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## Teaching Subjectively: Interdisciplinary Insights

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# Teaching Subjectively: Interdisciplinary Insights

## **Abstract**

This article of linked, short essays reflecting on the experiences of five female scholars across three disciplines — law, social work and political science - draws upon Britzman's (1991) notion of the "dialogic discourse" to explore how these professors' sense of self is constituted through interplay with colleagues and their perceptions of students within the classroom. The authors explore the teacher/learner relationship as a dialogue within which learners and educators shape each other as they come to understand how and what they know. What the collection makes explicit is what is often only implicit, that the ways in which professors understand their practices and subjective self is central to the identity of "a professor", which is never stable or certain, but is always a creative practice. Such practices, we argue, are best sustained through collegial reflective practices that help us make sense of ourselves and continue our work.

Cet article consiste de courts essais reliés entre eux qui relatent les expériences de cinq professeures érudites qui oeuvrent dans trois disciplines différentes : le droit, le travail social et les sciences politiques. Il est basé sur la notion de « discours dialogique » de Britzman (1991) qui permet d'explorer comment la conscience de soi de ces professeures s'est constituée à travers leurs interactions avec leurs collègues et leurs perceptions des étudiants dans la salle de classe. Les auteures explorent les relations entre enseignants et apprenants sous forme de dialogues au sein desquels les apprenants et les éducateurs se façonnent les uns les autres au fur et à mesure qu'ils comprennent comment ils apprennent et ce qu'ils ont appris. Ce que la collection rend explicite est ce qui est souvent seulement implicite, à savoir que les diverses manières dont les professeurs comprennent leurs pratiques et leur moi subjectif sont au centre de l'identité d'un « professeur », qui n'est jamais stable ni certaine mais qui est toujours une pratique créatrice. Nous suggérons que de telles pratiques sont plus durables par le biais de pratiques réflexives collégiales qui nous aident à nous donner un sens à nous-mêmes et nous permettent de continuer à travailler.

## **Keywords**

teaching, professor identity, subjectivity, dialogic, discourse

The process of becoming a university educator involves continually remaking oneself in conversation and interactions with students, colleagues, the institution and, at times, the public outside the institution's walls. It is an ongoing process of "becoming" in which we mold our identity around our intersecting personal and professional lives, which shift depending upon the nature of the interactions we are having and the people with whom we are speaking. In this article, we explore our own experiences of constituting a professorial self through dialogic discourse. Britzman (1991) suggests that using this framework to understand education "takes into account the discursive practice" and the social relationships that realize pedagogy and "the lived experience of teachers" (p. 1). She further explains the framework:

At first glance, the dialogic may remind one of the dialogue, the conversations between persons and the shared sense that communication is possible only through exchange. A concern with the dialogic, however, allows us to move beyond the conversation itself to attend to the conditions of its production: the words we choose, the way we reinflect them with past and personal meanings, the style used to position meanings, and the mix of intentions that are inevitable when speakers interact... This understanding can help us begin to identify the kinds of discourse that are made available, and decide whether a discourse can provide the practices we desire. (p. 238)

In this paper, we use this approach to make visible how professorial positions are negotiated where there is tension between the dominant narrative of what a professor is and the unpredictability of the university classroom. We understand the university classroom and the performance of professor as highly uncertain and in an ongoing cycle of re-construction. When exploring the professor as continually shaped by "polyphony of forces that interact, challenge, beckon and rearrange our practices and the positions we take up" (Britzman, 1991, p. 239), we are able to explore subjectivity within pedagogical relations that are "unpredictable, incorrigible, uncontrollable, unmanageable, disobedient" (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 8). We reflect upon the ways in which conversations within and between ourselves, colleagues and students reshape our classrooms and identities. We also, as best as we can in a piece about our own subjectivities, speculate on the dialogic space between professor and student. Throughout, we investigate the ways in which we put the paradox of education and educating – as being equally about what we intend and what we do not anticipate as educational content – to use within our disciplinary spaces.

This collection is concerned with how the subjectivities of university professors are constructed through ongoing interactions within the university and how we negotiate these "felt encounters" (Greene, 1984). There are everyday unnoticed conversations that give us a sense of familiarity and predictability, but there are also those interactions that stand out as challenging us to reconsider who we hope to be as professors. In addition, there are conversations that seem to have little individual meaning; these interactions reshape who we are. Each author grapples with the tensions between what we believe and how we behave, the theories we draw upon, and our pedagogical practices. We have all had the experience of writing our teaching philosophy only to be confronted by moments in our practice that transgress our stated goals, sometimes with beneficial outcomes and sometimes in ways we regret. In reflecting on the professorial self as fluid and always under

construction, we can interrogate the various ways in which professional selves are created, maintained, and restructured. The power of the conversation and interaction between key players in the institution are also taken up so as to unsettle the stable and coherent “professor role,” replacing it with a subject that is deeply affected and transformed through interactions with colleagues, students and the institution. As the self is transformed, so is the teaching and learning experience. We explore the various ways we negotiate our identities and fears of failure, vulnerability, and reprisals that determine the texture of our teaching (see also Britzman, 1991).

The collection begins with Sucharov’s use of voice in the university classroom and a particularly challenging teaching experience in which a small group of students’ approach to dialogue overturned her intended pedagogical project. Following this contribution, Schwartz explores the social work notion of “use of self” in relation to her biracialized identity and the benefits and the tensions between passing and disclosing in the classroom. As the professorial self is negotiated through dialogue and interaction in the classroom, both our professional and personal selves are of interest to students and become the material from which they learn. This can, as Kuzmarov suggests, create significant tension for many educators and tends to unnerve the educational enterprise that organizes itself on content, often to the exclusion of the teaching subject. Kuzmarov and Douglas offer different, though overlapping, narratives about negotiating a gendered body as professor in the classroom. Both authors explore the ways in which education is lost and found “somewhere between the search for pleasure and the confrontation with reality” (Britzman, 2003, p. 13). Finally, Todd explores the interactive production of student and professor subjectivities in professional programs. Her piece demonstrates that teaching is a space in which “desires are rehearsed, refashioned and refused” (Britzman, 2003, p. 220). She explores how dialogue between professors and students who are in the process of trying to craft identities from an oversaturated field of possibilities also destabilizes the professorial self. As students negotiate what to own, borrow or avoid, the educator is both in the role of offering guidance and also reconstituting herself in relation to these negotiations. As a collection, these contributions explore the interactions between personal and political narratives and our professorial performances in the university classroom.

### **Mira Sucharov**

Britzman (1991) writes that “[o]ur voice is always contingent upon shifting relationships among the words we speak, the practices we construct, and the communities in which we interact” (p. 12). This is an essay about subjectivity and how we negotiate multiple voices: an “opinion voice” in the realm of scholarship and newspaper columns, and a “teaching voice” in the university classroom around Israeli-Palestinian relations. It’s an essay about how, despite our best attempts to decide when and in which voice we will speak, it may feel like our audience is casting our voice as other than that which we intend. It’s a story about the inherent fragility of the project of constructing one’s professorial identity around conversations in which students and professors may feel that they are not recognizable to each other.

A recent semester was a particularly challenging one for me. In having eschewed final exams, I restructured in-class time to be a guided conversation. It’s a format that requires less furious note taking, and more face-to-face engagement. It’s a format that lends

itself to generating questions together and discussing how we would go about answering those questions, even if time doesn't allow us to gather all the evidence and come to firm conclusions right there.

In that back-and-forth engagement, and using my classroom “voice,” I am aware of what drives me as an emotional and intellectual being in the world: a desire to challenge my audience to consider different perspectives, and a desire to challenge deeply-held beliefs that may require more evidence to either affirm them or reject them. In the classroom, I want my students to generate their own scholarly conclusions from the evidence we uncover together. I also want to serve as a model for them of how scholarly assessment and opinion can be usefully married. As such, I teach opinion writing by regularly assigning an “op-ed” style assignment. And I include many of my own op-eds on the syllabus (in addition to my formal scholarly writing), which means that students are privy to my academic and political judgments. I want to model for them the role of a public writer and thinker— even if I see my teaching role as distinct.

That recent semester held an unexpected kind of challenge, as the process of spontaneous engagement I try to cultivate seemed to misfire. A handful of students seemed particularly on edge with my approach over the course of the term, which frequently involved me challenging what I sensed were deeply held truths that might deserve more public examination, even if, after considering evidence in light of whatever values, morals or ethics one might bring to bear, students retained their view.

A particularly tense standoff involved a debate over the use of the term “apartheid” to describe Israel. It's a word I am hesitant to use to describe Israel writ large—I believe it offers more heat than light—but I am fairly comfortable using it to describe Israel's occupation in the West Bank. We didn't manage to get to the details of each of Israel's regimes (within and outside of the Green Line, the 1949 armistice line); however, since, once a student raised the term, I began by suggesting we “bracket the West Bank for a moment,” and “consider the nature of rights and practices within Israel proper,” which includes roughly 80% Jews and 20% Palestinian citizens of Israel.

Students balked. Some challenged my framing. I felt cornered. In that split second, I felt like my subjectivity of being a “professor who seeks multi-dimensionality” was being challenged. In the framework of multiple voices that Britzman (1991) describes, I felt that my students were implying that the teaching voice I work so hard to cultivate was being transformed into an ill-placed opinion voice. Complicating this were the inevitable power dynamics that lurk in the background. These are complex and countervailing: on one hand there are the professor-student dynamics by which the professor wields authority (especially around grading). On the other hand, there are the teaching evaluations at term's end, documents which are used as a metric of employment performance.

In the intervening week, the coauthors of this very essay met over breakfast. My colleagues provided the kind of support that we, as teachers and professors, so often require when we feel like our voice has been interrupted. And while there is comfort in sharing personal struggles with colleagues, the process is not without its risks. Later in this paper, Kuzmarov writes of our natural desire to secure professional credibility, and Schwartz identifies the “risks associated both with disclosing and not disclosing” aspects of one's subjectivity. There, she is talking about disclosure to students and about specific aspects of biography and identity, but so too is revealing one's vulnerability to colleagues not without some risk. Colleagues here and elsewhere offered conceptual suggestions, in a way that

felt like I had a script to fall back on. The following week, I opened the class by describing my goals for the course: a journey of open inquiry where we would see where the evidence takes us. The atmosphere was tense—and, regrettably, the tension begat silence. We proceeded, each of us (professor and students) having retreated to our expected subject positions.

When I eventually received my course evaluations, I saw that roughly the same number of students from whom I had felt cornered had issued a litany of cutting criticism. For a professor whose subjectivity is tied up with her role as being an “outstanding” professor, these criticisms were naturally hard to take. But I felt like something deeper was going on: a challenging of my attempt to cultivate a certain teaching voice in the classroom against the background of my “opinion voice.” This dynamic was especially painful given that the overall classroom conversation between students and teachers naturally has a monologic dimension. The post-hoc quality of student evaluations, their anonymity, and the evaluative component means some of the most important conversations about the teaching space end up taking place outside of conversation altogether. The dialogue had become distorted as students remained silent—or were cowed into silence by my attempt at re-instilling an authoritative “teaching voice”—until the moment of evaluation. In this context, there is no way to correct “misfires” or misunderstandings. Perhaps most importantly, when teaching conversations are truncated, the learning experience is overshadowed by a focus on a misplaced rivalry between student and teacher subject positions, rather than constituting a journey of discovery.

### **Karen Schwartz**

In social work practice, there is discussion regarding professionals’ “use of self” or the ways in which social workers manufacture a certain self in order to affect their relationships with clients. These “choreographed performances,” as they are described by my co-authors, mirror the social work understanding of self as something that is used strategically and is significant in social work practice and the classroom. In some contexts, use of self means consciously using yourself as an instrument for a specified end. Often that end is, as described by de Montigny (2007), to help people who seek social work support to develop “insights, syntheses, and understanding” (p. 184). In other contexts, it means being critically aware of yourself as you interact with service users and others (Urdang, 2010). While these authors consider the “use of self” to be a key consideration in responsible, ethical practice, the concept has been problematized for the ways it can be deployed as a strategy to sustain one’s privilege and to defend against criticism of the therapeutic relationship (Rossiter, 2007). I am using Arnd-Caddigan and Pozzuto’s (2008) conceptualization of self as “a function of relationships with others in which the self is continually created, maintained and re-created” (p. 235). Even in this writing group, the process of working together re-created how we worked in the classroom. These types of conversations spill out of the immediate moment and change how we operate in other settings. Thus, I see the professional self of the social worker and university educator as similarly in constant and often unpredictable reconstruction. This mirroring of roles and processes places an added burden in the classroom, where my subjective self is a model I use to highlight possibilities for students negotiating their subjectivity in practice. In the following paragraphs, I explore how the dialogic discourse of educator self and social work

self in the context of the social work classroom is full of pitfalls when negotiating a bi-racial self that is able to pass as white.

The relational aspects of the self I deploy in the classroom is complicated by my experiences as a bi-racial woman in a society that struggles to recognize such a subjectivity. There was no category called bi-racial or mulatto on my driver's license application when I was 16. I could have ticked the box signifying black because legally with .5 black blood I was, but as I easily "pass" for white, I wondered what use would it be as a piece of identification. The narrative through which I construct myself is difficult to make sense of in the Canadian classroom. It is difficult to insert into dialogue that I was born in the Bronx in the 1950s, my father was Jewish from an orthodox family, my mother was a very "light skinned" black woman. While these historical narratives are central to understanding the bi-racial self that I perform in the classroom, I am not a "visible minority" and often ask myself, "Which students see themselves reflected in me? Do I have a responsibility to 'out' myself so that we can have conversations about how narratives exploring relations of racism and the professional subject are absent from the social work classroom (see Badwall, 2014) and the implications this has for social work?"

Although we ask our clients and often students to disclose a great deal about themselves, when the pressure is put on me to do so as an educator, I realize that there are a lot of risks associated both with disclosing and not disclosing certain subjective aspects of self. These risks were also identified by Sucharov in political science and Kuzmarov in law and legal studies. In social work education whether a professor is seen as an insider or outsider has a significant impact on how legitimately able to speak to issues concerning that group. Students often see me as a large middle-aged white woman who sometimes reminds them of their mothers. Some get angry and feel betrayed when they find that their assumptions are wrong and I am not what they assumed. The sense of sharing a narrative is, in these moments, quite fragile and is often dominated by uncomfortable silence similar to those described above by Sucharov. Students may regret a comment that they made in my presence when they thought that I was white. The reconstruction of myself as bi-racial through conversation with students also shifts relations of power. Research has shown that when a white faculty member and a faculty member of colour teach the same course and give the same assignments, students challenge the white male faculty member less than a female faculty member or one of colour (Keahey & Schnitzer, 2003). While narrating my way out of a position of white privilege is risky, it also opens up new learning for students about how race is organized, the problematics of passing, and the challenges of being in a professional position built on whiteness when my own embodiment of whiteness is so slippery (Jeffrey, 2005). It also unsettles my interactions with white and racialized students. In many ways by narrating my biracial identity in the classroom, I take on a self that feels more truthful, but it is not without its lingering doubts of "will I be considered black enough?" By situating inside a subject that is somewhere between whiteness and "other," dialogue becomes less certain. When discussing issues of race, from what subject position can I speak and from what subject position am I heard? If there are disconnections between what I say and how I am experienced will I face the kinds of problems that x experienced in her students' course evaluations? It is a challenge to "use a self" for which there is not a clear discourse to familiarize and legitimate the conversation. At times, it feels exhausting and that passing would be easier, but then doing so also requires denials of myself and a certain sense of failing to act congruently with the risk taking that I ask of my students.

The dialogic discourse through which my passing and/or bi-racial self is performed and spoken in the social work classroom is always unstable. There is no well-worn performance or narrative that students can recognize as familiar, comforting and legitimate. It is always unpredictable and it is not always clear beforehand what will be at stake: the opportunity for learning, my authority and legitimacy in the classroom, or the very dialogue in which learning can take place. In trying to bring my bi-racial self into the class through dialogue, I hope that those students who do not embody whiteness can ask risky questions and that the classroom can unsettle the “social work” as practice of white privilege (Badwall, 2014; Jeffery 2005, 2007).

### **Betina Kuzmarov**

This piece is about sense of self, pride and, well, shoes. Let me explain. Early on, my professional pride led me to adopt a repressive model of teaching. I shed my subjectivity and adopted an objective classroom persona (Britzman, 2003). But what had provoked this mode of teaching was not a belief that I could remove my personhood from my teaching (I’m a feminist who understands that this does not exist, nor should it), it was fear. I was afraid that my credibility would be lessened if I engaged in disclosure.

As Sucharov and Schwartz have pointed out, disclosure comes with risks and rewards. Sucharov notes that departing from expected teaching models, particularly when dealing with controversial topics, can come with professional risks and can be personally destabilizing. Of course, as Schwartz points out, it may be impossible to construct a stable identity when one’s sense of self departs from “familiar, comforting or legitimate” performances of self, as we are never in control of how others react to our disclosure. This explains the fear attached to disclosure and its attendant loss of control over the performance of our teaching self. And so, out of fear, I ensured that my conversations with students always focused on them and, as much as possible, I avoided discussion that I perceived as giving too much of myself away.

In the spirit of full disclosure (oh the irony!), my reticence was based on the fact that I knew I was giving up control in the classroom and my fear of the perceptions that I attributed to my students about me, a white, young looking, less than physically imposing, but able-bodied female professor. Added to this was my awareness that I am nurturing, warm and friendly, that I need to be liked, and that I am particularly prone to the fraud syndrome. All this led me to feel that I would have tenuous credibility in the classroom. Of course, as Sucharov has pointed out, sometimes this fight for credibility is not only based on our internal perceptions, but on the “real” reactions of our students in the classroom. Our constructed self, with its ascription of perceptions, always encounters actual student perceptions in the classroom.

This conflict of perceptions has been reflected in my shoes. I am ashamed to admit this because it reveals my conflicted relationship with beauty norms; however, our reliance on eye contact in maintaining meaningful dialogue and to project authority means that it is not trivial for me to consider shoe height as part of my self-representation. And so, my choice of shoes will give you insight into how I have seen myself in the classroom.

In my first year of teaching, I was assigned our large first year introductory class. It was 400 eighteen year olds and me. I chose to wear 3.5 inch platform shoes when I taught. Big clunkers that I thought were stylish but that I also felt gave me authority by

height (I know this was fictional because even with these enormous heels I was still only barely making five feet). In my first class, I tripped on the stairs up to the podium in front of the whole class. And yet I wore those shoes for the rest of the year.

In retrospect, I realize that my conflict over my shoes was my way of trying to balance my fears about my credibility with my need for authenticity. Credibility is based on the student's perception that the instructor has something to offer them whereas authenticity is based on the student's perception that the instructor is "honestly" there to help them learn. These aspects of self are rehearsed and reinforced through student/professor interactions. Brookfield (2006) asserts that the ideal teaching environment is the one where these two elements are in constant tension. So, as authors Schwartz and Douglas highlight, I was in good company when I felt conflicted over my footwear.

Further, this may have been sound strategy. As the research cited by Schwartz has shown, any instructor who does not meet the image of the older white male professor will have a harder time establishing credibility (and this is compounded the further away from this image one's reality is – the intersectionality here is abundant). To compensate for this, I would over prepare for my lectures, and, in order to demonstrate my expertise, I would start each introductory lecture with a recitation of my degrees and achievements.

Was this wrong? Maintaining credibility and authenticity is a balance. Students consider too much disclosure by instructors "inappropriate" for good teaching. Students want instructors to be fully human, but they also want a professional self with boundaries, teaching in classroom. On the other hand, appropriate disclosure is a tool for good instructors to explain course content (Downs, Javidi, Nussbaum, *Communication Education*, 1988). However, what is considered appropriate disclosure may be based on gender and other forms of bias. For example, studies have shown that "attractive" females are often perceived as less credible authoritarians, and as a result they have a harder time asserting authority in the classroom (Buck & Tiene, 1989). The risk is that with already reduced credibility too much personal conversation only enhances student perceptions. So, it was reasonable to assume that, as a young looking female instructor, too much disclosure would reduce my credibility.

Over time I began to reflect on my own practice in the classroom. I realized that in spite of my fears I did engage in quite a bit of, appropriate, disclosure. I was, as Brookfield (2006) cautioned, fairly clear about my "expectations and agendas," I did bring my personhood into my teaching, and that not to be explicit about this would have been an inappropriate (and unfeminist) exercise of my power in the classroom. Further, Brookfield contends that, my fears aside, I could not help but bring these elements into my teaching.

As a result, I've come to an accommodation. I now own a pair of boots with a sturdy 2-inch heel that I can walk in. I've realized that I have to balance my pride and my fear in order not to sacrifice my authenticity. As Sucharov notes, authenticity comes with risks and rewards. Further, as Douglas observes, my shoes are a part of how I represent myself, a key part of the performance that is my teaching self. And so I hope that just as I'm now comfortable in 2-inch heels, I will continue to be explicit in my agenda, and more authentic in how I bring my personhood and commitments into the classroom.

## Stacy Douglas

As I started my first job as lecturer in the university, individuals of different ilks warned me about being confronted with students' assumptions about the appropriate demographic of a professor (a demographic I did not *entirely* belong to – although white, and able-bodied, I was young and female). Heeding these cautions, I prepared myself for battle. My strategy of defense was to emulate a mentor of mine who, in his adoption of an almost severe presence in the classroom, commands much respect as a teacher and researcher. As his strong personality and self-assuredness left little room for superfluous contestation in the classroom, it seemed to me that this was the perfect prototype to mimic to avoid being subject to a student-led mutiny based on gender and age deficiency. Where Kuzmarov donned 3.5 inches as her shield, I put on my best imitation of a senior male colleague.

Britzman (1991) insightfully reminds us that conventional images of the teacher as infallible expert fail to account for the social dynamics that condition the experience of professors in everyday life. The pressure to perform professionally often means a denial of the reality of our identities, which are not “unitary and non-contradictory” but deeply inflected by conditions of gender, race, and class—at the very least—that push and pull from the past, present, and future (Britzman, 1991, p. 6). The compulsion to cohere to the mythological image of ideal instructor adds mounting pressure on the individual and increased anxiety about ‘blowing your cover’. Fear of failure, fear of reprisal, fear of vulnerability, fear of being an imposter, are all common themes in the reflections of my colleagues herein.

Partially my strategy was sincere. I did—and do—want to be an intelligent teacher with high standards. However, one of the fallouts of this strategy meant that I had to occupy a position as omnipotent pedagogue. Of course I know that I am not an all-powerful expert but thought that any indication otherwise would result in classroom chaos, my perceived professorial paucity giving license to undermine my credibility. Equally, I know that the domineering character I wanted to be was ridiculous—I have been trained consistently to acknowledge the limitations of my knowledge, both in my research and teaching. I know that saying “I’m not sure. Let’s look it up and come back to it next week” is an important way to respond to a challenging question from a student, not only because it avoids an awkward overstretching of knowledge, but also because it emphasizes the importance of research and the ongoing process of learning. And yet, I was fearful of the peripheral discourse that suggested young women have a rough go in the classroom. In order to avoid this dilemma, I put on the mask of the professor I imagined I should be. And it worked. Or did it?

My first year of teaching went well. I received good scores on teaching evaluations and experienced no overt age or gender-based attacks. Students were thoughtful and engaged. In all, my invincible persona was legitimized. Except for one thing. I had spent so much psychic energy being the professor with high standards, I was exhausted. My panicked desire to avoid an attack on my capabilities lead me to my own self-destruction; the more time I spent trying to be the preeminent pedagogue, the less time and energy I had to devote to writing and research, key goals for the early stage of my career. With perfect dramatic irony, and like Kuzmarov’s piece above, my protective shield was also my kryptonite.

I am not suggesting that every junior female professor has the same experience. Many young women have felt undermined in the classroom due to a perceived lack of knowledge. Research highlighted by Schwartz and Kuzmarov underscore this. And young women of colour are much more likely to have negative experiences in the classroom (Berlak & Moyendi, 2001; hooks, 1994; Razack, 1998). Many of my racialized colleagues experience openly racist remarks on their teaching evaluations. Here the violence created by the powerful stereotypes of who can be the all-knowing professor is most palpable. Attacks in this form directly affect individuals' abilities to renew contracts, get tenure, win awards, and keep their jobs. Sucharov above speaks about the ways in which student evaluations disrupt the process of dialogic pedagogy—they serve as an end point to a conversation that is meant to continue. Evaluations also recast the mythological image of teacher as expert in an asocial world, demanding continuous and increasing success on scores that are presumed to be void of discrepancies due to cultural bias based on categories of race, gender, class, and ability.

Although my particular experience is deeply linked to my own identity as a young, white, able-bodied, cis-woman with an Anglo-American accent, in the spirit of Britzman's (1991) insistence on teaching and living as always a process of "becoming," I think there are two points that can be gleaned from my performative misfire. The first is that sometimes our performances, can be paradoxically detrimental to our desires and goals. Although the discourse of young female vulnerability was offered as assistance and taken up as defense mechanism, I allowed it to over-determine my actions and, consequently, redirect energy away from my passionate interest in writing and research.

Secondly, it is interesting to reflect on the amount of effort that came from my colleagues to prepare me—as an individual—for the experience of discrimination in the classroom. Collective fears about the negative consequences of such experiences are exacerbated by institutional review processes like teaching evaluations, which are inherently linked to other measures of success in the university, such as tenure and promotion. The negative effects of sexism, racism, and other systemic oppression are further individualized when institutions fail to address their existence and their implications in standardized review practices. Rather than responsabilizing individuals for arming themselves in the classroom, we might better work collectively to simultaneously address these legacies and alleviate the burden of their implications.

So, while our contributions here contemplate the fluidity of identity in teaching, there is also a need to put such considerations in institutional context. Teaching is certainly a process of becoming, but the conditions of teaching at the contemporary university are unhelpfully tied—in overt and covert ways—to an outmoded image of professor as omnipotent expert that have negative ramifications for teachers and students alike. The task then, in the spirit of Britzman's (1991, 2003) insights, is to recast teaching as always a process of becoming and as always integrally tied to the social conditions that influence such becoming.

### **Sarah Todd**

In the social work classrooms I inhabit, I am often intrigued by the ways in which professional and academic subjectivities merge, disrupt and diverge from one another in conversation. I am particularly interested in how students and educators imagine each other

in the classroom and how this, in turn, relates to the discourses of the classroom and broader society. As my colleagues have eloquently shared in the preceding essays, our anticipation of who our students are and how we predict students will perceive us can have a significant impact on the professorial subject that we adopt. I am particularly interested in considering how one's investments in specific imagined and symbolic subjects shapes the dialogue and interaction between educator and student. I also wonder about the political and interpersonal consequences of the subjects these discourses produce and how our comfort with particular performances reproduces normative expectations.

For me, the discourses that I negotiate are not as hotly debated in the public sphere as those Sucharov grapples with in her political science classroom. The discourses that I grapple with are rarely explicit in the classroom. Contemporary narratives about higher education seem to constitute a learning subject that is skeptical about the classroom project in which they are engaging, unsure of its value. This seems connected to contemporary anxieties about whether a university degree will ensure one gets a middle-class job and whether it provides the skills to do that job (Lewington, 2011). Here, the subject in the classroom is not only shaped by contemporary doubts about universities, but also by how students imagine themselves and work in the future. The classroom subject is textured by an anxiety about a workplace setting that is in a significant state of flux and thus difficult to grasp or predict (Fenwick, Nerland, & Jensen, 2013).

Oftentimes student concerns translate into demands for more skill-based technical learning and a decrease in theory and reflection. When demands are discussed among faculty they are often linked to the consumerist trend in higher education (Worsley et al., 2009). In turn, the rhetoric of what Furedi (2011) has called “defensive education” is mobilized. The student and educator are positioned in a similar manner to that which is anticipated (and sometimes experienced) by my colleagues in this group—in tension, even opposition to one another.

The pressure to align learning and working subjects has a direct impact on the interactions in the classroom. I am often trying to ensure that the professorial self I manufacture is easily recognized through professional and practical discourses as much as through academic and intellectual ones. While conversations focus on which technique or skill is more effective or appropriate, I notice myself spending less time interrogating the very desire for skill than I might have in the past. The space in which to contextualize and deconstruct skill and technique and its relationship to an imagined competent subject narrows.

In this discursive context, I find myself relying more heavily on what students would refer to as my “real world” credentials rather than constituting myself as an academic, or thinking, subject. I invest in a self that is highly skilled in social work practice. I then function as “a mirror” for student's emerging identification as social workers (see Bibby, 2011). Increasingly, my investments slip away from trying to educate social work students about how to interrogate and situate the work they will be entering and instead focus on how to ensure they are sufficiently skilled to begin work. The ways in which we engage in discussion and the types of assignments I create in turn reshape the subject that is produced through our interactions. While a less personal turn than the one described in Schwartz's essay, the professional practice of social work and its evolution within the neoliberal context leaves me uncertain about how to craft an authentic and credible subject.

As professional knowledge is reshaped through practical/technical discourses my attention is drawn to how my investments in certain subjectivities also shifts. The pace quickens and is in constant motion; what slips away is reflection, or deep thought that requires solitude and slowness, which as Rose (2013) notes, is “a generative mode of thought and therefore the basis of creativity, insight, and new ways of thinking about the world and ourselves” (p. x). The dialogic discourse shifts to foreground worker over citizen. If this is so, then the project of the university also shifts.

The shifts in the dialogic discourse in my classroom are shaped, in part by the increased turn towards performativity that Ball (2001) has mapped. As academics, students and workers are negotiating audit contexts that demand measurable continuous improvement, the resulting subject is not only entrepreneurial, but also increasingly uncertain. In turn, the conversation and interaction in my classroom also becomes increasingly tied to those components of learning that are easily accounted for and concretized, or as able to be recognized as having value in the context of audits and, as my colleagues have noted, course evaluations. The anxiety of the student subject, who must continually gain more credentials for an ever shifting labour market and the academic who is in a continuous cycle of accounting for one’s productivity and teaching excellence shapes the classroom dialogue. Increasingly, our interactions are focused on grounding the classroom so that its relevance to professional practice is explicitly clear.

Of course, such turns and tendencies are not all encompassing and spontaneity and creativity are still present. I wonder at my excitement in these moments, while also watching the various reactions in the room—there are some that seem to jump into the intellectual space that opens while others struggle with questions of relevance. I grab at the opportunity to push these conversations, to consider the thinking that underpins them and to ask us to reflect on the project at hand. Maybe these moments are sufficient to enliven our intellect, but I cautiously watch my negotiations with my own subjectivity and how I have restructured myself as a result of conversations with students anxious to enter the professional world after university. I wonder how to work both with and against the collapsing of workplace subjectivity and student subjectivity so as to achieve Howard’s vision of critical educational praxis that “can help students become more invested in learning, understanding, imagining and knowing” (Howard, 2002, p. 1126).

## **Discussion**

This collection, while stemming from diverse disciplines and with varying foci, explores various components of the dialogic discourses through which professorial subjectivities are constituted. As a group, these essays explore the personal, relational, and political forces that shape our subjectivities in the classroom and how they impact pedagogy. They make visible the internal worries and the interactional processes that lie underneath the pedagogical approaches we draw on and, in part, explain the ways in which classroom performances drift away from our well-crafted teaching philosophies. In each narrative, we explore how our projections of student fears, expectations and desires interact with our own practices of representation and, as a result, unsettle and shift the learning project. Schwartz and Kuzmarov explore dynamics of disclosure and non-disclosure of self and the impacts this can have on raced and gendered learning environments. Kuzmarov and Douglas interrogate the ways in which conversations and experiences that take place

before a course begins impact how a professor enters conversations with students, sometimes to unexpected ends. Ellsworth (2004) considers these negotiations from the perspective of film studies where filmmakers remain aware that the intended message of a film may misfire; that the messages received may, or may not, have any relation to the filmmaker's intentions.

Collectively, these essays explore moments of misfire and the questions that emerge as we try to negotiate what we perceive as misunderstanding our intentions or purpose. What is valuable from Ellsworth's (2004) work is the realization that misfires are also opportunities for learning and creativity, which is observed in the narratives included in this article. However, such opportunities are, as evidenced throughout these texts, full of worry and uncertainty, difficult paths towards creativity.

There are a number of moments in the collection where the implementation of neoliberal education, through the use of student evaluations or the framing of professional education as oriented to the labour market has transformed the possibilities of dialogue—at times truncating them and at other times distorting them to the point of unsettling the teaching project itself. Through mapping these incursions into the professor's class and understanding of self, we see the ways in which broad social and political forces shape every day teaching practices and the professor themselves.

In each narrative, we reflect on how our own subjectivities are renegotiated in conversation and interaction with students. Our narratives highlight the ways in which the teaching-learning subject is always in the process of becoming and simultaneously being undone. Such a process rests upon an emotional terrain of “understanding, misunderstanding and for tolerating not understanding, subtle events that compose our moment-to-moment education” (Britzman, 2009, p. 130).

A number of the narratives in this collection also reflect on the strategies we use to facilitate students becoming more aware of their subjective selves, whether in relationship to our identities or in relation to the material that we are teaching. The collection highlights how unpredictable these pedagogical strategies can be. We can never tell in advance how our use of own subjectivity, or our encouragement of students to reflect on their subject positions will be taken up. While the contemporary university and professors have largely done away with the notion of expertise to create distance between professors and students, the collection shows that there are still significant cleavages between the professorial and student self.

Britzman (2009) reminds us of Freud's view that there are “three impossible professions – educating, healing and governing” (p. 128) because they “are a terrible reminder of what is most incomplete, arbitrary and archaic in us and in the events of working with others” (p. 130). Education tends to require that educators and students take everything that is felt as true and intuitive and exchange that for something more disturbing and uncertain (Britzman, 2009). The resistance to such exchanges is not only evident in our narratives, but is also experienced by the students we teach as seen most acutely in Todd and Sucharov's narratives.

In focusing on the teaching subject through dialogic discourse these essays reflect a commitment for educators to be present in the classroom and to reflect on how their teaching self and voice unfolds through the teaching process (see Britzman, 1991). This collection explores the teacher/learner relationship as a heavily predetermined dialogue within which learners and educators shape each other as they come to understand how and

what they know. This requires negotiation, depends on the context, and is imbued with power and desire (Britzman, 1991). What the collection makes explicit is what is often only implicit, that the ways in which professors understand their practices and subjective self is central to the identity of “a professor,” which is never stable or certain, but always a creative practice. We are reminded that the classroom can rarely be accurately determined in advance. The collection shows that even proven approaches, careful conversations with experienced colleagues and attention to the broader pressures faced by students does not give the classroom, or ourselves, stability or continuity. The work of the professorial self is largely improvisational, which we suggest might best be sustained through reflective collegial practices that shore us up to continue to become what we hope and fear in the classroom and to wake up the next day to do it again.

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