EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AND REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

IN TEACHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores ways of incorporating reflective practice and experiential learning in teacher education. Many examples are drawn from the book *Understanding Teaching Through Learning* (Kurzweil and Scholl 2007), the first in the series of teacher education books called School for International Training Frameworks for Language Teaching. These examples illustrate ways in which teacher educators can support rich meaningful learning experiences. Specifically, I look at the impact of reflective practice as outlined by Dewey (1910) and Rogers (2002), the variety of experiences that can be used in teacher education, and how ideas from experts in the field can be incorporated into teacher education without being prescriptive.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Teachers make thousands of decisions in and for any given lesson. What will be the focus of the lesson? What activity will students do first? What will students be doing? Should I write on the board? Where? What color? Where will I stand or sit? How loud will my voice be? What will I say? Many, if not most of these decisions, happen almost unconsciously with the teacher relying on prior experience and beliefs. However, in my experience, teachers often focus on their own actions rather than on the impact their decisions have on student learning. To be effective in the classroom, I believe that teachers must base their teaching decisions upon their students' learning. To further facilitate that process, teachers can engage in reflective practice, examining the impact of their decisions on student learning. Teacher educators face the challenge of nurturing this reflective process and yet also helping teachers systematically learn about methodology and content. In this thesis, I explore three main factors that can affect teachers' learning: reflective practice, the variety of experiences from which teachers learn, and the way knowledge and ideas of experts from the field can affect teachers.

In this chapter I first begin by framing some of the problems in teacher education through a discussion my own learning as a teacher and teacher educator. This leads to a description and analysis of a teacher training book I co-authored called *Understanding Teaching through Learning* (Kurzweil and Scholl 2007). A familiarity with this book is important as I refer to it throughout the thesis to provide examples of one way in which a reflective and experiential approach to teacher education can be put into practice.

My learning as a teacher and teacher educator

In 1992 I began my first formal teacher training by taking the Royal Society of Arts

Certificate in Teaching English as Foreign Language (now known as CELTA, the

Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults, offered by Cambridge ESOL). It

was a wonderful experience that opened my eyes to the complexities of teaching and

learning. I knew at that time I wanted to be a teacher and teacher trainer. However,

during that course and in the first few years that followed, I often found myself struggling

to teach in the "right" way. I read voluminous amounts of methodology books and poured

through course books trying to figure out the best way to teach. Always in the pursuit of

making more effective lessons, I spent many hours creating and revamping materials and

lessons. Though my teaching continued to improve, I continued to feel a sense of

disconnect between what I wanted to happen in the classroom and my beliefs about

learning and teaching.

I began to fully explore this tension when I became a trainer for the School for

International Training's (SIT) TESOL Certificate course. With experiential learning and

reflective practice at the heart of that curriculum, I began to focus more on how teacher

decision-making can affect student learning and less on what a teacher "should" do. In

2004 I began studying for my Master's degree at SIT. My coursework and teaching

practicum helped me further explore what it means to teach to the whole person. The last

two years have been a wondrous time in my teaching career. I have felt renewed energy

and enthusiasm that has sprung from the connections I have made with my students. As I

reflected on my teaching and experience in the MAT program, I began to make deep

connections between my beliefs and practice about how to support student and teacher learning.

My development as a teacher and trainer during the MAT program was complemented by the work I did working on a series of teacher education books for SIT and McGraw-Hill. As I designed the chapter structure of the books and wrote the first volume, *Understanding Teaching through*, I began articulating my ideas about how to support teacher-learners (Freeman 2001: 72, Kennedy 1991) going through a teacher education program. This process proved to be a rewarding one as I drew upon my experiences as a teacher trainer and a teacher-learner. The two themes of reflective practice and experiential learning emerged as particularly significant for me. In this thesis, I explore these ideas and show how their careful implementation in teacher education can help teachers focus on student learning and seeing options rather than "right" answers. I argue that teacher educators can support teacher-learners in making meaningful changes to their teaching practice by overtly working with their beliefs and actual experiences.

Overview of the McGraw-Hill Teacher Education series

The series includes four volumes: Teaching/Learning, Listening/Speaking, Reading/Writing, and Assessment. Each book has two authors, and I had the pleasure of working with one of my best friends, Mary Scholl, also a trainer on the SIT TESOL Certificate Course. The main target audience includes both native and non-native speakers of English who are or will be teaching English to speakers of other languages. The idea was to create a course book that could be used by teacher-learners in workshops or on teacher training courses. For example, each year the United States Peace Corps

trains thousands of volunteers to teach English during their 12-week pre-service training. Technical trainers hired by the Peace Corps could elect to use books from this series. Likewise, bi-national centers, language schools and public school systems often have in-service training and could use volumes in the series. The books are designed to be reflective tools that focus teacher-learners on fundamental aspects of teaching and learning through an experiential approach. In writing *Understanding Teaching through Learning*, I strove to offer something practical, but not prescriptive.

Approaches to teacher education

As mentioned above, I adopted a reflective approach in writing *Understanding Teaching through Learning*. Before going any further, it would be useful to clarify that approach by contrasting it with other approaches. In teacher education Wallace (1991) offers three main approaches that have been historically used. In the craft model the teacher-learner is said to develop professional competence by observing a master teacher. Teacher-learners note the master teacher's techniques and then practice those techniques until they develop their own competence. Wallace goes on to describe the applied science model as one in which researchers and experts develop theories about effective teaching that are then transformed into applied practice and passed on to teacher-learners. The teacher-learners then arrive at professional competence by studying the underlying principles and practicing the techniques. In the third model, the reflective approach, teacher-learners develop their practice by reflecting on their own teaching and incorporating the ideas of experts and master teachers. The first two approaches often lead to the afore-mentioned dilemma of a teacher struggling to teach in a prescribed manner, be that through imitation of one master teacher or through the adoption of

techniques developed by research experts. A reflective approach encourages teacher-learners to develop their own ideas about how to teach. Teacher-learners may utilize the ideas of master teachers or research experts, but they must decide on their own how to best support their students' learning. This focus on student learning drives the reflective approach and attracts me to it. When teachers learn how to pay attention to their students' learning, they can more effectively make decisions and use their repertoire of classroom techniques and activities.

Roots of the SIT/McGraw Hill Teacher Training Series

The series has its roots in the SIT TESOL Certificate Program, a 130-hour teacher-training course based on experiential learning and reflective practice. That curriculum was designed by Kathleen Graves, Mike Jerald, and Elizabeth Tannenbaum in 1997, and incorporated many of the best practices of the MAT program. The certificate course consists of workshops, teaching practice, feedback and written assignments. The workshops are divided into eight modules: learning, teaching, speaking, listening, grammar, reading, writing, and culture. *Understanding Teaching through Learning* draws on many of the objectives and workshops sessions from the teaching and learning modules on the course. As I sat down to design the chapter structure and write the book, I asked myself: How can I create a book that will allow the reader to learn about critical aspects of the teaching/learning process and still maintain that feeling of personal discovery done in community?

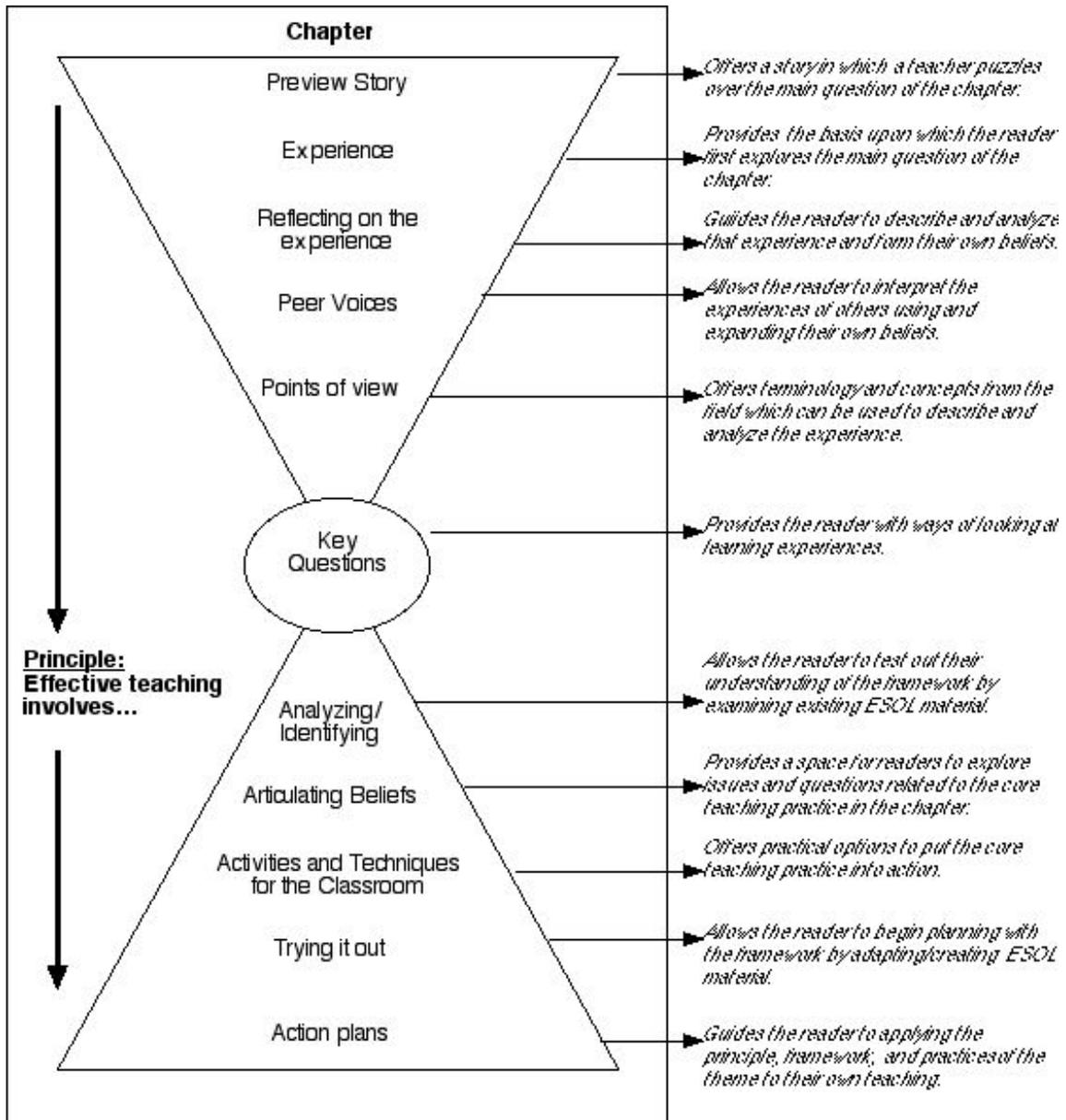**The content of *Understanding Teaching through Learning***

In the following sections, I describe first the content and then the structure of *Understanding Teaching through Learning*. In doing so, I hope to provide a sense of how

the book provides focus for the reader while also allowing space for personal discovery. The book consists of three themes that are each divided into two chapters.

The first theme looks at the individual student and learning. Chapter 1 focuses on factors that affect individual learning such as learning styles and individual preference. Chapter 2 explores how interactions among students and with the teacher can affect student learning. The second theme examines process of designing a learning experience. Chapter 3 asks how teachers can plan learning objectives and know whether their students have achieved them. Chapter 4 then looks at designing a lesson flow that supports student learning. The third theme examines ways of supporting a learning experience. In Chapter 5, readers look at how to set up a classroom to support student learning. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes with a look at how 'teacher talk' such as instructions, explanations, corrections, and conversation can affect student learning.

The structure of a chapter

Each chapter can be divided into four main parts: drawing on reader experience, looking at key concepts from the field, working with those concepts, and then applying the concepts. In the Experience section readers do some tasks that provide the basis for later reflection. They then can use terminology from the field to describe similar types of learning/teaching experiences in the Points of View section. The Key Questions section offers readers questions to focus on how to look at and design learning experiences in terms of this principle. In the latter parts of the chapter, readers begin to apply their ideas first in controlled ways, and finally in their own context. The entire chapter structure can also be understood using the following visual.

Chapter

Preview Story — Offers a story in which a teacher puzzles over the main question of the chapter.

Experience — Provides the basis upon which the reader first explores the main question of the chapter.

Reflecting on the experience — Guides the reader to describe and analyze that experience and form their own beliefs.

Peer Voices — Allows the reader to interpret the experiences of others using and expanding their own beliefs.

Points of view — Offers terminology and concepts from the field which can be used to describe and analyze the experience.

Key Questions — Provides the reader with ways of looking at learning experiences.

Principle: Effective teaching involves…

Analyzing/ Identifying — Allows the reader to test out their understanding of the framework by examining existing ESOL material.

Articulating Beliefs — Provides a space for readers to explore issues and questions related to the core teaching practice in the chapter.

Activities and Techniques for the Classroom — Offers practical options to put the core teaching practice into action.

Trying it out — Allows the reader to begin planning with the framework by adapting/creating ESOL material.

Action plans — Guides the reader to applying the principle, framework, and practices of the theme to their own teaching.

Drawing on reader experience

Each chapter begins with a Preview story that describes a puzzle that a teacher is having and frames the focus of the chapter. In Chapter one, a teacher puzzles over why a student cannot learn the fundamentals of how to play soccer. The Experience section follows and provides readers with a concrete experience that addresses the main question of the chapter. For example in Chapter 1, readers are asked to recall a time when they learned a

non-language skill such as driving or riding a bicycle. Through careful scaffolding readers are guided to reflect on that experience so that they can answer the main question of the chapter for themselves. Again, referring to Chapter 1 readers consider what helps or hinders their own learning, generating ideas and theories that can guide their own learning and teaching. After this personal reflection readers then moves to the Peer Voices section where they can see the reflections of other teacher-learners who have just done the same experience activity.

Looking at key concepts in the field

In the following that section, Points of View, readers see how experts in the field would name, describe and analyze the experience they just had. For example, this section in Chapter 1 discusses ideas such as learning styles and multiple intelligences. The ideas in the Points of View section are then synthesized into the Key Questions that follow. In this way, readers are invited to look at their own classroom experiences using the same line of inquiry that experts in the field might use. Here are some sample Key Questions from Chapter 1: "Learning Styles: What sensory mode might help this student relate this new content to what she or he already knows? What types of activities or experiences might help the student learn?" (Kurzweil and Scholl 2007: 14) The questions focus on student learning and were written so that they could be used by teacher-learners as they plan, teach or reflect on a lesson.

Working with the concepts

After the Key Questions, readers move to Using the Key Questions for Analysis, which allows them to examine the decisions another teacher made and to generate more options. For example, in Chapter 1 readers look at a student discussion activity called Timeline,

which has the students make and discuss a timeline of major events in their lives. By

using the Key Questions, readers can examine how the activity might appeal to individual

learners and also consider how they could adapt the activity. This section functions as a

kind of controlled practice through which the reader can further clarify and start to

internalize the Key Questions and main concepts of the chapter. Next, the reader comes

to the Core Teaching Practice, which synthesizes the chapter focus into a single

statement. In Chapter 1 it reads: "Effective teachers create rich learning environments

which appeal to a variety of individual learners." (Kurzweil and Scholl 2007: 16)

Immediately following, in the Articulating Beliefs section, readers have a chance to

consider issues and questions that are arising for them in relation to the Core Teaching

Practice. For example, after concluding that real-world applications can motivate

students to learn, a teacher might ask a question such as, "How can I balance the feelings

of challenge and frustration among my students while they work toward real-world

goals?" These questions are meant to allow readers to personalize and continue to

explore the issues that surround the core practice.

Applying the concepts

After this reflection, readers come to the Activities and Techniques for the Classroom

section. This section provides them with a toolbox of classroom practices that they can

choose from as they begin to design their own lessons. For example in Chapter 1 the

reader is encouraged to:

> Brainstorm options based on how students learn
> In both planning and interacting with students, consider different ways of explaining content. The
> VAKT and Multiple Intelligences models can help provide many options." (ibid, p. 17)

This section is followed by tasks that offer freer practice in applying the ideas of the chapter to the classroom. For example:

> **Task 1 (Brainstorming options):** Imagine you are helping a person get to your school or training center from the nearest airport. One common way to do that would be to orally give them directions (i.e. Turn right at… and go three kilometers…). Use the Key Questions and concepts in Points of View to generate a list of options for different types of learners." (ibid, p. 18)

In this way, readers can have a shared experience to work with and later discuss. There is no one correct answer, but rather many possibilities. This leads readers to consider their own learning/teaching situation in Action Plans, where they are asked to do similar tasks in their own setting. For example:

> Analyze and adapt activities: List three in-class activities you have participated in as a student or done as a teacher. What type of learners would it appeal to? Use the Key Questions to adapt it. Brainstorm options. (ibid, p. 19)

In this section, readers have a chance to use the ideas from the chapter in adapting and designing learning experiences in their own context. The actual tasks are quite similar to what they have done in the Trying it Out section, but now readers are thinking about their students, course books, and classrooms. To truly make the chapter useful, readers must be able to apply the concepts to their own contexts. My hope is that through shared experiences and scaffolding readers can more easily work with the ideas of the chapter and apply them to their teaching practice.

In the final Synthesis section, readers review and reflect on their learning. In this section, readers explain how key concepts from the chapter relate to the Core Teaching Practice. In addition, readers are asked to consider what parts of the chapter were most important to them. In this way, they are encouraged to make personal meaning from each chapter, while also developing the ability to describe learning in terms of key concepts. Most importantly, by the end of each chapter, readers developing their ability to adapt and

design activities that put the Core Teaching Practice into action in their own teaching. They have, hopefully, been able to relate the ideas of the chapter to their own prior beliefs and experiences. They are developing their ability to look at a learning experience in a different way. They are also developing their repertoire of classroom options and skills to support learning. I believe these steps help teacher-learners develop their own approach to teaching by working toward, "…a coherent set of links between actions and thoughts in language teaching" (Larsen-Freeman 2000: 1).

Overview of this thesis

In Chapter 2, I examine the qualities of rigorous reflection as defined by Dewey and elaborated on by Carol Rodgers. I then move on to discuss the nature of learning from experience in Chapter 3, focusing on how knowledge gained from experience can affect beliefs and teaching practice. This discussion leads to Chapter 4 where I look at the effect of ideas from experts in the field, including published authors and teacher educators, in the process of teacher education. The thesis concludes with a discussion of how a reflective experiential approach in teacher education fits into existing definitions of teacher training and teacher development.

Toward a reflective approach to teacher education

My own personal journey toward reflective practice mirrors that of the field of teacher education. Donald Freeman notes:

> Since the 1980s, teacher education has moved from this view of knowledge transmission to one of knowledge construction in which teacher-learners build their own understandings of language teaching through their experience by integrating theory, research and opinion with empirical and reflective study of their own classroom practices" (2001: 73-74).

The construction of knowledge whether in student learning or teacher education holds

deep significance in terms of how teachers and trainers think about their classrooms. By

working to see how people learn, teachers are better able to support the learning process

in a way that makes sense to themselves and to their individual learners. In this chapter, I

have suggested that an experiential and reflective approach in teacher education helps

teacher-learners develop their ability to focus on student learning. I offered a detailed

overview of that approach as it is used in *Understanding Teaching through Learning* to

demonstrate one way it can be put into practice in teacher education. In the following

chapters I will further elaborate on this approach and show how teacher educator

decisions can impact teacher-learners.

Chapter 2

Defining Rigorous Reflection

<u>What is rigorous reflection and how can it affect the teacher-learner?</u>

Reflection has become a widely used term in teacher education in recent years and can mean many different things (Zeichner and Liston 1996: 7). To clarify the qualities of rigorous reflection, I refer to critical factors Dewey (1910) outlined and that Carol Rodgers (2002) elaborated upon. Rodgers explains that reflection is first and foremost a *meaning-making process* by which teachers can draw understanding from experiences. That process requires thinking in *systematic* manner in *community*. Finally, to fully enter into this process, teachers must cultivate attitudes that value "personal and intellectual growth" (Rodgers 2002: 845). She explains that doing so allows the skill of reflection to be discussed, assessed, learned and taught. In this chapter, I first offer my own experience with reflective practice so as to show how rigorous reflection can engage a teacher on a deep and meaningful level. I then examine each of Dewey's criteria and explain how I have worked to incorporate them into the design of the *Understanding Teaching through Learning* (Kurzweil and Scholl 2007). By explaining the criteria of rigorous reflection, I will demonstrate how it can help teachers develop their own principles of teaching and align those principles with their teaching practice.

My experience with reflective practice

The following is an excerpt from my Interim Year Teaching Practice (IYTP) report

written in February 2005 during my MAT program. This piece of reflective writing

focuses on the issue of 'teacher talk,' which, in this case, refers to utterances made by the

teacher during class such as instructions, corrections, explanations, and conversations.

> *When I was talking with (my student) Naoko about her research paper topic the other day, I felt a flash of ideas about how she could organize her paper. I started to tell her about that, saw her eyes begin to glaze over, and then stopped, asking her to try to form her thesis statement and subtopics. The energy shift was amazing. She immediately became engaged again and started to work through her ideas. I was then able to listen, ask some more questions, and jot down my ideas afterwards. This experience reaffirms my belief that my own teacher talk can result in students not having space to talk and, more importantly think. When I am talking they are not, and as they struggle to understand me their own ideas get lost. This leads to a disconnect and lack of involvement in the learning process. To work with my urge to "tell" I developed the following strategies to help me:*
>
> - *Label my own thinking process: ex. I am getting some ideas*
> - *Get the student thinking and talking by asking a question or giving a task.*
> - *Note down my ideas afterwards (or even in the moment if possible), so that they are clear to me and so I can focus my mental energy on finding out what my student is thinking*
> - *Remind myself that I want to know what the student is thinking. I actually sometimes hear Bonnie's voice saying, "Be curious about what your students are thinking."*
>
> *I am sure I will keep thinking of and refining these strategies, but I feel that biggest leap was in becoming aware of my own behavior and process, so I could see that how my behavior was out of synch with my beliefs. I knew that telling students something instead of inviting them to figure it out could be problematic. That's why I incorporate design activities and materials, which get the students thinking. However, when I get into that moment when I am thinking through the ideas, myself, my principle fell to the wayside. Holding these ideas back for me involved recognizing what I was thinking about and figuring out what to do with those thoughts. (Kurzweil 2005)*

The above reflection and my discussions with my supervisor, Bonnie Mennell, were

some of my most important learning moments as a teacher because they were

immediately relevant and meaningful to me. During the IYTP visit, Bonnie observed my

lessons and then we would sit down at a café and talk through the issues that had come

up in my teaching that day. It was an exhilarating experience to have someone focus so

much of their energy on the support of my own thinking processes. I chose to focus much

of our discussions on issues of how to convene class discussions and how to use (or not

use) my own teacher talk to promote class discussions and student learning. Bonnie expertly summarized what I had to say, sometimes asking questions or offering parallel stories. I felt very strongly, however, that I was making my own discoveries about my teaching practice. Her enthusiasm for that process and the exploration of these issues in teaching and learning was joyful. We worked together exploring practice and theory. Part of this process involved me writing reflections immediately following the lessons and then in reports that summarized my learning throughout the week. In writing these reflections I strove to follow the criteria outline by Dewey.

A Meaning-Making Process

Dewey defines reflection as a "meaning-making process" that comes about when questions or puzzlement arise from an experience. Carol Rodgers summarizes this idea saying it, "moves a learner from one experience into the next with deeper understanding of its relationships with and connections to other experiences and ideas" (2002: 845). As seen in my journal entry, I felt that very same puzzlement about why my students seemed so quiet in class discussions and in one-to-one conversations with me. By going through the reflective process I was able to make meaning from those experiences that then allowed me to better engage in future experiences.

In *Understanding Teaching through Learning*, I designed a sequence of tasks that would support readers in engaging in the reflective process. Each chapter begins with this type of puzzle story as told from the point of view of a teacher, who becomes a virtual member of the readers' community. For example in Chapter 6, the preview story describes Dan, who wonders why his "Find someone who" fluency activity fails. He had

found the activity in a teacher resource book and heard rave reviews of it from colleagues, and yet it completely flopped in his classroom (Kurzweil and Scholl 2007: 105). As readers consider Dan's experience and draws upon their own prior knowledge they begin to actively make their own meaning. After doing the Experience task in which they plan their 'teacher talk' for a fluency activity called "Bag of Cards," this process of interpreting continues by answering questions that lead the reader through the reflective process.. This sequence of experience and reflection allows readers to explore the different issues of each chapter. Critically important to this part of the chapter is that readers actively make their own meaning before encountering the interpretations of others. Without this step, readers might be tempted to simply accept the conclusions of others in the community and not truly engage in reflective process.

Thinking in a systematic way

Dewey argues that reflective thinking must be systematic in order to be effective. The six steps Dewey elaborated have since been broken down into the four-phase experiential learning cycle (Kolb 1984, Rodgers 2002). Kolb labels these stages as concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract generalization, and testing hypotheses. On the SIT TESOL Certificate course trainers (School for International Training 2005) have adopted the more user-friendly terms experience, describe, analyze, and plan action, which I will explain and then use for the remainder of this paper.

First, I would like to summarize how teachers go through these steps after which I will provide several examples of the process in action. Teachers can engage in this reflective process after experiencing a lesson or interaction. They first describe what happened in

the classroom, focusing on their own behavior and feelings and most importantly student

behavior. Teachers then analyze this description coming up with interpretations and

theories to explain what happened. These ideas and beliefs then form the basis of action

plans that guide teachers as they enter future experiences. In this way, teachers engage in

the process of aligning their beliefs with their actual practice.

To illustrate this process of using the experiential learning cycle to guide reflection, I

have labeled the reflection I wrote during my Interim Year Teaching Practice:

Description. I describe what happened with Naoko.

Analysis. I begin with an interpretation about how my 'teacher talk' hinder student learning.

Analysis. I state a theory about how teacher talk can affect student learning.

I realized that my natural interest in others can be derailed by my own thinking out loud and a desire to share my understanding of something with students. During my time with Bonnie and since the visit, I have been able to more quickly notice when and why I slip into telling mode. When I was talking with (my student) Naoko about her research paper topic the other day, I felt a flash of ideas about how she could organize her paper. I started to tell her about that, saw her eyes begin to glaze over, and then stopped, asking her to try to form her thesis statement and subtopics. The energy shift was amazing. She immediately became engaged again and started to work through her ideas. I was then able to listen, ask some more questions, and jot down my ideas afterwards. This experience reaffirms my belief that my own teacher talk can result in students not having space to talk and, more importantly think. When I am talking they are not, and as they struggle to understand me their own ideas get lost. This leads to a disconnect and lack of involvement in the learning process. To work with my urge to "tell" I developed the following strategies to help me:

Plan Action Here are concrete steps I can take to help to help me act in accordance with my theory about 'teacher talk.'

- *Label my own thinking process: ex. I am getting some ideas*
- *Get the student thinking and talking by asking a question or giving a task.*
- *Note down my ideas afterwards (or even in the moment if possible), so that they are clear to me and so I can focus my mental energy on finding out what my student is thinking*
- *Remind myself that I want to know what the student is thinking. I actually sometimes hear Bonnie's voice saying, "Be curious about what your students are thinking."*

The above notes on my reflection illustrate the idea of consequence that Dewey explains

is so critical. Description, analysis, and action plans must link with one another in

rigorous reflection. Without this quality teachers can leap to conclusions and subsequent

action plans that are not grounded in the reality of what actually happened. I have noticed

that because my natural tendency is to leap to analysis, I must be sure to ground my theories in description of concrete experience to ensure my reflections have consequence and are thus rigorous. The act of writing externalizes my thought processes and helps me think and make discoveries from my teaching experience.

This importance of consequence can be exemplified through the experience of Dan, the teacher from the above preview story. When students did not do the "Find someone who" activity as he had hoped, Dan could have leaped to the conclusion that his students were rebelling against him. Alternatively he might have decided that these types of communicative activities just would not work with his students. By observing and describing his own behavior and the students' reactions in terms of 'teacher talk,' he was able to come up with alternative explanations that would help him better implement the activity next time. Without specific description of student and teacher behavior an explanation or theory may not be grounded in what really happened. Moreover, teacher-learners are often not aware of the beliefs that they hold and how those beliefs guide and sometimes limit their actions

In *Understanding Teaching through Learning,* readers are given similar opportunities to go through the cycle of describing, analyzing, and planning action. For example, in Chapter 6 of, the reader has an <u>experience</u> by writing down what they would say in each stage of the "Bag of Cards" activity. In the task that follows, readers are asked to fill out a chart in which they <u>describe</u> what they noticed about their teacher talk and <u>analyze</u> "how it might affect student learning and participation." (Kurzweil and Scholl 2007: 108)

In doing so, the teacher-learner creates a solid link between their description and analysis. They are then asked the following questions:

> What factors might make teacher talk problematic for students?
> What generalizations can you make about how to use teacher talk to effectively set up a student-centered activity? (ibid, p. 108)

These final questions move the reader toward from explanations of potential problems toward theories to guide them as they <u>plan a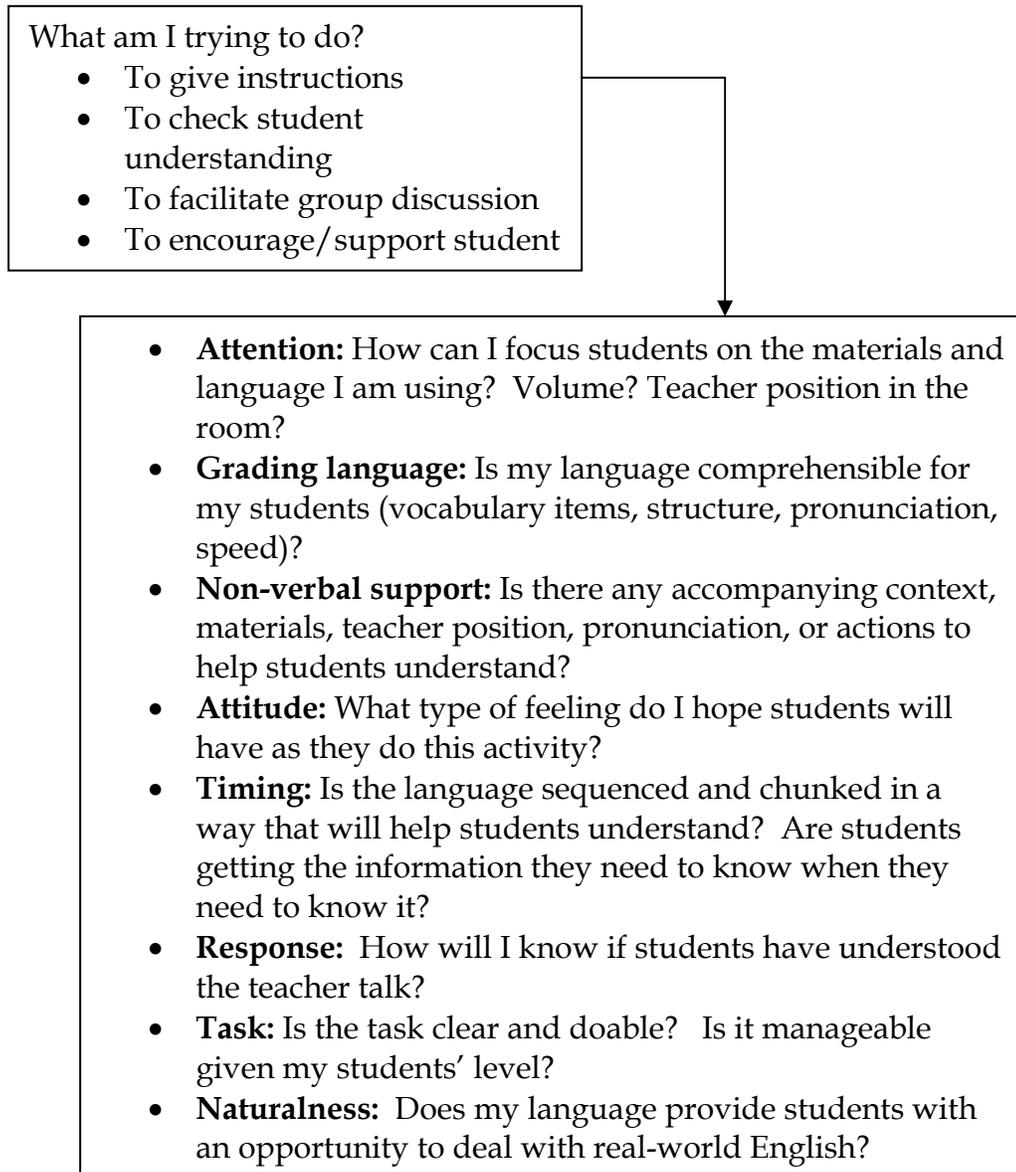ction</u> for teacher talk in future lessons. Toward the end of the chapter the teacher-learner follows the same process in the Action Plans section, but now in planning and reflecting on their own classroom practice. Through the exercises in the chapter, readers can develop the systematic thinking involved in reflection, while also exploring the specific issue of teacher talk in the classroom. By going through these steps repeatedly throughout the book and discussing this reflective process they can develop the skills and awareness necessary to become more advanced reflective practitioners.

Using lenses on learning and teaching

When describing an aspect of a lesson in the reflective cycle, using a variety of lenses with which to view the experience can be very useful in finding critical points that affected student learning. In any given moment in a lesson there are thousands of observable facts. Carol Rodgers explains, "One can, however, develop one's ability to be present, to perceive more rather than less" (2002: 852). Part of this skill involves slowing down to observe what is happening in the classroom. I would also argue that teacher-learners can notice more by looking at the experience from different perspectives. In the above case, Dan might not have noticed that his instructions were unclear without describing the experience in terms of his 'teacher talk.' In developing a reflective

practice, teacher-learners can learn to see more by identifying critical issues in the

teaching/learning process. The Key Questions in each chapter of *Understanding*

Teaching through Learning focus readers on particular aspects of classroom experience.

For example, the following Key Questions from Chapter 6 focus on 'teacher talk':

What am I trying to do?
- To give instructions
- To check student understanding
- To facilitate group discussion
- To encourage/support student

- **Attention:** How can I focus students on the materials and language I am using? Volume? Teacher position in the room?
- **Grading language:** Is my language comprehensible for my students (vocabulary items, structure, pronunciation, speed)?
- **Non-verbal support:** Is there any accompanying context, materials, teacher position, pronunciation, or actions to help students understand?
- **Attitude:** What type of feeling do I hope students will have as they do this activity?
- **Timing:** Is the language sequenced and chunked in a way that will help students understand? Are students getting the information they need to know when they need to know it?
- **Response:** How will I know if students have understood the teacher talk?
- **Task:** Is the task clear and doable?   Is it manageable given my students' level?
- **Naturalness:** Does my language provide students with an opportunity to deal with real-world English?

(Kurzweil and Scholl 2007: 118)

These questions provide a scaffold by which readers can reflect upon their 'teacher talk'

in a lesson. By thinking about these questions, teachers start to pay attention to how their

'teacher talk' affects student learning and participation. That description can then lead to explanations of what transpired in class and to the creation of beliefs about effective 'teacher talk'. These, in turn, can result in action plans for future lessons. It was precisely this type of process that I went through during my IYTP as I considered how my 'teacher talk' was affecting my students' participation in one-to-one and class discussions.

In their description of reflective practitioner behavior, Jack Millett and Claire Stanley argue that at the advanced level teachers are able to generate multiple explanations of a given experience (2000). By the end of *Understanding Teaching through Learning*, readers can utilize a variety of lenses by which to examine their own classroom experience: Factors that affect individual student learning (Chapter 1), classroom interaction (Chapter 2), learning objectives (Chapter 3), the way activities flow together in a lesson (Chapter 4), classroom/student arrangement in the classroom (Chapter 5), and 'teacher talk' (Chapter 6). Each lens provides readers with another way of reflecting upon the teaching/learning process. In this way, teacher-learners can more deeply explore critical aspects of their lessons as they go through Dewey's reflective cycle.

Working in Community

Dewey argues that rigorous reflection needs to be done in community. Rodgers synthesizes Dewey's arguments for reflection done in community saying that: 1) it provides a sense of value toward experiences, 2) different perspectives bring broader understanding, and 3) it offers support while engaging in challenging work. (Rodgers 2002: 857) From my own experience as a teacher and trainer I have found that, though I can reflect on my own, doing so in community incredibly enriches that process. My

experience with Bonnie in the week of my IYTP visit symbolizes and exemplifies that

truth for me. Her presence provided a structure for regular reflection, while her

observations and ideas provided me with additional lenses that helped me make major

breakthroughs in my teaching. Working with her gave me the sense of community that

Dewey argues so enriches reflective practice.

In writing *Understanding Teaching through Learning*, I strove to support reflection in

community by bringing in the voices of other teachers and providing opportunities for

readers to share their ideas. The Preview Story is always told from the perspective of

another teacher. I envisioned that type of story as the kind that might arise in the staff

room or a workshop session. Similarly after each Experience task, the reader encounters

Peer Voices, which offer the type of multiple perspectives Dewey mentions. For

example, in Chapter 6 Mark, another teacher-learner, offers the following comment about

planning teacher talk in the Bag of Cards activity:

> Too much talking from the teacher that they don't understand or need is frustrating for students!
> The other thing is that I gave them so many instructions at once and they did need it but it was so
> much that they couldn't get it. (Kurzweil and Scholl 2007: 110)

Rene, another peer voice, says, "It's important not to be patronizing, and yet be clear and

simple." (ibid, p.109) Since readers will have done the same Experience task and written

their own reflections, the Peer Voices provide the same kind of stimulus one might find

in a workshop discussion following a shared experience. Even as I transcribed the

comments that went into the Peer Voices, I found myself thinking, "That's an interesting

point. I hadn't thought of it in quite that way." The insights of other teachers at this stage

of the reflective process can provide part of the community Dewey speaks of and can

lead to a re-examination of the experience, more complex theories, and additional action plans.

Similarly, when *Understanding Teaching through Learning* is used on training courses or with groups of teacher-learners, all of the tasks can be discussed, providing more community interaction. Throughout the chapters there are open-ended questions to be discussed with other teacher-learners. In addition, readers can compare their ideas after completing tasks. For example, in Chapter 6, the task in Using the Key Questions for Analysis, has readers rewrite problematic instructions. Since there is no one correct answer, the resulting discussion can help deepen readers' understanding of how 'teacher talk' affects student learning. In this way, I provide readers with the opportunity for community support and learning that Dewey outlines.

Valuing personal and intellectual growth

Dewey argues that the reflective process requires a particular set of values and attitudes. Rodgers summarizes what the reflective teacher must do:

> As much as possible she must remain engaged in the experience as it is happening, in an undistracted way, so that data can be gathered through observation (whole-heartedness and directness). She must also remain open-minded, entertaining many interpretations of her experience…." (Rodgers 2002: 863)

Whole-heartedness and directness refer to an attitude of enthusiasm toward content being taught and to the processes of learning and teaching. In addition, when teachers believe in the value of reflection on experience, they enter experiences with a complete involvement, knowing that doing so will provide the basis for reflection and discovery. Reflective practitioners must also be open to data yielded from the experience even when the results run counter to long-held beliefs.

These attitudes can be cultivated in teacher education by creating tasks in which teacher-learners can have genuine experiences and explore issues that interest them. For example before my IYTP supervisor visit, Bonnie had me make a "top ten" list in which I decided what I wanted to focus on during our time together. I found these tremendously empowering as a teacher. By thinking through what was important to me, I became much more invested in the discussions I had with Bonnie. I had a choice about what I wanted to focus on which validated my ideas and also made me more open to and hungry for new ideas.

In *Understanding Teaching through Learning*, I provide opportunities for that same kind of personal investment. In addition to actually doing and reflecting upon tasks, I work to support personalized exploration and choice in each chapter. For example, in each chapter readers are encouraged to form guidelines and questions for themselves that related to the theme of the chapter in the Articulating Beliefs section. Below is the chart that readers work with in Chapter 6.

Articulating beliefs and issues: Read through your notes from this chapter and highlight any points that you could explore further so as to be able to use language effectively in the classroom. Here are some of the key concepts discussed in this chapter get you started: Grading language Being natural/respectful Getting attention Modeling Creating space for student talk Doing run-throughs Eliciting Encouraging participation in class discussions Support language Participating as a student in activities Waiting	
What have I noticed?	**What am I thinking about? (beliefs, questions, guideline?)**
Ex. I noticed that when I did the "go-around" at the end of the Find Someone Who, some kept directing their comments to me.	*Ex. How can I create an environment in which student listen/speak to each other in class discussions?*

(Kurzweil and Scholl 2007: 120)

By doing this task, readers can decide which aspect of 'teacher talk' they wish to explore in their own teaching. I provide key word prompts and a format, but it is up to individual readers to decide what is significant to them. Later in the chapter, readers make similar decisions in the Action Plans, by either choosing from options or coming up with their own action plans. Lastly, in the Synthesis section, in addition to reviewing the key concepts from the chapter, readers reflect on what they learned through the experiences throughout the chapter. By building on this element of choice, readers can direct their own learning and, thus, becomes more personally invested in the process. I believe that this decision-making about what to explore in their own teaching can help teacher-learners cultivate the attitudes that Dewey extolled as necessary to the reflective process.

Conclusion

Reflecting on a concrete experience can be engaging and productive for teachers regardless of their experience or knowledge. Dan, a relatively new teacher, was having difficulties setting up a fluency activity, whereas I had fifteen years experience and focused on how to facilitate group discussions. Both experiences revolved around 'teacher talk.' Bonnie has over forty years of teaching experience and yet she joyfully entered into the reflective process with me. The power of reflective practice and what Carl Rogers calls "self-initiated learning" amazes me. (Rogers 1989: 302) This process involves recognizing that reflection involves actively making meaning and systematically thinking by going through the stages of the experiential learning cycle. Reflection also requires attitudes of whole-heartedness and open-mindedness that are well supported in community. In writing *Understanding Teaching through Learning*, I strove to adopt a reflective approach utilizing the ideas laid out by Dewey because I believe they help teachers develop their own theories of teaching and learning, which they can then align with their classroom practice. More importantly, I did so because I wanted to share the joy of discovery and learning that I felt during that week I had with Bonnie and that I continue to feel as a teacher and trainer.

Chapter 3

The Power of Experience

<u>How does experiential knowledge affect the reflective process?</u>

"I have come to feel that the only learning which significantly influences behavior is self-discovered, self-appropriated learning. Such self-discovered learning, truth that has been personally appropriated and assimilated in experience, cannot be directly communicated to another." (Rogers 1989: 302)

Carl Rogers' words have always struck me as both profoundly true and desperately

needing elaboration. From my own career as a teacher trainer I have seen many cases of

teacher-learners' behavior being profoundly affected by discoveries made through

experience. Likewise, I have also witnessed countless instances of participants on

training courses not being able to effect the changes in their teaching that they or the

trainer wanted. I have sat with trainers mournfully shaking our heads when a participant

did not clarify the meaning of the target language or provide enough practice in a lesson,

despite the fact that it had been covered in workshop sessions. The frustrated trainer

might say something about having *told* the participants about these techniques and even

how the participants had been able to repeat back the ideas in their own words. However,

the listening to and telling of ideas had not affected the participants' actual behavior in

the classroom. The learning, as Rogers points out, needed to be "self discovered" and

"assimilated in experience." Rogers talks about learning from experience, but what

qualifies as an experience? Are there different types of experience? What is it about

experience, which has such an impact on behavior among teacher-learners? In this

chapter I will discuss how different types of experience can affect teacher-learners and

the reflective process. I will also go on to argue that the emotional component of experience creates a critical empathy that informs teacher-learners' decision-making.

The problems of language and telling

Donald Finkel frames the problem of traditional teaching saying, "Our natural, unexamined model for teaching is Telling. The fundamental act of teaching is to carefully and clearly tell students something they previously did not know." Finkel goes on to summarize current educational research by explaining, "What is transmitted to students through lecturing is simply not retained for any significant length of time" (2000: 2-3). These same ideas were articulated by Dewey nearly a century ago. Dewey explains the limits of language saying, "Words can detach and preserve a meaning only when the meaning has first been involved in our own direct intercourse with things" (1910: 176). He goes on to explain that words, when separated from experience, become symbols that can be manipulated without a deepened understanding. The message here is clear. To facilitate learning, teacher educators must some how engage teacher-learners in an experience.

Defining experience

Dewey also distinguishes between experiences that are educative and those that are mis-educative. Educative experiences allow for growth and understanding that lead to entering future experiences in a productive and moral manner. Mis-educative experiences, on the other hand, prevent future growth, leading to routined or immoral action. Carol Rodgers summarizes Dewey's definition of experience, "An experience, then, is not an experience unless it involves interaction between the self and another person, the material world, the natural world, an idea, or whatever constitutes the

environment at hand" (2002: 846). Dewey offers a broad conception of educative

experiences and it those different types that I would like to explore in this chapter. I will

discuss real-world experiences, recalled experiences, vicarious experiences, and shared

workshop experiences so as to show how their difference can impact the depth of impact

they have in reflection and learning.

Real-world experience

For many people, experiential learning conjures an image of people out in the world

engaging in and learning from normal everyday activities. For English language learners,

this might include activities such as going to a restaurant and learning the corresponding

English through actually ordering and talking to a waiter (Jerald 1994: 60). For teacher-

learners, experiential learning often refers to the teaching practicum in which they plan,

teach, and reflect on lesson with a supervisor and possibly a peer group. Part of what

makes this approach so effective is that it brings a real-world application and immediacy

to their learning. This connection allows for the continuity Dewey spoke of in the

reflective process that allows meaning to be made from one experience so that it leads to

another. When teachers engage in reflection on their own classroom experience, they are

often more fully invested in the process because they utilize the already existing strong

emotional connection to the students and lessons.

Workshop experience

In teacher education there are several other types experiences commonly used, which

involve teacher-learners engaging in workshop sessions. I would label these recalled

experiences, vicarious experiences, and shared experiences. In writing *Understanding*

Teaching through Learning, I utilized all three in an effort to provide different types of meaningful learning opportunities for readers.

Recalled Experience

Recalled experience refers to a concrete experience that happened to the reader at some point in the past but was not witnessed by other members of the present teaching community. For example, on the SIT TESOL Certificate course and in Chapter 1 of *Understanding Teaching through Learning* there is a task called "Reflection on Learning" in which participants note the steps and feelings they went through while learning a non-language skill such as riding a bicycle. (Kurzweil and Scholl 2007: 2-3) By comparing the factors that helped and hindered their learning with those of other teacher-learners, the reader can develop an awareness of how individual learners vary in their needs, thinking processes and preferences. This type of experience allows teacher-learners to relate target concepts such as learning styles to their own lives. However, recalled experiences have limitations since the other teacher-learners and teacher educators were not present and cannot add to or dispute descriptions of what happened. As noted in Chapter 3, the idea of consequence reflective process often challenges teacher-learners action plans and theories may not actually be connected to the description of the experience. Likewise, teacher-learners may have not noticed a vital part of the classroom interaction that could affect their analysis and theory. For these reasons, teacher educators must be skilled in questioning and offering a variety of lenses to help teacher-learners more fully describe what happened in their lessons. When used effectively, recalled experiences in workshop sessions can provide teacher-learners with an opportunity to re-examine prior experiences in light of new concepts or ideas from the

community. This reframing of experience can lead to new understandings and discoveries that are relevant for the individual teacher-learner.

Vicarious Experience

Vicarious experience includes that which teacher-learners create in their mind's eyes as they read or hear something. For example, when people hear a good story they are often able to internally see, feel, hear, and even taste what is happening in the story. In the same way a dream can seem real so can the vicarious experience. Dynamic lecturers are often said to bring the subject alive, using anecdotes and evocative language. For this reason, it is useful to distinguish between internal and external experience. In *Doing Teacher Research: From Inquiry to Understanding* (1998), Freeman relates the following story:

> As I was driving just south of White River Junction, the snow had started falling in earnest. The light was flat, although it was mid-morning, making it almost impossible to distinguish the highway in the gray-white swirling snow. I turned on the radio, partly as a distraction and partly to help me concentrate on the road ahead; the announcer was talking about the snow. 'The state highway department advises motorists to use extreme caution and to drive with their headlights on to ensure maximum visibility.' He went on, his tone shifting slightly, 'Ray Burke, the state highway supervisor, just called to say that one of the plows almost hit a car just south of Exit 6 because the person driving hadn't turned on his lights. He really wants people to put their headlights on because it is very tough to see in this stuff.' I checked, almost reflexively, to be sure that my headlights were on as drove into the churning snow. (Freeman 1998: vii)

In this story Freeman describes a kind of learning, in this case about current weather conditions. In terms of the experiential learning cycle what happened? The initial announcement did not evoke any kind of internal experience making it harder to relate the vital generalization about the weather conditions to the action plan of turning on the headlights. In contrast, the descriptive story about Ray Burke created an incredibly vivid internal experience that he almost instantaneously related to the necessity (theory) of turning on his lights (action plan).

I like this story because it reminds me so much of the dilemma teacher educators face all of the time. Since they already know the content of language teaching so well, they often tend to want to share abstract theories and concluding action plans. When teacher-learners "don't get it" it may be because they have not been able to relate the theory to their own experience. Notice how the radio announcer still shares the action plan of turning on the headlights. The key difference now is that Freeman has had an experience that he can relate to that action plan.

In *Understanding Teaching through Learning*, each chapter begins with a Preview story that tells of a puzzled teacher. Although the stories are short they evoke clear images and frame the key issues of the chapter. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Chapter 6 begins with the teacher-learner, Dan's reflection on how a fluency activity called "Find someone who" failed to engage students. This story provides readers with the type of vicarious experience I mentioned above. Interestingly, when I piloted the Preview stories and corresponding tasks with participants on the SIT TESOL Certificate course, I found that the participants started referring to the teachers in the Preview stories by name, almost as an absent classmate despite the fact that they had never met. In this way the vicarious experience allows readers to more fully relate to the puzzle of the chapter. Lastly I would add that the vicarious experience is important in a book as readers often skip the tasks that provide the shared concrete experiences.

Shared Experience

The last type of experience I will discuss happens in workshops and provides the participants with a shared concrete experience upon which to reflect. For example, on teacher training courses one type of shared experience workshops is the foreign language learning experience. While being beginners in a foreign language, participants can develop insights into what it means to learn a foreign language. This type of experience when accompanied by rigorous and focused reflection can yield long-lasting insights in the learning process that deeply affect teacher-learners' future teaching. For example, many teacher-learners develop a sense of the importance of peer interaction through a language learning experience. They also feel what it is like to be frustrated or to need time to internalize something. In short, by being in the position of the student, they can arrive at very useful generalizations to inform their own teaching. It is critically important that these generalizations are grounded in the feelings of their own experience. For example, on training courses I have heard participants while planning lessons say things like: "I initially thought this drill might be boring for my students but then I remembered how much I needed that kind of repetition when I was learning Japanese." Likewise, when talking about the use of L1 in their classroom, they can be reminded of how and why they used English in the language learning experience. In this way, teacher decisions link directly to the feelings the participants had as students. In my own teaching, I find that I actually relive the shared workshop experience to some extent as I consider my options.

While writing *Understanding Teaching through Learning*, I had friends and family do all of the Experience activities in the book. This dry run allowed me to revise problematic

instructions and also to gather the Peer Voices that came in the subsequent section of the chapter. In Chapter 2, to explore how classroom interaction can affect student learning, I created some activities learning American Sign Language. For this activity, I enlisted my wife, Eka, and my father, Jack. My father had been a college professor for over thirty-five years. As I became involved in teaching we had many conversations about how to help students learn. While he acknowledged in the abstract the potential value of doing pair work or group work, he never expressed any real interest in diverging from his lecture style. Rather, he talked about how his students just were not "getting it," and hypothesized about different socio-economic causes.

It was not until he reflected upon the sign language lesson that I ever really saw any real desire to make a change in his teaching. From the outset of our 20 minutes learning sign language together he felt nervous and uncomfortable with the pressure of a classroom setting. He said, "When studying by myself I was able to work at my own pace. Learning things rapidly under pressure is the worst thing for me. I panic. My mind closes shut, unless I can work at my own pace and think things through" (Kurzweil and Scholl 2007: 29). Later, as we processed the experience of learning with Eka more he said, "The Point and Say activity helped solidify the structure of the signs for me. Talking to Eka, I noticed a pattern – T, N, M are a kind of progression. That really helped me remember them. Telling [Eka] about my discovery helped reinforce it for me" (ibid, p. 30). After we had finished the activity and reflection, Dad came up to me and thanked me for the experience, expressing for the first time how he would like to talk about incorporating this type of student-student interaction for his students. This awareness and interest, stemming from a discovery based on his own experience and feelings, can be the first step in creating action plans for future teaching.

The emotional content of experience

Throughout *Understanding Teaching through Learning* there are questions such as:

"How did you feel during this activity?" or "What struck you about this activity?" The

inclusion of such questions reflects my belief that emotion plays a pivotal role in the

education of teachers. In this section, I will examine how three educational thinkers

Dewey, Rogers, and Palmer view the teacher's emotions relative to the reflective process.

In the section that follows I will discuss examples of how emotional reaction can provide

the impetus for change and empathy among teacher-learners.

Dewey discusses how reflection and experiential learning involve a deep understanding

of an experience, which then allow teacher-learners to make connections to other

experiences. (Rodgers 2002: 845) He also talks about how the reflective process is very

personal, requiring the teacher to be open to new ideas and willing to accept evidence

that goes contrary to long-held beliefs. For Dewey, the quality of thought process and the

attitude of the practitioner are at the heart of effective reflection. One can see a merging

of intellectual and emotional content in the reflective process. Dewey talks about

"directness" which involves being open to new ideas and being willing to abandon

beliefs when they run contrary to evidence. Furthermore, he discusses the importance of

being "whole-hearted," meaning that the teacher should possess an enthusiasm or passion

for the process of learning (ibid, p. 859). However, Dewey also seems to place emotion in

opposition to reason and, thus, as an impediment to the reflective process, which requires

that, "…we shall discriminate between beliefs that rest upon tested evidence and those

that do not, and shall be accordingly on our guard as to the kind and degree of assent

yielded" (Dewey 1910: 27). Dewey's argument here springs from a tradition of scientific

inquiry and the objectivism of the scientific method. For Dewey, passion can fuel the

desire for reflection, but is also what teachers must get past in order to be able to arrive at

scientific truth.

In contrast to Dewey's view, Parker Palmer places emotion at the center what he calls the

inner landscape of the teacher (1998). It is within this terrain that teachers make

connections between themselves, their content and their students. Parker says, "The

connections made by good teachers are held not in their methods but in their hearts –

meaning *heart* in its ancient sense, as the place where intellect and emotion and spirit and

will converge in the human self." Parker explains how teachers are very much part of this

process and their willingness to engage in it defines their "courage to teach," for it

"…tugs at the heart, opens the heart, and even breaks the heart…" (1998: 11). While

Dewey sees emotion as something drives the pursuit of truth in teaching and learning,

Parker argues that it is the essential factor that defines good teaching. When teachers and

learners make connections between the content, their feelings and their understanding,

learning takes place at deep level. In the sections that follow, I offer examples to

illustrate this type of learning and change.

Emotion as the starting point for change

In my own experience as a learner, teacher and teacher trainer I have found the emotional

component of educative experiences play a critical role in learning. In the following

section, I will describe some examples of how emotion can affect the quality of learning

that takes place. I will then go on to explain how teacher educators can use the emotional

content of experience to create empathy with students that informs their decisions as teachers. The first example I will offer is the well-documented case of Jane Elliott, an educator who has devoted her life to the unlearning of discrimination. I will then go on to offer examples from my own experience as a teacher-learner in the SIT Master's program.

In the 1968, following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Jane Elliott felt compelled to deal the issue of racism in her third grade class in Riceville, Ohio. The lesson involves separating the students into two groups, those with brown eyes and those with blue eyes. Elliott (2006) explains to the students that the blue-eyed people are far superior to the brown-eyed people and proceeds to run the class affording the blue-eyed students more privilege and treating them more favorably. At the same time, she constantly reminds the brown-eyed students of their inferiority. In the footage of the students, it is astonishing to witness the class transform from a loving community of learners to a group of children filled with violence and even hate. The next day, Elliott explains that she made a mistake and reverses the roles. Amazingly the same patterns of behavior manifest themselves as Elliott discriminates now against the blue-eyed students. As Elliott de-briefs the students on the experience, profound learning takes place about the way in which racism can affect people. Even fourteen years later when the students reunite to discuss the experience, they all relate how the exercise continues to affect their understanding of racism and discrimination. When they witness discrimination, they do not just label or analyze it, they feel it. Their sense of injustice, hopelessness, and anger springs from the emotions of having experienced it themselves.

Elliott has continued to do the exercise with groups of adults in many countries around the world. In an interview, Elliott describes effects her exercise has had on participants.

> A number of years ago we did the exercise in Berlin in a building not far from the still-raw remnants of the Berlin wall. There was a woman from East Germany in the brown-eyed group who insisted that we not do the exercise. She said we could appeal to her reason but not to her emotions. So we had to vote on whether the group would hear the lecture or do the exercise. The group voted to do the exercise and when it was over the East German, with tears running down her face, said, "I'm so glad that I lost that vote. I learned so much by going through this exercise. I could never have learned from listening to you talk what I learned from the experience." (Elliott 2006)

From this story I can see a clear distinction between understanding an interpersonal dynamic in the abstract and having an experience that stirs a complex set of emotions that lead to deep understanding and compassion.

Elliott also talks about a chance meeting with a woman who had studied Elliott's exercise while at college. Elliott recounts the story of meeting this woman atop the Eiffel Tower in Paris: "She said, 'I studied you for a week. We saw that film and then we studied you for a whole week.' She went on, 'I'll never forget that; that has had such an impact on my life.'"

I also watched the film, *A Class Divided*, and was incredibly moved by the experience. It was painful for me to see the children in the film suffer, and I was stunned by the learning they had. At the same time, I felt a gap between the experience of the children and my own experience. While I had feeling that stemmed from empathy and vicarious experience, I did not feel the actual hurt they felt at being discriminated against. Like the woman on the Eiffel Tower, I was greatly affected by the film, but unlike the German woman, I did not *feel* what is like to be discriminated against. I believe there is a profound difference between recognizing a feeling and actually feeling it oneself. The

emotional content of an experience provides a deep and lasting thread in a person's life, which greatly affects the way they enter and behave in similar future experiences. When at some point in the future, one of Elliott's adult participants encounters a situation in which a person is being discriminated against, they do not simply understand the injustice, but actually feel it. This feeling then in turn informs their decisions about how to respond. I would argue that this emotionality provides a key aspect of learning from experience. While vicarious experience can create strong emotional reaction, direct, shared experience would seem to provide a stronger basis for lasting change. Rather than placing the two in opposition, however, I would argue that one could create a continuum. At one end of this continuum we can see vicarious experience that minimally engages a teacher-learners' emotional response. At the other end lies actual experience in which a teacher-learner is fully engaged and has strong emotional response.

Vicarious experience that minimally engages emotional response	← →	Actual experience that fully engages emotional response
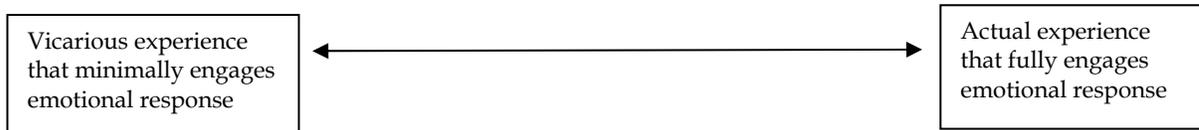
Plotting experiences out on this continuum helps me recognize the variety of emotional response experiences can bring. Teacher-learners may have vicarious experiences that stir powerful emotional response or actual experiences that provoke little emotional response. I would argue that the degree to which change in teacher-learner behavior takes place often depends on where they fall along this continuum. The experience with emotional content can provide the basis of meaningful change depending on how teacher-learners subsequently reflect on that experience. When there is strong emotional content and rigorous reflection that meets Dewey's criteria (as detailed in the previous chapter), we see the lasting change in teacher behavior.

Just as Elliott's students learned about discrimination through compassion and empathy drawn from their own experience, effective teachers can tap into feelings of what it is like to be a language learner as they help their students. By providing teacher-learners with shared concrete experiences in workshops, teacher educators can create a foundation of emotional understanding that springs from experience. Throughout the SIT TESOL Certificate course, trainers strive to incorporate such experiences, and I am always struck by their power. For example, when teacher-learners have the experience as a language learner of being unable to remember a word they have just learned, they can later reflect on that experience and generate theories about the need for repetition and practice in lessons. Moreover, when they are in class and their students have difficulty remembering something, these experiences create a sense of compassion that informs their subsequent decisions. Rather than simply being told about the importance of providing practice time in lessons, the memorable emotional content of an experience of either not having enough practice time and wanting it, or wanting practice time, getting it and succeeding helps teacher-learners develop empathy and understanding that guides their decisions as teachers.

Learning on the MAT program

As a teacher-learner in the MAT program at SIT, I participated in many shared concrete

experiences, some of which have had a profound impact on me as a person and teacher.

To conclude this chapter I would like to relate two of them. In my Four Skills class with

Paul Levasseur, I participated in a Spanish lesson based on a poem by Langston Hughes,

called "The Dreamkeeper." As a teacher and trainer, I had had many experiences with

reading lessons and quickly identified the Pre-During-Post[1] (PDP) structure of the lesson

plan Paul was using. However, as I did the activities in Spanish, I gained invaluable

insights into the ways that these types of PDP lessons can help learners. I have a vivid

memory of sitting with my partners as we peer taught the vocabulary in the poem. It felt

so liberating to be using my Spanish to be discovering the meaning of the poem. I felt a

sense of closeness to my classmate, Teddy, that I had not felt before. Later as we

discussed the pictures we had drawn to represent our interpretation of the poem, I could

actually feel myself getting more fluent in Spanish. I understood on a deep level how

speaking about a motivating topic can affect one's sense of self as a language learner. I

also was tremendously moved by the discussion of the poem and realized the profound

impact that type of reading can have on students. All of these insights stayed with me in a

visceral way as I returned to my teaching job. I started using poetry for the first time in

my classes. I looked with wonder as I watched my students engage in peer teaching and

fluency activities. From this story, one can see how my experience and reflection helped

me gain a deeper insight into techniques I already used. Not only can experience create

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[1] The Pre-During-Post framework is used on the SIT TESOL Certificate course as a way of planning and
reflecting upon lessons designed to improve students' listening and reading skills. Teachers plan lessons in
terms of what happens before, while, and after students read or listen to a text.

initial awareness, it can support rich exploration and the continued development of theory.

Another experience I had in Paul's class involved a learning activity called literary circles. Again, we were discussing a poem by Langston Hughes, this one entitled, "Theme for English B." I had always been a bit skeptical of these types of prescribed roles in discussions that are used in literary circles. Moreover, I realized that on a deep level I had limited appreciation for the learning that can happen in community. During our discussion, as my classmates related their experiences and interpretations of the poem I was astonished at the exponential quality of learning about the poem and racism that was taking place for me in this focused community. My group helped me understand the indignation of Langston Hughes and the complexity of race relations in a way I never would have gotten on my own. I was moved to tears as I heard stories of subtle searing forms of racism. That twenty-minute discussion forever changed me. When I have "go arounds"[2] now in my classes, I listen with a curiosity and eagerness, I had never known before. I do not need to be convinced of the power of learning in community. I feel it.

This experience with literary circles employed both rich vicarious and direct experiences. The stories that my classmates told were so vivid that I felt like I was there. At the same time, I had the direct, shared experience of learning in community as we exchanged ideas in the literary circles. The combination of these two types of experiences, along with the reflection I did in class and on my own helped me develop a deep value for literary

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[2] "Go arounds" are a technique I learned in the MAT program that draws upon the Way of Council. In this whole class activity, a talking piece is passed, giving each person a chance to speak and be heard on a given topic or question.

circles and learning in community. This new-found attitude shaped my future lessons as I strove to experiment with factors that support this type of learning in community.

In the Chapter 2, I discussed the way in which reflection helps teachers align their beliefs and practice. In this chapter, I have illustrated how different types of experiences can create an emotional thread in teacher-learners that weaves its way through their lives. This emotionality along with rigorous reflection forges a link between experience and learning that as Carl Rogers' says "significantly influences behavior." I then explained the shortcomings of telling as outlined by Dewey and Finkel. Finally, I offered stories of experiential learning in which the power of emotional content fueled learning about peer teaching, discrimination, reading, and learning in community. I have also argued that emotional involvement bring about empathy and help form deep values that can positively affect teacher-learners. When teacher educators provide opportunities for this variety of experiences coupled with rigorous reflection, teacher-learners can effect meaningful changes to their own teaching practice.

Chapter 4

The Role of the Expert

How can received knowledge be used effectively in teacher education?

The previous chapters have discussed the process of reflective practice and the variety of experiences that can trigger learning among teacher-learners. I have argued that these approaches facilitate deep learning among teacher-learners that lead to meaningful changes in teacher behavior and a greater focus on how to support student learning. In Chapter 2, I talk about the importance of reflecting in community and, indeed, teacher-learners are often working in groups in teacher education courses. Participants interact with peers, teacher educators, and the works of published authors. This chapter picks up on that thread by examining how to balance expert knowledge from the field with teacher-learners' own discoveries. I consider two main questions: How can teacher educators support reflective practice and yet not have teacher-learners reinvent the wheel? What is the role of the expert in the reflective process?

To answer these questions, I first refer to Penny Ur's idea of enriched reflection (1991: 7). I then offer several examples in which teacher educators derail the reflective process by offering expert knowledge. This leads to a discussion of the nature of received knowledge (Wallace 1993:14) and an examination the potential dangers for teacher-learners. From there I explore Donald Freeman's (1996) work on the ideas of renaming and restructuring in which expert ideas are used in teacher education and actually play a vital role in the reflective process. Finally, I show how *Understanding Teaching through*

Learning (Kurzweil and Scholl 2007) uses these concepts to promote reflective practice and develop awareness of the teaching/learning process.

Enriched reflection

According to Dewey, ideas cannot be told. He made the bold statement that learning only arises from experience (Dewey 1910: 176). In other words, each person must go through the stages of the experiential learning cycle to be able to learn. Yet, he does not believe that teacher-learners can effectively reflect and learn in isolation. The question then arises about how of other people's ideas fit into the reflective process of the individual teacher-learner. Ur maps out the dilemma of not reinventing the wheel in her discussion of "enriched reflection." In the chart below I summarize her ideas in terms of experiential learning cycle. I have put Kolb's (1984) terms in parentheses in the left column.

Stage of the Experiential Learning Cycle	Ways in which the stage can be enriched
Concrete Experience	Vicarious experience
Description (Reflective observation)	Other people's observations
Analysis (Abstract conceptualization)	Input from profession research, theorizing
Planning Action (Active experimentation)	Other peoples action plans or experiments

(Ur 1991: 7)

Ur argues that teacher-learners should be able to benefit from the learning of those that have come before them and should not have to discover everything anew. She points out that teacher-learners can profit from seeing experienced teachers as in the craft model and from hearing the conclusions of experts and researchers as with the applied science model (Please see my discussion of Wallace in Chapter 1). The question then becomes how to integrate this outside input with the teacher-learner's reflective practice so that they may freely use the ideas of others, but not be limited by them.

Derailing the reflective process through expert knowledge

The following message was posted on the teacher training discussion board of "Dave's

ESL Café" by a recent graduate of the CELTA (Certificate in English Language

Teaching to Adults, offered by Cambridge ESOL). The writer is distressed over a conflict

between what his CELTA trainer seems to have prescribed and what the head teacher at

his school is suggesting.

> I was taught to monitor my students from behind. We were taught to place chairs in a 'horseshoe'
> shape and to monitor student activities from behind. CELTA trainers would chastise us if we
> didn't do this. It was argued that monitoring from behind is less obtrusive and that we could read
> more easily what the students were writing. My head teacher (who didn't do a CELTA) told us
> that teachers should monitor from the front of the students and that we should be able to read
> upside down! LOL!!! (sic) I hate reading upside down and, since I was trained this way by
> seasoned CELTA trainers, that I am doing it correctly. Any CELTA trainers or senior teachers
> agree with my head teacher on this? (Anonymous Posting, 2006)

In the above letter, the teacher is trying to find the right answer, wanting to know the best

way to monitor students in all situations. Jeff Mohamed, a seasoned CELTA trainer then

offers a sound response:

> As with most things in the classroom, a lot depends on the particular context that you're working
> in; for example, the amount of space makes a lot of difference. Personally, I prefer to monitor
> closed work from behind, because I think it's less intrusive. When I monitor from the front,
> students tend to be more aware of me and often stop speaking or writing. However, I've often
> worked in rooms where there wasn't enough space to walk behind the students and so I had to
> monitor from the front. When I did this, the sky didn't fall in! I feel it's important not to think in
> terms of fixed, dogmatic rules for teaching. Instead, keep asking yourself what you're trying to
> achieve and whether the line of action you've chosen is the best way to achieve your aims.
> (Mohamed, 2006)

Mohamed offers the more tempered view of considering different options and evaluating

how they affect the teachers' aims in a given stage of a lesson. As I read over the CELTA

graduate's posting, I wondered if the trainer mentioned had really intended that

prescription, or if the graduate simply had taken that message away. In either case, he

was limited in his responses. Instead of reflecting on how different types of monitoring

might affect specific students' learning, he focuses on his own teacher behavior seeking the "correct" technique.

I had an experience observing a CELTA course several years ago that highlights the dangers of this dynamic in an even more extreme manner. I was observing teaching practice and noted how several trainees used concept check questions (CCQs)[3] in a very odd way. They kept asking their students the CCQ's before the meaning of the vocabulary item had been clarified. For example, a teacher might have been introducing the word "pottery." They students clearly didn't know the word. The teacher instead of clarifying the meaning for them, asked concept check questions such as, "Is it made of glass?" at which point the students would look blankly and say "I don't know." This line of CCQs then continued much to the students' and my bafflement. The observing trainer scribbled notes with a knot in her brow. I assumed that this trainee must have been really tired or confused until I saw two other trainees do the exact same thing with CCQ's in subsequent teaching practice sessions that day. Later, talking to the trainees and the trainers I began to realize what was happening. They had recently had a workshop session on CCQ's and were told that they had to demonstrate proficiency in asking them during their upcoming lessons. The trainees had become so focused on showcasing their techniques that they were completely oblivious to the effect of their behavior on student learning. In short, by focusing on pleasing the trainer and passing the course, they had not developed a deep understanding of CCQ's or their purpose in terms of the overall teaching/learning process.

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[3] Teachers often use concept check questions to see whether students have understood the meaning of a new language item.

Problems of received knowledge

Wallace contrasts received knowledge with experiential knowledge saying that in the former, "…the trainee becomes acquainted with the vocabulary of the subject and the matching concepts, research findings, theories and skills which are widely accepted as being part of the necessary intellectual content of the profession" (Wallace 1993:14). I have already discussed Dewey's contention that ideas separated from experience do little to deepen understanding (see Chapter 3). Dewey also explains problems of students placing to much importance on the teacher's words and actions, "Sheer imitation, dictation of steps to be taken, mechanical drill, may give results most quickly and yet strengthen traits likely to be fatal to reflective power." He goes on to observe, "Later, teachers wonder why the pupil reads with so little expression, and figures with so little intelligent consideration of the terms of his problem." (Dewey 1910:51) While Dewey is talking about general school subjects, the same process can be seen in teacher education. The CELTA trainees above were able to execute CCQ's, but did so without consideration of their effect on student learning.

Teacher-learners, like most students, fall into the trap of trying to find the "correct" answer that will get approval from the trainer. Dewey explains that often in education the student's "…chief concern is to accommodate himself to what the teacher expects of them, rather than to devote himself energetically to the problems of the subject matter" (Dewey 1997: 49-50). In teacher education this pattern often manifests itself with

teacher-learners focusing on "correct" lesson shapes, techniques, and classroom set up.

As I read the above exchange on Dave's ESL Cafe, Dewey's words, written almost one hundred years ago echoed through my mind. The teacher-learner's "sheer imitation" leads a type of thinking "fatal to reflective power." Instead of focusing on their students' learning, teacher-learners' attention shifts to their own behavior, comparing it to the model they received either unconsciously as students or consciously as part of their teacher education.

Potential consequences of a prescriptive approach

In sharp contrast to Dewey's warning about teachers telling students ideas and techniques, some teacher educators advocate a prescriptive approach in their training. A common rationale is that teacher-learners will be able to learn how to reflect once they have mastered basic classroom skills. In his preface to "Teaching English as a Foreign/Second Language," David Riddell explains this sentiment candidly:

> But I will always argue, from long experience, that a level of prescriptiveness is needed (and welcomed by trainees) at the beginning of their teaching career. I make no apologies for being prescriptive in this book—once teachers have more experience and confidence they can develop their awareness and methodology. (Riddell 2001:2)

I would agree with Riddell in that teacher-learners often do want prescriptive answers in their training. However, that desire is usually the result of an educational system based on "right" answers and pleasing the teacher. In most traditional schools students are expected to memorize information, answer questions, and solve problems based on what the teacher has told them. To get the all-important grade, students must demonstrate that they have learned what the teacher has taught. Riddell's book offers a wealth of very practical ideas and techniques, but I would argue that without reflection on learning,

grounded in the teacher-learner's own experience, these wonderful tips can limit rather than expand the teacher-learners' views of the classroom.

When teacher-learners do not explore the underlying principles of learning and teaching in terms of their own experience, they slip into the above-mentioned problem of looking for a "correct" technique or method that works in all situations. This approach runs counter to looking at student learning and considering options. For example, Riddell offers this advice with regard to classroom management, "If two students are chatting to each other when they should be listening (to you or another student), stop them, otherwise it becomes very distracting. If you are teaching adults, treat them as adults - so just a gentle and polite request for them to listen" (ibid, p. 24). Riddell quite rightly observes that this chatting can be distracting, but suggests that teachers adopt one course of action; tell them to stop talking. Riddell thus offers the "correct" solution to a problem that may arise in class. While some teacher-learners may end up reflecting on this problem and coming up with other solutions, many may simply adopt this solution unquestioningly in all situations. If and when that solution does not work as expected, teacher-learners often becomes frustrated, wondering why they got poor training or, even more commonly, why they have such horrid students.

The core of Riddell's classroom management advice is quite sound and even humanistic. At the same time, he suggests a simple singular response to a behavior that may have many causes. Why are the two students chatting while the teacher is speaking? What are they talking about? Perhaps, one student is explaining a key concept to the other. Perhaps the student isn't feeling well. Maybe their topic would actually be much more

interesting for the teacher and the class. It is possible that in the students' culture, it is

quite permissible for people in an audience to talk to each other during a lecture. And

maybe they are just chatting and the teacher will end up asking them to pay attention.

The problem with a prescriptive approach is that it focuses on teacher behavior instead of

on the students and their learning. Teacher–learners often end up only thinking about

their students' behavior in terms of aiding or disturbing their own aims. To reflect on

this issue of students talking while the teacher is talking, I might rephrase it with

questions: What affect does students' chatting have on their language learning in

this particular moment in the lesson? How can I get and keep student attention in

class? This might also lead to action-plan questions such as: How can I investigate the

causes of student chatting? What are different options I have for dealing with this

behavior?

By considering these questions, teachers now begin to focus on the students and their

learning at that moment. This type of empathy is further strengthened when teachers can

remember how and why they might have chatted in a class while a teacher was talking.

How would they have felt if they had been told to be quiet? How would that have

affected their attitude toward learning and the teacher? This empathy relates back to the

importance of experience in learning and teacher education discussed in Chapter 3.

Renaming and restructuring experience

From the above, one can see how introducing techniques and accepted concepts from

field can be problematic in teacher education. However, the opposite situation in which

each teacher works alone, without benefiting from the work of the professional

community, is equally unappealing. Donald Freeman offers an approach to deal with this conundrum. He argues that "renaming/restructuring" is a vital part of teacher education. He explains that concepts from the field can help teachers reflect on the puzzles that arise in their classrooms.

> To develop their classroom practice, teachers need to recognize and redefine these tensions. In this process of renaming what they know through their experience, the teachers critically reflect on –and thus begin to renegotiate – their ideas about teaching and learning (Freeman 1996: 226).

Freeman offers examples of journal entries from teacher-learners being able to apply a concept to name their own experience. Cindy, a teacher-learner in the MAT program at the School for International Training writes, "For me, student initiative creates a security if it's given slowly. I realized that's what I was talking about: I was looking for 'initiative' and didn't know the word (for it)" (Freeman: 230). In terms of the experiential learning cycle, Cindy uses the analytical concept of student initiative to describe her own experience. The idea of student initiative, which she got from her reading of Earl Stevick, helps her to perceive and interpret her own practice. This, in turn, can result in action plans. This process relates back to the role of perception in the reflective process. When teacher-learners use the theoretical concepts of experts from the field to name their own experience, they alter their perception, seeing more and being more present. In short, by linking experts' concepts to the concrete experiences of teacher-learners, teacher educators can avoid the pitfall of language that Dewey warns against. Ideas only have meaning when they are attached to teacher-learners "direct intercourse with things" (Dewey 1910: 176).

Using received knowledge

In *Understanding Teaching through Learning* I use Freeman's approach to support the teacher-learner's reflective process. I work toward this goal through sequencing, language choice, and the presenting of multiple options so as to promote reflection over prescription. To explain how this process happens in *Understanding Teaching through Learning* I would like to refer back to Chapter 2, which explores how classroom interactions can affect student learning.

Before any theory is introduced, readers first have an experience that they reflect upon. That process involves them interpreting their experience and those in the Peer Voices with whatever language they already have. For example, in Chapter 2, after experiencing the activities learning sign language, my father, Jack was able to draw conclusions about how explaining the signs to his partner, Eka, helped him clarify their meaning and form. (Please refer to Chapter 3 of this thesis for a more detailed description of that interaction.) Later in the Points of View that type of interaction is labeled as peer teaching. Below is the section from the Points of View about possible ways that pair work can help students:

> Students can also engage in **peer teaching**. Students can learn from each other and the act of teaching can help **re-enforce** the content. *Ex. One student might clarify how to position their fingers to make the sign for "N" or share their observations about how "N" looks like an "N" and "M" looks like an "M"*(Kurzweil and Scholl 2007: 33).

As readers are introduced to the concepts, they can immediately use them to describe their shared experiences. In addition, at the beginning of the Points of View section, the reader is asked to consider how different interactions can affect student learning. Since they have already experienced the activities, they can think about how they and their partners felt. In this way, readers are not simply told to do pair work in a prescriptive

way, but rather can explore the ways in which pair work might help student learning. As I

spoke to my father after introducing the term, peer teaching, he started using it to

describe what happened in the sign language activity. He then was able to start thinking

about how he might apply that type of interaction in his own classes. As he goes back to

his classes he may pay more attention to interaction in the classroom and see

opportunities for peer teaching.

Language choice and the voice of the expert

In the above quotation from *Understanding Teaching through Learning*, note the use of

words such as "can." "Students <u>can</u> also engage in **peer teaching**. Students <u>can</u> learn

from each other and the act of teaching <u>can</u> help **re-enforce** the content." I believe these

linguistic choices are critical in avoiding a prescriptive tone and allowing for the fact that

the reactions of individual learners may vary. There is no guarantee that learning will

happen with every student, every time pair work is done. Throughout the Points of View

section I employ words of possibility to support the reader in seeing how teacher

decisions can affect learning. Interestingly, when my very skilled copy-editor changed

some of the "cans" to "shoulds" in the *Understanding Teaching through Learning*

manuscript, the entire tone of the chapter changed for me. Note the difference between

the following and the above line: "Students <u>should</u> also engage in **peer teaching**.

Students <u>will</u> learn from each other and the act of teaching <u>helps</u> **re-enforce** the content."

By changing the "can engage" to "should engage" the message becomes prescriptive.

Moreover, the results of this course of action are reified by saying students "will learn" as

opposed to noting that peer teaching "can" help them learn. As teachers, we cannot know

that peer teaching activities will always lead to greater learning among all students. The

interpersonal dynamics are complex and not so easy to predict. Student insecurities, boredom, and competitiveness are among the factors that can curtail learning in such situations.

By using language such as "should" and "will" teacher educators focus teacher-learners on a specific, prescribed teacher behavior, shifting attention away from the needs and circumstances of individual students and limiting the options the teacher has to choose from. In addition, for many teacher-learners, the message then becomes that they are doing something wrong if they cannot get their students to peer teach. By using language of possibility, the focus stays on describing what students may or may not be doing and how that is affecting their learning. In this way teacher-learners can use expert voices to deepen their reflection, while remaining the "expert" about their own students and teaching.

The Points of View of *Understanding Teaching through Learning* uses expert ideas and professional jargon to help teacher-learners name their experiences and see factors that may support learning. The Activities and Techniques for the Classroom offers readers a variety of practical classroom options that they can choose from or expand upon to actualize the ideas presented in the Points of View. Rather than saying that teacher-learners should do any one particular technique or activity, the section provides teacher-learners with options with which they can experiment. For example, Chapter 2 suggests readers find different ways of offering students 'individual think time,' a concept introduced in the Points of View section. I do not say specifically when and how this 'think time' should occur. Rather, based on their own experiences and reflections,

readers decide when that technique might help their student learn in a given lesson. Additionally, there are many different ways of providing 'think time' such as: individual writing, speaking with a partner, dictation, copying from the board, and quiet time in class. In offering these different options, I establish that there is no one "right" or "best" way to teach, but rather that the teacher's job is to evaluate the effectiveness of different decisions in terms of their students' learning.

So, I return to the problem of balancing expert knowledge with the reflective process. Reflective practice keeps teacher-learners focused on individual student learning and how their decisions in and out of the classroom can help or hinder student learning. I have argued that when teachers focus instead on their own behavior, seeking a technique that works in all situations, they become disengaged from both their own the learning process and that of their students. One potential danger of received knowledge is that teacher-learners accept a singular course of action regardless of their students' needs. To keep the focus on student learning and the reflective cycle in *Understanding Teaching through Learning*, I made conscious decisions about the sequence, focus, and language of each section so as to put a priority on the reader's experience and yet create space for received knowledge as described in Ur's enriched reflection. By allowing readers to use key concepts from the field to describe their own experience, they can actually enhance their reflective practice while deepening their understanding of critical issues in the teaching/learning process. Rather than looking for the "right" way to teach, teacher-learners can use received knowledge to rename/restructure their experience, see student learning more fully, and have a wider range of choices when planning action.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

<u>How does an experiential reflective approach fit into current teacher education?</u>

Throughout this paper, I have explored issues related to supporting teachers as they learn. In the first chapter I discussed different approaches to teacher education and laid out the structure of the book *Understanding Teaching Through Learning*. In Chapter 2, I clarified the idea of rigorous reflection and demonstrated how, when the criteria are met, teacher-learners can make discoveries that help them form theories that provide the basis for classroom behavior that supports student learning. Chapter 3 further explored the idea of what constitutes a learning experience and suggested that emotional content inherent in experience creates the basis for lasting learning. Finally, in Chapter 4, I discussed ways in which ideas from experts can help or hinder the development of teacher-learners. To conclude this paper, I would like to take a broad look at teacher education and see how the ideas these chapters fit into definitions of teacher training and development.

Teacher training and development

Teacher training often seems to imply that there are prescribed skills that the teacher-learner needs to become proficient at, even though they may not be intrinsically motivated to do so. In their book *Readings in Teacher Development*, Head and Taylor summarize the work of Paul Davis who offers some key differences. He notes that training tends to be associated with the words "temporary, external agenda, skill/technique (and) knowledge based." In contrast, teacher development is usually

described with words such as "voluntary, holistic, long term, ongoing, internal agenda, and awareness-based, angled towards personal growth." (1997: 9) Head and Taylor go on to quote Adrian Underhill who writes that a person who values training might say, "I believe that my effectiveness as a teacher depends largely on my pedagogic skills…. My teaching is only as good as the techniques or materials that I employ." Underhill then explains that a teacher seeking development might say, "…my effectiveness as a teacher depends largely on the way I am in the classroom, on my awareness of myself and my effect on others" (1997: 10). As defined above, training and development are put at odds with one another. Training equips teacher learners with necessary skills while development engages the whole person and allows for personal discovery.

I believe that effective teacher education combines the above elements of training and development and Head and Taylor support this sentiment saying that they that these characteristics of development can be incorporated into pre-service training. They note how such an approach can provide teacher-learners with a foundation for continued learning and growth in their teaching careers. I agree with the authors but would also add that I have found such an approach to be effective not only with pre-service teachers but also with experienced teachers seeking to make changes in their practice. Head and Taylor explain this approach saying, "This kind of development involves the teacher in a process of reflecting on experience, exploring the options for change, deciding what can be achieved through personal effort, and setting appropriate goals" (1997: 18). The experiential reflective approach discussed in this paper provides a way of working toward the above vision.

Aligning beliefs and actions

For teachers to be effective in the classroom, I believe that they must feel a congruency between their beliefs and their actions. That is, if they try to adopt a technique based upon underlying principles that they do not understand or agree with, it is likely to be ineffective. I say this for two reasons. First of all, to effectively implement a technique or activity in the classroom teachers must make countless decisions and refine that decision-making based upon responses from students. Without a clear understanding of the underlying principles, teachers are likely to make decisions that negatively affect the outcome of the activity. Secondly, when teachers behave in a way that runs counter to their beliefs they can appear false to students and feel very ill at ease. This discomfort can lead to anger and frustration, both detrimental to career growth and satisfaction. By incorporating ideas from both training and development, teacher educators can support teacher-learners in acquiring practical skills and knowledge while also exploring the underlying principles of classroom practice. These principles, when arrived at through experience and reflection, can provide the foundation for classroom decision-making and future development.

To summarize that process, I would like to return to the example from Chapter 4, about learning how to use concept check questions. As I explained in Chapter 4, problems arose when teacher-learners strove to use the technique to please the trainer and satisfy the requirements of the certificate course. On the course I observed, teacher-learners actually were checking that the students had understood something before it had been clarified for them. They did not have a deep sense of how concept check questions fit into the learning

process. In order to create that context, they need to relate CCQs to their own learning experiences.

I suggest the teacher-learners can develop a deep understanding of how a technique like asking CCQs affects student learning by reflecting on their own experience. These types of experiences have the emotional content I refer to in Chapter 3 which makes learning personal, memorable and likely to affect future behavior. Finally, when teacher-learners rigorously reflect on their own lessons as described in Chapter 2, they can consider how asking (or not asking) concept questions affected student learning. Moreover, teacher-learners may continue to explore issues related to using CCQs, noting different effects on student learning and their own comfort level with them. For example, some teacher-learners may wonder how to use them without sounding like they are testing students. They might also explore issues about timing or ways of making CCQs less teacher-centered. They may start to explore other ways of assessing student learning. By considering such issues in the broad context of learning, teacher-learners continue to actively reflect and develop their practice. While training courses do often have prescribed sets of objectives for participants, the way that teacher-learners work toward these objectives can have a profound affect on their learning.

I want to return to the issue raised in the introduction about the dilemma of teachers searching for a "right" way to teach. Throughout this thesis I have advocated an approach that redefines the notion of the "right" way to teach. Rather than a single, static method or technique, I believe that teaching in a right way involves attending to individual student learning, developing a reflective practice in a community of teachers, and

experimenting with teaching practice in a way that is congruent with examined beliefs arising from experience. For me, the joy of teaching and learning lies here, in this process of exploration, shared inquiry, and discovery. Teacher training and development must go hand in hand; without one, the other is less effective. Reflective practice and experiential learning along with careful input from experts can provide a solid foundation for this union and the basis of teaching that serves learning.

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