

Examining transition from student to teacher

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"It was the hardest thing I ever had to do, emotionally and mentally." These are not the words we generally associate with a university student who is undergoing teacher training, yet Concordia researcher Anita Sinner has heard similar statements from many such individuals. Every year thousands of students make the transition from student to teacher and the stories of those who struggle are often missing from our conversations.

"Pre-service [teachers](#) who experience varying degrees of struggle have few stories against which to compare their experiences when entering the teaching profession," Sinner explains. This magnifies a sense of dislocation in the very profession they seek to dedicate their working lives." By examining the challenges faced by one person transitioning from student to teacher, she hopes to "raise awareness about the stresses of the teaching occupation and works to establish, within teacher culture, alternative perspectives about the profession."

Writing in the peer-reviewed journal, *Teachers and Teaching: Theories and Practice*, Sinner, a professor in Concordia University's Department of Art Education, offers what she calls a "critique from the inside." She focuses her study on Nathalie, a young woman at the practicum stage of her [teacher education](#).

Nathalie is stimulated in her university classroom, where she is encouraged to "approach teacher education through inquiry, development of interdisciplinary perspectives, collaboration with students and teachers, and ongoing reflective writing and visual

expression." Yet, she is stifled in her job-training, which continues to follow an apprenticeship model, where her authority and abilities are questioned— not by the Grade 8 kids to whom she's teaching art, but by the "sponsor-teacher," who is meant to be imparting wisdom, support and guidance.

"It was a very odd relationship," writes Nathalie. "At times I would think maybe she doesn't mind sharing her classroom with me, and then there would always be an incident that reminded me that I'm in her space. Even when she had the opportunity to help me, she wouldn't. It got to the point where she asked me, 'Haven't you ever taken a drawing class?' That was the tone of the practicum."

This disconnect between the university classroom and the grade-school teaching placement represents something of a paradox. "Students like Nathalie learn to be teachers while behaving as if they have already mastered the necessary skills and knowledge. This puts them in a difficult space, where they have a double identity as a student who is also a teacher. That can be very hard to navigate, because the roles subvert one another, which can leave student teachers questioning the ethics of their practicum experiences."

"The existing practices of teacher education leave some pre-service teachers vulnerable to exploitation. The scope of Nathalie's emotional experience raises critical concerns about the apprenticeship model and the value of field experience," Sinner goes on to explain. Indeed her research brings into question whether such job placements are the most productive means to prepare a new teacher for the classroom.

Ultimately, Sinner sees this research as the beginning of a larger study that can encompass more disciplines. "This doesn't just apply to [student](#) teachers struggling with practicum experiences. On-the-job training is part of degree requirements in fields including nursing, medicine, social

work, law, architecture and engineering. By opening up the dialogue around practical training, we can help the next generation of teachers, lawyers, doctors, engineers and architects become better able to discuss their struggles as they train – and, in so doing, improve that training experience."

Provided by Concordia University

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