

281 The impact of symbolic violence on the perceived choices of female trainee primary school teachers: A poetic perspective

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Research Domains

Postgraduate scholarship and practice (PGSP)

Abstract

This presentation builds on another in the stream, that of Professor Richard Waller who discusses the forthcoming book *Critical Perspectives on Educational Policies and Professional Identities: Lessons from doctoral studies* and is from the perspective of an ECR, lead-author of one of the chapters in that edited collection.

This presentation looks at how symbolic violence impacts the perceived choices of young women training to be primary school teachers: a central aspect of the lead author's doctoral research. It discusses how the study's participants 'chose' primary school teaching based on the embedded notion that they are 'good with children'. Alongside the substantive content of the presentation is an examination of how the ECR and their co-author navigated the authorial journey together using autoethnography and poetry as ways to explore the concept of symbolic violence in the own lives as well as the lives of the research participants.

Full paper

This presentation focuses on one of the chapters from the forthcoming book **Critical Perspectives on Educational Policies and Professional Identities: Lessons from doctoral studies** (Waller, Andrews & Clark, forthcoming, 2024) discussed by Professor Richard Waller in a previous presentation. The context of Prof. Waller's presentation is an exploration of the processes and procedures taking place during the inception and writing of the book and this presentation homes in on the findings from a single chapter. The presentation examines the substantive theoretical framing and content of the chapter and how the lead-author and co-author worked together to shape and enrich the chapter as it progressed and evolved.

The chapter being discussed in this presentation is entitled *The impact of symbolic violence on the perceived choices of female trainee primary school teachers: A poetic perspective* and is presented by the lead author of the chapter who is an Early Career Researcher. It focuses on the concept of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2001) as a powerful yet invisible force permeating society - 'an effective tool of silent domination and silencing the dominated' (Thapar-Björkert et al., 2016, p.8). The overarching thesis from which this chapter developed was a study of why young working and middle-class women make the decision to become primary school teachers and in the thesis the lead author argues that this is in part due to class and gender-based expectation and assumption which manifests as symbolic violence. The book chapter that has developed from the thesis focuses on this aspect of the thesis.

This presentation will look at the literature that underpins the concept of symbolic violence as presented in the chapter (Steedman, 1982; Bourdieu, 2001; Thapar-Björkert et al., 2016). It considers the impact of symbolic violence in the lives of the research participants who believed that choosing teaching as a future career was a conscious, personally motivated 'choice'. It goes on to embrace the concept of embedded and contingent choosers (Ball et al. 2002) as a contributory factor in reinforcing symbolic violence in the lives of working-class families and for the purposes of the chapter in the lead-author's data. Furthermore, it argues that hot knowledge (Ball et al. 2002), the middle-class privileged knowledge of how Higher Education works, mitigates against the impact of symbolic violence for middle-class – embedded - choosers. This is also a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1993) where the middle-classes 'pass on to their children – knowingly or not – the capacity for them to succeed at school and university, and thereby get the sort of qualifications which help them to move into the best jobs' (Savage et al., 2015, p.49)

The book chapter interweaves the narratives of the participants with those of the lead and co-authors to illuminate the exponential impact of symbolic violence. This presentation demonstrates how the chapter, like the thesis, uses narrative inquiry as its methodological tool and presents the data as poetry. This was a choice made by the lead author during the thesis and influenced by Richardson (1995, p.704) who suggests that poetry is a way of demonstrating that 'poems as "findings" resituates ideas of validity and reliability from "knowing" to "telling". Everybody's writing is suspect – not just those who write the poems'.

It also embraces autoethnography: the authors' experiences of symbolic violence are presented as poems alongside those of the participants to create a poetic vignette which is robustly underpinned by literature. The overarching thesis from which the chapter – and hence this presentation – evolved had become increasingly steeped in autoethnography and the presentation discusses how this growing necessity to situate self at the heart of the study gradually became not only apparent to the lead author but an essential, non-negotiable aspect of their doctoral journey, the 'little provocation [to] start an avalanche' that Douglas and Carless (2013, p.93) discuss. The co-author of the chapter was one of the lead author's doctoral supervisors whose own work is situated in narrative inquiry so the collaboration on this chapter was a 'natural' step and one that will be discussed in the presentation.

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