Teacher Vulnerability and Teachability:
A Case Study of a Mentor and Two Interns

By Robert V. Bullough, Jr.

Introduction

Teachers immediately resonate with Parker Palmer's conclusion that teaching is a "daily exercise in vulnerability" (1998, p. 17). To teach is to be vulnerable; it is the way in which "teachers live in their job situation" (Kelchtermans, 1996, p. 307). Drawing on Robert Solomon's insight that emotions are judgments that have objects, vulnerability is a mood: "There are passions which need not even begin with a particular incident or object, which need not be *about* anything in particular; these are *moods*" (1993, p. 112). It is a mood born of a demanding and uncertain environment where teachers confront ever present and constant reminders of their limitations as reflected in the eyes of a disappointed pupil or made public by a grumbling and dissatisfied parent. To be vulnerable is to be capable of being hurt.

Robert V. Bullough, Jr., is a professor with the McKay School of Education at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

While vulnerability is part of teaching, teachers manage it differently, and these differences have profound importance for teachers and their development, students and their learning, and teacher educators and their practice. Some teachers seek to make themselves invulnerable, immune to the possibility of failing, while others seem to enjoy risking self. Additionally, differences in the work context either

heighten teachers' sense of vulnerability or diminish it, and enable or limit their ability to realize their aims and to perserve their senses of self. This point is underscored by studies of teacher stress. Increases in the symptoms of teacher depression are generally independent of preexisting symptoms but directly related to adversity in school environments, including "events that demonstrate to the individual a strong sense of personal disappointment and thwarted goals" (Schonfeld, 1992, p. 137). Some schools are clearly better places to work than are others, and not only teachers are impacted. Brouwers and Tomic (2000), for example, have argued that emotional exhaustion, which is a "long-term stress reaction" (p. 249) connected to the inability to cope with vulnerability, leads to a decrease in teacher self-efficacy and diminished classroom performance.

Given findings of this kind, it is easy to jump to the conclusion that eradicating the conditions that produce teacher vulnerability is a worthy educational aim, good for teachers, good for students. In some respects, this certainly is a worthy aim but not all sources of vulnerability are alike in origin or effect. Sources external to and constraining of the teacher/student relationship such as inadequate instructional materials and mandated and frequent high stakes testing are of a different order from those that are internal to human relationships and to competence building. External sources may call for different responses than do sources arising from human interaction. Altering the former may require political action, while the later may require something different, that a teacher confront personal limitations and biases and get deeper into and closer to the origins of vulnerability, such as a child's dislike and rejection.

Clearly, such a distinction is not easily made or maintained. In fact, a teacher might respond to both sources in similar ways and seek certainty and security rather than growth. As John Dewey (1929) reminds us, humans generally strive for certainty and security: "The quest for certainty is a quest for a peace which is assured, an object which is unqualified by risk and the shadow of fear which action casts. For it is not uncertainty *per se* which men dislike, but the fact that uncertainty involves us in peril of evils" (1929, p. 8). Dewey goes on to write that "The natural man dislikes the dis-ease which accompanies the doubtful and is ready to take almost any means to end it... Long exposure to danger breeds an overpowering love of security" (p. 227). When facing the sort of situations that raise the very real possibility of harm, Dewey asserts there are only two courses of action open: A person can "make a change in himself either by running away from trouble or by steeling himself to Stoic endurance; or he can set to work to do something so as to change the conditions of which unsatisfactoriness is a quality. When the later course is impossible, nothing remains but the former" (pp. 232-33). In either case, certainty is not a genuine possibility, for arrested development, dogmatism, and "irresponsible dependence and sloth" follow (pp. 227-228). Uncertainty is a condition of freedom; insecurity a fact of life and fundamental to growth.

Vulnerability is not merely a part of teaching that must be managed, it is also

a powerful motivating force behind human development, a determining factor of competence that is dependent upon the existence of the genuine possibility of failing, and, when connected to unpredictability in relationships, a source of much that is delightful and inspiring about teaching. Thus, the burden of vulnerability, when too heavy, may crush one's hopes and dreams or, in some forms, it may spur a reshaping then a realization of them. As Dewey implies, certainty as the absence of vulnerability is probably a desperate delusion. This said, vulnerability in any form need not be sought, it simply comes with the teacher's territory, as Parker Palmer observes.

Purpose

This article is a follow-up to a larger study of 23 interns, drawn from a sample of approximately 100 elementary interns, and their year-long development (Bullough, Young & Draper, 2004). Teacher vulnerability was a dominating theme of that study, and several sources were identified and explored that mostly paralleled those discussed in the wider literature including the external forms connected to the bureaucratic nature of teachers' work, the busyness of teaching, administrator evaluation, and the rise of standardized testing as well as the internal forms linked to student behavior and parent and teacher relationships. Most of these items were present in Fuller and Bown's (1975) ground breaking study that pointed them toward what they called the "survival concerns" of beginning teachers, concerns about "one's adequacy and survival as a teacher" (p. 37). The interns in this study "responded to their feelings of vulnerability by working harder to increase their teaching competency, seeking help especially from their mentors, and striving to improve their curriculum and instruction" (Bullough, Young, & Draper, 2004, p. 381). Only 2 of the 23 interns ended the year with marked signs of self doubt. In large measure, this finding was attributed to mentor support but the data set did not allow a detailed exploration of this conclusion.

A second study was planned, following the same approach taken in the first, but this time more and more detailed data were gathered on the mentors, mentor actions, and mentor/intern relationships. Drawing once again from a set of about 100 interns, data from 18 mentors and 36 interns were analyzed. From this data set, a single case study of a mentor and two interns was constructed. This triad was selected for study because it was one of two from the entire data set within which the two interns had radically different, and contrasting, experiences of being mentored. These differences profoundly affected the mentors who encountered them and, from a research perspective, opened up in surprising ways the emotional landscape of learning to teach. The specific purpose of the case study is to illuminate the processes involved for both mentors and interns in simultaneously managing vulnerability *and* encouraging development. Data from the mentor is included not only because involved mentors profoundly influence the kind and quality of interns' teaching experience but also because they may contribute to beginning

teacher vulnerability (see Maguire, 2001). Moreover, mentoring, itself, often is highly stressful (Bullough & Draper, in press).

The Study

Context and Data Sources

Brigham Young University operates a large internship program. Interns[1] are employed as full-time teachers by local school districts for half salary with full benefits. By employing two interns, one experienced teacher is freed to mentor two beginning teachers. As noted, the current study is drawn from data collected from 18 elementary school mentors and 36 interns. Interns responded weekly to a protocol via e-mail that sought information about their experience of learning to teach including high and low points as well as about their relationship with their mentor, issues they discussed, and frequency of interaction. In addition, twice during the year the interns were asked to step back and assess their development as beginning teachers.

Mentors were asked to respond to a similar protocol but only every other week. They were asked to provide two adjectives that characterized their relationship with the interns, to identify high and low points for the interns, and describe how, as a mentor, they responded to the high and low points, and to state insights they gained about teaching, mentoring, and themselves as mentors. In addition, they were asked how many times they met with the interns during the two weeks, who set the agenda for those meetings, and what was discussed.

The e-mails for both the interns and mentors were organized chronologically and each set was analyzed by two researchers to identify central themes.[2] Interpretations were compared to identify differences, which were remarkably few in number. The basic questions asked were, "What is going on here?" "What is the story?" A matrix was created (Miles & Huberman, 1984) to enable comparison along what appeared to be the salient dimensions of the stories including development over time, dominating mentor and intern concerns, emotionality, mentoring roles, and kind and quality of mentor/intern relationships (based on who set meeting agendas, how often meetings were held, kind and quality of feedback given, and intern assessment of the relationship, including praiseworthy acts and disappointments).

Patterns in the Data Set

The dominating pattern of mentoring (12 of 18 interns) was for mentors to be *responsive* to the interns, to do whatever they could to facilitate intern development and to be supportive, especially emotionally, but not pushy.[3] Other studies have reported similar findings, including a hesitancy on the part of mentors to interfere with novices' autonomy (Wang, 2001). In effect, the interns set the agendas for meetings and for mentor action by either requesting assistance of one kind or another or by demonstrating a need recognized by the mentor who then offered it. A variation on this theme (4 of 18 interns) was for the mentors to be *directive* for

a short time at the beginning of the year by way of helping the interns settle in, get oriented to the school, and recognize and begin to grapple with established institutional and curricular tasks but then to back away into a more *responsive* mode of offering assistance either when asked or when clearly needed. Again, these mentors sought to avoid being pushy, believing that each intern needed to find his or her own way into teaching and establish their own comfortable style, and were seldom, if ever, judgmental or critical in their feedback. The belief that beginning teachers should "develop in their own way" (Beck & Kosnick, 2002) is common (see, Feiman-Nemser, 2001). On the whole, except at the beginning of the year, mentors resisted being *directive*, much preferring to respond to the interns than to guide them in their development. Like the mentors in a study by Strong and Baron (2004), these mentors went to "extreme efforts...to avoid giving direct advice" (p. 55).

On their part, the interns generally wanted and got an abundance of interaction with their mentors, at least until mid-year when many withdrew from active mentoring believing the interns needed to be wholly responsible for their classrooms (see Hawkey, 1997). Mentors were thought to be sources of emotional support first and foremost and as resources for materials and ideas useful for teaching. As in the first intern study mentioned above, on the whole the interns were sharply focused on student learning as a dominating concern, which included the importance of building warm and caring relationships with students. Talk of love of students and of disappointment when something went awry is abundant. In both data sets, vulnerability is a dominating mood, but it is tempered by growing confidence and a maturing optimism from almost every intern about their ability to become an effective teacher.

The Case

Analyzing the relationships of Mrs. Eddington, Allie, and Katherine (pseudonyms) presents a means for deepening understanding of beginning teacher and mentor vulnerability. Mrs. Eddington, the mentor, represents the dominate mentor pattern found in the data set. She began the year trying to meet all the intern requests as well as to anticipate needs: She is part of the group mentioned above of 12 "responsive" mentors. Early in the year she posed questions of the interns to help them clarify their thinking and worked with them to identify and find solutions to their problems. She assumed a therapist role when that seemed necessary, giving unqualified and much appreciated emotional support. The data reveal virtually no instances when she acted judgmentally. Sometimes she worked as an aide, and consistently she served as a resource seeking to meet any and all requests made of her by the interns. But, despite treating the interns alike, they responded very differently to her efforts as well as to their classes and the tasks of teaching.

Early in the year, Mrs. Eddington discovered she had to reconsider her approach to mentoring. With Katherine, Mrs. Eddington remained a supportive

resource all year long, but Allie, Mrs. Eddington concluded, needed something very different. As a mentor she could not follow Allie's lead. Much like "James" in a study conducted by Page, Rudney, and Marxen (2004), Allie was not teachable and lacked some basic teaching skills. For the sake of the children and, Mrs. Eddington thought, of Allie's development as a teacher, she concluded that she (Mrs. Eddington) had to become directive *and* critical, a mentor role not natural to her or at all to her liking. In effect, for Allie's own good, Mrs. Eddington would increase her sense of vulnerability by forcing her to confront her limitations.

Mrs. Eddington, Allie, and Katherine

Mrs. Eddington was a well-seasoned mentor, having served in this role for 16 years, most recently in a Title One School (a Federal designation indicating a high percentage of low income children) where she worked with Katherine and Allie. Being a mentor for so long, Mrs. Eddington had established a set of practices that had proven value for her and for those she was assigned to mentor. Prior to the start of the school year she met with the interns to assist them to plan for the upcoming year. Once school began, each Monday she scheduled what she called a "Milk and Cookies" meeting with the interns. In this meeting she shared information about the upcoming week that the interns might have missed and chatted about any concerns they had. The agenda for each Monday meeting was set a week in advance. In this way Mrs. Eddington had time to prepare a response: "I try to find the answer if I don't have it or find someone that is better at [what] they want to know, [like] how to use [the computer grading] program." In addition, she observed each intern weekly and set a time to talk about the observation. She actively sought opportunities to praise the interns and their performance. She did not wish to correct, but to support them.

Three weeks into the school year, the data reveals signs of Mrs. Eddington beginning to worry. Allie was having serious difficulties especially with classroom management, with taking charge of her class and of creating a positive learning climate. Allie was frustrated and becoming increasingly angry about student misbehavior. Finally, one day, Allie exploded in class: "I found myself yelling [at the children]." She was embarrassed by her behavior, but disgusted with her class. Despite her experience as a mentor, Mrs. Eddington struggled to decide what to do to be helpful to Allie and, noting that her efforts were failing, remarked: "I am not good at confrontation and need help when it comes to correcting behavior that is not acceptable." Feeling uncomfortable and seeking confirmation, she visited with the principal for advice and to "see if what I am doing [as a mentor] is appropriate." She became much more involved with Allie, posing questions, making suggestions, and, indirectly, pointing out possible directions for change hoping that Allie would take hold of some suggestions. But she did not. Allie resisted. Mrs. Eddington scheduled more meetings with Allie and tried to be more available to answer questions. Like other struggling teachers who suddenly find themselves the object of increased attention (Page, Rudney, & Marxen, 2004), Allie found these actions

disturbing, not helpful, and wrote that she wished Mrs. Eddington "didn't come in everyday to check up on me. I like my freedom." At the same time, Allie reported a weakening commitment to teaching.

Relying on hints, tactfully offered suggestions, and questions aimed at encouraging Allie to evaluate her teaching and reconsider some decisions, did not lead to any apparent changes in Allie's attitude, behavior, or in her classroom. Finally, at the end of October, mustering her courage and almost in desperation, Mrs. Eddington shifted strategies and told Allie directly that "she was not doing an appropriate job and needed to improve." She then gave Allie specific suggestions about what needed to be done to improve the learning climate. The meeting was very upsetting for both Allie and Mrs. Eddington. It ended with Mrs. Eddington telling Allie, sincerely, that she was "here and would really like to help her become the teacher...she can be." Stunned by Mrs. Eddington's negative assessment, Allie listened and said very little, only that she "wanted time to think about the situation." Afterwards, and doubting that Allie had gotten the message, Mrs. Eddington concluded that she had not been "direct enough." "I have tried to [help her] make corrections by being positive and modeling what was expected. I tried to treat her as I would expect her to treat her students in a positive way, hoping that the concept [and practice] would transfer, [but it didn't]." Only after a university supervisor visited and assessed the situation in much the same terms as did she, did Mrs. Eddington begin to think she "was on the right track" with Allie. Up to that time she fretted, prayed, and gingerly felt her way along. Like Allie, Mrs. Eddington was feeling vulnerable and in need of confirmation.

Asked to describe the situation with Allie, Mrs. Eddington chose two adjectives, "strained" and "tense." As Allie's anger simmered and deepened, Mrs. Eddington, who reported that she (Mrs. Eddington) simply did not "handle conflict well," forced herself to stay involved in Allie's classroom and with Allie, even though she would have liked to disengage. As Mrs. Eddington became more directive, Allie withdrew and the situation became even more difficult for Mrs. Eddington who continued to look to Allie for clues about what she should be doing. For a time, as Allie's frustration grew, she began to blame her disappointments on the students: "I can't be the only one to care if my students do their work. They must care too." She also complained about Mrs. Eddington, who she charged with being unsupportive: "This week I wish my mentor had given me a compliment." In the meantime, even while being pushed away, Mrs. Eddington kept trying to engage Allie in conversation in order to help her to gain perspective on what she (Mrs. Eddington) saw as edginess and on her failing classroom practices. One day, Allie reported, Mrs. Eddington asked her, "Do you like your class?" The question was stinging. "I realized," Allie wrote, "that I don't always come off as liking my class." She determined that it was true, she did not laugh often with the children, nor act in other ways to let them know she at all enjoyed their company and cared about their learning. Still, Allie complained: "This week I wish my mentor had not made me

feel like she noticed all the bad things I've done so far." Mrs. Eddington took no pleasure being pointedly critical; this was not the kind of relationship she wanted with an intern nor a role she wished to play as a mentor. She remarked that the stress from her relationship with Allie was spilling over into her home life, that she was affected "greatly" and negatively by school events, even as she chided herself for not being able to set her feelings aside and better manage her emotions and mood.

Matters were made worse by Katherine's success and by the warm and positive relationship she shared with Mrs. Eddington, a relationship that Allie envied. In Katherine, Mrs. Eddington found a source of constant delight and personal pride. As Allie described a week in October as "difficult" and "trying," Katherine characterized the same week as "great, crazy, fun, dangerous, silly, hard, exhausting." While Allie lamented that the demands of teaching "never end," Katherine worried that she (Katherine) should be "doing more." As Allie complained about a lack of support from Mrs. Eddington, Katherine expressed gratitude for all the help she received from Mrs. Eddington and concern that she (Mrs. Eddington) was working far too hard as a mentor and teacher.

While Mrs. Eddington was comforted and her actions confirmed by the visit and advice of the university supervisor, Allie broke down in tears. "Everything just came out. She (the supervisor) told me that I have a lot to work on. She told me that right now I'm not a marketable teacher." Recognizing that Allie was devastated by her meeting with the supervisor, Mrs. Eddington dropped by her classroom, walked up to her, and gave her a hug. This act of kindness profoundly shook Allie, who, feeling conflicted, momentarily reassessed her feelings about Mrs. Eddington. "I need to develop a better relationship with her. She's here for me. I just don't know what I want her to do for me." Still, only a couple of weeks later, Allie would write: "[Mrs. Eddington] is my supervisor. She wants to be my friend too, but it's a little too weird." Such are the effects of criticism on mentor/intern relationships, when development and evaluation responsibilities clash, as they often do. The first week of December Allie wrote:

> I'm not glad about anything [having to do with] my mentor. She picks me apart. She sits in the back of my classroom and finds anything negative about me and my lessons, and then tells me. I don't feel like she's on my side.... I think she is out to get me.

Despite the personal costs, Mrs. Eddington was doing all she could to try to assist Allie, but Allie could only see Mrs. Eddington as on the attack, an enemy, and her vulnerability grew, found its object, and turned to anger.

Christmas break came and little had changed. But over the break and away from the children and Mrs. Eddington, Allie reviewed her situation and began to reconsider, then reaffirm, her desire to teach. She vowed to work harder and to improve. Time away from mentoring also helped Mrs. Eddington gain perspective, and she returned to her duties with renewed energy, resolve, and a revised plan for

working with Allie. During the first Milk and Cookies meeting after the break, Mrs. Eddington reviewed "expectations for the new year." She was positive, up beat, and interested. She reassured Allie, letting her know that she expected her to improve and had faith that she could and would become an effective teacher. Having reviewed her difficulties teaching over the break, Allie knew she needed Mrs. Eddington's help to succeed, and she decided she would openly seek it. In effect, she determined to become more teachable. Allie planned more carefully, made her classes more interesting for the children, was more consistent in managing her class, and she focused more sharply on children's learning. Each were topics that Mrs. Eddington had earlier addressed, but seemingly to no effect. In response to signs of Allie's growing determination to improve and increased effort, Mrs. Eddington stopped looming over her. She continued to drop by Allie's classroom, but with less frequency and she lingered less often. Also, she actively looked for opportunities to be complimentary of Allie. Gradually, Mrs. Eddington started once again to be more like the responsive mentor she thought of herself as being.

In contrast to Allie, Katherine began and ended the year wonderfully teachable and sharply focused on student learning. The children enjoyed being in Katherine's classroom. Katherine had relatively few management problems because, she said, she worked hard and the students started to "follow procedures without me reminding them. [Following my rules] is almost becoming natural to them." Her biggest disappointment came when, as she wrote, "I know that my students are capable of accomplishing something or acting a certain way and they choose not to do it." She carefully attended to student assessment, and delighted when she saw evidence that "most of [the students] have improved." She worked diligently to improve her practice, and, unlike Allie, was openly self-critical about her work in the classroom as well as about her treatment of students: "If I expect students to act a certain way then I must act like that also because they are watching." "I need to tighten down on my transitions." Statements like these are absent in Allie's writing. As Katherine reviewed her development as a teacher in November, in response to the question, "Are you on course to becoming the kind of teacher you imagined yourself capable of becoming?", she wrote: "Yes, I am on course, but I am not there yet. There are so many things that I want to do. Every day I teach I discover things about myself and my students. I know every one of my students pretty well. I try to get to know them and know what they like and what their personalities are like. I think this is very important." When thinking about Mrs. Eddington, Katherine wrote: "I know that she cares and is always willing to help me. By the things that she does for me I can tell that she puts a lot of time, effort, and thought into helping me as a teacher. Not only does she help me as a teacher but she also helps me as a friend."

Despite her growing confidence and overall teaching success, Katherine also had difficult days. Teaching was not easy for Katherine. For example, she said that because of having to spend a good deal of time preparing for parent/teacher conferences she did not prepare with care for the next day's classes. Upon arriving

at school the next day she realized she had forgotten she would be observed by her university supervisor, who, happily, "was very understanding." But, Katherine wrote, "I was just so stressed out and felt unprepared." In this instance, she worried about herself and the negative evaluation she might have, but did not, receive. This said, Katherine rarely expressed self concerns and never survival concerns.

Self-Confirmation, Transcendence, and Positioning

Three theoretical lenses are helpful for gaining perspective and making sense of the case study data.

1. Self-Confirmation

Like all systems, teachers above all else seek to keep themselves in "an ordered state" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993, p. 20). In the desire for self-preservation and feeling vulnerable "all too often we notice and add to our memory store only what supports a strongly held belief, ignoring any that does not" (Hunt, 1993, p. 546). We seek self confirmation; we want to know that we are all right. When a beginning teacher's conception of self-as-teacher proves inadequate or institutionally poorly fitting, teaching may prove shocking and one tends, but not always, to hunker down for self-protection (Bullough, 1992). Struggling with "reality shock," many "neophyte teachers...become disillusioned with their own practice. At this time there is a tendency to blame the preservice teacher education programs for not providing an accurate enough picture of what they might expect" (Goddard & Foster, 2001, p. 360).

2. Expertise and Self-Transcendence

How the threat to self is met determines, in large measure, what sort of teacher the neophyte becomes. Mirroring Dewey's comments noted above, Csikszentmihalyi (1993) observes that: "it is easier to develop selves around goals that lead to stagnation rather than to grow[th]" (pp. 245-246). Self-protection comes naturally, but, importantly, humans also crave self-transcendence. On this question, research on the development of expertise conducted some years ago by Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993) is helpful. Why do some people close down when threatened while others, those of interest to Bereiter and Scardamalia, press on and move toward becoming expert? Working at the edge of their competence, experts push boundaries and literally engage in a "venture beyond natural abilities" (p. 4).

I have addressed this issue elsewhere:

> ... what a context demands of a teacher, and the structural and personal support that is available along with the teacher's individual traits, matter a great deal [to the outcome]. With respect to the former: 'it seems that our skills develop up to the level that is required for the environment' (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993, p. 91). With respect to the later: 'persistence, industry, and desire for excellence are relevant,' as are innate talents (p. 43). (Bullough & Baughman, 1997, p. 104)

Teachers push boundaries, and in doing so, confront their vulnerability. They do so for various reasons, including: because it feels good to be stretched and to gain in competence; "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993); the joy of seeing students progress almost despite themselves; to avoid boredom; and because they have to, the context and one's colleagues, in this instance especially one's mentor and fellow interns, demand it (see Bullough & Baughman, 1997, p. 105). In addition, as Bereiter & Scardamalia note, there is a "heroic element" to self-transcendence that resists explanation but is quite evident. It is here where we suspect one would find teachers with a lively sense of "calling."

3. Positioning

Positioning theory provides an additional source of insight. Positioning theory opens up the ways in which humans are "continuously generating their local sense of the real and the good" (Gergen, 1999, p. 176). As an act, positioning "refers to the assignment of fluid 'parts' or 'roles' to speakers in the discursive construction of personal stories that make a person's actions intelligible and relatively determinate as social acts" (van Langenhove & Harre, 1999, p. 17). It is a "discursive process whereby people are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines" (Davis & Harre, 1999, p. 37). Speakers position others and are, in turn, positioned in a shifting set of relationships and within evolving storylines. How parts are assigned and played out reveal how events are understood as well as convey a sense of how one understands self and others. The process of positioning takes place within specific contexts of meaning that bring with them sets of rights, duties, and obligations which reflect differences in power and authority. Moreover, positioning within these contexts may be tacit or intentional, unrecognized or strategic and forced.

The quest for self-protection in the face of vulnerability, boundary pushing, and positioning, are each important thematic elements of the case study. Allie began the year resistant to Mrs. Eddington's efforts to assist her. Desiring above all else to confirm her sense of herself as teacher, she was not teachable. Feeling threatened on many fronts from student misbehavior and the inability to effectively manage a classroom to Mrs. Eddington's looming presence, Allie hunkered down seeking self-protection. To do so she first looked outside of herself to place blame: on students, which is not uncommon among beginning teachers (McDiarmid, 1990), on the busyness of teaching and the impossibility of doing all that teaching requires, on poor parenting of children, and, especially, on Mrs. Eddington who was seen as unfair and deeply biased against her. In this mood of vulnerability, Allie was unresponsive to Mrs. Eddington's gentle suggestions and closed to change. While Allie's teaching methods may have proven less than effective with the students, they were, nonetheless, still *her* methods, and as such inextricably intertwined with how she thought of herself as a person and as teacher. The two are not separable (Tirri, Husu & Kansanen, 1999); and criticism was personalized. This is an

important point as Sprinthall, Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall (1996) have shown: "Restructuring means giving up one's current system and often entails strong feelings of fear and sometimes (even) antagonism" (p. 693). Sharply focused on self-concerns, as Fuller and Bown (1975) describe them, Allie blocked as best as she could evidence challenging her views of herself and desperately sought self-confirming evidence, even when there was precious little of it. Positioning herself as "victim," she complained bitterly, and in disbelief, when Mrs. Eddington offered few if any compliments. Ironically, Mrs. Eddington badly wanted to be complimentary. When Mrs. Eddington's negative assessment of Allie's teaching was confirmed by the university supervisor, Allie could only sob in despair. Alone and without allies, Allie was fully exposed and had no place of refuge, no place to hide herself.

When Mrs. Eddington's gentle suggestions and careful questioning did not have the desired effect, and despite her reluctance, she forced herself to become more direct, more critical, and, perhaps as a by-product of her inner struggle, she became less forgiving. In turn, Allie became more defensive, distant, depressed and even less teachable. A cycle formed, and both Allie and Mrs. Eddington spiraled into deepening self-concerns, positioning and being positioned in ways that closed off opportunities for growth and development: Mrs. Eddington, worrying that she could not help Allie, had taken the wrong tact as a mentor, and was failing; Allie feeling that she probably should not be a teacher and that she lacked potential to succeed. Mrs. Eddington, however, at least could look toward Katherine, her classroom success, and frequent expressions of appreciation, for self-confirmation. Katherine embraced each opportunity to grow, and with gratitude and grace became increasingly skilled and effective in her teaching. On her part, Allie found some solace in moments within the classroom when the students behaved as she hoped and enjoyed an activity. Neither she nor Mrs. Eddington found their relationship pleasureful. Both were having difficulty productively managing their increasing sense of vulnerability, and, for Allie, anger. Both resented being positioned as failures; and both sought self-confirmation.

Facing similarly difficult situations, mentors often disengage to avoid conflict (Slick, 1997) and hurt. But Mrs. Eddington could not back-off both because she cared deeply about Allie's development as a teacher, and because of her moral commitment to the students who badly needed Allie to succeed. While Allie sought to pull back from the confrontation with her limitations, Mrs. Eddington was determined to push her to face and to overcome them. But how? Sprinthall (1996) and his colleagues have written that "of all the developmental conditions, the ability to balance support and challenge is probably the most difficult and the most necessary" (p. 693). Determining, then establishing, an appropriate balance is a matter of mentor knowledge of the person being mentored, skill, and artistry. It is also a matter of intern teachability. Lacking this quality, Allie had to be made more, not less, vulnerable; she had to be forced to accept her limitations and Mrs. Eddington's offers of assistance even if she did not want them.

Supporting conclusions reached by Bereiter and Scardamalia about the development of expertise, Alfi, Assor & Katz (2004) write about the place of failure in learning, stating that optimal challenge "entails the possibility of temporary failure and frustration" (p. 32). If growth is to occur, failure, they argue, must be temporary; pupils (like beginning teachers) "benefit from temporary failure only if teachers (read mentors) use educational practices that enable pupils to cope well with temporary failure and prevent it from deteriorating into massive failure" (p. 34). It is on this point where a critical moment took place in Mrs. Eddington's and Allie's relationship. In trying to force Allie to confront her limitations and to change, Mrs. Eddington had difficulty making her believe there was hope, that the failure she (Allie) was experiencing was, in fact, likely to be only temporary. The hug Mrs. Eddington gave Allie was intended as a message of encouragement and hope, a statement that Mrs. Eddington would help Allie to improve. While important, it does not appear that Mrs. Eddington followed up this gesture with hope engendering actions, and prior to the Christmas break Allie slipped back into anger and finger-pointing blame. Nevertheless, Mrs. Eddington, and also the university supervisor, had pushed Allie up against the boundaries of her abilities where she had a choice: self-protection and stagnation, or growth. Deciding she would not quit teaching, she finally chose growth and entered into a "venture beyond [her] natural abilities" in which she badly needed Mrs. Eddington.

The pattern of positioning of the triad members is in some respects remarkable. Prior to the beginning of the school year and during the first few weeks of teaching, Mrs. Eddington positioned both Allie and Katherine as promising beginning teachers, as competent but in need of experience. Hope abounded. It was a time of optimism and excitement for both interns and Mrs. Eddington. Mrs. Eddington had not imagined that she would have to play other than a supportive mentoring role for Katherine and Allie. She fully expected to praise, not to criticize, both interns, and to celebrate their accomplishments. Katherine confirmed Mrs. Eddington's definition of her as competent, allowing Mrs. Eddington to play her mentor role just as she defined it. Implicitly, she and Katherine agreed on one another's place and position in the story of mentor and beginning teacher.

At the first sign of serious difficulty for Allie, Mrs. Eddington seemed stunned. For a time she waited for Allie to request help and to right herself, but she did not. At first, Mrs. Eddington held tightly to her preferred mentoring role, and resisted redefinition which a change in her view of Allie and of Allie's abilities and needs would have required. Mrs. Eddington was heavily and personally invested in her responsive mentoring role and resistant to change despite disconfirming evidence of the effectiveness of that role with Allie. When Mrs. Eddington shifted positions simultaneously she repositioned Allie as deficit, which was crushing for Allie and discomfirming. An agreement was broken, and the established but imaginary mentor and mentee relationship shattered.

Although unspoken, the original agreement between Mrs. Eddington and both

Katherine and Allie was that Mrs. Eddington would be positive, supportive, and generous in sharing her resources. On their part, Katherine and Allie would work hard, love and care for the children, and succeed in the classroom. Presumably they each knew their parts, their positions in the story of becoming a teacher and of mentoring. Moreover, the interns knew as a matter of duty and obligation that Mrs. Eddington would assess them, but they believed this responsibility was secondary to providing assistance and support. When Mrs. Eddington assumed the position of assessor and was direct and critical, Allie, who had hoped for a friend, not a judge, felt betrayed for a time and responded with muted anger and a new storyline, that of victim. In turn, Mrs. Eddington was positioned by Allie as oppressor and enemy, positions foreign to her sense of self. It is important to note that all of this relational movement took place outside of the relationship Mrs. Eddington and Katherine enjoyed, but to be understood these interpersonal shifts must be seen against Katherine's and Mrs. Eddington's budding, and for Allie, threatening, friendship.

After the Christmas break another repositioning took place. Neither Mrs. Eddington nor Allie were happy with their relationship prior to the break. Both wanted the relationship to change. Despite Allie's withdrawal and apparent unwillingness to take directions, Mrs. Eddington had continued to seek engagement. Obviously, she cared deeply about Allie. After the break, Mrs. Eddington lightened up. She made Milk and Cookies Mondays more informal, more playful, less tense. Allie admitted that she had serious problems with classroom management and with relating to some students, and reached out for assistance. Rather than resist, she tested the ideas offered, some of which proved helpful and was more welcoming of Mrs. Eddington to her classroom. As Mrs. Eddington witnessed positive changes in the classroom climate, she had more and more positive comments to make which encouraged Allie to make additional adjustments and take new risks, now not fearing a negative assessment. Mrs. Eddington found fewer and fewer reasons to be forceful and direct with Allie, and as Allie sought assistance she (Mrs. Eddington) settled into a role more like the one she served for Katherine, a supportive resource although not quite a friend. And the mood changed. At year's end, Mrs. Eddington felt comfortable giving Allie a positive evaluation, indicating increased teachability, and wrote, "Allie continues to listen to feedback about her teaching and incorporate new ideas into her classroom." She had, Mrs. Eddington concluded, made significant progress. Despite the difficulties of the first part of the year, she was pleased with what Allie eventually accomplished.

Conclusion

> Being a teacher and in particular being a 'beginning' teacher implies far more than a merely technical set of tasks that can be reduced to effectively applying curriculum knowledge and didactical skills. The person of the teacher is inevitably also at stake in these professional actions... When one's identity as a teacher, one's professional self-esteem or one's task perception are threatened by the profes-

> sional context, then self-interests emerge. They always concern the protection of one's professional integrity and identity as a teacher. (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002, p. 110)

Standing back from the story, one wonders: Was it necessary for Mrs. Eddington to force Allie to face her weaknesses? Was there an alternative approach to opening Allie up to become more teachable? Based upon the data set, probably not. Unlike Katherine, Allie lacked the personal qualities and temperament that lead to embracing uncertainty and confronting limitations. Allie rejected Mrs. Eddington's overtures time and time again, and seemed determined to go it alone. An increase in vulnerability, brought about by her mentor, appears to have been necessary for Allie to grow. Normally, the context of teaching itself is sufficient to engender the degree of vulnerability needed to sustain teachability. But not in this case. Whether or not an appropriate balance between challenge and support needed to move beyond self-concerns was achieved is less certain but Mrs. Eddington, a highly respected mentor, must be given the benefit of the doubt. She desperately did not want to be critical and directive, but above all else she was committed to Allie's professional growth and to doing all she could to assure a good educational experience for Allie's students. If this meant repositioning herself, and becoming hard and demanding, she would do it, albeit reluctantly and with great difficulty and initially with considerable resistance. Mentoring in this way was not consistent with Mrs. Eddington's identity but she saw no alternative. Intern interests and children's interests may sometimes clash, and if Mrs. Eddington had been forced to make a choice, she would have chosen the children over Allie, and terminated Allie's internship. But it is clear that such an action would have been devastating for both Allie and, importantly, for Mrs. Eddington, whose conception of herself as a mentor may not have recovered.

As noted above, to teach is to be vulnerable and so it is with mentoring. Managing vulnerability is a large part of learning to teach and being effective as a teacher and, once again, so it is with mentoring. As a mentor, managing one's own vulnerability is essential to creating the conditions and providing the kinds of support and challenge needed to assist a beginning teacher learn to manage his or her own vulnerability, to get beyond self concerns, to become or remain teachable, and to maximize growth. At times, and despite their hesitancy, it is probably necessary, as Page (2004) and her colleagues suggest, for a mentor to position a beginning teacher in a place where there is no avoiding the confrontation with limitation, especially given the urgency of the mentor's charge to protect children. Beginning teachers must be helped to understand and to face their weaknesses even when they do not wish to and even when mentors, who badly want to be supportive and not directive, would rather disengage, as so many do, to avoid conflict. While the personal cost to mentors of forcing a beginning teacher to face self can be high, as it was for Mrs. Eddington who worried constantly about Allie and Allie's students, the moral and professional costs of not doing so are even greater and longer lasting.

Notes

[1] The internship replaces study teaching.

[2] Additional members included professors Roni Jo Draper, Lynnette Erickson, Leigh Smith and Janet Young

[3] A continuum was identified moving from a *responsive* mode of mentoring to an *interactive* mode to a *directive* mode. This model of mentoring captured virtually all of the data.

References

Alfi, O., Assor, A. & Katz, I. (2004). Learning to allow temporary failure: potential benefits, supportive practices and teacher concerns. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, *30*(1), 27-41.

Beck, C. & Kosnik, C. (2002). Components of a good practicum placement: Student teacher perceptions. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, *29*(2), pp. 81-98.

Brouwers, A. & Tomic, W. (2000). A longitudinal study of teacher burnout and perceived self-efficacy in classroom management. *Teaching & Teacher Education*, *16*(2), pp. 239-253.

Bullough, R.V., Jr. (1992). Being teacher curriculum decision making, personal teaching metaphors, and teacher education. Teaching & Teacher Education, *8*(3), pp. 239-252.

Bullough, R.V., Jr. & Draper, R.J. (In press). Mentoring and the emotions. *Journal of Education for Teaching.*

Bullough, R.V., Jr., Young, J. & Draper, R.J. (2004). Year-long teaching internships and the dimensions of beginning teacher development. *Teachers & Teaching, 10*(4), pp. 365-394.

Bullough, R.V., Jr. & Baughman, K. (1997). *First year teacher—Eight years later: An inquiry into teacher development*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1993). *The evolving self: A psychology for the third millennium*. New York: HarperCollins.

Davis, B. & Harre, R. (1999). Positioning and personhood. In R. Harre & L. van Langehove (Eds.), *Positioning theory*, pp. 32-52. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Dewey, J. (1929). *The quest for certainty*. New York: Minton, Balch & Company.

Feiman-Nemser, S. (2001). From preparation to practice: Designing a continuum to strengthen and sustain teaching. *Teachers College Record*, *103*(6), pp. 1013-1055.

Fuller, F.F. & Bown, O. (1975). Becoming a teacher. In K. Ryan (Ed.), *Teacher Education, the Seventy-fourth yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*, Part II, pp. 25-52. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Gergen, K.J. (1999). *An invitation to social construction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Goddard, J.T. & Foster, R.Y. (2001). The experiences of neophyte teachers: A critical constructivist assessment. *Teaching & Teacher Education*, *17*(3), pp. 349-365.

Harre, R. & van Langenhove, L. (Eds.). (1999). *Positioning theory*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Hawkey, K. (1997). Roles, responsibilities, and relationships in mentoring: A literature review and agenda for research. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *48*(5), pp. 325-335.

Hunt, M. (1993). The story of psychology. New York: Doubleday.

Kelchtermans, G. (1996). Teacher vulnerability: Understanding its moral and political roots. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *26*, pp. 307-323.

Kelchtermans, G. & Ballet, K. (2002). The micropolitics of teacher induction: A narrative-biographical study of teacher socialisation. *Teaching & Teacher Education*, *18*(1),

pp.105-120.
Maguire, M. (2001). Bullying and the postgraduate secondary trainee teacher: An English case study. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, *27*(1), pp. 95-110.
McDiarmid, G.W. (1990). Challenging perspective teachers' beliefs during field experience: A quixotic understanding. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *41*(3), pp.12-30.
Miles, M.B . & Huberman, A.M. (1984). *Qualitative data analysis*. Newbury Park: Sage.
Page, M.L., Rudney, G.L. & Marxen, C.E. (2004). Leading preservice teachers to water...and helping them drink. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, *31*(2), pp. 25-41.
Palmer, P.J. (1998). *The courage to teach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
Schonfeld, I.S. (1992). A longitudinal study of occupational stressors and depressive symptoms in first-year female teachers. *Teaching & Teacher education*, *8*(2), pp. 151-158.
Slick, S.K. (1997). Assessing versus assisting: The supervisor's role in the complex dynamics of the student teaching triad. *Teaching & Teacher Education*, *13*(7), pp. 713-726.
Solomon, R.C. (1993). *The passions: Emotions and the meaning of life*. Indianapolis, IN: Hacket.
Sprinthall, N.A., Reiman, A.J. & Thies-Sprinthall, L. (1996). Teacher professional development. In J. Sikula (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teacher education*, pp. 666-703. New York: Macmillan.
Strong, M. & Baron, W. (2004). An analysis of mentoring conversations with beginning teachers: Suggestions and responses. *Teaching & Teacher Education*, *20*(1), pp. 47-57.
Tirri, K., Husu, J. & Kansanen, P. (1999). The epistemological stance between the knower and the known. *Teaching & Teacher Education*, *15*(8), pp. 911-922.
van Langehove, L. & Harre, R. (1999). Introducing positioning theory. In R. Harre & L. van Langenhove (Eds.). *Positioning theory*, pp. 14-31. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
Wang, J. (2001). Context of mentoring and opportunities for learning to teach: a comparative study of mentoring practice. *Teaching & teacher Education*, *17*(1), pp. 51-73