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Inquiry, Identity, and Integrity in a Biblical Studies Methods Course

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Abstract

In this study, a university professor, a high school teacher, and two teacher-candidates engage in an inquiry into the identity and integrity of the religious studies teacher. Using Charteris's (2014) 'epistemological shudders' as a framework, the authors explore the experience of learning to teach Bible in Christian schools by paying attention to the ways in which their experience with the unfamiliar intersected with their taken-for-granted beliefs and perspectives. The authors believe such reflections on experience are essential in particular to teachers of the Bible in Christian schools, but also, more generally, for ongoing lifelong teacher growth. This paper offers insights into how inquiry can be used as a method in a teacher education context. It also serves as an example of the importance of the partnership between universities and schools in the education of future teachers.

Keywords: teacher education, bible teaching, epistemological shudders, teacher identity

Introduction

Literature in teaching and teacher education points to the importance of the identity of the teacher. Teaching is not a mechanically programmed, rote activity. Rather, it is a personal, relational and deeply human endeavor. Palmer (1998) proposes that "good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of teacher" (p. 10). He suggests that teachers teach themselves to their students. As such, they must dare to become familiar with who they actually are and choose paths and patterns that are consistent with this awareness. Kelchtermans (2009) points out that "teaching is done by somebody. Teaching is an act, or teaching is enacted by someone. It matters who the teacher is" (p. 258). The identity of the teacher – both who the teacher identifies as and how others identify the teacher – is important. Russell (2012) suggests that regardless of the lessons and

advice one gives to students and teacher-candidates, how we teach is the message, not what we teach. In other words, the pedagogy we practice is much more powerful than the pedagogy we profess. Preferred and embodied teaching reveals priorities and beliefs that in the end, reveal the teacher. Accordingly, Kelchtermans (2009) extends Russell's (2012) suggestion as follows: "who I am in how I teach is the message" (p. 259). The act of teaching is an extremely personal yet public act. It is in the act of teaching that the true identity of the teacher is revealed.

Teacher education should provide opportunities for teacher candidates to know themselves and their deeply held beliefs. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) suggest that reflection is "a key means by which teachers can become more in tune with their sense of self and with a deep understanding of how this self fits into a larger context which involves others" (p. 182). For teacher-candidates the process of knowing themselves as teachers is a tricky business. At one level, candidates are transitioning from being a student to a teacher. Elliot-Johns (2014) highlights the importance of meaningful reflection to help candidates develop "explicit awareness of the important 'shift' from thinking like a student to thinking like a teacher" (p. 107). Images candidates have of teachers and teaching are deeply ingrained – often from experiences as students. As such, their understanding of what it means to think like a teacher might need some reflection. Norsworthy (2009) suggests that "preservice teachers approach their initial teacher education with established and resistant to change beliefs about teaching" (p. 101). This often results in ends/means expectations of teacher education, a desire for technique and strategy, and an overarching consumption approach to teacher education. As such, reflective activities, designed to have teacher candidates consider who they are through how they teach, can become

viewed as tasks to complete rather than person-forming opportunities.

Norsworthy (2009) suggests that reflection in teacher education be viewed as a personal stance rather than a tool to be employed. One way to achieve this is to have candidates “experience the transformative power of the reflective process rather than read about it” (p. 107). Reflection can be stimulated and embedded in the context of teaching itself. Russell (2012) states that “only the teaching experience can generate the essential learning-to-teach questions” (p. 12). It is in the learning environment that the lived experience of teaching is most clearly recognized. It is also in the learning environment where biases and assumptions, insecurities and questions can be laid bare if one is prepared to look for these.

This study focuses on the journey of two teacher candidates seeking understanding of their teacher identity in relation to the teaching of the Bible in Christian schools. According to McCreery (2005), teacher attitudes and beliefs about religion have a direct effect on the teaching of religion. McCreery found that teacher candidates approach the teaching of religion with a diversity of experiences and perspectives and that they need to be given the opportunity to reflect on these perspectives in their teacher education. While this can be said of all content areas, religion carries specific issues that should be considered. One of the distinctive features of teaching Bible classes in a Christian school is the expectation that the teaching will move beyond biblical knowledge and be directed towards faith formation. Campbell (2009) found that in addition to an increase in biblical knowledge, most Christian schools seek to have students grow in their love of the Bible and develop a personal relationship with Jesus so that they grow spiritually as well as intellectually (p. 51). These goals can create issues for teachers. According to Van Brummelen (2002), “one danger of teaching biblical studies in Christian schools is that we force faith and spirituality onto students” (p. 225). The Bible teacher has a pedagogical, ethical, and perhaps even spiritual duty to create a learning environment in which spiritual growth is authentically the students’ and not simply a rearticulation of the teacher’s beliefs. This requires that teachers know their beliefs and

understand how these beliefs were formed. It requires that teachers know how their belief shape their Bible teaching and their expectation of Bible class in Christian schools.

Background

The context of this paper is a teaching religious studies methods course which is offered as an elective in the B.Ed. program at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ontario, Canada. The course offers insights into teaching Bible in Christian schools. The course that is the focus of this particular study was constructed as an independent study rather than a regularly scheduled course due to the fact that only two teacher candidates, Abigail and Jonathan, had enrolled. This provided flexibility for the structure of the course. Phil, assistant professor of education at the time this course occurred, met with Abigail and Jonathan early in the semester to discuss their interests and their questions related to teaching Bible in Christian schools as well as possible themes the course might address. During their first meeting, it was decided that they would seek to connect the independent study to their upcoming six-week practicum placements which involved teaching Bible in Christian high schools. It was also decided, at Phil’s suggestion, that the driving question of this study would be: “Who is the teacher in the religious studies classroom?” They agreed that they would pursue an inquiry approach. Inquiry-based learning is a constructivist pedagogy that encourages students to ask questions, gather information about the topic, investigate and answer the question, and then report or present findings. Phil introduced the possibility of having Abigail and Jonathan observe and assist in a high school Bible class for the first part of the study as a way of connecting theory to practice and as a stimulus for asking questions for their inquiries. This brought David, a local Christian high school teacher, into the course and the study.

The following steps for the independent study were established: First, Abigail and Jonathan would write autobiographies contextualizing their Bible class experiences as students in Christian schools to understand what they were bringing to the experience. Second, Abigail and Jonathan would spend one day per week for four weeks in David’s Bible class, observing him and his students and

engaging with the class where appropriate. The intention was that Abigail and Jonathan would develop inquiry questions to provide a focus for their six-week practicum placements, which involved teaching Bible in Christian high schools. Third, Abigail and Jonathan would write reflections based on their experiences throughout the semester and submit these to Phil and to each other for feedback. Finally, they would collaborate and report their findings through an article once they were done their program of study.

Methods

The teaching religious studies course was shaped significantly by the inquiry-based learning pedagogy presented by Watt and Colyer (2014), who articulate an approach that focuses on asking and answering questions through sustained student inquiry. The intention from the beginning of the course was to communicate the experience to a broader audience. As such, this study can be understood as a form of qualitative research. The authors sought to understand the experiences and perspectives of people through their lived experiences (Merriam, 2009). This project took on a narrative tone with autobiographical perspectives. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) state that autobiographical and biographical writing can serve as sources of data in narrative inquiry. Similarly, Kelchermans (2009) explores a narrative-biographical approach to understanding teachers and teaching, writing that “People have a personal history. Their life develops in time, between birth and death. Interpretations, thoughts and actions in the present are influenced by experiences from the past and expectations for the future” (p. 260). In this article, the authors’ reflections were contextualized in their autobiographies, which explored their experiences as students in Christian schools and how these intersected with their new experiences throughout the course and their expectations for themselves as aspiring Bible teachers. Data for this study include the course work and reflections submitted as part of the course and correspondence between the authors during throughout the length of the independent study.

Regardless of the honesty and openness that was experienced throughout the learning and writing journey, the participants in the study were

positioned differently in the field of education. As such, ethical considerations must be addressed. Abigail and Jonathan were teacher candidates, Phil’s students. Although the course was presented as flexible and collaborative, it is a fact that Abigail and Jonathan were accountable to Phil as students. He, in the end, was grading them on the course, and further, as a professor in the department of education, held power including but not limited to writing letters of reference to future employers. David, although not a direct supervisor to Abigail and Jonathan, was nonetheless positioned differently as an experienced teacher, a more centrally positioned participant in the teaching community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Certainly, power can be used in productive ways. For example, Phil introduced the driving question which became the focus on the course. He introduced this question in light of his own beliefs about teacher education and his experience as a teacher educator. The result was productive, but to say that his idea for a driving question was simply a suggestion without recognizing the weight professor’s words may hold with students is naive and ignores the role rank and power play in university settings.

Steps were taken to address issues of power in a number of ways. First, the analysis of the data and writing of the article did not begin until the summer after Abigail and Jonathan graduated from their B.Ed. program. Second, interpretations and constructions of the data were shared between the writers, each contributing and responding to drafts of the document.

Findings: Who am I and Where am I?

The authors theorized their experiences and wrote through the lens of epistemological shudders, described by Charteris (2014) as “a paradox which opens up possibilities for sense making” (p. 13). Such shudders are events or experiences that trouble taken-for-granted beliefs and assumptions and make room for new understandings and broadened perspectives. According to Charteris, epistemological shudders occur in liminal spaces, in between one state and another, and can be compared to a rite of passage:

This view of liminality suggests that learners experience a sense of detachment and

disorientation (much like an epistemological shudder) before they take their new place in society. Therefore, epistemological shudders can be likened to a rite of passage where there is a sense of anchorlessness and confusion before new understandings are generated. (p. 13)

Another way of understanding epistemological shudders is through the concept of disequilibrium. Cook (2009) explores the concept of productive disequilibrium, referring to this as a state of imbalance that forces individual to adapt and revise the way they think about their new reality and their beliefs about reality and themselves as a result. The authors intentionally and reflectively engaged in observations and practicum experiences that were designed to highlight their previous experiences and perspectives through encounters with the unfamiliar. The hope was that they could use these experiences and their reflective awareness of their responses to these experiences to shape their own Bible teaching in fruitful ways.

Analysis of the data, revealed two prominent themes that emerged as significant reflective questions: *Who Am I?* and *Where Am I?* The original driving question focused the authors on identity. Throughout the study, they found that identity was closely linked to questions of context and location. *Where am I?* became as important a question as *Who am I?* in a number of ways.

David's Story

The initial classroom observations in David's class served as an epistemological shudder (Charteris, 2014) that displaced Abigail and Jonathan for a time. This shudder was crucial in their understanding of themselves and their tasks as teachers. It is important to understand David's particular approach to teaching Bible to understand Abigail and Jonathan's reaction to and learning from it.

David's particular approach to teaching Bible was the catalyst for much of Abigail and Jonathan's learning in the independent study. David's approach is one of decentering himself so that his students can discover the Bible for themselves, and in doing so, discover who they are in relationship to that

which is revealed. David describes his philosophy as follows:

A passage that guides my teaching of the Bible is found in Mark 9 where an uneasy crowd is gathered around a boy who has an unclean spirit. Present is the boy's father, some scholars, and Jesus' disciples who were unable to heal the boy. When Jesus arrives post transfiguration, the people are "greatly amazed" and run to Him. When Jesus confronts the father of the boy with the unclean spirit, Jesus asserts that the boy can be healed if he believes. It is the man's response to Jesus that speaks to me about my own faith and the faith of my students: "I do believe; help my unbelief!"

David's personalization of the father's response to Jesus is important. Bible class is in part about understanding personal belief and personal unbelief. While David believes that all learning must be personal, he feels that learning in Bible class must be particularly so:

Students of all subjects, no less, Bible learn deepest and longest those things that come from earnest sustained inquiry. Students who can ask questions, discuss, and challenge ideas develop into lifelong learners. In the Bible classroom, they are also students who recognise that they are on a journey and that they can build on their belief by dragging out their unbelief into the light rather than stuffing it away to fester in the dark. A Bible classroom should be a space where students can own their learning and own their faith.

It is in this spirit and philosophy that students investigate the Bible. They are allowed to ask their own questions, raise concerns, but then are required to find answers for their questions from scripture and test the merit of their concerns against Christian orthodox belief. When asked by students, "Why don't you just give us the answer?" I respond by telling them that until they know the key themes and ideas in scripture for themselves after the hard work of really studying the Bible, everything they

know is second-hand knowledge and hearsay. Students gain firsthand experience of God's Word and are empowered to identify the truths that all believers cling to. I do my work as a Bible teacher in faith because I play only a small part in my students' faith formation. This is God's work! My desire for my student is that they internalize what they learn so that they may be a faithful presence wherever they go. To do so, they must encounter and wrestle with their doubts in a supportive environment while learning the skills they need to understand scripture firsthand.

David's approach to teaching Bible is one of creating a learning environment that is safe for students to ask questions and explore possible answers over a period of time. In some ways, he is seeking to follow Palmer's (1993) lead and create a space where a community of truth is practiced. According to Palmer, such a space is characterized by openness (to the truth we seek but also to the truth that seeks us), boundaries (without which there is chaos and fear), and hospitality (where others and their ideas are received with care). Plantinga (2002) expands on this last point of hospitality, connecting the hospitality one might extend to others and the very nature of God:

Supposing that hospitality means to make room for others and then to help them flourish in the room you have made, I think we could say that hospitality thrives within the triune life of God and then spreads wonderfully to the creatures of God. The one who spreads it is a mediator, a person who "works in the middle." We ordinarily think of Jesus Christ as the mediator of salvation, but I think we can see now that those mysterious places in the New Testament that speak of creation happening "through Christ" reveal that the agent of redemption is also the agent of creation, Christ is the person designated to work in the middle both times. (p. 21)

Hospitality in this sense is not simply something offered for the sake of a pleasant environment or workspace. Rather, it is an essential element of a learning space if one is indeed interested in the

flourishing of those who are welcomed in. Like the Trinity itself, which is "in a constant movement of overture and acceptance, each person envelops and encircles the others" (p. 21), so, too, should teachers seek to create spaces in which such truth can be practiced. For David, the purpose of such hospitality is relationship with the truth. Truth in this sense is not a set of principles or questions and answers. As Palmer (1993) suggests, the truth is not a what, but rather a who.

David's narrative points to the creation of a hospitable space for students to seek truth through the posing of personal questions and inquiry. His approach was intentional. It was also one that provided an important point of contrast to the experiences and expectations Abigail and Jonathan brought to his class with them. His approach provoked an epistemological shudder (Charteris, 2014) that Abigail and Jonathan recognized, connected to their past experiences, and reflected upon during their practicum placements.

Abigail's Story

Abigail contextualized her perspectives through her upbringing in a Reformed Christian community:

Because of my Reformed upbringing, it is nearly impossible for me to consider religious education without considering covenant theology. As a Reformed Christian, I believe that the grace of God extends to his people through covenant. We cannot earn salvation or choose God on our own, but God uses families and covenants to carry out his saving work. The nature of Christian schools and Christian education is rooted in this covenant theology. This is why we must teach our children about the Christian religion. This is why we must open their eyes to the things of faith, that they might recognize and accept his promises.

Abigail knew well that the foundations of her perspectives on the study of Bible in school were laid early in life, through partnership between her family and the Christian school's Bible classes. She understood that covenant children needed to be taught God's word, and the school was one place where this happened. She also acknowledged that from her perspective, the goal of the Bible class was

to not just teach the Bible for the sake of knowledge, but to teach it with "...the hope that these children will eventually own and accept the promises for themselves with a deep and personal faith in these truths."

Abigail's narrative highlights how her perspective was shaped by a personal experience in a high school Bible class in which her faith was strengthened through a course that sought to deepen student knowledge of the Bible and the Christian religion.

Personally, my commitment to Christ took a significant turn late in my high school years. . . . the roots of my personal faith and commitment were no doubt established and strengthened in high school, and in particular through a grade 12 apologetics class. In my grade 12 apologetics class, we were required to formulate questions about our faith, and through inquiry and investigation, to answer them. We learned about the defense of the faith, and while the course focused on defending the faith against unbelievers, many of the pupils were no doubt more reassured of the Gospel truths as they developed and articulated their arguments.

Norsworthy (2009) discusses the "powerful notion of the right way" (p. 103) in teacher education. When teacher candidates experience learning that works for them as students, they may expect similar strategies to work for their own students. Their expectations are deeply rooted in their experiences. Abigail's background was one in which Bible class was rooted in an understanding of covenant and an experience of coming to deepened faith through exposure to the Bible and through the construction of compelling arguments for the Christian faith. The goal of the apologetics class was certainly the defense of the faith against its detractors and focused on head knowledge, logic, and communication. She experienced it as an exercise in reassurance that she truly believed the principles she was being trained to defend. This was an approach that she valued and to some degree expected in Christian high school classes.

Abigail found herself surprised by the pedagogical approach she witnessed in her initial observations in David's class:

In the first class I attended, I observed something unfamiliar to me. The class was learning about the Gospel of John, and during the course of the lesson the teacher introduced the students to the theological concept of universalism, the belief that God's design is for all people to be saved, not simply the select few. It was not the concept of universalism itself that was unknown to me, but rather the teacher's presentation of it. He remained neutral. The students had a number of questions about the concept and the teacher took the time to answer them and explain it in more detail, but he never presented a judgment or assessment about the concept itself. In my religious training as a youth, I have encountered universalism a number of times. However, it was never presented in a neutral manner...when I observed the Bible class and heard the students wrestle with universalism and ask questions, it made me consider what religious education should look like.

The neutrality Abigail observed was a choice David had made regarding how to address student questions. It was not that he was neutral in that he had no opinion. Rather, he chose silence as a means of honouring student questions and perspectives as well as a way to have students unearth their own beliefs. Abigail's recollection of her high school Bible classes involved the teacher offering opinions more often and more readily than what she was witnessing. Her observations shaped her inquiry, causing her to focus on the question "What role should a teacher's own religious convictions and opinions play in the religion class?" Through her practicum, she wrestled with the place of the teacher's faith in the classroom and wondered how far a teacher should go in communicating a stance. Her initial classroom observations made her attentive to her decision making in this regard during her practicum.

The practicum itself took place in another Christian high school, one that was very similar to the school

Abigail had attended as a student – a Christian school for Christian families and their children. She recalled the following scenario:

While religion teachers may opt to speak with neutrality or never explicitly teach their personal views on doctrine or theological matters, I sincerely believe that they should never encourage (or condone) relativism among their students. That being said, I sincerely believe that God created his children diverse and different, and a religion teacher has an important call to respect and nurture that diversity within their class. Consider the following example. As my grade 10 Bible class went through the Pauline epistles, we had one class where we discussed Paul's theology of Christian freedom versus libertarianism and legalism, a common theme in the epistles. The students were given a number of scenarios and asked to use Christian freedom to justify participation in the scenarios. The scenarios included watching an "R" rated movie, eating out on a Sunday, and drinking underage. With the majority of students being from similar churches and families, their answers were quite uniform. This gave me a degree of concern. The students' opinions were very black and white. For example, they were very quick to condemn eating out on a Sunday, an activity discouraged by their tradition. I pointed out that there are many faithful, Bible-believing Christians who do eat out on Sunday. In fact, I told them, some do it quite regularly as a church community activity, similar perhaps to the students' familiar Sunday soup tradition. The point I was trying to emphasize with my students was that we should be slow to condemn others simply because their practices differ from our own.

In the above narrative, Abigail problematized her students' perspectives on Christian freedom by pointing out that unfamiliar social practices do not mean people are wrong. She wanted her students to see that when Christians are firm – not neutral – on the essentials of the Christian faith, there was room for tolerance and understanding on other issues. She

understood that her students' opinions on these issues would be fairly homogeneous. She wanted them to think about those opinions. She had moved from being troubled to some degree by her initial classroom observations, and had transitioned to troubling her own students' perspectives and opinions in their Bible class. Her reflections demonstrate her awareness of her transitioning from thinking like a student to thinking like a teacher (Elliott-Johns, 2014).

Abigail's observations opened her eyes to the fact that biblical studies cannot be assumed to be the same in all Christian school contexts. She took this to heart, and eventually came to the conclusion that the answer to the question of the identity of the Bible teacher and what should and should not be said depends on the context in which teachers find themselves:

While the creed and confession of a school can no doubt have an impact on the demographics and theological diversity of a school, it can also have a deeper and more poignant impact on religious education. I previously mentioned the necessity for a religious educator to respect the appropriate diversity and exercise of Christian liberty. A religious studies teacher in a non-denominational Christian school would have an even greater responsibility to respect diversity of beliefs because of the necessary diversity of the pupils. To be sure, such a teacher in a denominational school still retains this responsibility to respect differing practices and beliefs and instill that respect in their students as well. However, the reality of such diversity would be more evident and poignant for the non-denominational school teacher. On the other hand, if an educator opts to forgo neutrality and instead express his or her own beliefs and convictions, there would be particular expectations he or she would be expected to adhere to in the light of the creed and confession of the school itself.

Abigail's reflections reveal a sense of disorientation as she was confronted by a situation that was unexpected and unfamiliar in a context with which she expected, to some degree, to be familiar. She

had entered a Christian high school to observe Bible classes. She brought to this experience her own perspectives and experience that shaped her expectations, and was surprised to find an environment and a pedagogy that was initially strange to her. David had chosen to remain silent on theological issues, causing Abigail to ask “Where am I?” This initial dislocation caused her to consider her own perspectives—or in fact that she had perspectives—and to consider how to integrate this new learning into her practice. She did this initially by asking “Where am I?” in a productive manner, reconciling a perceived neutral stance with the context in which one teaches. By the end of the practicum, she had found a position that suited her evolving beliefs, refusing to remain silent on key theological issues, but yet understanding that withholding personal opinions from her students while asking critical questions about Christian belief and conduct was potentially beneficial for student faith development and learning.

Jonathan’s Story

Like Abigail, Jonathan’s inquiry also led him back to his educational past as a student in a Christian school. His experience was one of being immersed in the Christian religion, but not always a willing participant in it.

I grew up as part of the Reformed Christian community, and as such inherited a long line of religious practice that heavily emphasized the role of biblically-based education. This is something for which I am now grateful, but throughout the period of my elementary and most of my secondary education, I was resistant, resistant not only to Christian belief, but also to all forms of religious education. Bible class was particularly suspect. I did not believe that God’s word held any authority over me, much less serve as a lamp, a guide to my life.

The inquiry caused Jonathan to consider his own Bible studies background and realize that he had

...received the full treatment of religious studies education as a child and adolescent: catechism, Christian school, youth group, weekly church attendance, and the reading

of “good books” as my parents liked to call them.

Jonathan had been immersed in what might be understood as a covenantal community, a cloud of witnesses that told a consistent story of God’s love and truth. Jonathan, however, was not buying into the message completely in this youth. This realization caused him to consider certain aspects of his own Bible class experience. He acknowledged that his experience in high school Bible classes was certainly the result of his own struggles rather than a result of poor Bible teaching. However, he also wondered about an uncritical approach to Bible teaching. For example, he explored the complaint by some that Bible classes can be boring:

An inherent uncritical presumption in the goodness of religious education, accompanied with an appropriate conservatism, has the potential to create an educational environment of disenchantment. By this I mean that the theory and practices of religious education is seldom criticized openly (constructively or otherwise), which could result in a mediocre delivery of the subject. For example, the teacher’s Old Testament Survey class is positively downcast at the prospect of writing yet another five-page hermeneutical paper on Judges 4, capped off with the traditional “your contemporary Christian perspective,” but none of the pupils dare complain openly because, well, it’s Bible class. The teacher takes their silence as indicative of their approval, and continues with similar assignments, never adjusting the pedagogy, and continues with Bible instruction that may never authentically enter the hearts of the students.

Jonathan wondered if teachers and students hesitated being critical of their religion classes for fear of being seen as questioning the very foundations of their faith. This caused him to approach Bible class with caution. His “powerful notion of the right way” (Norsworthy, 2009, p. 103) was rooted in a somewhat self-inflicted negative experience as a student.

Jonathan noticed in the initial observations in David's class that David had remained silent on theological issues in some of his classes. This was an unfamiliar experience to him. His processing of this experience, however, was contextualized by a diverse student-teaching placement that occurred after his time in David's class. He saw the teacher employing several good pedagogical tools including plenty of student choice, safe spaces for student discussion, and appeals to honest responses. Despite this, he also saw student disengagement, and he wondered if this was the result of years of Bible study and the perception of students that Bible was something that they simply had to go through. He interpreted the situation through the lens of his own Bible class experience as a student, an experience that occurred during a particular point in his life when he did not fully believe that which was being taught in school. He had no context for the Bible class for English Language Learners (ELL). The students in the ELL class were primarily international students who were largely unfamiliar with Bible classes as traditionally taught in Christian schools. This caused Jonathan to reflect on the identity of the Bible teacher and the role location and context plays on such an identity. In the grade 11 class, he saw students who knew the biblical story but maybe did not believe it for themselves – he saw himself in those students. In the ELL class, he was teaching the biblical story to students who perhaps had very little familiarity with it.

Jonathan was able to make sense of his diverse experiences by reflecting on what it means to be called to teach Bible in a specific community. The concept of partnering with parents stood out for him, but not in a simplistic way, in which the teacher reinforces the message of the parents. He writes:

The program of religious education comes with a built-in conservatism as parents take special care to ensure uniformity and consistency between school and belief communities. This is a good thing, as long as religious educators discern a healthy sense of their own identity. Their job is not to subvert, or to uncritically endorse all the idiosyncrasies and theological distinctives

held by the community. Either of these leads to confusion on the part of the students, feeling manipulated at the hands of external politics in a community. In my own experience, being part of a conservative, Reformed community, there are plenty of (very good) theological distinctives that I could weave throughout my teaching practice. However, teaching Bible to ELL students who have lived literally so far-removed from the debates over liturgical order, supra and infralapsarianism, free will before the Fall, etc., made me realize that it becomes utterly impossible to imagine sharing these ideas with them. This realization made me reflect on my teacher identity. I was tasked with teaching the Bible to these students, and no amount of community specific theological debate could replace that. This carries over into Bible class for Christian students, a decade into their religious education. It is not wise to identify on one side or the other of a community-specific debate, but rather to identify as a member of the community tasked with the responsibility of bringing religious education to parent-entrusted students. This integrated identity balances pedagogical aims with the overall community perspective, which, if done honestly, can create an educational environment in which kids flourish within that very community without being bombarded with particularities.

Jonathan's perspectives reveal his emerging identity as a Bible teacher that was made possible by the problems posed in his initial classroom observations and then through the contrasting experience of teaching Bible to seasoned Bible students and new to the Bible ELL students. He found that what was important for students new-to-the-Word was just as important for those students who have heard it repeatedly. For him, this meant understanding himself as a Bible teacher, someone who could help students understand how to apply the Bible to the issues of the day.

Conclusion

This study provided the authors with the opportunity to conduct a prolonged inquiry into the identity and integrity of the Bible teacher in Christian schools. The study reveals that teacher education for Bible teachers can and perhaps should involve reflection and some dislocation as candidates come to grips with who they are and what they believe and compare this to what is required and what is responsive and effective in the classroom. Both Abigail and Jonathan experienced an epistemological shudder and had entered a liminal space (Charteris, 2014). They experienced some disorientation in David's class but also the integration of new experiences with prior knowledge through this inquiry. Their narratives reveal the importance of reflection on new experiences as teacher candidates find their way as teachers and make sense of how their perspective and experiences come to the fore and change in the classroom. Abigail and Jonathan's growth is well documented in the narratives presented above. David experienced growth through this process as well. He states:

Having Jonathan and Abigail in my room made me more aware of my practice and philosophy. Whether they challenged or validated my approach to Bible learners, I found myself reflecting on why I do what I do and am eager to look for weaknesses in guiding my students to firsthand knowledge of Scripture. I am more deliberate in providing skills and providing guided practice so that students are better equipped to examine scripture and its truth. I teach a variety of students from semester to semester, and feel that this process has made me more agile when adjusting my practice to the culture of each class and the needs of my students.

David looks forward to future opportunities to work with teacher-candidates as a way of serving the profession and as a spring board to encourage his own reflective practice. He is grateful to work in a school that promotes partnerships with visiting institutions and knowledgeable guests. Phil looks forward to engaging in similar independent studies and inquiries with other teacher-candidates in the future.

A number of implications emerged for the authors. First, identity is not static. We are all growing and changing – personally, professionally, and in our faith. Teacher education for biblical studies should seek to have candidates understand themselves as works-in-progress so that they can encourage their students to embark on their own journeys. Identity and integrity as a Bible teacher in a Christian school requires a humble stance of one who believes deeply in the grace of God and the truth of his Word, but realizes, in Greene's (1995) words, that "the way things are for our life and body allows us only a partial view of things, not the kind of total view we might gain if we were godlike, looking down from the sky" (p. 26). Abigail discovered that this may require silence on issues at times, and a critical pushing of student opinion and perspective at others. Jonathan discovered that this may require returning to the basics and coming to grips with the teacher's and students' place in the biblical story.

Second, the authors discovered the importance of Bible class for the increase in biblical knowledge and faith formation for students and teachers alike. To facilitate this mutual benefit, teachers might (re)consider their Bible classes as a community of learners who have been called together to become disciples. When considered in the light of epistemological shudders (Charteris, 2014), this idea becomes particularly important. What if the Bible class became a place in which such "shudders" were welcome? What if we explored the possibility of Bible class as a venue for our blind-spots to be revealed rather than a search for the right answers to predetermined questions? For teachers (teacher educators and teachers of children) perhaps this raises other important inquiry questions: How can Bible class become a place where the Spirit is welcome to shape hearts and bring us closer to God? What impact might this have on the rest of the curriculum?

Third, teacher education in general should seek to integrate opportunities for experiences and reflection that stimulate shudders or disequilibrium into all areas of teacher education to varying degrees. The initial classroom observation in David's class was an experience that dis-placed Abigail and Jonathan for a time. This shudder was crucial in their understanding of themselves and

their tasks as teachers. Cook (2009) studied the journey of 10 first-year English teachers as they faced disequilibrium in their teaching for the first time. She states that “beginning teachers are not naturally or necessarily equipped with the strategies and motivation to [embrace disequilibrium]. Only after they had been granted a captive audience to reflect on that experience were these ten beginning teachers able to make sense of how they managed the disequilibrium of their first year of teaching” (p. 289). This paper presents the possibility of engaging in intentional disequilibrium during a teacher education program, prior to that crucial first-year teaching experience. Classroom observation and reflection can be important parts of this, particularly when such reflection causes candidates to connect their past to their present, in anticipation of the future as teachers. Teacher educators need to be aware that not all candidates will be prepared for such a journey. Teacher-education on its own is emotional work: adding questions of faith can be overwhelming. Care must be taken and wise judgments made when designing such experiences.

The authors realize that the key learning that took place in this inquiry was stimulated by specific observations in a specific context: David’s classroom. They realize that had Abigail and Jonathan entered another teacher’s classroom and observed something different, their inquiry may have looked much different. Similarly, two different candidates entering the same class would likely have experienced things differently as well. Inquiry requires that attention be paid as much to the context in which questions are raised as to the answers themselves. Teacher candidates may better understand themselves when they intentionally reflect on their specific reactions to particular situations and contexts. They might understand how their past experiences have shaped them, and then carefully embark on their calling to shape respectful and hopefully fruitful learning spaces for their own students.

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