

Teaching Philosophy Statement and Ideological Becoming: from individual practice to social meaning

Filosofía Educativa Personal y Devenir Ideológico: de la práctica individual al significado social

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Abstract

The writing of a teaching philosophy statement can be interpreted as a dynamic component in the development of the teacher's system of ideas, their ideological self. In this reflective article, the exercise of personal reflection and growth that promotes the development of a personal teaching philosophy is examined according to some available writing guidelines. Through a documentary method, the assumptions of the beliefs in question are argued in order to interpret them under the Bakhtinian concepts of heteroglossia and ideological becoming. The examination of heteroglossia in the text of a TPS increases the awareness of individual teaching activity connected to broader social, cultural, and political practices built through writing. These considerations are intended to connect the activities of educators with the possibility of more democratic societies.

Keywords: Ideological becoming; teaching philosophy statement; reflective practice; teacher education

Resumen

La escritura de una filosofía educativa personal puede interpretarse como un componente dinámico en el desarrollo del sistema de ideas del docente, su yo ideológico. En este artículo de reflexión se examina el ejercicio reflexivo y de crecimiento personal que el desarrollo de una filosofía educativa personal promueve de acuerdo con algunos modelos de escritura disponibles. A través de un método documental, se precisan los supuestos y las creencias en cuestión para interpretarlos bajo los conceptos bakhtinianos¹ de heteroglosia y devenir ideológico. El examen de la heteroglosia en el texto aumenta la conciencia de la actividad docente individual al conectarla con las prácticas sociales, culturales y políticas más amplias construidas a través de la escritura. Estas consideraciones tienen por objeto vincular las actividades de los educadores con la posibilidad de sociedades más democráticas.

Palabras clave: Devenir ideológico; filosofía educativa personal; práctica reflexiva; formación docente

* Este adjetivo se refiere a la obra de Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895-1975) filósofo ruso del lenguaje y teórico literario cuyas aportaciones han influido más allá del ámbito literario en la semiótica, la sociolingüística y los estudios de comunicación, por mencionar algunos.

INTRODUCTION

More increasingly a teaching Philosophy Statement (TPS) conforms a requirement of a teaching portfolio, a relevant constituent in teacher's applications at the start of their career and also during promotion, tenure or award processes (Laundon, Cathcart & Greer, 2020). With the benefits of having a document to appraise the expertise of teaching the development of a TPS it's gaining institutional implementation (Humphreys, 2020) Writing about matters of teaching and learning requires teachers to engage in a thinking process which, at best, participates in the practice of philosophizing on teaching (Beatty, Leigh & Dean, 2009b) but ultimately, when asked for a TPS, the teacher produces a concrete *text* on their own teaching practice.

An underlying assumption in continuous teaching development, as well as in writing a TPS, is that reflection improves the teaching practice and the overall results of learning (Schön, 1983; Schön, 1987; Johns, 2017; Thompson & Thompson, 2008). Better informed decisions based on reflective practices have a positive effect on learning (Colton & Sparks-Langer, 1993) and should be promoted. In writing a TPS, teachers are presented with the challenges of reflection, clarification and organization of the components of teaching and learning in a coherent text, with particular attention to teaching and learning in a specific disciplinary field and in a specific context. A teacher will use the words typically associated with theories, approaches and perspectives encountered during their own experience. Although it is not guaranteed that the outcome of this process results in a blueprint of teaching performance, the assumption is that these ideas inform their decisions in the classroom.

The concepts and terms used in a TPS are not individually produced but rather selected by the author from a pre-existing heteroglossic group of discourses. They are brought to mind and placed together in a text motivated by an array of factors, such as the fulfillment of a licensing requirement, an item in a job application, compliance with standard procedures of educational institutions, or as a clarification to oneself what kind of teacher one would like to be or become.

Bakhtin has already shown up in relation to the writing of a TPS. An interpretation on dialogism has been used recently in the work of Merkel (2020), where the author demonstrated that the process of writing a TPS can be aided by a dialogical interaction, engaging students to clarify their thoughts concerning their TPS by verbalizing them and afterwards transferring them to writing. However, in this article returns to the text as a work in which the dialogical interaction occurs between the author and the world through a series of concepts and theories embedded in their writing in an attempt to capture their own thoughts about teaching and learning. This conceptualization of a TPS as a text in which heteroglossia is displayed allows us the observation of the preceding voices, to consider the production of a philosophy of teaching as a milestone in ideological becoming.

METHODOLOGY

This article of reflection takes a critical qualitative approach. In a first stage, a documentary method was used with models for developing and writing a teaching philoso-

phy statement as sources. The documentary method as sustained by [Bohnsack, Pfaff & Weller \(2010\)](#) remains closely bound to the analytical development of the sociologist Karl Mannheim which shifts the focus of research from what truth and normativity in society are to how they are developed and produced by looking at the practices and narratives. The main premise of this method is the distinction between two levels of meaning, one of which is verbally and explicitly communicated making possible the reconstruction of the underlying and implied meaning. This is referred to as documentary meaning. The three stages of documentary interpretation are considered: formulating interpretation, reflecting interpretation, and type formation ([Bohnsack et. al., 2010](#)). By focusing on the process of how to write a TPS, the underlying meaning that concerns social practices that are ideologically loaded becomes accessible to critical reflection. In identifying how the relevant topics of a TPS are reflected upon by the author, the final product is interpreted as a type of dialogical text in which reflection and self-development play a role.

During a second stage, the results of the previous review are highlighted with socio-critical considerations. As a method of inquiry, critical reflection considers the understanding of the individual in a social context, thus allowing us to see the practice of writing a TPS in “the social context of professional practice” ([Fook, 2010](#), pp.2–3). Accordingly, once the relevant topics of a TPS are identified, they are interpreted in the context of a social practice by revisiting the bakhtinian concepts of heteroglossia and ideological becoming. It is from this second movement that the proposal for attention on the located meanings used in the writing of a TPS emerge.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The results are organized in three sections. In the first section, the analysis of the conceptualization of a TPS and the relevant topics of reflection and self-development are shown. In the second, the concept of heteroglossia is introduced to interpret how the TPS conforms to a social practice in the professional development of teaching. In the final section, after identifying the systematic writing and engagement with a TPS, we facilitate a movement from the individual to the social as the process of ideological becoming.

Teaching Philosophy Statement (TPS)

A teaching philosophy statement is a document that, simply put, synthesizes the complexities of a teacher’s ideas about teaching. [Schönwetter, Sokal, Friesen & Taylor \(2002\)](#) define TPS as “a systematic and critical rationale that focuses the important components defining effective teaching and learning in a particular discipline and/or institutional context” (p. 84). By this operational definition, the authors aim to build a model for writing and evaluating a TPS. Their model considers the personal beliefs and the individual expectations that the teacher/author brings into the context. They also take notice of how the author considers the disciplinary cultures and institutional structures when elaborating the text.

These guidelines serve as a kind of template to alleviate the messiness of the thinking process underlying the writing by providing an organizing structure. “Given that the development of a teaching philosophy statement involves a complex process of gathering, assimilating, analysing, reflecting upon, and evaluating and adapting *thoughts* [emphasis added] on effective teaching and learning, it is helpful to express this *thinking* [emphasis added] in some organized fashion for both the writer and the reader” (Schönwetter et al., 2002, p. 84).

A TPS as the result of a thinking process is amply recognized in the literature. The idea is that following an organizational guideline generates a coherent product that can be read and shared. According to Chism (1998), a TPS will describe the thoughts of the teacher on how learning takes place, how they can intervene in the process, what the expected goals for students are, and what actions to implement their intentions. While Schönwetter et al. (2002) identify elements in a TPS such as: definitions of teaching and learning, perspectives on learner development, student-teacher relationships, teaching methods and evaluation. On their part, Yeom, Miller & Delp’s (2018) model considers the “alignment” of educational concepts found in the institutional framework to “one’s beliefs, likes, and expectations regarding teaching and learning.” (p. 131). The components may vary a bit, but they have in common the goal to separate areas of attention for the teacher/author.

To help this process of articulating definitions, the project of Beatty, Leigh and Lund Dean included an activity consisted of the use of a series of cards that help connect a group of key concepts and themes “incorporating the educational philosophy themes into the philosophy statement. Such incorporation is valuable because it helps teachers *give language to practice* [added emphasis] in meaningfully shared ways” (Beatty, Leigh & Dean, 2009a, p. 121). Later on, Cathcart, Greer & Neale (2018) adapted that exercise into an online app (app.teachingadvantage.org) with the purpose of generating a TPS “as a way to articulate an approach to learning and teaching by describing, analyzing and justifying methods and goals” (par. 1). The user selects key words from digital cards which, when turned, give the specificity of a theory, or suggest an author who can be consulted for a fuller understanding of the term. This tool provides the appropriate lexicon, giving the statement the appearance of validity, which may be important for its acceptance or recognition.

Although the process of writing a TPS varies, one of the general rules of generating it is that it “should be written with the audience in mind” (Chism, 1998, par. 4). It is not difficult to imagine the document being addressed to an audience that expects a display of expertise and knowledge, in that context, the TPS enacts a shared belief system.

Sometimes the use of the appropriate words can be explicitly mentioned, as in the model by Yeom et al. (2018) where it is suggested to locate organizational values in documents, such as the mission statement of a University one tends to apply to, because “[t]hese key terms should be incorporated in the introduction to the teaching philosophy statement” (p. 132). Furthermore, this model also recommends “to ensure that the draft teaching philosophy contains the essential components reflecting specific concepts or standards required in the department or discipline” (Yeom et al., 2018, p. 133).

Frequently the perceived reader of a TPS is a person in a position of power, a decision maker, such as a potential employer. Within this power dynamic, writing an acceptable statement could be an act of submission and compliance to the power and the beliefs an institution or a group promotes. This recognizes that the goal and the audience are kept in mind as the writing anticipates the reception of this work. The text participates in the construction of the communicative act and the relationship between the teacher as author and her audience.

TPS as a reflective practice

The construction of TPS has also been seen as “reflective and personal” (Chism, 1998 par. 4). These texts are assumed to be the result of a critical thinking process, “a critical rationale will exhibit congruence between these various components of the teaching philosophy statement, *demonstrating the significant amount of assimilative, analytical and evaluative thought that precedes the articulation of it* [emphasis added]” (Schönwetter et al., 2002, p. 84). Often the guidelines for filling in the content of the TPS coincide with the prompts and objects of focus to promote reflective decision making (Colton & Sparks-Langer, 1993). The goals of gaining awareness and developing a TPS come together, in that a philosophy of teaching encompasses the overall reasoning behind the process of teaching.

Thus, the TPS goes beyond the requirement of its elaboration. Even in the proposed way of introducing the appropriate terms and concepts mentioned above, Beatty et al. (2009b) give a caveat to their activity, recommending that participants engage in a larger discussion of the historical shared foundations of educational philosophies, as well as contemporary discussions with colleagues at their local institutions. And to “use the cards as a new source of educational information to write their teaching philosophy *after* deep reflection” (Beatty et al., 2009a, p. 128). It may be added that it would also be important to clarify the circumstances under which the TPS is being generated in the first place, exposing any power structures and any other external demands that certainly affect its creation. Generating a TPS presents one with the opportunity of engaging with one’s own belief system in dialogue with others, quite literally as in the work of Merkel (2020) or in subtle way through the use of other voices in the writing of the text, a point to which I’ll return.

Furthermore, reflection is facilitated when the text is considered in its belonging to a meaningful social world.

The document itself is not necessarily evidence of a reflective practice. We do not have access to a teacher’s thinking process behind the writing of the TPS unless the process of reflection itself is investigated. Since a reflective practice is an ongoing professional skill that occurs within constantly changing circumstances, it would be problematic to consider any TPS as something that is not in flux. The materiality of the text gives the reader the notion that it is static or complete. In fact, some texts are often printed or attached to professional files or in publications that, in time, become imprecise or irrelevant. The challenge lies in understanding the unfinished dimension of the text. The ideas are only partially understood and the position to them is captured or engaged only in the current

situation. So, considering this text, as much as any other text, as something that participates in communication, and so in culture and social relations, under the ideas of Bakhtin, can help us to reposition ourselves as readers and writers of our underlying conceptions about teaching and learning. This in turn, as explain later, will lead to the consideration of a TPS as a dynamic component in ideological becoming.

TPS enabling personal growth and development

As we saw in the previous section, for some authors the elaboration of a teacher's philosophy statement is an activity that promotes reflection. In this regard, a particular line of reflective activity projects toward future development. It espouses the usefulness of creating a vivid image that anticipates a desired outcome, as presented by Chism (1998) "a vision of the teacher one wants to become" (par. 12). She suggests stimulating recollection and comparing current concepts and actions to previous ones, understanding how a teacher has "grown in teaching" (Chism, 1998, par. 12) as a construction through time in which the dialogue with others helps and from which a synthesis or this *vision* would emerge. She suggests this would be "a very effective way to conclude a philosophy of teaching statement" (Chism, 1998, par. 12) offering a personal tone to the overall effect of a TPS.

Even in models that are produced with standards in mind, consideration to self-reflection is given. Yeom et al. (2018) remark on reflection as a matter of experienced teaching "as time passes, self-reflection may be more common than formal evaluation [...] One's teaching philosophy should be a living document that is integrated in and actualized by the art of science or *one's* teaching [emphasis added]" (p. 134). Here, however, it is still focused on the individual synthesis, not necessarily confronting the document to its social meaning.

Similarly, the personal development of teaching as a work of 'self' is considered by Schönwetter et al. (2002) as one of the components of constructing a TPS. This aspect characterizes the writing as an "autobiographical project" (Cole & Knowles in Beatty et al., 2009a, p. 116). It is from this emphasis on the revision of experience and assessment of personal growth that this exploration of 'self' sets the construction of a TPS within the process of ideological becoming once a social aspect is included.

Social heteroglossia in the TPS

The multiple elements involved in the construction of the TPS as well as the social and contextual dynamics present, determine its form. Bakhtin's idea of heteroglossia that he uses to characterize novelistic relationships, is useful for us here. Seeing the text with Bakhtin's concept in mind, we are able to capture the instability and dynamics of a TPS as an unfinished product, as an evolving organism and not simply a production with "instrumental benefits" (Beatty et al., 2009b, p. 110) for instance, getting a job. The text is a space to which the author can revisit and examine the relationship of the words chosen within a social context. The TPS is, in this sense, a milestone or a marker along the path of a process of what we refer to in the next section as ideological becoming.

The investigation of Bakhtin of the novel as a genre with particularities that are due to the presence of contrary forces, namely, heteroglossia and unity, opens a path for the research of everyday speech and discourse. He rejected formalism in ahistorical views of literature and instead he linked formal traces in texts to their conditions of production and reception (Norris, 2002, p. 383). For Bakhtin the text was constructed by utterances and words that express not only a connection to a language system but to the social life in it. He referred to this as the verbal/social world (Bakhtin, 1981). It is in this sense that Bakhtin's notion of text is conceived dialogically, that is, as an encounter between the individual and the social (Arán, 2006).

Each utterance is originated in a multitude of meaning, values, social discourses, cultural codes, etc. (Norris, 2002, p. 383), such as those arising from the complexity and multiplicity within the practice of teaching out of which a TPS emerges. What the ideas of Bakhtin about the presence of multiple voices in the text can illuminate is our consideration of a TPS not as a static, fixed text but rather activated in each engagement. If it is read with contextual information in mind, such as a response to a job application it will be just that, if it is read to promote individual or collective reflection it will be an instrument for that as well.

This bakhtinian multiplicity of voices can be considered when looking at the suggested components of teacher's philosophy statement. As a heteroglossic text, it includes narratives, descriptions, argumentations, and evaluative statements (Nohl, 2010). There are several different voices entering the composition, beginning with an authorial narrator, a self. Then there are forms of extra-authorial speech, like those stemming from the various disciplines and the given paradigms of education and philosophy of education. Furthermore, there are institutional and contextual boundaries that impose or imply regulations and so on, that take into consideration the everyday operations and activity in which the author/teacher is engaged in. And while these relatively distinct areas can be recognized, the resulting text is a unity that through the author's process of "orchestrating" different voices has achieved a structured system. Taking this stratification of speech and language calls attention to the fact that it is not necessarily an individual text, the result of personal, independent reflection. It is, rather, a type of dialogic text.

To illustrate one small way in which heteroglossia could operate on our TPS, we could consider the terminology that is frequently deployed, and has even come to be standard fare in a TPS. Take for instance, the use of the word "autonomy" as it may be conceptualized or presented in the form of a sentence that asserts "to promote autonomy in learning", as a goal of effective teaching. During the defining process and while reflecting on the definition of autonomy, the teacher/author of the TPS might track it down to when as a student or as an incipient teacher and also as a member of a particular social group and culture came across it, and how it gained significance and then became salient in relation to teaching. It already seems a daunting memory task, if indeed possible at all. We take for granted the positive value of autonomy, apparently, but why? What historical connections can be defined? The exploration would involve seeking the term's relation to the world outside the text, to that verbal/social world Bakhtin mentioned, and how autonomy connect to issues as democracy, capitalism, and modernity, for example.

Even as a cultural value the experience of autonomy is not learned the same way. Depending on the surrounding environment, the entire range of value, from the lowest to the highest, is represented. Some societies expect autonomy from their citizens and encourage it from an early age both at home and in schooling. Other societies might consider autonomy to be a threat to the regime in power, and a fully selfish, if not anti-patriotic sentiment. The term itself ‘autonomy’ can be connected to the maintenance or the resistance of a whole cultural social and political system. And even if the goal of autonomy is noble, the results do not guarantee that the society will receive the autonomous student justly, considering intersectional differences like gender, race, ableness. Autonomy in some marginalized members of society is often, in fact, received with violence. How it works for us and how it projects into society is not equal. The point here is not to discuss the particular term, however. This paper is not about ‘autonomy’. What is discussed is how the text is an unstable entity. Meanings that are often taken for granted, are, in fact, highly elusive.

The creation process of the TPS text is a moment that gives voice to a teacher’s own belief system which, when clarified, presents the opportunity to examine relationships to knowledge and that of peers, tutors, mentors, and authors present in the text. To look at the potential in the text for ideological becoming means to identify the social power dynamics and disconnect them while not necessarily rejecting their particularities. The text is then a part of a continuous and open process, almost a byproduct and not some outcome of a finished process.

Ideological becoming

Next, the heteroglossia of TPS will be situated in the process of ideological becoming. The term *ideological becoming* became influential in teacher education in the areas of language and culture since the introductory work of [Freedman & Ball \(2004\)](#). In *Bakhtinian Concepts to Guide the Study of Language, Literacy, and Learning* they introduced a new direction for research teaching and learning in the global complexities of diversity, change and conflict. With this goal they revised the definition and distinguished the Russian word ‘*ideologiya*’ not charged with the political and sometimes inflexible connotations from the English cognate (Morris in [Freedman & Ball, 2004](#)) to clarify it as: “*ideological becoming* refers to how we develop our way of viewing the world, our system of ideas, what Bakhtin calls an ideological self” (pp. 4–5). In this sense, ideological becoming revolves around the conscious development of the ‘self’.

This ideological self develops when the reflection is *deep reflection* [emphasis added] ([Beatty et al., 2009a](#), p. 128) and promotes a reflective practice ([Schön, 1987](#); [Johns, 2017](#)) or focuses overall on becoming critical ([Brookfield, 2017](#); [Thompson & Thompson, 2008](#)). Furthermore, as Bakhtin was referring to written texts, we can add emphasis to the textual form of the TPS thus restoring the value of heteroglossia in ideological becoming. In their contribution, [Freedman & Ball \(2004\)](#) made use of two other terms from Bakhtin, namely, the authoritative versus the internally persuasive discourse. The text is a synthesis, so to speak, of the conversation that the author has been having, through reading, thinking and writing, with other ideological beings and the social practice of

being a teacher, not simply the product of an individual. And here, in the development of a TPS, “it is what each person thinks for him-or herself, what is persuasive to the individual, that determines the development of their ideologies” (Freedman & Ball, 2004, p. 10). They consider the possibilities of exploring ideological becoming as a social process, close to the methodological principles of Bakhtin and Medvedev, one of his close collaborators, “We are most inclined to imagine ideological creation as some inner process of understanding comprehension, and perception, and do not notice that it in fact unfolds externally, for the eye, the ear, the hand” (Bakhtin/Medvedev in Freedman & Ball, 2004, p. 27) as in a text which is what has allowed us to examine the writing of a TPS as a social practice following a documentary methodological approach.

Since then, ideological becoming has been used to promote and develop teacher’s cultural awareness in multicultural and multilingual settings (Sharma & Phyak, 2017; Holdway & Hitchcock, 2018; Parr, Bulfin, Diamond, Wood & Ceridwen, 2020), a critical need, in my opinion, to foster inclusion and diversity for most educational settings where the classrooms become more aware of the increasing number of nonbinary-sexual identities, indigenous peoples, African descendants and the changing roles of women and so on. In this context, investigations of ideological becoming and reflection in relation to language and culture have understood the complexity of the classroom and the challenges for teachers to make moment to moment decisions and carry out plans adequate to the changing dynamics of teaching. However, this attention to differentiated learning is a responsibility that must be handled somehow by all the actors of the teaching learning environments regardless of their disciplinary fields.

A reflection on the goals of education are crucial to face the challenges of the accelerated and abrupt changes in the environment. The emergence, for example, of the necessity to implement more sophisticated and widespread employment of distant learning technologies presents another dimension to our processes of ideological becoming. When the problems of access to knowledge are being resolved, the issues of social access and inequality, racism, sexism, and all forms of discrimination need the urgent attention of democratic societies. A TPS, then, as an open text that resonates with the voices of discourses, social, cultural, and political opinions, norms and expectations has the potential to address, with awareness, some of these pressing needs.

CONCLUSIONS

Following a three-stage documentary method, the relevant themes of reflection and self-development in building models for writing a Teaching Philosophy Statement (TPS) were analyzed. The concept of heteroglossia was introduced to suggest that the TPS conforms to a social practice in the professional development of teaching. Thus, identifying the systematic writing and engagement with a TPS, we facilitate a movement from the individual to the social as the process of ideological becoming.

While in writing a Teaching Philosophy Statement (TPS), following guidelines or organizing principles eases the compliance with certain institutional requirements, a TPS, as a text, can also promote awareness not only in the individual practice of its elaboration, but also as a way of addressing the socially constructed expectations of the readers and

the communities they belong to. The words that are used, in a sense, lay the foundation for teaching in the given context. Under the expectations of its fulfillment, a belief system about the complex activities that teaching, and learning involve is deployed.

This moment can also serve as an opportunity to assess the assumptions and validity of the belief system under consideration. By keeping in mind, the bakhtinian ideas of heteroglossia and ideological becoming during the engagement with the TPS, one can bring a heightened awareness of its state as an ephemeral, or permanent work-in-progress. The recognition and acknowledgment of its relationship to the disciplines and the context is enabled by this particular awareness of the participants. Understanding the heteroglossia in the TPS encourages an exploration of its connections to the verbal/social world outside the text. The personal growth that a TPS promotes, enhances the recognition of schooling, training and education as processes that binds the individual activity of teaching to the wider social, cultural and political practices constructed through the language.

These conscious acts of revision, rereading and rewriting the texts further the constantly evolving ideological becoming through a better understanding not of the words of others as one's own, but the relationship to those words, and ultimately, to the previously constructed world. Through the appropriation of those words and the resulting understanding of a relationship to the social/verbal world we gain a clearer more critical ideological picture. This consideration of the world beyond the simple power dynamics of educational settings, connects the activities of educators to the possibility of more democratic societies.

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