

Exploring the Potential of ‘Bromance’ to Promote Teacher Learning and Change

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Abstract

This paper presents the story of John, a mathematics teacher, who embraced ‘change’ at a rather advanced stage of his teaching career. As part of this development, he managed to transform his largely traditional practices to practices that advance inquiry-based learning, a pedagogical approach that is aligned to the reform visions for mathematics teaching and learning (see Maaß & Artigue, 2013). Drawing on narrative research (Squire et al., 2013), his case was studied to shed insights on what facilitates or hinders teacher learning and change. The narrative was co-constructed between John and the first author in the form of a ‘conversation’ that originated from a number of Messenger chats on Facebook. The thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) of the data revealed four distinct phases, so far, in John’s journey towards becoming a teacher (see Buhagiar, 2018). The journey through these phases is of particular interest to anyone concerned about the impact that different teacher education initiatives have on teacher learning and change. In particular, this paper focuses on the professional and personal relationship between John and Paul, the then recently arrived Head of the Mathematics Department at school, which was pivotal to John’s professional transformation. Overall, John’s story suggests that teacher change can happen and appears to be facilitated by certain factors, foremost among which a ‘bromance’ relationship, described by Robinson et al. (2017) as a close friendship between two heterosexual men, concerning a mentor (i.e., Paul) and a mentee (i.e., John). However, the potential of bromance to promote teacher learning and change needs to be problematised in view of the dramatic manner in which Paul’s unexpected departure from school affected John, both professionally and personally. The case is made that while bromance can trigger teacher learning and facilitate teacher change, other forms of professional learning are also needed in schools if change is to endure beyond the motivational physical presence of effective ‘change agents’.

Keywords: *Teacher change; teacher learning; bromance; mentoring; narrative research.*

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