free association narrative interviews, through which I sought to elicit stories about the relationships and frustrating and challenging situations. I was interested in the psychological work of the teacher in these particular situations.

For this article, I drew on a frustrating situation experienced by one of the teachers, Anne. The aim was to capture in-depth descriptions of the possibility (or not) to learn from experience. I called this case "the problem with the group of boys". The situation described in the case is not unique. In my fieldwork on the two schools, I found this case to be an *exemplifying* case [32]. I followed this case over a period of 7 month. It was not the problem itself that interested me, but Anne's perception of it as a problem, which would allow me to draw non-generalised explanations of what the teachers feel, think and do in frustrating situations. This particular situation was of interest because it made Anne's immediate and "raw" thoughts of frustration accessible. I wanted to get as close as possible to Anne's feelings and perception of the situation, and I conducted my first interview with her the day after she experienced the incident with the boys.

Define abbreviations and acronyms the first time they are used in the text, even after they have been defined in the abstract. Abbreviations such as IEEE, SI, MKS, CGS, sc, dc, and rms do not have to be defined. Do not use abbreviations in the title or heads unless they are unavoidable.

3.2. Participants and Data Collection

Participants were selected based on their connection to the case. Anne (all names are pseudonyms) is my main informant in this case. I had two formal interviews with Anne, one the day after she cried in the staff room and the second towards the end of the school year. I included one interview with her colleague Sara, one with the counselor Karen and one with the former class teacher Maria. Having multiple participants enabled me to "strengthen the precision, validity, stability, and trustworthiness of the findings" ([33], p. 33). The interview comprised open questions inquiring about "the problem with the group of boys." The interviews focused on the teachers' understanding, experiences and perception of the problem. In addition to the interviews, I had many hallway conversations with the teachers. Especially, I often asked Anne informally about the case to see if anything changed during the school year. I also conducted observations in the staff room to determine whether other teachers talked about the case. Analytic field notes were maintained throughout the data collection process, utilizing a process of Constant Comparative Method (CCM) to identify, refine, and follow up on themes from interviews. All interviews were recorded and transcribed, and observation notes were taken by hand and transferred to a personal laptop afterwards.

3.3. Narrative Analysis

To understand how Anne possibly learned from this frustrating situation, a

narrative analysis was conducted from the collected data. I exported all transcripts coded in Nvivo data analysis software chronologically. Thus, the case could be red as one long narrative. Accordingly, I conducted a narrative analysis [34] [35] [36]. The entire chronological case-narrative was divided into 3 themes, background (how it started), the understanding of the problem, and support and problem-solving. I also looked for the development across these themes, e.g., did the experience of support or experience of the problem change over time?

4. Result

In this result section, I present a narrative account of the case. In the account, I use the informants' own voices as much as possible, followed by my own reflections and interpretations of what was being said. In this way, I present both the informant's self-understanding and the common-sense level of analyses, as described by Kvale and Brinkmann [37]. In Section 4, *i.e.*, Discussion, I move to Kvale and Brinkmanns' analysis level three involving theoretical understanding.

4.1. Background

A group of six boys in their final year of middle school created, through their behaviour, problems for fellow students as well as teachers in the school. The problems emerged the year before. I conducted an interview with Maria to gain an understanding of how it all began. She told me that she was the sole class teacher at that time. It was her first year as a newly trained teacher. She described the year as *very difficult* (I use interviewees' own words in italics). Maria felt that the school management was *the opposite of supportive*. They had asked her how they could help, but she could not express what she needed, she said. She felt, nevertheless, that they did not understand her situation. She said she felt *powerless*. Maria was *delighted* not to have to teach the class again this year. Two of the boys in question (David and Samuel) were new to the class last year. Both were non-native speakers and came from more or less difficult backgrounds. A group of four boys joined David and Samuel in the class (*hangers-on*). The problem concerned criminal acts as well as threats inside and outside of school. The Educational Psychologist (EP) service provided support in connection with the two ringleaders. Maria told me that the teachers Anne and Sara had shared responsibility for the class this year; however, Anne covered most lessons. The teachers did not know much about what was going on with the boys at the EP service. Anne said, "*I don't know what we're supposed to know really.*".

4.2. The Problem Today

Let us return to that day in November and ask: what was it that caused Anne to shed tears in the staff room? In the interview, I asked Anne to recount, as specifically as possible, what had happened.

Anne had returned to teaching that autumn after having been on leave for a

year. She did not know much about the class. She had heard a few rumours but she said she made a conscious decision not to ask Maria about the class. As Anne disclosed, "*You prefer to see how things are for yourself.*"

Anne told me she had felt very discouraged in the past few days, and then she told me what happened the day she had started to cry in the staff room. The group of boys had been caught outside the school area during a short recess, which is not allowed. Anne said, "*Then they had the temerity to say that I'd given them permission!*" In the following lesson, Anne spoke to the group of boys, but she felt, "*They banded against me (…) I was boiling inside. I was furious. I said nasty words. I told them as well, I keep swearing….*" Anne felt she was unable to do her job properly, and she spent some time talking to the class afterwards.

While I was interviewing Anne, I was surprised by how she expressed such high emotions about a minor infraction of the rules, but I did not comment on this to Anne. I asked instead of other examples of problems she felt were arising from the group of boys. She answered, "*It was a couple of weeks into the semester. One of the boys* (Samuel) *came up to me and said goodbye. He's polite in general, he goes home but he goes home knowing he's vandalised* 3 *or* 4 *bikes belonging to his classmates.*" Anne had attempted to deal with the case of bike vandalism by talking to the boys, wanting them to say who did it. However, they covered up for each other. Anne recounted that the first time she went to school management to report something was after this episode of bike vandalism. She wanted to show the students that they (staff) take episodes like this seriously. "*The vice principal came up to see the class and told them a bit about the consequences of that sort of thing.*"

The third example of the problem I could extract from my interview with Anne concerned a fire, "*There was a meeting here at the school one evening and then they discover flames outside. Sara goes outside, and so do the principal and quite a few others who were at the meeting, and then they see someone cycling away, and Sara manages to cycle after him, she sees a face from our class. So that's been really hard for her …. That was about six weeks ago.*"

Anne expressed her opinion that the boys (Samuel and David) were acting out because of *painful things in their past*. Because of this, they (the teachers) had tried to *look after them, build them up, give them a chance, give positive feedback, and be attentive*. Anne said she felt they had spent a lot of energy on these students, but in her opinion, the students' foreign background made positive change a lot more difficult, and it also made it hard for these students to accept her as a female teacher, she said. Anne could not think of anything more that they, as teachers, could do.

I asked Anne who had provided support for her this autumn. Anne replied, "*My other colleagues, naturally. People I talk to every day. Talking to people, getting things out… (…) My colleagues here are really outstanding (…) you notice how they* (her colleagues) *ask you about things, and that's where you notice much more of a distance between yourself and the school management as op-*

posed to your colleagues."

Anne has reported to the school management that, "*We don't want one of the boys who is sort of at the root of the problem, who causes fear, I don't want him in my classes.*" Usually, Anne sees herself as a good class teacher; however, she stated, "*I feel like right now it's about such big things that I need someone to... I'm not interested in reading books about bullying and that kind of thing because I've done that so many times, but now I need someone who can help me take action straight away.*" She did not get much help now, she felt, "*Everyone knows about it, and it's just lying there.*"

I asked Anne what she was left with after everything that had happened that autumn. Anne replied, *I'm left with a feeling of powerlessness* (…), *but the days have sort of worked, and you've sort of kept going. you've let the days pass...*" Anne had high hopes for the case conference scheduled for the following day.

4.3. Violation of Identity in Relationships

When trying to extract clear definitions of the problem (breach of rules, vandalism and the fire), I discovered how difficult it was to separate Anne's description of the problem from her description of her reaction to the problem. Anne's frustration seemed, for example, to have something to do with the hurt of being deceived. When the boys lied to her, she felt *used, powerless, and anger,* among other negative feelings. Anne's did not seem to be frustrated quite so much about the actual wrongdoings of the boys. Instead, Anne reacted more strongly to having been deceived rather than to the fact that the boys had almost set fire to the school. This made me curious. Could Anne's problem be described as a violation of her sense of being both a good teacher and a kind and caring person in the abovementioned problematic situations? Viewed this way, it was easy to understand why Anne was so upset and cried in the staff room when the boys went outside the school area without permission. The action in itself was not that disturbing, but the boys lied about what had happened and made a fool out of her. Anne perceived it as a personal attack, and my interpretation is that she perceived the incident as a violation of her personal and professional self. It seems that the violation affected her like a trauma. Anne had no capacity to respond adequately, she felt profound helplessness and loss and a disappointment that no other persons or group would intervene. Britzman [26] says that, "what makes trauma traumatic is the loss of self and other" (p. 202).

Anne's reaction makes sense also when I connect it to one of my findings from the overall fieldwork conducted in the two middle schools, which provides a clue as to how teachers could define a good relationship between student and teacher, "A good relationship is when the student is open and willing to talk about his/her problems so the teacher can offer support and show that he/she cares" ([28] p. 161). My data from the fieldwork also showed that teachers wanted to *know* their students in order to be able to *like* them, which would make them feel good about their role as teachers. However, the boys in Anne's story did not apologise for what they had done and did not talk about their

problems. Anne tried to show the students trust, talked to them and listened to them, but they did not reciprocate the trust and did not talk to her or listen to her in return. In my interpretation, Anne was not able to "like" the students while trying to "get to know them". In other words, she was not able to have the kind of relationship with the boys that would allow her to feel like a good teacher. One of my findings from the overall fieldwork in the two schools was that teachers were unwilling to talk about their failure to "like" all students. Aversion or dislike of students is hence unaccepted and unspeakable feeling in the school. Ann felt powerless and wanted the students expelled.

This interpretation also sheds light on Anne's feelings of support from her colleagues as opposed to the school management. From my point of view as an observer in the staff room, I was not that convinced about the support the teachers gave each other, but for Anne they were *outstanding*. In light of violation of identity, the support she received through relationships with her colleagues may have counterbalanced her feelings of violation to a certain extent. Her colleagues showed her that they "knew" and "liked" her. They made her feel like a good teacher, and this may have reduced her feeling of having failed in relation to her students. The management, on the other hand, did not "see" Anne and her feelings and instead concentrated on actions towards the boys. I will revisit this idea later in the paper.

Overall, interpretation was that Ann experienced violation of both personal and professional identity. However, a third dimension of violation could be recognized in this situation. When Anne stated that she "*tried to build them up, give them a chance*" and when she mentioned that it was "*hard for these students to accept her as a female teacher,*" she expressed a cultural understanding of the problem. Thus, we get a hint that her sense of herself as a citizen (cultural identity) was also violated. The ring leaders came from a foreign country. In Norway, teachers are trained to consider migration and empathy is a leading pedagogical principle in learning about intercultural co-existence and change attitudes of students and teachers. In the Norwegian national imaginary, the nation is "good" and innocent of colonialism and racism, portrayed in terms of both denial of the aspects of the past and externalization of present-day challenges, according to Svendsen [38]. Additionally, Mazzei [39] realized, based on her study conducted in an urban school district in the US, that the white teachers had little or no experience of themselves as having a "racial position" and that their experience of having lived in a world of white privilege severely limited their ability to see or express themselves as "Other". Mazzei claimed that this lack of awareness led to noticeable silences in the conversations related to race. She stated "…we lull ourselves into a dream state induced by this soporific silence. A silence that shields and veils until finally, something, someone, shatters the dream" ([39] p. 1126). Anne tried to be the empathic, non-judgmental, non-prejudiced person who treats students equally. However, in her relationships with these boys, she felt attack on these values, which were a part of her identity. In other words, there is something that adds to the felt violation of her

professional and personal identity that is cultural. This cultural friction challenges her as a woman, a teacher and a social democrat. These "unknown others" are only hinted at in the case of the group of boys, but there are layers of violation through the system. Anne is overwhelmed, but the teacher collective is also overwhelmed. Typically, Anne sees herself as a good class teacher, stating, "*I feel like right now, it's about such big things that I need someone to...this is bigger than the bigger event.*" She is vaguely aware of race and gender issues. However, Anne and the school management are not putting their prejudices into words. They are instead in danger of being colorblind, a term that is often used to signal disregard of racial characteristics [40]. However, colorblind beliefs are negatively related to reported willingness to adapt teaching to culturally diverse students [41] [42].

4.4. The Case Conference

The day after my interview with Anne, I was allowed to attend the case conference during which the staff members planned to talk about David and Samuel due to Anne having reported problems. Anne and Sara had been asked to attend the case conference along with the regular group of two vice-principals, one representative from the EP Service and two special educators (the boys' parents were not invited). One of the two special educators conducted the conference.

Although the conference was about to begin, Anne was not present. Nobody knew why she was absent; thus, they began the meeting without her. The chair asked Sara to describe the situation (*Anne's familiar with it*, he said). It became obvious that Anne was not in any way the main character here. Anne and Sara became communicators of the problem. The issue obviously concerned the two boys rather than their teachers.

Sara quickly and clearly explained the problem with the boys. The discussion moved to how they could deal with the boys and how to get external assistance. At that moment, Anne arrived. She said she was waiting in another office. They continued when she arrived, without informing her about what had been discussed before her arrival. They did not ask her about the matter. Anne sat down and the others continued.

They agreed that they had to come up with separate plans of action for each of the two students as well as for the class as a whole. Anne entered the conversation (she hardly said a word since she came in), "*I don't know what I'm doing in different subjects. My head's a mess...*" (She seemed on the verge of tears and very confused).

Being there as an observer, I was impelled to ask myself why violation is not recognized in the school or among the teachers. Is it because violation can be difficult to describe? Is it because feelings of violation are uncomfortable and will probably cause more problems in the sense that they demand more thought and more work, if they are to be taken more seriously? In any event, the case conference did not appear to help mobilise more mature mental capacity and enable Anne to overcome the unavoidable emotional imbalance that comes with being a

teacher [43] [44]. Instead, it seems important for teachers avoid unbearable feelings. They seemed to favour not thinking reflectively. The teachers adopted a wait-and-see attitude, expecting the problem to eventually disappear.

4.5. Believing in Making a Clean Start

Throughout winter and spring, I heard decreasingly less about the "group of boys" and noted that meetings planned between school management and Anne and Sara were frequently cancelled. Sara said that the meetings often were not given high priority "*because things work in a sort of a way. (…) We're putting out fires,*" she said. She also said that the teachers constantly felt *inadequate* and continued, "*We don't have it in us, we can't do it.*"

I wanted an ending for my "story" and requested one last interview with Anne in June to make conclusions. I asked Anne to tell me what she felt about the situation now. She described her feelings during the difficult stretches, "*The thoughts and feelings you're left with, it's sort of. … not having a strategy, not being able to handle that kind of problem, if you get my meaning. You're left with a feeling of sort of having failed too, because you can't turn the student around and make him do what you want and what's normal (…) It's very wearing, of course. As a teacher you always take your work home with you, it all becomes problems spinning round in your head. (…) It really all comes back to you. Because you feel responsible for the class as a whole, when you have a problem in the class, it comes back to you and you're thinking: "What can I do so that we don't have that problem?" … And when you can't come up with a solution, the problem's still there, the negative things, and for the rest of the class too, and you're left there with them…*".

Anne disclosed how the case described in this paper affected her self-esteem, her self-understanding and her identity. She felt responsible when things went wrong and when the problems with the class emerged. "*It comes back to me,*" she said.

I asked her what would make things better. Anne answered, "*Well, time. You have other things to think about, concentrate on. You know? Then you're back. After one explosion you deal with all the worries that go with it, and then it's quiet for a while and then…*"

Anne seemed disillusioned and traumatized. She did not think that her feeling of powerlessness could be addressed in any way. She could not imagine thinking about or understanding the situation differently in the class again next year. "*Noticing change is difficult,*" Anne said. "*It's soon holidays, but if it was going to be like this for another year, I imagine we'd be in the middle of the same nightmare again, of painful episodes. (…) One student or parents can cause a lot of trouble. Of course we should have a discussion about these things, but what can you do? It's never the time or place for a debate like that.*" She talked about *getting used to it.* In other words, in Anne's case, it might be more about adjusting to experiences at school rather than progress. To be able to remember the feelings she had had, Anne had to *turn back time.* It was like she had already

forgotten. It was as if the only solution was to start over. The "problem" in the class is just passed on to other teachers who "make a clean start". It was now Sara and Anne's turn to teach the class as the main class teachers after Maria. Maria was *delighted* that she would not be doing it this year while Anne was happy that this was the students' last year in middle school. Anne said that when teachers asked school management for help, they had a feeling of, "*Is this a problem*?" Thus, it seems that the teachers' choice was to start all over again with a clean sheet.

5. Discussion

5.1. Turning a Blind Eye

Many of these actions (or lack thereof) I have described in this case must not be interpreted as a visible proof of incompetence but rather as a felt need for teachers to distance themselves from uncomfortable feelings. One way to achieve this is by "turning a blind eye" [2]. The expression describes what happens when we are vaguely aware of ignoring facts without being aware of exactly what we are avoiding. Steiner stated that such avoidances could lead to a sort of dishonesty. It is possible to cover up what is happening, "… turning a blind eye is an important mechanism, which leads to a misrepresentation and distortion of psychic reality" (p. 171). "Turning a blind eye" is more complex and deceptive, as it may involve the effects of several defence mechanismsrather than a single defence mechanism. Steiner himself concentrated on how "turning a blind eye" play a role in the oedipal drama and in clinical settings. In school, however, "turning a blind eye" is about moments where teachers or their managers are on the verge of understanding but still choose to turn away from understanding.

Steiner [45] used the term "psychic retreats" to express the phenomenon of turning a blind eye within organisations. In the same way a patient is able to unconsciously convince him/herself that he/she can avoid reality if he/she stayed within the small area of his/her own personal psychic retreat, teachers and schools themselves represented by their structure and practice seem to be convinced that they can avoid reality by not thinking about their vulnerability and feelings that threaten their identity, for example, feelings of inadequacy, personal responsibility or guilt. For example, the fact that racism is present in schools means, according to Mazzei [39], that the teachers and the school management participate, "whether knowingly or not, and a claiming of this participation is also a claiming of innocence lost" (p. 1135).

The school management left Anne and Sara with the feeling of *is this a problem*? The teachers felt that their frustration was not addressed, as managers seemed unable to tolerate the experience of Anne's feelings. Subsequently, Anne became less curious about trying to understand herself and her students. For instance, when I tried to keep her focused on her feelings or when I asked her to consider what it would be like having the class again next year, Anne did not use my questions as an opportunity to reflect on her own feelings. In a way, the teachers blind themselves to the complexities by choosing not to know much

about their students' life circumstances , by not asking previous teachers about the class (Anne did not ask Maria), and by not wanting to read about bullying and other problematic issues, like Anne said. Such information is important to be able to adjust one's expectations of students and student-teacher relationships. Nevertheless, I felt teachers often weren't very curious about these aspects. The issue is not one-sided, of course. As mentioned, there are signs that Anne did reflect upon things, for instance when she was talking about the situation when it *cracked*. She said then that she reflected: *How do you do it, how do you handle this student?*

5.2. Capacity for Thinking

In Bion's [1] theory, thinking involves a continuous transformation of emotions and experiences, which irrevocably change the thinker and his/her perception of inner and outer reality [46]. Thinking and learning are thus connected from a psychodynamic perspective, and the process of learning from experience is considered a personal development. A mother's capacity to contain and transform her child's raw emotion creates the experiential foundation for the child's ability to think [1]. Learning from experience, during life, reflects the capacity to contain one's feelings without denying them and to take responsibility for having them and how one passing them on to the others. The teachers need help to get sense of all their various reactions, a safe and regular space within which to explore their feelings [46]. They need someone that can serve as a "container" for the uncomfortable feelings. A school manager or an educational psychologist who is capable of functioning as a container allows the teachers to explore their frustrations. Teachers would be better able to meet the needs of the students if their own needs are supported [47]. Fox [44] called it "caring for the carers", which includes the support and containment available to the teacher to enable him or her to reflect rather than act out experience. As this case, among others, relates to learning about ethnic or cultural differences, the function of the container, according to Garrett and Segal [48], may be to parse out various emotionally charged reactions to conversations, wonder about when these emotions seem absent, and question the teachers about their different kinds of silences. It requires being attentive to the teachers' struggles and being open to their confusions and acts of defending their self [48].

The case reveals something important about the difficulty teachers experience in deciding between knowing and taking responsibility on the one hand and not knowing and disclaiming all responsibility on the other hand. French, Simpson and Harvey [49] wrote about the need to create a "working space" or a "capacity" for creative thought on the edge between knowing and not knowing. What has become clear through my case is that the school has not been able to create such "space" or environment for containment. Hunt [50] also underscored the significance of having a work environment that recognizes the emotions as a legitimate way of knowing and understanding rather than as something to be suppressed or controlled. Neither Anne nor her colleagues were able to under-

stand the situation in terms of personal, professional and cultural violation of relationships. Teachers in many cases do not get through to their managers. "*I don't know what to do,*" Anne stated. Here is her golden window of opportunity to think, which means that she does not have to give in to the often strong impulse to act. Instead, action in the form of disciplinary measures is taken in relation to the boys. "There is always a temptation to be drawn into unreflective actions, a wish to "do something" or even blame someone, when we feel knocked off balance in face of pain that is difficult to bear" ([46] p.185). The task of a reflecting space is to hear different points of view and provide a forum where teachers can gather and think about different views. Britzman [26] claimed, "To implicate oneself in one's own narratives of learning and teaching means turning habituated knowledge back on itself, and examining its most unflattering—for many, its most devastating—features. It also means exploring how even this most unflattering moment may offer insight into making significance" (p. 204).

If the teacher is allowed to change and develop, he or she has to be confronted with the social and psychological compulsion to repeat [51]. It may however appear that everyone—teachers as well as students—needed to convince himself or herself that everyone could just start over afresh. Putting difficult things behind them and making a clean start every year seemed to be an "offer" available to both students and teachers. Both teachers and the management did not want to recognize difficulties. It was as if they hoped that as time went by, the perception of a difficulty would disappear. Thus, the problem itself was allowed to remain unclear, but so did possible solutions. Thoughts and reflections about the problem were blocked out and disregarded.

6. Implications for Practice

In terms of practical implications, the results of the present case present the ways in which violation of teachers' identities affect teacher-students and teacher–management relationships. Such violation has to be addressed so that teachers' emotional experience in everyday life can be thought about and thereby positively influence their professional development. This is in line with Chen [7] who suggested that programs should be developed to help prospective or practicing teachers understand their identity and vulnerability. Thus, initial teacher education should help future teachers understand the professional relevance and value of their emotional experiences and support them in analyzing those feelings as reflecting their identity [7]. Educational psychologists are often asked to engage in complex and messy real-life situations in schools, and they play a crucial role in supporting students as well as teachers to develop and manage complex and confusing emotional situations [52]. However, educational psychologists draw upon a range of frameworks for practice, but what appears to be missing, amongst these theoretical frameworks, is psychodynamic psychology, according to Pellegrini [24]. This article highlights the use of such framework to "see" the problem better and thus support professional development.

Another implication of the case is that teacher education should consider in-

tegrating more courses on teacher-students emotional and relation issues in its curriculum. Furthermore, especially new teachers but also more experienced teachers should be offered supervision in their workplace. This supervision should focus on the teachers' own emotional experiences from everyday life in school, with the emphasis on the teachers' relationships.Group based peer-support can be one way of helping teachers reflect upon their practices [53].

In this present case, it is clear that addressing identity violation is a vital condition for learning from experience. In line with Kayi-Aydar [54], it is important to be aware of how and when teachers consider themselves powerless. When teachers are given the opportunity to be actively involved in decision making and problem solving in their school, they may feel less vulnerable and their professional identity may be less threatened [55].

School management plays an important role in teachers' informal learning [27]. An aspect of culturally responsive school management is "critical self-awareness" ([42] p. 1280). My case sample underscores Khalifa *et al.*'s [42] suggestion that the school management as well as the teachers must be willing to interrogate their racial and cultural beliefs.

7. Conclusions

I began this article by claiming that in my attempt to grasp the teachers' problems and to understand their frustrations I felt as though it slipped through my fingers. My findings in the case presented here go some way to explain my difficulties. We have seen that part of the teachers' problems in this case was connected to uncomfortable feelings, such as violation of identity in relation to students, and to their inability to form "good relationships" with the students. Teachers' frustrations were difficult to grasp because they were unwilling to talk about their negative feelings towards students. It is not easy to understand something that is not verbalised or discussed openly.

It is also understandable that the teachers did not feel supported by the school management due to their experiences of identity violation in relation to the student. Had the EP service or the school management been able to go beyond seeing themselves as being there not only for the benefit of the students, but also for the teachers, it could have helped the teachers see themselves as a part of the problem. Narrow action was instead taken to stop unwanted forms of student behaviour. By this sort of compartmentalising understanding of the problem, which only described the students as a problem, the teachers avoided self-reflection and considering their own feelings. They avoided becoming a part of the problem themselves. This also prevented them from being able to understand the complexity of the problem and thereby finding satisfying solutions to the problem.

The violation of all dimensions of identity (personal, professional, cultural) contributed to the creation of a problem, which was so big or complex that nobody knew how to deal effectively with it. Systemically and personally, there was an investment in not linking together the contributing elements. Thus, the conditions for learning from experience were not accessible, and the problems were

repeated rather than understood and addressed.

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