VOICE IN SELF-STUDY*

Rosebud Elijah
Hofstra University

Abstract

I argue in this chapter that the voices in self-study research are integral to creating and exploring a new landscape in teacher education that is able to bridge long-standing gaps. These voices are heterophonic and polyphonous, authoritative and authentic. They highlight dissonance and living contradictions within teacher education contexts. In doing so, they are creating a discourse that is responsive to the contexts teachers and teacher educators find themselves in. This is the new discourse of the new landscape in teacher education.

Any piece of writing has voice (Ivanic & Camps, 2001), but how that voice is defined, the characteristics embedded within it, and that which it constitutes has long been the subject of inquiry and debate among scholars in composition, rhetoric, and writing. The issue of voice has also been raised both explicitly and implicitly in the comparatively new body of work on self-study. In both bodies of literature, voice is interpreted as being integrally related to epistemology, ideology, and politics. Some frequent questions about voice that relate to self-study are: “Who has voice?”, “Who should have voice?”, “What kind of voice?”, “Is voice personal?”, “Is voice social?”, “Does voice need to be authentic?” and, “Does voice need to have authority?”

In this chapter, I show that the voices in self-studies are integral to defining the work of self-study. Drawing on the literature on voice and on the work of self-study, I argue that the voices in self-study are simultaneously personal and social (Prior, 2001) and explain why they have to be so. I show how the voices in self-study are necessarily authoritative and authentic (two defining features of voice in the literature). Finally, I use a self-study that explores the issue of choice and voice (Fernandez & Mitchell, 2002) as an example of voice in self-study. Based on my arguments, the body of self-study work, and the example I

*Chapter consultants: Jerry Allender, Temple University and Claudia Mitchell, McGill University.
use, I conclude that the voices of self-study have begun to construct a new landscape in teacher education (Russell, 2002) by explicitly recognizing dissonance within the contexts in which they work (e.g., universities and schools), and in the context of their work (e.g., teaching and research). This new landscape is inclusive of both teacher educators and teachers (an infrequent phenomenon in other genres of educational research). Indeed, it is constructed by the voices of teachers and teacher educators, who bring ‘living contradictions’ (Whitehead, 1993) of their practice to their scholarship. This new landscape is not problematized by the theory-practice gap that has been historically characteristic of both teacher education and schools.

**Voice: Defined**

Much of the research in the areas of college writing, freshman composition, and second language acquisition overtly focuses on voice. Researchers discuss and debate the very definition of voice (see Elbow, 1994; Falmer, 1995; Hashimoto, 1987; Keithley, 1992; Macroire, 1985; Murray, 1986; Nakayama, 1997; Rose, 1989; Stewart, 1972; Wershoven, 1991), the applicability of voice especially in second language acquisition (Ivanic & Camps, 2001; Matsuda, 1999), and the hegemony of voice in western cultures (Ivanic & Camps, 2001; Matsuda, 1999, see also Goodson, 1997). Most all agree that voice is distinguished by authority and authenticity. If literacy is a hallmark of being educated, then it seems that having authority and authenticity in one’s writing is ambitiously associated with it.

Voice is variously defined as expressions of authenticity (Stewart, 1992), authority (Rose, 1989), and identity (Ivanic & Camps, 2001; McElroy-Johnson, 1993). The personal element in voice (Elbow, 1973; Macroire, 1985; Murray, 1986; Stewart, 1972) suggests a presence (Bowden, 1996) or ‘juice’ (Hashimoto, 1987) in writing. Personal writing, or writing using the personal voice, has increasingly been encouraged in writing and composition classes since the late sixties and seventies under the persuasion of the expressionists – Macrorie, Elbow, Murray, and Stewart, for example. The emphasis on the personal in voice is an attempt to free student writers, “from restrictions that had traditionally been imposed on them,” and to encourage them, “to reveal themselves in an honest, authentic voice” in an attempt to validate student voice and redistribute power (Wershoven, 1991 drawing on Harris, 1989, p. 22), and to emphasize freshness, creativity, and authenticity (Wershoven, 1991 citing Harris, 1989).

Efforts have been made to analyze the issue of ownership of voice. Drawing on sociohistoric theory (e.g., Voloshinov and Bakhtin) and sometimes the developmental theory of Vygotsky, some researchers of voice argue that, “voice is simultaneously personal and social (instead of either/or) because discourse is understood as fundamentally historical, situated, and indexical” (Prior, 2001, p. 55; see, also Bowden, 1996; Dickerson, 1989; Fleckenstein, 1997; Greenhalgh, 1992; Hashimoto, 1987; Yancey, 1994). Fleckenstein (1997) speaks of, “the heterophonic third voice which is neither culture nor psyche, but both” (p. 475).